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IMPORTANT NEWSFLASH - The Work Programme

Submitted by amielouisewilliams on Thu, 10/06/2010 - 11:39am

A Ministerial Statement regarding the future of welfare to work contracting has been released today. All affected providers are being written to and are promised one to one discussions to discuss what this means for them.

Key information is that:

- The Work Programme will be introduced nationally by Summer 2011
- The vehicle for bringing the Work Programme into being and handling all work-focussed services (and related commissioning) will be a new framework of preferred providers.
- This framework, "The Work Programme Framework", will be used not only for the Work Programme but for "other future Welfare to Work requirements" and will be accessible by other public service commissioners who may wish to commission work-focussed services.
- Selection on to the framework will be based on a provider's ability and capacity to deliver job focussed services over the lifetime of the framework
- The framework competition will commence at the end of June 2010, identifying framework providers by November and placing contracts in the first half of 2011.
- There will be an event in July for providers interested in the framework
- All current competitions are superseded. There will be no fND2, Invest to Save, Personalised Employment Programme or Community Task Force
- fND1 providers are being given immediate twelve months notice of the end of fND1 contracts
- The intention is to achieve maximum continuity of service and to minimise disruption
- All fND1 providers are encouraged to bid in to the framework for a managed move on to the Work Programme
- There is no decision yet on Work Choice but the statement gives a commitment to "supporting severely disabled people"
- No decision has yet been made about how Work for your Benefit will fit within the Work Programme
- Current New Deal, Pathways and EZ contracts will be extended in fND2 areas then will roll in to the Work Programme.

The Ministerial statement closes by signalling the significant new opportunities for contractors from the private and voluntary sector within the Work Programme to deliver "truly flexible and personalised support", the importance of building of appropriate delivery partnerships and the crucial role of the voluntary sector in tackling worklessness.

Further details about the design and implementation will follow.

Martin Dunford (Chair of the Association of Learning Providers and CE of Skills Training UK - an fND1 prime provider) gave the following comment:

"The new Government has not said or done anything that it did not say in Opposition and since it came to power. The possible surprise to some will be the termination of fND1 contracts but if one considers that there may be changes in geographical areas one can understand why they would want to open up a competition on a new geographical basis. They have made it clear they value the high performing parts of the infrastructure, and that is good. However, if too many variables are changed at the same time and we get a different result from the experiment it will be unclear what variant effected the change: longer periods of sustained employment; a new financial structure or different geographies - to name a few.

In terms of investment decisions, people, if they don't already, will regard all 5 year or longer contracts as really only as long as the termination clause in the contracts, as with 12 months termination within fND1 contracts. It is also worth noting that by the time the Work Programme starts there will only be a maximum three and a half years left of the Government's term to run.

There are many good things about the Work Programme and that, combined with a high regard by the Government for the industry infrastructure, one hopes bodes well for the future."

Rob Murdoch, Chair of the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) welcomed the further clarity given today by the Government on how existing welfare to work schemes will be replaced by the single Work Programme saying:

"This is a significant step, and will help employment services providers to help many more thousands of long term unemployed people get off benefits and into work. Introducing the Work Programme next year allows adequate time to put the new scheme in place and manage the transition. ERSA will continue to engage positively with Government to ensure that this transition is managed smoothly and to achieve the greatest possible value from a single scheme.

We encourage the Government to create maximum flexibility, by allowing other Whitehall departments and local authorities to pool their budgets with DWP spending and deliver services through the single Work Programme.

In honouring the 12 month notice period that ERSA negotiated as part of Flexible New Deal, we welcome the Government's recognition that, should contracts be terminated, a full year's notice is necessary to ensure a smooth transition and stability within the sector, in the best interests of jobseekers and long term value to the taxpayer."