



South Australian Centre for Economic Studies

# Review and Evaluation: Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN)

## Final Report

Report commissioned by

**Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions**

The Government of Victoria

Report prepared by

**The South Australian Centre for Economic Studies**

University of Adelaide

**September 2019**

**Copyright:** All rights reserved. The Copyright Act 1968 permits fair dealing for study, research, news reporting, criticism or review. Selected passages, tables or diagrams may be reproduced for such purposes provided acknowledgement of the source is included. Otherwise, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the Publisher.

**Disclaimer:** This study, while embodying the best efforts of the investigators is but an expression of the issues considered most relevant, and neither SACES, the investigators, nor the University of Adelaide can be held responsible for any consequences that ensue from the use of the information in this report. Neither SACES, the investigators, nor the University of Adelaide make any warranty or guarantee regarding the contents of the report, and any warranty or guarantee is disavowed except to the extent that statute makes it unavoidable.

**Authors:** Associate Professor Michael O'Neil, Executive Director, SA Centre for Economic Studies  
Dr Andreas Cebulla, Senior Research Fellow, SA Centre for Economic Studies  
Steven Whetton, Deputy Director, SA Centre for Economic Studies  
Anthony Kosturjak, Senior Research Economist, SA Centre for Economic Studies  
Suraya Abdul Halim, Research Economist, SA Centre for Economic Studies

**Published by:** South Australian Centre for Economic Studies  
University of Adelaide  
SA 5005  
AUSTRALIA  
Telephone: (61+8) 8313 5555  
Facsimile: (61+8) 8313 4916  
Internet: <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/saces>  
Email: [saces@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:saces@adelaide.edu.au)

# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Value for money	1
1.2 Case studies	2
<b>2. Jobs Victoria Policy – The Background</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Government priorities: Jobs Victoria	3
2.2 Jobs Victoria program design features	3
2.3 JVEN funding	5
2.4 Target clients and target areas	6
2.5 Participant profile	8
<b>3. What Works? Key Learnings from the Evaluation</b>	<b>10</b>
3.1 Reverse tender process	10
3.2 Delivery models	10
3.3 Organisational capacity	11
3.4 Services that work	11
3.5 Targeting need and streaming job seekers	12
3.6 Effectiveness and equity	12
3.7 Reflection on the JVEN Outcomes Logic Model	13
<b>4. Conclusion</b>	<b>15</b>
4.1 Increasing potential	15
<b>Appendix A: Key Evaluation Questions</b>	<b>16</b>



## Executive Summary

### Key Points

- The Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) has fostered a flexible, client-focussed network of support for disadvantaged job seekers that has added to existing employment service provision in Victoria, offering under-served client groups longer lasting support associated with higher rates of employment to 26 weeks.
- JVEN providers have placed more than 7,600 job seekers into work, of whom so far more than half have remained in work for 26 weeks. This has been achieved through creating and building relationships with employers, combining activities with local knowledge and networks, and connecting core with ancillary services.
- The program is on track to achieve its overall target of transitioning almost 6,205 job seekers into work. Follow-up data suggests that about 70 per cent of job seekers placed into work with JVEN support sustain employment longer term.
- Achieving the target of over 6,205 job seekers placed into work will ensure that JVEN is just as cost-effective as, and possibly more cost-effective than, alternative employment services catering for the most disadvantaged, such as job seekers in *jobactive* Stream C.
- Variations to project contracts in 2018 have reduced average unit costs and increased the expected number of job placements.
- Accredited training and mentoring (i.e. post-placement) supports have been most effective in assisting job seekers in obtaining and sustaining employment. Providers offering mentoring for job seekers and post-employment support for employers have also been amongst the most successful.
- Combining case management and employer engagement in one role is helping to match jobseekers and employers.
- JVEN reverse tendering process helped to generate innovate projects and a range of delivery models, which have now been tested and which offer learnings and opportunities to connect, to strengthen JVEN capacity to operate in different environments.
- JVEN enables providers to spend more time with individual job seekers and offer a range of supports that can be shown to improve outcomes.
- Coordination of Victorian employment services under the one umbrella of Jobs Victoria/DJPR has helped to connect personal support programs to employment services previously not available; this program integration should eventually lead to greater service efficacy and, potentially, efficiency savings.
- JVEN has encouraged employers to make greater use of this Victorian State Government program, including substituting it for *jobactive* or in-house recruitment processes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that employers may be more familiar with the “Jobs Victoria” brand rather than “JVEN” (or “Jobs Victoria Employment Network”).

This Final Report brings together the key findings of the Review and Evaluation of the Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) conducted by the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies (SACES) of the University of Adelaide, commissioned by the Department of Jobs, Precinct and Regions (DJPR) in May 2017.

The Review and Evaluation analysed the Global Engagement Monitoring System (GEMS) database, which holds JVEN provider and participant records; conducted JVEN Participants Survey twice a year since 2017; undertook two JVEN Providers Surveys; and case studies of ten JVEN providers in metropolitan and regional Victoria.

The Final Report draws on the two accompanying reports: the Value for Money Report and the JVEN Case Study Report. These reports have separately been provided to DJPR. A summary of their key findings are included in sections 1.1 (Value for Money) and 1.2 (Case studies) of this report. Our assessments to date of the Key Evaluation Questions that have guided this Review and Evaluation are included in Appendix A.

### Government Priorities: Jobs Victoria

In 2016, the Victorian Government approved a proposal for improving employment outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians by fostering a coordinated, evidence-based approach to employment support. The Victorian Government agreed to a Victorian Employment Policy Framework that recognised that better links between employment and other support services are crucial in addressing the complex employment barriers of the most disadvantaged job seekers.

The Victorian Employment Policy Framework sought to provide an integrated system of client-centric supports to addressing the specific needs of job seekers under a single, coordinated service delivery model under the auspices of the DJPR. Duplication with Commonwealth services was to be avoided and local employment services be better connected to other Victorian Government support services.

The new Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) was to focus on supporting job seekers most in need, which was defined as:

- people who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, high levels of labour market disadvantage and who require more intensive support than provided by the Commonwealth.
- people from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds who have inadequate access to Commonwealth employment programs.

Specifically identified as job seekers potentially eligible for support under the JVEN program were:

- long term unemployed people from culturally diverse communities including refugees and asylum seekers;
- Aboriginal job seekers;
- mature age job seekers (aged 50+);
- youth justice clients;
- young people in out-of-home care;
- workers retrenched from the automotive manufacturing and supply chain industry;
- other retrenched workers;
- disengaged young people (aged 15-24 and not engaged in education, training or employment);
- single parents;
- job seekers with a disability;
- job seekers with a mental illness;
- social housing tenants;
- ex-offenders; and
- veterans and their immediate families.

### JVEN design features

In May 2016, the Department invited proposals from eligible legal entities, such as community organisations or commercial employment service providers, for delivering flexible and tailored support services to disadvantaged job seekers to help them obtain employment of typically 30 hours per week for a minimum of 26 weeks. DJPR adopted a *reverse tendering* model, which asked service providers to propose, cost and bid for the number of employment outcomes they committed to achieve over the life of the contract and the range of services they committed to provide.

Decisions for funding Round 1 of JVEN were announced in August 2016 for services to be delivered between July 2016 and June 2020. A second round of funding (referred to as Stage 2) was allocated for further employment support services to be provided between July 2017 and June 2020. Following an assessment of program performance at the mid-term point of the initial contractual agreements, 36 of the 51 JVEN providers had their contractual funding and outcomes targets varied. Additional funding was provided in the 2019-20 Victorian State Budget.

### JVEN funding

At Round 1, some \$39.2 million was allocated to 38 projects in August 2016 with a total target employment outcome between them of 4,247. In Stage 2, a further \$11.6 million was allocated to 13 projects in July 2017 with an additional target employment outcome of 1,245. An amount of \$10 million was allocated to 22 existing projects in September 2018 following a further allocation to JVEN from the 2018-19 budget to enable the extension of JVEN services to new clients or locations.

### Target clients and target areas

JVEN projects are geographically targeted at areas of demonstrable social and economic need as well as at job seekers experiencing high levels of socio-economic disadvantage. Almost half (45%) of JVEN participants to date have come from the 15 (of 79) Local Government Areas in Victoria with the highest rates of unemployment. Twenty-six of 35 different JVEN providers have been providing services in, and recorded job seeker registrations from, each of these high unemployment LGAs.

### Participant profile

In the administrative database, GEMS, the socio-demographic disadvantage of JVEN participants is described using one or more of the eligible target group descriptors, often mirroring the multiplicity of disadvantage that

participants experience. The largest groups of job seekers participating in JVEN have been those on low income (12,372 job seekers), the long term unemployed (8,066), people of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background (8,180), young people aged 15 to 24 years (5,914) and those unemployed for six to 12 months (5,105). In total, by 7 August 2019, 18,903 job seekers had registered with a JVEN provider, including 1,271 (7%) Aboriginal job seekers, aligning as intended with the program's targeted job seekers.

## What works? Key learnings from the Evaluation

The Review and Evaluation examines six program features that defined JVEN or made a difference to its effectiveness:

1. its reverse tender process;
2. JVEN's delivery models;
3. the organisational capacity of JVEN providers;
4. effective services;
5. the targeting of need and streaming of job seekers; and
6. effectiveness and equity.

### Reverse tender process

The reverse tender process was one of the recommendations made in the best practice review report prepared by the University of Melbourne in advance of the design and implementation of JVEN. In our assessment, the reverse tender process approach has helped to achieve a diversity of approaches by providers to the delivery of employment support services, which helped to generate interventions more responsive to local needs both from the perspective of job seekers and of employers.

JVEN has been especially successful where providers have been able to demonstrate understanding of local labour markets and exploited or developed linkages to local employers, helping job seekers find employment they were also able to access with little or no commute. The latter was critical as many job seekers have limited access to transport or are otherwise impeded from travelling (long distances) independently. Content flexibility built into JVEN additionally enabled providers to offer the type and range of services they thought most appropriate for their area and their clients, resulting in different delivery models.

### Delivery models

The case studies helped to identify three distinct delivery models:

- a welfare or 'life-first' approach (emphasising personal capacity building process with employment an outcome)
- an employment or 'jobs-first' approach (identifying job opportunities with limited job readiness preparation)
- co-design (customised training program meeting the needs of employers for existing vacancies).

A fuller description of these models is included in Appendix A, Section 10b.

Jobs-first services and life-first services with deep employer connections have been most effective in meeting the outcome targets they had contractually agreed with DJPR. Employers especially appreciated with direct support they received from both types of service providers in identifying and preparing job seekers for employment.

Co-design approaches rely on active employer participation, which may need time to develop and require an active commitment on the part of the employer to invest time and resources into the program. This can make co-design approaches harder to implement.

Life-first approaches invest more in preparing job seekers for employment than jobs-first approaches, and often also support more homogenous groups of disadvantaged job seekers. Insofar as this signals added support needs, it can make job placements more challenging to achieve; life-first approaches thus work best if able to draw on relationships with employers who accept and are willing to accommodate job seekers with high social and personal barriers to work.

### Organisational capacity

The JVEN program has helped to generate innovative initiatives connecting employment with ancillary services within provider consortia or in working with external organisations, thus bridging the gap between personal and social barriers to work, and employment. Whilst many JVEN providers had prior experience in employment (or training) services, others have had to build this capacity and, with it, linkages to local employers.

Those most effective in placing job seekers into work often integrated job seeker case management and employer engagement into a single role for JVEN staff.

## Services that work

JVEN providers offer a mix of services including accredited training, CV writing, additional pre-employment services (e.g. job coaching, interview techniques, presentation, confidence building) for job seekers and post-employment services for employers. Most services have greatly increased the chances of a job seekers being placed in employment. Most effective were accredited training and pre-employment services, which make a key difference to job seekers also remaining in employment for a minimum of 26 weeks.

JVEN allows providers to invest more time in preparing job seekers for the labour market than jobactive typically does, which enables JVEN providers to offer these supports, often in combination.

## Targeting need and streaming job seekers

Besides being well targeted geographically and in terms of clients, JVEN has been effective in placing job seekers into work – and supporting many to completing at least 26 weeks working with one or more employers.

JVEN projects have applied *screening* processes assessing job readiness, which may also be accompanied by a *streaming* process that directed job seekers to supports and ancillary service providers to assist with building job readiness. Anecdotal evidence suggests that streaming clients is an effective tool that helps to reduce the risk of unsuccessful job placements and poor job seeker-employer matches.

## Effectiveness and Equity

JVEN has helped to link job seekers to existing and new employment opportunities. To date, JVEN providers have placed 41 per cent of job seekers registering with them into work. Retrenched workers and Aboriginal job seekers have been most likely to be placed with an employer. Both were also most likely to complete 26 weeks in work and, thus, achieve the JVEN outcome target. In total, 55 per cent of job seekers placed in work remained employed for at least 26 weeks.

Some job seekers populations had lower, sometimes considerably lower, rates of placement into work and of converting placements in 26-week employment outcomes. Amongst those were job seekers of youth justice clients, social housing residents or homeless job seekers. Job seekers with lower placement or conversion rates may be experiencing more complex disadvantage.

Longer term outcome data from the JVEN Participant Survey suggest that about 70 per cent of JVEN clients who completed 26 weeks in JVEN facilitated employment were still, or again employed, sometime after leaving the program.

## Reflection on the JVEN Outcomes Logic Model

JVEN was developed based on an Outcomes Logic Model that articulated contextual, input and output assumptions, and anticipated outcomes. In our assessment, the Logic Model has largely proved accurate and a good guide.

Its '*Context*' assumption that "at-risk cohorts are not eligible for Commonwealth services" may be overstated as JVEN target populations are not necessarily excluded from these services, but may receive fewer and less effective services. JVEN can and does offer more intensive job seeker services, both in terms of the range of supports and time invested in the individual.

The Jobs Pipeline is becoming a helpful '*Input*' (in Logic Model terminology) assisting especially those JVEN providers and job seekers who can respond quickly, with little additional job preparation, to emerging employment opportunities.

Further collaboration between, or integration of, the Jobs Pipeline, the JobsBank and currently external services, such as Disability Employment Services might help to increase the scope of cross-institutional participation (as intended as an '*Output*'), supporting learning across specialist services. Resultant greater client mix within or between JVEN providers might also positively affect placement and outcomes through stronger employer relationships and denser networks.

## Conclusion

SACES concludes that JVEN closely aligns with the Victorian Government priorities in regard to employment outcomes, recognising and addressing job seekers' complex barriers to employment and the need for better links between employment and other support services to address these barriers.

There remains a role for state government in the delivery of employment assistance programs, notwithstanding anticipated changes to the Commonwealth's *jobactive* program that are seeking to provide greater assistance for the more disadvantaged. To further enhance its potential, the program may consider:

- strengthening the capacity of JVEN providers with a life-first approach, especially those that may be at risk of not reaching their contracted outcome targets, by helping them develop or increase connections with local employers. This may be achieved by such diverse means as:
  - providing specialist assistance through the Jobs Victoria Business Engagement Team
  - customising the Jobs Pipeline to meet the special job placement requirements of these providers
  - connecting life-first providers with (successful) jobs-first providers - to assist with identifying placement opportunities (and possibly also to act as 'mentors')
- facilitating more/intensive mutual learning among providers for sector capacity building;
- developing good practice delivery models that adapt or are adaptable to different environments:
  - life-first, jobs-first, co-design
  - case management and employer engagement role integration
- considering involving DSS/DES in future JVEN arrangements.

The JVEN Provider Survey also produced the following specific suggestions:

- added flexibility by allowing lower minimum weekly hours in work for some highly disadvantaged groups and/or those wishing to combine work with study;
- Tax File Number (TFN) data linkage to reduce time spent by service providers chasing pay slips
- funding for employers who are willing to offer on the job training
- funding similar to JobsBank FlexiFund for job seekers not linked to *jobactive* (e.g. not eligible for wage subsidy).

## 1. Introduction

This Final Report brings together the key findings of the Review and Evaluation of the Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) conducted by the South Australian Centre for Economic Studies (SACES) of the University of Adelaide. The Department of Jobs, Precinct and Regions (DJPR; formerly Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, DEDJTR) commissioned SACES in May 2017 to undertake this evaluation, which is to complete in October 2020.

The Review and Evaluation has included the following components:

- analysis of the Global Engagement Monitoring System (GEMS) database, which holds JVEN provider and participant records
- implementation and analysis of, and reporting on, the JVEN Participants Survey, which is being conducted twice a year and has three waves completed to date, gathering data on the longer term employment outcomes for job seekers who had participated in the program
- conduct of two JVEN Providers Surveys in 2018 and 2019 respectively, collecting information about provider activities not otherwise available, and assessments of the effectiveness of the JVEN program
- case studies of ten JVEN providers in metropolitan and regional Victoria, involving repeated site visits (three to each site to date) and interviews with providers, staff, job seekers and employers.

Data from all four sources of information has been utilised in writing this report, which is accompanied by two separate reports addressing (i) the value for money of the JVEN program and (ii) summarising the key learnings from the ten case studies.

This Review and Evaluation is not due to be completed for another 12 months. An update on the value for money and case studies reports is scheduled for 2020.

The Final Report provides an overall assessment of the efficacy of the JVEN program in the context of the Victorian Government's Employment Policy Framework and strategic policy priorities; JVEN program funding, implementation, and participant and area targeting; and the emergence of effective practice models. Throughout, the Review and Evaluation of JVEN has been guided by 11 Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) and 44 sub-questions that DJPR had identified prior to commission. Our detailed assessments of those questions, insofar as we are in position to respond to them at this stage, are included in Appendix A of this report.

As such, it draws on the two accompanying reports. The Value for Money Report sets strong parameters for the overall program evaluation, as it demonstrates the cost-effectiveness of JVEN to date; while the insights gained from the case studies (and summarised in the JVEN Case Study Report) have been critical to understanding what makes JVEN work.

To avoid unnecessary repetition, the Final Report will not go into great detail as to the methodology or the findings from the JVEN Value for Money or JVEN Case Studies Report. Rather we present a short summary for their conclusions:

### 1.1 Value for money

Key findings and determinations are:

#### **Procurement: establishing value for money**

- SACES is satisfied that the DJPR through its Departmental Selection Panel rigorously assessed the quality of, and selected to support, JVEN project proposals on the basis of their demonstrated value for money and meeting other key selection criteria (addressing labour market need; demonstrating organisational expertise and capacity; working in partnerships; complementing, not duplicating existing services).

#### **Employment outcomes**

- Approximately three quarters into the initial four year funded program, JVEN providers had achieved 68 per cent of their contracted outcomes.
- The JVEN Participant Survey and enquiries with providers participating in our case studies found that 71 per cent of job seekers who had completed their 26-week JVEN facilitated employment were still employed several months after completing the program.
- By 1 August 2019, about 22 per cent of job seekers registering with JVEN had completed 26-weeks in JVEN facilitated employment.

### Targeting disadvantage and areas

- JVEN providers have successfully targeted eligible job seekers experiencing disadvantage as intended by the program.
- JVEN projects have been servicing areas of high unemployment, all of which have since seen a narrowing of the gap in the rate compared to low unemployment areas.

### Competitive unit cost

- In terms of cost, the average of the 51 selected JVEN providers' average unit cost (contracted amount to be paid per 26-week employment outcome) was \$9,964; decreasing from an average of \$10,175 for the 38 providers supported in Round 1 to \$8,580 for the 13 providers supported in Stage 2.
- Unit costs have varied from a low of \$2,000 to a high of \$19,446 per employment outcome, reflecting differences in services, clientele, pre-existing infrastructure and experience.
- Average unit costs were below those for comparable programs servicing the most disadvantaged job seekers, such as Job Services Australia Stream 4 (\$10,059 in 2018/2019 \$).
- The outcome rate for JVEN compares favourably with that of *jobactive* Stream C, of whose participants 27 per cent were still employed 12 weeks after participation in *jobactive*.

### Effective monitoring by DJPR

- Following adjustments made to contracted outcomes by DJPR and funding amounts in 2018, economies of scale became apparent as comparatively lower unit cost (and effective) JVEN projects were contracted to increase their intake and placement of job seekers.

## 1.2 Case studies

Ten JVEN projects were selected for in depth case studies; all but one starting in September or October 2016. Two of the ten projects have reached the end of their contract. DJPR had contracted the ten projects to place 1,830 disadvantaged job seekers into employment of at least 15 hours per week for a minimum of 26 weeks out of a period of 30 weeks, providing just under \$17 million in support. By 7 August 2019, the ten had assisted 1,186 job seekers into employment of 26 (or more) weeks; equivalent to 65 per cent of their contracted outcomes target.

The main conclusions from the case studies are:

- the JVEN projects have served typically highly disadvantaged populations residing in areas of high socio-economic disadvantage
- job seeker registrations with JVEN and employers hiring through the program both demonstrated initial, current and likely future need for JVEN
- JVEN has contributed to greater collaboration of employment services with other Victorian Government services, but linkages with *jobactive* have been variable
- There is little evidence of service duplication
- case study providers sought, and mostly achieved, provision of customised supports for job seekers and to develop or strengthen relationships with employers
- three delivery models were identified: a welfare/life first model, an employment/jobs first model, and a co-design model. To varying degrees, each was reliant on socially responsible employers and/or a buoyant, labour market. Projects relying least on employers taking an active role in job preparation, induction or recruitment processes appeared most successful. The three models are explained in a little more detail further below in this report.

## 2. Jobs Victoria Policy – The Background

### 2.1 Government priorities: Jobs Victoria

In 2016, the Victorian Government approved a proposal for improving employment outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians by fostering a coordinated, evidence-based approach to employment support. The Victorian Government agreed to a Victorian Employment Policy Framework that recognised that many individuals have complex barriers to employment and that better links between employment and other support services are crucial in addressing these barriers. The Victorian Employment Policy Framework sought to provide an integrated system of supports to address complex barriers to employment, and to provide a client-centric approach to employment support where services were to be tailored to the specific needs of job seekers. It was to represent a single service delivery model so as to ensure a coordinated approach to streamline and better target support to the most disadvantaged job seekers. The Policy Framework also stressed that individual service providers would not duplicate Commonwealth services; they would link-in to other Victorian Government support services and better connect to local employment opportunities.

The Victorian Employment Policy Framework and the Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) policy and program initiative prioritised the goal of employment outcomes with a focus on those who have, or are at risk of, having the highest levels of labour market disadvantage.

A key principle of the Policy Framework was the recognition that, to assist individuals who have complex barriers to employment, a ‘service system’ is required which is flexible and able to link employment services with other support services. In short, programs that operate in isolation struggle to address complex barriers to employment. In that regard Jobs Victoria is transformational in that it has sought to bring together up to 12 ‘core’ employment programs where the primary objective was to prepare individuals for, and assist them to obtain, employment, as well as a further 17 ‘non-core’ employment-related programs in which achieving employment is one of a range of objectives. Related services included support for young people at risk of homelessness, general health and mental health services, programs and support within the justice system, and education and training programs. The Framework is for the whole of government as it incorporates employment programs and sub-programs that have traditionally been delivered by other government agencies. At least seven agencies had some responsibility for employment and/or general support programs including, *inter alia*, Department of Education and Training (DET), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Department of Justice and Regulation (DJR), Multi-Cultural Affairs unit (Department of Premier and Cabinet, State Revenue Office (SRO), and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR)<sup>1</sup>.

The Policy Framework was clear in its recognition that the Commonwealth Government was to remain the primary provider of employment support in the State. However it was equally clear that there were gaps in existing services. There were cohorts who were not eligible to receive any services and there were opportunities to combine/link/extend services such as where DJPR and DHHS successfully negotiated participation in the DHHS-funded Work and Learning Centres as satisfying Commonwealth Annual Activity requirements. Overall, Victorian services, specifically employment related support, but also a broader package of assistance measures for those who require more intensive assistance were to be oriented to focus on supporting job seekers who are most in need, which was defined as:

- people who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, high levels of labour market disadvantage and who require more intensive support than provided by the Commonwealth
- people from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds who have inadequate access to Commonwealth employment programs.

### 2.2 Jobs Victoria program design features

In this report, we are concerned with an evaluation/assessment of the Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) program.

In May 2016, the Department invited proposals from eligible legal entities, such as community organisations or commercial employment service providers, for delivering flexible and tailored support services to assist disadvantaged job seekers prepare for, search and/or obtain sustainable employment. It was estimated at the time the Policy Framework was in embryo that there were approximately 50,000 Victorians with complex barriers who had been unemployed for more than three years and who were not being adequately serviced by Commonwealth employment programs. While it was estimated that there were 39,000 job vacancies at that time, Jobs Victoria considered that there was an important gap in services to assist individuals with complex barriers to employment, including general health, mental health, housing, education, disability and socio-

<sup>1</sup> Formerly Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR)

economic disadvantage (those services in which the Victorian Government invests heavily) to achieve employment outcomes and reduce demand for state government financed services.

Decisions for funding Round 1 of JVEN were announced in August 2016. Support services were to be delivered between July 2016 and June 2020. A second round of funding was allocated for further employment support services to be provided between July 2017 and June 2020. As a consequence of an assessment of program performance at the mid-term point of the initial contractual agreements, there have been some minor funding and outcomes variations required for individuals programs. Additional funding was provided in the 2019-20 Victorian State Budget.

Projects emerged from a reverse tendering process that invited proposals for support services assisting disadvantaged job seekers into employment of typically 30 hours per week for a minimum of 26 weeks. Refugees, asylum seekers and disengaged young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities were prioritized. Providers were able to bid for the number of employment outcomes they committed to achieve over the life of the contract at a unit cost per individual and hence total cost for the delivery of services.

Program delivery models were not mandated. Employment program providers were able to deliver support in a flexible way with an emphasis on building local partnerships with other service providers, and most importantly, collaboration with employers. Service partnerships sought to ensure that non-vocational and vocational barriers of job seekers were addressed so as to maximise sustainable employment outcomes. Service providers had the flexibility to determine how best to deliver the type of help that their clients needed so that services were ultimately designed around the client, relevant for local industry and employer needs and in a way that leveraged a broad range of other service providers. A stable platform of funding (3-4 year basis) supported this approach, including performance monitoring, reporting and data collection requirements and evaluation during the life of the program to provide evidence of what works.

JVEN aims to streamline a diversity of employment programs operating in Victoria and funds targeted supports to disadvantaged job seekers from 14 specifically identified socio-demographic groups who require additional help or are not eligible for Commonwealth employment programs. JVEN providers are allowed flexibility and choice in the types of supports they may wish to provide, however, services must address gaps and must not duplicate existing provisions, such as those provided by *jobactive*. The socio-demographic groups specifically identified as job seekers potentially eligible for support under the JVEN program were:

- long term unemployed people from culturally diverse communities including refugees and asylum seekers
- Aboriginal job seekers
- mature age job seekers (aged 50+)
- youth justice clients
- young people in out-of-home care
- workers retrenched from the automotive manufacturing and supply chain industry
- other retrenched workers
- disengaged young people (aged 15-24 and not engaged in education, training or employment);
- single parents
- job seekers with a disability
- job seekers with a mental illness
- social housing tenants
- ex-offenders
- veterans and their immediate families.

The needs of targeted populations were acknowledged to vary by a diversity of personal circumstances, age, prior workforce experience, locality and conditions in the local labour market. For example, disengaged young people aged 15 to 25 years and from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Melbourne were identified as of particular concern to public policy. Hence, JVEN was encouraged and offered to fund a range of support services, including:

- active job search support and job search mentoring
- work preparation, including job-specific skills training
- active engagement with employers to identify suitable employment opportunities and match job seekers

to roles

- job matching and placement into employment
- post-employment support to employees (job seekers) and employers
- personal support to address non-vocational barriers (e.g. health, housing, drug and alcohol dependence, childcare, transport) in collaboration with community support services
- referral to vocational skills training if required
- referral to literacy and numeracy support if required.

## 2.3 JVEN funding

Over the life of the program, there have been two rounds of funding (called Round 1 and Stage 2; see Table 2.1) and an additional allocation in the 2018-19 budget. At Round 1, some \$39.2 million was allocated to 38 projects in August 2016 (funded from a 2016-17 budget allocation) with a total target employment outcome between them of 4,247. In Stage 2, a further \$11.6 million was allocated to 13 projects in July 2017 (from a 2017-18 budget allocation) with an additional target employment outcome of 1,245. Another \$10 million was allocated to 22 existing projects in September 2018 (see Table 2.1) following a further allocation to JVEN from the 2018-19 budget<sup>2</sup>.

### Funding Round 1 and Stage 2, and location

Following a mid-term review of programs, variations to individual projects were undertaken based on provider performance up to that time. As a result, variations were made outside of the two funding points. Variations involved an increase or decrease in previously allocated targeted outcomes and funding.

**Table 2.1 JVEN project funding and proposed outcome summary, Round 1 and Stage 2, and Additional Allocation**

	Recommended funding amount (\$)	Proposed employment outcomes	Estimated Average unit cost (\$)
Round 1	39,154,022	4,247	9,219
Stage 2	11,630,836	1,245	9,342
Total (Round 1+ Stage 2)	50,784,858	5,492	9,247
Additional Allocation	10,000,000	1,000 (approx.)	Not calculated
Total	61,023,860	6,484	9,411

Note: The total estimated average unit cost at the point at which funding was allocated. For this reason it differs from the average unit cost applied in the report on Value for Money of \$9,964.

Source: SACES summation of material provided by DJPR.

One provider closed down and was replaced, so in total there are 51 JVEN service providers. Four projects have a designated state-wide focus; the remainder are located as shown in Table 2.2 across metropolitan Melbourne and in regional Victoria. A number of providers are offering services in more than one location so that the total number of project locations is 83 for the 51 funded JVEN projects. There are ten providers who are engaged in detailed case studies with SACES, four in regional Victoria and six in metropolitan locations.

**Table 2.2 JVEN project locations, Round 1 and Stage 2**

Location	State-wide	Metro South Eastern*	Metro-Northern	Metro-Western	Metro-Inner	Metro-Eastern*	Barwon	Metro-Inner Southern*
Number of projects	4	12	11	10	8	6	5	4
Location	Central Highlands*	Gippsland	Great South Coast*	Mallee	Ovens Murray*	Loddon-Campaspe	Wimmera Southern Mallee	Goulburn
Number of projects	4	4	4	3	3	2	2	1

Note: \*indicates areas identified specifically in Stage 2.

Source: SACES review of summary of applications.

<sup>2</sup> The 2019-20 State Budget allocated a further \$6.3 million to support an extension of JVEN services enabling them to continue to take new clients and maintain capacity until a funding proposal for the next generation of Victorian Government employment services can be considered by Government as part of its 2020-21 budget process.

## 2.4 Target clients and target areas

JVEN providers typically identified several target populations in their funding applications while in most cases also emphasising specific target populations. Assuming these to be the intended primary job seeker cohorts, JVEN projects especially sought to provide services for people from cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, ex-offender or Youth Justice clients, people with disability (including mental illness), Indigenous people, refugees and asylum seekers, and disengaged young people (Table 2.3). Five providers identified they would be generalist providers while all JVEN target cohorts were identified by at least one or more providers.

**Table 2.3 JVEN projects' primary target population, Round 1 and Stage 2**

Target population	Generalist	CALD	Ex-offenders/ Youth Justice	People with disability (incl. mental illness)	Indigenous (any age)	Refugees/ asylum seekers	Youth (incl. NEET, care leavers)
Number of projects	5	8	7	6	5	5	5
Target population	Automotive industry workers	Locality	Families	Indigenous youth	Long term unemployed	Public housing tenants	Women (domestic violence)
Number of projects	3	2	1	1	1	1	1

Source: SACES review of target populations in applications.

It is also important to acknowledge that the experience of unemployment and intergenerational disadvantage/inequality is more concentrated in some regional, rural and local areas than in other areas. Table 2.4 shows the top 15 Local Government Areas (LGAs) by unemployment rate when the average unemployment rate for Victoria was 4.4 per cent. Clearly there are LGAs with much higher rates of unemployment than the all-state average despite there being substantial gains in employment in those LGAs (except for Greater Geelong). The average unemployment rate in these 15 LGAs is 6.8 per cent.

Table 2.4 illustrates the need for employment assistance programs such as JVEN, and targeted interventions that assist the most disadvantaged to gain work and to share the benefits of a growing economy. The number of JVEN program participants from these 15 LGAs totals 7,790 representing 45.4 per cent of the 17,151 registered participants as at December 2018. Comparatively, for the 15 LGAs with the lowest rates of unemployment (the average for those 15 LGAs is 2.5 per cent), the number of JVEN registered participants was 1,122 representing only 6.5 per cent all registrations.

**Table 2.4 LGAs, SEIFA rank, highest unemployment rate and JVEN participants (May 2016 - December 2018)**

Local Government and SEIFA Score	JVEN Participants	Unemployment Rate	Change in unemployment (-) is increase	Labour Force Change (+) is increase
Brimbank (C) 2	1,113	9.4	558	2,564
Greater Dandenong (C) 1	1,308	8.2	2,316	8,046
Hume (C) 12	1,045	8.1	46	12,442
Latrobe (C) (Vic.) 7	255	7.9	828	2,247
Melton (C) 50	450	7.4	-81	5,593
Central Goldfields (S) 1	68	7.3	229	-97
East Gippsland (S) 17	418	6.8	332	1,497
Greater Geelong (C) 40	305	6.8	-1,656	7,927
Wyndham (C) 55	1,020	6.4	-95	10,584
Loddon (S) 4	13	5.9	54	167
Casey (C) 51	946	5.8	2,204	23,054
Maribyrnong (C) 24	405	5.8	417	2,375
Greater Shepparton (C) 13	188	5.7	-314	542
Frankston (C) 44	226	5.6	141	3,675
Bass Coast (S) 27	30	5.5	353	1,359

Source: SACES calculations, ABS Local Government Areas, Small Area Labour market data and GEMS database. SEIFA 1 is the lowest rank 80 is the highest

This comparison of LGAs with the highest unemployment as shown in Table 2.4 rates and JVEN registrations is further evidence that JVEN projects are targeted at areas of demonstrable social and economic need as well as people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

In Table 2.5, 'opportunities' are defined as the number of JVEN projects that have registrations from the LGAs shown, so that there are 1,133 individuals from Brimbank registered across 35 JVEN projects. Again, participants are drawn principally from areas of high unemployment. They are able to access or be referred to local, state-wide and/ or cohort specific programs. The number of individual JVEN registrations from the more

disadvantaged LGAs taking up JVEN opportunities is 9,531 representing 55.6 per cent of all registrations. Between 26 and 35 different JVEN providers recorded registrations from each of these LGAs. Comparatively, for the 15 LGAs with the lowest rates of take up of opportunities, there were only 294 registrations or 1.7 per cent of all JVEN registrations with an average of 2.5 opportunities in those 15 LGAs.

**Table 2.5 JVEN Participants by number of providers for each LGA (May 2016 - December 2018)**

LGA	Number of JVEN participants	Number of opportunities in which participants are registered
Brimbank (C)	1,113	35
Wyndham (C)	1,020	32
Casey (C)	946	30
Hume (C)	1,045	30
Frankston (C)	226	29
Greater Dandenong (C)	1,308	29
Melbourne (C)	560	29
Moreland (C)	771	29
Darebin (C)	525	28
Maribyrnong (C)	405	28
Melton (C)	450	27
Monash (C)	216	27
Moonee Valley (C)	544	27
Whitehorse (C)	166	27
Glen Eira (C)	236	26

A cautionary note on interpretation of the data presented in Table 2.5 is that while this lends further support to the assessment that JVEN projects are targeted at areas of demonstrable social and economic need, participants are not all drawn from disadvantaged communities and/or LGAs. An individual residing in metropolitan Melbourne, for example, will have access to a greater number of JVEN projects (i.e. 'opportunities') than an individual residing in Wodonga or Mildura. The key lesson from this table is support for the claim of successfully targeting the most disadvantaged and not that regional and rural areas are not well served.

As noted earlier, there are 51 JVEN providers operating across 83 locations. A breakdown of the 83 locations reveals that there were 47 metropolitan locations and 32 non-metropolitan locations, and four of the providers funded at Round 1 and Stage 2 were contracted to provide state-wide services across Victoria.

Most JVEN project areas exhibit social and economic need suggesting higher levels of potential disadvantage including lower job growth (Wimmera, Southern Mallee, Mallee, Great South Coast), high unemployment and low labour market participation (Metro South-eastern, Gippsland, Metro Northern), high shares of non-English speaking populations (Metro-Inner, Metro-South-eastern) and high levels of mortgage stress (Metro-South-eastern, Goulburn, Metro-Western).

**In summary**, JVEN projects are geographically targeted to areas of demonstrable social and economic need as well as job seekers experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. As a labour market intervention and assistance program, JVEN is concerned with the 'most disadvantaged job seekers'. The language is important, as the program is not concerned with 'the disadvantaged' who are not job seekers.

For areas in which JVEN is operating, we observe high, above-State average levels of unemployment, young people with not in education or training status or households experiencing mortgage stress. Historically the areas have experienced low levels of labour market participation and relatively poor economic performance. Several LGAs have been the 'home of automotive worker and supply chain retrenchments'. While jobs growth has improved in recent times, the JVEN service areas have traditionally had lower jobs growth than the state as a whole. JVEN providers are registering the specific target populations they identified in their application providing services for job seekers from cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, ex-offender or Youth Justice clients, people with disability (including mental illness), Indigenous people, refugees and asylum seekers, the long-term unemployed, public housing tenants and women (especially victims of domestic violence) and disengaged young people.

With general improvements in the Victorian labour market, external conditions are supportive of JVEN providers placing job seekers into employment and then working with them to achieve 26-week employment outcomes. The JVEN program is contributing to unearthing jobs with employers that would not otherwise have

existed. It is contributing to skilling-up the labour force by supporting many job seekers to first complete a qualification. It is helping job seekers break the debilitating cycle of job search disappointment and social exclusion.

The program aligns with Victorian Government priorities. The benefits of the JVEN program are larger than simply the employment outcomes achieved. A number of JVEN providers contribute to future avoidance costs for the Victorian Government and community through breaking the cycle of criminal activity and anti-social activity and/or helping individuals to achieve a qualification that facilitates entry into the labour market, achieve stable housing and income and personal resilience. There are significant welfare benefits as well through diverting potential future clients of government services into sustainable, gainful employment.

## 2.5 Participant profile

Table 2.6 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of JVEN participants derived from the data entered by 51 providers into the Global Engagement Management System (GEMS) database. In entering data on any individual, the provider is able to record all those characteristics identified at the time of interview or screening. We know that many individuals in the JVEN target group experience multiple barriers to employment so we expect to observe that in the database for the program. Table 2.6 provides a cumulative summary of registrations, placements and outcomes (employed for 26 weeks) by demographic characteristics. Various labels have been used to describe job seekers as their details are entered onto the GEMS so the table is based on multiple counts and in aggregate sums to 77,120 registrations, which is about four times the actual number of registrations as at 7 August 2019. Placements and outcomes are also based on multiple counts.

**Table 2.6 JVEN Demographic Characteristics: Registrations, Placement and Outcomes data, as at 7 August 2019**

	Registrations	Placements	Outcomes*
Aboriginal	1,271	693	421
Asylum Seeker	1,437	456	246
Culturally Diverse	8,180	3,297	1,886
Ex-offender	2,150	775	295
Homeless	670	230	110
Low Income	12,372	4,731	2,438
Mature Aged 50+	2,397	924	538
Other Retrenched Workers	32	20	9
Person with a disability	1,218	394	203
Person with a mental illness	2,281	817	382
Refugees	2,153	858	459
Retrenched	519	244	159
Single Parent	1,892	611	317
Social Housing Resident	1,372	405	187
Unemployed 6-12 months	5,105	2,179	1,172
Unemployed more than 12 months	8,066	2,739	1,391
Veteran or veterans immediate family	55	22	13
Workers retrenched from the automotive industry	-	-	0
Young people aged 15-24	5,914	2,510	1210
Young people in out of home care	163	68	31
Youth Justice Client	694	227	421
Interim Total (multiple count)	58,217	22,241	11,537
Male	10,704	4,548	2,364
Female	8,142	3,091	1,805
Other/unknown gender	57	10	6
Total (multiple count)	77,120	29,890	15,712
Total (single count: persons)	18,903	7,649	4,175

Note: Outcomes includes cases with Outcome Status recorded on GEMS as approved, awaiting approval or ready to claim.  
Source: GEMS (own calculation).

We observe that JVEN's participant profile does align with the program's targeted job seekers. Through the conduct of ten case studies and our participant survey, SACES has met and talked with many JVEN participants and we endorse the finding that JVEN providers have recruited those most at risk in the labour market. As JVEN is a voluntary program there are likely to be some individuals who have participated in JVEN who might be said to be 'more motivated' than others but this in itself does not negate the fact they may have experienced multiple barriers to employment. An individual referred from a Magistrate's Court may become more motivated because they understand the implications of not being so; equally many new migrants and refugees are highly motivated to develop skills and find employment to support their family and become integrated into the 'Australian community'.

**Our Assessment** is that JVEN has attracted the program's targeted job seekers as summarised in Table 2.6, job seekers with multiple barriers to employment, long-term unemployment and those who have experienced difficulties in negotiating the labour market. It has been successful in achieving outcomes for these cohorts.

Of the 18,900 JVEN registered job seekers, some 11,100 (59 per cent) have an activity recorded against their GEMS entry (e.g. accredited training, full-time, part-time, pre-employment support, mentoring). Adopting a conservative position, we assume this group are genuine and active participants. Of this number some 7,650 (69 per cent) have been placed into employment which is deemed to be JVEN's net placement rate. Of those placed into employment we report that 4,175 (55 per cent) have reached a 26-week outcome. (Final row Table 2.6).

### 3. What Works? Key Learnings from the Evaluation

JVEN is, in various ways, an innovative and experimental program with some unique strengths and capabilities that, in our view, have the potential to reshape employment services in Victoria and beyond. Here we outline the key strengths of JVEN, drawing on the quantitative and qualitative evidence collected in the course of this Review and Evaluation. We also present learnings and suggestions for developing the program in the future.

We highlight six program features:

- its reverse tender process
- JVEN's three distinct delivery models
- the organisational capacity of JVEN providers
- effective services
- the targeting of need and streaming of job seekers
- effectiveness and equity.

We also reflect on the JVEN outcomes logic model.

#### 3.1 Reverse tender process

The reverse tender process approach was one of the recommendations made in the best practice review report by the University of Melbourne<sup>3</sup>. While DJPR's project selections have helped to ensure that a broad range of disadvantaged populations are covered by the JVEN program, the competitive, reverse tender process approach has helped to achieve a diversity of providers (see 3.2 below) to the delivery of employment support services and responsiveness to local needs (cp. KEQ9, Appendix A) – both from the perspective of job seekers and of employers. Many providers had very extensive experience and proven competency in the delivery of labour market programs.

The emphasis on local needs is important. JVEN has been especially successful where providers have been able to demonstrate understanding of local labour markets and exploited or developed linkages to local employers. From the case studies, we are aware of a few attempts to deliver service further afield (e.g. WCIG to Don KR in Castlemaine; SVA in Colac), which proved hard to realise or unsustainable after some initial success. Job seekers often had mobility challenges (notably, no or limited access to private transport), which required job opportunities to be within their locality or a short commute. Local relationships have also helped to be responsive to industry as well as job seeker needs, and to promote the employment service as an opportunity for investing in the local economy.

The reverse tender process came with built-in flexibility that enabled providers to offer the type and range of services they thought most appropriate for their area and their clients. Initial service offerings may not always have proven effective to the extent anticipated, but, looking ahead, JVEN's service diversity is now generating opportunities for comparisons and mutual learning. This should help JVEN to become yet stronger with time and would not have been possible to the same extent if the program had adopted a one-size-fits-all approach.

#### 3.2 Delivery models

The JVEN program has encouraged (at least) three distinct delivery models, which are described in more detail in the JVEN Review and Evaluation Case Study report. The three models, identified in the course of conducting the case studies, were:

- a welfare or 'life-first' approach (emphasising personal capacity building process with employment an outcome)
- an employment or 'jobs-first' approach (identifying job opportunities with limited job readiness preparation)
- co-design (customised training program meeting the needs of employers for existing vacancies).

Jobs-first services and life-first services with deep employer connections have been most effective in meeting the outcomes targets they had contractually agreed with DJPR.

<sup>3</sup> Jeff Borland, Mark Considine, David Ribar, Reuben Finighan, Barbara Broadway, Guyonne Kalb, Nicolas Salamanca and Claire Thibout (2015) Best Practice in Employment Programs and Recommendations for Victoria.

Co-design approaches are more challenging to implement because of their reliance on active employer participation. For most employers with whom we spoke, the appeal of JVEN has been its capacity to assist in identifying, screening, selecting and inducting job applicants, thus effectively reducing employers' own time and resource commitment. This contradiction between employers' generic expectations and those of the co-design approach is overcome only when there is a clear social commitment on the part of an employer to engage in co-design and to recruit from amongst disadvantaged populations. Fostering that commitment takes time and a joint commitment to building a long-term relationship between JVEN provider and employer.

A variation on the co-design model is where a provider works with an employer/industry group to redesign modules or units in an accredited field of study specific to the needs of an employer. VICSEG (Coburg) and Edge (Echuca) are examples of JVEN/RTOs that adapt modules to suit the needs of an employer. This is one small factor underlying the employment success of this provider. The Food and Fibre project (JVEN 118) at Bairnsdale/Gippsland has demonstrated responsiveness to job seekers skill requirements and employer needs in the entry level courses it has commissioned.

Capacity to build long-term relationships is a challenge that co-design shares with life-first approaches. The latter's often more homogenous client population (e.g. victims of domestic violence, young people with mental health problems) accentuates the social nature of job seekers' barriers. Both can make these services less attractive to a typical employer whose main concerns are commercial and who then might prefer to recruit from less 'risky' populations.

This should not render the co-design or the life-first approach redundant, but requires different and possibly more intensive employer engagement work, on the part of either service providers or a third, co-ordinating body.

### 3.3 Organisational capacity

The JVEN program has been demanding, in a positive sense, on the organisational capacity of providers, who needed to demonstrate or develop expertise in serving both job seekers and employers, and connecting personal and employment support services. This has resulted in some innovative initiatives (e.g. Orygen's linking of mental health/clinical supports with employment services; or the regional economic cross-sectoral networks in Mildura and industry networks in Gippsland). Consortia formed under the JVEN umbrella have sought to build on the partners' respective strengths and capacities. Such collaborations have made a significant contribution to the joining up of services.

Organisational capacity building has been most apparent with respect to JVEN providers' building linkages with local employers.<sup>4</sup> JVEN providers without or with a limited track record in employer engagement had to and did build new connections. But not every provider succeeded in this effort or succeeded to turn opportunities for job placements into employment for clients, for a variety of reasons.

Those most effective in placing job seekers into work often had integrated job seeker case management and employer engagement into a single role for JVEN staff. This appears to enhance post placement support benefiting the employer and job seeker. This integration may be a model that other JVEN providers may wish to explore as a means of increasing placement rates.

Lower caseloads on average than those for many *jobactive* providers (1:148) combined with the voluntary aspect of JVEN have contributed to more personalised and trusting relationships and contributes to more user friendly services. This is the feedback SACES has gained from case studies and participant's surveys. Equally, employers are 'time poor' and they report valuing JVEN's ability to provide appropriate and skilled job seekers.

### 3.4 Services that work

JVEN providers often offer a mix of services, although the full extent and its depth may vary.<sup>5</sup> Analysis of Global Engagement Monitoring System (GEMS) data showed that the provision of accredited training, CV writing, "Fitted for Work"<sup>6</sup>, mentoring (i.e. post-employment services for clients) and pre-employment services enhanced the chances of a job seeker being placed in work (cp. 2018 Annual Report). Once in work, the chances of completing 26-week in employment were highest for those who have benefited from accredited training and/or pre-employment service.

<sup>4</sup> Capacity building in delivering social supports has been less evident because of its lesser role in jobs-first approaches, which appeared to rely on referrals instead – within the consortium or to external providers.

<sup>5</sup> Both are difficult to assess. The Global Engagement Monitoring Systems is currently the only continuous source of information about the provider activities, but there are concerns about inconsistent recording and categorisation.

<sup>6</sup> 'Fitted for Work' is a service offering a dressing service, job preparation and mentoring support for women and those identifying as women.

Whilst we have some concerns about the quality of the recording of JVEN activities on GEMS, the finding that certain supports increase the propensity for employment for JVEN clients is consistent with existing evidence and underlines the value to active interventions to enhance job seekers' employability.

### 3.5 Targeting need and streaming job seekers

The JVEN program has been well targeted both in terms of localities and in terms of clients (cp. Table 2.4, Table 2.6, Table A.12).

The voluntary nature of the program increased the likelihood of attracting motivated job seekers. In some instances, such as programs involving ex-offenders, there was an added compliance incentive for job seekers if participation was a condition of their probation. None of this has ruled out the inclusion of job seekers who were not yet ready for work. In fact, the need to assist in job readiness formed the rationale, especially, for services targeting specific client populations.

One observation from the case studies, largely from discussions with job seekers themselves, is that the aspect of voluntary participation compared to compliance and mutual obligation changes personal motivation and relationships with providers. Job seekers consistently referred to the “help”, “the staff”, and the “support” they received from their provider as if both were working to achieve an agreed outcome. In the 2019 JVEN Provider Survey, providers also described the voluntary nature of the program as one of its distinguishing strengths.

To manage this client diversity, JVEN projects applied *screening* processes assessing job readiness, which in some cases was accompanied by a *streaming* process that directed job seekers to supports and auxiliary service providers in correspondence with their job readiness. These supports were provided in-house (i.e. within a consortium) or outsourced by way of referrals to external/community service organisations.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that streaming clients is an effective tool that helps to avoid or reduce the risk of unsuccessful job placements and poor job seeker-employer matches. To meet contractual targets, however, especially where they are substantive, effective streaming benefits from providers attracting a high number of client registrations.

### 3.6 Effectiveness and equity

JVEN has reached out to, and attracted interest from, job seekers of diverse backgrounds and experiencing a mix of socio-economic disadvantage (cp. Table 2.6 and Table A.12). JVEN has also served groups of job seekers fairly equally: larger groups of registrants were also more often placed in work, and hence, placement rates corresponded to the share of registrations—although there were some variations.

In presenting the relevant statistics here, we adopt the approach preferred by DJPR, which allows every participant to be counted multiple times using any of a maximum of 20 descriptors available in the JVEN Participant Registration Form and entered into GEMS. The maximum number of descriptors entered for JVEN participants on GEMS is ten; the median is two.

With an average placement rate of 41 per cent (calculated as the percentage of placement over registrations, using the single count of participants), eleven of the 20 categories of disadvantage had placement rates within five percentage points above or below the mean. The population placement rates more than and less than five percentage points above or below the mean are shown in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Placement rates as a per cent of registrations (7 August 2019)**

Mean placement rate was 41 percent	
5 percentage points above the mean	5 percentage points below the mean
Other retrenched workers (63 per cent)	Long-term unemployed (more than 12 months) (34 per cent)
Aboriginal job seekers (55 per cent)	Homeless (34 per cent)
Retrenched workers (47 per cent)	Youth justice clients (33 per cent)
	Single parent (32 per cent)
	Asylum seeker (32 per cent)
	Person with disability (32 per cent)
	Social housing residents (30 per cent)

Source: analysis of data contained in GEMS.

Approximately 57 per cent of all registrations were males, 43 per cent females. Placement rates stood at 43 per cent for male job seekers and at 38 per cent for female job seekers.

Conversion rates of placements into outcomes have similarly varied around the mean. Compared with a mean conversion rate of 55 per cent (single count), two groups achieved rates that were five or more percentage points higher and nine groups achieved conversion rates five or more percentage points below the average rate as shown in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2 Conversion rates: placements into outcomes (per cent) (7 August 2019)**

Mean Conversion rate was 55 percent	
5 percentage points above the mean	5 percentage points below the mean
Retrenched workers (65 per cent)	Young people aged 15-24 (48 per cent)
Aboriginal job seekers (61 per cent).	Homeless job seekers (48 per cent)
	Persons with a mental illness (47 per cent)
	Social housing residents (46 per cent)
	Young people in out of home care (46 per cent)
	Other retrenched workers (45 per cent)
	Ex-offenders (38 per cent)
	Youth justice clients (29 per cent)

Source: analysis of data contained in GEMS.

Male job seekers achieved a conversion rate of 52 per cent; female job seekers, 58 per cent.

It is arguable that job seekers in the categories with below average conversion rates typically experience more complex (as well as specific) types of disadvantage than those with above average conversion rates whose descriptions are of a more generic kind. Differential conversion rates would, for this reason, be expected.

The JVEN Participant Survey found that about 70 per cent of JVEN clients who completed 26 weeks in JVEN facilitated employment were still or again employed sometime after leaving the program. This survey is continuing with firmer long-term data expected later in the course of the Review and Evaluation.

Data reported in more detail in the Value for Money report suggest that the JVEN program's ability to achieve 26-week employment outcomes for its clients and, as far as can be ascertained at this stage, sustained employment thereafter has been on par with, or exceeding, that of comparable Commonwealth and State programs. Overall, JVEN appears to be on track to achieve its overall outcome target.

### 3.7 Reflection on the JVEN Outcomes Logic Model<sup>7</sup>

The JVEN program was developed based on an Outcomes Logic Model that articulated a number of contextual, input and output assumptions, and anticipated, as a result, a number of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. Our review of the evidence pertaining to the implementation and performance of JVEN to date is largely supportive of the assumptions articulated in the program's outcomes logic model, but also highlights a number of conflicts, which, if addressed, should help to increase the program's efficacy in the future.

One rationale for JVEN (the 'Context' in the logic model) has been the assumption that "at-risk cohorts are not eligible for Commonwealth services" (i.e. *jobactive*). This may be overstated insofar as JVEN target populations are not necessarily excluded from these services. However, in the case of *jobactive* and as volunteer participants in that program, they may be entitled to fewer services and less intensive support. This is an important distinction as it highlights the current added value provided by JVEN, namely the ability to provide deeper, less time-limited support or, as one provider put it, allowing providers

*"to work intensely with [their] cohort [which] has ensured quality service and they are getting the extra support required to achieve meaningful employment outcomes"* (JVEN Provider Survey 2019).

This statement, echoed by other providers, identifies a principal strength and difference of JVEN – and the feature that the program ought to retain. That said, JVEN providers did not necessarily all share the view expressed in that statement. Some providers prefer a focus on rapid placement to intensive case management. Rapid placements are already provided, in principle, by *jobactive*, albeit perhaps with fewer roots in and concerns for local labour market needs - another strength of JVEN that does stress the role of the 'local'.

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see discussion of KEQ3.

Rapid placement services are currently most likely to benefit from the Jobs Pipeline (an ‘Input’ in the logic model), which, according to our case studies, has been less influential for intensive case management (life-first or co-design) service providers. Intensive case management providers – and their clients – may not be able to respond sufficiently quickly to emerging job opportunities notified via the Jobs Pipeline.

There is scope for improving the supply line of job seekers (e.g. via JobsBank) as well as jobs (via the Jobs Pipeline). While cross-departmental collaborations (‘Participation’ in the ‘Outputs’ of the logic model) are being acknowledged and appreciated by JVEN providers, the absence of collaboration with disability employment services (DES) and of the responsible body, the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS), has been criticised by providers as they consider it would not duplicate DES clients.<sup>8</sup>

Bringing different employment services closer together, including DES, may have the potential to increase learning across specialist employment services – and to increase client mix across and within JVEN providers. From our analysis of top performing JVEN providers, we know that a greater client mix is associated with greater placement success (cp. Table A.14). This may simply reflect a greater job readiness of their job seekers who are more typically described as experiencing generic (e.g. mature age workers) rather than specific forms of disadvantage (e.g. the homeless).

A diversified set of clients increases JVEN providers’ capacity to take advantage of, and fill, a more diverse range of vacancies, from which stronger employer relationships and denser networks should grow over time. The case studies have shown that it is possible and beneficial to engage local industry in the process, especially where and when it experiences labour or skill shortage, and can offer attractive working conditions.

There is, for this reason, a good case for encouraging diversification of client populations. This may be achieved within providers, but also by fostering collaboration between and across providers, thus retaining, not replacing, specialist services. It remains important to retain ‘specialist providers’ who are expert in dealing with their key target group/s (and will become more so) and because JVEN has absorbed and is supporting target groups that previously were the responsibility of other agencies whether or not that agency had an employment outcome focus (e.g. multicultural affairs, DHHS).

Successful JVEN providers have explained to us that their challenge was not a lack of demand for labour (i.e. employment opportunities), but a lack of supply of labour of a quality that met employer expectations. This serves to underline the need for continued investment in job readiness and job training. Strengthening employer connections, especially for JVEN providers with currently weaker, underdeveloped linkages, should not take focus away from this.

---

<sup>8</sup> DSS has deemed that JVEN duplicates DES services and does not allow co-servicing of DES clients. However, providers are indicating that JVEN could provide enhanced services for DES clients.

## 4. Conclusion

In 2016 the Victorian Government approved and has since continued to support as a major policy priority the Victorian Employment Policy Framework, which includes a broad set of programs designed to improve employment outcomes for vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians by fostering a coordinated, evidence-based approach to employment support. The Victorian Government has an unequivocal priority to facilitate economic and jobs growth to ensure that all Victorians benefit from rising economic prosperity. The Government is seeking to create inclusive growth, with a strong economy delivering jobs and rising incomes for all Victorians.

The JVEN program closely aligns with the Victorian Government priorities in regard to employment outcomes. It recognises and addresses the fact that many individuals have complex barriers to employment and that better links between employment and other support services are crucial in addressing these barriers. Fifty-one JVEN non-government providers are contracted to deliver a client-centric approach to employment support where services are tailored to the specific needs of job seekers. It represents a single service delivery model so as to ensure a coordinated approach to streamline and better target support to the most disadvantaged job seekers.

There remains a role for state government in the delivery of employment assistance programs, notwithstanding recent changes to the Commonwealth's *jobactive* program that are seeking to provide greater assistance for the more disadvantaged. The Commonwealth's *jobactive* employment service has historically not proven to be successful in dealing with the most disadvantaged job seekers as acknowledged by *jobactive* providers and the Commonwealth itself. It has not successfully established viable and dense employer networks. It is estimated that less than five per cent of employers use the service<sup>9</sup>. Most significantly, the *jobactive* employment service has been a stand-alone service without any evidence that it has been able to find solutions to address complex barriers to employment or integrate employment services with other human services.

JVEN has stepped into this gap and offered a new model for delivering employment services rooted in local knowledge and the serving the local labour market, that is, local job seekers and local employers.

### 4.1 Increasing potential

Our Review and Evaluation to date suggests a number of ways and opportunities that might help strengthen the impact of JVEN in the short- and medium term. These include:

- strengthening the capacity of JVEN providers with a life-first approach, especially those that may be at risk of not reaching their contracted outcome targets, by helping them develop or increase connections with local employers. This may be achieved by such diverse means as:
  - providing specialist assistance through the Jobs Victoria Business Engagement Team
  - customising the Jobs Pipeline to meet the special job placement requirements of these providers
  - connecting life-first providers with (successful) jobs-first providers - to assist with identifying placement opportunities (and possibly also to act as 'mentors')
- facilitating more/intensive mutual learning among providers for sector capacity building
- developing good practice delivery models:
  - life-first, jobs-first, co-design
  - case management and employer engagement role integration
- considering involving DSS/DES in future JVEN arrangements.

The JVEN Provider Survey also produced the following specific suggestions:

- added flexibility by allowing lower minimum weekly hours in work for some highly disadvantaged groups and/or those wishing to combine work with study
- Tax File Number (TFN) data linkage to reduce time spent by service providers chasing pay slips
- funding for employers who are willing to offer on the job training
- funding similar to JobsBank FlexiFund for job seekers not linked to *jobactive* (e.g. not eligible for wage subsidy).

<sup>9</sup> The Hon Kelly O'Dwyer MP, *jobactive* CEO Forum, Melbourne 20 March 2019, page 3.

## Appendix A

### Key Evaluation Questions

This Appendix provides our assessment of Key Evaluation Questions (KEQ) as specified in the Department's RFQ.

#### Appropriateness/relevance

##### 1. To what extent is JVEN an appropriate response to the context?

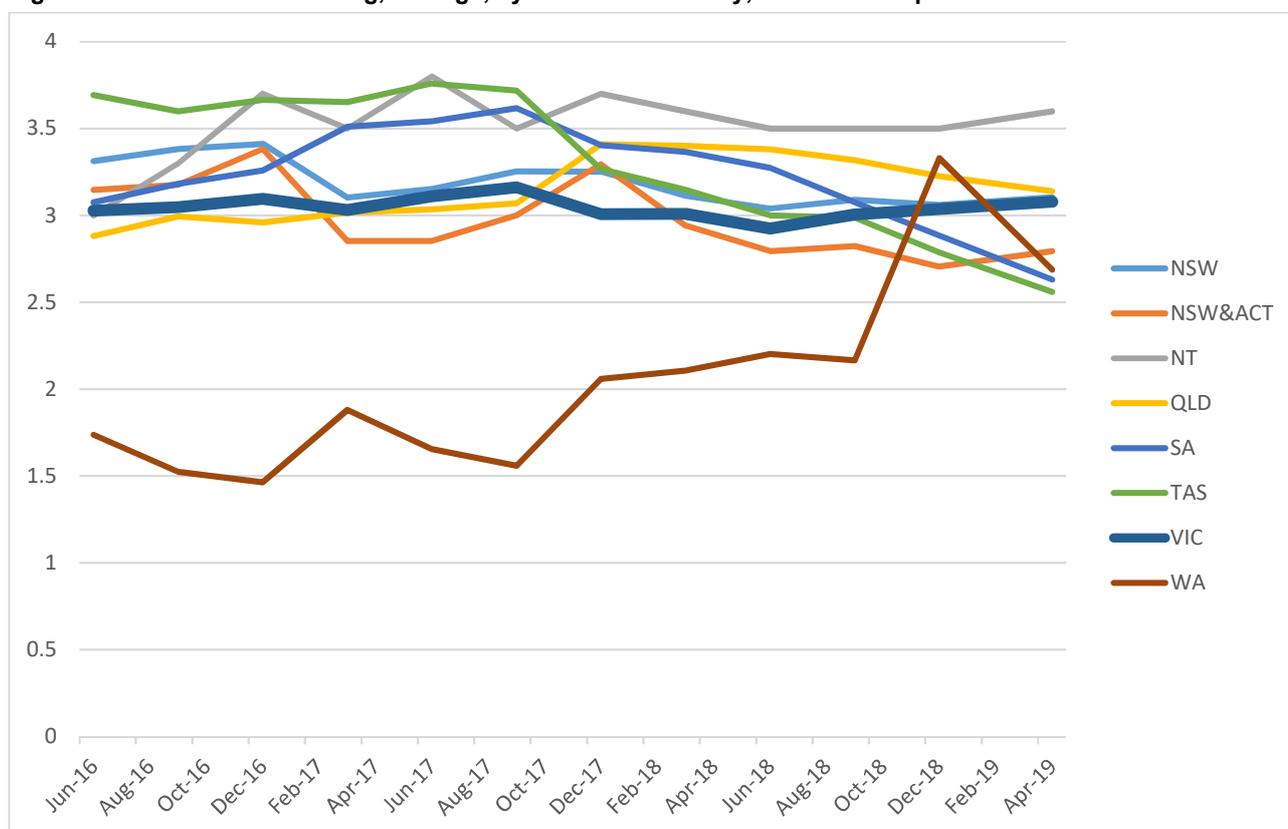
###### 1a Does JVEN address a demonstrable need?

JVEN has been successfully targeted at disadvantaged people from diverse backgrounds, including from Aboriginal or Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, ex-offenders, people with disability as well as hard to place *jobactive* clients. With few exceptions, JVEN participants had typically been unemployed before registering with JVEN; up to half had been unemployed for at least one year. A description of the demographics of JVEN registrants and those completing 26 weeks in JVEN facilitated employment see also KEQ 10a, Table A.12.

JVEN has successfully targeted resources at job seekers in areas of high unemployment (for a more detailed account, see the Value for Money Final Report of the Review and Evaluation).

JVEN providers and employers recruiting JVEN job seekers identified the need for improved employment services as Commonwealth employment services (*jobactive*) were found not to be meeting the needs of local employers. Star rating data of *jobactive* services published by the Australian Government Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business show that Victorian *jobactive* providers have been performing less well than their counterparts in most other States and Territories (Figure A.1). Recent improvements in Victorian *jobactive* providers' position was due to lower rating received by services in other States and Territories rather than higher ratings for Victorian providers. Together these data confirm the case for interventions to improve employment services in Victoria.

Figure A.1 Overall Star Rating, average, by State and Territory, June 2016 - April 2019



Source: Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, *jobactive* Site Star Ratings, various years.

**1b To what extent do the objectives and activities of JVEN respond to participant requirements, local needs, the operating environment and stakeholder needs?**

JVEN enables customisation of support services that meet labour market needs, including through the direct involvement of employers with currently unfilled vacancies or projected demand for workers.

An employer-driven approach, occasionally involving co-design of training and employment preparation services with or by employers, are good examples of customised and need-driven approaches, which set JVEN apart from other job services that do not have the resources for such dedicated collaboration.

JVEN providers take a client-centric approach, that is, they start by working with job seekers to establish their needs and interests, and to build their job readiness and job skills. Whilst not unusual for employment services, this support is often backed up with specialist services to meet the very specific requirement of the target populations. This is done to a standard that *jobactive* has not been able to match.

**1c To what extent does JVEN reflect best practice principles of employment support?**

The implementation of JVEN has followed the recommendations for best practice made by Borland, Considine, Ribar, Finighan, Broadway, Kalb, Salamanca and Thibout in their 2015 review for the Department.<sup>10</sup> Their recommendations were for:

1. funding for employment programs to focus on:
  - a. job seekers who have or are at risk of having the highest levels of labour market disadvantage
  - b. job seekers who are disadvantaged and have limited access to existing Commonwealth employment programs.
2. employment programs for disadvantaged groups to:
  - a. enable job readiness
  - b. provide assistance in obtaining job-specific skills necessary to obtain employment
  - c. provide assistance in obtaining a job placement
  - d. give on-going monitoring and support in the job placement.
3. the Victorian government to
  - a. adopt a whole of government policy framework for employment programs, articulating:
    - i. a common position on the purpose and expectations of employment programs
    - ii. the rationale for investment in employment programs by the Victorian government
    - iii. the types of programs that would be implemented based on evidence of what works
    - iv. measures to achieve coherency between employment programs.
  - b. award DJPR oversight of employment programs, including:
    - i. monitoring outcomes
    - ii. oversight of evaluations
    - iii. sharing of best practice across programs
    - iv. connecting Victorian programs to innovative thinking from other jurisdictions.
  - c. adopt a coherent and transparent organisational structure for employment programs in Victoria
4. a regular cycle of performance monitoring, supported by:
  - a. funding provided on a relatively stable platform (3-4 year basis), but subject to review during that period.

Recommendation 1 is addressed in KEQ1a and KEQ10a.

Recommendation 2 is addressed in KEQ5d.

Recommendation 3 is addressed in KEQ5b.

Recommendation 4 is addressed in KEQ5c.

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Borland, Mark Considine, David Ribar, Reuben Finighan, Barbara Broadway, Guyonne Kalb, Nicolas Salamanca and Claire Thibout (2015) Best Practice in Employment Programs and Recommendations for Victoria.

## 2. What is the evidence of a continued need for JVEN and role for government in delivering this program?

### 2a To what extent does JVEN align with Victorian Government priorities?

JVEN aligns with the Victorian Employment Policy Framework, prioritising the goal of employment outcomes with a focus on those who have or are at risk of having the highest levels of labour market disadvantage. In accordance with the Policy Framework, JVEN seeks to :

- provide a holistic suite of support offering services prior to, during and following employment placements, including for employers as well as workers
- deliver services to where and to whom they are most needed
- enhance cooperation between programs and services through complementary service delivery and creating effective referral pathways
- reduce overlap between programs and services by assigning employment program oversight to one Department (DJPR) and ensuring individual programs do not duplicate existing services.

JVEN is currently achieving these goals.

JVEN is providing assistance for regions and individuals who have experienced disadvantage. JVEN projects are geographically targeted to areas of demonstrable social and economic need as well as job seekers experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. For areas in which JVEN is operating, we observe high, above-State average levels of unemployment, young people with NEET status or households experiencing mortgage stress. Historically the areas have experienced low levels of labour market participation and relatively poor economic performance. The number of JVEN program participants from the 15 LGAs with the highest rates of unemployment (average U/E rate was 6.8, for Victoria it was 4.4) was 7,790 representing 45.4 per cent of the 17,151 registered participants as at December 2018.

We also conclude from the ten case studies that JVEN projects have contributed to addressing strategic policy objectives of VicHealth and Corrections Victoria. For more detail, refer to the JVEN Review and Evaluation Case Studies Final Report.

### 2b To what extent has the need for employment support services and the context of service delivery changed since the implementation of JVEN and has the program responded to this?

Whilst unemployment rates in the areas targeted by JVEN have decreased since the start of the program, and have done so at a faster rate than typical for Victoria, they remain above average, warranting continued interventions linking job seekers there to vacancies in those areas and beyond.

Evidence from the 2019 JVEN Provider Survey suggests continued demand from job seekers, with eight of 30 providers reporting a waiting list with an average of 30 job seekers.

### 2c To what extent does JVEN promote awareness of the Victorian Government's support for employment services?

JVEN has encouraged employers to make greater use of this Victorian State Government program, including substituting it for *jobactive* or in-house recruitment processes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that employers may be more familiar with the "Jobs Victoria" brand rather than "JVEN" (or "Jobs Victoria Employment Network").

## 3. To what extent are the program's assumptions valid?

### 3a Refer assumptions outlined in Outcomes Logic Model

The JVEN Outcomes Logic Model is based on a number of context, input and output assumptions, and anticipates, as a result, a number of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. We will assess these in turn. The logic model was discussed with JVEN providers in the course of the case studies.

### Context

**Commonwealth employment services are not effective for some disadvantaged cohorts due to lack of flexibility and integration with other support services. This can lead to long term need for State-funded support services.**

This is contested. The Star rating evidence reported at Figure A 1 suggest underperformance on the part of *jobactive* providers in Victoria. But there is also the view that *jobactive* is well placed (and just as well placed as JVEN) to operate flexibly and integrate with other support services, but that *jobactive* does not have the number of suitable job-ready candidates to meet the needs of larger employers. In the view of JVEN providers,

the strength of JVEN over *jobactive* is its focus working locally with local employers, and less pressure on instant placement, which gives providers time to invest in preparing job seekers (better) for employment.

**Some at-risk cohorts are not eligible for Commonwealth employment services, leading to further social and economic exclusion and long-term unemployment.**

*Jobactive* is primarily available to job seekers in receipt of an income support payment and/or with a mutual obligation requirement. Others may volunteer for the program providing they are not working or studying full time and have the right to work in Australia. Apart from availability (not studying or working full time) and right to work, there are no exclusions from *jobactive* (note that people without the right to work would and should not be registering with JVEN). However, *jobactive* services for volunteer participants are more limited in content (e.g. no Job Plan preparation) and time (maximum six month of service). This undermines the effectiveness of *jobactive* for volunteer job seekers – and illustrates the difference that strengthens JVEN.

Average *jobactive* caseloads are reported (by the Commonwealth) to be 1:148 which provides no flexibility or time to work more intensively with individuals. Providers also experience high staff turnover. Job seekers consistently report that the ‘onus of compliance and not being listened to’ characterised *jobactive* services.

Another barrier may be a public perception that *jobactive* is a mandatory service for job seekers with mutual obligations only (i.e. the public does not know that one can volunteer).

**As the provider of other support services and with existing connections to employers, the Victorian Government is well placed to provide coordinated employment support services to disadvantaged job seekers.**

The Victorian Government and Jobs Victoria in particular have played a critical role in connecting (a) state services to JVEN (by delegating some of their own program to JVEN, and maintain referrals channels) and (b) engaging employers through the Jobs Pipeline and, more recently, JobsBank. JVEN providers have noted scope for modifying the Jobs Pipeline and JobsBank to improve the initiatives’ capacity to match jobs or job seekers with individual JVEN providers’ clients and service portfolios.

## Inputs

**JVEN funding Jobs Vic: digital engagement, employer liaison, policy coordination DJPR EDEI staff: Employment Policy • Employment Programs • Employer liaison**

The general perceptions is that these are integrated to a good degree. However, as noted, above, there is scope for fine-tuning the delivery of some of the associated services (i.e. Jobs Pipeline and JobsBank).

## Outputs

**Participation: Minister for Employment & Industry • Minister for Multicultural Affairs & Citizenship • DJPR: EDEI • Vic Gov: DPC; DHHS; DJR; DET • Commonwealth Department of Employment • JVEN providers • Disadvantaged job seekers and communities • Employers and industry groups**

There is evidence of involvement of each named partner (although we have no direct evidence of ministerial involvement). We do however note quarterly briefings provided to the Department Executive.

JVEN providers raised concerns about the absence of involvement of, or coordination with, Disability Employment Services and, thus, the Australian Government Department of Social Services within JVEN. To the extent that service integration is one of the objectives of JVEN and that a track record as DES provider strengthens capacity to deliver JVEN, there may be benefit in examining the potential gains from bringing a DES/DSS closer to JVEN.

## Activities

**Provide funding to experienced providers for flexible employment support services to job seekers with barriers to employment**

JVEN has engaged organisations and consortia with different depth of experience in providing employment support services (including no substantive experience at all). To some extent, this has coincided with the adoption of different delivery models, and with more experienced JVEN providers able to rely on deeper employer relationships and also more likely adopting a ‘jobs-first’ approach. Whereas ‘newcomers’ to employment services perhaps inadvertently approached the service from a ‘life-first’ perspective. There is insufficient evidence to determine whether it was differences in approach or, for instance, difference in client mix that contributed most strongly to performance differentials (‘jobs-first’ providers being more strongly represented amongst those providers meeting contracted outcomes targets early).

The funding approach has been conducive to capacity building in the employment and community service sector. (JVEN should build on this to strengthen employment services in life-first providers and community services in jobs-first providers, as appropriate.)

### **Proactively engage with employers to identify job opportunities for JVEN participants**

This has been one of the strengths of JVEN, allowing and directing JVEN providers to deepen employer relationships and, if new to employment services, building these. Placement data demonstrate the range and diversity of employers that have hired job seekers through JVEN. Case study evidence suggests that, with some exceptions, employer engagement has been working well and diversified capacity especially among life-first providers. Case studies also indicated that it was typically not a lack of demand for labour on the part of employers that proved challenging to providers, but the size of the pool of job ready candidates.

A crucial aspect in developing linkages with employers was JVEN providers' capacity to both understand the labour needs of employers and the capacity of registered job seekers to meet those needs. The ability to make this connection was greatly facilitated when JVEN providers had the resources and intent to integrate case management and employer liaison in one employment support role.

As far as SACES was able to determine from the case studies, the Jobs Pipeline has to-date played a minor role in the activities of providers. This was especially the case for providers working with job seekers who needed more time to become job ready (and/or whose job preparation programs were ongoing), had mobility constraints (e.g. not access to private transport; inability to travel independently on public transport) or could or would not consider potentially physically demanding labouring jobs that had frequently become available.

### **Encourage and enable workforce needs linkages and collaboration between community support services, employment services and JVEN providers**

This has been a critical aspect of the program – and part of its success. Overall, our assessment is that JVEN providers have worked to achieve a high level of collaboration between different stakeholders. There have inevitably been variations in performance that are reflected in providers' ability to achieve collaboration; these could be addressed through the facilitation of mutual learning exercises/workshops, as some JVEN providers have suggested.

One aspect that should also be considered in this context is geography. To date, the location of JVEN projects has minimised the risk of providers competing with another for access to employers or job seekers. This is a strength that should be retained; especially should the program's geographical reach be changed in the future.

## **Outcomes<sup>11</sup>**

The extent to which JVEN has achieved outcomes is discussed under the relevant KEQs. Overall, the evidence suggest that JVEN has been contributing to improved employability and higher employment rates amongst participating job seekers. There is also evidence, albeit less comprehensive evidence, of greater service collaboration associated with JVEN, closing some existing service gaps by bridging employment with essential auxiliary services.

## **Efficiency**

### **4. To what extent does JVEN represent value for money?**

A full report, JVEN Review and Evaluation Value for Money has been provided to the Department addressing the key question of value for money and the three sub-questions shown below. We provide a final summary comment below.

#### **4a Are there any alternatives for achieving comparable results with less resources?**

#### **4b Is the relationship between inputs and results achieved reasonable and justifiable?**

#### **4c To what extent does JVEN reduce state costs on other support services?**

<sup>11</sup>

#### **Short Term Outcomes:**

- Flexible and customised assistance is available to disadvantaged job seekers to develop job readiness skills;
- Employment support services are developed that respond to local and regional labour market needs;
- JVEN participants gain employment for 26 weeks;
- Relationships with employers are developed which increase the number of jobs opportunities identified for JVEN participants;
- Victorian community support and employment services are better coordinated to address the barriers faced by disadvantaged job seekers; and
- Services are provided that address gaps and complement existing Commonwealth services.

#### **Medium-term Outcomes**

- Employment is sustained by JVEN participants beyond 26 weeks;
- Employability of JVEN participants is increased;
- Increased confidence of employers to recruit through Victorian Government employment programs; and
- Evidence of JVEN's effectiveness informs employment support services.

The average contracted unit costs of the 51 JVEN providers is \$9,964 decreasing from an average of \$10,175 for the 38 providers supported in Round 1 to \$8,580 for the 13 providers supported in Stage 2. The average unit cost is below those of comparable programs servicing the most disadvantaged job seekers, such as Job Services Australia Stream 4 (\$10,059 in 2018/2019 \$).

Given currently achieved placement and conversion rates, and evidence from the JVEN Participant Survey on sustainable employment outcomes, JVEN compared favourably to other employment programs for which outcomes and cost-per-outcomes data are available.

In this early stage of JVEN it is not possible to provide a firm assessment or quantitative estimate of the impact of JVEN on other state support services. SACES nonetheless sees potential in the program reducing costs of those services as (i) resources are better coordinated with a single Department (DJPR) being given oversight of the suite of Victorian employment programs; (ii) employment increased financial and personal wellbeing diverting job seekers from social and community services (and also judicial programs).

## **5. Is JVEN being delivered to scope, budget, within the expected timeframe and in line with appropriate governance and risk management practices?**

### **5a Do program stakeholders (including DJPR staff, providers and other stakeholders) have sufficient knowledge of JVEN and their roles and responsibilities?**

Stakeholder consultations suggested good knowledge of JVEN, its objectives, and opportunities for connecting existing employment and training programs, but also community services to JVEN. Providers and other stakeholders understood the opportunities that JVEN presented for connecting community, employment and training services, using JVEN as a vehicle to create synergies and to enhance effectiveness.

### **5b Is JVEN supported by robust and appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes?**

Putting into place monitoring and evaluation processes accompanying JVEN was one of the recommendations of the report by Borland et al. (2015) for the Department. This Review and Evaluation is part of the implementation of that recommendation.

In addition, data from the 2018 JVEN Provider Survey and reported in the JVEN Review and Evaluation's 2018 Mid-Term Review report confirmed that most JVEN providers were evaluating, or intended to evaluate, their program against internal or external benchmarks (Table A.1).

**Table A.1 Providers evaluating the effectiveness of their performance**

	N	
Yes, evaluate against past performance	10	34.5
Yes, evaluate against similar currently offered services	11	37.9
Yes, evaluate against other benchmarks	15	51.7
No	8	27.6
N		29

Source: JVEN Provider Survey (SACES).

JVEN providers were also hoping to be able to access the Global Engagement Management System (GEMS) data to gather aggregate data on their performance and to benchmark them against others or the JVEN program as a whole. This has not been possible as GEMS allows JVEN providers access only to their own data. Greater flexibility and use of GEMS for benchmarking purposes may have assisted providers in monitoring their performance, although steps would have had to be taken to ensure some comparability of ultimately very diverse initiatives (to safeguard against spurious comparisons).

Whereas JVEN providers were not able to conduct their own benchmarking, the review of projects by Grosvenor Management Consulting effectively provided this comparison, although, as far as we are able to determine, without accounting for differences in project and client profiles.

We also note that, for some considerable time, GEMS was showing significant weaknesses with respect to user friendliness and data entry quality, as identified in the KPMG JVEN Outcomes Data Review of July 2018. That review had identified deficiencies in record keeping, including the inclusion of duplicate records, failure of partners to update participant records to reflect current and final placement and outcome status, and conflicting outcome status records.

SACES had conducted its own review of GEMS (in March 2019, prior to receiving the KPMG report), which also identified duplicate records and, in consultation with JVEN providers, inconsistencies in the use of GEMS to records activities, notably:

- recording whether support activities (such as monitoring or pre-employment support) were provided or not
- recording individual instances of support provision versus single reporting to indicate support provided over a given time period
- instant versus periodic updating of records, resulting in inexact recording of dates, in particular activity cease dates
- failure to close cases where job seekers who had initially registered for the program had not sought or not been provided with services over a long time period (indicative of program exit)
- incorrect recording of job seeker contact details, e.g. incorrect email addresses or mobile phone numbers, which would have made verifying continued employment of job seekers placed in work by a JVEN project difficult if not impossible (potentially resulting in under recording of outcomes)
- lack of, or inconsistency in, completion of client details, such as referral sources, past or preferred employment types.

The Department has since invested significant resources into updating and improving the GEMS database.

### 5c To what extent do JVEN's governance and institutional arrangements reflect best practice?

Borland et al. (2015) recommended a whole of government policy framework for employment programs, articulating:

- i. a common position on the purpose and expectations of employment programs
  - ii. the rationale for investment in employment programs by the Victorian government
  - iii. the types of programs that would be implemented based on evidence of what works
  - iv. measures to achieve coherency between employment programs.
- b. award DJPR oversight of employment programs, including:
- i. monitoring outcomes
  - ii. oversight of evaluations
  - iii. sharing of best practice across programs
  - iv. connecting Victorian programs to innovative thinking from other jurisdictions.
- c. adopt a coherent and transparent organisational structure for employment programs in Victoria.

The evaluation to date has shown that JVEN has been implemented as intended and in close alignment with the strategic objectives of the Victorian Employment Policy Framework. Program implementation to date have also corresponded well to the recommendations by Borland et al.

JVEN providers have indicated to the evaluators that they would like to see more opportunity to exchange learnings, and develop more collaborative ties, with other providers. This is also one of the recommendations of this Review and Evaluation. We see opportunities for increasing program effectiveness by connecting providers and developing referral systems between them in order to enhance the flexibility and range of services available to job seekers through collaborative networks. This would also give providers added scope to contribute with their respective specialist skills to strengthening JVEN.

### 5d To what extent are there clear and well- understood objectives for JVEN?

Our case studies found that JVEN providers had a shared understanding of the JVEN objectives, namely to:

- *“assist Victorians who are disadvantaged in the labour market to gain and retain employment, contributing to increased social and economic inclusion and assisting Victorian businesses to meet their skills and labour needs*
- *support the objectives of Jobs Victoria by contributing to a more coordinated and streamlined suite of employment-related services for Victorian job seekers.” (Program Guidelines 2016)*

The case studies found that JVEN providers could be divided into two principal groups: (i) those who perceived employment as an avenue to greater social and economic inclusion and (ii) those that, conversely, saw personal capacity buildings as a pre-requisite to successful labour market access. This is a difference in approach and provider ‘philosophy’, but also reflective of differences in the labour market barriers of job seekers supported by different providers. In all instances, JVEN providers shared a concern for improving both economic and social wellbeing of job seekers, as well as a desire to assist Victorian business in meeting its skills and labour needs by preparing job seekers and matching them to emerging vacancies.

The case studies also found that JVEN providers were motivated to provide streamlined employment services for employers that, they knew, were unhappy with the then evident ‘patchwork’ of services and service providers. The 2018 and 2019 JVEN Providers Surveys found evidence for that in the range of services, including post placement support and accredited training qualifications (see Table A.2 & KEQ8h), that JVEN providers were offering to employers as well as job seekers.

**Table A.2 JVEN providers supports for job seekers and employers**

	Frequency	Responses	Cases
<b>Supports for Job seekers</b>			
Generic job preparation and soft skills training	33	14.7	97.1
Job search support and mentoring	33	14.7	97.1
Post-placement support for job seekers	33	14.7	97.1
Generic job matching to vacancies without direct employer involvement/contact	30	13.4	88.2
Accredited vocational skills training	22	9.8	64.7
Support with addressing health issues/substance use	22	9.8	64.7
Support with housing problems/transport/mobility	21	9.3	61.8
Support with language proficiency/literacy/numeracy/digital literacy	20	8.9	58.8
Support with childcare	10	4.5	29.4
<b>Supports for Employers</b>			
Post-placement support assisting employers	33	20.4	97.1
Personal introduction of individual job seekers (reverse marketing)	31	19.1	91.2
Working with employers to identify job opportunities in their business	28	17.3	82.4
Generic work preparation/induction	27	16.7	79.4
Pre-placement support assisting employers	23	14.2	67.7
Co-design of training program with employers	20	12.4	58.8
Valid N	34		

Source: 2019 JVEN Provider Survey.

## 5e To what extent are participants and stakeholders satisfied with JVEN’s outcomes and implementation?

The JVEN Participant Survey found that job seekers were typically happy with the support they were receiving or had received. Over the three waves, 63 per cent (weighted) were either happy or very happy with the services (Table A.3). Satisfaction rates were higher in Wave 2 and Wave 3 compared with Wave 1.

**Table A.3 JVEN participants’ assessment of JVEN services**

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Waves 1-3
Very Unhappy	33.2	19.4	24.2	18.8
Unhappy	7.4	5.8	5.2	3.2
Neutral	8.1	4.9	8.6	14.5
Happy	18.1	18.8	15.8	25.4
Very Happy	33.2	51.1	46.2	38.0
N	103	360	244	685

Note: Job seekers were asked: “On a scale from 0 to 9, how happy are you with your JVEN service? 0 is very unhappy and 9 is very happy. Participants were only asked this question at the point of their first survey participation.

Source: JVEN Participant Surveys, Waves 1, 2 and 3.

Twenty-two per cent (weighted) of JVEN participants were either unhappy or very unhappy with the service. From personal interviews with job seekers, we learned that their principal concerns were either a lack of direct support services, or communications with the JVEN providers, or reflected poor and unsatisfactory working conditions (such as insufficient hours or, over time, decreasing number of shifts, which especially affected those placed in work via labour hire companies).

Employers were not surveyed, but interviewed either face to face or by telephone as part of the case studies. They typically expressed a high level of satisfaction, especially where JVEN services had reduced the employers’ need to recruit, pre-select and interview job seekers for vacancies, effectively outsourcing these tasks to the JVEN provider.

Not every employer was satisfied with JVEN. The Review and Evaluation also encountered instances of employers ceasing collaboration with JVEN providers because they had been unhappy with how jobseeker placements had been managed (e.g. promised, but not delivered) or job seekers could not be retained (e.g. encouraging a rethink of the business's recruitment strategy). Other employers reduced the level of their engagement with JVEN providers, notably those offering co-design, because they could not or no longer wished to commit time and resources to working with JVEN providers to prepare job seekers for employment. It is interesting to note in this context that where a relationship with employers experienced strain or indeed broke down, this was not typically because of a lack of quality of JVEN services, but because of shifting business priorities or weaknesses in the business's underlying recruitment strategy as well as time constraints.

Both case studies and the two JVEN Provider Surveys showed that providers were supportive of the JVEN initiative, even where they were facing difficulties in delivering their own program and/or had been put on a Performance Improvement Program. Providers that were struggling to reach their contracted outcomes targets were concerned that the Department were sometimes not fully appreciative of the obstacles they – and their clients – experienced in realising job placements.

## **6. To what extent are JVEN services coordinated with existing Commonwealth and State services?**

### **6a To what extent do JVEN services duplicate existing Commonwealth and State services?**

Case study interviews found that JVEN providers were acutely aware of the requirement to avoid duplicating existing services and have used various strategies to minimize this risk. First, JVEN providers have collaborated with existing employment and community service providers to ensure their own provisions were additional to those already provided. This was achieved, for instance, by insisting that agencies, department or community organisation referring job seekers to JVEN fulfilled their own service obligations rather than the JVEN provider delivering these services. An example of this was the initiation and payment for police checks. *Jobactive* providers were resourced to provide and pay for these checks.

JVEN providers also targeted and catered for clients (and age) groups not typically engaged with existing employment services. Similarly, some JVEN providers have worked closely with employers or local industries, building on a unique level of mutual knowledge and understanding, and providing a focused service that *jobactive* providers were not typically resourced to offer. Although about half of JVEN registered job seekers were also *jobactive* clients, evidence from interviews suggests that *jobactive* clients receiving services through JVEN were typically harder-to-place and not sufficiently supported by *jobactive*, which lacked specialist supports.<sup>12</sup>

JVEN providers also pointed out that the fact that their service was voluntary sets it apart from most existing services, which were often mandatory. As a result, JVEN providers were drawing job seekers from a different pool of inactive and/or unemployed individuals.

Neither jobseeker nor employer interviews suggested there was obvious duplication of service. The wrap around nature of JVEN services made it a unique source of support for job seekers with specialist needs, such as mental health problems, lack of cultural familiarity. Employers, on the other hand, perceived and often used JVEN as a genuine (and sole) alternative to, in their views, often ineffective *jobactive* providers to recruit their labour..

### **6b To what extent do JVEN services coordinate with and complement Commonwealth and State services?**

There was no evidence of *direct* coordination of Commonwealth and State employment/JVEN services, but our review of Commonwealth and Victorian employment programs, and of programmatic practice, suggests complementarity, but also some instances of competition.

The main interface between JVEN and external service providers is via Commonwealth/*jobactive* and Victorian State services. Table A.4 shows that almost a quarter of JVEN participants (24%) registered by 7 August 2019 had been referred from Commonwealth program and a further tenth (10%) from a Victorian Government Department's program, whilst the single largest number of registrants were self-referred ('walk-ins'). We have identified seven federal programs (Table A.5) and four programs operating in Victoria (Table A.6) to assist unemployed and/or inactive people of working age into work. All programs have covered eligible populations and/or are operating in geographical areas that also benefit from the JVEN program. However, the risk of service duplication is reduced by (i) referral sources (notably Victorian State government departments) delegating service responsibility to JVEN, (ii) JVEN typically providing (or having the capacity to provide) more

<sup>12</sup> Although GEMS allows the recording the *jobactive* Stream levels of JVEN registrants, this information is largely missing. It was therefore not possible to examine quantitatively the labour market distance of *jobactive* clients on the JVEN providers' books.

advanced and specialist services (e.g. compared with Skills and Jobs Centres or community organisations), and/or (iii) formal or *ad hoc* collaboration between JVEN and the referring organisation (e.g. seeking *jobactive* support with accessing wage subsidies or financing training activities/licencing).

**Table A.4 JVEN Registrants' referral sources (as at 7 August 2019)**

	Number of Registrants	Per cent of registrants
Walk-in/Self-referral/Friends etc.	7,095	38.3
Existing client	391	2.1
Commonwealth program	4,389	23.7
Jobactive	70	0.4
Dept. of Justice and Regulation	673	3.6
Skills and Jobs Centres	441	2.4
Court Services Victoria	305	1.7
Dept. of Education and Training	170	0.9
Dept. of Health and Human Services	124	0.7
Work and Learning Centre	81	0.4
DPC (Multicultural Program)	53	0.3
Employment and training services providers	433	2.3
JobsBank	194	1.1
Jobs Fairs	162	0.9
Headspace	251	1.4
YMCA - The Bridge	182	1.0
Other JVEN Provider	210	1.1
Community organisations	854	4.6
Auto and supply chain	282	1.5
Other	1,929	10.4
Missing	245	1.3
All	18,534	

Source: GEMS – JVEN Participant Information – own calculation.

Feedback from JVEN providers in interviews and the 2019 JVEN Provider Survey has nonetheless evidenced frustration with some referral agencies (notably *jobactive*) and isolated claims of competition and indeed conflict, such as client poaching by *jobactive* providers. JVEN providers are concerned that *jobactive* providers do not reciprocate support that JVEN providers provide to job seekers who may use both sources to find work (and may be referred by *jobactive*), and that there is no incentive for *jobactive* to work collaboratively.

The introduction of the Commonwealth Youth Jobs PaTH program has also adversely affected a JVEN program that targeted a similar client group, but could not compete with the Commonwealth program on the employer incentives that it offered.

See also KEQ8e for referral destinations *from* JVEN.

### **6c To what extent has JVEN's collaboration with other services enabled achievement of the programs outcomes?**

Case study evidence tells us that collaboration with other services has been most effective in achieving outcomes where it extended beyond mere referral of job seekers, but was based on a mutual understanding of shared objectives. This was most apparent with respect to the CVGT Broadmeadows Second Chance program for juvenile offenders, where the job service provider worked closely with the Magistrate's Court – and the Court with the provider – to enable offenders to transition seamlessly between institutions and into becoming a job seeker. This was facilitated by continued personal, that is, face-to-face, contact between JVEN project staff and the Magistrates.

In some cases JVEN providers *have* been able to work with *jobactive* services, drawing on the latter's capacity to offer wage subsidies to employers or cover the cost of pre-employment training and acquisition of job relevant qualifications. Anecdotally this has been said to help to place job seekers in work.

As noted under KEQ6b and further elaborated under KEQ8e, JVEN provider have not only received but also initiated referrals of job seekers to external services. We currently have no information as to what happened to job seekers following or indeed during these referrals, and are therefore not able to assess their impact on achieving outcomes. We recommend that Jobs Victoria explores whether referral destinations could be recorded on GEMS just as referral sources are currently being logged.

## **7. What would be the impacts of continuing or ceasing JVEN funding?**

### **7a If increased funding was provided, what level of efficiencies could be realised?**

### **7b What would be the impact of ceasing the program and what strategies have been identified to minimise negative impacts?**

We consider both questions in the context of what the Victorian Government has set out to do in what is a transformative labour market program. JVEN has already illustrated some remarkable successes in employment outcomes. It provides a platform for the further development of integrated services for some of the most vulnerable people in the community and it has provided Government agencies with a referral network that, while in embryo, can be expanded (e.g. Courts, Corrections, DHHS, Multi-Cultural unit amongst others).

Ceasing the program would leave several groups that are not currently serviced, or not serviced well, by the Commonwealth's *jobactive* program (refugees, visa holders with a right to work, new migrants) without support. There appears to be good outcomes for Indigenous job seekers noting that further concrete evidence to support this claim is required.

JVEN as a voluntary program is attracting individuals back into the realm of 'individuals seeking help' and this has great potential to be expanded. For example, could a JVEN provider build in further generic skills such as literacy and numeracy and/or digital numeracy, both of which are essential skills for the opening of employment opportunities, given we are witnessing the loss of many entry level jobs? This might require additional resources without which employment placements will be difficult to sustain.

Several JVEN providers that have been successful suggest there is an opportunity to replicate the program/s in another geographical area. Linking to the Magistrate's Court is one example. Linking Police referrals to a JVEN program is another example. Connections with industry groups such as in Bairnsdale suggest the needs of job seekers and employers can be welded together through skills training and commitment to employ.

There are very valuable learning lessons from JVEN (which in our view the Commonwealth's *jobactive* is endeavouring to copy). Government and DJPR would be well served to view JVEN to-date as an experimental program in the sense to ask:

- What have we learnt?
- How best to build on current successes?
- Do we need to build in other objectives, outcomes?
- How best to strengthen employer connections and outcomes?
- How best to assist providers connect with employers that will lead to further improvement in outcomes?
- Are there programs/providers that are able to be replicated?
- Are there programs that could be strengthened to accept more government agency referrals?

Some might consider that with the proposed reforms to the Commonwealth's *jobactive* employment assistance program that this provides an opportunity to cease the JVEN program and that the proposed reforms will minimise any negative impacts. We do not support this view. On the contrary, while the Commonwealth's proposed reforms are welcomed, they are largely untested. They are based on a number of assumptions that are also untested and they will take a considerable period of time to implement/'bed-down'.

**Table A.5 Federal employment support and activation programs**

Name	<i>jobactive</i>	Work for the Dole	National Work Experience Program (part of <i>jobactive</i> )	ParentsNext	Youth Jobs PaTH (PrepareTrialHire)	Transition to Work	Engaging Early School Leavers
<b>Target/ eligible Population</b>	Job seekers on income support payments with mutual obligation requirement.  Volunteer job seekers may participate without obligation.	Job seekers aged 18 and over, with mutual obligation requirements, and commenced with <i>jobactive</i> for 12 months or more.	Registered in <i>jobactive</i> , over 18 years of age, and receiving income support payment.	Parents in 10 trial areas; with youngest child aged 5 years or under, no paid employment in last 6 months. Trial site in Victoria: Hume. National rollout from July 2018.	Job seekers under 25.	Young people aged 15-21. Targeted at early school leavers and others experiencing difficulty transitioning to employment, regardless of income support status.	Early school leavers: -in receipt of Youth Allowance (other) -15 to 21 years -without Year 12 or Certificate III level qualification
<b>Mandatory/ voluntary</b>	Mandatory	Mandatory	Voluntary	Mandatory for Parenting Payment recipients	Voluntary	Voluntary	Mandatory
<b>Content</b>	<b>Support with:</b> -writing a résumé -looking for work -preparing for interviews -getting skills that local employers need -finding and keeping a job.	<b>Work-like activities</b> at not-for-profit host or community-based project.  Mandatory for six months each year in order to keep receiving income support.  Income support supplement of \$20.80 per fortnight.	<b>Work experience:</b> unpaid work placement (up to 25 hours pw; max. 4 weeks).  \$20.80 per fortnight in addition to income support payment	Support with planning and preparing for employment while caring for young children in time for when children start school.	<b>Employability skills training</b> (max. 150 hours).  <b>Internship placement</b> (4 to 12 weeks). \$1,000 incentive to hosting business; \$200 fortnightly to job seekers on top of income support.  <b>Youth Bonus wage subsidy:</b> \$6,500 to \$10,000 to businesses hiring eligible young job seeker.	<b>Pre-employment support</b> to improve work readiness and to help into work or education including apprenticeships or traineeships.  <b>For employers:</b> help to recruit young employees who meet business needs. <b>Youth wage subsidy</b> of up to \$6,500 over 12 months	Job search  Year 12 Equivalency  Extending eligibility Education outcome payments (\$1000; 15-21)

**Table A.6 Empowering Youth Initiatives, Victoria**

Name	iEmpower Youth Cooperative	20Squared	Equip! Geelong Ethnic Communities Council:	Youth BACE (Western Business Accelerator and Centre for Excellence)
<b>Target/ eligible Population</b>	Young people aged 15-24 years who are who are currently unemployed, and living in Western, Inner Western, Inner Northern suburbs and Inner Melbourne catchment area.	Young people aged 15 to 24 years in disadvantaged communities particularly young women, in Melbourne, Colac and Broadmeadows, Victoria..	Young people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background who are currently unemployed or in school or further education. Greater Geelong.	Young people: -aged 15 to 24 years -disengaged from education -unemployed -residing in the greater western area of Melbourne (Brimbank and Melton).
<b>Content</b>	Graffiti removal and cleaning cooperative, providing employability skills and understanding of business management principles.	Multimedia game for young people to experience working with virtual clients/ customers in the health care sector.  Training related to digital products with ICT experts. Work-ready training, work experience placements with health care employers and intense training in the health care sector.	Career counselling, employability skills training, local industry mentoring; work experience (12 months).	Traineeship with local employers; pre-traineeship (Certificate II or III) in an IT related field.  Assistance with language, literacy and numeracy; mentoring; résumé and interview skills.
<b>Initiatives runs from</b>	23 June 2017 to 22 June 2019	24 June 2016 to 24 June 2018	22 April 2016 to 22 April 2018	16 June 2016 to 24 June 2018

## 8. To what extent is JVEN producing or contributing to the intended outcomes in the short, medium and long term? As defined in the Outcomes Logic Model

### 8a Short term: to what extent did JVEN services provide flexible and customised assistance to job seekers?

Our review of JVEN projects and, specifically, our case studies highlighted a diverse set of activities, typically customised to local circumstances and targeted populations.

All providers appeared to offer **customised assistance** (we can only be certain about this with regard to our case study projects), as recorded on GEMS. We do however note inconsistencies in JVEN providers' record keeping on GEMS, which makes determining the range of supports provided impossible.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, GEMS does not allow any judgement as to the depth/intensity of assistance.

In most instances, the JVEN providers (including those in our case studies) offered support that prepared job seekers (a) for the labour market (e.g. language proficiency, motivational training), (b) specific jobs (e.g. help with getting tickets, job induction, co-designed training). For these the focus was firmly on making clients ready for employment. Others, however, placed equal or indeed greater emphasis on pre-employment activities, which included (c) career identification and development support and (d) a broad range of practical (e.g. stable homes) and psycho-social support.

Table A.7, which draws on responses to our JVEN Provider Survey 2019 (66 per cent response rate) illustrates that virtually all providers offered job search related services, including job preparation and soft skills training. Fewer, however, provided accredited training (although they may refer clients to relevant third party providers), or support with health issues or substance use; housing, transport or general mobility; or language proficiency, literacy, numeracy, digital literacy. They were demand-dependent and not every provider's clients needed this support. This also applied to childcare support, offered by about one third of JVEN providers.

**Table A.7 JVEN providers' Support services offered to job seekers**

	Number of providers	Per cent cases
Generic job preparation and soft skills training	33	97.1
Job search support and mentoring	33	97.1
Post-placement support for job seekers	33	97.1
Generic job matching to vacancies without direct employer involvement/contact	30	88.2
Accredited vocational skills training	22	64.7
Support with addressing health issues/substance use	22	64.7
Support with housing problems/transport/mobility	21	61.8
Support with language proficiency/literacy/numeracy/digital literacy	20	58.8
Support with childcare	10	29.4
N	34	

Note: Survey question: "Please indicate the type of supports provided or activities undertaken as part of your JVEN service for job seekers."

Source: JVEN Provider Survey 2019.

### 8b Short term: to what extent did JVEN services respond to local and regional labour market needs?

- Refer to Implementation and VFM reports

Our review of labour market data suggested that JVEN projects have been active in areas of above average needs for socio-economic support (cp. Table 1.4 above; and Table 2.1 in the 2019 Case Study Report). The additional targeting of disadvantaged populations – often in smaller geographical areas than our labour market data review was able to observe – would be expected to ensure JVEN responsiveness to very specific and high levels of need. The program hosted in Wodonga (JVEN 043) for the Tallangatta Health Service is one example.

### 8c Short term: how many JVEN participants achieved employment outcomes of 26 weeks?

- Refer to VFM report.

By 7 August 2019, 2,872 job seekers, about 38 per cent of JVEN registrants who had been *placed in JVEN facilitated employment*, had completed 26 weeks in work and their outcomes had been "approved", that is, confirmed by Jobs Victoria, and so recorded on GEMS. This figure rises to 4,175 (55%) if we also include

<sup>13</sup> Including at least one provider not recording any support activities. Inconsistent reporting, for instance, included some JVEN providers recording each support activity (e.g. post-placement telephone catch up with the job seeker) on GEMS, resulting in multiple entries on GEMS per client. In contrast, other providers only recorded the *period* during which support activities were offered, resulting in a single entry on GEMS per client.

those cases marked on GEMS as “awaiting approval” or “ready to claim”. The latter is equivalent to 22 per cent of all JVEN registered job seekers.

An alternative method for estimating the conversion of employment placements into 26-week outcomes is to use data collected for 27 JVEN providers that responded to the 2019 JVEN Provider Survey. The advantage of using survey data is that it includes information about 26 week outcomes that providers had not yet claimed and which would not be recorded in GEMS and be unknown to Jobs Victoria. Together with those “approved”, “ready to claim” or “awaiting approval”, these 27 providers estimated to have placed 2,639 job seekers into work for 26 or more weeks. That is 25 per cent of their registrants, and thus a little higher than the percentage estimated using GEMS data. It is thus conceivable that the actual number of 26-week outcomes is higher than recorded on GEMS, which is inevitably lagging behind real time.

We also know anecdotally that at least some JVEN providers only record outcomes up to the number for which they have been contracted. It is thus possible, perhaps likely, that JVEN as a whole may be achieving more outcomes than will be recorded.

#### **8d Short term: to what extent were relationships with employers developed which led to jobs opportunities identified for JVEN participants?**

- Refer to Mid-Term Review – Data report

In our Mid-Term Review report, and based on data collected in the 2018 JVEN Provider Survey, we reported on JVEN providers’ engaging with up to 100 or more employers in efforts to locate vacancies for job seekers and develop relationships with industry. Importantly, over half of JVEN providers stated that they had no previous relationship with the majority of these employers.

The 2019 JVEN Provider Survey, conducted in May/June 2019, confirmed these statistics. One fifth of the 30 respondents to the survey had placed job seekers with 100 or more *different* employers; half had placed clients with at least 50 different employers (mean: 59). While in most instances, the placements filled existing vacancies<sup>14</sup> (median/mean: 65 per cent), a small, but not negligible percentage of job vacancies had been specifically created<sup>15</sup> to accommodate JVEN job seekers (median: 15 per cent; mean: 23 per cent).

Case studies also showed that providers have both developed new and deepened existing relationships with employers. Providers new to the provision of employment services have had to develop entirely new relationships and networks with employers. All providers have actively engaged in promoting their programs in direct approaches to business or advertising them at public events attended (also) by employers. Anecdotally, these direct and indirect approaches encouraged employers to hire JVEN job seekers even where they had no initial intention to recruit. The case studies also found instances of employers taking on additional JVEN client after initial positive experiences hiring through JVEN.

#### **8e Short term: to what extent are Victorian community support and employment services better coordinated to address the barriers faced by disadvantaged job seekers?**

Case studies demonstrated increased collaboration across employment and community services. Coordination of activities was most advanced where JVEN programs were able to connect with auxiliary services, especially where these connections were critical to the concept – and thus success – of the service model. For instance, closer linkages have been developed with mental health services, the justice system, and education and training facilities. This is illustrated Table A.8, which, drawing on the 2019 JVEN Provider Survey, shows JVEN providers referring clients especially to TAFE and Skills and Jobs Centres, but also mental health, homelessness, and drug and alcohol counselling services, to name but the most prominent.

We noted earlier (see KEQ 6b; Table A.4) that JVEN providers were also *receiving* referrals from various State and Commonwealth programs and services. This greater two-way engagement suggests improved service sharing and, possibly, service allocation.

<sup>14</sup> Survey question: “Approximately what proportion of your employment placements that your program has achieved to date filled an existing vacancy (advertised or not)?”

<sup>15</sup> Survey question: “Approximately what proportion of your employment placements that your program has achieved to date filled a position specifically created to accommodate the jobseeker?”

**Table A.8 JVEN provider referrals to auxiliary services, last 12 months**

	Number of JVEN providers	Responses
TAFE	26	11.5
Skills and Jobs Centres	23	10.1
Disability service provider	21	9.3
Mental health support services	21	9.3
Jobactive	18	7.9
Homelessness services	16	7.1
Disability Employment Service/Australian Disability Enterprises	14	6.2
Drug and alcohol counselling	14	6.2
Language learning services	13	5.7
Reconnect	11	4.9
Transition to Work	11	4.9
Housing Vic	10	4.4
Private or third sector housing provider	10	4.4
NDIS/NDIA	7	3.1
Work for the Dole	4	1.8
Youth Jobs PATH	4	1.8
ParentsNext	3	1.3
National Work Experience Program	1	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Survey question: In the last 12 months, has your JVEN program referred a job seeker to any of the following initiatives or programs for additional supports?  
Source: 2019 JVEN Provider Survey.

### **8f Short term: to what extent did JVEN services addresses gaps and complement existing Commonwealth services?**

JVEN has enabled one-stop-shop type provision of services that, as employers told us, greatly facilitated recruitment for vacancies (by presenting them with a larger pool of job seekers, effective job preparation support through JVEN, and post-placement support, where required).

In some instances, JVEN has been the platform for genuinely new initiatives (e.g. Orygen's first post-pilot venture into the field of employment support for young people with mental health problems, a service with no other provider) or specialist services for under-served populations (e.g. VICSEG's employment program for refugees). In other instances (possibly the majority), however, services may have been available in principle and as stand-alone services elsewhere. The strength of JVEN has been to facilitate their integration or their collaborative alignment with employment services thus creating new synergies in service delivery.

JVEN services have addressed gaps in Commonwealth services to a varying extent. By linking up in partnership arrangements/consortia, several of our case study providers have been able to offer a combination of job preparation (here we include language learning services), job search and job acquisition (e.g. interview skills, post-placement supports) services. Where consortium partners did not provide these services, providers have built networks with external providers to fill any service gaps (e.g. Mildura's Real People Real Jobs program JVEN 051).

It is important to note that Commonwealth services, notably *jobactive*, are, in principle, not prevented from building similar networks and thus providing similar depth and range of service. The reality however is that they typically do not because the financial arrangements/incentive structures that guide *jobactive* mitigate against it.

### **8g Medium term: how many JVEN participants sustained employment beyond 26 weeks?**

- Refer to VFM report

The JVEN Participant Survey has to date surveyed JVEN participants on three occasions to determine their employment status after participation in JVEN across three waves, it is estimated that, on average, 72 per cent of job seekers who had completed 26 weeks in JVEN facilitated employment and were still – or again – employed (Table A.9).

**Table A.9 Last recorded economic status of JVEN participants after 26-weeks employment (column %)**

Last recorded economic status	Completed 26 weeks in work	
	Status at First survey wave	Status at Latest survey wave
<b>Wave 1, weighted</b>		
<i>Employed</i>	51.7	53.3
<i>Looking for work</i>	24.8	21.8
<i>Inactive</i>	23.5	24.9
Number	46	46
<b>Wave 2, weighted</b>		
<i>Employed</i>	69.4	72.2
<i>Looking for work</i>	15.3	11.6
<i>Inactive</i>	15.3	16.1
Number	121	152
<b>Wave 3, weighted</b>		
<i>Employed</i>	72.0	21.5
<i>Looking for work</i>	14.3	27.6
<i>Inactive</i>	13.8	50.9
Number	149	22

Source: JVEN Participant Survey, various waves.

### 8h Medium term: to what extent was the employability of JVEN participants increased?

Data from the 2019 JVEN Provider Survey show that, besides placing job seekers in employment, JVEN providers also provided accredited training to facilitate access to employment. Between them, the 31 providers that responded to the survey had provided accredited training to 1,031 job seekers, in particular in construction and support service related activities (Table A.10). Training course durations varied from one or two days to 24 months.

**Table A.10 Most frequently mentioned accredited training qualifications offered**

Qualification	Providers offering (N)
Civil constructions/White Cards/Forklift Driving/Rail Industry Awareness	22
Individual/Age/Disability/Community/Early Childhood Support	15
Business/administration/bookkeeping/payroll	9
Meat Processing/Food handling	8
Agriculture/Horticulture/Land management	5
Engineering	2
Traffic management	1
Other	15

Note: Providers were asked to name up to five qualifications. Other included First Aid, Responsible Serving of Alcohol.

Source: 2019 JVEN Provider Survey (Respondents N=31).

The total number of job seekers who have benefited from JVEN facilitated training is likely to be higher since the 2019 JVEN Provider Survey collected data from respondents for only up to five training qualifications, and some providers might have offered additional courses. Also not included in this count are the training activities of providers that did not respond to the survey and providers' referrals to external training providers.

Overall, the data is indicative of the additional 'employability capital' that JVEN job seekers have received through the program.

Employers in our case studies also remarked that effective JVEN providers had managed to improve the match of job seekers to the requirements of the business or specific vacancies. This had typically been achieved through intensive job preparation, including motivational testing, and job induction, which employers rated particularly highly.

In interviews, JVEN job seekers also noted that even work placements that did not result in a 26-week completion had helped them become clearer in their own mind as to the type of work they would like to undertake. This clarity had given them greater confidence in pursuing job offers, which, in turn, should help employers recruit the rightly motivated, thus more job ready and *employable*, person for their vacancies.

**8i Medium term: to what extent was the confidence of employers to recruit through Victorian Government employment programs increased?**

Case study interviews with employers typically generated positive feedback, although several employers also expressed disappointment (see KEQ6c).

Reviewing GEMS data on employers of case study providers found several instances of repeat business, which may be indicative of growing confidence in Jobs Victoria as an alternative employment service provider to conventional (private market) sources that employers had previously used.

**8j Medium term: to what extent has evidence of JVEN’s effectiveness informed other employment support services?**

We understand that the Commonwealth Government had been briefed about JVEN and it undertook site visits as it prepared the New Employment Services under *jobactive*.

**8k Long term: to what extent is JVEN likely to have contributed to higher rates of employment for JVEN participants?**

As noted under KEQ8g, it is estimated that about 72 per cent of former JVEN participants who had completed an employment placement were still or again in employment after leaving the program. About half of these (former) job seekers had been unemployed for at least one year before signing up to the JVEN program. Only about five per cent of those with 26 weeks in JVEN facilitated employment had *not* been unemployed at the time of their JVEN registration; a further sixth (14 per cent) had been unemployed for less than 3 months. Although we do not know what would have happened to these individuals in the absence of JVEN (the ‘counterfactual’), the statistics suggests that JVEN has helped job seekers to find and sustain employment, and has thus increased employment rates amongst former participants.

**Table A.11 JVEN participants’ employment status prior to JVEN registration, JVEN participants working in a paid job after leaving JVEN (per cent)**

	Not unemployed/ unemployed less than 1 week	less than 3 months	3 months to less than 6 months	6 months to less than 1 year	1 year to less than 2 years	2 years or more
All JVEN participants	6.4	12.0	9.5	20.9	18.4	32.8
JVEN participants completing 26 week in employment	4.5	13.6	9.1	23.6	19.1	30.2

Source: JVEN Participant Survey, Waves 1 to 3.

**8l Long term: to what extent is JVEN likely to have contributed to increased economic and social inclusion of participants?**

**8m Long term: to what extent is JVEN likely to have contributed to meeting Victoria’s workforce needs?**

**8n Long term: to what extent is JVEN likely to have informed future models of Commonwealth employment programs?**

It is too early to make a firm judgement regarding this KEQ. Long term outcomes are not expected to become apparent until at least four years into the lifetime of JVEN (cp. JVEN Outcomes Logic Model). As we continue to follow up on former JVEN participants, updating information on their current labour market status, through the JVEN Participant Survey, more and better information as to the economic inclusion of participants should become available in the next 12 or so months and will be captured in future reports

From employer interviews it is, however, apparent that JVEN providers have been able to assist major (construction) projects in Victoria to meet their workforce requirement by providing access to suitably prepared job seekers within a short time.

- See also 11a for some preliminary assessment

**8o To what extent can changes be attributed to JVEN (crosscutting for Questions 9a-n)**

Attribution is challenging given the multiplicity of factors that can and do affect economic growth in Victoria and the economic and social wellbeing of job seekers in the state. Moreover, in the absence of a control group or counterfactual to JVEN participation, the net impacts of this program cannot be quantified. Qualitative evidence (from case studies and associated interviews) nonetheless suggests that JVEN has provided a practice model that has proven its capacity to deliver results and, equally importantly, is being supported by providers as innovative and effective.

## 8p What unintended outcomes were produced?

SACES were only told about one notable unintended consequence, namely the entry or return of some job seekers to (further) education rather than employment as they were weighing career options and, typically, the value of vocational education and training. Although unintended (by the program) and depriving affected JVEN providers of recordable outcomes (and associated payments), from the JVEN participants' perspective choosing this option may nonetheless be rewarding in the short, medium or long term.

## Effectiveness

### 9. To what extent is the design of the JVEN enabling the program to achieve its outcomes?

#### 9a What components of JVEN's design are distinctive when compared to other employment support services programs?

Distinctive features of the JVEN program include:

- population and area targeting
- reverse tendering process that draws on applicants' local knowledge and self-assessed capacity and resource needs for developing service approach
- JVEN provider flexibility and autonomy to adopt and implement support services as deemed most effective in order to achieve contracted outcomes
- multiplicity of activities and strategies.

These are all components that JVEN providers, many of whom are experienced employment or disability employment service providers, described as particular strength of JVEN.

#### 9b To what extent has the design of JVEN enabled the program to achieve its outcomes?

In case studies and the 2019 JVEN Provider Survey, JVEN providers identified a number of program characteristics that, in their view, greatly facilitated their ability of achieve 26-week employment outcomes.

The **voluntary** nature of the program was one of the key factors, as it reduces the risk (and number) of job seekers registering with the program because they were required to do so, typically by *jobactive*, but lacked motivation for seeking and retaining employment. Supporting instead more cooperative and motivated job seekers allowed providers to get the most out of the range of tools and services available through JVEN's **flexible, provider-driven** service arrangement. This flexibility had been achieved through JVEN's **reverse tender process** approach, which provided greater scope for projects to root activities in local knowledge and expertise, and to test new and innovative approaches.

Other design features to which providers attributed their capacity to deliver outcomes were:

- the provision of tailored supports, especially intensive one on one support
- a comparatively small caseload (especially compared with *jobactive*)
- the absence of strict time limits on service provision to job seekers and an "affordability to be able to 'work' with job seekers and to then be able to deliver post placement support"
- a good program reputation brought about by an effective communication strategy that raised awareness in communities and amongst business about the program, resulting in:
  - a good rapport with employers and relationships of trust within their communities- highly appreciated (mostly), effective linkages with Jobs Victoria and the Department (DJPR).

#### 9c To what extent has the design of JVEN hindered the achievement of its outcomes?

The JVEN case studies have helped to identify a number of obstacles that providers encountered in implementing their projects successfully. Some of the obstacles were specifically JVEN-related insofar as some providers were struggling to meet their contractually agreed outcomes, because:

- job seekers registering with them were not able to meet the minimum 15 hours working week eligibility condition (e.g. for health reasons, or preference for combining work with study)
- job seekers were not able to meet the 26-week employment outcome condition, despite getting close, marking a "huge achievement for the participants"
- employment opportunities or the structure of program delivery (i.e. block training arrangement) did not allow job seekers to meet the 26-in-30 week employment outcome condition after leaving an initial placement
- job seekers (or their employers) failed to provide proof of continued employment

- providers could not offer employers incentives to take on trainees, apprentices or entry level job seekers, which, they felt, would have increased placement opportunities.

In other instances, providers had:

- over-estimated their capacity to register job-ready candidates (supply challenge)
- over-estimated their capacity to address/overcome pre-employment challenges speedily (service challenge), and/or
- they encountered competition from alternative (Commonwealth) programs.

## 10. To what extent are participants being reached as intended?

### 10a To what extent does JVEN's participant profile align with the program's targeted job seekers?

- Refer to VFM report

A review of JVEN project applications shows that the projects' target populations align well with those identified in the JVEN guidelines.

**Table A.12 JVEN job seeker demographics, registrations, placements and outcomes (at 7 August 2019)**

	Registrations	Placements	Outcomes	Placements as per cent of registrations	Outcomes as per cent of placements	Outcomes as per cent of registrations
Aboriginal	1,271	693	421	54.5	60.8	33.1
Asylum Seeker	1,437	456	246	31.7	53.9	17.1
Culturally Diverse	8,180	3,297	1,886	40.3	57.2	23.1
Ex-offender	2,150	775	295	36.0	38.1	13.7
Homeless	670	230	110	34.3	47.8	16.4
Low Income	12,372	4,731	2,438	38.2	51.5	19.7
Mature Aged 50+	2,397	924	538	38.5	58.2	22.4
Other Retrenched Workers	32	20	9	62.5	45.0	28.1
Person with a disability	1,218	394	203	32.3	51.5	16.7
Person with a mental illness	2,281	817	382	35.8	46.8	16.7
Refugees	2,153	858	459	39.9	53.5	21.3
Retrenched	519	244	159	47.0	65.2	30.6
Single Parent	1,892	611	317	32.3	51.9	16.8
Social Housing Resident	1,372	405	187	29.5	46.2	13.6
Unemployed 6-12 months	5,105	2,179	1,172	42.7	53.8	23.0
Unemployed more than 12 months	8,066	2,739	1,391	34.0	50.8	17.2
Veteran or veterans immediate family	55	22	13	40.0	59.1	23.6
Young people aged 15-24	5,914	2,510	1,210	42.4	48.2	20.5
Young people in out of home care	163	68	31	41.7	45.6	19.0
Youth Justice Client	694	227	66	32.7	29.1	9.5
Interim Total	58,217	22,241	11,537	38.2	51.9	19.8
Male	10,704	4,548	2,364	42.5	52.0	22.1
Female	8,142	3,091	1,805	38.0	58.4	22.2
Other/unknown gender	57	10	6	17.5	60.0	10.5
Total	77,120	29,890	15,712	38.8	52.6	20.4
Total (single count)	18,903	7,649	4,175	40.5	54.6	22.1

Note: Outcomes includes cases with Outcome Status recorded on GEMS as approved, awaiting approval or ready to claim. Job seeker demographics count in each category used to describe a job seeker (i.e. these are multiple counts).

Source: GEMS (own calculations).

**10b To what extent are different services models better able to meet the needs of JVEN participants?**

- Refer to the Value for Money report

Based on our case studies, we can identify three distinct service models:

- life-first – which emphasises pre-employment supports to help job seekers address and overcome personal barriers to work and inclusion (e.g. health, housing) in preparation for readying him or her for work;
- jobs-first – which emphasises job placement over addressing personal barriers – or as a basis from which personal barriers may be addressed; and
- co-design – which collaborate with employers to train job seekers for specific vacancies.

Table A.13 illustrates in which of the three service models the 10 case study providers fall.

**Table A.13 Categorising JVEN Providers (case study evidence)**

Opportunity Account	Life-first	Jobs-first	Co-design
McAuley	x		
Wodonga Institute of TAFE		x	
CVGT Broadmeadows Second Chance		x	
Mildura Rural City Council	x		
VICSEG New Futures		x	
Qualify Future		x	
East Gippsland Food Cluster		x	
Westgate Community Initiatives Group (WCIG)		x	
Orygen Youth Health	x		
Social Ventures Australia			x

Source: Review and Evaluation case studies.

## Features, strengths and weaknesses of service models

### ***Life-first model (helping job seekers address non-work barriers prior to placement)***

Providers that adopted the life-first approach differed with respect to their roles in their locality: as third sector providers (McAuley JVEN 015, Orygen JVEN 039) or local government bodies (Mildura JVEN 051) taking on a coordinating role. The former have a more specialist/targeted client groups than the latter, which is likely to have affected their ability to meet contracted outcomes.

The providers also differed with regard to employer/industry connections, although not necessarily along the third sector versus local government line. Where the welfare model is applied to defined groups (McAuley, Orygen) experiencing elevated levels of disadvantage, engaging employers can be difficult (as they prefer to and can recruit from potentially, from their perspective, less 'risky' populations). This makes these providers more dependent on employers who are empathetic to the added challenges that job seekers face and may bring to the workplace. A different type of provider-employer communication is thus required: one based on a more personal approach, appealing to social and corporate responsibility.

Organisations with a history of prior employer contact (e.g. as RTOs or DES) are in a better position than others to combine life-first approaches with employment services. This is notably because they know the labour market and employers who may be open to accepting vulnerable employees in their workplaces. Others have to invest in identifying these employers before they can start placements.

The provider with a broader, more mixed client group (Mildura JVEN 051) may be less dependent on identifying and working with employers with social concern. However, it still has to make the connections, which, in our case study example, was facilitated by the presence of a network (and directory) of local employers and industry ready to participate.

### ***Jobs-first model (fitting job seekers to vacancies)***

This category of providers also includes sub-models. The clearest distinction is between those that purposely stream job seekers based on their job readiness and then develop tailored supports for them (East Gippsland Food Cluster JVEN 118), and others that either do not stream or do not tailor services, although they may refer job seekers to community services or partner organisations providing these (e.g. WCIG JVEN 010).

In contrast to the welfare model, jobs-first approaches expect job seekers to demonstrate their readiness/willingness *not* to make their personal challenges affect their capacity to perform at the workplace.

The employment model does not rule out life coaching supports, even in the absence of a streaming process, but emphasises vocational education and training, and generic work preparation over addressing barriers to personal welfare (e.g. CVGT Broadmeadows Second Chance JVEN 044, VICSEG New Futures JVEN 055).

Employment centric approaches have resulted in, or built on, positive relationships with employers that see benefit in utilising the service to trial a workforce before hiring (Wodonga Institute of TAFE JVEN 043), in fact, some have started out with a firm industry commitment based on strategic need (e.g. East Gippsland Food Cluster). These approaches are also more likely than life-first or co-design approaches to engage labour hire companies, typically to manage the numerically larger and faster throughput of job seekers, with the added advantage of getting more information about the labour market (e.g. Quality Futures JVEN 057, East Gippsland Food Cluster). Providers with a larger pool of job seekers can also place more of them (as long as there is employer demand) because they are more likely to find good job seeker-to-employer matches (e.g. Westgate Community Initiatives Group).

A jobs-first approach can also involve employers in job readiness training or induction (e.g. VICSEG New Futures), blurring the lines between jobs-first and co-design.

### ***Co-design model (customised training program for specific vacancies with direct employer involvement)***

Only one of the case study projects used a ‘pure’ co-design model with the guidance and in the presence of employers. This model was eventually abandoned and a more conventional job placement (jobs-first) model adopted in its place.

Case study interviews showed that employers above all appreciated the hands-on support that JVEN offered them, for instance, by taking on/over recruitment, especially candidate pre-selection, and job induction. Co-design is different and, indeed, does very much the opposite. By involving employers directly in the co-design process, it adds to employers’ time and resource commitment rather than reducing it. Our interviews with employers involved in co-design projects found that commitment expected of them can become an obstacle to continued involvement and has, in fact, resulted in employers withdrawing from the process. Continued commitment would require successful matching of job seekers to the identified vacancies. In this case study, capacity to do so was undermined by the provider (Social Ventures Australia JVEN 073) attracting less well motivated and less job ready candidates following the introduction of a competing Commonwealth program, Youth Jobs PaTH.

## **Our Assessment**

To summarise, based on the case study evidence, it appears that the co-design model does not correspond well with what employers tell us they like most about JVEN, namely direct assistance with (and taking on the task of) recruitment, job preparation, job induction, obtained ‘White Cards’ and other essentials for working with the employer. This does not make the co-design model redundant, but it means it is more reliant on having ‘champions’ in businesses to engage them – and on producing results for those employers as well as for JVEN.

Jobs-first models thrive in (i) expanding labour markets (high demand for low skilled labour that can be trained up quickly, preferably by JVEN, (e.g. WCIG)), (ii) labour markets with chronic labour shortage where employers sign up to support the program (e.g. EGFC), and (iii) smaller local labour markets with poor employment service infrastructures and networks (that JVEN has helped to construct, e.g. Wodonga).

Life-first models typically have a more ‘focused’ client group that is also facing typically higher socio-economic barriers (at least in our case studies). They are more reliant on, or more likely to be effective if they manage to build on, personalized relationships with (empathetic) employers. Placements may take longer to achieve, although streaming clients may accelerate the process for those most job ready. Life-first approaches benefit from providers’ capacity to build on past experience as, for instance, DES provider.

## Impact

### 11. What are the key results of JVEN?

#### 11a How has JVEN made a difference for disadvantaged Victorians?

JVEN participation has contributed to increased employment rates among program participants (cp. KEQ8k).

In interviews, (former) participants primarily pointed to the economic benefits they had gained from employment through and following the JVEN program. For some, this also had positive effects on the family (partners and children) because of the extra income earned. In other instances, JVEN participants explained the program had helped them gain a better understanding of the type of employment (and in some instances, career) they may wish to pursue.

From a broader societal perspective, JVEN projects have helped to ‘divert’ participants from engaging in anti-social, deviant or personally damaging activities, although the extent to which this has been the case cannot currently be determined.

In the 2019 JVEN Provider Survey, respondents identified the following ways in which JVEN participants benefitted from the program in addition to gaining employment:

JVEN Participants were offered

- “connections to other services, awareness of other assistance available, connections to community, increase of employability skills and self-confidence, whole of person transformation”
- “hope that someone can help them to find a job”
- opportunities for “getting [...] involved in the community”
- help to get their “life back on track”
- support in gaining a more positive outlook on life as a result of building trust through respect
- inspiration to realise ambitions and take on new challenges, such as return to education, voluntary work
- help to manage and reduce mental and physical ill health
- support to improve parenting skills.

#### 11b Which demographics are benefiting most from the program, in what circumstances and why?

People on low income, from CALD communities, long term (12 or more months) and medium term (6-12) unemployed, and young people aged 15 to 24 years have been the largest groups of JVEN participants (see Table A.12). They have also been amongst those most likely to achieve a 26-week outcome.

At the other end of the spectrum, several populations’ outcome rates are below the overall average (20 per cent of registrants), especially youth justice clients (see also more detailed depiction in KEQ10a). Populations with low outcome rates may be more likely to experience high social barriers in addition to the skills related and experiential barriers to work that most job seekers share.

The voluntary nature of the JVEN program has meant that it has attracted a large number (and share) of motivated job seekers, as confirmed by providers and employers alike. Some CALD communities, the short or medium-term unemployed and Aboriginal people are known to share this motivation for work, which most likely facilitated their successful participation in the JVEN program.

- See also Table A.11

#### 11c To what extent have participants who achieved successful employment outcomes experienced greater economic and social inclusion?

- See 11a