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# Evaluation of Work for the Dole 2014-15

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## Executive summary

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The Social Research Centre was commissioned by the Department of Employment in November 2014 to undertake an evaluation of the Work for the Dole 2014-15 (WfD2014-15) Programme. The evaluation comprised qualitative and quantitative research with job seekers, qualitative research with Work for the Dole coordinators, employment service providers and host organisations, and analysis of administrative data (undertaken by the Australian National University (ANU)).

### Background

Work for the Dole 2014-15 (WfD2014-15) was announced by the Australian Government as a core requirement for 18-29 year olds (in 18 selected areas located within Priority Employment Areas) who have been registered in Job Services Australia for at least 12 months and are in the Work Experience Phase or Compulsory Activity Phase of service. Work for the Dole activities are intended to provide eligible job seekers with work-like experiences (over a six month period) that help job seekers to learn new skills and improve their chances of finding a job. The programme will be national from July 2015 and cover most eligible job seekers up to the age of 60.

### Overview of the evaluation

An evaluation framework was developed by ANU with the Social Research Centre, using information supplied at briefings with departmental staff in national and state offices between December 2014 and January 2015. The evaluation framework was accepted by the department on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2015.

The four overarching evaluation questions were identified in the evaluation framework as:

- What if any impact has the WfD2014-15 programme had on the referral of job seekers to WfD2014-15 or other activities and their commencement in those activities? (Mutual Obligation objective)
- Has the supply of activities under WfD2014-15 been sufficient to meet demand?
- Has WfD2014-15 provided suitable work-like experiences for eligible job seekers?
- Is WfD2014-15 associated with improved employability?

The timeline for the evaluation (December 2014 to March 2015) has enabled detailed insights into early implementation and initial outcomes. However, the short timeframe has meant that it has not been possible to capture longer-term outcomes at this stage (as most job seekers are either still within their WfD work experience activity or have only recently completed it).

### Methodology

The evaluation methodologies included:

- Quantitative data collection of experiences, attitudes and views of 700 job seekers eligible for participation in WfD2014-15 via a telephone survey (conducted in February 2015)
- Qualitative data collection (online, face-to-face and telephone) from key stakeholders (Department of Employment officials, Job Services Australia (JSA) providers, WfD Coordinators, host organisations and WfD participants), conducted between January and March 2015
- Analysis of administrative data (from July to December 2014) provided by the Department of Employment, which covered all job seekers who entered Work Experience Phase or Compulsory Activity Phase in the last six months of 2013 and 2014, in selected areas and in other areas (for comparison purposes).

Full ethical approval for the participant survey and qualitative research was obtained from the Anglicare Victoria Research Ethics Committee in early 2015 (AVREC reference no. 2015-01).

The full report synthesises the evidence across the following areas:

- Providers' experiences of implementing the new WfD2014-15 programme

- The experiences of the new Work for the Dole Coordinator role
- Referrals to, and commencements in, WfD2014-15 activities
- The experiences of host organisations
- Job seeker circumstances and engagement in WfD2014-15
- The provision of work-like experiences for job seekers
- Issues relating to compliance in the WfD2014-15 requirements
- Outcomes for WfD participants
- The impact of WfD2014-15 on host organisations and communities.

The remainder of this Executive Summary focuses on answering the four key evaluation questions.

### **Impact of Work for the Dole 2014-15 on the referral of job seekers to WfD or other activities, and their commencement in those activities**

Analysis of the administrative data revealed that the implementation of WfD2014-15 substantially increased the proportion of eligible job seekers referred to the WfD programme above what would otherwise have been the case. It is estimated that WfD2014-15 increased the rate of referral to WfD by 28 percentage points for someone with a consistent set of characteristics (from a baseline of 22%). Data from the department showed a steady increase in the rate of referral from the early months of the programme (58% in November 2014, 67% in January 2015 to the latest available figure of 76% in March 2015). WfD2014-15 significantly increased providers' activation of job seekers by increasing the rate of activity referrals.

The rate of referral varied substantially across the 18 selected areas, from 67% to 87%, whilst holding other characteristics constant. During the reference period (July to December 2014) for WfD2014-15, the proportion of job seekers being referred to other activities or not referred to anything declined.

A number of factors appear to be associated with the likelihood of referral. Overall, Stream 4 job seekers and Parenting Payment recipients were far less likely to be referred to WfD than other job seekers. Job seekers with recent work experience (within two years) were less likely to be referred to a WfD2014-15 placement and more likely to be referred to a part-time or casual paid employment activity. Education is also a factor in WfD placement – job seekers without Year 12 education were less likely to be placed into a WfD placement, or any other Work Experience Activity.

The estimated rate of referral amongst individual providers also varied, ranging from 35% to 89% whilst holding other characteristics constant. This suggests that even when job seeker characteristics are taken into account, there are still large variations in whether someone is referred to a WfD activity or not, based on their employment provider.

There is evidence from the evaluation that suggests job seeker eligibility for WfD2014-15 can change within a very short period of time. To highlight this, in the survey sample over a third (37%) of those who had been referred to WfD2014-15 but were yet to commence in mid-January 2015 had commenced another Work Experience Activity by the time of survey interview (February 2015).

Providers expressed frustration in delays in commencements, caused by a range of factors including job seekers not turning up for their WfD activity, changes in job seeker circumstances (such as the onset of illness) and delays in 'processing' (such as waiting for agreements to be confirmed and for police checks). A number of providers had put in place specific activities to assist with successful commencement – these included early check-in with the job seekers to find out how they were getting on in their placements and opportunities for participants to meet with supervisors to talk over roles and responsibilities.

### **Has the supply of activities under WfD2014-15 been sufficient to meet demand?**

At up to 15 hours per week per participant, the number of available work experience activities has been sufficient to meet demand – although initially a slow start, once the coordinators and providers

were on board with the programme there appeared to be little difficulty in sourcing activities (although there were some exceptions in some of the more regional locations) through host organisations. Once on board, coordinators implemented successful strategies in identifying sufficient numbers of work experience activities. However, the suitability of activities has not necessarily aligned with what job seekers are able to do (or want to do). This may explain why some activities remain unfilled. In some cases, it was reported that activities were created by coordinators (as expected) but then providers were unable to provide suitable job seekers to fill those places because, for example, they had criminal records so could not be placed in that activity, they had transport/access difficulties, or became ineligible for WfD. Some providers and job seekers expressed a concern that too many activities were of the same type (charity shop work and environmental/gardening were cited, for example) that did not always provide sufficient work-like experience or choice. Coordinators would benefit from having greater access to information about the individual job seekers that providers seek to place, and the kinds of activities that would best suit them.

There was some concern from providers, coordinators and a few host organisations that hosts could be frustrated with multiple contacts from different providers, causing some confusion (for example, different payment amounts being offered by different providers for what appeared to be the same activity) and additional administration (such as multiple risk assessment activities). Streamlining approaches to host organisations should help to minimise the potential inconsistencies and 'overburdening'.

Providers and coordinators did not feel that finding sufficient work experience placements would be a challenge when the WfD programme is extended, although the reality of the demand for places with the expansion of the programme from 18 areas to national coverage, and from the 18-29 year age group to a much wider age group may be different. It was noted that increasing the requirement to up to 25 hours for the under 30s may be a deterrent for some hosts although this is yet to be tested.

Even if sufficient activities are identified with relative ease, ensuring that the quality of the activities, in terms of providing good supervision, work-like experiences, variety and so forth, will take a concerted effort, particularly with new host organisations who are unfamiliar with both the WfD programme and the client group, and with new providers that come on stream from July 2015 onwards under *jobactive*. Additionally, the 'fit' of 25 hours into a working week is yet to be understood. According to host organisations 15 hours fits comfortably into two working days, allowing host organisations the option of setting aside two days a week as WfD programme days, or four days, taking on two different groups within one working week.

The funding of the programme was said to be generally adequate in principle – however in practice the relatively high turnover of job seekers participating in an activity meant that funding could rapidly become insufficient with multiple participants moving through one activity with each requiring induction, training, protective equipment or safety checks.

### **Provision of suitable work-like experiences for eligible job seekers in Work for the Dole 2014-15**

Overall, stakeholders reported that the programme delivered quality work-like experiences. The quantitative survey of WfD2014-15 participants revealed a number of findings supporting this claim:

- Two-thirds (68%) reported having had a valuable experience
- Two-thirds (67%) reported doing "interesting" activities
- Four fifths reported they felt like a valuable member of staff (81%), that host organisations were willing to teach new skills (78%) and that the routine was good for them (79%).

There was evidence that host organisations were committed to providing as full a range of work-like opportunities as possible within the confines of the WfD context and their organisation. Many host organisations recognised the reciprocity of the arrangement in that WfD provided them with an opportunity to get work done they might otherwise not have been able to achieve, while at the same time, job seekers were provided with valuable work experience and work-related skills that they would not have otherwise received. It was apparent that one of the main reasons for host organisations to

engage in WfD was based on altruistic motives. Many saw it as an opportunity to help local job seekers to find employment or become more employable – whether this altruism exists more widely among employers who will be new to this environment is yet to be determined.

Providers, host organisations and coordinators all felt there were advantages and disadvantages to group and individual placements. Group placements were generally perceived as being more financially viable, less overall administratively burdensome and often better suited to the job seeker. However there was also acknowledgement that there are difficulties in supervising groups, particularly given the often challenging circumstances and behaviours presented by some individuals (and the extent to which supervisors have the right skill set). Individual placements may be more beneficial to job seekers needing one-on-one supervision and the ability to tailor a placement to an individual (although the funding was said to be insufficient). There was also a perception of less risk involved for the host organisation with individual placements, as the impact of non-attendance was less than for group based activities.

According to hosts, the supervision of job seekers on work experience could be challenging – requiring supervisory experience, job-related skills, handling difficult situations/conflicts and an understanding of the circumstances and characteristics of this cohort, many of whom have significant labour market barriers and other disadvantages. Coordinators noted that supervision by host organisations could be of variable quality (and may be a factor in programme drop-out). Four out of five (81%) WfD2014-15 survey participants reported the *amount* of supervision was “about right” and three quarters (76%) said the *quality* of supervision was good or very good.

Evidence supports the premise that the better the quality of the match between job seeker and host organisation work experience activity, the better the outcome for both parties: fewer drop-outs, more productive for hosts, better engagement of job seekers, greater enhancement of employability skills for job seekers. While two thirds of job seekers (67%) reported their WfD2014-15 placement was suitable, amongst those who reported the placement was unsuitable – the main reason provided for this was the placement not being appropriate for the job seeker’s skill set or in their preferred industry for work experience and ultimate employment.

There is a balance to be made between timely commencements from referrals, and finding good quality ‘matches’ – pressure on providers to place job seekers quickly could mean that activities commenced are not always the most suitable (resulting in unsuccessful outcomes). Certainly those who left WfD early reported much lower levels of satisfaction with the programme.

### **Is Work for the Dole 2014-15 associated with improved employability?**

It should be noted that because of the relatively short timeframe for the evaluation, carried out during the first eight months of the WfD2014-15 programme, it is not possible to identify post-programme outcomes (because insufficient numbers of job seekers have completed the six month programme). In the absence of this, the evaluation has focused on areas of improved employability, self-reported and observed. For the purposes of this evaluation, it has been assumed that implicitly, improved employability means that there has been an improvement in how attractive an individual is to prospective employers (that is, whether they have increased their chances of working) as a result of taking part in a WfD2014-15 activity.

For those who remain in a WfD activity for a sustained or consistent length of time, it would seem that the benefits can be considerable even for those who commence initially with a negative or recalcitrant attitude. Significant gains can be (and have been) made through some or all of the areas identified above. Two thirds of survey participants felt that their ‘soft’ skills had increased - primarily their ability to work with others (72%), self-confidence (69%) and general work skills (65%).

However, it remains that relatively high proportions of participants do not remain in their WfD activity, either leaving (very) early (within the survey 27% left WfD2014-15 before completion), or repeatedly moving in and out of their WfD activity and, in some cases, going through repeated rounds of non-participation/re-engagement activities. The efforts of both providers and host organisations to minimise this appears to be considerable, not least because it is also in their own interests to ensure



each job seeker remains in their activity as required. Furthermore, this job seeker behaviour does not seem to be related to the quality of the work experience activities – whilst the evidence indicates that there may be scope for further variety in some activities, in the main they do appear to be providing varied tasks and delivered in a supportive environment that enables the development of work-related skills.

There remains a sizeable proportion of the WfD eligible population who frequently move in and out of WfD through not turning up, missing days (sometimes weeks) and reportedly showing a general reluctance or unwillingness to engage with the programme. For this group, the employability outcomes will be negligible. For this group who remains resistant to, or detached from, the programme, the possible benefits of WfD activities are unlikely to be achieved without some form of enhanced compulsion or intervention or a stricter sanction regime.

Despite the noted complexity around measuring employability, the difference-in-difference estimates from the administrative data found that WfD2014-15 increased the rate of part-time/casual paid employment reported to JSA providers by 7 percentage points more than in the comparison areas controlling for other characteristics (from a baseline of 13%). This is a substantial short-run impact. Analysis of the administrative data suggests that part of the impact of WfD2014-15 on rates of part-time/casual employment is reporting of previously unreported part-time paid employment and in part it is a 'real' increase in paid employment.

WfD2014-15 had a smaller, but still statistically significant impact upon job placements and moving off income support. It is estimated that in the short-term WfD2014-15 resulted in an additional 2 percentage point increase in the probability of job seekers having a job placement controlling for other characteristics (from a low baseline of 14%). Furthermore, moving off income support increased by an additional 2 percentage points, compared to what would occur in the absence of WfD14-15 (from a baseline of 13%). It should be noted though that WfD14-15 appeared to mitigate a decline in the probability of moving off income support with a significant decline in the probability for the comparison areas. Both the job placement and movement off income support effects are large relative to baseline probabilities.

The evaluation also considered whether there are differences in the estimated impact of WfD2014-15 on different population sub-groups (sex, age, Indigenous status, whether from English-speaking or non-English speaking background, duration as a job seeker and extent of an individual's employment barriers). There were no major differences between demographic subgroups in the impact of WfD2014-15 on part-time employment, job placement or movements off income support.

## Implications for national implementation 1 July 2015

Notably, the WfD2014-15 programme is somewhat different to the programme that will be rolled out from July 2015, which will be national and will cover all age groups (with an increase to 25 hours per week for the under 30s). The new *jobactive* service brings a change in employment service areas, and new contracts now issued for the supply of employment services, as well as a refocus on employment outcomes for job seekers (supported by a range of policies). However, there are some lessons from this evaluation that can support the implementation of Work for the Dole as it extends nationally.

The implications of the findings for the national roll-out fall under three main headings:

- Participation, compliance and programme management
- Host organisations
- Coordinator information.

### *Participation and compliance and programme management*

- **Refocussing job seeker understanding of the programme as providing valuable work experience** - the title 'Work for the Dole' was generally agreed as unhelpful for engaging job seekers (and to an extent, new host organisations) – there is clearly stigma associated with the programme and those who participate in it. There is an assumption by some job seekers that the

aim of WfD is purely punitive — seen as ‘working for benefit’ or providing ‘free labour’ rather than as opportunity to gain work experience, skills and a reference for potential employers. This is likely to be a particular challenge for providers who have been operating under the JSA regime (that is, outside the 18 WfD2014-15 areas) where Work for the Dole was not the priority activity and who will now need to ensure that they are able to implement the new regime relatively quickly. Notably, providers commented that it took them some time to achieve the shift in the mindset of frontline staff to work to the new policy objective of WfD as a priority activity; this is likely to also be the case as the programme is extended nationally.

- **Better tools and systems for the management of non-participation** - a considerable area of frustration for providers (and hosts) is their inability to be able to take action for non-participation and non-compliance, with providers reporting feeling ‘let down’ by Centrelink decision making, which they reported often did not uphold their Participation Reports. In the absence of an examination of individual Participation Reports, the full reasons for PRs not being upheld in such circumstances are unknown, but could in part relate to the complexity of the legislative framework which regulates Participation reporting and decisions, including the need for Centrelink staff to take into full account the reasons for non-compliance, to have receipt of accurate Participation Reports, and for the job seeker’s Employment Pathway Plan to have been included as a compulsory activity. Nevertheless, whatever the reasons for the PRs not being upheld, providers in this qualitative research commonly reported frustrations around these decisions.
- **Programme management** - the focus of providers on commencement to comply with requirements has meant that commencement rates from initial referral have continued to rise since July 2014. However, given the evidence of the high proportion of ‘drop-outs’ before completion it may become pertinent to also focus on retention in, and completion of, WfD activities.

#### **Host organisations**

- **Host organisation commitment** - many of the host organisations in the current WfD2014-15 programme are organisations that are established at providing work experience activities for labour market activation programmes. As WfD expands there is a need to increase the pool of host organisations, many of which will be new to this environment. The commitment of host organisations (and supervisors/managers) is critical to the success of WfD, in helping job seekers to gain skills and experiences.
- **Improved information for host organisations** - evidence from the qualitative research indicates that host organisations would benefit from more information and guidance about Work for the Dole, covering issues such as understanding the client group (and their likely socio-economic barriers), ensuring employability skills are embedded into activities, the importance of the supervisory role, dealing with conflict and difficult issues (including managing group dynamics) and ensuring variety and elements of progression into activities.
- **Managing increased demand on host organisations** - there is concern that the demand on host organisations will increase from 1 July 2015, from coordinators and providers, as the programme extends nationally and to a wider age group. It was suggested that a lead provider model (trialled in some ESAs) and/or a greater responsibility for this role for coordinators would be beneficial to ensure that the pressures on host organisations were managed effectively.
- **Potential impact of the increase in hours for the under 30s** - close monitoring of the impact of the increase in hours for host organisation participation is advised. One unintended effect of this could be that host organisations prefer to take on older WfD participants. Furthermore, it may be that non-compliance increases as the under 30s find it more difficult to manage their commitment (particularly if they have other activities, caring responsibilities or poor health), which in turn could lead to higher levels of Participation Reporting and subsequent non-compliance actions.
- **Supervisor role** - the supervisor role is critical as it has the capacity to make the biggest impact on job seekers. Where supervisors are internal to the host organisation, they may benefit from more support/access to resources to enable them to best support job seekers in this cohort.

### ***Coordinator information***

In order for coordinators to continue to successfully generate the appropriate number and type of activities for providers, there is a need for them to have enhanced access to the providers' requirements for their job seekers (including location, specific inclusions/exclusions and skill requirements).

### **Departmental Action**

The Social Research Centre's evaluation provided valuable insights into early implementation and initial outcomes of Work for the Dole 2014-15 which were considered in the implementation of Work for the Dole nationally from July 2015. As acknowledged by the authors, given the purpose of the evaluation, its timeline (December 2014 to March 2015) was short and meant that it was not possible to capture longer-term outcomes. To provide additional context for how the evaluation has helped inform the implementation of Work for the Dole under jobactive, text boxes like this one have been included, where relevant, in subsequent chapters of this report.

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1. Background – Work for the Dole 2014-15

The term 'Work for the Dole' can incorporate a range of programmes. What they share though is a specific type of welfare conditionality whereby eligible recipients of income support are required to undertake work-like activities in order to receive or continue to receive payments. Such programmes have been around for a number of years – for example the Community Development and Employment Projects or CDEP Scheme that commenced in the late 1970s in a number of remote Indigenous communities and has expanded and contracted over the subsequent years. However, the term Work for the Dole has tended to refer to the programme piloted by the Howard Government between November 1997 and June 1998, expanded to the rest of Australia shortly thereafter, and continued in various iterations since.

The original objectives of the pilot programme were threefold:

- 'Develop work habits in young people
- Involve the local community in quality projects that provide work for young people and help unemployed young people at the end of the projects
- Provide communities with quality projects that are of value to the community' (Neville and Neville 2006: 75).

The most recent change to the Work for the Dole system, and the one to be evaluated as part of this project, was announced in the May 2014 Budget and commenced on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 in 18 areas. This WfD2014-15 programme has a very clear objective of providing 'work-like experiences' for job seekers to improve their employability and future job prospects and assist them to meet their Mutual Obligation requirements. As such, WfD2014-15 is defined as a work experience programme and reflects the policy focus on increased compliance of long term unemployed job seekers in undertaking work experience activities. Eligible job seekers are advised by their Job Services Australia (JSA) provider that participation in WfD2014-15 is mandatory, and benefit sanctions can be applied if they do not comply. In WfD2014-15 areas, JSA providers are required to refer all eligible job seekers who are not already meeting their Mutual Obligation requirement to a Work for the Dole activity in a host organisation. Work for the Dole activities are to be given priority over other types of Mutual Obligation activity, with the exception of part-time paid employment.

The existing Work for the Dole was to continue to be available for individuals to volunteer into at any time at which they were registered with a provider, available as one of the 'work experience activities' compulsory for job seekers who have been registered in JSA for 12 months or more (other activities including: Green Corps; part-time study; part-time or casual paid employment; unpaid work experience; voluntary work activities; and Drought Force).

From the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2014, WfD2014-15 was introduced in 18 areas, selected from Priority Employment Areas. The motivations or expected benefits of WfD2014-15 are similar to those enunciated in 1997. Specifically, according to the project specification, WfD2014-15 activities are designed to assist in preparing participants for when they leave income support and take up employment. The programme will do this by providing:

- Work-like experiences
- Skills that are in demand within the local labour market and/or training relevant to the specific activity.

Activities can only take place in not-for-profit or government organisations and therefore are designed not to displace paid workers or involve the job seeker undertaking tasks that would normally and otherwise be undertaken by a paid worker<sup>1</sup>.

WfD2014-15 is a geographically based programme with the Australian Government providing \$14.9 million over two years to prioritise Work for the Dole for 18-29 year olds in the 18 selected areas. During what was announced as the phase-in period (1st July 2014 to 30th June 2015), WfD2014-15 is the core requirement in 18 selected areas for job seekers aged between 18 and 29 years who have been registered in JSA 12 months and are therefore in the Work Experience Phase or the Compulsory Activity Phase.

There are exceptions to this requirement, though they are not expected to make up a large proportion of relevant job seekers in the area. Specifically, exemptions are available for job seekers who are either:

- Participating in sufficient paid part-time work
- Not on a full rate of income support
- Stream 4 job seekers who are not capable of undertaking a WfD2014-15 activity, as determined by the provider, or
- Living in areas where no suitable activity is available.

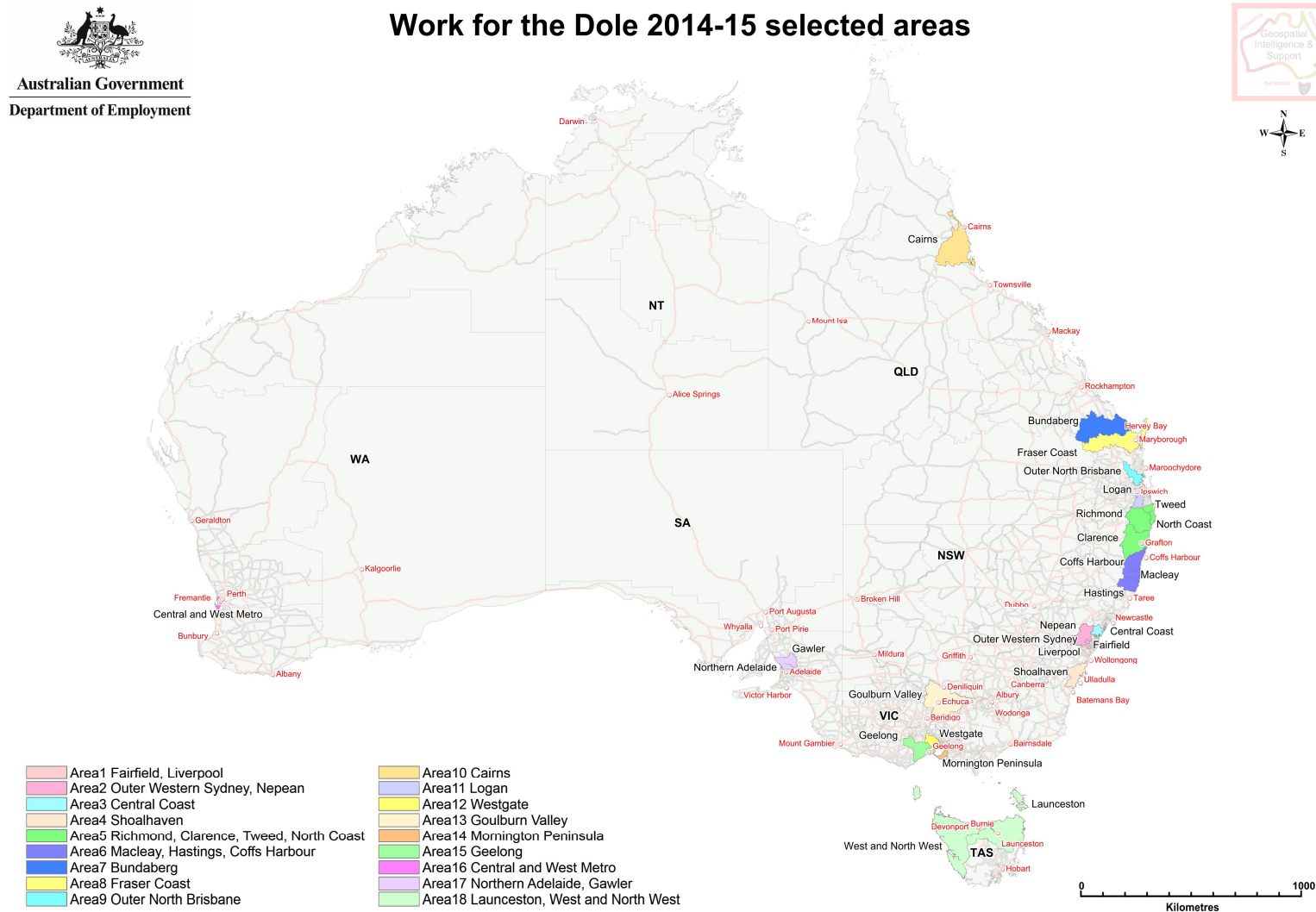
The 18 locations are spread across six Australian states, as listed below (see Figure 1):

- NSW – Fairfield, Liverpool; Nepean, Outer Western Sydney; Central Coast; Shoalhaven; Tweed, North Coast, Richmond, Clarence Valley; Coffs Harbour, Macleay, Hastings
- Victoria – Westgate; Goulburn Valley; Mornington Peninsula; Geelong
- Queensland – Bundaberg; Fraser Coast; Outer North Brisbane; Cairns; Logan
- South Australia – Northern Adelaide; Gawler
- Western Australia – Central and West Metro
- Tasmania – West and North West Launceston.

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<sup>1</sup> Under Work for the Dole 2014-15, activities must not be in child care or preschools; involve personal care of an intimate nature of people from vulnerable cohorts, e.g. dressing, showering, feeding, toileting; involve counselling or psychological support.

**Figure 1: Work for the Dole 2014-15 Selected Areas**



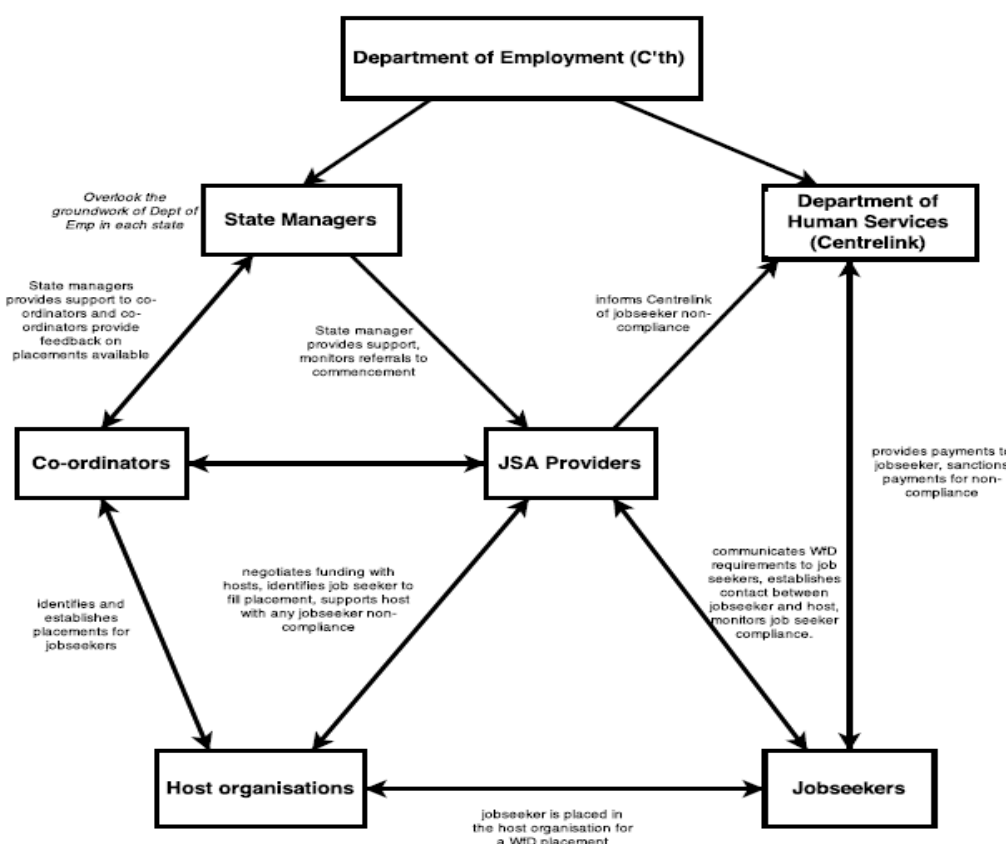
In-scope job seekers in these areas should be referred to WfD2014-15 placements through their provider, with priority given to individual hosted placements.

Activities in the 18 locations chosen for the scheme included a mix of individual and group activities (with an expectation that individual activities would account for a majority of placements) aimed at providing people with activities that may be as “work-like” as possible. Five main sets of individuals or organisations are involved in achieving this aim. These are defined below:

- Participants (i.e., job seekers), who undertake the activities and whose subsequent employability and job prospects are the focus of the programme and the evaluation
- Employers ('host organisations'), who must be not-for-profit organisations or government organisations (across all levels of government). Activities that involve direct care of vulnerable people (for example, children and frail older people) are specifically excluded. It is further stipulated that host organisations must provide positions that do not displace paid workers or involve the job seeker undertaking tasks that would normally and otherwise be undertaken by a paid worker
- WfD2014-15 Coordinators (21 in total across the 18 sites<sup>2</sup>), who are tasked with identifying and securing individual placements with host organisations
- JSA providers, who refer job seekers to the placements
- Departmental staff, who administer the programme.

Their roles and responsibilities are illustrated in the diagram below.

**Flowchart of stakeholders in Work for the Dole 2014-15 Evaluation**



<sup>2</sup> Three of the 18 areas have more than one coordinator, to cover the larger area.

One of the important considerations for the evaluation of WfD2014-15 is that it is being implemented alongside a number of other policies and programmes whose target groups include unemployed young people or that may have a direct effect on them. These include other employment services through the JSA network, education and training support for young people transitioning from school, income management services for certain groups receiving welfare payments, employment incentive payments and wage subsidies.

Many of these focus on raising employability skills and increasing labour market engagement and participation; job seekers who are eligible for WfD2014-15 may have also experienced some of these other supports. In evaluation terms, this can be challenging in terms of attributing change or causality directly to specific interventions.

Some of these policy initiatives, and WfD2014-15 in particular, are part of the Government's reinvigoration of the 'mutual obligation' paradigm of support for welfare recipients. The Government is committed to welfare reform that shifts the focus from a simple 'government pays' approach to one of shared responsibility and greater self-reliance. In the context of WfD2014-15, this means that job seekers have responsibilities to pursue work-like experiences and to demonstrate their commitment to improving their job prospects. A key focus of this evaluation is therefore to identify the extent to which WfD2014-15 is contributing towards these aims. The evaluation must therefore be done in a way that as accurately and robustly as possible correctly attributes any positive effects (particularly in relation to employability and job prospects) and any unintended consequences of the programme itself.

## **1.2. Evaluation aim and objectives**

The evaluation of WfD2014-15 focuses on two overarching evaluation objectives, one formative and one summative. Specifically:

- Formative evaluation – what can be learnt from the experiences of the five key stakeholder groups (job seekers, providers, coordinators, host organisations and department officials) around the implementation of the phase-in that can help improve the programme for the remainder of 2014-15 and for the full implementation of the scheme from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015?
- Summative evaluation – how have the participation requirements and employability outcomes of participants been affected by participation in the programme?

Ultimately, both objectives are attempting to establish to what extent and how the model can be improved in relation to the key elements, the overall design and the guidelines of the programme and whether there are any other lessons for national implementation on 1 July 2015.

The results and analysis presented in this report is guided by an Evaluation Framework for the overarching project, agreed to with the Australian Government Department of Employment prior to the evaluation commencing. The four overarching key evaluation questions identified are:

- What if any impact has the WfD2014-15 programme had on the referral of job seekers to WfD2014-15 or other activities and their commencement in those activities? (Mutual Obligation objective)
- Has the supply of activities under WfD2014-15 been sufficient to meet demand?
- Has WfD2014-15 provided suitable work-like experiences for eligible job seekers?
- Is WfD2014-15 associated with improved employability?

These overarching evaluation questions have guided the structure and content of this report, and are explicitly returned to in the final chapter.



### 1.3. Report structure

The evaluation findings are presented using the following structure:

- Methodology (Section 2)
- Introduction of WfD2014-15 (Section 3)
- The role of the coordinator (Section 4)
- Referrals and commencements (Section 5)
- Engaging host organisations (Section 6)
- Engaging with WfD2014-15 job seekers (Section 7)
- Funding WfD2014-15 activities (Section 8)
- Providing work-like experiences (Section 9)
- Compliance issues (Section 10)
- Outcomes for WfD2014-15 participants (Section 11)
- Impact on host organisations and communities (Section 12)
- Overview and implications (Section 13).

The Appendices contain the research instrumentation (questionnaire and example discussion guides and the full analysis of the administrative data).<sup>3</sup> The survey technical report is available as a separate document.

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<sup>3</sup> Analysis of the administrative data was undertaken by the Australian Centre for Applied Social Research (AusCen), Research School of Social Sciences (RSSS), Australian National University (ANU).

## 2. Methodology

This section outlines the approach to the evaluation, specifically the research methodology, recruitment, sample composition, and the analysis approach. Further methodological details are provided in the Appendices. The methodology for the analysis of administrative data is given in detail in the accompanying report; it is summarised in this section.

### 2.1. Evaluation design

The evaluation of WfD2014-15 is guided by an Evaluation Framework for the overarching project, agreed to with the Australian Government Department of Employment prior to the evaluation commencing.

Full ethical approval for the participant survey and qualitative research was obtained from the Anglicare Victoria Research Ethics Committee in early 2015.

The evaluation was undertaken by the Social Research Centre from January to March 2015. This evaluation utilised a mixed-methods approach, with a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and analysis of existing administrative data. The evaluation methodologies included:

- Quantitative data collection of experiences, attitudes and views of WfD participants
- Qualitative data collection (online, face-to-face and telephone) from key stakeholders (Department of Employment officials, JSA providers, WfD Coordinators and WfD participants)
- Analysis of administrative data provided by the Department of Employment.

#### 2.1.1. Quantitative research

A telephone survey of 700 job seekers was conducted between 11th and 27th February 2015. The main interview length averaged 18.9 minutes. The final questionnaire and accompanying Interviewer Briefing Notes are contained in the Appendices.

#### Sample design and selection

A total population frame of eligible job seekers was provided to the Social Research Centre. Sample selection occurred on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2015. A summary of the final population frame is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Final population**

Population	Participated in WfD	Not Yet Started	Other Activity	Total
<i>Total</i>	5,554	1,024	8,450	15,028
Sampled	1,600	1,024	600	3,224
Not Sampled	3,954	-	7,850	11,804

All of the respondents sampled were sent a primary approach letter (refer to the Appendices) informing them of the study and providing them with the opportunity to opt out of the research or update their details.

#### Survey results

All respondents went through a screening section to determine which group (and / or sub-group) they should be allocated to, taking into account their experiences between sample draw and the time of interview. Of note, 80% of those who were determined as not yet started WfD at the time of sample draw had shifted into either participated in WfD2014-15 (43%) or other activity (37%) by the time of interview. This is of significance in that it shows the difficulty of defining the eligible WfD2014-15

population at any given point in time, as there is constant and substantial change in eligibility even within a very short period of time.

The final distribution of interviews is summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: Final distribution of completes**

Final Sample	Complete (n)	%
Total	700	100
Participated in WfD	501	72
<i>Currently doing WfD</i>	338	48
<i>Completed WfD</i>	30	4
<i>Left WfD early</i>	133	19
Not yet started	49	7
Other activity	150	21

### **Final call results**

For the purpose of this report, participation or response rate is defined as the total number of interviews as a proportion of the total number of interviews plus all refusals<sup>4</sup>. The final overall response rate was 86%. The formula used to calculate this is as follows:

$$\text{Response rate} = \frac{\text{Number of interviews (n=700)}}{\text{Number of interviews (n=700)} + \text{Number of refusals / mid survey terminations (n=116)}}$$

### **Sample overview**

Upon entry into the survey, participants responded to the questionnaire using one activity as a reference point. The activities referred to are summarised in Table 3. As can be seen, other than WfD2014-15, paid part-time work and study or training were the most common activities participated in.

### **Analysis**

Data was weighted by location by activity and sex by age by activity. Population estimates for weighted purposes were taken at the time of sampling. All figures presented in this report are weighted estimates.

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<sup>4</sup> American Association for Public Opinion Research Standard Definitions, Version 2, Co-operation rate 3

**Table 3: Activity type and status**

Activity / Activity Status	Category of Activity and Activity Status	Participated in Work for the Dole	Referred to WfD but not yet started	Participated in other activity
<i>Base: Job seekers eligible for a Work for the Dole 2014-5 placement (n)</i>		501	49	150
<b>Activity</b>	Work for the Dole (%)	100	100	
	Paid part time work (%)			55
	Study or training (%)			38
	Job search skills (%)			5
	Unpaid volunteer work (%)			2
<b>Activity Status</b>	Participating at time of survey (%)	67		74
	Completed placement / activity (%)	6		17
	Left placement / activity early (%)	27		8
	Yet to start placement at time of survey (%)	0	100	

Amongst those who had commenced a WfD2014-15 placement, a breakdown of those who were still completing the placement at the time of interview, those who had completed their placement and those who had left early is summarised in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Summary of level of completion of Work for the Dole 2014-15 placements at the time of interview**

	Currently completing a placement	Finished a placement	Left placement early
<i>Base: Job seekers who had commenced a Work for the Dole placement (%)</i>	67	6	27
Duration (average number of weeks)	14.9	17.6	8.5
Duration (average number of months)	2.4	4	1.9

### 2.1.2. Qualitative research

The approach used for the qualitative component of this evaluation study, as set out in the Department of Employment's research design included in the tender specification, was designed to involve a wide range of stakeholders over a relatively short space of time. The approach used covered:

- Initial 'scene setting' face-to-face qualitative discussions with the Commonwealth Department of Employment staff in Canberra, as well as with staff in all six state/territory offices involved in the 2014-15 Work for the Dole
- Face-to-face discussions (managers and frontline staff) with six JSAWfD providers (selected by the Social Research Centre), to provide an opportunity to explore issues in some detail
- One online bulletin board qualitative discussion with all WfD2014-15 Coordinators invited (16 out of 22 participated)
- One online bulletin board qualitative discussion with a selected sample of WfD2014-15 providers (16 participated out of 50 invited, representing around a third of those invited)
- Qualitative tele-depth discussions with 36 WfD2014-15 host organisations
- Qualitative tele-depth discussions with 36 WfD2014-15 participants

The Department of Human Services was not interviewed as part of the evaluation study.

Further details for these groups are provided in the Appendices.

## **2.2. Analysis of administrative data**

The analysis of administrative data focuses on two main aspects of WfD2014-15 – the impact of WfD2014-15 on intermediate outcomes directly related to participation in WfD (referrals to WfD, commencements on WfD) and the impact of WfD2014-15 on participant outcomes related to the employability of job seekers. The analysis is based upon administrative data from July 2013 to December 2013 (inclusive) and July 2014 to December 2014 (inclusive), provided by the Australian Government Department of Employment for the purposes of the evaluation.

In analysing the range of outcomes mentioned above, individual and area level characteristics were controlled for, as reported by the individual to Department of Human Services (DHS) or their JSA provider or recorded as part of administrative processes in the Employment Services System administered by the Department of Employment. The focus is on difference-in-difference results. That is, the first step is to estimate differences in outcomes for those individuals in Selected Areas from before the introduction of WfD2014-15 (the pre-treatment group) to those in the same areas after the introduction (the post-treatment group). The same calculation is made for those living in a set of comparison areas (the pre-control and post-control groups). The difference between these two differences is then taken to be the effect of WfD2014-15 over and above any other changes occurring in the Australia labour market or income-support system. The control group is defined in a few different ways to test for the sensitivity of our conclusions to the estimation methodology. Importantly, choice of methodology did not appear to be driving the results or conclusions.

### 3. The introduction of Work for the Dole 2014-15

This section discusses the experiences of implementing the new WfD2014-15 requirements for Job Services Australia providers, which commenced on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014.

The section draws mainly on qualitative discussions conducted with providers (six face-to-face and 16 respondents in the online discussion board). Discussions explored the communication from the department about the new requirements and the challenges providers faced to implement these. Interview discussion guides and online topic guides can be found in the appendices.

#### Summary of key points

- a) There was accepted acknowledgement that the new WfD2014-15 was introduced rapidly, with relatively little time between announcement and implementation. As a result, access to supporting written documentation and guidance was delayed, meaning that there were some initial difficulties with implementation (due to lack of knowledge across the board).
- b) Shifting the 'mindset' of frontline staff also took time among providers, to ensure that consultants fully understood that for this client group in the relevant Employment Service Areas WfD was now the priority activity in meeting job seekers' mutual obligation requirements.
- c) Webinars and associated materials were useful but more implementation information 'on the ground' would have been helpful. Providers valued the regular discussions from state offices.
- d) Particular challenges were raised in regard to the 'Work for the Dole' programme title, with providers feeling that this had a negative (legacy) reputation and did not emphasise the value of work experience to job seekers.

#### Departmental Action<sup>5</sup>

Work for the Dole Coordinators commenced on 1 May 2015 ahead of the 1 July roll out of Work for the Dole to enable them to engage actively with potential Host Organisations and jobactive providers and to source Work for the Dole places for job seekers for the start of jobactive on 1 July 2015. The Department's State Network has worked closely with Coordinators and jobactive providers since they were announced to support the effective operation of Work for the Dole.

There was an early release of guidelines and a comprehensive training strategy from April 2015, including webinars for Coordinators and jobactive providers. This included an emphasis on providers knowing their caseload, planning ahead and collaboration between providers and Coordinators.

The Department held Work for the Dole Host Forums in 53 locations across the country throughout May and into June to engage local stakeholders and build community awareness of jobactive, the national implementation of Work for the Dole from 1 July 2015 and the benefits of Work for the Dole.

<sup>5</sup> This response provides an update on actions undertaken in response to the findings of the evaluation.

### **3.1. Providers in the new Work for the Dole 2014-15**

This section explores the experiences of providers adapting to the new requirements of the WfD policy. Discussions focused on the transition to the 2014-15 programme, any difficulties or challenges they faced and strategies they used to ensure a smooth transition. Providers and departmental staff acknowledged that the introduction of the new programme was rapid and that as a result there were inevitably some initial implementation issues as all parties were learning about the new policy and the associated requirements and regulations.

#### **3.1.1. Supporting documentation**

One of the major issues identified by providers was the timeliness of access to and distribution of the guidelines, policies and procedures by the department. Generally, providers felt that the information materials (regulations and guidance) were provided late, well after the policy change, which made it difficult for them to implement the changes. It was evident in consultations with providers and via feedback on the online forum that providers found the delay frustrating, which impacted on their ability to update their staff on the new requirements in advance of the implementation.

A major challenge reported by providers in implementing the new changes was shifting the mindset of their staff so they understood that WfD had become the priority activity for eligible job seekers to meet their mutual obligation requirements – this will be discussed later in this section. Many felt that the department needed to provide the information earlier so that they could organise staff training and prepare resources ahead of time. Once the guidelines were distributed, they were felt to be useful and informative.

*By the time it does get down to us here on the ground floor we're almost becoming reactive rather than proactive because by the time it gets down to us we've got to run with it straight away. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*Upon receiving and understanding the supporting documents the transition had already commenced. (JSA Provider online forum)*

*The policies and procedures were so clear and easy to manage and guide, however we would recommend earlier release of policies that will contribute to earlier preparation to tackle changes, when they take place. (JSA Provider online forum)*

*We got the guidelines at four o'clock on the Monday afternoon and they came into effect at nine o'clock on the Tuesday morning. Yes, literally, I got the email at four o'clock with the guidelines from my national manager. We have overnight to figure out how it was going to work, because as soon as the 1st of July happened, the department were on our backs about making it work. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Providers said they suspected that departmental programme managers were at the time developing the detailed guidelines and procedures, which meant in some cases delays in receiving responses to queries (for example, about eligibility).

The webinars that were run by the department were found to be good, although some providers felt that a greater focus on implementation 'on the ground' would be more useful.

#### **3.1.2. Challenges in implementing new WfD**

The feedback from providers on the introduction of the 2014-15 WfD programme showed that the initial stage post-1 July 2014 was difficult, with many challenges in implementing the new guidelines. However, most providers by the time of the research (early 2015) were running the programme with relative ease.

The main challenges in the early implementation of WfD2014-15 were:

- Managing the administration
- Changing the 'mindset' of staff to prioritise WfD as the main activity for eligible job seekers
- Being able to meet the department's requirements (particularly in referral to commencement timeframes).

### **Administration**

One of the main issues identified by providers was the extra administrative burden of WfD, which they felt they had insufficient resources to assist with. Many providers suggested a more streamlined approach where some of the tasks, such as risk assessments and signing host agreement contracts, could be delegated to the coordinator to reduce the provider tasks.

*But hopefully moving forward they will really look at that admin-heavy side of it and make it more streamlined. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Providers generally understood that there would be an increase in demands on them and implemented some strategies to assist with the transition. Some providers employed new staff, whilst a few others collaborated with other providers in the area to identify suitable placements and learn from each other.

### **Changing 'mindsets'**

Another major challenge identified by providers implementing the new requirements of WfD2014-15 was changing the mindset of their staff. Providers found it challenging to ensure staff understood WfD for the eligible population was now a priority activity (after paid work) and were able to successfully convey this message to job seekers. Many providers conducted internal training sessions to bring their staff up to date and they felt that this was useful for all involved. Providers felt that early dissemination of policy guidance and information would be helpful. However, only one provider mentioned staff resistance to WfD changes, and it did not appear to be widespread within employment services.

*Then there's the whole mindset shift that you've got to get your staff to understand what needs to happen, then you've got to drill that down to your job seekers. So that took us a while, that wasn't something that happens overnight and it probably took us a good three months to see the shift from there to there, it took us that long for the staff to get on board and understand and there was a lot of back-end effort to help that as well. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

In some instances, collaboration between providers (sharing information at meetings organised by the state office, for example) assisted the implementation of WfD2014-15, although there appeared to be some resistance in some areas of providers working together in this way. This was said to be largely because historically, providers worked in a competitive environment rather than a collaborative environment.

### **Meeting requirements**

There were varied responses over the level of support the department provided at the implementation stage of WfD2014-15 – although this was largely recognised by providers as challenging for the department also, as they also were learning about the new policy. However, a main concern raised by providers was about the demands placed on providers to see eligible job seekers as quickly as possible, and ensure they commence in activities within a two week period. Many felt that this was impractical (particularly prior to September, as the WfD coordinators were not yet in place), as it did not take into account the practicalities of finding, setting up and allocating placements for job seekers.

*Yeah so we totally understand that the government wants to see this work, it's very loud and clear and we get that message. What I don't think the department*



*realises is there's a lot of stuff that needs to happen to put these things in place. It's not an overnight fix, well it wasn't for us anyway that had to generate our host agreements and develop relationships with them, attempt to collaborate with other providers in the ESA as well. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Some providers felt that this requirement was in conflict with a focus on matching job seekers to a suitable placement, and that it took time for negotiations with host organisations and job seekers to ensure maximum engagement.

*If we take the time to actually tailor and match them [job seekers] into an activity that not only do they want to do but that is alongside their employment pathway plan we find engagement increases, they attend, the host is happy, all that sort of thing. So flipside of that though is that I do spend a lot of time doing that but it affects me placing people within that two week timeframe. I could get everybody placed with the hosts we have available if I really wanted to sit there and just say okay you're going there, you're going there it's not in the best interests of the job seeker I don't believe either. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

### **3.1.3. Messaging issues**

In the provider consultations, respondents discussed their views on the title 'Work for the Dole'. Most preferred to refer to the programme as a 'work experience placement' to their clients instead of Work for the Dole, feeling that there was a negative stigma attached to the name which could automatically put a barrier up in the minds of job seekers (who could also see the programme as punitive), thus making it more difficult to engage in the programme. This was in part due to legacy issues – associating the programme with, for example, picking up rubbish and cleaning off graffiti. One large national provider worked with their internal communications department to develop job seeker and host organisation materials, utilising phrases other than 'Work for the Dole'.

Some providers suggested alternative names for the programme, including 'Community Work Placement', 'Newstart Work Experience' or 'Pathways to a Newstart', highlighting the fact that unemployment benefit payments are no longer called the 'dole'.

Providers also highlighted the need for consistent messaging and guidelines for all WfD stakeholders to avoid confusion and conflicting messages. Providers perceived that there could be some inconsistency in the messages Centrelink gave to job seekers (for example, apparently – according to some job seekers - advising clients that Work for the Dole was not compulsory) – this is in all likelihood because of WfD2014-15 only running in certain areas and only for eligible job seekers under 30, and because it was running alongside the existing WfD option for all other job seekers. However, examples were given when apparent miscommunication between stakeholders has hindered providers' ability to enforce WfD, particularly in relation to job seekers engaging in study.

*We've put them into an activity, they've not attended; we've done the participation report, Centrelink have come back and said "No, we're overturning this because our guidelines say that they can go into education at any point." So their wording on their policy is written different to our wording . (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

## 4. The role of the coordinator

The WfD2014-15 Coordinator is a new role introduced as part of the WfD2014-15 programme. Coordinators (one for each of the 18 WfD areas, apart from two larger areas which have two coordinators to ensure sufficient coverage) act as an intermediary for linking providers with host organisations. Thus, their primary role is to source suitable placements with host organisations.

Although the role started on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014, the coordinator appointments did not commence until September 2014. Up until that time, the role was undertaken by state office staff. This section draws on the qualitative discussions with providers (six face to face and 16 online) and with host organisations (36 interviews) as well as with the coordinators themselves (16 consulted).

### Summary of key points

- a) Many providers felt the coordinator role was beneficial, although because of the initial delays in commencement of this role, some providers had successfully identified WfD activities in host organisations independently, and continued to do so.
- b) There were some examples of provider mistrust of coordinators who were associated with providers operating in the same area (related to a perception of preferential treatment in sharing information about host organisations, for example) – coordinators were aware of this, and emphasised the importance of independence and collaboration, rather than competition.
- c) Some providers and hosts suggested there was a greater role for coordinators in liaising directly with host organisations who had multiple providers, and to aligning processes (for example, multiple risk assessments for similar activities for different providers).

### Departmental Action<sup>6</sup>

Under jobactive, each of the 51 Employment Regions across Australia has a Work for the Dole Coordinator whose primary role is to engage with not for profit organisations to source suitable Work for the Dole activities which will help prepare job seekers for the work environment.

Collaboration between jobactive providers and Work for the Dole Coordinators is a key contractual requirement and is monitored actively. The importance of collaboration is also demonstrated by its inclusion in the Performance Frameworks for jobactive providers and Coordinators.

A more streamlined risk assessment process was introduced as part of jobactive. The organisation that sources the Work for the Dole activity is required to undertake the risk assessment of the Work for the Dole activity. The Department has provided tools and guidance, including example risk assessments, to assist providers and Coordinators.

The Department consults with employment services sector representatives, jobactive providers and Work for the Dole Coordinators on their experience with Work for the Dole and suggestions for operational improvements. Where needed, the Department's State Network staff are available to assist.

<sup>6</sup> This response provides an update on actions undertaken in response to the findings of the evaluation.

#### 4.1. Introduction of the coordinator role

Views held on the value and understanding of the role of the WfD coordinator varied considerably amongst both providers and host organisations. Many saw the benefit of the role, whilst a few experienced some difficulties with this new role (particularly in the early weeks and months) and how responsibilities overlapped with provider roles in identifying and securing host organisation activities.

Unsurprisingly, the delay in commencement of the coordinator role created some initial difficulties, particularly in establishing relationships and securing host organisations and providing sufficient activities to meet demand. However, by the time of the research considerable progress had been made.

*She's trying her hardest to get other activities out there and she is doing that, but with some of the issues that we've had it's too little too late. We really needed it in July (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*I think certainly if the Work for the Dole coordinator that role was actually put in place from day one of the trial that would have definitely made a big difference. Because as soon as [coordinator] came on board the vacancies and things that he's been bringing in there's such a scope of activities that I think yeah if that was put in place from the start our sign ups or our commencements would have been higher. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*Then these guys' [the coordinators'] roles didn't start until probably the 8th of September and I know that in a couple of the locations--there really wasn't anything established down here by the department, even though they might have thought they had. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

The delay in establishing the coordinator role meant that in some cases providers had already made significant headway with host organisations, establishing placements directly. For some providers and hosts, the usefulness of the coordinator role was less apparent.

*we've been up and running for eight weeks prior to him being launched as the local coordinator it was like I'd set up my partnerships with my providers, I'd set up my activities and didn't really need to interact with him. (Host Organisation)*

Some stakeholders identified that the introduction of a WfD coordinator developed a level of mistrust amongst the providers where the coordinator was employed by a provider operating a WfD contract in that ESA. There was concern that there was a conflict of interest surrounding the coordinator's ability to be impartial when identifying and allocating activities.

*the company that she works for won the tender for the Work for the Dole coordinator, but the Work for the Dole coordinator is supposed to be completely independent of the company that she works for, but they created an activity down in [xxx], without any consultation (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*not just myself, but other host organisations in the area that were getting visits from them [coordinators] and saying we've already got a job service signed up. We're very happy with our relationship so why ? (Host Organisation)*

However, the coordinators themselves appeared fully aware of this perception and were mindful of the need to be unbiased when allocating placements.

*In the beginning we as coordinators that happen to be aligned with a JSA provider, were initially received with some degree of distrust, but over time and through demonstrating our impartiality we believe that this has greatly diminished, with the majority of providers utilising our services (Coordinator online forum)*

*Although I am employed by a JSA from the ESAs, I am very aware of promoting an unbiased approach when allocating placements and in discussions with providers promoting confidentiality of information shared because of the competitiveness of the industry. (Coordinator online forum)*

*I am employed by one of the JSA in my area but have not seen this to be an obstacle to working with the other JSA with my role reporting to management outside the JSA stream. I ensure my actions demonstrate impartiality and ensure confidentiality at all times. (Coordinator online forum)*

*We are from a JSA in our ESA, but do not promote this. There is no branding on anything that we distribute indicating this. All providers work with us extremely well, even to the point of divulging performance information to us as they consider us impartial. (Coordinator online forum)*

#### **4.2. Working with host organisations**

Host organisations were asked to discuss their impressions of the WfD coordinator role and the benefit it has had for them. The host organisations' reflections of the role were based on the nature of the contact that they had had with the local coordinator. It should be noted that across the host organisations, whilst most had been in contact with the coordinator at some point, it appeared that a few had limited contact or that some may have been confused if they had been engaging with a WfD 'coordinator' rather than the JSA WfD provider.

The benefit of the WfD coordinator role for host organisations produced a lot of varied responses. For host organisations who had had contact with their local WfD coordinator, it was common for them to have developed a positive relationship with the coordinator and many saw the role as beneficial to the programme. According to some host organisations, it appeared that the good relationships were developed through good communication and consultation.

*They've then done really what their role is between us and the providers in the region and has been quite successful I think definitely a good key central point who's then advocated for activities, and again, more of a partnered approach, working together on getting the activity up, helping us with what would be expected and things like that in the region. (Host Organisation)*

*We have a really good working relationship We catch up at least once a month, sometimes twice a month. (Host Organisation)*

*we would not be working towards a significant investment toward Work for the Dole if it wasn't for the local coordinator, she's been quite proactive and encouraging and helpful. (Host Organisation)*

Conversely, it was also common for some host organisations to have reservations about the coordinator position. This reluctance to engage with coordinators appears to mainly be from host organisations who already had established relationships with providers and WfD placements, and therefore viewed the coordinator as adding an additional and inconvenient layer of communication.

*It creates more work, because I know from my perspective if I want to get up an activity I can just go directly to the providers, but the way it works you go to the provider. You go to the works coordinator and then they refer you to a JSA provider. I could do that myself I just don't think many people found it very useful to be honest and it's just a waste of money in my opinion. (Host Organisation)*

There were a few that reported very little contact with their coordinator.

*So we're now in week 18 of the programme and I still haven't seen the Work for the Dole coordinator. I don't even know if they've appointed one. (Host Organisation)*

*I haven't had to speak to them once at all really. It would only be, sort of, meet and greet if they're changing over or anything like that, but apart from that, I just use the provider. (Host Organisation)*

#### **4.2.1. Identifying placements**

Despite the relatively slow start, coordinators were by early 2015 generally making good progress in getting host organisations on board and identifying suitable work experience activities.

*Schools, Community Services, Community & Neighbourhood Centres, Aged Care Facilities, Local Councils, and Local Health have been supportive of the WfD programme from the start. Clubs are starting to come on-board as hosts from the help of Clubs NSW (Coordinator online forum)*

*Participating host organisation (e.g. councils, clubs, associations, community organisations, and state government departments) have all responded well to the opportunity of having a Work for the Dole placement. (Coordinator online forum)*

Coordinators were keen to match their job placements to specific providers' and job seekers' needs to ensure that places were being created appropriately.

*The WfDC sends emails to us now pre proposal going ahead to see if we have interest in that activity and can fill with our job seekers. This is a better way to maximise time efficiency and to not waste host or WfDC's time (JSA Provider online forum)*

*They have been holding regular meetings in our area with all JSA providers and have sourced activities based on our job seekers' need. (JSA Provider online forum)*

Coordinators did identify some industries (including childcare, aged-care) and government departments which they believe could provide some valuable WfD placements, yet they tend to be constrained by policies and unions.

*other Government organisations have been a bit standoffish due to their Unions not wanting to participate, which is a shame. (Coordinator online forum)*

*Some state departments have stated they want to participate but because of state policy have not been given permission to do so. Many schools and child care centres have also expressed a strong interest in taking on job seekers but have been unable to because of the WFD guidelines. (Coordinator online forum)*

In some cases, the coordinator had implemented strategies, in consultation with providers, to ensure best practice when working with multiple providers with differing demands and needs.

*Based on this analysis I will then determine who I allocate the new host/activity to i.e. who needs the places (no use referring to someone who has plenty of places, unless diversifying skills in the activity), who has clients in that particular area and could furnish the places, etc. I don't advertise the places to all at the same time as we had agreed as a group that this would be impractical. When I allocate the new activity the JSA has 3 days to respond in writing to accept or decline the allocation. This gives the JSA time to consider all impacts and ensure the activity is aligning best with their cohort, location, needs, etc. All JSA have agreed they*

*prefer this method of allocation and we have not experienced any difficulties at all. (Coordinator online forum)*

*The coordinator also finds places specifically for individual providers, these places are not opened up for everyone and we only know about them once they have been taken. (JSA Provider, online forum)*

A few issues were raised by some providers who felt that the descriptions of the positions were too vague, or the positions the coordinator referred to them were not suitable. There were also reported difficulties for the coordinators in finding activities in rural areas.

*sometimes there is a lack of detail around the activity to make a determination. (JSA Provider online forum)*

*There is a little of bit difficulty sourcing places in rural areas and most providers appear to be playing catch up here. (JSA Provider online forum)*

*At this stage we have not seen a huge value in the coordinator. Throughout the ESA the coordinator has only been focused on one major town which is good for us in that particular area but in outlying areas where we have full time sites we have only received one host with limited placements at which we already had a host agreement in place. (JSA Provider online forum)*

#### **4.3. Working with providers**

There was a varied response from both coordinators and providers on their relationships with each other and the way that they have developed. Despite some initial 'teething problems' coordinators generally felt that the relationship with providers was now positive and collaborative.

*It does take some work to build confidence with the JSPs and to get them to understand that our role is to assist all JSPs in the ESA. (Coordinator online forum)*

*Definitely coordinator role is valuable being the middle man between hosts and JSA to create a good bond in interaction for the best interest of the job seekers (JSA Provider online forum)*

*My experiences with the WFD Coordinator has been very positive Very lucky to have such an experienced person in this role who doesn't believe in one JSA getting all the spots - shares activity between all providers and will also assist with other activities if we have hosts we would like to approach. (JSA Provider online forum)*

In the earlier stages of the programme, there was some frustration reported about establishing places and placing job seekers into activities in a timely manner from both providers and coordinators. Difficulties in finding suitable placements for job seekers could mean that by the time a suitable activity was identified then the job seeker was no longer available.

*I have also found that there is sometimes quite a delay getting approval for activities. Sometimes I get a response within a couple of days, other times a week or more. This is unfortunate in terms of maintaining momentum and enthusiasm with hosts. (Coordinator online forum)*

*JSA's wanted certain activity types e.g. admin, hospitality, gardening etc. I sourced them - however no referrals. (Coordinator online forum)*

*usually we source our own, in saying that in general the list that coordinators send, turn up to be a host of ours already. (JSA Provider online forum)*

Coordinators' awareness of providers actively seeking their own placements appeared to cause a degree of frustration for some because of multiple contacts to host organisations.

*Many continue to seek their own activities (and freely admit to this) despite repeated instructions from both DoE and myself to involve the WfDC in any discussions. Several providers have repeatedly told me for some months that they have adequate positions and are not interested in current WfDC-initiated activities (Coordinator online forum)*

*With both WFDC and JSA prospecting for new hosts/places we can end up both contacting the same organisations and cause some confusion or wasted time (Coordinator online forum)*

*I feel some providers are still fixated with having to source their own activities & I think this is so because of the competitiveness. (Coordinator online forum)*

*I also find that I am competing for places with providers and have on one occasion been 'warned off' by a JSA for dealing with a host, as they claimed to have exclusive rights to them. (Coordinator online forum)*

#### **4.3.1. Liaison**

Most coordinators and providers reported that communication between the two parties was key to a productive and successful relationship. Generally, communication has developed through a range of methods – including telephone, email and regular face-to-face meetings (it was common for coordinators to meet face-to-face with providers at least once a month).

*Communication has been extremely good which I believe is the key to the success we are having in using their services. (JSA Provider online forum)*

*Initially we commenced having weekly meetings with providers and DOE to assist with building relationships and open the communication lines. This proved to be beneficial when setting up processes for the trial. This moved to fortnightly and after Christmas moved to monthly meetings. Providers remain in phone contact and also by email almost daily. (Coordinator online forum)*

On the other hand, coordinators felt that there was some reluctance from a few providers to collaborate. The main reasons for this were suggested as legacy (provider competition being the norm for other programmes) and concerns that places that providers had sourced would be 'taken' from them.

*At the beginning it was apparent to me any way, not being from a JSA the providers were a bit reluctant to communicate and thought there was no need for a non JSA WfD Coordinator and with some providers it's still the case. Through developing a comprehensive communication process with the providers and creating quality places requested by the providers the relation now is 100% better than it was. (Coordinator online forum)*

*Communications are open mostly until asked what activities they have & then it becomes a secret. I think due to the fact that they think the WFDC is in competition with them (Coordinator online forum)*

*We had a provider there that would not touch [coordinator] because - they thought 'oh look he's just going to steal all our hosts, blah-blah-blah'. They've finally*

*broken down this year and that's taken quite a few months (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

This provider gives a clear insight into the nature of the relationship and the consequences of introducing the coordinator role.

*The challenges for the coordinators are going to come down to the fact that it's an odd relationship with the providers, because the providers do not need to engage with the coordinator if they choose not. They can get their own activities. So that leads to a sense where you've got the two groups, the providers and the coordinators contacting hosts and that can cause a bit of friction. Having said that, by the same token, that promotes competitiveness to get out there and start making calls. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*



## 5. Referrals to, and commencements in, Work for the Dole 2014-15

This section covers the referral of eligible WfD2014-15 job seekers, and subsequent commencement into a WfD activity. Attention has focused on ensuring that commencement rates are as high as possible from initial referrals – data from the department has shown a steady increase from the early months of the programme (58% in November 2014, 67% in January 2015) to the latest available figure of 76% (March 2015). This section draws primarily on the analysis of the administrative data.

### Summary of key points

- a) WfD2014-15 successfully changed provider behaviour in referring job seekers to Work Experience Activities as evidenced by significantly increased rates of referral to any activity and to WfD activities in particular.
- b) The programme impact on activity commencements, though smaller than the referral impact, is statistically significant and greater than observed in other, non-WfD2014-15 areas.
- c) Rates of referrals and commencements in the 18 WfD2014-15 areas varied, even after controlling for observable characteristics of job seekers. In particular, Stream 4 job seekers and people with Parenting Payment were far less likely to be referred to WfD than other job seekers.
- d) Levels of referrals to any activity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers were generally lower, but referral to WfD was higher than for other job seekers.
- e) In the qualitative discussions, providers expressed frustration in delays in commencements, caused by a range of factors including job seekers not turning up for their WfD activity, changes in job seeker circumstances (such as becoming unwell), and delays in 'processing' (such as waiting for agreements to be confirmed and for police checks).

### Departmental Action<sup>7</sup>

The National jobactive Forum on 27-28 April 2015 brought together senior managers from organisations selected to deliver jobactive services, including Work for the Dole Coordinators, and departmental programme and contract management staff to set expectations ahead of the start of the contract period

In the lead up to July 2015, the Department published guidelines and training materials with an emphasis on the importance of planning and preparing job seekers and delivered 13 supporting webinars. These materials included messaging on matching a job seeker's characteristics to a suitable activity.

The Department will continue to consider feedback from jobactive providers and Work for the Dole Coordinators on the operation of the programme to identify any areas for refinement or supplementary information or support.

<sup>7</sup> This response provides an update on actions undertaken in response to the findings of the evaluation.

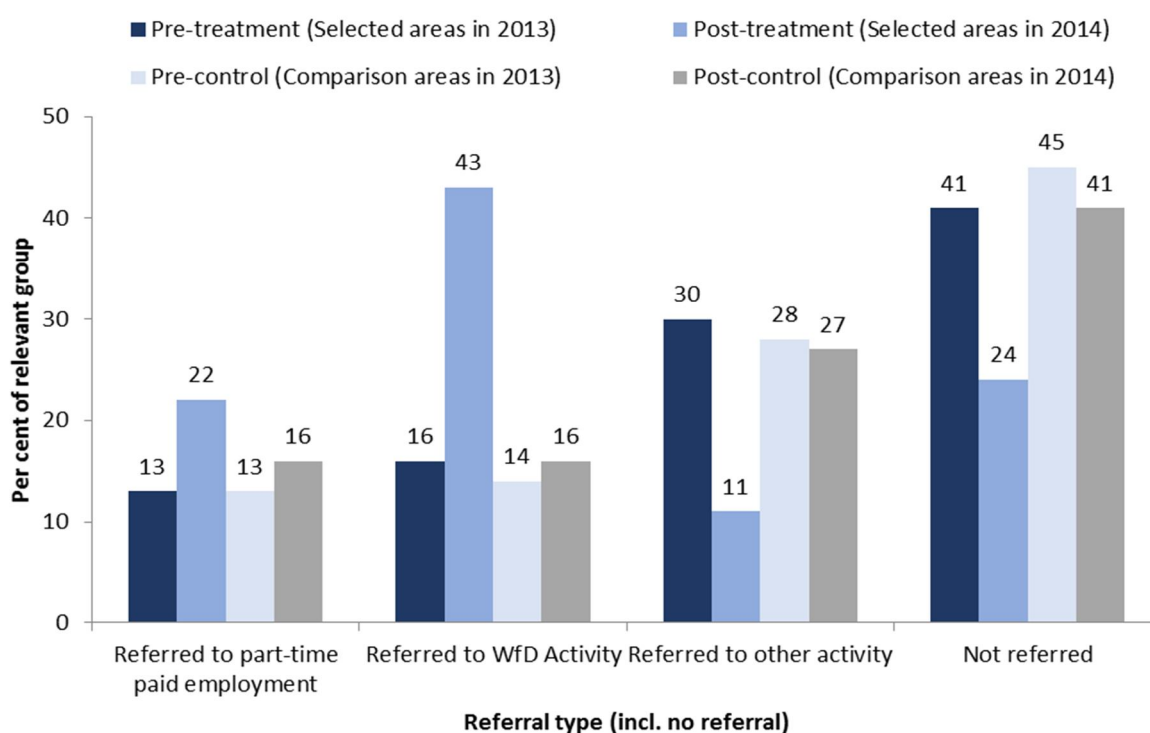
Roughly halfway through the WfD2014-15 programme period, approximately 17,260 eligible job seekers in the 18 selected areas were ready to commence a Work Experience Activity. Just over half (52%) were participating in an approved activity other than Work for the Dole, for example, part-time or casual paid employment. Of those who were eligible and ready to commence in a Work for the Dole activity (8342 job seekers), 67% of were doing Work for the Dole. The commencement rate continued to increase over the programme period and was at approximately 76% at the time of writing this report in March 2015.

One of the main questions though is the *extent* to which WfD2014-15 increased these referrals and commencements. The administrative data used for this evaluation cover the period 1 July to 31 December and are based on job seekers who commenced in the Work Experience Phase of service between these dates in 2013 and 2014 (for comparing before and after the introduction of WfD2014-15) and in different regions (for comparing trends in the 18 selected areas and in non-WfD2014-15 comparison areas). The data was split into four groups, as outlined below:

- Pre-treatment group – Job seekers in WfD2014-15 areas who commenced in the Work Experience Phase between 1 July 2013 and 31 December 2013
- Pre-control group – Job seekers in comparison areas who commenced in the Work Experience Phase between 1 July 2013 and 31 December 2013
- Post-treatment group – Job seekers in WfD2014-15 areas who commenced in the Work Experience Phase between 1 July 2014 and 31 December 2014, and
- Post-control group – Job seekers in comparison areas who commenced in the Work Experience Phase between 1 July 2014 and 31 December 2014.

Analysis of administrative data showed that in the first six months of operating, the activation of job seekers with a Work Experience Activity Requirement had increased substantially in the WfD2014-15 selected areas (compared to the previous year). This is summarised in Figure 2, which gives the proportion of eligible job seekers referred to particular activities in the four groups outlined above.

**Figure 2: Proportion of potentially eligible job seekers referred to a Work Experience Activity, by group (area type and date)**



Full information on the estimation methodology is available in a separate methodology report. The main results, which were statistically significant at the 1% level of significance,<sup>8</sup> are that:

- The probability of being referred to a Work Experience Activity (any type of activity) increased by 16.9 percentage points in WfD2014-15 areas (from 61.2% to 78.0%) compared to 4.5 percentage points in comparison areas (from 57.0% to 61.5%), and
- The probability of being referred to a WfD activity specifically increased by 29.7 percentage points in WfD2014-15 areas (from 22.4% to 52.1%) compared to a 2.2 percentage point increase in comparison areas (from 19.4% to 21.6%).

These differences are for someone with otherwise identical observed characteristics<sup>9</sup>. There is strong support from the administrative data, therefore, that that implementation of WfD2014-15 increased the rate at which JSA providers refer job seekers to relevant work experience activities. In other words, there is strong evidence that WfD2014-15 has increased providers' 'activation' of job seekers in the Work Experience or Compulsory Activity Phase of service. Importantly, this finding holds under different estimation methods.

For job seekers referred to Work for the Dole activities, there appears to be a smaller though still statistically significant effect on the likelihood of commencing an activity. Specifically, holding other characteristics constant, there was an increase in the probability of commencing an activity of 0.041 in the Selected Areas (from 0.806 to 0.847). In the comparison areas, on the other hand, there was an estimated decrease in the probability of 0.003 (from 0.833 to 0.830). Commencement rates were historically reasonably high (though referrals were not). WfD2014-15 appears to have increased this even more.

The effect of WfD2014-15 on referral to a WfD activity or commencement in an activity was not consistent across job seekers. The effect on referral was found to be much larger for non-Indigenous Australians from an English Speaking Background compared to non-Indigenous Australians from a Non-English Speaking Background and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The effect was also larger for those who had been a job seeker for a relatively short period of time (two years or less) compared to those who had been a job seeker for three years or more (who would be likely to have more profound labour market barriers).

To summarise, WfD2014-15 has had a materially larger impact on the referral behaviour of providers than on the commencement behaviour of job seekers, though both are statistically significant effects. For a typical Stream 1 job seeker with consistent characteristics, the modelling indicates small changes in the comparison areas, but in WfD2014-15 areas the predicted probability of referral to any activity increased from 0.612 to 0.780 in the evaluation reference period; referral to a WfD activity increased from 0.224 to 0.521; and the probability of commencing in a WfD activity (once referred), from 0.81 to 0.85.

### **5.1. What is associated with referrals and commencements?**

There remains considerable variation in referrals and commencements across individual job seekers, even after the introduction of WfD2014-15. Employability (as measured by job seeker Stream) is strongly associated with the likelihood that an eligible job seeker is referred to WfD. In particular, job seekers with severe barriers to employment (Stream 4) were substantially less likely to be referred to WfD than job seekers facing less severe barriers to employment.

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<sup>8</sup> Statistical significance refers to the likelihood that observed differences are driven by chance based on the particular sample selected, rather than reflective of differences for the population as a whole across repeated samples. In the analysis in the accompanying administrative data report, information is available for all participants rather than from a sample of participants. However, similar assumptions can be made assuming sampling across time for individuals, rather than across individuals at one point in time.

<sup>9</sup> A separate methodology report has details on the full model specification. In summary though, characteristics that are controlled for are: Stream, payment type, job seeker duration, age, sex, Indigenous status, country of birth, health conditions, previous criminal offences, recent work history and education.

Job seekers in receipt of Parenting Payment were less likely to be referred to any work experience activity compared to those who receive NewStart Allowance (controlling for difference in age and gender). Job seekers who receive a Youth Allowance payment, on the other hand, were slightly more likely to be referred to any activity, but significantly and substantially more likely to be referred to a WfD activity.

Recent work experience (within two years) has a significant positive association with referral to a Work Experience Activity. Within this group who are referred to any activity, those with recent work experience are somewhat less likely to be referred to a WfD activity. This is likely to be because job seekers with recent work experience are more likely to be referred to part-time or casual paid employment as their Work Experience Activity.

Job seekers without Year 12 schooling are significantly less likely to be referred to a Work Experience Activity (any activity) and, if referred, are less likely to commence the activity, compared with job seekers who have completed Year 12. This suggests that JSA providers have difficulty placing long-term unemployed job seekers with low educational attainment in any type of activity. Findings in the field consultations resonate with this finding.

Compared to non-Indigenous Australians, Indigenous Australians were significantly less likely to be referred to any activity, and also less likely to commence either any activity or a WfD activity. However, for those who are referred to any activity, WfD is a somewhat more common referral type for Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous job seekers.

There were 27 Employment Service Areas (ESA) within which WfD2014-15 was implemented, involving 48 JSA providers. When analysed, the administrative data described above shows that there is significant variation in referrals and commencements across these areas and between providers, and that this variation remains even after controlling for observable characteristics of the job seeker. On balance, there was a larger standard deviation across provider organisations than there was across areas, though the specifics also vary. In particular, there is quite a large degree of variation across areas in the probability of an individual being referred to WfD, conditional on being referred to any activity. Across providers, the largest variation is in terms of commencements conditional on WfD referral.

The qualitative and quantitative data gives us some further insight into the variation across individuals, areas and providers. While the sample size is small, job seekers' reasons provided for not participating in the Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme included: a preference to do paid work, already meeting activity requirements, a preference to study and the Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme not fitting in with existing commitments.

Providers mentioned specific activities they had introduced to ensure that successful commencements occurred. This included early participant 'check-ins' shortly after commencement to check how the participant was getting on, and weekly information sessions for WfD referred job seekers to meet host organisation supervisors and talk over roles and responsibilities.

*Certainly not a bad conversion rate from referral to commencement, once we've got them engaged to think about where they're going every Wednesday we do information sessions, they meet our supervisors get an idea of what they can do, have a look at the options available, so from that point it's generally quite successful, it's getting them to the information session that's the greater [challenge] of the two (JSA provider)*

*We have also implemented clients having an appointment a week after commencement date to make sure of attendance and rostered days and any issues with transport etc to activity (JSA provider)*

According to providers, the main reasons for delays in commencement following referral include job seekers not turning up to their work experience activity when they should (despite indicating engagement with their employment consultant during meetings and subsequent conversations).

*Some are resistant, generally however most will comply whilst in our office. However, attendance at activities reflect they are not prepared to undertake their requirements either by their resistance when they attend the inductions or by failing to attend (JSA provider online)*

In addition, some providers mentioned that there were some job seekers who, at the point of referral, had issues or circumstances which meant that they were no longer eligible. This included the disclosure of paid work, significant caring responsibilities or poor health.

In the survey, job seekers who had been referred to the WfD2014-15 programme but had not commenced within two months of referral, were asked if there were any specific reasons for the delay. Although the sample size is small, and therefore results should be treated cautiously, the most commonly cited reasons included: no longer being required to attend, finding employment, an unwillingness to participate in the programme, problems with the provider and an existing study commitment.

Those who were yet to commence fell into three distinct categories in relation to their expected start date, with roughly a third in each category. Some expected to start imminently, others were unsure and there was a group who were hoping to never commence, or commence in the distant future.

## 6. Host organisations' experiences

This section explores how host organisations become engaged in the WfD2014-15 programme, their views on the programme and their reasons for becoming a host organisation for WfD work experience activities (plus any concerns they had about being host organisations). Their experiences of the practicalities of setting up WfD work experience individual and group activities are also explored.

This section is based primarily on data from the 36 qualitative discussions with host organisations themselves, supported by evidence from providers and coordinators.

### Summary of key points

- a) Most host organisations for WfD2014-15 had previous experience of volunteers, including through other employment service programmes.
- b) Host organisations demonstrated a commitment to WfD and to providing opportunities for this cohort, as well as seeing WfD as a way of supporting their organisation by undertaking activities and completing tasks that they would not have otherwise had the resources to do.
- c) Concerns were raised by some hosts about the costs of setting up and running activities – particularly individual activities. Other concerns included finding sufficient activities for the 15 hours per week, and providing the necessary training and equipment.
- d) It was observed by some hosts and providers that some potential hosts could be discouraged from participating due to concerns about taking on this client group (some had had previous negative experiences), and the impact on their existing workforce (paid and unpaid).

### Departmental Action<sup>10</sup>

Under jobactive, Work for the Dole fees were increased from \$600 to \$1000 per individual hosted place and from up to \$1200 to up to \$3500 per group based place.

The Department continues to actively look at the supports and tools that can be provided to assist host organisations in supervising a range of job seekers in activities. The *Work for the Dole Host Induction Kit* prepared by Volunteering Victoria and funded by the Australian Government, is available on the [employment.gov.au](http://employment.gov.au) website.

The Department held Work for the Dole Host Forums in 53 locations across the country throughout May and into June to engage local stakeholders and build community awareness of jobactive.

Information on the Department's website for potential host organisations includes a video about Work for the Dole and its benefits.

<sup>10</sup> This response provides an update on actions undertaken in response to the findings of the evaluation.

## 6.1. Engaging host organisations

A variety of host organisations were involved in delivering the WfD2014-15 programme including:

- Small not-for-profits (including 'op shops', charities)
- recycling organisations (including food, pallets, computers, bicycles)
- aged care organisations
- youth service organisations, and
- local councils.

Many of the host organisations had been involved in WfD previously and if not, most had experience engaging with volunteers or with participants in other labour market programmes. Host organisations were often also involved in student (secondary and tertiary) work experience placements, community service orders, youth justice programmes, government pay back schemes and the Green Army/Green Corps. Running these programmes meant that many host organisations had previous links and built relationships with employment service providers, and had some understanding of the client group and their circumstances.

### 6.1.1. Communication with host organisations

One of the key influences for host organisations engaging in the new WfD was the existing relationship they had with providers. Many host organisations had prior connections with providers' services and this relationship appeared to be crucial in how open host organisations were to becoming involved in WfD2014-15. Open communication between all stakeholders was identified as fundamental to successful outcomes.

It appeared that coordinators and providers would promote WfD as an opportunity to complete tasks or activities within an organisation that they would not normally have the resources or time to do. For example, one of the coordinators spoke of discussing with potential hosts a 'wish list' of tasks they would like to achieve within their organisation, and found this a useful 'way in', particularly for not-for-profit organisations who were often limited both in time and resources.

*I talk about 'wish list' stuff so I ask them to think about if in a perfect world they could open up their wish list and get jobs done, what would they do? And that's when they go "Oh " the cogs start turning and they start thinking about the different things that they can do (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Other recommendations from coordinators to engage host organisations were to do background research on their business to be able to suggest how WfD could benefit their organisation, and to run information sessions inviting potential host organisations.

*Do your homework on your potential hosts before doing a presentation to them so that you have the best opportunity to advise them on how WfD can assist them either through individual and/or group activities (Coordinator online forum)*

There were a number of concerns from all stakeholders (hosts, coordinators and providers) that individual host organisations were being approached by multiple stakeholders. This included the initial contact to start up an activity and the processes involved in setting up a placement (e.g. host agreements, risk assessments). Providers and coordinators thought that being approached numerous times could be a deterrent for host organisations and that more streamlined approaches would be beneficial to host organisations.

*Host organisations are being approached by providers and WfD coordinators competing against one another for places and the information communicated is inconsistent. (Coordinator online forum)*

## 6.2. Host organisation views on Work for the Dole 2014-15

Qualitative discussions with host organisations revealed that they generally saw the WfD2014-15 programme as a positive initiative that provides job seekers an opportunity to develop skills, build confidence and get some valuable work experience. It was also felt that the programme had positive impacts on the self-esteem of the cohort, and as such host organisations were motivated to assist these job seekers. Host organisations indicated commitment to providing work-like experiences for job seekers to improve their chances of gaining employment. Examples of this commitment sometimes extended to providing assistance with improving their résumés and searching for jobs.

*We'll get a new person comes into the warehouse to do the programme and we'll drag him into the job club room and say right, we're going to help you find a job. Give us your resume. What sort of work do you want to do? (Host Organisation)*

The compulsory nature of WfD for this cohort was felt to be appropriate amongst host organisation respondents, who acknowledged (and had observed) that many job seekers need some encouragement, or even coercion, to progress towards employment.

However, despite most host organisations agreeing with the compulsory nature of WfD, there were a few hosts (and providers) that said this depended on the individual's circumstances and some may not be suitable for it.

*I have a philosophical concern about Work for the Dole as a punitive activity. But, I do believe it has, if done correctly, has the chance of providing people with real skills and real employment opportunities. (Host Organisation)*

## 6.3. Motivations for becoming a host organisation

It was apparent that one of the main reasons for host organisations to engage in WfD was based on altruistic motives. Many saw it as an opportunity to help local job seekers in finding employment. It was reported that there were some host organisations whose mission statements were established on the basis of helping vulnerable or disadvantaged people find employment so WfD was essentially endorsing their mandate.

*I've got one host that really, it's a youth enterprise organisation, they work specifically with youth and they heard about the new Work for the Dole and wanted to be part of changing the lives of young people, so they are genuinely in it for the greater good. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Another motivation mentioned was that WfD helped community organisations complete jobs that they had put 'on the backburner' for a long time and would never have been able to progress without the assistance of the job seekers. Some also viewed the WfD programme as an opportunity to develop community infrastructure, where they had not previously had the resources. A few of the host organisation respondents had themselves been unemployed in the past (including as WfD participants) and based on their history and positive outcomes from WfD felt encouraged to participate. For the few the local councils interviewed, their motivations to participate were so that they could be seen as supporting government policy.

*We were advised that they were targeting local government to actually participate in this. So we were virtually obligated to participate. (Host Organisation)*

There was no evidence in the research that host organisations' motivation to participate in WfD was solely to benefit the organisation – indeed a key role of the coordinator was to ensure that this was not the case.



*There has only been one host that has been eager about the dollar value they receive rather than the assistance they gain, which prompted us not to follow through with that host. (JSA Provider)*

Whilst some welcomed the opportunity to increase their volunteer workforce, the ability of the programme to help job seekers gain work-related and employability skills was a key motivator. That said, the funding of WfD was clearly an added incentive. Some host organisations stated that the funding made a significant contribution to the ongoing operations of their business.

*We had a number of other funding channels that were dried up, programs that had come to an end, so we were certainly looking at different ways to go to keep the organisation going. (Host Organisation)*

*Because, and it's a great idea for us, because it gives us an income that we wouldn't normally get. Because, we're sort of like a self-supporting, we rely on grants and donations and now basically what we sell out of the shed anyway. So, this is another way for us to get a bit of income into the shed. (Host Organisation)*

#### **6.4. What deters potential host organisations?**

Previous involvement by host organisations in other (earlier) WfD programmes was one of the main disincentives to participate in the new WfD2014-15 programme. According to some coordinators and providers, negative experiences of dealing with job seekers and providers under previous programmes had made some host organisations harder to engage with once again.

*I have a minority of hosts who have had a not so good experience from previous Work for the Dole participants and JSA providers have experienced a lack of re-engagement by host organisations due to bad experiences with WfD placements such as lack of attendance, placements turning up but not completing the day or not attending at all. (Coordinator online forum)*

Some minor issues that emerged in discussions was that host organisations can perceive WfD to be 'babysitting' unemployed people, had concerns over their ability to provide the necessary supervision and had some trepidation about being able to create full activities.

Other concerns about being a host organisation included:

- Costs - providers identified that some hosts were concerned about participating in WfD because of perceptions that there was insufficient funding available, particularly for individual activities.

*The host organisations have told us, \$600 is nothing, it's not worth me getting involved for that kind of money. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

- The nature of the WfD client group – potential host organisations could be concerned about taking on job seekers *per se*, and in particular perceptions of them being unreliable and unmotivated.

*They take a lot of volunteers that are retired people who--because the reaction I got when I phoned people in that first six months was "oh we don't take job seekers, we want long-term volunteers". So they're thinking people who have retired are going to be reliable because they'll show up because they've got nothing else to do, whereas job seekers will show up if they feel like it, or until they get a job and then they've got to start the training all over again. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

- The impact on the existing workforce - there were a few hosts who were initially concerned that their regular volunteers would be resistant to WfD job seekers, but these concerns appeared to be unfounded.

The administration of WfD was raised by only a few host organisations – most found the administrative processes (primarily around timesheets) to be perhaps a little arduous, but not complex and evidently not a deterrent to participation.

The displacement of paid staff or volunteers was not an issue for most host organisations as many, being not-for-profit, were already restricted (financially) with the number of paid staff they could have and were already reliant on volunteers. For organisations that had paid staff, they were fully aware that they had to ensure job seekers were not engaging in activities that they would normally pay staff or contractors to do.

## **6.5. Setting up placements**

Setting up placements required intensive dialogue and discussions between hosts, coordinators and/or providers. There were eight key areas which emerged from the research around placement establishment:

- Risk assessments
- Screening of participants
- Police checks
- Equipment and uniforms
- Inductions and occupational health and safety
- Additional training requirements
- Transport, and
- Finding sufficient hours.

### **6.5.1. Risk assessments**

Risk assessments are conducted for all WfD activities and providers and coordinators were concerned over the time it took to complete them, especially when dealing with multiple providers. This could cause delays to the commencement of activities.

*That's three risk assessments that have to be done on the same activity. So then all three of us are calling the host to try and organise times to go out and do the risk assessment, and not only that, it presents inconsistencies. You've got three different risk assessments each provider has a different form (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Both providers and coordinators agreed that risk assessments should be conducted by the coordinator, to ensure consistency and a streamlined approach for host organisations to manage.

*There needs to be one point of contact and there needs to be one risk assessment done on behalf of the activity. The contract at the moment doesn't allow us to do that, there has to be three different risk assessments. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*I also think it would be extremely beneficial for WfDCs to be able to conduct risk assessments. It also of course reduces red tape and time from the host (in the case of a group activity with multiple providers). Providers are reluctant to rely on another provider to conduct a risk assessment on their behalf as they would still be held responsible. (Coordinator online forum)*

### **6.5.2. Host organisations screening participants**

It was common for many host organisations to screen a job seeker prior to them being placed with them, particularly for individual placements. This meant that job seekers go through a process of meeting the host representative, having an interview and conducting additional checks which could mean that it takes longer for the activity to commence. Some providers expressed concerns about this process in that it could negatively impact on the job seeker's self-esteem if they were not successful in getting a volunteer role for a work experience activity that they have to do to meet their activity requirement. Some providers also felt that it was not necessary, given that job seekers had already been screened by them, and that there was a risk of expectations being too high from host organisations.

*The [host organisations] will actually interview them prior to referring them to an activity, which can be quite demeaning like if you've got a Stream 4 job seeker that's been unemployed for quite some time and has had some maybe family breakdown and some anxiety issues going on, if they were rejected from something that they're getting paid for, that's not going to help their self-esteem...These people genuinely need to be given a chance somewhere and if they can't get a chance in a volunteer capacity how is that going to help them feel like they're going to get a job? (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*Individual activities seem to have more requirements - hosts want the "right fit" and the opportunity to meet and interview potential participants which can cause delays in filling the places. (Coordinator online forum)*

### **6.5.3. Police checks and Working with Children checks**

Many host organisations requested police checks to be conducted prior to the commencement of a job seeker (although some providers suggested that police checks were actually not always necessary for the type of work experience they would be undertaking). Some providers indicated that many of the cohort had criminal records and this presented particular challenges in placing them in suitable activities.

*So that's a big thing [police clearances for community organisations], that rules out three-quarters of our clients, maybe - between half and three-quarters - that will not be able to work in that particular hosted environment because their police clearances are not clear. It could be a small thieving thing on their police clearance, but then you can't put them into a retail option. So police clearances have quite a significant impact on who we can place where. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*Because they know they won't pass, and they're quite open to tell you, I won't pass a police clearance. It could just be something quite small and silly they did years ago, but Salvos and stuff, they just won't accept it. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

For coordinators and providers, a common concern was the subsequent delay on commencement, whilst the checks were being processed.

*The issue regarding hosts requiring police check continues to delay placements. (Coordinator online forum)*

*Most hosts require criminal history or working with children's checks. JSA providers do not like activities where checks are required, causing delays in referring/placing job seekers. (Coordinator online forum)*

*I mean, we'll avoid them where we can. The idea is to try and get them into something as quickly as possible. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Some providers stated that they anticipate that host organisations will request police and Working with Children checks, so are applying for them as early as possible to ensure job seekers are ready when they become eligible for WfD. However, others were concerned of the cost of doing this for groups of job seekers, as many of them would later become ineligible for WfD or drop out before commencement.

*We've started police checking everyone that's coming up within the four weeks, so we're kind of hedging our bets so when it comes into the time that they're due to go in, that they can go straight into an activity. Because we don't have many activities that don't require a police check at the moment. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*At 48 weeks we would start to I suppose plant the seed and inform them about the Work for the Dole phase. And we've started now to fill in police checks at that point to try and make sure that it's completed and we can get them straight into a placement. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Some host organisations were unsure if they could request police checks to be conducted by their employment provider and whether these costs would be absorbed in their funding agreement.

*I wanted to look into police checks but that will cost us the money. We won't actually be reimbursed for that I don't think. So we don't do it. (Host Organisation)*

#### **6.5.4. Equipment and uniforms**

It is common for host organisations to have requirements that job seekers wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and uniforms. Host organisations said that there were numerous occasions where job seekers would not adhere to the appropriate PPE requirements, prohibiting them from taking part in the activity. According to respondents, PPE gear and uniforms were generally provided by the provider, however, a few host organisations provided it directly. Both providers and hosts commented on the cost of such provision, particularly where multiple job seekers flow through one activity place and each requires a new set of PPE and/or uniforms.

#### **6.5.5. Induction and occupational health and safety**

Inductions are commonly run in most of the host organisations prior to or at the commencement of a job seeker placement. These inductions generally incorporated company values, Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) measures and exploring the worksite.

*When they come on the Wednesday induction is about safety induction as well as a code of conduct about really setting up the ground rules about what we expect and gives us an opportunity to just start that conversation. (Host Organisation)*

*So it might be an hour and a half going through a corporate induction and then go to the site where they're getting placed and connect with the key report and then it's an actual site induction. (Host Organisation)*

For some host organisations, the induction process prior to the job seeker commencing the activity provided a good opportunity for job seekers to see what their role will involve and choose activities they might be interested in. Sometimes the induction process made job seekers appear to reassess the suitability of the activity, which meant that they may not subsequently return. For hosts, this could be beneficial as it meant that only those who were engaged participated but clearly for providers this was a challenge for commencement targets.

*We purposely do it on a Thursday morning because people have had — it takes a good hour and a half and people have had a good look at it and decided whether they're going to turn up the following Tuesday or not. So it saves a lot of time all round. So when we induct ten people, we know that four or five will turn up the following Tuesday and the rest won't. (Host Organisation)*

*How we work is we do inductions each week, and job seekers that are referred to the program, they go into an induction, and that could be in any job network. Then in that induction they work out what they want to do, because we provide all the different skills. We inform them of what skills that we can provide, and then they choose what they want to go into. (Host Organisation)*

#### **6.5.6. Additional training**

Most informal training occurs on the job, but there were some host organisations who required training to be completed pre-placement or had it arranged for them to complete when they commenced their WfD activity. White cards – for construction – appeared to be the most common training required for placements, and this was generally conducted prior to commencing the placement and run through the job seeker's provider. Others included warehouse, logistics, food handling and processing and some job-specific training, like tree felling, coxswain and deckhand courses and training.

*We have actually put them through training, too, which I don't know whether we were supposed to do that or not which we have actually paid for because they all needed a white card and some of them needed change-all ticket. So, we have actually paid for that which is great, but it's not something that we budgeted for, nor did we expect to. So, we are not really sure about whether we had to do that, but of course they couldn't do the work without it. (Host Organisation)*

Host organisations occasionally mentioned that job seekers could benefit from receiving a certificate or acknowledgement of the training they had completed, acting as an incentive for job seekers to attend.

#### **6.5.7. Location of activities and transport issues**

The location of WfD activities and transport to and from those locations was often mentioned as a difficulty in terms of job seeker attendance. Coordinators placed emphasis where possible on initiating activities that were easy to access.

*Now our young guys down in [place names], there's no public transport down there so we're constantly having battles with getting them into programmes anyway. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*Activities are accessible by public transport, however the further the distance the less likely they will attend. (JSA Provider online forum)*

Despite the travel subsidy of \$20.80 per fortnight to attend WfD, many providers and some host organisations felt that this was not sufficient to cover the real cost of travel to and from activities. This was identified particularly in rural areas where public transport options are not as accessible, nor as frequent, and can be quite expensive.

*And the west coast activity, the round trip bus far is like \$15.00 or something where the actual activity is, is a significant distance from the little bit of public transport that they do have, and the department have actually really pushed us to put our clients into these activities, which has been really challenging because we're talking an hour and a half for them to get there. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*And the reality also is that transport supplement is not enough. It actually doesn't cover two days of public transport now and some of our clients have to attend for three days, and in the new contract, they have to attend for four days. That's where the \$20.80 is an issue, because if you've got someone from [place] going all the way through [place], all the way down to [place], it's going to cost them \$20 a week to get there, not \$20 a fortnight. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Some providers and some hosts were able to provide shared transport for job seekers, collecting them from bus stops or train stations for example, and taking them directly to the WfD activity.

*Transport's a huge issue. So again, we always refer back to our own internal activities. An element of that is there are mobile teams. We have vehicles and we transport the job seekers so that the only thing they need to do is get here and then we transfer them to wherever the job is that day. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

### **6.5.8. Finding sufficient hours**

Some host organisations, particularly smaller ones, and those reliant primarily on volunteers and part-time staff, mentioned that they found it challenging to find enough activities for job seekers to meet the 15 hours' worth of activities during weekdays (notably, some had plenty of activities at the weekends but reported that they were unable to use WfD participants). Many hosts provided the activities over two full days of 7.5 hours each (often this was for host organisation's convenience – for example a site only being open for two days, or only having supervision available for two full days each week). Some found that they struggled to find activities that covered 7.5 hours and as a result found it challenging to keep job seekers engaged and enthused over the course of the day.

### **6.6. Establishing and running group and individual activities**

Coordinators and providers stated that they were focused on creating placements based on the needs and skills of job seekers, whether they are group or individual, but felt that group activities were more financially viable, less overall administratively burdensome and often better suited the job seeker (through being in a group activity, communicating with others). There was some resistance to the focus of creating 75% individual activities/25% group activities in the WfD2014-15 (advice given in a webinar to providers).

*The bit that gets me with a 75/25 split rule is why we need it. What is this ratio achieving? In my ESA we work hard to have enough places and don't have the luxury to knock back anything to maintain a certain ratio (Coordinator online forum)*

*In my ESA, I endeavour to adhere to the 75:25 ratio but will not reject an activity just because it may throw this ratio out. I am just focusing on having enough places, be they individual or group to fulfil the needs of providers. (Coordinator online forum)*

However, managing group dynamics and supervising up to 15 people was identified as difficult for even experienced supervisors. Particular concerns were highlighted where there were 'clashes' within groups – this appeared to occur occasionally in more localised or rural settings where job seekers could be known to one another and have a previous history of conflict.

*The reason being is we are only a small council, we are in a regional area, and there are a lot of people who know people. So, I wanted to make sure that we weren't selecting someone and putting them with someone who they knew because that tends to take a lot of – that can become difficult. So, I would rather*

*them be put with strangers, because that's what happens in a work environment.  
(Host Organisation)*

*We can provide you with names, being small community stuff, and you can tell us if they'll be a fit or not, because they'll know. There's one particular person up in [area] that there is not in any way known that he will ever get on a project in his own community. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Some providers felt that individual activities could be more beneficial to some job seekers as they were more individually tailored, with more one-to-one supervision and could be better aligned within an existing activity rather than creating a new one. It was also noted by some host organisations and providers that non-attendance at an individual placement had a more minimal impact on the operations of the organisation.

*The individual activities have significant less impact on our day to day operations.  
(Host Organisation)*

*All our activities are individual and attendance for the host is not so critical. (JSA Provider online forum)*

The administrative processes for setting up individual or group activities were said to be similar, but there was higher payment for group activities.

*It is easier to find individual placements over group based activities, but the amount of administration for a group based activity in comparison to an individual activity is almost identical when writing up proposals and performing risk assessments. So from a JSA perspective it is easier to refer multiple job seekers to a group based activity rather than one job seeker to an individual placement.  
(Coordinator online forum)*

*Because of the admin management involved in individual placement for us it's almost as much to admin one as it is to admin thirty. (Host Organisation)*

## 7. Job seeker circumstances and engagement with Work for the Dole 2014-15

This section outlines job seekers' understanding and views of the WfD2014-15 requirements, followed by descriptions of the characteristics and circumstances of the eligible job seekers. Details on job seekers' circumstances at the time of the survey are also provided.

The section draws on data from the survey and qualitative research with job seekers, providers, hosts and coordinators. The analysis of the administrative data also provides some information on the characteristics of those referred to the programme – this is covered in Section 5.

### Summary of key points

- a) Job seekers had variable understandings of WfD2014-15 offered to them, with most indicating that their provider had not fully explained the opportunities, and some indicating that they had not initially been aware that it was an obligation or were given very short notice in relation to commencement.
- b) Job seekers appeared initially to see WfD2014-15 as purely an obligation and were somewhat resistant – however, for those who commenced (and stayed) the benefits became apparent over time.
- c) In terms of requirements, job seekers mostly felt that the hours and duration were acceptable, with some concern about increasing the requirement to 25 hours a week
- d) It was widely recognised (by providers, coordinators and hosts) that those eligible for WfD2014-15 had significant labour market barriers (some of which needed to be addressed outside of programmes such as WfD) – these included mental health problems, a history of criminal behaviour and the consequences of intergenerational unemployment.
- e) By the time of the survey, over a third of participants were working (mostly in temporary jobs), with a further third primarily focused on looking for work. Cited barriers to work by respondents were primarily health-related, transport-related or insufficient suitable job vacancies.

### Departmental Action<sup>11</sup>

The Department released promotional materials including letters to job seekers to explain their obligations, a job seeker video to promote the benefits of the Work for the Dole and information products to explain the programme. In addition, SMS prompts are sent to job seekers to remind them of upcoming obligations. Through these materials the Department has emphasised the value of Work for the Dole activities in developing positive work behaviours, such as punctuality, teamwork and commitment.

The Department will continue to use the findings of the evaluation as well as feedback from the employment services sector and job seekers to inform future information products regarding the programme and its benefits.

<sup>11</sup> This response provides an update on actions undertaken in response to the findings of the evaluation.



## 7.1. Job seeker understanding and views on new requirements

Before engaging with WfD2014-15, or some other kind of activity, approximately four out of ten job seekers had heard of the reintroduction of WfD2014-15 – of those more than half reported hearing about it from their provider. Other frequently mentioned sources included the media (television, radio and newspapers) and from friends or family. The results are presented in Table 5.

Just over half (52%) of job seekers felt that it was appropriate for recipients of income support payments to be asked to participate in WfD2014-15, a further 31% indicated it depended on the situation and 14% felt they should not be asked to participate.

**Table 5: Awareness of the reintroduction of Work for the Dole 2014-15**

Base Category	Population and awareness	Participated in Work for the Dole	Referred to WfD but not yet started	Participated in other activity
<i>Base: Job seekers eligible for Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme</i>	Number of job seekers (n)	501	49	150
	Aware of Work for the Dole prior to participation (%)	38	34	40
<i>Base: Job seekers aware of the reintroduction of Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme</i>	Number of job seekers (n)	180	13	62
	JSA provider (%)	49	91	66
	TV / Radio / Newspaper (%)	30	8	11
	From friends / family (%)	17	1	7

In initiating the discussion around participating in WfD2014-15, job seekers reported that some providers offered other alternative options to WfD2014-15. These included study and training (41%), paid part time work (28%), unpaid volunteer work (26%) and job search skills (19%). Of note is that two fifths (40%) of job seekers reported that their provider did not discuss any other options. The results are presented in Table 6.

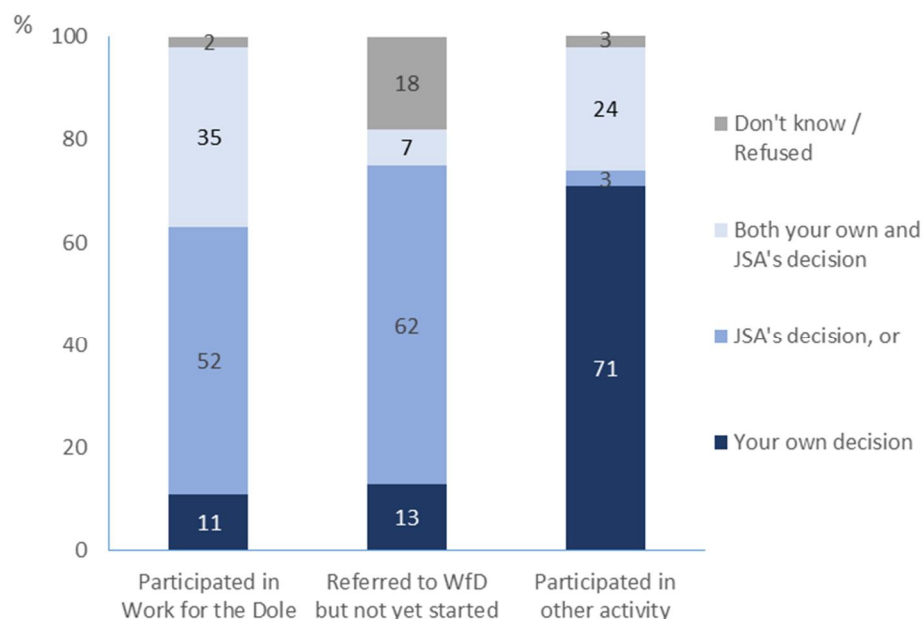
For job seekers who did discuss other options with their provider, over half (56%) reported that their provider recommended they participate in WfD2014-15 above all other options discussed. A third (36%) reported that their provider did not recommend WfD2014-15 over other mutual obligation activities. This suggests that there was some confusion at that time about the compulsory nature of WfD.

**Table 6: Options discussed with JSA when introducing participation in Work for the Dole 2014-15**

Options Discussed / Not Discussed	Options Discussion	Job seekers	Participated in Work for the Dole	Referred to WfD but not yet started
<i>Base: Job seekers eligible for Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme (n)</i>		550	501	49
<b>No options discussed</b>	JSA did not discuss options (%)	40	42	28
	I did not want to discuss options (%)	2	1	10
<b>Options discussed</b>	Study or training (%)	42	42	48
	Paid part-time job (%)	28	29	21
	Unpaid voluntary work (%)	26	27	18
	Job Search Skills (for example resume writing, interview techniques) (%)	19	18	31
	Green Corp (%)	7	7	13
	Non-vocational activity (for example, rehabilitation, or counselling) (%)	7	7	9
	Defence Force Reserves (%)	5	6	4
	Drought Force (%)	3	3	1
	Other (%)	1	0	1
	Don't know (%)	1	1	0

Where WfD2014-15 participation had commenced, the perception of job seekers was that the provider was instrumental in the decision to participate in WfD2014-15, with the decision being the provider's alone (52%) or both the provider and the job seeker making the decision together (35%). This is in direct contrast to those job seekers who were participating in another activity, of whom 71% reported it as their choice of activity and a further 24% said it was a joint decision with their provider. For those who had been referred to WfD2014-15, but were yet to start, 62% reported it was the provider's decision, and a further 18% were unwilling to comment or were unsure as to who made the decision. The results are presented in

**Figure 3: Perceptions of decision maker for Work for the Dole 2014-15 participation**



Base: Job seekers who discussed other alternatives to WfD2014-15 with JSA – participated in WfD2014-15 (n=296), are yet to start WfD2014-15 (n=29) or participated in another activity (n=91)

Of the job seekers who had been referred to WfD2014-15, 42% indicated that their provider had talked about some of the advantages of the programme (suggesting that the majority did not recall their provider talking to them about the positive aspects of WfD). The most commonly discussed advantages of WfD2014-15 as recalled by job seekers were:

- Increase your work experience (38%)
- Increase your chances of getting paid work (29%)
- Chance to develop work skills (27%)
- Chance to get a work reference (15%)
- Chance to improve your CV (12%), and
- Would receive more money (10%).

Of particular interest is the perception of how clearly providers explained to job seekers what was involved in a WfD2014-15 activity. Generally speaking, those who had commenced participation in the programme were more positive than those job seekers yet to commence with 66% reporting their provider gave a clear or very clear explanation of what was involved. This compares to only 23% of job seekers who were yet to commence an activity. Just over two thirds (69%) of job seekers who had been referred to WfD2014-15 but were yet to commence, reported that their provider had not clearly explained what was involved.

**Table 7: Perceived clarity of explanations provided to job seekers regarding involvement in a Work for the Dole 2014-15 placement**

Perceived Clarity of Explanations	Participated in Work for the Dole	Referred to WfD but not yet started
<i>Base: Job seekers who have been referred to Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme (n)</i>	501	49
Very clearly (%)	20	9
Clearly (%)	46	14
Not very clearly (%)	22	56
Not clearly at all (%)	9	13
No explanation given (%)	1	7

When it came to discussing specific details of how WfD2014-15 works, it would seem that those who were participating were more informed than those who were waiting to commence their placement. Almost all of those who had commenced WfD2014-15 were aware it was compulsory (94% compared with 59% who had not commenced). Similarly, 73% of those who had participated were aware that the placement had a six month duration, compared with only 38% of those who had not. Job seekers reported that on average, WfD2014-15 had a 15.9 hour per week. This is slightly higher than the policy of 15 hours per week. The results are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8: Knowledge of key requirements of Work for the Dole 2014-15**

Knowledge of key requirements	Job seekers who have been referred to WfD	Participated in Work for the Dole	Referred to WfD but not yet started
<i>Base: Job seekers eligible for Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme (n)</i>	550	501	49
JSA mentioned Work for the Dole is compulsory (% yes)	90	94	59
JSA mentioned you had to attend for 6 months (% yes)	69	73	38
Mean hours JSA indicated was required (mean hours)	15.9	15.9	16.8

In the qualitative research, job seekers expressed a number of issues with their interactions with their employment services provider, particularly in relation to perceptions of poor communication. For example, there were some reports of being given just a few days' notice before they were required to attend WfD. This was in contradiction with the provider evidence, which indicated that they explained the requirements well in advance of referral.

*She mentioned two weeks before I started, but it wasn't stressed, she just mentioned something about it. And the next time I came to an appointment with her she said the next day you're going to have to go to the appointment. (Job seeker)*

*We've been trying to introduce where we start having the conversation with the job seeker at 42 weeks, and then that gives them six weeks to become accustomed to the idea that they're going to be required to do Work for the Dole. Often we'll find that they will put all their energy into job searching and all of a sudden they'll come up with a job. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Contrary to the survey data, the qualitative data with job seekers indicates that alternatives to WfD (and still being able to receive benefit) were rarely discussed; job seekers mostly described WfD as being something that they had to do, although providers highlighted the importance of presenting WfD as an opportunity to gain work experience.

*When I went to ask more about what was in the booklets, as opposed to Work for the Dole, they just basically just sort of threw Work for the Dole at me and I felt like I didn't really have a choice, and I felt stuck the whole time that I was doing it. (Job seeker)*

*They said TAFE wasn't a good option and they said anything other than full-time work is not a good option. You need to work in either full-time employment or Work for the Dole. There is no in-between. (Job seeker)*

*Here we are trying to highlight the carrots trying to sell these opportunities as what it does and it needs to be delivered in an understood, clean and non-jargon way. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*So as an office we decided that obviously that Work for the Dole is something that they were quite resistant to and using that phrase they'd often not want to do it I suppose or not wish to participate. So we have sort of flipped it around and used more the work experience and really sold the benefits, so we've done a lot of staff training around how you sell the benefits of the work experience. And we use a lot of good news stories that we've had out of that. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Whilst initially job seekers admitted they were resistant to being involved in WfD, over time many have experienced a change in attitude and stated that they enjoyed the experience.

*It was not something that I would have ideally done, but now that I've started it, I don't really mind work. It's not too bad. (Job seeker)*

*As I said, I came into doing this [WfD] very negative. I didn't want to do it at all. And then being in there and doing it now, I don't mind it at all. (Job seeker)*

*But like I said before, I do believe that the personal--person's circumstances do need to be accounted for and they need to understand it a bit better because I don't think it could technically apply to everyone but I do agree with it 100 per cent and I do think it's fantastic. (Job seeker)*

### **7.1.1. Attitudes to Work for the Dole 2014-15 requirements**

Generally, job seekers felt that the number of hours and the six-month period of WfD were reasonable. The number of hours was felt to be similar to a part-time/casual job, and manageable alongside other commitments. There were a few who suggested that the six-month placements could be increased by a couple of months to allow for more time to settle in. Some job seekers felt it was too long, impacting on their time to search for a full-time job. Some job seekers were unaware of the six month requirement altogether.

*I think they should last longer honestly, because it can take a while to mesh with your new surroundings, your new job. And once you get comfortable, they move you on to the next one and you've got to start at the beginning all over again. (Job seeker)*

*I personally feel that the duration of the actual Work for the Dole placement should actually be during the whole entire duration of while the person is receiving the payment and the reason I feel that is [It] helps them get into the routine of going to work and being comfortable with the idea of it. So they don't just do it because it's a requirement (Job seeker)*

In the survey, current job seekers who had been referred to WfD2014-15 activities said that the current arrangements are acceptable, with about three in ten suggesting that a six month placement is too long (29%), two in ten (21%) indicating that 15 hours per week is too many and 69% reporting that it was about the right number of hours. However when asked about increasing the requirement to 25 hours a week, the majority of current WfD2014-15 participants felt it was too many (74%) and 20% suggested it was about right. The results are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9: Attitudes to Work for the Dole 2014-15 requirements**

Attitudes to Work for the Dole	Job seekers who have been referred to WfD	Participated in Work for the Dole	Referred to WfD but not yet started
<i>Base: Job seekers eligible for Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme (n)</i>	550	501	49
Six month placement (% far or slightly too long)	29	28	27
15 hour activity requirement (% far or slightly too many)	21	21	20
25 hour activity requirement (% far or slightly too many)	74	76	57

### 7.1.2. JSA support during Work for the Dole 2014-15 placement

Of note is 75% of those who had participated in WfD2014-15 had been in contact with their provider at some point during their placement. This decreased slightly to 67% amongst early leavers. Approximately a third (36%) of early leavers had been in contact with their provider since leaving the WfD2014-15 programme.

## 7.2. Characteristics of the client group

There was a general agreement among stakeholders that the job seekers eligible for WfD2014-15 had significant labour market barriers generally interwoven with difficult or challenging personal circumstances.

*Most of these people are very pleasant, very intelligent, very decent people who have probably just had a tough life growing up and haven't had a chance to extend themselves and get involved in the workforce in any meaningful way (Host Organisation)*

For both host organisations and providers, the personal circumstances of individual job seekers were seen as the barrier to address, some of which needed to be addressed prior to commencement but they felt that they had limited resources to do this (mentioning in relation to the job seeker stream). Examples given by providers included people recently released from prison, people with drug and alcohol problems and people who had experienced violence or abuse. The concern was that until some of the resultant problems were resolved, these individuals would continue to face difficulties in successfully engaging in the labour market.

*By the time they come to us, they're already got anxiety, insomnia, depression, some of them have lost their homes, lost their kids. They are now addicted to drugs, to alcohol, all because of the unemployment cycle. It's that fatalistic curve, by the time they get to us they're at rock bottom and we need to somehow get them all the way up in a very short timeframe. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

A few host organisations remarked that for some job seekers issues were not initially visible but became apparent after a few weeks of being in the work experience activity. These typically included poor social interaction skills and underlying personal issues.

Some other specific issues for the client group that were observed included:

- The impact of intergenerational unemployment
- Low skills, education and training levels
- Mental health problems, and
- Transport/location difficulties.

### ***Inter-generational unemployment***

Another barrier identified by providers and host organisations stemmed from intergenerational unemployment, where job seekers came from families where no-one had worked for many years, sometimes generations. As such, it was observed that job seekers could lack a 'work ethic' or an understanding of the role and value of employment.

*Mum, dad, grandma and in some cases great grandma and grandpa have been on welfare all their lives. So they know nothing else and they never think about - can't see the big picture and don't know what the big picture is. So there's been a lot of that. (Host Organisation)*

*If mum and dad had been unemployed all their life and they haven't had to work and they've survived and they've put food on the table and everything else, why the hell should I work? (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

### ***Education, skills, training and experience***

Many host organisations observed, and were often surprised, by the low (or absence of) literacy, numeracy and computer skills in job seekers.

*Some of these guys do not have any skills. Numeracy and literacy has become a huge issue with a load of young ones and that's an absolutely massive issue for employment. They've gone right through the school system, a lot of these guys (Host Organisation)*

It was noted in some areas that there was a large contingent of unemployed young men who had not finished secondary education, making it increasingly difficult for employment services to find suitable jobs. For example, in one ESA, it was thought that less than half of the clientele had completed Year 10 schooling.

Lack of previous work experience was a major barrier to finding employment. It was also noted from some host organisations that they were surprised in the poor quality of job seekers' résumés.

*They've never been working and they're 26 years old. So it's very hard, if they never get the opportunity...no experience = no job. (Host Organisation)*

### ***Mental Health***

Mental health issues were mentioned often, by providers and host organisations as well as by job seekers themselves. The experience of being long term unemployed (or in some cases never having worked) appeared to have a profound impact on confidence, self-esteem and general social skills. Anxiety appeared to be common, particularly social anxiety related to worries about participating in a group activity, talking to others at the work experience, communicating with staff and customers and so forth. In some cases this was compounded by other problems relating to family background or personal circumstances

*And it [unemployment] affects their self-esteem and that's one of the areas I think there with, especially with a lot of the people who are Work for the Dole, that's half their problem and that is, how could I say? Their confidence levels. (Host Organisation)*

### **Transport and location**

Location and access to transport were often mentioned as barriers to participating in employment and work experience – this was mentioned by all groups, including job seekers themselves (most of whom were not able to drive or did not have a car).

*I don't have my licence which is making it kind of hard to get the jobs because of travelling. (JS35)*

*We were surprised when not one of them had their driver's licence when they started the program. And I think that's contributed to their reasons why they're unemployed. (Host Organisation)*

*Invariably, they've lost their drivers licence or haven't got them or can't get them which basically makes them unemployable. A driver's licence is critical. (Host Organisation)*

As referred to earlier, public transport was sometimes not easily accessible for job seekers and many of the host organisations and providers felt that the additional fortnightly payment for transport whilst participating in WfD2014-15 was insufficient to cover travel costs, particularly for longer journeys or in regional areas. Some hosts organisations and providers assisted job seekers to get to their placements by arranging carpools or transporting from central locations using their own vehicles.

*I mean a lot of our guys ride bikes now because they can't afford the seven dollars a day return trip on a bus. So, we actually organise a pickup from the centre of town and everybody gets a little bit extra, 20 bucks a fortnight or whatever it is to cover the buses. (Host Organisation)*

### **7.3. Circumstances of the client group (at the time of the survey interview)**

Table 10 presents a summary of the main activity amongst job seekers at the time of the survey interview. Overall, approximately one third were working in some capacity, with a further one third actively looking for work.



**Table 10: Summary of main activity**

Main Activity	Job seekers	Participated in Work for the Dole	Referred to WfD but not yet started	Participated in other activity
<i>Base: Job seekers eligible for Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme (n)</i>	700	501	49	150
Currently working (%)	38	21	23	62
Focussed primarily on looking for work (%)	33	48	37	13
In training or education (including at school / college) (%)	15	6	27	23
Work for the Dole or other Work Experience Activity (%)	9	17	3	-
Caring for children or other people (%)	2	2	2	1
Coping with a long term condition or disability (%)	1	2	2	-
Getting better from a temporary illness (%)	1	1	6	-
Voluntary or unpaid work (%)	1	1	-	-

All job seekers surveyed had been in contact with their JSA provider and the majority were still in contact (93%). Of those job seekers who were no longer in contact with the provider, the most commonly cited reasons for ceasing support were paid work (56%) and relocation (13%).

Almost all job seekers (93%) surveyed had participated in at least one activity in the last six months as part of receiving income support:

- Work for the Dole (55%)
- Study or training (40%)
- Paid part-time job (37%)
- Job Search Skills (25%), and
- Unpaid voluntary work (13%).

Over one third (37%) were working in a paid job at the time of the survey with a further 20% having done some sort of paid work in the last 12 months. This increased to 80% (62% currently working and 18% having had a paid job in the last 12 months) amongst those in referred to an alternate activity, where most of those currently working (76%) were working as part of their mutual obligation.

The majority of those who had worked in the last year, including those currently employed, were employed in temporary jobs (80%), 14% were permanent and 4% were self-employed. Those who had worked in the last year, worked on average 21 hours a week. Up to a quarter had worked on average for 12.5 hours a week and the top 25% had worked 30 or more hours a week. The average length of employment was 10 months, with those currently working having been employed for just under a year, on average 11.8 months. Those who had worked in the last 12 months, but were not currently working had worked on average for six months in their previous job. The average hourly rate of pay was \$21.61.

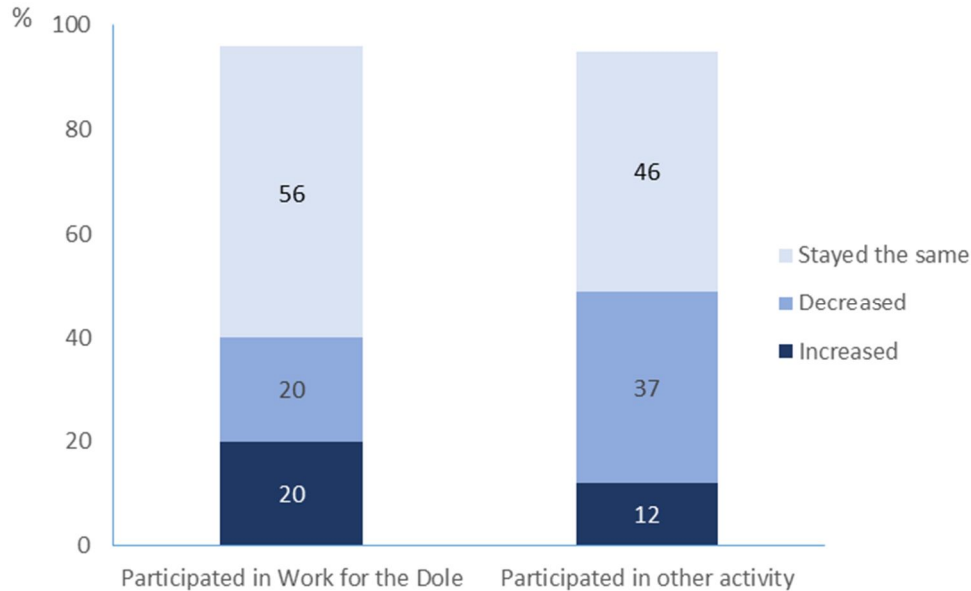
Of those not currently working, job seekers surveyed had been unemployed on average for 17 months. When asked if there was anything in particular that made it difficult to work, four out of ten job seekers (41%) did not nominate anything in particular. Commonly cited reasons included:

- Health issues or disabilities that limit the kind of work you can do (19%)
- Access to or cost of transport to get to work (18%)
- Lack of vacancies or too much competition for jobs (9%)
- Not having the right skills for the jobs available (9%)
- No recent work experience (6%), and
- Family or caring commitments (4%).

Approximately three quarters of job seekers indicated they were looking for work (78%). This dropped to 62% amongst those undertaking an alternative activity, most likely due to the higher level of employment in this group.

Since undertaking either WfD2014-15 or another activity, job search activity had remained the same for approximately half of respondents. Between 10% and 20% had increased their job search and between 20% and 40% had decreased the level of job search activity. The results are presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Perceived impact of participation on job search activity**



Base: Job seekers who have or are participating in WfD2014-15 (n=501) or another activity (n=150)

## 8. Funding Work for the Dole 2014-15 Activities

This section explores how the WfD2014-15 model worked for providers and host organisations. Funding for WfD2014-15 was drawn down from providers' Employment Pathway Fund, with \$600 for an individual place and \$2,100 for a group activity place. From July 2015, the funding will be separate, and funding for individual and group activities for Work for the Dole will increase to \$1,000 and \$3,500 respectively. From 1 July funding will also be on a 'per place' basis.

In general, host organisations and providers felt that running individual activities for \$600 was not financially viable. This was largely due to set-up costs, providing necessary training (and equipment, if needed) and the need to provide some form of supervision.

Running group activities was said to be more financially viable in the current funding regime, but difficulties arose when multiple individuals moved through activities (that is, left early to be replaced by others).

### Summary of key points

- a) Host organisations and providers alike felt that funding for individual activities was inadequate, particularly as it covered the place not the individual when in reality many individuals move through one place.
- b) Funding for group activity places was felt by hosts to be more realistic, although many still reported subsidising the costs from other areas of the business, or said they were 'out of pocket'. This was particularly the case where there were fixed costs such as White Cards, protective equipment and police checks needed, and again where there was a high turnover of participants.
- c) There was reported variability in the payment amount providers offered to host organisations (sometimes for the same activity). Furthermore, some providers paid for fixed costs, but in other cases it was expected to be covered in the host organisation's funding agreement.
- d) Funding of places is likely to be more adequate if the churn of individuals through places is reduced.
- e) There is some concern among providers about the increase in hours to up to 25 hours per week from 1 July 2015, and whether the increase in funding is sufficient to cover the additional supervision required.

### Departmental Action<sup>12</sup>

Under jobactive, Work for the Dole fees were increased from \$600 to \$1000 per individual hosted place, and from up to \$1200 to up to \$3500 per group based place. Budgets are developed with host organisations for each activity.

Work for the Dole Coordinators and jobactive providers are required to plan and budget for the likelihood of multiple job seekers participating in one place over a six month period.

To ensure consistency and a single point of contact for host organisations, there is a single Coordinator in each Employment Region and a Lead Provider is identified for each activity.

<sup>12</sup> This response provides an update on actions undertaken in response to the findings of the evaluation.

## 8.1. Cost issues

The financial consequences of non-attendance (as discussed in Section 10) was raised by some providers, particularly for activities that required protective equipment, training or police checks, or where participants needed additional financial support for the cost of travel. Because funding was per place, where places had multiple people starting and leaving (as was generally the case), for individual placements in particular funding was often exhausted quickly.

*If you have a place and you put ten people through that place, let's say every single job seeker needs a police check, that has to come out of that \$600, so if they need protective equipment there's no money left which means that the host is out of pocket and the whole idea of Work for the Dole is that the host is not meant to be out of pocket, there's money to support the project (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Other providers had not, however, encountered issues with the funding – this tended to be the case where equipment costs were minimal, and/or where the host organisation had developed efficient systems and processes to manage programmes such as Work for the Dole.

*We have not had a problem with the new funding model to date, you are given a budget and you need to find a way to work within that budget, we have not had an activity that we have struggled with costing (JSA provider)*

## 8.2. Negotiating costs with host organisation

There were some reports of host organisations being offered different amounts of funding by providers, and selecting the one that offered the most. This meant that providers were competing against each other and the coordinator to secure places with hosts. Those host organisations who had more than one provider for WfD felt that there was inconsistency between them in terms of how flexible they were with the funding.

Providers felt that some hosts were particularly knowledgeable about the funding regime for the programme and as a result were able to leverage maximum funding for their activities. One provider felt that greater transparency was needed from host organisations as to how they spent the funding they received, particularly if there seemed to be minimal equipment costs to running activities.

*Because of the little bit of advertising that the government did do, it became very common knowledge that there is \$600 available for an individual activity, or \$2,100 for a group based, per place, so that became what people asked for (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*There are some unfilled places in the major town of our ESA and this is due to the cost of the placements (JSA provider)*

Examples were also given of providers being able to offer funding to host organisations for programmes other than WfD2014-15, which were more financially attractive.

*In many instances providers are offering other services or alternative buckets of money that is more than WfD funding allocations (Coordinator online forum)*

### 8.2.1. Adequacy of WfD funding for activities

The biggest concern about the adequacy of funding related to the fact that it was linked to activities not individuals, and that generally speaking there was high turnover of individuals in activities. This meant that while in principle the funding would be adequate to support people in activities if they remained relatively static during the 26 weeks, in reality due to the large numbers of job seekers moving in and out of activities before the 26 weeks was up the funding was generally insufficient to meet the costs of new entrants to the activities.

Most host organisations reported that they did to a greater or lesser extent subsidise the activities. Hosts with activities that required protective equipment (boots, hats, clothing etc.) and a white card<sup>13</sup> were more likely to indicate this. Many host organisations – particularly smaller not-for profit ones – were said to be running ‘on a shoestring’ and were largely reliant on volunteer time.

*We would probably think twice before we took on another group where we had to provide all that stuff again (Host Organisation)*

*Often the programs and manuals on stuff we need to buy. So we try and cover them as best we can. Obviously we get a certain amount from the JSA providers, but that’s fairly minimal (Host Organisation)*

*We do get some recompense for what we do. If you were to actually do the sums it doesn’t work out to be very user friendly, it’s not a lot of money (Host Organisation)*

*I must say this, we actually run the Work for the Dole programme at a loss. It costs us money to run it (Host Organisation)*

There were also mentions of having to replace equipment that ‘went missing’ or was reportedly stolen, uniforms not being returned (particularly an issue when people dropped out of the programme), and repairs to equipment inadvertently damaged.

*So we tend to find that we do have a bit of breakage and that sort of thing, just from misuse and not knowing the correct way. Even though they’re getting the job done, they don’t always care for the tools (Host Organisation)*

It is likely that that these reports of inadequate funding for activities relate to the high numbers of job seekers flowing through the activities, with funding linked to places rather than people.

*The agreement was that we would be paid \$400 each for those four places. But number one and number two took off and we got numbers five and six. We don’t get paid for five and six because we’ve already been paid for one and two . But we still have to give them the training and the knowledge and the skills (Host Organisation)*

Funding issues appeared to be less of an issue for host organisations that offered activities with few equipment or training costs (charity shop work, for example).

### **8.2.2. Negotiating funding with providers**

Some host organisations mentioned negotiating funding arrangements with providers to enable them to cover the costs of running activities. Agreed arrangements included the provider arranging and paying for White Cards before job seekers were sent to the host organisation, covering the cost of protective equipment and providing transport (or assistance with transport costs) for participants. In a few cases, it was reported that providers were reluctant to offer further funding because they had insufficient funds available themselves.

There were also examples of hosts being offered different funding amounts from different providers for the same activities. In one example, a host organisation reported being offered the full amount of \$2,100 by one provider, and a far lesser amount for the same activity from another provider. From a provider perspective, this was felt to be detrimental to the efficacy and reputation of the WfD programme; for coordinators liaising with host organisations this could cause difficulties in reconciling

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<sup>13</sup> A White Card indicates completion of a General Construction Induction course and is mandatory for anyone who works in the construction industry. The cost is approximately \$40.

with a host why they might be offered, or receive, different amounts from different providers. It was suggested that there needed to be a more coordinated way of managing this, either through the WfD Coordinator or through a 'lead provider' model when dealing with host organisations who offer multiple activities to more than one provider.

*It needs to be the same amount of money for all providers the Work for the Dole coordinator should be developing the budget with the host and then if it comes to \$2,100 it comes to \$2,100, and that's what we all pay. Or if it comes to \$1,400 then it's \$1,400 and that's what we all pay (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

### **8.3. Concerns about changes in funding for July 2015 onwards.**

A few concerns were raised about the increase in funding for the next phase of WfD and how that related to the increase in required hours, from up to 15 hours per week to up to 25 hours per week for the under 30s. The issue was raised in regard to task-based group activities (for example, construction). The example given by one respondent was that if a specific task typically took 10 people in a group activity for 15 hours a week (150 hours) to complete with one supervisor, over 26 weeks, then under the current funding regime that host organisation would receive up to \$21,000 to cover 390 hours of supervision (in other words, just under \$54 per hour of supervision).

Under the new regime, if one assumes that the activity still requires 150 hours a week, then fewer WfD participants would be required to complete the task (6 instead of 10), so the host would receive up to \$21,000, which equates to \$32 per hour. There was thus a concern that host organisations would need to ensure that they still take on the same number of participants (and would need to also ensure that they had sufficient extended activities for each participant to meet the 25 hours of activity per week) to continue to receive the same amount of funding for the extended supervision requirements.

Some host organisations (and some feedback from job seekers) indicated that in some cases it was difficult to find sufficient activities to fill 15 hours – this is likely to become a bigger challenge when individual requirements are increased to 25 hours (which may also require increased scheduling and coordination for host organisations).

## 9. Providing work-like experiences

A key evaluation question is whether the WfD activities that job seekers are placed in are ‘work-like’ – in other words are the activities that job seekers are being tasked with in their work experience able to contribute to the development of participants’ work-related and employability skills, help them to develop in a work environment and help them to become more ‘job-ready’?

This section of the report first identifies the range of activities job seekers were undertaking. The suitability of those activities (in terms of providing work-like experiences) is then explored, followed by the extent to which job seekers were engaged in those activities, and issues relating to the supervision of job seekers in those activities.

This section is based on the qualitative data from host organisations, providers, participants and WfD coordinators as well as data from the survey of participants.

### Summary of key points

- a) A wide range of WfD work experience activities were being provided, with around one quarter in charity work (27%) and around one in 10 in conservation/environmental (12%) or café/catering organisations (8%).
- b) Host organisations were generally committed to providing as full a range of work-like opportunities as possible within the confines of the WfD context and their organisations, and saw WfD as a reciprocal arrangement with job seekers.
- c) Around half of job seekers reported being offered options for work experience selection (51%), but options could seem limited to certain types of work, which did not always align with the experience job seekers hoped to gain (reported in just under a third of cases).
- d) Evidence supports the premise that the better the match between job seeker and host organisation activity, the better the outcome for both parties (fewer drop-outs, more productive for hosts, greater enhancement of skills for job seekers). There was some indication in the qualitative data that job seekers did not always know what to expect prior to commencing their work experience (and in the survey over half indicated that they had had no prior contact with the host before starting WfD activity).
- e) Two thirds (68%) of those who commenced a WfD work experience activity reported that it was a valuable experience, suggesting that on the whole those who commenced (and stayed) found it beneficial, they felt like a valuable member of staff and learnt new skills.
- f) There is a balance to be made between timely commencements from referrals, and finding good ‘matches’ – pressure on providers to place job seekers quickly could mean that activities commenced were not always the most suitable (resulting in unsuccessful outcomes). Certainly those who left WfD early reported much lower levels of satisfaction with the programme.
- g) At the time of the survey, 27% of WfD2014-15 participants reported leaving the programme early. Just under half (46%) reported that the reason they left was for paid work, for the remainder it was for a range of reasons including opting for training, poor health and generally not liking WfD.
- h) Supervision from appropriately skilled supervisors is critical but can be lacking due to the complex skill mix required from supervisors. This suggests further support, guidance and information is required to help host organisations provide suitable supervision to job seekers.

### Departmental Action<sup>14</sup>

Prior to the start of jobactive, the Department released training materials to jobactive providers that highlight the importance of planning and preparing job seekers for Work for the Dole. This included promoting the positive aspects of participation in the programme, such as learning new skills and the enhancement of soft skills.

Providers are required under the Deed and guidelines to match job seekers to suitable activities to help keep them engaged and participating in activities as well as meeting host organisations' needs.

Information on Work for the Dole and a video describing what job seekers get out of the programme are publicly available on employment.gov.au.

The *Work for the Dole Host Induction Kit* prepared by Volunteering Victoria and funded by the Australian Government has been published on the Department's website and the Department continues to actively look at the supports and tools that can be provided to assist host organisations in supervising a range of job seekers in activities.

In addition, the Department introduced the Work for the Dole Supervisor Mobile App to help streamline reporting of job seeker attendance for host organisations (supervisors) and providers and to provide real time participation information.

### 9.1. Nature of activities

Host organisations gave wide and detailed descriptions of the nature of the work experience, and the type of activities within the work experience placement that job seekers were undertaking. The range of work experience described included:

- General maintenance, cleaning and repairing (tidying outdoor areas, repairing fences/buildings, signage, computer repair/recycle, graffiti removal etc.)
- Gardening (planting, cutting grass, growing vegetables, pruning)
- Restoration (boat restoration, furniture restoration, renovation of old buildings)
- Retail (serving customers, shelf filling, sorting stock, order picking/packing)
- Administration (filing, paperwork, answering the phone, working on reception, cataloguing, data entry), and
- Factory work (using factory equipment/tools).

In the survey, respondents reported being placed in a wide variety of organisation types, including:

- Charity shops (27%)
- Conservation or environmental organisations (12%)
- Café or catering organisations (8%)
- Organisations involved in construction, renovation or decorating (7%)
- Recycling charities or organisations (6%)
- Private properties (5%)
- Other community services (5%), and
- Repair and maintenance shops, Council offices (or similar), Newspaper offices, Manufacturing / warehousing, Gardening / farms, and Events / festivals / showgrounds (all under 5% each).

The most commonly reported activities included:

- Organising stock or goods (31%)
- Undertaking other manual work such as building, decorating or repairing (22%)

<sup>14</sup> This response provides an update on actions undertaken in response to the findings of the evaluation.



- Undertaking physical tasks outdoors such as digging and planting (18%)
- Cleaning (16%)
- Dealing with members of the public or serving customers (15%), and
- Administrative or clerical work such as filing, photocopying, and dealing with paperwork (11%).

Interestingly, there were a number of demographic differences in the tasks assigned to WfD2014-15 participants, as follows:

- Females were more likely to be asked to organise stock or goods (41% compared to 27% of males), deal with members of the public or serve customers (28% compared to 9% of males) and deal with money / use cash registers (12% compared with 4% of males)
- Males were more likely to be assigned to outdoor activities (22% compared with 10% of females), and
- Those aged 25-29 years were more likely to be asked to conduct administrative work (19% compared to 6% of 18-24 year olds).

Coordinators discussed the emphasis they placed on prospective host organisations in providing suitable work-like activities. Examples were given where the activities initially offered by hosts were not sufficiently work-like or did not have a sufficient range of activities to develop skills – in such cases organisations would be encouraged to combine tasks or enhance activities (for example, cleaning of signage could be expanded to become an audit of the condition of signs and whether they needed repair/replacement, participants could rotate through different activities etc.).

Just over two fifths (43%) of WfD2014-15 survey participants reported working alongside employees of the host organisation. This compares to 47% who did not work alongside host organisation employees. A further 10% were unsure. Of those who reported working alongside host organisation employees, three quarters (76%) suggested they were performing the same or similar tasks to that of paid employees. The remaining quarter (24%) said they were doing something different.

#### **9.1.1. Providing 'meaningful' activities**

Host organisations highlighted their commitment to providing opportunities to job seekers to develop their workplace skills, as well as working on tasks or activities that, without the WfD participants, would be unlikely to get done, and providing 'meaningful' activities.

*There's nothing more soul destroying than digging a hole and then moving up one meter and digging another hole. It has to be meaningful work otherwise there's no point in doing it (Host Organisation)*

*[They] are really enjoying the fact that they have to be here on time, they knock-off on time, they are in a work environment which is quite structured and they are really enjoying that (Host Organisation)*

As noted earlier, all host organisations who participated in this evaluation clearly outlined their understanding of the importance of providing activities that were work-like in nature, within a work environment. This was delivered through the provision of job-specific tasks and activities, as well as creating an environment for the development of 'soft' skills such as team working, time keeping, taking instructions, communicating and using initiative. Particularly successful approaches appeared to be ones where the host organisation was able to provide a variety of activities that participants could progress through as they gained confidence and experience and demonstrated a commitment to developing. According to hosts, often job seekers initially showed little commitment or enthusiasm (seeing it primarily as an obligation and nothing else); the ability of host organisations to offer opportunities to garner enthusiasm and to recognise progress appears critical.

*Often they come and they're quite reluctant at first but once they do the training and they see how beneficial it is and at the end of it they will go 'oh that was really good' (Host Organisation)*

*Well they hate Work for the Dole, they love the project it's the compulsory, they don't like that part at all (Host Organisation)*

Hosts also ensured that the environment was as work-like as possible by outlining requirements with regard to start and finish times, and advance notification of absences.

*They use their timesheet as their clock-in card and they use their timesheet as their clock-out card, if they can't turn up for work this morning because they are ill or whatever else it is, they all have my contact number and and they are to contact me a minimum of half an hour before their official start time so everything is done as to no different from me coming to work, or you going to work (Host Organisation)*

### **9.1.2. Reciprocity between hosts and job seekers**

WfD2014-15 was often considered by host organisations as a reciprocal arrangement – host organisations were benefitting by getting work done within their organisation that they would not otherwise be able to achieve; job seekers were benefitting by gaining valuable work experience and work-related skills that they would not have otherwise got, which will in turn improve their chances of finding employment in the future.

*We believe that the project is really worthwhile, but these young people really need an opportunity. We're not using them just as labourers, they're doing a lot of the labour work for us, but we're also in turn giving them opportunities to develop their skills (Host Organisation)*

*What the purpose of the programme is, to eventually get some work. You know, it's not a babysitting program, there is actually an outcome (Host Organisation)*

### **9.1.3. Providing variety and opportunities to progress**

Some host organisations discussed the rotation of participants through different activities – partly to ensure that participants remained engaged but also reflecting progression through activities as job seekers learnt more skills and gained confidence.

*You start from the basic which is sweeping and cleaning watering moving material around from one building to another from there and then you start getting into the bit more involved work where they'll do painting and putting up boards a bit more complicated work from there which needs someone to sort it, sit down and work out and measure things (Host Organisation)*

Despite the evident efforts and commitment of host organisations, some of the WfD participants interviewed raised the issue of monotony or boredom in their WfD activity. In part this appeared to be related to insufficient activities to fill the day, and in part this related to repeating the same activities with little variety (this was commonly raised relating to charity shop work and garden maintenance).

*It was OK but I just found that the tasks were very repetitive, monotonous, and I didn't feel like I was making any kind of real difference. I know it was a charity shop and you're helping out and everything but they have loads and loads of volunteers and you're just sorting out clothing, again and again, the same thing... (JS09, F20)*

Some providers also expressed concern about the variety of some activities, and whether they were of sufficient quality to provide real work-like experiences to develop people's employability.

### 9.1.4. Improvements to Work for the Dole 2014-15 activities

Job seekers who had participated in WfD2014-15 were asked if they could think of any improvements to the programme. While just over half (52%) were not able to think of improvements, some were able to offer some comment for consideration:

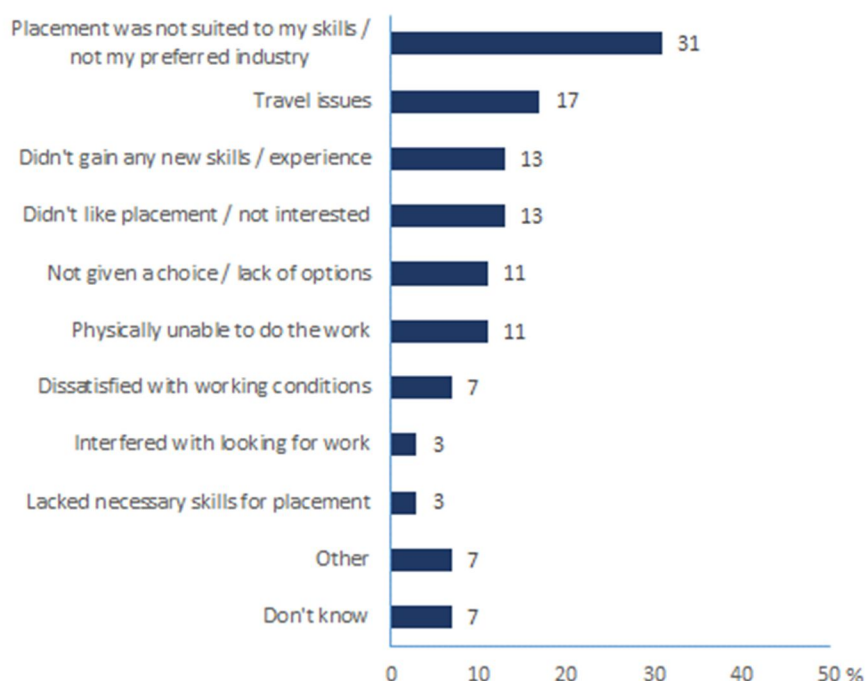
- Having more choice or a variety of placements (10%)
- Providing more training or opportunity to learn useful skills (6%)
- Offering work that is relevant to skills or within a preferred industry (6%)
- Ensuring better supervision (4%)
- Ensuring better working conditions (4%)
- Offering work that is of interest (4%)
- Ensuring providers provide a better service (3%)
- Ensuring the placement is more organised and / or structured (3%)
- Ensuring the host organisations have sufficient work to do (3%)
- Offering different or more appropriate hours (2%), and
- Providing more assistance to find a real job (2%).

### 9.2. Suitability of placements

Approximately half of WfD2014-15 participants had been asked by their provider what sort of WfD2014-15 placement they would be interested in undertaking (53%). When asked if they had been offered a choice of placements, it was split almost half and half between those who had been offered a choice (51%) and those who had only been offered one placement (46%).

Encouragingly, two thirds (67%) of WfD2014-15 participants felt that based on the information they were provided with, the placements was or would be suitable for them. Figure 5 shows the reasons provided for placements not being suitable to job seekers.

**Figure 5: Reasons provided for reporting unsuitable placements**



Base: Job seekers who reported their WfD2014-15 placement was unsuitable (n=155)

### 9.2.1. *Appropriate matching*

Host organisations and providers discussed the importance of the suitability of the work experience activity for job seekers, in that the better 'match' between the job seeker and the work experience on offer, the more likely it was to be a positive and sustained activity. Host organisations were largely reliant on the provider to ensure that match was appropriate; there was recognition among hosts that providers had been selected by government and tasked to provide the service and hence a degree of trust was placed in providers to allocate individuals to places accordingly (and hence some disappointment when unsuitable people were referred on).

*Our participants were probably quite specifically chosen by the job services providers to be suitable within our environment, where we've got a specific workforce as such . That was through the skills and matching by the job services providers (Host Organisation)*

*We still get some people who are a complete mismatch and have no interest in the area in which they're placed or enthusiasm about where they've been placed which then leads to non-attendance and eventually an unsuccessful placement (Host Organisation)*

*As of late they're almost, if they're a warm body they will throw it to us (Host Organisation)*

Some host organisations gave examples of where they perceived the 'match' was poor and unsuitable job seekers were sent to them (sometimes reportedly without the host having any knowledge of what to expect).

*We want to know what's coming, we want to know if they've got a criminal background, we want to know if they have a disability, we want to know all those things so we can prepare for that experience . We've had pregnant women turn up, we've had people with disabilities that aren't suitable to our activities and we'd probably prefer to be prepared for that or to stop it before it even starts (Host Organisation)*

From a provider's perspective, job seekers often presented with a range of personal circumstances which could be challenging when finding a suitable match, particularly transport barriers (living in a location with poor public transport networks) and having a criminal record (particularly problematic was said to be drug, alcohol and violence offences). Undoubtedly, providers felt pressure to be able to commence eligible job seekers as soon as possible, and to fill activity vacancies as soon as possible. However, they encountered some difficulties in doing so where there was a mismatch between available work experience opportunities and job seeker characteristics and circumstances. They noted that it often took time to understand job seeker requirements and to then find suitable activities within a host organisation. When a match was found, some hosts — particularly small voluntary organisations — even when they agreed in principle, required consent and formal approval from, for example, a governing board or committee, which typically comprised volunteers, did not meet regularly and moved at a relatively slow pace.

*The feedback from both the job seeker and also the host is that if we take the time to actually tailor and match them into an activity that not only do they want to do but that is alongside their employment pathway plan we find engagement increases, they attend, the host is happy, all that sort of thing. So the flipside of that though is that I do spend a lot of time doing that but it affects me placing people within that two week timeframe. I could get everybody placed with the hosts that we have available if I really wanted to sit there and say ok you're going there, you're going there. But that's not what the hosts want and it's not in the best interest of the job seeker (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*So far the biggest challenge was not the availability or suitability of the activity, but the time to find a suitable job seeker to fill it (JSA Provider)*

### **9.2.2. Availability and suitability of hours**

As noted in Section 6.5 (Setting up placements), some host organisations appeared to find it difficult to find sufficient activities to fulfil the required 15 hours a week, particularly if they were small organisations with limited opening hours and run primarily by volunteers. Limitations in the scheduling of WfD activities could also cause difficulties for job seekers, particularly where they had other commitments and responsibilities such as voluntary work and childcare.

*They aren't open every day, it's two times a week and one of those days clashes with school and one day clashed with my other place that I'm already volunteering at (Job seeker)*

From a WfD coordinator perspective, they placed emphasis in understanding the kinds of activities providers needed for their cohort and then were able to try to source activities that met those needs. This again took time (and it was commented that sometimes activities were found but the job seeker was no longer available for WfD).

*I'm actually talking to the providers about what their needs are, what they can forecast their job seekers' needs will be and what areas might interest them, so the activities are being created around the job seekers so you get that automatic engagement, rather than having a whole stack of activities that no-one's interested in because they're not tailored to anyone, or any interests (Coordinator)*

Job seekers also provided examples of what they perceived to be an unsuitable – or less than ideal - activity for them. This generally related to it being not the type of work they wanted to do, not the type of experience they wanted to get, or not liking the other WfD participants in the activities.

*I said I wanted to do money handling behind the counter, or retail work, or to get into retail, but you know I'm not allowed to do that particular thing because I'm a volunteer (Job seeker)*

*There was a lot of hotheads, people using drugs, fighting at work and slacking off. It was all sorts there (Job seeker)*

*I thought I'd like it before I got into it, but then I was just like no this is seriously not for me. I'd get too frustrated because I suffer from bipolar, so yeah not my thing (Job seeker)*

Some hosts also felt that participants were poorly prepared for their work experience, often seemingly not knowing what kinds of activities they were doing – whether this was down to insufficient preparation on the part of the provider, or job seekers not taking on board information provided to them about their placement, is unclear. Nevertheless, this again was a factor that could lead to an unsatisfactory outcome (i.e., commencement being unsustainable).

In a few cases, it would seem that host organisations were expecting job seekers to be largely 'work ready'.

*They really do need to make sure that the people they are putting forward are actually suitable and actually work-ready (Host Organisation)*

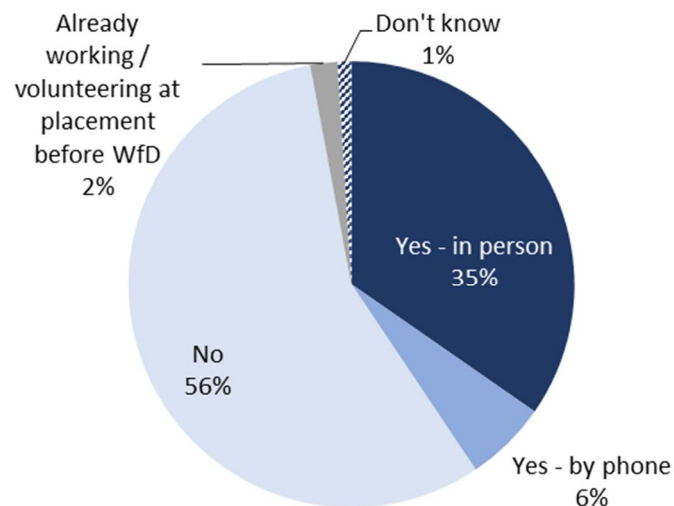
However, most hosts recognised the considerable labour market disadvantages faced by this group (as noted in Section 6). Some hosts discussed interviewing potential candidates to enable them to better match people to work experience opportunities. From a provider's perspective, this was generally discouraged if possible because they felt that they (as providers) were already doing their own assessment of suitable candidates. In addition, it was mentioned by providers that rejection for a

mandatory work experience placement for their job seekers could have a negative impact on the job seeker's self-esteem.

### 9.3. Job seeker engagement in activities

As can be seen in Figure 6 approximately four out of ten (41%) of WfD2014-15 participants had the chance to talk with someone from the host organisation prior to commencement, mostly in person. Just over half (56%) said that they had not had a chance to talk with someone from the host organisation prior to commencement.

**Figure 6: Contact with host organisations prior to Work for the Dole 2014-15 placement commencement**



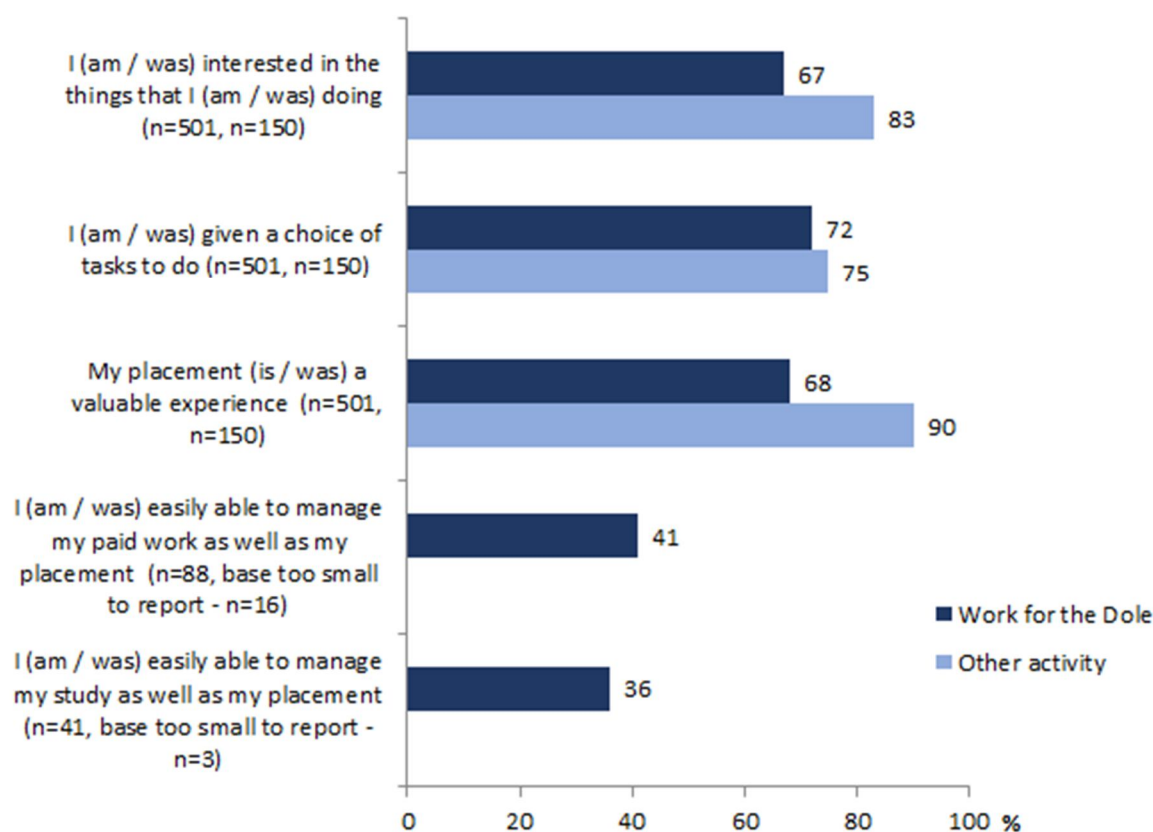
Base: Job seekers who had commenced a WfD2014-15 placement (n=501)

Job seekers reported that their experience of WfD2014-15 on the whole was something they were interested in (67%), that they were given a choice of tasks to do (72%) and that the placement was a valuable experience (68%). These findings suggest that participants on the whole were engaged with the programme. Results compare slightly less favourably to job seekers who were participating in an alternative activity.

In contrast it would appear that a reasonable proportion of job seekers did have some difficulty managing a WfD2014-15 placement as well as work (41%) and study (36%) commitments.

The results are presented in Figure 7.

**Figure 7: Attitudes towards Work for the Dole 2014-15 placement (% agree)**



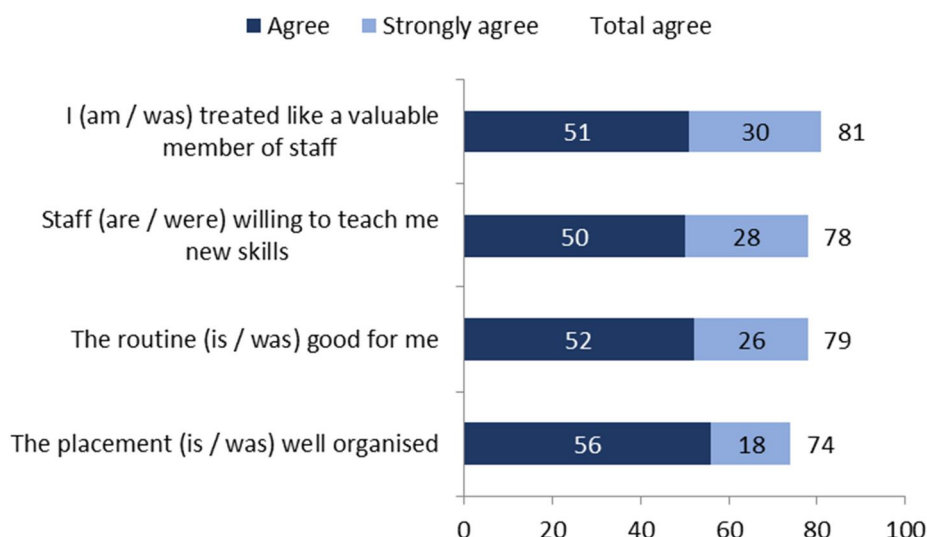
Base: Job seekers participating in WfD2014-15 or another activity

WfD2014-15 participants, on the whole, reported feeling positive towards their placement with four fifths (81%) reporting that they felt like a valuable member of staff, and four fifths (78%) also reporting that host organisation staff were willing to teach participants new skills. Furthermore, similar proportions (79%) reported that the routine was good for them and three quarters (74%) felt that their placement was well organised (refer to Figure 8). Those participants who left their placement early were significantly less positive on these factors as follows:

- I (am / was) treated like a valuable member of staff (67% agree with this statement)
- Staff (are / were) willing to teach me new skills (64% agreed with this statement)
- The routine (is / was) good for me (64% agreed with this statement), and
- The placement (is / was) well organised (60% agree with this statement).

These results demonstrate that early leavers are less positive about their work experience than participants who complete or are currently completing their activities.

**Figure 8: Perceptions of Work for the Dole 2014-15 placements**



Base: WfD2014-15 participants (n=501)

A similar pattern of results was observed in the satisfaction levels with respect to specific elements of the WfD2014-15 programme. Those who left the programme early were significantly less satisfied than those who were completing the programme at the time of interview. However, overall satisfaction levels were high, with 81% reporting they were satisfied with the level of responsibility they were given, 76% reporting satisfaction with the amount of work and 74% reporting satisfaction with the variety of tasks given. The results are presented in Table 11.

**Table 11: Satisfaction with specific elements of the Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme**

Specific Elements	Job seekers who have been referred to WfD	Currently doing WfD	Completed WfD	Left WfD early
<i>Base: Job seekers who had commenced a Work for the Dole placement (n)</i>	501	338	30	133
The amount of responsibility you (are / were) given (%)	81	86	91	67*
The amount of work you (are / were) given (%)	76	82	88	60*
The variety of tasks you (are / were) given (%)	74	81	94	54*

\* Significantly lower than those currently completing a placement, p<.05

At the time of the survey, 27% of WfD2014-15 participants reported leaving the programme early. Reasons for leaving early included:

- Received offer of paid job (46%)
- Decided to go on training instead (13%)
- Health reasons (9%)
- Personal circumstances meant I no longer had to attend (8%)
- Did not like - the work (6%)
- Did not like - the hours (4%)
- Did not like - the people (4%), and
- Hours of paid work increased (4%).



### **9.3.1. The willingness of the job seeker to actively engage with the activity**

The willingness of the job seeker to actively engage with the activity appears to depend on two main factors: firstly the extent to which they felt they could choose activities that they perceived were most suited to them and secondly the extent to which the activity was enjoyable and enhanced their work-related skills. The first primarily depended on options available to them, but the second depended more on their understanding of what WfD could offer to them, and what host organisations could do to support (through appropriate supervision and the availability of suitable tasks) the development of employability and work-related skills.

Providers strived to offer a choice of host organisations to job seekers where possible (although it could be challenging to do this in more regional or rural locations). According to providers, at the start of WfD2014-15, being able to offer a choice to job seekers was limited due to the slow build of participating host organisations, but they felt under pressure to commence job seekers into activities which meant that job seekers could be placed into activities that were unsuitable.

*In the first two months of WfD commencing, we had limited activities to refer clients to. The clients had no choice but to go to this activity and transport and barriers were not taken into account. Now that we have a lot more activities, these are discussed with clients to work around transport issues, their career goals and interests and we seem to be having a lot better engagement into activities (JSA Provider)*

*We need a better range of activities and not just more activities we've got a community garden, we have a warehousing one we have a few individual placements working in op shops. There needs to be much more variety but having said that it seems that our coordinator doesn't want to source activities that won't be filled immediately (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Notably, providers found that some activities – typically the more novel or ‘interesting’ ones, such as museums, sports related and IT related – offered fewer places but were more desirable (and hence generally full).

In the qualitative discussions with job seekers, most said that they had been offered a choice of activities (generally three or four different host organisations). However, according to job seekers the choice was limited (for example, charity shop or environmental work) and did not always match what they felt they wanted to do. Thus, decisions were generally made by job seekers through a rejection of activities that they did not want to do (or felt unable to do), together with a consideration of geographical location and proximity to their home or public transport networks.

*events, organizing events and stuff, but they were too far for me to go so I had to just go catering because it was the closer one to me (Job seeker)*

Job seekers generally reported that they had limited discussions with their provider about the type of work experience they would like to have; discussions appeared to be limited to the types of activities currently available to them (rather than, for example, wider discussions about employment goals). There were a few exceptions to this, where job seekers reported that they were provided with an option that met their needs.

*I just asked if I could get somewhere where I could get some retail experience because that's the industry I want to work in and that's why I ended up in the op shop (Job seeker)*

### 9.3.2. Poor engagement in WfD activities

Poor engagement of job seekers in WfD activities was the biggest source of frustration for host organisations, who stated this was evident in:

- late arrivals, or not turning up at all (without explanation)
- turning up in unsuitable attire (for example, inappropriately dressed, bringing a child with them)
- reluctance or unwillingness to take on tasks
- appearing to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- general negative, resentful, disruptive or aggressive attitude, and
- verbally making it clear (to the host and others) that they did not want to participate in WfD2014-15.

Almost all providers were able to give examples of these behaviours, and some estimated that such behaviours were apparent in around half of their WfD participants. Such behaviour was unsurprisingly generally not tolerated by host organisations, and many could give examples of where a placement was ultimately terminated because of one or more of the above behaviours. However, often hosts were able to work with participants (in conjunction with providers, where appropriate) to explain what was and was not appropriate or acceptable.

*Like some people may have never worked so they don't understand things like break times and arriving on time and leaving on time and, you know, getting things done in a timely manner so for some of them we have to actually teach from scratch how to physically work (Host Organisation)*

*So we said to them 'all we are looking for is the right attitude. We can train you in everything else' if you turn up on time and you have the right attitude and you're happy to get in and get amongst the work we will happily give you a reference. And we'll do everything we can to support you getting another job (Host Organisation)*

That said, host organisations acknowledged that in the main, all job seekers commenced their activities clearly demonstrating or articulating that they were unwilling participants in WfD2014-15. According to host organisations, a key role for them was to change the perception of WfD being seen as simply an obligation for job seekers, to being seen as an opportunity to help them in the future.

*We have guys here that enjoy coming here and enjoy the camaraderie of the place as well, but that doesn't happen on day one. It often happens a month or two months down the track when they realize that they really enjoy it and they're learning a lot (Host Organisation)*

*[Job seekers ask] 'what's the signage up there [in the office] for?' and I'll turn around and I'll say 'they are my food donors but they are your potential employers' and right from that stage there you'll see these guys having a real good look at that board (Host Organisation)*

### 9.4. Supervision of job seekers

Good supervision of job seekers was thought by providers and coordinators alike to be a critical factor in a successful, completed WfD work experience activity. However, there were some concerns raised about the ability of host organisations to provide this – partly related to resources and partly related to skills.

Overall, WfD2014-15 participants in the survey reported that the amount of supervision was 'about right' at 81%, but this dropped to 64% amongst early leavers. Three quarters (76%) reported that the quality of supervision was either very good or good. The most commonly reported reason for

reporting poor or very poor supervision was supervisors being absent or unavailable (27%). This result should be treated with caution due to a small sample size.

According to hosts, the supervision of those on work experience could be challenging – requiring supervisory experience, job-related skills, handling difficult situations/conflicts and an understanding of the circumstances and characteristics of this cohort, many of whom had significant labour market barriers and other disadvantages. Coordinators noted that supervision by host organisations could be of variable quality.

*Supervision has been of variable quality. As other WFDCs have highlighted, good supervision requires multiple skills and also to a lesser degree relies on the suitability of the match between the job seeker and the activity. Some supervisors have the technical skills and knowledge to run the activity but lack the interpersonal skills to engage job seekers (Coordinator online forum)*

*Having a great activity where participants attend and get the tasks done are usually run by great supervisors who can motivate participants and enhance their work/soft skills (Coordinator)*

There was a wealth of evidence from the host organisation respondents about the importance of an understanding yet firm supervisory role within the organisation, from the initial induction with job seekers through to day to day management and general mentoring. There were many examples given of supporting participants through providing guidance and offering help. An often repeated word within the host organisation interviews was 'respect' – showing respect to the job seeker in the expectation that that would then be appreciated and subsequently reciprocated.

*We want to create an environment for people that turn up that isn't sort of the dregs, that they're being treated with some respect (Host Organisation)*

*Once we get them in we tend to keep them we treat them with a bit of respect, and make it very clear that we're working for them while they're working for us (Host Organisation)*

*She's [supervisor] been very good, she's very respectful, if you need help she'll be more than willing to help you (Job seeker)*

Notably, some host organisations felt that job seekers could have other issues that the host may not always be equipped to deal with (for instance, family problems, anger management). One example of how this was managed was to engage a local youth services provider to provide a youth worker who could visit the host organisation periodically to help the young people work through these issues (which hosts felt without this help could impede progress in WfD activities). In another example, a provider was establishing a dedicated 'safety' role to deal with the apparently increasing incidents related to job seeker behaviour (such as drug taking, threatening others, careless use of equipment).

*Because we can't deal with those, you know, they're rather large issues for some of the kids and you can see they're not going to progress any further until those issues are dealt with. So that's been a really big part of it, huge (Host Organisation)*

Coordinators emphasised the diverse skills supervisors needed, and their critical role in the success of a WfD work experience placement.

*One of the main obstacles I see in the WfD programme itself is around the WfD activity supervisors, either the organisation doesn't have anyone, they are not suitable, cost is not achievable to recruit in, not skilled in addressing JS [job seeker] barriers, not knowledgeable on current labour market or employer expectations and more .. the role is multi-faced and challenging. The supervisor*

*needs skills for the activity then they need supervisory skills (this suggests someone who has come from a higher wage expectation to) and thirdly we need someone who really has the skills of a consultant in employment services, i.e. labour market knowledge, working with JS and their barriers, driving things like attendance, cooperation, team work, motivation and work ethic (not usual things a supervisor in a work environment manages) (Coordinator online forum)*

*Hosts have provided suitable supervision, however the supervisors may never have had to engage with WfD participants so whilst the organisation is supportive the supervisors may have differing views when job seekers do not display the same work ethic they expect, so further support, time and communication has been required to assist with this (JSA Provider)*

In some cases, providers provided supervisors to host organisations for group activities – where this was the case it appeared to work successfully (and was seen as essential in host organisations that were primarily run by volunteers). There were also examples given by host organisations where supervisors initially came through the WfD2014-15 programme themselves and were subsequently taken on as supervisors in that activity.

According to host organisations, resourcing the supervision of individual activities could be challenging. Often the supervisor was pressed for time, or could be a volunteer themselves – but there were also mentions of reluctance on the part of the person in the supervisory role to take on the responsibility.

*It's always a challenge because our [supervising] staff are already underpaid and under resourced which is the industry [aged care] this is part of my education programme that I have to implement, is 'I don't want to babysit someone. I'm not here to babysit. It's too hard' and it's like 'well no this is not about you, this is about the residents so if you need to provide a little bit of guidance then you will do that as part of your job' (Host Organisation)*

*The other concern was making sure we had people who were prepared to actually look after these guys not everybody is willing or able to actually take on that role.. we had to make sure it didn't impact or disrupt what it is that they were doing as well (Host Organisation)*

Several providers mentioned that it would be useful to have guidance or an information manual that could be provided to supervisors about their role as supervisors of WfD participants, the kinds of skills they needed, how to deal with different incidents or challenging circumstances and so forth.

## 10. Compliance issues

Job seeker compliance with their WfD activity requirements was a commonly discussed issue in the qualitative interviews with providers and host organisations. As noted earlier, all hosts and providers gave many examples of non-compliance, such as not turning up for a WfD activity, leaving a WfD activity (without prior notice or reason) or general inconsistent attendance.

This section draws mainly on findings from the six visits to providers, the online discussion board with providers and the qualitative interviews with host organisations.

### Summary of key points

- a) Providers and hosts observed that non-compliance in WfD was high – estimates suggested around half of participants do not attend at some point without prior notification.
- b) Providers and host organisations expressed frustration at job seeker non-participation in WfD work experience activities and the challenges this presented to the WfD programme.
- c) Job seekers are generally fully aware of the implications of non-compliance in their WfD activity, and the need to provide evidence of a valid reason for non-participation.
- d) Sickness, injury and general poor health were the main reasons given by job seekers, as well as transport issues and, to a lesser degree, disagreements at the work place.
- e) Participation Reports submitted to DHS (Centrelink) were reported by providers to be frequently not upheld. Both providers and host organisations felt that there needed to be stricter sanctions to enforce participation, and that providers needed more delegation to be able to manage compliance (as they were able to with non-attendance at provider appointments).

### Departmental Action<sup>15</sup>

In 2014-15, two thirds of all activity related Participation reports submitted to the Department of Human Services by employment services providers resulted in the application of a financial penalty. In the remaining one-third of all activity related participation reports, either the job seeker was found to have a reasonable excuse (which the provider may not be aware of at the time of submitting the report) or the Participation Report was invalid due to administrative error on the part of the provider. Under social security law the Department of Human Services cannot apply a penalty where the participation report is invalid or if the job seeker has a reasonable excuse.

The Department of Employment rolled out extensive training to employment services provider staff in three waves throughout 2014-15. This included face-to-face training sessions at 16 locations around the country, online learning units and interactive video presentations, guidelines for providers to use and a range of easy-reference products that front-line provider staff have at their fingertips and can use when deciding if they wish to take action under the job seeker compliance framework where job seekers do not attend or are otherwise non-compliant. Additionally, the Department requires all provider staff who are involved in the use of the compliance framework to undertake and pass a key online learning unit before they can do so.

The Department of Human Services is required to take into account a variety of reasons for reported non-compliance, including, but not limited to whether the job seeker had a reasonable excuse for their

<sup>15</sup> This response provides an update on actions undertaken in response to the findings of the evaluation.

non-participation, whether the Participation Report was accurately completed and whether the Work for the Dole activity was included as a compulsory activity in the job seeker's Employment Pathway Plan. For all No Show No Pay participation reports submitted by employment service providers for job seekers aged 18-29 years old in 2014/15, 60.9 per cent were applied. Of the 39.1 per cent that were not applied, over half of these were rejected for not meeting specific legislative requirements. The remaining failures were rejected by the Department of Human Services, following an assessment of reasonable excuse, as required under legislation.

The Department of Employment continues to work with the Department of Human Services and employment services providers to share information about the legislative requirements for Participation Reports. The Department of Human Services has specialist staff to assess all types of non-compliance action.

### 10.1. Understanding of non-compliance

Host organisations and providers alike felt that job seekers clearly understood the implications if they did not fulfill their WfD work experience activity requirements, and were aware that there could be a reduction in their benefit amount if they were not able to provide evidence of a genuine reason for non-attendance. In the participant survey, almost all WfD2014-15 participants were aware that their benefits could be sanctioned if they did not comply with the programme (85%). Nine per cent claimed they had not been told anything and 2 % thought they could be reported to Centrelink.

Providers discussed job seekers' generally positive responses to the WfD information sessions (run by providers), where the compliance requirements are clearly explained to job seekers, but this was often not followed through in terms of actual attendance at the activity.

*I think that 90% of reactions are positive. That does not mean however the actual attendance reflects this. The actions of 50% of the JSs [job seekers] do not reflect the positive and confirming response that is received in their appointment (JSA Provider)*

This understanding of the compliance environment is supported by evidence from job seekers themselves in both the survey and follow-up qualitative.

*If you want your Centrelink payment you have to come and sit here for this many hours in a day. And that's pretty much what we're, like they gave us the option, they said you know you don't have to be here but if you go then you're not going to get your payment (Job seeker)*

*I know I've got my medical certificate, I take it to them. I take it to Centrelink so they can't stop my payment if I've got a medical certificate (Job seeker)*

Some hosts mentioned that job seekers sometimes asked them to complete timesheets for when they were not actually in attendance (or were late/missed sessions) – a request which was reportedly denied.

### 10.2. Extent of, and reasons for, non-compliance

Most host organisations and providers in the qualitative discussions reported relatively high rates of non-attendance without prior notification (some estimates were up to a half of all of their WfD participants).

*We never see 15 ever, on an activity, although there's the opportunity for 15 to turn up we probably see on a good day between 10 or 11 (Host Organisation)*

Other hosts – particularly the larger ones - reported similar rates of participation of between a third and half of the expected participants turning up when they should, although a few gave a lower estimation of around 15% non-attendance in some areas.

*Yeah, we get about 50% (Host Organisation)*

*I'm working on 30-40% attendance daily. It varies across the sites and it varies across the site job service provider. But if there's 20 allocated or are identified to attend for the particular day at that site I'm working on, maybe 10 – 9 to 10 (Host Organisation)*

*You get plenty of non-compliance guys and they just drop off or get PRs. If they come back later on instead of doing two days a week they have to do four just go keep the dole, and then they don't do that and you notice they've dropped off and they've lost their dole for four weeks, or eight weeks, or three months (Host Organisation)*

Hosts and providers reported that the main reasons participants gave for not turning up were related to being sick or having an injury (typically, reported to have been sustained at work through, for example, heavy lifting). Almost all of the 36 job seekers in the qualitative research provided examples of where they had missed WfD due to sickness and/or injury. Host and providers' views were that whilst some job seekers clearly had health issues (particularly mental health concerns) others chose to give being sick as a reason not to attend (and were able to obtain medical certificates to support this). Some doubts were expressed about the genuineness, and concerns about the apparent relative ease in which participants were able to provide medical certificates.

*there is a medical centre who gives out medical certificates like they're lollies. So we do have some participants who take full advantage of that (Host Organisation)*

*There are doctors in small country communities who are just writing out medical exemptions for people repeatedly (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

According to hosts, another common reason for non-participation was that job seekers appeared not to know what to expect when they came for their work experience, and when they commenced they found it 'boring' or not what they wanted to do. Some hosts observed that job seekers appeared to be poorly informed, despite providers briefing them about the activity.

*The biggest problem is the lack of motivation and they get referred to us and we're told that they know about us and they know what to expect but the majority of the time they don't. They have no idea what they're going to be doing . It can be very, very hard to motivate them (Host Organisation)*

Examples were also provided (by providers and job seekers) of participants leaving a WfD work experience activity because they did not 'get on' with others in the activity, or with the host organisation.

*I didn't get along with the owner, and she was just really rude all the time and it wasn't enjoyable at all. I absolutely hated it (Job seeker)*

Some providers felt that certain groups, notably young males, were less willing to engage in WfD and thus were less compliant. Females, and those at the older end of the age range, were said to be more reliable and more willing to engage in WfD opportunities.

### 10.3. Reporting non-participation

Host organisations had a clear understanding of their role in reporting those who had not turned up for their activity, through the submission of timesheets to the providers and notifying them when people have not attended. A few hosts telephoned non-attendees to check on their whereabouts but in the main this responsibility was understood to sit with the providers. Host organisations reported that it could be a difficult role for them in reporting non-compliance, particularly where they were working hard to support their participants.

*They [supervisors] still feel that they're the ones in a way dobbing them in for not being there, so that's not a nice feeling for someone who's there feeling like they're wanting to help a job seeker into a job . (Host Organisation).*

Some hosts mentioned the trial 'app', which they felt would ease the process of reporting non-attendance through a more automated process (although notably some providers felt that many host organisations would not have the skills or technology to use the app).

Providers sometimes commented that it could be difficult to determine how genuine a reason for non-attendance was to enable them to make decisions about reporting non-compliance. Both providers and hosts commented that they often heard the same reasons given again and again by the same and different people.

*Yeah it's very hard making decisions. They ring you and you don't know if it's true or not. 'I've been kicked out of the house', 'I'm on the streets', 'I can't go to do this, I have no money', 'I'm sick', 'I'm going to the doctor' (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

A commonly raised issue among all six providers visited as part of the evaluation was submitting Participation Reports (PRs) to Centrelink, and Centrelink then not upholding the decision after having spoken to the job seeker. This, according to these providers, occurred frequently and caused considerable frustration (and was mentioned across all of the discussions with providers). The consequences of this from a providers' perspective was that they felt that some participants were 'playing the system' and knew what to say to Centrelink to ensure that their benefits were not withheld.

*The feedback I get from providers is that they just don't get supported by Centrelink. They do all the follow up and all the reporting and whatever else, and nothing happens (Host Organisation)*

*The [PR] successes are few and far between. We don't seem to be getting backed up right now by the Centrelink side of it. So when we're putting in participation reports, people are getting away with not showing up for weeks on end because of transport issues. You know, we're following the processes .they're not following through with the compliance measures (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*Not upholding the PRs, that's been very frustrating. We've got one particular incident where the client has been reported three times and they've not been upheld, and that is very frustrating (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

In the absence of an examination of individual Participation Reports, the full reasons for participation failures not being applied in such circumstances are unknown, but could in part relate to the complexity of the legislative framework which regulates Participation reporting and decisions, including the need for Centrelink staff to take into full account the reasons for non-compliance, to have receipt of accurate Participation Reports, and for the job seeker's Employment Pathway Plan to have included Work for the Dole as a compulsory activity. If the job seeker has a reasonable excuse or if there are provider errors which make the Participation Report invalid, Centrelink cannot apply a penalty under social security law. Nevertheless, whatever the reasons for the PRs not resulting in the



application of a participation failure, providers in this qualitative research commonly reported frustrations around these decisions.

It was suggested by providers that there could be a greater role for providers in PR decisions (as was perceived to be the case with the Non Attendance Report process).

A further concern expressed was that Centrelink/DHS was using incorrect information about WfD. Some providers reported inconsistencies between around activity compliance and that of Centrelink. For example, in one example Centrelink advised a provider that their guidelines stated that WfD eligible participants could go into education at any point (which then meant they were not compelled to commence a WfD activity, hence a PR was not upheld) whereas the provider had clear guidelines stating that this was only the case if the job seeker was already enrolled in education. In another example, a Stream 4 job seeker reportedly indicated to the provider that they were not obliged to do WfD because they were Stream 4 (again meaning a PR was not upheld). A further example was provided where DHS had advised that job seekers who lived a certain distance away from a town then they did not need to participate in WfD. These apparent inconsistencies or lack of clarity could in part be related to confusion at that time between the WfD2014/15 as a priority activity, and WfD in other areas/for other groups running alongside.

*DHS have also advised that if the JS [job seeker] lives more than 30km out of town then they shouldn't have to do WfD. I believe that more training is required for DHS (JSA Provider)*

#### **10.4. Impact of non-compliance**

As mentioned in Section 9, providers and host organisations both highlighted the frustration of non-participation in WfD work experience activities and felt that it impacted negatively on the success of the WfD programme.

##### **10.4.1. Impact of non-compliance on host organisations**

For host organisations, having WfD participants not turning up (without notice) raised the following issues:

- Difficulties in the planning of activities, arrangement of transport, equipment etc.

*We would like to have a bit more consistency with our numbers, just so that structurally we can plan a bit better. But we're used to the changing dynamics of Work for the Dole, so we're sort of used to managing that. But it would be good if there was a bit more consistent numbers for our guys to sort of plan. (Host Organisation)*

*What we have to do is ring around and see if we can get some more volunteers to take their place, ring up [provider] and say 'where are they?' but [provider] don't know, we don't know. (Host Organisation)*

- Frustration when efforts had been made to provide and plan activities for the job seeker

*supposed to have three people come up, three or four not one of them turned up. And this is what's happening constantly, you get everything ready.. they say yes they're fine and then you give them the uniform, you give them a shift and you never see them again. (Host Organisation)*

*Hosts are frustrated when job seekers do not show up for their placement. Hosts have allocated work for the participants and are left short staffed and work incomplete. (Coordinator online forum)*

*Non-compliance has a negative impact on the host. We had a host recently that had planned all these activities based on the fact that job seekers were going to turn up, she'd even hired equipment for that particular activity, and then they don't turn up so it breaks the relationship between us and the host it's having a negative flow-on impact on the linkages that we have formed. (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

- A subsequent reluctance to take on other WfD participants

*Look I guess we feel like it's wasting our time basically. Those people who continually do that [not show up], I mean you lose interest in trying to actually engage them. (Host Organisation)*

*I think the biggest impact is on the reputation of the programme for that particular manager or supervisor, if they've had someone not turn up that makes it difficult for me and others to then try to persuade them to continue to participate in the programme. (Host Organisation)*

Some hosts who had been involved for some time in WfD had learnt that attendees would generally always be lower than expected, and subsequently planned on that basis. According to providers, some hosts were more understanding than others in regard to this client group. For those who were less understanding, it could be challenging for providers to manage the host's continued engagement in the WfD2014-15 programme.

*As most deal with volunteers who are committed to their organisation, it is difficult for them to understand why a job seeker would not want to engage/attend an activity (JSA Provider)*

Those who were involved in the trial of the timesheet App felt that this would help with compliance as they thought the information would go straight to Centrelink.

#### **10.4.2. Impact of non-compliance on providers**

For providers, job seeker non-compliance with requirements to attend a WfD activity had a large impact on their management of the programme, with a large proportion of their WfD population being non-compliant at some point (i.e., failing to attend their WfD activity). This caused considerable additional workload. Providers expressed frustration around:

- trying to establish why a job seeker has not turned up for their activity
- attempting to rectify the situation with the host organisation (such as renegotiating a new start time, working out whether the job seeker can make the hours up)
- time taken to prepare and submit a Participation Report
- delays in processing PRs (reports from providers of it being up to two weeks before Centrelink is able to speak to the job seeker to establish why they did not attend their WfD activity – this timeframe is largely dependent on the job seeker)
- the apparent frustration with submitting participation reports to Centrelink, which were then perceived often not to result in participation failures being applied by Centrelink (as noted above, for reasons that were not always clear, but appearing to include PRs not aligning with information in the client's Employment Pathway Plan and job seekers reporting that they did not understand the mandatory requirement to participate).

*And one guy I actually put in a participation report six times in seven weeks and three of them were applied, they just don't turn up, I don't know why they don't*

*turn up. I don't know whether it's because of the generational unemployment ..  
(JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

- Job seekers attending a 're-engagement' meeting with the provider, which then triggered the resumption of their Centrelink payment, but then the job seeker still not showing up for their WfD activity which meant that the entire PR process started again.

Some providers noted that some WfD participants appeared to accept losing some of their Centrelink payments with relative ease.

*They knock their day's pay off and they come back and they do the exact same thing again, so they know exactly what Centrelink is going to do to them, so they virtually just laugh at it (Host Organisation)*

*You do have a lot of participants specifically here in [area] they're happy to forgo their payment for a little while, rather than undertake this activity (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

It was suggested in some provider discussions that the difficulties in upholding PRs were exacerbated by having to deal with a national Participation team (who may not have had the detailed knowledge about the WfD2014-15 programme running in the 18 areas) rather than with a local Centrelink office, with staff with local knowledge who were better placed to make decisions around, for example, a job seeker saying they had transport difficulties and understanding the change in WfD policy for young job seekers.<sup>16</sup>

Providers felt that managing non-compliance was an area in which they needed to have greater decision-making authority.

*I think compliance tools are the only thing that we're really lacking. We can go out, we can get activities, we can do all that, we can set people up, but if they're not prepared to do it we need to be able to say 'you're not going to do it, so then this is the outcome' (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

*If we put through a NAR it automatically cuts the payment. It sends out a message to the client. The client then has to ring us and book a re-engagement appointment. Once they make that booking their payment starts again but as far as an activity goes we have to PR, and a PR doesn't stop their payments. A PR means that DHS has to get in contact with the client, and when they do the client will give them any story they like. The PR is not followed through (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

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<sup>16</sup> Department of Human Services information notes that they use a national Participation Solutions Team (PST) because the nature of this work and the decision making involved needs staff with a particular skill set who have received particular specialist training and that PST officers liaise with local area DHS staff or other relevant parties as appropriate in making their decisions.

## 11. Outcomes for WfD participants

This section identifies the outcomes for WfD participants, using data from the survey of participants, from the qualitative discussions with participants and from qualitative discussions with hosts and providers.

The outcomes for participants focus on four main areas:

- Work related skills
- Soft skills
- Attitude and behaviour (attitudes to work, job search behaviour etc.), and
- WfD as a pathway to employment (including gaining a job).

It should be noted that the research explored the first seven months' experience of the WfD2014-15 programme. As such, some participants had not yet, or only just completed their six months of WfD activity. In order to determine sustained and longer-term impacts of participation in WfD, a longer timeframe for evaluation is needed to base an assessment on job seekers who have completed their 26 week WfD2014-15 work experience activity and to enable the observation of any outcomes and longer term impacts related to employability, job readiness and post-programme labour market activity.

### Summary of key points

- a) The outcomes achieved that were the most often mentioned, among all groups of respondents, were those relating to 'soft' skills – confidence, self-esteem, team work, communication, learning about work place behaviour and so forth.
- b) Two thirds of WfD participants in the survey felt that their 'soft' skills had increased (primarily their ability to work with others, self-confidence, and general work skills) – host organisations felt that these types of skills were the most important. Despite these high levels of self-reported improvements, many participants still appeared somewhat pessimistic about their chances of getting a job, with only just over half (54%) saying that WfD2014-15 had improved their chances of finding work.
- c) Over half of WfD participants in the survey agreed that they had learnt new work-related skills, with customer service and using equipment the most frequently mentioned.
- d) Analysis of the administrative data revealed that WfD2014-15 increased the rate of part-time/casual paid employment (including reported and actual) by 8%, which is a substantial 'short-run' impact. WfD2014-15 also had a smaller, but still statistically significant, impact upon job placements and moving off income support. It is estimated that in the short-term WfD2014-15 resulted in an additional 2% of job seekers having a job placement and an additional 2% moving off income support, than would have occurred in the absence of WfD2014-15.
- e) It was evident from the qualitative and quantitative research that the greatest benefits were for those who stayed in their WfD activity for the duration. For those who remained engaged in their WfD activity, the outcomes were positive and most felt that it had increased their employment opportunities —those who left early reported considerably lower ratings on all skills.

### Departmental Action<sup>17</sup>

jobactive information highlights that participation in Work for the Dole can build skills that employers want, like teamwork, communication and reliability, increase job seekers' confidence and show they are ready for work while being involved in their local community.

The Department will use the evaluation findings to continue to refine the programme and inform job seekers, providers, host organisations and the general public about Work for the Dole.

The Department also notes that its Surveys of Employers Recruitment Experiences show that, while job specific skills are valuable, soft skills are essential with few employers willing to hire a person who they think will not be able to work effectively and cooperatively with others in their business. Further information is available at [lmip.gov.au](http://lmip.gov.au).

#### 11.1. Work-related skills

From the qualitative interviews with hosts, participants and providers, many examples were given of work-related skills being obtained. Hosts and providers felt that the variety of work experience activities that were available to job seekers enabled anyone who wanted to improve their skills and employment opportunities the chance to do so. Over half (52%) of WfD survey participants felt that they had learnt new skills in WfD (this was highest amongst those who were participating in WfD at the time of survey — 61% compared with only 34% of early leavers), and the respondents in the qualitative study were able to provide a range of examples of new work-related skills gained.

The most frequently mentioned skills gained amongst WfD2014-15 survey participants included:

- Customer service / retail experience (18%)
- How to use tools / machinery (15%)
- Interpersonal / social skills (13%)
- Communication skills (9%), and
- Gardening / horticultural skills (9%).

That said, as noted earlier many job seekers in the qualitative discussions appeared frustrated at the choices for WfD activities that they were offered, feeling that they did not match the kind of opportunities they were hoping for. Nevertheless, in the qualitative interviews with participants some had found their experience beneficial, even if it was in an area that they had not chosen.

*(Interviewer – ‘did you think that you wanted to do kitchen work?’) No, not really because I thought I would be bad at it because I’d never done it before. So I myself just didn’t feel confident in that type of industry. I thought to myself, I can’t do the things that they want me to do. I mean I’m confident now. It’s built up my self-esteem so it’s really good (Job seeker)*

Some participants were placed into WfD activities that they had done previously (for example, charity shop work) so felt that they had gained limited additional work skills.

#### 11.2. Soft skills

Providers and host organisations all gave many examples of improvements in ‘soft’ skills. The most commonly mentioned ‘soft’ skills gained were:

- confidence and self-esteem
- team working

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<sup>17</sup> This response provides an update on actions undertaken in response to the findings of the evaluation.

- responsibility and taking ownership of tasks
- initiative
- timekeeping/reliability/punctuality
- ability to listen to, and follow, instructions
- communication – talking to others in the group, to staff and to customers
- personal presentation (clothing, personal hygiene), and
- a general positive work ethic.

Both hosts and providers placed greater emphasis on these kinds of skills than the work activity that the job seeker was actually undertaking, and noted that these ‘soft’ skills were often lacking with this particular cohort (many of whom had never worked) but were frequently raised by employers as the kinds of skills they look for.

*We’ve focused around reliability, getting them used to being in the workplace, all that sort of thing, following instructions, all that work hardening, workplace expectation stuff, not just skill development (Host Organisation)*

*I’ve seen a massive improvement, she was very, very shy, she’s much more confident now, she actually shows a bit of initiative and does things without being asked all the time I’ve sat down and had a few chats to her and said ‘you need to do things without being asked, because if you get a real job that is what’s going to be expected. Don’t just sit there doing nothing fiddling with your phone’ (Host Organisation)*

*We’re doing basic construction work but the bulk of what we’re doing is turning up on time, wearing your PPE, working as a team, that really is a bulk of what we’re doing that’s constantly the request we’re hearing from the employer groups we’re engaged with (Host Organisation)*

The role of the supervisors/managers appears to be critical here, in displaying appropriate behaviours themselves and in providing a mentoring role to WfD participants. Giving praise and feedback to participants was perceived as valuable, and contributed to participants’ self-worth and self-esteem. Working with participants to help to identify their interests was also discussed by hosts, as a way of garnering enthusiasm and providing positivity.

*They’re doing track work, vegetation management, weed management, some minor drainage, all hand tools and certainly all managing of a project and coordinating with traffic control or coordinating with resources like trucks their supervisor’s working next to them side by side so they’re involved with those decisions, we encourage the supervisor to talk to them about what their thinking is and how they’re trying to plan the work (Host Organisation)*

*A pat on the back to say thank you to somebody for a job well done goes a long way, as I said, they feel appreciated for the workload they’ve put in, they go home on a high, they look forward to coming back (Host Organisation)*

*I encourage them to find something they’re good at. They might be good at colour coding, or they might be good at dressing mannequins or they might be good at writing signs and when we find their little thing that they’re good at we really try to encourage them and make them feel good about themselves (Host Organisation)*

Two ‘soft’ skills stand out from the data gathered from host organisations, providers and participants as having been enhanced as a result of participating in a WfD work experience activity – confidence (associated with self-esteem) and team work. Almost all participants in the qualitative discussions

mentioned these as benefits of their WfD experience, and host organisations also often highlighted these outcomes.

*Whilst there is mundane work, it's the overall package that we try and present. So I think confidence would be the biggest thing (Host Organisation)*

*I've gotten more confidence in working with other people, becoming confident, like doing the till by myself and all that (Job seeker)*

*Because it's a not-for-profit place, it sort of gave me a , sort of I suppose a more self-worth feeling, and yeah because I got more confident because I had to talk to different people like my communication skills have been improved a lot from working there (Job seeker)*

Many participants also mentioned that WfD helped with getting them into a routine of work, having to be up at a certain time and in their workplace by a certain time, and having something 'to do'.

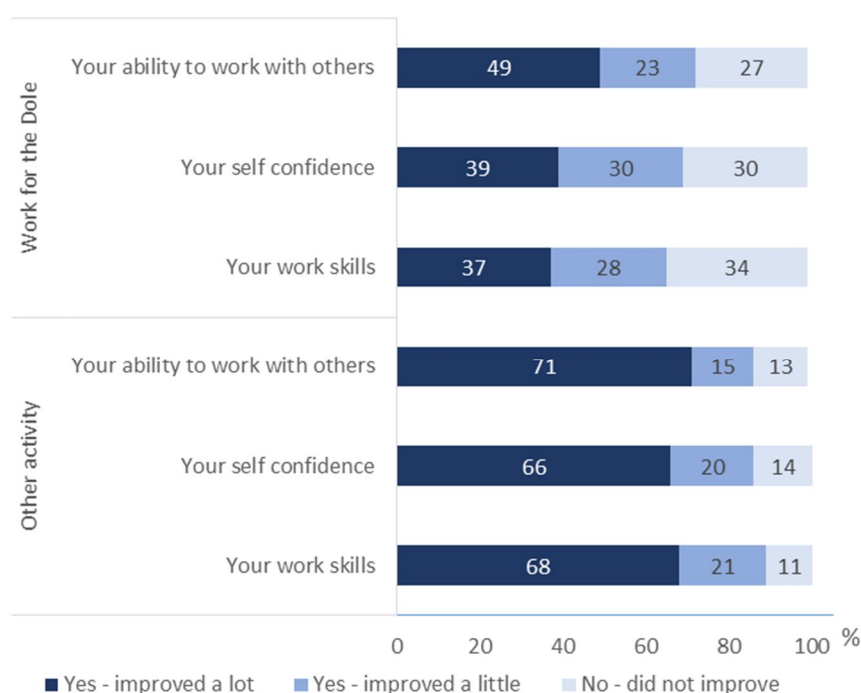
*Like to get to work it's just, I never used to. I always used to sleep in but now I just wake up and yeah, now ready to go (Job seeker)*

Similar findings were evident from the survey of participants. Overall, two thirds or more reported that the WfD2014-15 programme improved these skills, with a one third stating that the programme did not improve these skills. Among WfD participants, over three quarters (76%) reported that their experience of the WfD programme improved their ability to keep to a routine and overall, two thirds or more of participants in the survey reported that the WfD2014-15 programme improved elements of 'soft skills', particularly the ability to work with others (72%), self-confidence (68%) and general work skills (66%). The majority of survey participants also agreed that WfD activities could improve experience (76%) and help them to stay in touch with the workforce (71% agreed).

By comparison, almost all job seekers engaged in an alternate mutual obligation activity reported that activity had improved these skills. It should be noted that almost all of those undertaking an alternate mutual obligation activity were engaged in part time work or study / training (93%, refer to Table 3). While the numbers are too small to draw any conclusions from it would appear that among those not participating in part time work or study are more closely aligned in their responses to those participating in the Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme.

The results are presented in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Ratings of programme participation on soft work skills**



Base: Job seekers who had commenced WfD2014-15 (n=501) or another activity (n=150)

Survey participants also highlighted other non-skill specific benefits including:

- Meeting new people or making friends (16%)
- Gaining confidence or becoming more motivated (7%)
- Learning new (non-specific) skills (6%)
- Increasing the number of work contacts or improving my resume (5%), and
- Having something to do, a routine or a sense of purpose (4%).

Participants who left WfD2014-15 early do not appear to have gained as much from the programme as others, with considerably lower ratings reported on all skills. However this could be due to the early termination of the activity itself or a greater level of dissatisfaction with the activity. Refer to Table 12 for details.

**Table 12: Ratings of programme participation on soft work skills, by WfD2014-15 completion status**

Soft Skill	Job seekers who have been referred to WfD	Currently doing WfD	Completed WfD	Left WfD early
<i>Base: Job seekers who had commenced a Work for the Dole 2014-15 placement (n)</i>	501	338	30	133
Your ability to work with others (%)	72	80	58	56*
Your self confidence (%)	68	76	43	54*
Your work skills (%)	66	77	51	42*



### 11.3. Attitudes and behaviour

Many host organisations experienced negative attitudes from job seekers when they first attended their WfD activity – general reluctance, apathy and disengagement was common, as well as an initial inability to perceive any benefit of their WfD activity (and this appeared to be a common reason for the many early leavers on the programme).

Many hosts recounted examples of job seekers who had entered a WfD activity with a negative attitude which changed over the course of the WfD activity to a positive and enthusiastic one. One host, echoing the sentiment of others, felt that once a job seeker had stayed in the activity for the first few weeks, the benefits began to emerge and they started to become more engaged. Where activities were wide and varied appeared to be particularly beneficial for retention.

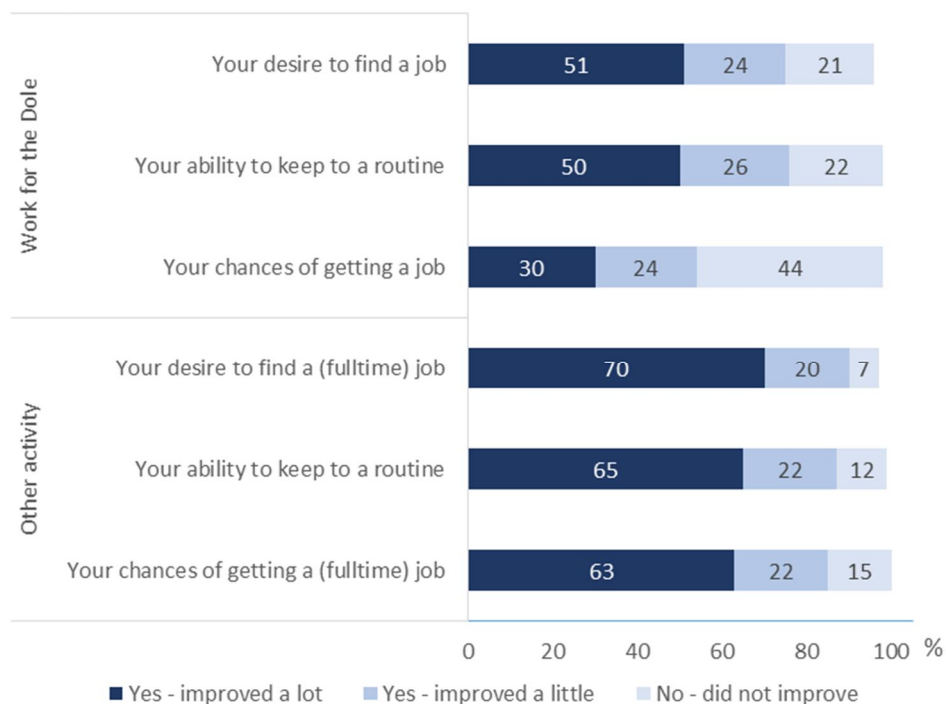
*WfD will benefit any job seeker who has a genuine desire to improve their employment opportunities. In particular with the range of activities available in our ESAs from the WfD Coordinators, there are opportunities for job seekers to develop skills in areas such as administration, retail, landscaping and IT support (JSA013)*

This changing attitude towards the work experience, as a result of the activities undertaken, the environment, and the support received led to a better state of 'work-readiness'.

*I will say that it makes them work-ready, as in they are used to a routine, they are used to getting up in the morning, they are used to going out and getting to work, getting dressed, putting on decent clothes, communicating with people and doing structured work whether it's the tasks we have set them make them job ready or not, I think it's the work environment that makes them job-ready (Host Organisation)*

From the quantitative survey of WfD participants, there was a strong sense that the WfD experience had encouraged participants to want to gain work. Over three quarters (75%) felt that their experience of the programme had improved their desire to find a job (although for some, the motivation could have been to avoid having to do any further WfD activities). That said, there was still some pessimism about the realities of finding work, with only just over half (54%) feeling that the WfD programme had improved their chances of finding a job. The results are presented in Figure 10.

**Figure 10: Ratings of programme participation on job search willingness**



Base: Job seekers that had commenced WfD2014-15 (n=501) or another activity (n=150)

Interestingly, job seekers also recognised the value of their work experience to the community, with over four fifths of those who had commenced WfD agreeing that it is an opportunity for them to give something back to the community (84% agreed).

#### 11.4. WfD as a pathway to employment

More detail on the effect of WfD14-15 on participant outcomes can be found in the separate methodology report. In summary, the difference-in-difference estimates from the administrative data found that WfD2014-15 increased the rate of part-time/casual paid employment by seven percentage points more than the increase in the control areas. Specifically, the probability of obtaining part-time or casual paid employment increased from 0.133 to 0.215 in Selected Areas (whilst holding other characteristics constant) and from 0.136 to 0.152 in the comparison areas. This is a substantial short-run impact.

Analysis of the administrative data suggests that part of the impact of WfD2014-15 on rates of part-time/casual employment is reporting of previously unreported part-time paid employment and in part it is a 'real' increase in paid employment. Because paid employment satisfies in part or in full the activity requirement of the job seeker, the referral to WfD may provide an incentive to report pre-existing paid employment. Data on timing of the reporting of part-time employment relative to the referral to WfD reveals that after the implementation of WfD2014-15, there was a slight increase in the proportion of employment being reported within one week of referral to WfD, but the proportion reporting employment more than four weeks after referral to WfD was unchanged by WfD2014-15. This suggests that not all of the increase in part-time employment was a reporting effect. It should be noted that the reporting of previously unreported part-time employment can be considered a positive outcome.

WfD2014-15 had a smaller, but still statistically significant impact upon job placements<sup>18</sup> and moving off income support. It is estimated that in the short-term WfD2014-15 resulted in an additional 2% of job seekers having a job placement and an additional 2% moving off income support.

The evaluation also considered whether there are differences in the estimated impact of WfD2014-15 on different population sub-groups (sex, age, Indigenous status, whether from English-speaking or non-English speaking background, duration as a job seeker and extent to which face employment barriers). There were not major differences between demographic subgroups in the impact of WfD2014-15 on part-time employment, job placement or movements off income support. It would appear though that WfD2014-15 had a somewhat larger effect on job placement for those with the greatest employment barriers, but a smaller effect on the probability of going off income support for job seekers who have been assessed as facing the greatest barriers to finding employment.

The survey data highlights some of the mechanisms by which WfD may increase employability. There were numerous ways mentioned that WfD could act as a pathway towards employment, including:

- Obtaining a reference
- Providing a track record of volunteer activity whilst out of work
- Gaining supervisory experience
- Getting recognised training/certificate whilst on WfD
- Being taken on as a paid worker by the host organization, and
- Being put forward by the host organisation for a paid job, through the host organisation's networks.

#### **11.4.1. Obtaining a reference**

Participants mentioned the benefit of having a reference from their host organisation, to put down on their CV. This was thought to be particularly helpful in responding to questions from prospective employers about what they had been doing recently, and thus strengthened their chances (particularly if the work experience was in the same industry or sector as the jobs they were applying for).

*I've got the reference from the manager, so I think also the sort of thing going on my resume saying I volunteer at a not-for-profit organisation is a positive influence to an employer because it shows that I'm trying to do something rather than sit at home (Job seeker)*

#### **11.4.2. Providing a track record of volunteer activity whilst out of work**

Hosts and providers, and some participants, mentioned the advantage of being able to put the WfD activity on a CV, although wording it as 'work experience' or volunteer work rather than as WfD (this relates to negative associations with the programme name, as mentioned elsewhere in this report).

#### **11.4.3. Gaining supervisory experience**

Some host organisations endeavoured to progress WfD participants into a more supervisory role once they became established, supervising new WfD participants.

*So the idea is that by offering these other Work for the Dole supervisory positions, volunteer position like that is the best way that I can give them experience, so if I can't take them in the future at least they're set up for someone else to (Host Organisation)*

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<sup>18</sup> These are Job Placements facilitated by JSA Providers, and attracting a Job Placement Fee for the Provider, where a job seeker is placed in an advertised job vacancy with an employer in the open labour market, i.e. paid employment. This result is over and above, and distinct from, the increase in Part-time or Casual Paid Employment recorded as an activity in the Work Experience Phase.

#### **11.4.4. Obtaining recognised training/certification whilst on WfD**

Some hosts were able to utilise the activity experience participants were gaining to lead onto a training course. For example, a few host organisations had linked up with the local TAFE or training provider to ensure that the WfD activities could contribute to an entry level/Certificate II qualification, and one had developed a trainee programme (refurbishing computers) that the most successful WfD participants could progress towards.

In the survey, approximately one quarter (25%) of WfD2014-15 participants had received some kind of training to help them with their placement, with the majority rating this training as either good (48%) or very good (32%). The majority (51%) of those who were working in addition to participating in WfD2014-15 reported that they used the skills and experienced gained from WfD2014-15 in their job either to a great extent (25%) or to some extent (26%).

#### **11.4.5. Being taken on as a paid worker by the host organisation**

There were examples of hosts themselves taking on WfD participants, either as supervisors or in other suitable roles.

*[Host organisation] are actually looking to employ some of the participants as trainees through their program, so to reward the participants with really high participation (JSA Provider face to face discussion)*

Providers were also able to give examples of WfD participants who had successfully made a transition to work due to the skills and experience they had gained during the WfD activity.

*They get real life sort of skills in cashier, in coffee-making, to cook, in assistant cook or kitchen hand so we have a lot of people get jobs from our café, so we either hire them or they end up getting a job pretty quickly (Host Organisation)*

#### **11.4.6. Being put forward by the host organisation for a paid job, through the host organisation's networks**

Being referred to job opportunities by 'word of mouth' was also mentioned. For example, one host organisation mentioned that he was sometimes contacted by local employers (who he knew) to see whether any of the WfD participants may be suitable for their opportunities (it was suggested they preferred to do this than open the vacancy up more widely and then be inundated with applications).

It was mentioned that for those whose WfD activity was within local government, it would place them at an advantage for future local government work above someone who had not worked in local government previously.

## 12. Impact on host organisations and communities

This section provides insights into the impact of participating in WfD2014-15 for host organisations and the wider community. It draws on data from the qualitative research (primarily from host organisations) but also includes some data from the survey of participants.

### Summary of key points

- a) Positive impacts mentioned by host organisations related to enabling them to complete tasks or activities that they would not otherwise have been able to do (or would have taken much longer to do).
- b) Benefits also included providing some financial security in a typically unstable funding environment, raising the profile of the organisation in the community (and among young people in particular) and the satisfaction of seeing people progress, and in some cases being able, to make a direct contribution to a transition into employment.
- c) Whilst the impact of WfD on communities was not collected directly from communities themselves, there is also some evidence in the data (primarily from host organisations) to suggest that there are positive community outcomes, including being able to provide support to their disadvantaged community members through WfD, as well as changing community perceptions of the programme and its participants.

### 12.1. Impact on host organisations

The positive impacts on host organisations of participating in WfD2014-15 mentioned were:

- Enabling them to get tasks done that would not otherwise have been done (or would have taken much longer to do)
- Stabilising the ongoing viability of the organisation
- Raising the profile of their organisation and their activities
- The positive aspects of engaging with this cohort of young people, and the benefits that brought to the organisation as a whole, and
- Being able to provide employment opportunities to the WfD cohort within the organisation.

The only significant negative impacts mentioned by host organisations related to resources – some found the programme costly to run (as mentioned earlier in this report – partly due to the high churn of participants) in terms of covering equipment, supervision and training.

#### 12.1.1. Enabling tasks to done

Examples included having the environment much more organised, clean and presentable than it would have been otherwise, being able to make products that could be sold and the profit invested back into the organisation, being able to widen their services and generally operate more smoothly.

*It's maintaining the playground. So, there's a few areas that we just wouldn't maintain if we didn't have those extra people around and it just makes it a bit more presentable overall, which is the biggest thing. (Host Organisation)*

*So it is a heritage building, and we are maintaining it and looking after it and the gardens and that around the place so it does look like a respectable operation, rather than overgrown and tardy and unkempt. (Host Organisation)*

*But I cannot possibly handle it without the Work for the Dole people. (Host Organisation)*

### **12.1.2. Stabilising the organisation**

WfD2014-15 had also helped some host organisations (namely those operating in the not-for-profit sector) to be sustainable, enabling them to continue operating and maintaining services to the community. There were mentions of concerns about the short-term funding for organisations in the not-for-profit sector, and a reliance on voluntary support, and a feeling that some of their projects would not be viable without the assistance of WfD job seekers.

*Look, it has allowed us to maintain some of the service that we were going to have quote, but some whole sections of the organisation were actually going to be closed down, we were going to lose staff, lose service delivery in the region, so it has allowed us to maintain some level of service delivery in what we do as an organisation here. (Host Organisation)*

*And, of course, that helps our business because we couldn't operate without our volunteers. (Host Organisation)*

*It's [WfD] become an essential part of the overall operation and existence. (Host Organisation)*

### **12.1.3. Raising the organisation's profile**

WfD2014-15 also raised the profile of organisations operating in the not-for-profit space, generally through word-of-mouth from job seekers and others a greater awareness of host organisations and their work was noted. This could help in recruitment as well as in attracting more participants to their project.

*They've got different contacts to us as well. As in, out there and that because we move in our circles and they sort of move in a different circle to us so it's basically getting into their...network of, yeah, people which opens the doors for more to come and have a look at our wares. So their network of friends actually helps get us more known out there and to a younger clientele as well. (Host Organisation)*

*We've had a lot of publicity with the auction last year and everyone was really impressed with what the boys have actually made. I think they take pride in what they make (Host Organisation)*

A few host organisations identified some publicity opportunities through their work with job seekers. For example, one respondent mentioned that they have been asked to speak at a national conference on the progress of their WfD community project and another mentioned new links with other businesses in the area.

*And I've actually been invited to a national conference, to speak at a national conference but the reputation is really getting around that this is what we're doing here. So that gives us a great opportunity and part of that will be of course talking about the Work for the Dole program. (Host Organisation)*

*It's opened us up to dealing with some new business partners being some of the providers that we haven't done business with before. (Host Organisation)*

### **12.1.4. Engaging with WfD client group**

WfD2014-15 also enabled host organisations to engage and develop relationships with a cohort that they may not have previously been involved with. This included engaging with young people – for

example, one organisation had developed relationships with young people who have a cultural connection with their project and may have been otherwise disinterested.

*Well, quite a bit actually because they've taken a lot of pressure of us, as in youth wise. Because most of us here are, like I said we're, a lot of us are over 60, 65. But it's just that youth that actually helps us out as well and really makes it a lot better. And their exuberance actually feeds us as well so, you know, it's a good circle. (Host Organisation)*

*I think, for our guys, our supervisors, there's the satisfaction of being able to pass on knowledge and expertise to them. So it's a win-win because they're getting something out of it and everybody's getting on. (Host Organisation)*

*And the gains for us have been that we actually have new artist members because of it. So we traditionally have had a lot of trouble engaging young Aboriginal people and getting them to sort of hang in there with us. So we've got three new young Aboriginal artist members who are coming in on other days other than their Work for the Dole days, to make art and actually be a part of the community gallery. (Host Organisation)*

#### **12.1.5. Providing employment opportunities**

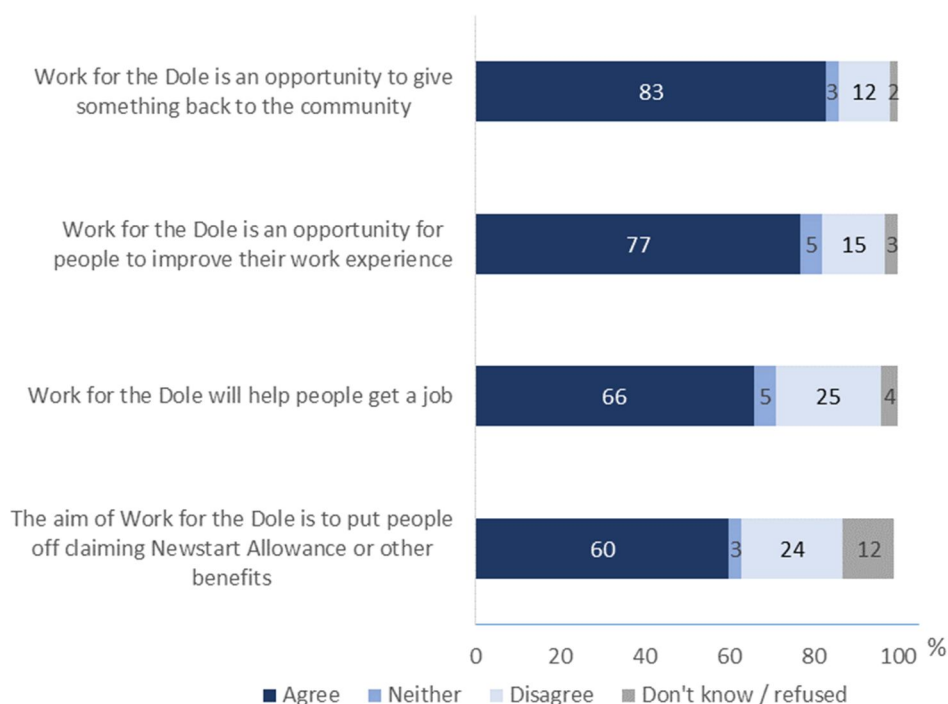
Hosts also spoke of the positive impacts of seeing the young people progress and, in some cases, being able to provide them with employment opportunities within their own organisation. This is discussed further in Section 11 'Outcomes'.

#### **12.2. Community impacts**

All survey respondents, including those who were participating in another activity, were asked their thoughts on the WfD2014-15 programme in a general sense. Just over eight out of ten job seekers (83%) felt that WfD2014-15 was an opportunity to give something back to the community, demonstrating the value that many placed on the activities within the programme. Three quarters (77%) felt that it was an opportunity to improve work experience and two thirds (66%) felt that it would help people find a job. Six out of ten (60%) job seekers felt that there is some truth that WfD2014-15 is designed to put people off claiming benefits.

There was no difference by participation in the programme or otherwise amongst these statements. Likewise there was little difference in the overall level of agreement amongst those who were completing or had completed the programme or had left the programme early. The results are presented in Figure 11.

**Figure 11: Job seeker perceptions of Work for the Dole 2014-15**



Base: Job seekers eligible for the WfD2014-15 programme (n=700)

In the qualitative research, most hosts identified some value to the wider community of WfD. This included enabling community projects to get established for the wider benefit of community members, and for WfD participants themselves to see the value to the community of the work they have undertaken.

*We have people that have worked here as part of their Work for the Dole projects and they will bring their families back and because it's an ongoing project we are able to say look, I helped build this, or was part of this project, and that sort of stuff. The locals are participating in a project that they can see grow over the years. (Host Organisation)*

*And this church has been getting hit by graffiti and vandalism and that quite a bit. Now these young people are now at that church refurbishing it. So they're rebuilding the fence, they're repainting it, you know, they're fixing up all this sort of stuff and they're--the word seems to be going around from them to their mates leave it alone, this is a project that I'm involved with. They're starting to take pride in doing that. (Host Organisation)*

In addition, host organisations who represented not-for-profit organisations for disadvantaged groups noted the wider benefits on their target populations. Host organisations observed that job seekers were able to see their value in their placement by helping them to, for example, prepare food parcels, recycle old computers and recondition bicycles to sell to people on low-income. One organisation recalled their successful auction last year where they were auctioning off furniture items job seekers had built from old pallets; the profits were given to a local hospital foundation.

*They know how many people they're helping and they can see the amount of food. We move 15 tonnes of food a week so they can see that and so they're very happy. (Host Organisation)*



*Now currently we're recycling computers, and we're making them available to people on low income (Host Organisation)*

*I think the other benefit is the community organisation itself that outreach to the community. We do a lot of food parcels and free lunches and things like that, and I think that it job seekers see that, and job seekers become a part of it. (Host Organisation)*

Some host organisations identified that WfD benefits the community as it re-engages people who may be disconnected from their community. Host organisations felt that for some people it is an opportunity to connect them back with their community through some constructive activities. One host organisation felt that the project they had established engaged young Indigenous participants with their culture as they learnt new things about their Aboriginal history and art that they have never identified with previously.

*But anything which gets people from sitting on the couch at home alone, you know, feeling a sense of despair, anything that can get them just to step up and get involved with whatever activity it might be, it's got to be a good thing (Host Organisation)*

*But it's a community development thing and I think that if we can all open our minds and our hearts to that sort of programme then it benefits lots and lots of people (Host Organisation)*

*Look I suppose again, just what I've heard about the young participants, that certainly has a wider impact within the local Aboriginal community. It brings them into contact with some of their elders who they can then learn cultural things from in a way that's relaxed and I guess meaningful for them rather than sort of, you know, a lot of young kids go "I don't know if I want to know about all that culture stuff" and it leaves the elders feeling quite frustrated. So that's been a really good benefit for the Aboriginal community. (Host Organisation)*

Some hosts also commented that another community outcome of WfD is a changing perception of young job seekers. Examples were given of initially negative community views of this cohort changing to more positive perceptions as they observed the activities being undertaken and the changes being made to local facilities and services. For example, for one council, WfD is seen as the council assisting with enhancing services for the community.

*I think it helps with perception with the work that the guys are actually doing something, and you see the community seeing the guys doing something, and I think that perception-wise is a good perception that yeah, our tax payers' money is sort of going to the government but helping people do stuff as well, helping people gain skills as well. (Host Organisation)*

*Because local governments are a local representation of the community. It's good for us to be essentially seen to be giving back or providing opportunities for community to be involved and ownership of community and development. (Host Organisation)*

## 13. Evaluation overview and considerations for the national Work for the Dole 2014-15 programme

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This section provides a synthesis of the evidence in response to the four key evaluation questions.

1. What if any impact has the WfD2014-15 programme had on the referral of job seekers to Work for the Dole or other activities and their commencement in those activities?
2. Has the supply of activities under WfD2014-15 been sufficient to meet demand?
3. Has WfD2014-15 provided suitable work-like experiences for eligible job seekers?
4. Is WfD2014-15 associated with improved employability?

The report concludes by providing some considerations for the national Work for the Dole programme which commences on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015 as part of the new 'jobactive' employment services.

### 13.1. Impact of Work for the Dole 2014-15 on the referral of job seekers to WfD or other activities, and their commencement in those activities

The administrative data analysis showed that WfD2014-15 substantially increased the proportion of eligible job seekers being referred to WfD activities, and activities in general. It is estimated that WfD2014-15 increased the rate of referral to WfD by 28 percentage points for someone with a consistent set of characteristics (from a baseline of 22%). While the rate of referral to WfD2014-15 was much higher in WfD2014-15 areas, there were still 24% of individuals in the Selected Areas who had not been referred to any activity. The effect of WfD2014-15 on referral to a WfD activity was found to be much larger for non-Indigenous Australians from an English Speaking Background compared to non-Indigenous Australians from a Non-English Speaking Background and Indigenous Australians. WfD2014-15 significantly increased the rate of commencement in WfD on being referred by 4 percentage points (from a baseline of 81%). There was no effect, however, for those assessed as having the greatest barriers to employment.

Minimising delays in commencement are likely to remain a challenge for providers, due to both the complexity of job seeker circumstances as well as the coordination and matching of available activities to individuals. Balancing the need to move job seekers into a required activity once they reach the 12 month point against ensuring that the activity is beneficial to the job seeker, and is of sufficient quality and relevance so that they continue to participate (ie, do not 'drop out' before any benefits are gained), remains challenging.

The evaluation findings have also suggested that for some job seekers with high levels of disadvantage (Stream 4 job seekers and Indigenous job seekers) there has been little change in referral rates to Work for the Dole as an activity. Further research to understand why this has not occurred for many of these individuals will help to inform the design of policy for these groups.

### 13.2. Sufficiency of activities to meet demand

At up to 15 hours per week per participant, the number of work experience activities has been sufficient to meet demand – although initially a slow start, once the coordinators and providers were on board with the programme there appeared to be little difficulty in sourcing activities (although there were some exceptions in some of the more regional locations) through host organisations.

However, the suitability of activities has not necessarily aligned with what job seekers are able to do (or want to do). This may explain why some activities remain unfilled. In some cases, it was reported that activities were created by coordinators (as expected) but then providers were unable to provide suitable job seekers to fill those places because, for example, they had criminal records so could not be placed in that activity, they had transport/access difficulties, or became ineligible for WfD2014-15. Coordinators would benefit from having greater access to information about the individual job seekers who providers seek to place, and the kinds of activities they would be best matched to.

A few providers and job seekers expressed concern that there were too many activities of the same type (charity shop work and environmental/gardening were cited, for example) which did not always provide sufficient work-like experience or choice.

Providers and coordinators did not feel that finding sufficient work experience placements will be a challenge when the WfD programme is extended, although the reality of the demand for places with the expansion of the programme from 18 areas to national coverage, and from the 18-29 year age group to a much wider age group may be different. It was noted that increasing the requirements to 25 hours for the under 30s may also be a deterrent for some hosts. Even if sufficient activities are identified with relative ease, ensuring that the quality of the activities (in terms of providing good supervision, work-like experiences, variety and so forth) will take a concerted effort, particularly with new host organisations who are unfamiliar with both the WfD programme and the client group, and as new providers come on stream from July 2015 onwards. Additionally, the 'fit' of 25 hours into a working week is yet to be understood. According to host organisations 15 hours fits comfortably into two working days, allowing host organisations the option of setting aside two days each week as WfD programme days, or having four WfD days, taking on two different activity groups within one working week. The 25 hour concept is yet to be understood in this context, and how the hours will be distributed over the course of a working week.

### **13.3. Provision of suitable work-like experiences for eligible job seekers in Work for the Dole 2014-15**

Generally speaking, the WfD activities are providing work-like experiences for job seekers. Hosts have made considerable efforts, working collaboratively with coordinators and providers, to ensure that their activities are work-like, meaningful and engaging, whilst also providing benefit to the organisation (by getting tasks done that would not have otherwise been possible) – the reciprocity of this arrangement was recognised. Notably, host organisations in the not-for-profit sector, many of whom had supported this client group through other programmes, place considerable value in being able to help disadvantaged groups such as the WfD eligible population. Whether this altruism exists more widely among employers who will be new to this environment (and the circumstances of job seekers) is yet to be determined.

One of the main challenges appears to be finding activities that 'fit' with what the job seeker would like to do, or is able to do, given that many have significant skill deficits (including 'soft' skills). That said, the biggest impact (evident from all stakeholders in the qualitative work as well as from participants in the survey) that the WfD2014-15 work experience has had on participants has been in improving their 'soft' skills (communication, team work, etc.), over and above work-specific skills.

### **13.4. Is Work for the Dole 2014-15 associated with improved employability?**

Although employability is a clearly stated objective of the WfD2014-15 programme, there is currently no universal agreement on a) what employability is and b) how it should be measured. For the purposes of this evaluation, it has been assumed that implicitly, improved employability means that there has been an improvement in how attractive an individual is to a prospective employer (that is, whether they have increased their chances of working) as a result of taking part in a WfD2014-15 activity. Thus, how employable a person is largely depends on four areas:

- work related skills (achieved through, for example, training and 'on the job' experience)
- 'soft' skills (communication, motivation, personal presentation, resilience, initiative and so forth)
- attitudinal and behavioural factors (such as attachment to the labour market, job search behaviour, attitudes to co-workers and supervisors), and
- labour market history (previous work experience).

WfD2014-15 has the capacity to contribute to a greater or lesser extent to all four of these areas (naturally, labour market structure and demands also influence someone's likelihood of obtaining work – in a slower economy it is harder for the more disadvantaged job seekers to gain work than it would be in a more buoyant economy – this is outside of the scope of this evaluation).

For those who remain in a WfD activity for a sustained or substantial length of time, it would seem that the benefits can be considerable, even for those who commence initially with a negative or recalcitrant attitude, and significant gains can be (and have been) made through some or all of the areas identified above.

However, it remains that relatively high proportions of job seekers do not remain in their WfD activity, either leaving (very) early, or repeatedly moving in and out of their WfD activity and, in some cases, going through repeated rounds of non-participation/re-engagement activities. The efforts of both providers and host organisations to minimise this appears to be considerable, not least because it is also in their own interests to ensure each job seeker remains in their activity as required. Furthermore, this job seeker behaviour does not seem to be related to the quality of the work experience activities – whilst the evidence indicates that there may be scope for further variety in some activities (which WfD2014-15 coordinators and providers are tasked with addressing directly with hosts), in the main they do appear to be providing varied tasks and delivered in a supportive environment that enables the development of work-related skills. That said, there is some evidence to suggest that job seekers do not fully understand the opportunities that their work experience activity can provide.

There remains a sizeable proportion of the WfD eligible population who frequently move in and out of WfD through not turning up, missing days (sometimes weeks) and reportedly showing a general reluctance or unwillingness to engage with the programme. For this group, the employability outcomes will be negligible. For this group who remain resistant or detached from the programme, the possible benefits of WfD activities are unlikely to be achieved without some form of enhanced compulsion or intervention (or a stricter sanction regime).

Despite the noted complexity around measuring employability, the difference-in-difference estimates from the administrative data found that WfD2014-15 increased the rate of part-time/casual paid employment reported to JSA providers by 7 percentage points more than in the comparison areas controlling for other characteristics (from a baseline of 13%). This is a substantial short-run impact. Analysis of the administrative data suggests that part of the impact of WfD2014-15 on rates of part-time/casual employment is reporting of previously unreported part-time paid employment and in part it is a 'real' increase in paid employment. Because paid employment reduces the activity requirement of the job seeker, the referral to WfD may provide an incentive to report pre-existing paid employment. Not all of the increase in part-time employment was a reporting effect; although it should be noted that reporting earnings to providers and confirming the existence of previously unreported part-time employment can still be considered a positive outcome.

WfD2014-15 had a smaller, but still statistically significant impact upon job placement and moving off income support. It is estimated that in the short-term WfD2014-15 resulted in an additional 2 percentage point increase in the probability of job seekers having a job placement controlling for other characteristics (from a low baseline of 14%). Furthermore, moving off income support increased by an additional 2 percentage points, compared to what would occur in the absence of WfD14-15 (from a baseline of 13%). It should be noted though that WfD14-15 appeared to mitigate a decline in the probability of moving off income support with a significant decline in the probability for the comparison areas. Both the job placement and movement off income support effects are large relative to baseline probabilities.

The evaluation also considered whether there are differences in the estimated impact of WfD2014-15 on different population sub-groups (sex, age, Indigenous status, whether from English-speaking or non-English speaking background, duration as a job seeker and extent to which face employment barriers). There were no major differences between demographic subgroups in the impact of WfD2014-15 on part-time employment, job placement or movements off income support—for these outcome measures the results hold generally across demographic subgroups. It would appear though that WfD2014-15 had a somewhat larger effect on job placement for those with the greatest employment barriers, but a smaller effect on the probability of going off income support for job seekers who have been assessed as facing the greatest barriers to finding employment (Stream 4).

### **13.5. Implications for the national roll-out**

The implications of the findings for the national roll-out fall under three main headings:

- Programme management—participation, compliance and commencement targets
- Host organisations, and
- Coordinator information.

#### **13.5.1. Programme management – participation, compliance and commencements**

##### ***Refocussing job seeker understanding of the programme as providing valuable work experience***

The title 'Work for the Dole' was general agreed as not helpful in engaging job seekers (and to an extent, new host organisations). There is clearly stigma associated with the programme and those who participate in it, there is an assumption by some job seekers that WfD is punitive — seen as 'working for benefit' or providing 'free labour' rather than as opportunity to gain work experience, skills and a reference for future employers.

It would appear therefore that the Work for the Dole programme is viewed *a priori* by job seekers with some negativity, and perceived as something that they are compelled to do without it having any benefit to them. This undoubtedly has a negative impact on the general attitude towards the programme (and perhaps initially to host organisations – or their existing paid and volunteer workforce within) leading to a general unwillingness to engage and attend. Providers and the host organisations have to work hard with job seekers to actually demonstrate the value of the programme in giving them work experience and gaining workplace skills that can enhance the likelihood of them subsequently gaining employment. This is likely to be a particular challenge for providers who have been operating under the previous JSA regime (that is, outside the 18 WfD2014-15 areas) where Work for the Dole was *not* the priority activity and who will now need to ensure, within a relatively short time frame, that they are able to implement the new regime (noting the challenges some WfD2014-15 providers reportedly faced in terms of changing the 'mindset' of their staff to refocus on WfD as the primary activity for job seekers).

Positioning the benefits of the programme through 'real life' experiences and highlighting 'good news' stories of providing valuable work experience, providing an opportunity to learn new skills, work with others, obtain a work reference and so forth may help to change the perception of what Work for the Dole is and what it can achieve for job seekers.

##### ***Better tools and systems for the management of non-participation***

A considerable area of frustration for providers (and hosts) is their inability to be able to take action for non-participation in WfD activities, with reports of feeling 'let down' down by the Department of Human Services/Centrelink decision making, which they said often did not uphold their Participation Reports. This was a universal view across all six providers visited – feeling that non-compliance (non-participation) was the biggest threat to the ongoing success of the programme (echoed in some of the comments in the online bulletin board). There was a further concern that some job seekers had become very knowledgeable on what to say to Centrelink to ensure their non-compliance action was not taken. The apparent relative ease of the production of medical certificates was also of concern.

In the absence of an examination of individual Participation Reports, the full reasons for participation failures not being applied in such circumstances are unknown, but could in part relate to the complexity of the legislative framework which regulates Participation reporting and decisions, including the need for Centrelink staff to take into full account the reasons for non-compliance, to have receipt of accurate Participation Reports, and for the job seeker's Employment Pathway Plan to have included Work for the Dole as a compulsory activity.

### **13.5.2. Commencements**

The focus of providers on commencement to comply with requirements has meant that commencement rates from initial referral have continued to rise since July 2014. However, given the evidence of the high proportion of 'drop-outs' before completion it may become pertinent to also focus on retention in, and completion of, WfD activities.

### **13.5.3. Host organisations**

#### ***Host organisation commitment***

Many of the host organisations in the current WfD2014-15 programme are organisations that are established within the provision of work experience activities for labour market activation programmes. As WfD expands there is a need to increase the pool of host organisations, many of which will be new to this environment. The commitment of host organisations (and supervisors/managers) is critical to the success of WfD, in helping job seekers to gain skills and experiences. However, where job seekers display a lack of enthusiasm or engagement (through not showing up, or being negative/disengaged whilst there), host organisations will become disinclined to participate, particularly where they have the choice of other volunteers via other programmes.

#### ***Improved information for host organisations***

Evidence from the qualitative research indicates that host organisations would benefit from more information and guidance about Work for the Dole, covering issues such as understanding the client group and their likely socio-economic barriers, ensuring employability skills are embedded into activities, the importance of the supervisory role, dealing with conflict and difficult issues (including managing group dynamics) and ensuring variety and elements of progression into activities.

#### ***Managing increased demand on host organisations***

There is concern from coordinators and providers that the demand on host organisations will increase from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015, as the programme extends nationally and to a wider age group. It was suggested that a lead provider model (trialled in some ESAs) and/or a greater responsibility for this role for coordinators would be beneficial to ensure that the pressures on host organisations are managed effectively. This would also manage the risk of different providers offering different amounts of funding to host organisations for what appeared to be the same activities.

#### ***Potential impact of the increase in hours for the under 30s***

Close monitoring of the impact of this increase in hours for host organisation participation is advised, as host organisations may find that the budget is not sufficient for increased supervisory hours required for the 18-29 year old cohort. One unintended effect of this could be that host organisations prefer to take on older WfD participants. Furthermore, it may be that non-compliance increases as the under 30s find it more difficult to manage their commitment (particularly if they have other activities, part-time work, caring responsibilities or poor health), which in turn could lead to higher levels of Participation Reporting and subsequent non-compliance actions.

#### ***Supervisor role***

The supervisor role is critical as they have the capacity to make the biggest impact on job seekers. Where supervisors are internal to the host organisation, they may benefit from more support/access to resources to enable them to best support job seekers in this cohort. The provision of supervisors by the provider appears to work well although this only viable where the tasks the job seekers are undertaking do not require specialist work skills.

### **13.5.1. Coordinator information**

In order for coordinators to continue to successfully generate the appropriate number and type of activities for providers, there is a need for them to have enhanced access to the providers' requirements for their job seekers, including location, specific inclusions/exclusions, skill requirements

and the suitability of individual or group-based activities for individual job seekers. Insufficient knowledge can lead to the creation of activities for which there are no suitable job seekers, and places then remain open, which is frustrating for coordinators and host organisations alike.