



# The Online Employment Services Trial evaluation

## Summary of key evaluation findings and departmental response

### Overview

The evaluation of the Online Employment Services Trial (OEST) examined job seekers' views and experiences in relation to the trial, which commenced on 1 July 2018. The evaluation found that online servicing is **efficient** and **effective** in delivering **quality** employment services to the most job-ready job seekers.

Online services were expanded in response to COVID-19 from April 2020, with the Online Employment Service (OES) replacing the OEST. There are several differences between the trial and the OES to note when interpreting the OEST evaluation findings. The trial was conducted during the relatively strong labour market conditions prior to COVID-19. Job seekers who took part in the trial were likely to have different characteristics to job seekers who have entered employment services post-COVID. Furthermore, OES offers online servicing for 12 months with enhanced functionality, while the OEST was limited to a maximum of 6 months, with a more basic service. As a result of the differences between the OEST and OES, the department is conducting a separate evaluation of OES.

Nonetheless, findings from the evaluation of the OEST have informed the rollout of OES and the Digital Services in the New Employment Services Trial (NEST). In particular, learnings from online servicing to date have informed the evolution of digital safeguards and enhancements which include:

- expansion of the Digital Services Contact Centre to assist job seekers to deal with issues and provide individualised advice
- review points to make sure job seekers are and remain suitable for online servicing
- the capacity for job seekers to choose to move out of online servicing to a provider
- functionality to encourage employer engagement in the online platform
- support to upskill or reskill through JobTrainer
- skills matching tools like Job Switch.

## Efficiency

- OEST participants commenced services more quickly than job seekers who were receiving provider-based services (the comparison group), and only a small number (9.3%) of job seekers opted out of the OEST, either before or after commencing in the trial. Reasons frequently quoted by job seekers for opting out of the trial included:
  - a preference for face-to-face servicing
  - online servicing not meeting their needs
  - online servicing being too difficult to use
  - a lack of confidence in using computers or the internet.

The department has made enhancements to the functionality to address this feedback.

- Participants in the OEST were no more likely to incur demerit points under the Targeted Compliance Framework than job seekers with a provider.
  - For participants who commenced between the start of the trial on 1 July 2018 and June 2019, 71% **did not** incur a job search related demerit within 6 months of service commencement (compared to 69.2% of comparison job seekers commencing with a provider).
  - For OEST participants who did not report their job search in time, many said they left their reporting to the last minute and missed or forgot the deadline.

## Effectiveness

- OEST participants were as likely to exit from income support or employment services as comparable job seekers receiving provider servicing.
  - 47% of trial participants and comparison group job seekers receiving provider servicing exited from employment services within six months of service commencement.
  - 50% of trial participants exited from income support within six months of service commencement, compared to 52% of comparison group job seekers receiving provider servicing.
  - 91% of trial participants did not return to income support within six months following their exit date, compared to 89% of job seekers receiving provider servicing.
- OEST participants indicated higher levels of confidence than did those in the comparison group that the assistance they received would help them secure employment.
- 70% of trial participants agreed that their skills in using the internet for job searches and applications had increased.
- Trial participants were more likely to report that the employment services they have received improved their chances of getting a job than the comparison group (63% versus 46%).

## Quality services

- Feedback from focus groups and interviews indicates that job seekers who participated in the OEST had generally positive views and experiences.
  - Most OEST participants were satisfied with the information provided to them about online employment servicing; reporting that it was clear, self-explanatory and sufficient to understand what was required of them.
  - The majority of OEST participants were satisfied with the services they received (64%). A high proportion of participants were satisfied with the jobactive website (80%) and found the website functionality easy to use (83%). The jobactive website is the department's platform for providing online employment services to OEST participants.
  - Many OEST participants indicated online servicing was more convenient, resulting in a greater sense of empowerment and reduced costs associated with travelling to a provider site.
  - Online employment servicing was the preferred way to receive employment services by OEST participants (72%). Most participants (66%) agreed online services should be the default option for employment services.
- Some job seekers with limited digital literacy and/or low English proficiency indicated they had difficulties using online servicing.
  - These job seekers could opt out of the trial and transfer to an employment service provider by contacting the National Customer Service Line (NCSL). Under OES job seekers can opt out online servicing to a provider without the need to contact the NCSL.
  - As mentioned earlier, additional safeguard measures have been introduced into OES. A Digital Assessment helps identify job seekers who may not have the ability to participate online and prompt them to move to provider servicing. A new Digital Service Review every four months helps to ensure job seekers are successfully managing their online job search requirements. Those job seekers identified as potentially at risk are encouraged to transfer to a provider.

## Duration of the OEST and transitioning to provider services

- Many OEST participants and some jobactive providers felt the current length of the trial (i.e. six months) was appropriate. Some trial participants could benefit more from provider assistance if they had been in online services for a long period but had not found a job.
  - Some trial participants reported becoming frustrated, losing motivation and/or confidence the longer they were on the trial without being able to find employment.
  - Job seekers with jobactive providers could also become frustrated after being in services for a long period without finding a job.

- The majority of participants who were transferred out of the OEST after 6 months felt supported, informed and able to adapt. However, at the early stage of the trial some participants and providers felt communication about the transition could have been managed better.
  - The department is looking at ways to best address the concerns raised by participants and providers about the transition from online to provider servicing. This could include system changes to ensure that providers are aware that a job seeker has transferred from online services and receive additional advice through existing communication channels.
  - Exits from income support and employment services after the transition from Online Employment Services will continue to be monitored.
  - The department is also monitoring the transition processes of job seekers moving from Digital Services to Enhanced Services in the NEST to ensure that job seekers are not disadvantaged through this process.