



Relocation Assistance to take up a Job (RATTUAJ)

**Feedback and review of Jobs Australia Member reflections on
the complexities of Program support for Participant relocation to
short-term seasonal employment away from home.**

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Important notice. This document is a draft and intended for Member feedback, review and discussion. It will not be ‘final’ until authorised by Jobs Australia Members and Chief Executive Officer of Jobs Australia, when it will be converted to .pdf. and the file name to include “final.”



About Jobs Australia

Jobs Australia is the national peak body which represents not for profit organisations across diverse employment services & pathways, education, training & skills pathways and community services all over Australia to provide the best possible assistance to disadvantaged communities and people.

With particular expertise and representation in employment services and because we are funded solely by our Members, we can advocate to government and others for what's right and best in helping unemployed people - with real insight and an independent voice.

We also provide relevant, timely and topical advice and support to membership on sector issues, workplace relations (including human Resource Management and Industrial Relations) and a wide variety of other services tailored to the unique needs of our not-for-profit members across the full range of community and social services.

We represent the largest network of not-for-profit employment-related community services in Australia - with members ranging from small local community agencies to large national charities.

Executive Summary

Using the respected Clarion Call, Jobs Australia interviewed DES, TtW, PN, CDP and HTS Member providers to gain top-line insight into the relocation support facilities provided the federal government through Not for Profit Employment Services Agencies.

If take-up is seen as an indicator of demand, it is clear that there are many successes from the various supports available to people who have located themselves to seasonal employment hubs.

Those successes are not so easily shared by Member working with the DES, PN, TtW, or CDP programs. Perhaps a conclusion is that if there is no demand for relocation, presumably the jobs are being filled as they become vacant or that those jobs will just remain vacant.

The problems expressed by HTS Member providers could be seen as a concern. It would seem that the 'entire supply chain' is suffering from demand exceeding supply. Not only are the providers stressed from the high-level manual intervention required, but there is high level of perceived risk to Provider expense claims, delays in processing and Government Contract Managers are substantially overworked in the manual processing of thousands of expense claims.

On a broader national market consideration, the question could be asked as to whether the HTS product could be modified, extended or otherwise changed to better respond to longer term demand.



Questions asked included;

- Has job seeker payment suppressed job seeker demand for employment?
- Can it be translated for those with English as second or third language?
- Should there be restrictions on portability/ transience?
- Can the program be used to reduce worker exploitation, and if so how?
- Are the consequences for participants not accepting work being applied?
- Should the program have a maintenance payment to support specialist provider management staff?
- Can the process be further automated or totally automated?
- How do we reduce Member financial risk?
- Is a whole-of-season view, or other views encouraging longer term job-start/stop cycles worth considering?
- How can the promotion to employers be increased and improved?
- How can the program support the accommodation of workers to places where there is no hostel of accommodation and should that be included in the provisions?
- What are Employer views/opinion/recommendations?
- Should the footprint for HTS be extended? Is the 90km threshold appropriate?
- Are the 'inclusions/exclusions' correctly balanced?

Background

Since mid-2020 National Media reported an emerging crisis in the agriculture sector. Crops were ripening and there was no labour to complete the harvest. Some producers were so desperate that bonuses of up to \$50,000 were offered to Participants who arrived for the first day of harvest and remained without a day off until the last day. (Blue Mountains, NSW, Blueberry Harvest).

The Australian weather particularly on the East Coast is under the influence of the El Nina phenomenon and it has influenced the normal consecutive ripening of many high demand crops, including tomato crops. The ripening cycle is usually consecutive and begins in Queensland, then New South Wales and then, Victoria. The crops in the 2020-21 season are ripening almost at the same time. This has been observed for other crops.

Mostly beyond public view are the itinerant harvesting pickers. The greater majority of the picker population comprises young people from overseas referred to as Backpackers who are enabled to work as part of their entry Visa conditions, and families of Pacific Islander sourced workers. Pacific Islander employees come into the country and work in teams, and typically follow the harvest seasons which in some cases can last for up to 8 months or so. Discussions with Members also indicated there is a smaller number of Australian workers who secure and follow the harvest work and often operate independently from Employment Services Providers.



The lock-down and closed border responses to the COVID 19 dramatically reduced the supply of all workers. The impact has been catastrophic. At time of writing, media reports many producers choosing which crops to leave to rot and which to harvest. Tons of vegetables are reported as ploughed back into the paddocks. Crops include celery, kale, spinach, apples, rock-melons and lettuce. Some fruit producers have changed their harvest models. For example, a great deal of the lucrative Mango harvests this year, has been flipped from largely hand picking (for the premium fruit markets) to mechanical picking. Mechanical harvesting is considerably cheaper and the fruit is sent to pulp/juicing facilities.

At the same time media and government also report levels of unemployment that are without precedent, with numbers exceeding one million.

There are a few support mechanisms available to registered job seekers to help them relocate, and to help with relocation expenses. A qualifier for the provision of HTS support is the programs with this facility include,

- Disability Employment Services (DES) program
- jobactive (ja)
- ParentsNext (PN)
- Transitions to Work (TtW)
- Community Development Programs (CDP)
- Harvest Trail Services (HTS).

Provisions include the usual/ broader programs supply of tools of trade, training, supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and up to six thousand dollars (\$6,000) in reimbursed relocation-specific expenses for a single person and up to nine thousand dollars (\$9,000) for a job seeker with a dependant person.

The question many are asking is ***“how could it be that Australia has the highest level of unemployment yet has the highest level of agricultural job vacancies?”***

This paper has been assembled following Jobs Australia Clarion Calls with Member organisations representing

- Disability Employment Services
- ParentsNext
- jobactive
- CDP
- Harvest Trail Services.



Observations

Our observations identified two groups within the over-arching program to support relocation to take up employment. Each session expressed remarkably different experiences and forward-looking views on the effectiveness and usefulness of the programs to help people find employment.

Jobs Australia Members providing HTS share a positive view of the program outcomes but find the management burden at near peak capacity.

Jobs Australia Members providing non HTS but relocation support within jobactive, DES, PN and TtW share a positive view of the facility when and if needed.

Jobs Australia Members providing CDP agree the facility is useful but rarely for their registered participants.

Member representation	Current position	Forward view
Providers of HTS	Positive. Actively support. It is a major part of their effort to place job seekers into target employment.	<i>"Due to volumes and the specific nature of each case, plus compliance obligations mean the HTS Program needs substantial re-consideration and re-work. It is hard to see how we continue."</i>
Providers of DES, PN, TtW, jobactive, CDP	Reserved. jobactive, PN, TtW and DES will use it when/if asked by a job seeker CDP will use it sparingly.	<i>"It is there when it is asked for. It's very complex and we do not have much demand. It is not appropriate to use with CDP Participants given the stresses of relocation – unless that is to a mining corporate with appropriate support structures."</i>



Member HTS Provider analysis and anecdotes

The Jobs Australia Clarion Calls with HTS Providers recorded the following commentary and anecdotes

HTS Program Strengths	HTS Program Challenges
<p>Dedicated (single owner) staff have in depth understanding of the HTS model</p> <p>The program is well promoted to target eligible employers</p> <p>Employers and Employees are enthusiastic to participate in the HTS program and get started</p> <p>The timing construct of 120 hours in 6 weeks is a good benchmark</p> <p>There is a robust system of governance of taxpayer funded support</p> <p>The scope of expense reimbursement is well defined and case study/ examples are clear</p> <p>The program has been useful in areas where there are short term seasonal opportunities and where there is a cohort 'ready to go' and actively seeking employment</p> <p>The program is a useful strategy in stimulating connection between legally compliant employers and employees.</p> <p>Work-ready and capable Participants have increased stimulus to secure employment.</p> <p>There is an established process for reimbursing HTS providers</p>	<p>Caseload volume exceeds planning and management capability, and there is no specific funding allocation for HTS Management within the deed provision</p> <p>HTS is not applicable to 'middle-men' and agencies or Hostels who interface between Producer and Employee</p> <p>Once employment is secured, the support for HTS provider drastically reduces, creating fiscal risk/compliance issues for provider</p> <p>Job transferability of employees within the 120 hours/6-week program increases administration and management burden and does not fully support employer</p> <p>Evidence based compliance is at such volumes it creates massive delays within the entire system (govt/provider/employer/employee)</p> <p>HTS is inconsistent in application for e.g., Hostel accommodation is allowable – but camper van hire/trailer hire in areas without accommodation is not.</p> <p>Has been less useful in helping longer term unemployed for many reasons – some including Participant payment, others being nature of work etc</p> <p>Evidence that HTS helps improve/ modify employer practices considered to be illegal or exploitive is not evident.</p> <p>The claims application system is manually driven. There is no mobile app or other tech to assist with (literally) thousands of expense claims from jobseekers</p> <p>Providers refer to high level financial risk, high degree of defaults by employers/employees, increasing 'sector wide' lethargy is 'the system is figured out'</p>



Member HTS Provider Anecdotes

“In my area there are farmers desperate for workers – but they subcontract their harvest to some dodgy guys who employ backpackers and migrants.”

“It’s no good for people with English as second language. Nor is it easy for us.”

“There may be more than 450 applications in process now. Each application might have on average of 9-12 separate pieces of paper. Some job seekers provide thirty or more for alcohol, weekend petrol and other things. We must filter each one, approve and/or reject, scan and save and explain why some aren’t acceptable. We don’t have the staff, and there isn’t any funding to employ more.”

“Of course, it helps. But you got to ask the question – would they have got the job anyway. In many cases the answer is yes.”

“There are funds for accommodation at the hostels. There are some farms and stations where there is no hostel and where there are a lot of jobs. Why can’t we reimburse camper hire?”

“The system upstream in government appears to have underestimated the demand, and where the demand was going to come from. Delays in processing really concern us. We are spending a lot of money and we are really concerned about getting it back. We carry all the risk.”

“We have people who have figured out the rules and they just want a subsidised working holiday. So, they do a few weeks here and move on and do a few weeks somewhere else. This is allowable – but it’s not what was intended. And each time they move, they get to claim again. So really – if you’re funded under HTS you should have to stay the 120 hours/ 6 weeks minimum.”

“There is a few. But there isn’t a lot of local unemployed people interested. A lot of the farmers aren’t interested in employing them either. The foreign people really work best.”

“It has to be made simple. At this rate it will become too big for us. It’s kind of there already.”

“Once the farmers have got their labour. That’s it. Getting payslips is like drawing hens teeth. The window of management opportunity for us is just a few days. If we don’t account for everyone in a week, then we are playing catch up. We have more than 400 employees registered, and the list is growing each day.”

“The department should take a longer-term view. Like – create the program over a season, or over different crops, or – whatever it is – needs to be more than just 6 weeks and 120 hours. Most of those wanting the work will work that amount in 2-3 weeks anyway.”

“Even if we tick all the boxes, the claims are then subject to review anyway. We really do not have our money back until it is banked. It drives our finance department crazy.”

“We get backpackers with poor English back and forth to Centrelink. Then police checks. Then ID checks. Multiple appointments and time consumed. Surely this could be managed via an app?”



Member jobactive, PN, TtW, CDP, DES Provider analysis

The Jobs Australia Clarion Calls with jobactive, PN, TtW, CDP and DES Providers recorded the following commentary and anecdotes

Relocation Support Strengths	Relocation Support Challenges
<p>There is a capability within the program to support job seekers/ program participants should they want employment opportunities beyond their home-area</p>	<p>Program relocation support is seen to be too complex for Employment Consultants if they are not using it every day</p> <p>Program relocation support is seen to be problematic for DES participants, Providers and Employers</p> <p>For the use to be increased, greater promotion and education is needed for Finance Management, General Management</p> <p>Perception is that farmers in the non HTS areas do not have such a demand for manual labour and can rely on long-standing relationships with local-living workers</p> <p>Program relocation support is seen as high-risk strategy to encourage a CDP participant to take up employment many hundreds of kilometres from home/country</p> <p>There is little belief relocations support can be of meaningful use with Parents Next, TtW participants who may need much higher level of specific tailored assistance.</p>



Member jobactive, PN, TtW, DES and CDP Provider Anecdotes

"If people living around here want to get a job on the spud farms, they can just go and ask."

"There's agricultural work around here. Heaps under 90 kilometers. We don't need the program here."

"It's just too complex. We have staff who just don't get it. But if a jobseeker really wants to relocate I know someone will help them out."

"The farmers, and in fact all other employers. They just let you down, and the job seeker just doesn't want to know you."

"For us – our nearest HTS provider is 500kms away. This means if we need to support a young indigenous person to relocate – they must get themselves all that distance. There's no jobs between here and there. So, it just isn't going to work. Not at all – we'd be sending them to fail."

"The only way to relocate an indigenous Australia job seeker on our program is through the Mining companies. They provide end to end support."

"Any time we talk about it – our Finance Manager flips out. There is no consistency of refunds, and even those which we believe to be legitimate can be rejected. So as far as we are concerned there are too many variables. We aren't a bank."

"Disability support people can work away from their homes. They need more than just relocation support. Not enough has been done here."

"90 kilometres from here and there's nothing – few locals here want to go interstate."

"Everyone gives the kids a hard time. If older adults won't pick the fruit – why should a young person?"

"Look – all best intentions and programs to one side – there are people who just do not want to work, no matter the features and benefits of that work. So, for some – this is just not worth the effort."

"Gradually – we have found some of the long term unemployed seeing some opportunity and perhaps this has helped find a few people in our area some employment"



Jobs Australia Observations and conclusion

Jobs Australia suggests a **Seasonal Employment Industry Forum** be held in the short term to investigate, explore and propose remedies to those matters raised by Members.

To this extent we welcome the opportunity to engage with Department Education Skills and Employment and to develop further discussion.

Thank you

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