

# Audit Reports Summaries

## Audit Report No. 3 1995-96

### Summary

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## Department of Employment, Education and Training

### CES CASE MANAGEMENT

### Performance Audit

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#### Background

This audit reviewed the efficiency and administrative effectiveness of case management in the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) to identify good practices and any areas in need of improvement.

Case management is a direct client service for people with barriers to employment. It is planned, goal oriented, client centred and relies on one-to-one contact between the client and his/her case manager to identify individual needs and coordinate access to relevant services. The goal is to get the client into paid employment and thus reduce dependence on government assistance.

Case management was introduced under DEET's Newstart Strategy in 1991 and later enhanced as part of a major initiative under the Government's White Paper, Working Nation. At the time of the introduction and enhancement of case management the Department was also undergoing significant structural change which impacted heavily on the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) which was directly responsible for the delivery of case management.

From January 1995 Employment Assistance Australia (EAA) assumed responsibility for delivery of DEET's case management services based on the Employment Services Act. The ANAO considers the findings and recommendations of this audit are also relevant to case management under EAA and private providers where similar processes are involved.

#### Audit findings

The audit included fieldwork in DEET National Office, Area Offices and CES centres. The sites visited covered approximately sixty per cent of the unemployed population. As well, the ANAO conducted a personal survey to gain a client perspective of the delivery of case management services as defined by the Department.

The implementation of case management has, in an overall sense, been well managed particularly given the constraints involved. The ANAO found that there were a number of areas which required attention in order to deliver case management in an even more effective and efficient manner. These include:

- setting indicators which provide a valid measure of case management effectiveness;

- providing case managers with appropriate guidance on minimum standards of service expected for the different target groups;
- providing adequate guidance to staff on how best to achieve the Department's targets while also providing equitable and effective levels of assistance to particular target groups;
- putting in place administrative arrangements to ensure case managers adopt appropriate strategies in order to achieve case management targets;
- provide staff with appropriate training; and
- implement a quality assurance program which the ANAO considers will enable the Department to detect and remedy many problems detailed in the report in a more timely manner.

## **Client survey**

The results of the client survey supported the audit findings. It found that client satisfaction was high for such issues as:

- the type and length of contact with the CES and their case manager; and
- client awareness of their responsibilities under their case management agreement with DEET.

However, the survey results also indicate some problems with the delivery of case management to the client. Major findings from the survey include:

- thirty-nine per cent of clients did not recognise that they had a plan of action to redress the barriers preventing them from gaining employment. This plan of action is a key element of case management;
- twenty-nine per cent of clients indicated they had never been asked for feedback about the usefulness of the tasks in the plan in finding them employment;
- forty-three per cent of clients responded that their motivation to find employment had not altered after case management commenced; and
- there were some differences between clients' perceptions of the extent and quality of case management according to their age, particularly the over-50 year age group.

## **Recommendations**

The ANAO has made seventeen recommendations aimed at improving the efficiency and administrative effectiveness of case management and at improving service delivery to the client. From 1995 the Department has been required to compete with private providers in the delivery of case management. The ANAO recommendations have been developed to assist the Department meeting this challenge.

## **Departmental response**

In relation to each specific recommendation the Department provided the following response in every case:

"This recommendation reflects the Department's operating policies and arrangements."

The Department also had concerns relating to the timing and value of the audit.

## **ANAO comment**

Because case management was evolving, the ANAO considered early identification of best practice and areas in need of improvement would greatly assist this evolutionary process.

The ANAO recommendations are based on evidence which shows that adequate procedures were either not in place or were not operating effectively. The ANAO notes that the Department has indicated that action has been taken to address many of the issues identified in the audit. The ANAO observes that, as in many of its audits, developments were not unrelated to the audit involvement, the information provided and issues raised.