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Disability Employment Services Advice to Providers Christmas Closures 2020-2021

The Department of Social Services (DSS) will close for business from 12.30 pm local time on Thursday 24 December 2020 and will re-open at 8.30 am on Monday 4 January 2021.

This is the Department Shutdown Period. Additional details regarding arrangements during this time are provided at **Attachment A**.

Disability Employment Services (DES) Providers may elect to close for the Department Shutdown Period, without the need to seek approval, by notifying the Department. All Providers are required to be open for business from Monday 4 January 2021.



Planned closure period	Providers must:
<p>Proclaimed national public holidays:</p> <p>25 December 2020 – Christmas Day</p> <p>28 December 2020 – Boxing Day</p> <p>1 January 2021 – New Year’s Day</p>	<p>Ensure no diary sessions or appointments are scheduled on public holidays.</p> <p>Ensure no calendar appointments are available for booking on public holidays in ESSWeb</p> <p>Ensure no previously scheduled appointments fall on public holidays and, if they do, immediately reschedule those appointments in ESSWeb and notify affected Participants.</p>
<p>Department Shutdown Period:</p> <p>Between 12.30pm on Thursday 24 December 2020 and 8.30am on Monday 4 January 2021.</p>	<p>Providers can choose to open sites over the shutdown period (with the exception of public holidays) but need to notify the Department.</p> <p>Please email DESagreements@dss.gov.au with intent to open sites, by 11 December 2020.</p> <p>If Providers choose to close sites they must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure no diary sessions or appointments are scheduled for the closure period.• Notify their stakeholders (including Participants and key employers) of the closure by 11 December 2020.• Display a sign at sites indicating the planned open and closure period.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Notifying Stakeholders

For closures outside of the proclaimed national public holidays, Providers must notify their stakeholders by **Friday 11 December 2020**. This advice must include:

- the Site(s) which are closing and the relevant dates and times; and
- details of the alternative servicing arrangements in place during the closure period; for example, a strategy to manage Participant enquiries regarding vacancies and activities on Australian JobSearch during the period of closure.

Diary Sessions and Appointments


Providers are responsible for:

- ensuring no diary timeslots are available for booking on closure days;
- ensuring no Appointments are booked during the period a Site is closed;
- immediately rescheduling all Appointments which have been booked during periods of closure, and notifying Participants;
- finalising any outstanding compliance action in the lead up to the extended holiday break; and
- ensuring that, immediately following the closure period, the electronic diary has time slots available to receive an Appointment for a Participant within **two** business days to conduct Initial Interviews, Re-engagement Appointments or a Contact following a Change of Circumstances Reassessment. These Appointments must be made available immediately following the Provider's closure period.

Compliance requirements

Participants whose Job Plan think time ends between 21 December 2020 and 3 January 2021 will automatically have their think time extended to expire on Monday, 4 January 2021. If they fail to agree to their Job Plan by this date, their payment will be suspended until they meet a reengagement requirement.

Participants with Job Search Periods (JSP) ending between 21 December 2020 and 3 January 2021 will not have their payments suspended, as job search efforts for job search periods ending during shutdown period will be pro-rated to nil. This is to ensure that Participants are not disadvantaged over this period by not having access to their provider to drop off manual job search efforts. Where a Participant has completed their job search requirement to a satisfactory quality prior to 24 December 2020 or the first day a provider's site will be closed, due to the departmental shutdown period, providers must record this assessment on the Job Search Reporting page.



When non-compliance with mutual obligation requirements is reported in ESSWeb, the Participant must contact their provider within two business days to discuss the non-compliance, to avoid their payment being put on hold. If the Participant makes contact within the two business days, the provider either records a Valid Reason in ESSWeb or sets a Reengagement Requirement for the Participant to meet.

Participants with compulsory participation requirements must also have an opportunity to re-engage within two business days.

Providers must consider the appropriateness of reporting non-compliance leading up to the holiday break, considering the likelihood and ability to make contact with the Participant, and to book a Re-engagement Appointment within two business days prior to the shutdown period. Participants must not incur payment suspensions when they were unable to reengage due to provider shutdown.

If a provider becomes aware that a Participant has committed a Work Refusal or Unemployment Failure any time between 21 December 2020 and 3 January 2021, they are advised not to submit the failure report to Services Australia until the first business day of 2021. Providers have up to 10 days after becoming aware of the non-compliance to report a Work Refusal Failure and up to 20 days after becoming aware to report an Unemployment Failure.


Any non-compliance with mutual obligation requirements reported between 21 and 24 December 2020 that is waiting for the Participant to make contact will be auto-finalised by the department to lift any payment suspensions. Providers should also review and finalise all outstanding Non-Attendance Reports beyond the provider's control for participants with compulsory participation requirements.

If a Capability Interview is required due to a Participant's non-compliance but cannot be delivered due to the shutdown period, the provider should record 'Reengagement Not Required' and book another Capability Interview as an appointment to occur within business days.

Capability Assessments will continue to be conducted by Services Australia over the departmental shutdown period except during the Services Australia closure period (25-29 December 2020 and 1 January 2021).

Rescheduling Re-engagement Appointments

Any Reengagement Requirements scheduled to occur between 21 and 24 December 2020 will automatically be set to 'No Longer Required' in ESSWeb by the department to prevent any payment suspensions that may occur over the departmental shutdown period. If a Reengagement Requirement has been booked prior to the provider's closure period and the Participant contacts the provider needing to reschedule the requirement and has an Acceptable Reason, the provider should record 'Compliance Action No Longer Appropriate' on the provider reengagement page in ESSWeb. This will remove the requirement to reengage and restore the Participant's income support payment if it is on hold. Providers are encouraged to book a contact appointment from 4 January 2021 to reengage the Participant. ESSWeb does not allow a Reengagement



Requirement to be rescheduled for more than seven days in advance of the date of booking. Therefore, unless the provider is going to be open during the closure period, the Reengagement Requirement cannot be booked.

Re-opening after the Closure

On re-opening, Providers should contact Participants by phone and confirm details of these Appointments to promote positive attendance.

DES Star Ratings

Given that the Department will be unavailable to process special claims during the Department Shutdown Period, the calculation of December 2020 DES Star Ratings will include claims with a status of approved or pending for:

- automated claims which are lodged up to and including 8 January 2021; and
- all special claims for which their associated overrides have been approved by the Department up to and including 8 January 2021.

This arrangement should ensure that all DES Providers have an equal opportunity to lodge Star Rating outcome related claims for inclusion in the December 2020 Star Rating calculations. These are the claims to be included, unless otherwise stated by the department via a news item on the DES Provider Portal.

DES Outcome Fees

Under the provisions of the Disability Employment Services Grant Agreement 2018 - 2023, **for DES Participants:**

- Where an Employer closes their premises over the Christmas-New Year period, this may be treated as a Permissible Break in a Participant's employment in accordance with the 'Outcome Guidelines'. DES Providers will not need to provide evidence of industry/business closure where a Participant has a break or reduces the hours of employment during this period. The Christmas-New Year closure period of the last working day before Christmas to the first working day after New Year's Day (24 December 2020 to 4 January 2021) does not require evidence from the Provider. Where a Provider closes their business beyond these dates normal Documentary Evidence requirements for Permissible Breaks apply.
- Where a Participant does not return to the same Employer after the Christmas-New Year period, the 'Permissible Break' and 'Voluntary Change in Employment' information set out in the Outcome Guidelines details how the Participant may still satisfy Outcome requirements.



- **Further information**

Additional information in relation to the Department's administrative arrangements over the Department Shutdown Period is at **Attachment A**.

Providers should contact their Relationship Manager, Lead Funding Arrangement Manager or Funding Arrangement Manager for any further advice.

Administrative arrangements over the Department Shutdown Period

Service	Arrangement	Further Details
National, State and Regional offices	All Department of Social Services (DSS) offices will be closed during the Department Shutdown Period from 12.30 pm on Thursday 24 December 2020 until 8.30 am on Monday 4 January 2021 .	Relationship Managers, Lead Funding Arrangement Managers and Funding Arrangement Managers will not be available during the Department Shutdown Period.
Services Australia	Services Australia has developed a comprehensive communication strategy to ensure that customers have information on the reporting and payment dates over the shutdown period.	Information is available on Services Australia's website Public holiday reporting and payment dates .
Employment Services System (ESS Web) and Australian JobSearch (AJS)	All Employment Systems applications will be available throughout the Department Shutdown Period including national public holidays and weekends.	Employment Systems Service Desk and Problem Management will not be available during the departmental shutdown period. Emails, Helpdesk Online queries and Overrides Helpdesk will not be actioned during that period.
jobactive Website	The <i>jobactive</i> website will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week as per the normal Hours of Operation of the website.	Updates to the jobactive website will not be conducted during the departmental shutdown period. Problem Management teams will not be available during the departmental shutdown period. Services will recommence when the department reopens on Monday, 4 January 2021.
Departmental notices to stakeholders	The Departmental notice to stakeholders will be displayed	This notice will alert stakeholders that some Providers may change their

Service	Arrangement	Further Details
	from mid-December at the following locations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESS Web Bulletins • Provider Portal 	operating arrangements over the Christmas-New Year period and advise stakeholders to check with their Provider about these arrangements.
Claim period and payments for Providers	The last payment run for 2020 will be processed on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wednesday 23 December 2020 – these funds will appear in recipients' accounts from Thursday 24 December 2020. Normal pay runs will resume on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monday 4 January 2021. 	Providers should note that payments entered into the system by COB 22 December 2020 with a claim due date prior to 5 January 2021 will be processed in the final payment run for 2020. Requests for payments sent after close of business on 22 December 2020 will be included in the first payment run for 2021.
Employment Systems Service Desk	The Employment Systems Service Desk will be closed during the departmental shutdown period.	EA Knowledgebase will be available but no emails or overrides will be actioned until Monday 4 January 2021 .
Question Manager	Questions will not be processed during the Department Shutdown Period.	Providers may still lodge questions during the Department Shutdown Period; however the 10 day Service Level Agreement (SLA) will exclude the Department Shutdown Period.
Employment Services Reporting (ESR)	Reports will be updated and available as per usual.	ESR Production Support will not be available during the Department Shutdown Period.

<p>Employment Services Information Line (13 62 68)</p> <p>National Customer Service Line (1800 805 260)</p> <p>Employer Hotline (13 17 15)</p>	<p>The NCSL will provide limited support during this period for those requiring urgent attention.</p> <p>Emails can still be sent to the NCSL at nationalcustomerservice@desec.gov.au.</p>	<p>Responses can be expected after services recommence on Monday, 4 January 2021.</p>
<p>JobAccess - Complaints Referral and Resolution Service (CRRS) and the National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline (the Hotline)</p>	<p>CRRS and the Hotline will be closed on Friday 25 December 2020 and reopen on Tuesday 29 December 2020 through to Thursday 31 December 2020. Normal hours of operation will resume Monday 4 January 2021.</p>	<p>Hours of Operation will be:</p> <p>Monday – Friday: 9.00 am – 7.00 pm AEDST.</p> <p>Saturday – Sunday: Closed.</p> <p>Public Holidays: Closed.</p>
<p>SMS</p>	<p>SMS facilities will be available during the Department Shutdown Period.</p>	<p>Availability is however, subject to DHS and Providers' operating hours and Site closures.</p>