



11 August 2025

Tēnā koe

Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 21 May 2025, requesting information about Start Your Own Business Support Programmes, including failure and retention analysis.

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 below.

You requested:

1. Start Your Own Business Support Programs Participation

*a. For the past five years, please provide data on individuals who have been **accepted into government-funded start your own business support programs**, including high-growth start-up accelerators and grants.*

b. Please include disaggregated data (where available) by:

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Educational background (e.g. completed tertiary education or not)
- Employment history (e.g. previous work in corporate sector, long-term unemployment, etc.)
- Income level or benefit dependency at the time of application

Please find the data you have requested for Questions 1a and 1b, attached as an Appendix with four tables.

- **Appendix A: The number of approved contracts and amount for Start Your Own Business Support Programmes during the period 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2025.**
- **Table 1: The number of approved contracts and amount for Start Your Own Business Support Programmes during the period 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2025, by year, gender.**
- **Table 2: The number of approved contracts and amount for Start Your Own Business Support Programmes during the period 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2025, by year, age.**

- **Table 3: The number of approved contracts and amount for Start Your Own Business Support Programmes during the period 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2025, by year, benefit group.**
- **Table 4: The number of approved contracts and amount for Start Your Own Business Support Programmes during the period 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2025, by year, ethnicity.**

Please note your bullet point requests for this data by educational background and employment history is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as substantial manual collation would be required to collate this information. If held, this information would only be contained within individual client files, which would each require manual review to respond to your request. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

*c. Please also provide equivalent demographic and socioeconomic data for those who **applied but were not accepted** into such programs.*

Your request under Question 1c for all information is very broad, and substantial manual collation would be required to locate and prepare all documents within scope of your request. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry) would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

d. Please detail:

- *Which businesses have been funded under these programs*
- *The criteria for funding selection*
- *The amount of funding provided to each recipient*
- *Measures of success and/or failure for participants, and any analysis on why participants may not succeed*

The appendix provides details of funding, as detailed in the four tables. Information to address the remaining parts of this request is as follows.

Business Training and Advice Grant

The Business Training and Advice Grant (BTAG) assists clients who are investigating or entering self-employment by paying for:

- business skills training
- the development of a business plan
- business advice before and during the start-up period of their business
- independent vetting report and
- mid-project financial report

BTAG should assist the client to:

- make an informed decision about whether it is viable for them to become self-employed and/or
- improve their ability to administer and manage the development or ongoing activity of a business.

BTAG is provided for under Clause 8(a) (*Assistance to enter self-employment, Costs preparatory to entering self-employment and to obtain business advice and certain reports*) of the Employment and Work Readiness Assistance Programme (EWRAP) Schedule:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/legislation/welfare-programmes/employment-and-work-readiness-assistance-programme/schedule.html.

To be eligible for BTAG, clients must meet the criteria for EWRAP. The list of qualifications can be found on our website here:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/employment-and-training/employment-and-work-readiness-assistance/qualifications.html.

The part of your question, *Which businesses have been funded under these*, is very broad, and substantial manual collation would be required to locate and prepare all documents within scope of your request. As such, I refuse your request under section 18(f) of the Act. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

The part requesting: *The amount of funding provided to each recipient*, is refused in full under section 9(2)(a) of the Act to protect the privacy of natural persons. The need to protect the privacy of these individuals outweighs any public interest in this information.

The part requesting: *Measures of success and/or failure for participants, and any analysis on why participants may not succeed* is addressed below with copies of the evaluation reports.

Flexi-wage self-employment

Flexi-Wage Self-Employment (FWSE) is a wage subsidy to help clients overcome financial barriers associated with moving into self-employment. It is expected that the client will in time be able to fully support themselves from their business.

Client eligibility

To qualify for FWSE, a client must meet the following client eligibility criteria:

- be aged 18 years or older and not qualified to get New Zealand Superannuation in their own right,
- meet the Flexi-wage residency criteria, found on our website here:
 - www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/employment-and-training/specific-employment-related-assistance/flexi-wage-subsidy/residence-01.html
- not be insolvent (currently declared bankrupt or subject to any other insolvency procedures),

- be unemployed,
- be at risk of long-term benefit receipt, and
- be disadvantaged in the labour market.

Employment eligibility

To qualify for FWSE the employment must be:

- permanent (i.e., on-going), and
- 30 hours or more per week for people with full-time work obligations, or
- 15 hours or more per week for people with part-time work obligations or a deferral from work obligations (if they can work 15 hours or more). They must be able to fully support themselves from their business without a main benefit.

The hours requirement also applies to clients not getting a main benefit. The work obligations are based on what their obligations would be if they were getting a main benefit.

Business eligibility

To qualify for FWSE the business must:

- be based and operating in New Zealand,
- be viable,
- not be an inappropriate business or an unsuitable industry (e.g., the Ministry generally doesn't use FWSE to support a person into a Taxi company, the real estate industry, commission sales and Non-profit organisations),
- not be a business previously operated by the client, and
- not be a business currently operated by the client (except in specific circumstances).

Self-employment start up

Self-employment start up is provided for under Clause 8(b) (*Assistance to enter self-employment, Business start-up costs*) of the Schedule of the EWRAP.

Information on Self-employment start up is available on our website here:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/employment-and-training/employment-and-work-readiness-assistance/assistance-to-enter-self-employment-01.html.

To be eligible for Self-employment start-up, clients must meet the criteria for EWRAP. The list of qualifications can be found on our website here:

www.workandincome.govt.nz/map/employment-and-training/employment-and-work-readiness-assistance/qualifications.html.

A client must also be disadvantaged in the local labour market.

Your requests for equivalent demographic and socioeconomic data for those who applied but were not accepted into such programmes, and for the businesses funded under these programmes are refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as substantial manual collation would be required to locate and prepare all documents within scope of your request. The greater public interest is in the effective and efficient administration of the public service.

I have considered whether the Ministry would be able to respond to your request given extra time, or the ability to charge for the information requested. I have

concluded that, in either case, the Ministry's ability to undertake its work would still be prejudiced.

e. Does MSD currently employ a blended or mixed-mode learning and engagement strategy (e.g. combining online modules, in-person sessions, mentoring, or peer support) to assist clients who are starting or intend to start a small business while receiving MSD support?

The Ministry tailors the support it provides based on the individual needs of each client. To assist clients, staff will talk with them about their business idea. This is accompanied by discussions regarding their circumstances and needs this helps us to understand what type of help we may be able to offer.

We'll ask to see their business plan and provide further guidance around the next steps of the process, if a client doesn't already have one, we help them to find out how to create one. We can also tell clients how a BTAG might be able to help.

Should the application proceed to the next step, we then send their business plan to be independently assessed to make sure the business is potentially viable. We use BTAG to fund business mentoring/guidance. The nature of that support depends on the provider who was contracted to supply it.

f. If such a strategy or programme exists, please provide:

- *An outline or description of the strategy, model, or programme in use*
- *Any evaluation reports or internal reviews assessing its effectiveness*
- *Information about how the strategy supports diverse demographic groups (e.g. Māori, Pacific Peoples, disabled people, young people, former refugees)*

g. Please provide any existing internal analysis, reports, or evaluations outlining: reasons for participant failure, drop-off, or inability to progress; common barriers to success identified across demographics; post-program follow-up or retention statistics

A client must also be disadvantaged in the local labour market and planning to take up or already be receiving FWSE and/or Self-employment Start up.

Being eligible for assistance under the EWRAP is not the same as being entitled to this assistance. Before deciding to grant any form of EWRA, the Ministry must assess and identify the client's needs. For every client the Ministry refers, it must show that EWRAP is appropriate.

To address your requests under 1f and 1g, please find two links below to reports published on our website evaluating FWSE:

- The effectiveness of the Flexi-wage Self-employment programme, August 2024: <https://msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/evaluation/flexi-wage-expansion/effectiveness-of-flexi-wage-self-employment-impact-evaluation.pdf>.
- Evaluation of the Flexi-Wage Expansion Product, November 2023: www.msd.govt.nz/documents/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/evaluation/flexi-wage-expansion/evaluation-of-the-flexi-wage-self-employment-product.pdf

To address the part of your request for *how the strategy supports diverse demographic groups (e.g. Māori, Pacific Peoples, disabled people, young people, former refugees)*, you'll see that while this report notes participant's ethnicity and gender, it evaluates the effectiveness of the programme by aggregation of data from all participants.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a horizontal line.

Anna Graham
General Manager
Ministerial and Executive Services