

Response from the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) to the DWP Consultation on Work Programme official statistics after June 2013: content and presentation

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Please accept this paper as evidence from the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) to the Department for Work & Pensions consultation on the Work Programme Official Statistics after June 2013: Content and Presentation.
- 1.2. ERSA is the trade body for the employment related services industry, sometimes known as the welfare to work industry. ERSA has a diverse membership of nearly 140 organisations covering the private, public and voluntary sector. ERSA has all the prime contractors of the Work Programme and Work Choice in membership. Its members deliver all nationally commissioned back to work schemes.
- 1.3. The following submission has been informed by input from ERSA members, including both Work Programme prime contractors and subcontractors. Questions about this submission should be sent to anna.robin@ersa.org.uk / 020 7960 6808.

2. Summary

- 2.1. ERSA welcomes the changes that have already taken place since the first publication of Work Programme statistics, including a commitment to quarterly publication of the release and the development of a more user friendly look with more visual data. However, the consensus across ERSA membership is that there is still sufficient scope to change both the content and presentation of data to allow more accessible presentation of Work Programme performance for a range of audiences.
- 2.2. A synopsis of the changes that ERSA is recommending are set out below:
 - Future releases should contain Job Start as well as Job Outcome and Sustainment data.
 - Subcontractors should be allowed to publish their own data
 - CPA level data should be augmented with information on regional economic data
 - Information should be published on the average number of Job Starts per Job Outcome and cumulative provider performance
 - That the statistics release should include a simple comprehensive summary, which avoids the use of industry jargon and foregrounds key figures such as overall Job Starts and Outcomes.
 - That performance for the 3-6 month versus 12 month prognosis groups in PG6 are separated out for reporting purposes.
 - That the tabulation tool is amended to allow users to access cohort information and to allow data to be imported into an Excel format.
 - That sustainment data should be presented as set out in Table A below
 - That data on completers should be extended to 30 months and set out as in Table B below.

3. Recommended additions to Work Programme Statistics

- 3.1. Although outside the official scope of the consultation, ERSA believes that it is important that, mid programme, the opportunity should be taken to review and adjust the information which is contained within the regular release of Work Programme performance statistics. The major change ERSA members believe needs to be put in place is the release by government of Job Start data, in addition to Job Outcome and Sustainment data. The reasoning behind this is threefold:
- First, it is the measure of performance most easily understood by the general public, as translated by the media. The reporting of Job Start data does not mean that there should be less emphasis on Job Outcome performance, either as a mechanism to manage or measure performance. Rather it should be an adjunct to the current reporting system.
 - Job Start data allows useful comparison across other programmes over time and across geographies. In particular, ERSA finds that local government wishes to compare the effectiveness of locally commissioned provision with national programmes, but can struggle to achieve this with the current system.
 - Job Start data is the best means of reporting up to date performance and the lead indicator of future Job Outcome performance. As such it is in the public interest for this information to be shared.
 - In addition more up to date data allows Work Programme providers themselves greater ability to compare performance. ERSA's first collation of Job Start statistics for instance was the first time many prime contractors had been able to assess their Job Start to Job Outcome ratios against the levels of other providers. Providers use Job Start data to forecast future Outcome and Sustainment performance.
- 3.2. ERSA understands that the release of Job Start data may necessitate additional processes for the Department for Work and Pensions, as well as Work Programme providers. However, in the interests of transparency, ERSA and the prime contractors would be keen to work with the department to find a way to progress this which would minimise additional administration costs and comply with the rules of the UK Statistical Authority.
- 3.3. As a means to aid subcontractor performance, ERSA also recommends allowing the release of performance data by subcontractors within each prime's supply chain. This would then better allow subcontractors to benchmark their own performance against similar providers and could provide the public with a better picture of performance within a CPA, thus improving overall accountability. Transparency of data tends to drive competition and is likely to lead to overall performance improvement as well as accountability.
- 3.4. ERSA also recommends the publication of some level of regional economic data alongside CPA level performance data, in order to allow a better comparison of performance in areas with similar labour markets.

Other additions that would help present a fuller picture of the programme's operation include the publication of information on the proportion of Job Starts that reach a Job Outcome in the minimum possible time (either 182 or 91 days), to help create a greater understanding of the current jobs climate and the presentation of cumulative provider performance to help people see growing performance in the industry

4. Format of current Official Statistics release

4.1. ERSA recommends that a number of changes to the format of the Work Programme statistical release are implemented to help simplify the release for the media and general public, as well as providing more information of use by providers and other stakeholders. To this end, ERSA suggests:

- That a simple, comprehensive summary is placed at the beginning of the statistical release.
- That the information in the statistical release is ordered by importance, with key figures at the front, such as overall Job Outcomes and Job Starts.
- That the overview of the release uses generic 'jobs' language that is understood by the public, such as achieving a job and then retaining a job, rather than terms such as outcome, attachment, sustainment and that the statistics are presented in a way that aligns with other employment statistics and Jobcentre Plus data.
- That Payment Group 6 is divided in the release between those jobseekers who received a three to six month work ready prognosis and jobseekers with a 12 month prognosis. ERSA notes that the original contract targets were not amended when the 12 month prognosis group was added to PG6 and thus it is in the public interest to increase understanding of the performance levels for each group
- That the tabulation tool, which accompanies the release, is amended to allow (a) users to access cohort information and (b) data to be imported from the tabulation tool into Excel format.

5. Presentation of sustainment payment data

- 5.1. Regarding the proposed method for presenting sustainment data, ERSA believes that to only show those who have achieved an outcome in their first 12 months on the programme would only cover a select group of people on the programme and would be unrepresentative.
- 5.2. ERSA suggests that instead of this proposal, sustainments be anchored by Outcomes (this could be presented as cohorts based on the month that Job Outcomes occur and the average number of sustainments achieved in the following 12 months). Please see suggested table below. This would allow for a time series to develop and therefore provide a broader comparable view on sustainment performance.

Sustainment Payments Table

Average number of sustainment payments within 12 months following a Job Outcome payment

Outcome payment achieved	Dec 2011	Jan 2012	Feb 2012	March 2012	April 2012	May 2012	June 2012	July 2012
Average number of sustainment payments over next 12 months								

6. Presentation of data regarding completers

- 6.1. ERSA members support the intention that the statistical release includes information on completers. However, ERSA believes that it is essential that the completer table goes further than a 24 month period.

This should be extended to 30 months for Job Outcomes and 42 months for Sustainment Payments as providers can be working with a jobseeker for up to 48 months. Ending the table at 24 months could cause confusion about the end point of the programme.

- 6.2. The completers table could provide a more comprehensive picture on the various routes within the programme and should include additional columns covering factors such as months off benefits and could include other information, such as to what provision programme leavers are moving on. Please see a suggested table below. ERSA believes this should be presented by monthly cohort.

7. Further information

- 7.1 In developing this response, ERSA convened a group of contractors, led by Maximus UK, to feed in thoughts. If helpful to the department, this group could be reconvened to explore further questions outlined in the consultation.

Completers Table

Status of Participants on the Work Programme at 104 week point, by referral cohort (June 2011)

Total Participants	Job Starts	Job Outcomes	Off-benefits		Achieved programme maximum of sustainments	Completed			In work at 104 weeks	
			3 months	6 months		earlier then 104 weeks	at 104 weeks	Post 104 weeks	Pre-outcome	Post outcome