MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

6 August 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 8 July 2025, requesting information about dress code and interview classification at work seminars.

I have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Please find my decision on each part of your request set out separately below.

I have also included some general information about obligation failures at the end of this letter, for your further information.

Question 1 - Is there any written MSD policy, procedure, or guideline that states clients are required to wear formal clothing (e.g. dress shirt, trousers, or formal shoes) when attending seminars such as Kapa Mahi?

There is no written Ministry policy or guidelines that state clients are required to wear formal clothing. Accordingly, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) of the Act, as the documents you have requested do not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate them, cannot be found.

However, clients with work obligations are required to be available for, and taking reasonable steps to obtain, suitable employment. Dressing appropriately for a seminar, especially one that may include meeting with potential employers, could be considered a reasonable step to obtain suitable employment.

In order for a client to meet this obligation, MSD would need to set clear expectations with a client about the required dress standard in advance of a seminar, and the client would need to be reasonably able to meet that standard i.e., they must have suitable clothing to wear.

If they do not own suitable clothing, this is something a client could apply for assistance with. It is important to note that different employers will have different expectations about dress standards, so one standard approach would not be suitable.

Question 2 - Are employer meet-and-greets, workplace tours, or similar "employer exposure" events conducted as part of these seminars considered "formal job interviews arranged by MSD" under Section 144(1)(c) of the Social Security Act 2018?

Employer meet-and-greets, workplace tours, or similar employer exposure events at seminars may be considered as attending and participating in an interview for any opportunity of suitable employment to which the beneficiary is referred by

MSD, if they include an aspect of an interview for a suitable employment opportunity.

Section 146 (c) of the Social Security Act 2018 (SSA) requires clients to report to MSD (or a person on behalf of MSD) on the person's compliance with the work-test obligations set out in this section or sections 144 and 147, and must do so as often as, and in the manner that, MSD reasonably requires.

Section 146 (d) of the SSA requires clients to participate or undertake any of the following activities specified by MSD that MSD considers suitable for improving the person's work-readiness or prospects for employment:

- a work assessment:
- a programme or seminar to increase particular skills or enhance motivation:
- a work-experience or work-exploration activity:
- employment-related training:
- any other activity (including rehabilitation) other than medical treatment, recognised voluntary work, or activity in the community:

If a client has been specifically asked to meet a dress standard for the purpose of any employment seminar and is reasonably able to do so, but chooses not to, MSD may consider they have failed their obligations without a good and sufficient reason and impose an obligation failure. This would apply across all seminars or work assessments as per the legislation.

I have also included publicly available links around Jobseeker Support obligations and qualifications below:

- https://workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/jobseeker-support/obligations.html
- https://workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/jobseeker-support/work-obligations-01.html
- https://workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/jobseeker-support/qualifications.html
- https://workandincome.govt.nz/map/income-support/main-benefits/jobseeker-support/job-search-requirements-01.html

I will be publishing this decision letter, with your personal details deleted, on the Ministry's website in due course. If you wish to discuss this response with us, please feel free to contact OIA_Requests@msd.govt.nz.

If you are not satisfied with my decision on your request, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or 0800 802 602.

Ngā mihi nui

pp.

Anna Graham
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services