

Activating States: transforming the delivery of 'welfare to work' services in Australia, the UK and the Netherlands

Australian Report back to Industry Partners, December 2008

Professor Mark Considine
Assoc. Professor Jenny Lewis
Dr Siobhan O'Sullivan

The School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Melbourne

Executive Summary

The study provides a unique opportunity to view the Australian employment services industry in comparative perspective. This first report details the results of the Australian survey of 2008, based on responses from 1,512 people engaged in employment service provision. Later reports will look at Australia compared to the UK and to the Netherlands. A further report will examine the changes in the industry since the original survey was undertaken some ten years ago.¹

These results are provided to participating agencies on a confidential basis and should not be used for other than internal purposes without the permission of the authors.

The headline findings in this report include some important characteristics of the Australian workforce in employment services. Almost all the frontline staff work fulltime (9.6% part-time), are female (74%) and about half have been in their current job for less than a year. Approximately half the workforce is found in organizations with operations across Australia and the majority offer only employment services (51.3%). The work itself is learned on the job through informal methods (57.6%). The vast majority of the work is managed through computer-assisted scripts and records with 73% saying they are logged-on while doing their job. The average caseload is 109.55 clients and on average these staff see 11.62 job seekers per day. More than half work in an office which offers a bonus or incentive system. About 35% say they are not satisfied with their present conditions of work.

While most report using answers to standard assessment questions in determining the approach to take with clients, they also report taking the job seeker's preferences into account and also the state of the local labour market.

The greatest levels of daily contact with people other than job seekers is with employers (40% reporting daily contact) and other parts of their own organisation (38.4% reporting daily contact). The lowest levels of contact are with other employment agencies, welfare agencies and local service clubs and media (0.7% and 1.0%).

¹ See: Considine, M. (2001), *Enterprising States: The Public Management of Welfare-to-work*, Cambridge University Press.

Less than 3% of their time is spent working with other service providers and almost 30% is spent on contract compliance work. Many are also relatively positive about this compliance work with 48.3% saying it is “fair enough”, although another 45.8% regard it as excessive. A majority (68.4%) say that their agency seeks to give the best service to the most capable job seekers.

In relation to how staff do their work, this survey indicates a number of factors influence this, including numerical targets and the need to shift job seekers off benefits, but also by gaining the trust of job seekers. Successful outcomes were seen to result from a team effort, and the lines of authority within their agencies were regarded as very clear.

In future reports we will explore the differences between the way case managers and consultants work and the changes over time. The detailed report below gives further information about these and other interesting characteristics.

Acknowledgments

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We would like to express our sincere thanks to all the Australian employment services providers, and their staff, for participating in this research. We are especially grateful to the contact staff in each agency, and to all frontline employment services staff who took time out of their busy days to complete the survey.

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Introduction

The frontline delivery of welfare-to-work services for the unemployed has changed significantly over the past ten years in response to structural and ideological pressures. Using benchmark data collected ten years ago, the Activating States project aims to analyse whether and how the activation of welfare clients has changed these services. This analysis will provide a means to assess the components of the new target and market-driven systems in Australia, UK and the Netherlands and to compare different tools for managing both clients and frontline staff.

This report represents the successful completion of the first stage of the Activating States project. Contained in this report are the results from an Australian survey of frontline employment services staff, conducted in July 2008. The report's method section describes how the 2008 questionnaire was adapted from a survey of frontline employment services staff first conducted in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands from 1996 to 1999. The adaptation process involved a mix of site visits to employment services providers, discussions with industry professionals, and extensive consultation with project partners. The survey was carried out online, and the methods section details the scope of the sample, which involved 1,512 frontline employment professionals from 33 Australian employment services agencies.

The Findings section of the report is broken into discrete subsections which describe different aspects of the Australian employment sector. Those descriptions are augmented by 23 tables and figures. The first part of the report's Findings offers an overview of the distribution of jobs performed by client-facing staff in the Australian employment industry. It also shows how long staff remain in the one job, their age, gender, education levels and work patterns.

The subsection entitled *Employment Sector Agencies* shows the geographical spread of the industry, typical office size, the extent to which the sector operates globally, and the type of training provided to frontline employment services staff. The next section, *Working with Job Seekers*, explores issues such as how difficult it is to place job seekers into work, the types of benefits Australian job seekers commonly receive, and frontline staff's perceptions of how willing job seekers are to get off benefits.

That discussion leads into a more detailed section on *Working as an Employment Services Professional*, which examines caseloads, the speed with which job seekers are placed in employment, how frontline staff make decisions about how to work with clients, and which external agencies frontline staff engage with while working to make their clients job-ready. This section also shows how long staff spend on various tasks, how they learn about employment opportunities, and the types of interaction that typically takes place between the government and service providers. Finally, that section shows how frontline staff ranked their priorities, and the extent to which survey respondents feel they are able to influence their work environment.

In the section titled *Sanctioning Powers*, the report illustrates how often frontline staff typically evoke their sanctioning power, and the circumstance surrounding the issuing of Performance Reports. That section is followed by *Factors Influencing Employment Services Agencies and how Staff do their Job*, which is concerned with the views held by frontline employment services staff on issues as diverse as the effectiveness of the Australian employment system, the functionality of the IT interface system AE3000, the priority agencies place on achieving a speedy outcome, the flexibility of the service offered job seekers, and level of commitment frontline staff feel towards the agency they work for. Finally, in the last Findings section, *Perceptions of the Employment System*, Table XVII is presented. That table contains answers to 31 questions concerning how client-facing employment services staff conceptualise their job, the sector, their agency, and job seekers.

Method

Survey Adaptation

The survey instrument that formed the bases of the *Activating States* research project was adapted from a study conducted during 1996-1999.² The 2008 version of the survey was constructed as follows. First, Dr. Siobhan O’Sullivan undertook fieldwork at various employment services offices. Both urban and regional offices were visited and she observed employment services staff working with job seekers. She also spoke to, and observed, a range of other employment services staff including trainers, reverse marketers and compliance officers. While onsite the language used in, and the themes of, the earlier survey was compared to the current situation. Where the terminology used in the original survey was found to have been superseded, appropriate changes were made. During the visits O’Sullivan also spoke to frontline employment services staff about the work they do, and how they perceive the Australian employment system. Some additional questions were added to the survey as a result of those informal dialogues.

Second, a paper based pilot study of the questionnaire was conducted. Ten frontline employment services staff were asked to complete the questionnaire. As they did so they provided immediate feedback and commentary. Some additional changes were made to the language and structure of the survey as a result of the paper-based pilot, and participants were given a movie gift-certificate.

Stage three of the survey update took the form of a meeting between the research team and the project’s industry partners, Sally Sinclair from NESAs and David Thompson from JA. The industry partners requested some minor alterations to the survey, reflecting changes to the employment sector since the earlier study, and those changes were incorporated.

The next phase of the adaptation process was a consultation with the Dutch research team, led by A/Prof. Els Sol from the University of Amsterdam. The Dutch team negotiated changes to some questions, as well as the inclusion of additional questions, with the objective of making the Australian and Dutch surveys as comparable as possible.

Finally, the survey was piloted as an online instrument. Members of the international research team, industry partners, and the industry partners’ employees, were invited to trial the survey online. Some final changes were made to the survey as a result of feedback received during the online piloting phase.

² Findings from this study are available in: Considine, M. (2001), *Enterprising States: The Public Management of Welfare-to-work*, Cambridge University Press, Considine, M. and Lewis, J. M., (1999), ‘Governance at Ground Level: The frontline Bureaucrat in the Age of Markets and Networks’, *Public Administration Review*, 59 (6), 467-480; Considine, M. and Lewis J. M. (2003), ‘Enterprise Governance: The Frontline Bureaucrat in Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the United Kingdom’, *Public Administration Review*, 63 (2), 131-140; and Considine, M and Lewis, J. M. (2003), ‘Networks and Interactivity: Making Sense of Frontline Governance in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Australia’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 10(1), 46-58.

The Survey Instrument

The survey was comprised of 98 questions. Not all questions appeared for all respondents, although most respondents were asked most questions. The questions were predominantly closed, while a small number of questions invited respondents to provide expanded answers.

The research team estimated it would take between 20 and 30 minutes for respondents to complete the survey. Participation was encouraged by the use of three incentive prizes: one \$500.00 gift certificate, and two \$100.00 gift certificates. The prize draw information and the survey responses were kept in two separate data files.

The survey was open to all participating agencies for a period of four weeks, from Tuesday July 1, 2008. Five agencies started between one and two weeks later than other participants, but late commencing agencies also had a four week response period.

The Survey Online

Once the survey instrument was finalised it was sent to the contracted survey company converted the questionnaire into an online survey.

The online survey was programmed so respondents had to read and acknowledge a plain English statement describing the research, and read and respond to the first two questions (designed to screen out unsuitable respondents) before they could enter the body of the survey. After that, respondents were able to progress through the survey even if they did not answer all the questions. However, respondents were advised at the start of the survey that only those who answered all the questions were eligible to enter the prize draw.

Survey question 48 required respondents to have Flash on their computer. A message appeared at the start of the survey alerting respondents to this requirement. Flash was used to make the survey more interactive. Despite the warning, some survey respondents appeared to encounter problems at question 48, most likely because their computer did not have the correct software.

Information on which agencies are not-for-profit and which are for-profit agency was provided to the programmers. Each participating employment services agency was given its own unique pathway into the survey. Thirty-four pathways were issued. One agency inadvertently used the pathway assigned to their sister company. Survey participants were not prohibited from entering the survey more than once. This was done primarily because the provision of a single pathway per-agency was considered more practical than the alternative which was to issue a unique pathway to each potential respondent, would have made administration of the survey considerably more taxing. The research team further took the view that due to the length of the survey it was unlikely anyone would complete the survey more than once. The survey was not populated, which means that if someone left the survey and returned at a later time they did not return to where they had left off, but rather they re-entered the survey at the start. Multiple responses from a single participant, where they could be identified with certainty, were removed from the final data file during the file cleaning process.

Participation Parameters

The survey was designed to be completed by frontline employment services staff working under a Job Network contract. Frontline staff were defined as employment services providers working directly with job seekers to either assist the jobseeker find work, help the jobseeker become job-ready, or help the client retain employment after finding a job. The second and third questions at the beginning of the survey were designed to screen out ineligible participants.

Participant Recruitment

The Australian employment sector was mapped and a matrix that differentiated Australian employment services providers according to the following criterion was created: for-profit/not-for-profit; large, small or medium size; urban, regional or remote operators; by state or territory. Once the Australian employment sector had been mapped, the research team, working in conjunction with their industry partners, identified suitable employment agencies to invite as participants in the survey. The agency sample was selected to ensure responses reflect the overall structure of the Australian employment sector.

Once a representative sample of agencies had been chosen by the project team each agency was approached. In most cases contact was made initially by e-mail or phone but follow-up face-to-face meetings with a representative from most participating agencies were also held.

Participant Profile

Twenty-six not-for-profit agencies participated in the survey. Of them, 25 agencies made all their frontline staff available to participate. One agency randomly selected 100 frontline staff to complete the survey. The not-for-profit sector provided 2,471 potential survey respondents.

Seven for-profit agencies participated in the research. Six of those agencies made all their frontline staff available to complete the survey. One for-profit agency invited six of its sites to participate in the research. The for-profit sector provided 931 potential survey respondents. This distribution roughly reflects the Australia employment sector where around one third of the sector operates on a for-profit bases, and two thirds on a not-for-profit basis. Two of the for-profit agencies that were approached declined to participate, while a small number of not-for-profit agencies did not respond to e-mails or telephone calls inviting them to be part of the project. Unwilling or non-responsive agencies were not pursued further. In total, 33 agencies participated in the survey. The total pool of potential respondents was 3,402.

Participating agencies were provided with written information about the survey. That information included a one page form which agencies were asked to complete and return. The form asked the agency to nominate a contact person and to provide contact details for that person. The form also asked how many sites the agency runs and how many eligible (to complete the survey) frontline staff they employ. In the case of the two agencies that gave only limited access to their staff, the staffing question was modified so it reported how many staff would be invited to complete the survey.

Receipt of the completed form was taken as confirmation of an agency’s willingness to participate in the project.

Cleaning the Data File

Once the file cleaning was complete, 1,512 usable survey responses remained.³ That represents a 44% survey response rate. An overview of the sample is shown in Table I.

Table I Sample Overview

	Number	Percentage
Not-for-profit participating agencies	26	78.79
For-profit participating agencies	7	21.21
Total participating agencies	33	
Potential not-for-profit respondents	2,471	72.64
Potential for-profit respondents	931	27.37
Total potential respondents	3,402	
Actual not-for-profit participants ⁴	1,056	69.8
Actual for-profit participants	392	25.9
Agency type unknown ⁵	64	4.2
Total actual participants	1,512	44.44

³ As part of the survey cleaning process 286 duplicate or incomplete cases were removed from the data file.

⁴ The actual number of participants was calculated once the data file had been cleaned.

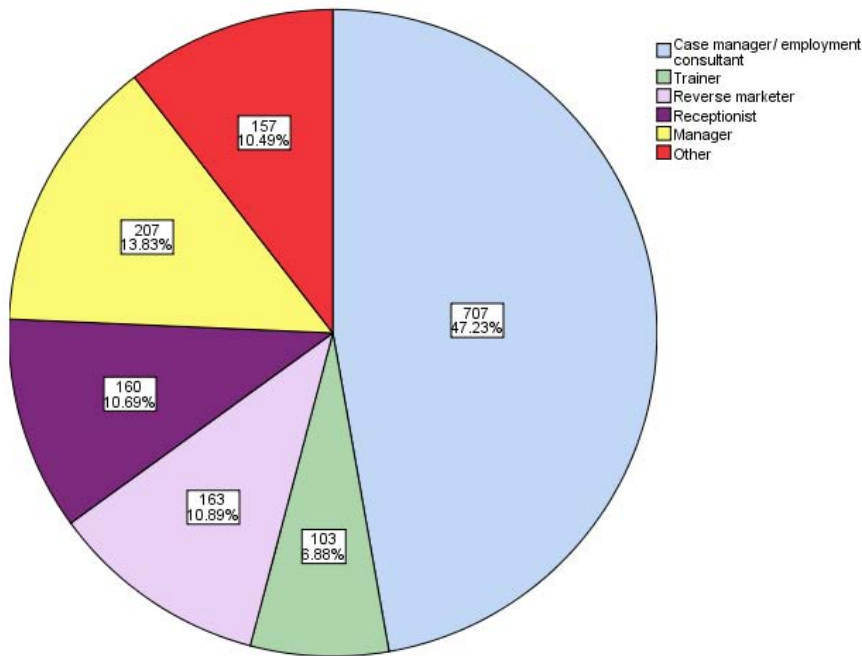
⁵ In a small number of cases the survey pathway became corrupted. In those cases it is not possible to tell which agency the respondent came from.

Findings

The Employment Sector Workforce

Survey participants were asked to indicate what job they perform as an employment services professional. As shown in Figure I, 47.3% of respondents work as case managers or employment consultants. That represents almost half of the positions held by frontline staff. Of the other staff, the most common positions, in descending order, are: managers (13.9%), reverse marketers (10.9%), receptionists (10.7%), and trainers (6.9%). One hundred and fifty seven respondents reported that their position description was not one of the choices provided in the questionnaire. Those who selected 'other' were asked what their job is. A range of responses were provided, including community work coordinators, marketers, contract compliance officers, post-placement support officers, admin assistants and quality assurance officers.

Figure I Job Description



Almost all staff working in the employment sector work on a full-time bases, with only 9.6% indicating that they work part-time (see Table II). This is despite the sector being dominated by female frontline staff. At 73.8% in this survey, it seems that women deliver most frontline employment services in Australia. A relatively small proportion (18%) of those who completed the survey speak a language other than English at home.

The survey results suggest some level of job stability, with 54.2% of respondents indicating that they have worked with their current employer for between one and five years. However, only 31% of those surveyed had worked in the sector for more than five years, while only 16.6% said they had

worked for their current agency in excess of five years. Only 15.6% had worked for a government owned employment agency, and less than 7% of respondents are members of a trade union (see Table II).

The employment sector continues to make strong use of information technology, although computers are not used by frontline staff universally while working with job seekers. While 73.8% of respondents reported always being logged on and accessing their computer while interviewing job seekers, almost 10% said they are either sometimes or never logged on while working with clients (see Table II).

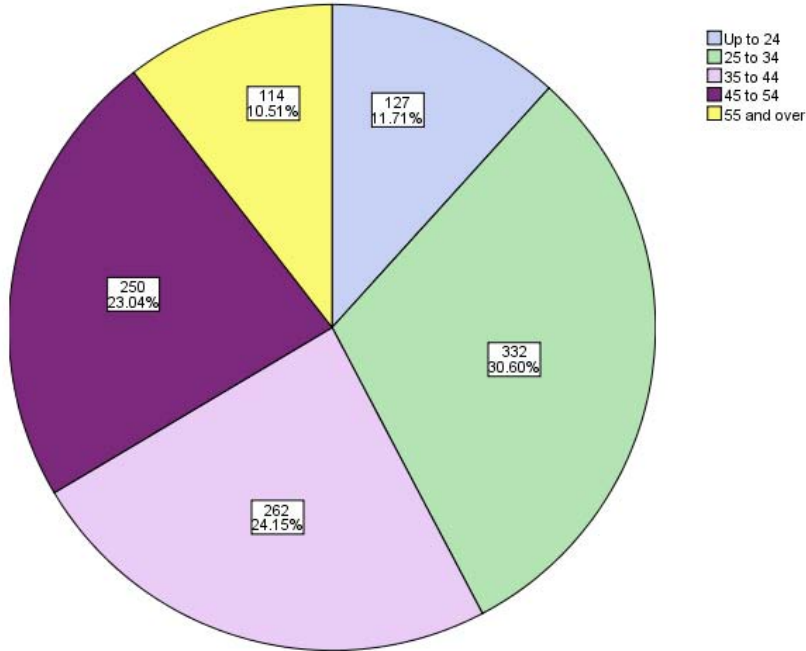
Table II Employee Profile

Full-time/part-time work	Number	Percentage
Work full-time	1350	90.4
Work part-time	144	9.6
Gender		
Female	801	73.8
Male	285	26.2
A language other than English spoken at home		
Yes	195	18.0
No	890	82.0
Years worked in the employment sector		
Less than 1 year	189	17.4
1 – 5 years	562	51.7
More than 5 years	337	31.0
Years worked for current employer		
Less than 1 year	317	29.1
1 – 5 years	590	54.2
More than 5 years	181	16.6
Employees who have worked for a government owned employment agency		
Yes	170	15.6
No	917	84.4
Employees who are members of a union		
Yes	74	6.8
No	1012	93.2
Computer use		
<i>Always</i> logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	863	73.8
<i>Most of the time</i> logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	197	16.9
<i>Sometimes</i> logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	81	6.9
<i>Never</i> logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	28	2.4

The largest proportion of Australian employment professionals who completed the questionnaire were aged between 25 and 34 years (31%). The next biggest group was those in the 35 to 44 age

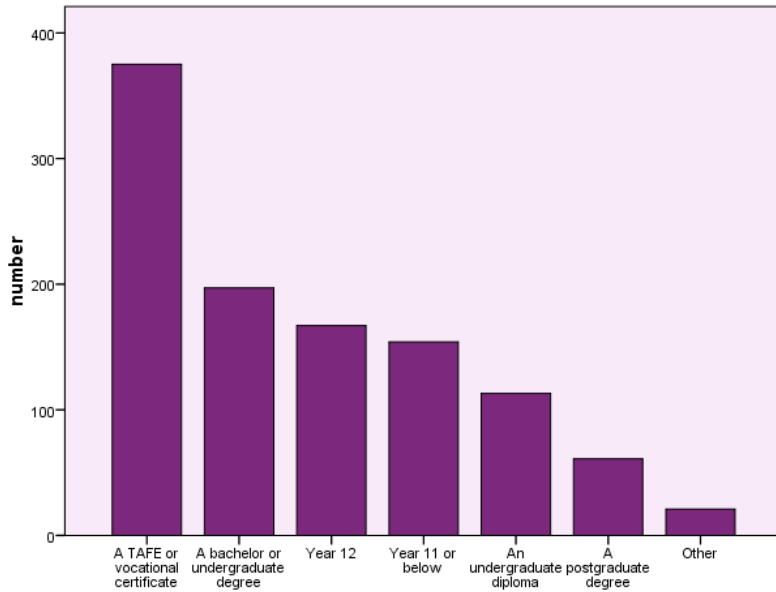
bracket (24%), closely followed by employees aged between 45 and 54 (23%). Those aged under 24 years and those aged over 55 years were the two smallest age groups (see Figure II).

Figure II Age groups



The survey also asked frontline employment services staff to indicate their highest level of education. As shown in Figure III, the largest group was those with a TAFE qualification or vocational certificate. The next largest group was those with an undergraduate university degree, followed in descending order by those who completed year 12, those who completed year 11 or below, and staff with diplomas. The smallest two groups were those who reported having a postgraduate degree (61 respondents) and those who classified themselves as ‘other’ (21 respondents).

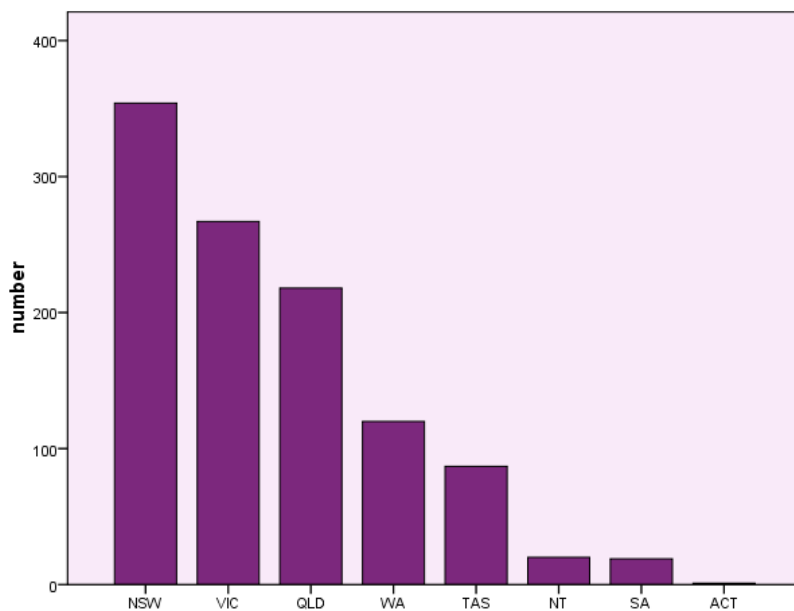
Figure III Highest education level



Employment Sector Agencies

Most respondents work in an office in NSW (32.6%), followed by Victoria at 24.6%, then Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory, South Australia and the ACT, in descending order, (see Figure IV)

Figure IV Agency location



Slightly more than half of our respondents work for agencies that have offices across Australia (51.3%). Table III shows that 38.8% work for agencies with offices in one state only, while 1.5% of respondents reported working for a single site agency. International agencies made up 3% of the sample. At the same time, there was not a great deal of difference between the number of respondents that work in metropolitan areas versus those that work in regional centres. Five hundred and forty people, or 49.8% of respondents, reported working in either a city or a metropolitan centre, compared to 488, or 45%, who said they are based in a regional centre. As expected, the smallest group were those who work in a remote location (5.3%). The average (mean) number of staff working in an office was 14.6, and the standard deviation indicates the huge variation in office sizes, (see Table III).

Survey participants were asked if their office provides special services to particular target groups. Most reported that they do not (53.2%). But when asked if they make services other than employment services available to various stakeholder groups, the response was largely positive with just over 64% of respondents reporting that their office makes additional services available to job seekers. In around one quarter of cases, special services are also delivered to employers (26.4%). For further information see Table III.

The majority of frontline staff in this survey reported that they received their job training informally from another member of staff (57.6%). A slightly smaller number of respondents (43.8%) were given formal in-house training. Some 16.5% of staff reported that they received their job training via a formal training course run by an outside trainer (see Table III), while 14% of those surveyed reported that they had received no training at all.

Table III Agency Profile

The agency has offices at	Number	Percentage
This site only	22	1.5
This state only	566	38.8
Nation-wide	749	51.3
International	44	3.0
Other	78	5.3
Location type		
City/metropolitan area	540	49.8
Regional centre	488	45.0
Remote location	57	5.3
Offices with special services for particular target groups		
Yes	673	46.8
No	765	53.2
Offices that offer any other services (apart from employment services) to the following stakeholders		
Job seekers	923	64.1
Employers	380	26.4
Other clients	295	20.5
Training prior to commencing work		
Formal training run in-house	626	43.8
Formal training run by an outside trainer	235	16.5
Informal training by colleagues	823	57.6
No training	200	14.0
Other	182	12.7
Number of staff in the office (n=1441)		
Including all types of staff	14.6	16.1

Working with Job seekers

Newstart payments were the most common type of benefit being received by job seekers, with survey respondents reporting that over half their clients (54.24%) receive that particular payment. That was followed by Parenting Support payments at 19.59% and Youth Allowance at 15.98%. The smallest proportion of job seekers were reported to be receiving the Disability Support Pension (3.88%), while 3.08% of clients are on another type of payment, and a slightly larger proportion on no payment at all (3.21%). For more information about the spread of payment types see Table IV. For our respondents, the largest group of clients are on Intensive Support (41.66%), while a similar number are receiving Intensive Support Customised Assistance (40.04%). The smallest group of job seekers are on Job Search Support.

The survey asked employment services professionals to estimate what proportion of their clients they perceive to have a mental health problem. The response was that on average around one quarter, or 25.60% of clients face a mental health challenge. Respondents were also asked their opinion concerning what proportion of their clients they believe would rather receive benefits than work to support themselves and their family. As shown in Table IV, the average response was that 40.95% of clients would rather be on benefits.

The issue of how difficult or easy job seekers are to place in work was explored via a question which asked respondents to indicate what proportion of their clientele are easier to place, what proportion are more difficult to place, and which sit somewhere in-between. The results are shown in Table IV. The responses tended towards the more difficult to place end of the spectrum, with 43.29% of job seekers, on average, being described as 'more difficult to place', and 21.47% being described as difficult to place. The combined percentage of the two difficult groups is 65.03%. Around 17% of job seekers were described as falling into each of the two easier to place categories.

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether the job seekers they work with are seeking work only, or are also participating in an activity. The results, which are contained in Table IV, show that the largest proportion of clients are looking for work, but not participating in an activity (39.31%). That group is followed by job seekers that are participating in an activity only (29.62%). The two smallest groups were those who are receiving support after being placed in a job or program (18.89%) and those that are neither participating in an activity nor looking for work (12.27%).

Job seekers may be monitored more or less intensively depending on a number of variables, including whether they are a new job seeker, whether they are participating in an activity, or whether they have been placed in a job. To gauge monitoring levels in practice, survey participants were asked to show what proportion of their clients they follow either: closely, somewhat, a little, or not at all. The largest proportion of clients, at 60.01%, are followed closely. The next largest group of clients (21.30%) are followed somewhat. This is followed by clients that are monitored a little, on 11.15%, and finally job seekers that are not monitored at all (7.45%). Respondents were further asked to estimate what proportion of their clients do not meet their obligations as job seekers. The average response was that 35.85% of job seekers do not comply with their obligations (see Table IV).

Table IV Job Seeker Profile

Proportion of clients that are estimated to receive (n=1427)	Mean percentage	Standard deviation
Youth Allowance payments	15.98	11.44
Newstart payments	54.24	18.54
Parenting payments	19.59	11.55
Disability Support Pension	3.88	6.74
Another type of payment	3.08	9.19
No payment at all	3.21	8.54
Proportion of clients that are estimated to be on (n=1399)		
Job Search support	18.15	27.04
Intensive support	41.66	28.51
Intensive Support Customised Assistance	40.04	29.74
Proportion of clients perceived to have a mental health problem (n=1294)		
	25.60	21.97
Estimated percentage of job seekers not complying with their obligations		
Percentage (n=1140)	35.85	22.90
Percentage of job seekers that are followed (n=1121)		
Closely	60.01	31.94
Somewhat	21.30	20.47
A little	11.15	16.16
Not at all	7.45	19.39
Approximately what percentage of people who apply for benefits or an allowance do you think would rather be on benefits than work to support themselves and their families?		
Percentage (n=1101)	40.95	23.31
Proportion of job seekers that are easier to place versus more difficult to place (n=1220)		
1 (easier to place)	17.55	17.52
2	17.34	10.50
3	21.74	11.86
4 (more difficult to place)	43.29	24.49
Estimated number of job seekers that are (n=1175)		
Participating in an activity	29.62	23.22
Looking for employment but not participating in an activity	39.31	24.14
Receiving support after being placed in a job or program	18.89	17.53
Not participating in an activity and not looking for work	12.27	15.70

Working as an Employment Services Professional

On average, survey respondents reported having a caseload of 109.55 clients. However, that question also generated a large standard deviation of 111.34. Only survey participants that identified themselves as employment consultants were asked what their caseload is. This suggests that the wide variation in responses is a result of some respondents working in other capacities, for example, running training courses for small groups. The results therefore indicate that while the average employment consultation's caseload is just under 110 clients, some staff have a significantly larger case load, while some have a much smaller caseload. Results are contained in Table V. Wide variations also occurred in the question which asked employment consultants how many job seekers

they see in a day. The average response was 11.62 job seekers are seen daily. The standard deviation for that question was 14.69, indicating substantial variations in caseloads.

The survey asked how many job seekers had been placed into work in the last month, and in the last year. On average, 9.83 people had been placed into work in the last month. That was 13.92% of the respondents' caseload. At the same time, respondents reported having placed 99.75 people into work in the last year. That represents 35.31% of the respondents' overall caseload. The large standard deviation for these again indicates the large variation in caseload.

Over half of all respondents (59.1%) reported that they use a client classification checklist or tool to assist them in deciding how to work with job seekers, while another 25.5% said this was not applicable to their position (see Table V).

Table V Working with Job seekers

	Mean percentage	Standard deviation
Current caseload (n=612)	109.55	111.34
Number of job seekers seen on an average day (n=1388)	11.62	14.69
Estimated number of people placed in work in the last month		
People placed in work (n=844)	9.83	7.81
Percentage of caseload (n=763)	13.92	14.77
Estimated number of people placed in work in the last year		
People placed in work (n=578)	99.75	91.50
Percentage of caseload (n=514)	35.31	23.75
Use of a client classification Tool		
	Number	Value percentage
Used when deciding how to work with clients	746	59.1
Not used	189	15.0
Not applicable to the position	327	25.9

Employment services professionals make numerous decisions concerning the type of assistance an individual job seeker should receive. The questionnaire asked frontline staff to indicate how influential a range of factors are in determining the types of activities recommended for each job seeker. The results are shown in Table VI. Respondents indicated that the need to get a quick outcome (17.0%) and the need to substantiate a case for sanctioning someone (15.9%) were the two least influential factors in their decision making process. At the other end of the spectrum, labour market demands (31.5%) and the employment services professional's own judgement (26.3%) were the two most influential factors, while the availability of labour market program activities (25.5%) and access to funds for special assistance (21.5%) were also influential in a significant number of cases.

Table VI Influences when determining what activities are recommended for each job seeker

	Percentage			
	Not at all influential	Somewhat influential	Quite influential	Very influential
Answers to a standard set of assessment questions (n=1155)	7.8	40.0	34.2	18.0
Other assessment results (n=1150)	5.4	38.3	42.7	13.7
My own judgment (n=1156)	1.8	25.1	46.8	26.3
Job seeker's preference for activities (n=1156)	4.2	37.0	47.0	11.9
Labour market demand (n=1154)	3.1	22.4	43.0	31.5
Availability of labour market program vacancies (n=1155)	5.4	27.5	41.6	25.5
Access to funds for special assistance (n=1152)	7.3	31.8	39.4	21.5
Need to substantiate a case for sanctioning someone (n=1146)	15.9	40.3	31.4	12.4
Need to get an outcome quickly (n=1152)	17.0	39.3	26.9	16.8

Table VII shows regularly of contact between employment services frontline staff and various service providers, excluding contact associated with assisting a job seeker obtain a job interview. The results show that frontline staff are in regular contact with employers, with 40.1% of respondents indicating that they speak to employers on a daily basis. The lines of communication are also strong between different offices in the one organisation. Almost forty percent (38.4%) of staff said that they are in contact with another office in their organisation on a daily basis. At the other extreme, the results show that frontline staff do not have strong links with the media, local services clubs such as Rotary, or local government; 65.1% said they never contact the local media, 38.2% said they never contact local service clubs, and 33.9% said they never contact local government. The links between frontline staff and school, universities and welfare agencies are also reasonably weak, with 20% of respondents saying they never contact schools of universities and 13.9% saying they never contact a welfare provider.

Table VII Regularity of contact outside the office (excluding contact associated with assisting a job seeker obtain a job interview)

	Percentage					
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Less than quarterly	Never
Another office in this organisation (n=1173)	38.4	39.8	12.4	2.2	4.0	3.2
Officials from a government department (n=1158)	15.1	37.2	19.8	7.6	10.8	9.5
Local government (n=1149)	2.0	9.0	17.1	14.1	23.9	33.9
Welfare agencies (n=1152)	6.6	26.9	24.7	12.7	15.2	13.9
Employers (n=1161)	40.1	33.1	12.8	2.9	5.7	5.4
Training providers (n=1157)	18.0	48.4	20.4	5.4	3.9	3.9
Another employment agency (n=1161)	9.9	40.0	24.5	8.7	9.0	7.9
Local service clubs (n=1153)	0.7	5.0	18.0	17.3	20.8	38.2
Schools and universities (n=1157)	1.0	15.6	26.0	18.5	18.8	20.0
Local media (n=1157)	1.0	3.9	6.1	8.0	16.0	65.1

Table VIII provides information on the employment services workplace. Overwhelmingly, frontline employment services staff spend the largest proportion of their time in direct contact with job seekers (45.24%). The second biggest component of their time is spent on contract compliance to meet government reporting and administrative requirements (25.16%). The remainder of their time is distributed between working with employers (11.83%), working on other tasks (8.51%), at internal staff meetings (6.51%), and working with other service providers (2.75%). Respondents were also asked how many meetings or interviews they conduct with job seekers outside their office. The average response was 1.77 meetings per week are conducted elsewhere. As in other questions, the standard deviation for these are large, showing the enormous variation between what people on the frontline are spending their time on.

As shown in Table VIII, the two most popular sources of information about the local labour market is information from within the staff member's employment agency (84.8%), and the newspaper in hardcopy form (84.8%). The next most popular sources of labour market information, in descending order are: the staff member's own experience (71.9%), online sources such as seek.com (68.3%), direct contact with employers (67.5%), government departments (51.6%), another organisation (27.5%), and other sources (11.3%). Sixteen respondents said they do not have information about the local labour market. Frontline staff were invited to say where else they sourced their local labour market information from. Responses included: community contacts; from job seekers, both past and present; personal or community networks; and the news media more broadly.

The survey asked questions designed to learn more about the types of interaction that occurs between frontline employment services staff and the government. Just under 60% of respondents (59.7%) reported that they have never been asked to provide feedback to government decision makers on training courses, Work for the Dole, or other programs offered to job seekers in their area (see Table VIII). Survey respondents were also asked their opinion concerning the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' (DEEWR) evidence requirements. The results of that question were split with 48.3% of those surveyed stating that they feel that the amount of evidence required by DEEWR for each client is fair enough, while 45.8% said they think it is excessive. Less than one percent of those surveyed thought the amount of evidence required by DEEWR is inadequate (0.8%).

In relation to the IT system, the largest proportion of respondents (66.8%) feel it provides them with adequate information to do their job. Furthermore, just over half of all those who filled out the questionnaire work in an office that has an incentive scheme, (see Table VIII).

Table VIII The employment services workplace

Proportion of time per week spent (n=1189)	Mean	Standard Deviation
In direct contact with job seekers	45.24	23.90
Working with other service providers	2.75	3.96
Working with employers	11.83	17.01
On contract compliance to meet government reporting/administration requirements	25.16	19.35
On internal staff meeting	6.51	6.76
On other tasks	8.51	13.28
Number of weekly meetings with job seekers conducted outside the office (n=1143)		
Number of weekly meeting	1.77	6.12
Sources of information about the local labour market		
Number	Percentage	
From within the organisation	982	84.8
From government departments or organisations	598	51.6
Own experience	831	71.9
Newspapers (hard copy)	982	84.8
Direct contact with employers	782	67.5
From another organisation	318	27.5
From online sources such as seek.com	791	68.3
Other	131	11.3
No information about the local labour market	16	1.4
Regularity of feedback to government in the past six months		
Often	70	6.0
Several times	95	8.2
A few times	304	26.1
Never	694	59.7
The amount of evidence required by DEEWR for each client is		
Excessive	497	45.8
Fair enough	524	48.3
Inadequate	9	0.8
Not relevant to my job	40	3.7
Don't know	16	1.5
Is enough accurate information available via the IT system?		
Yes	723	66.8
No	342	31.6
I don't use the IT system	17	1.6
Does your office have a bonus or incentive scheme?		
Yes	582	54.0
No	495	46.0

Figures V and VI show the results of two questions which asked respondents to identify which of four statements best reflects the priorities in their office, and their own personal priorities. Figure V shows that most people thought that the priority in their office is meeting the targets set by management, closely followed by knowing the rules and official procedures. Far fewer people felt the priority in their office is competing successfully with other providers, or establishing and maintaining a strong set of contacts outside the office. When survey participants had to again choose

between the same four statements, but consider the response from their own personal perspective, the results were slightly different. Figure VI shows that most people's priority is knowing the rules and office procedures. That is followed by meeting the targets set by management. Then there is again a big drop, with equal numbers of people seeing their own personal priority as having good contacts outside their agency, and competing with other employment service providers.

Figure V Office priorities

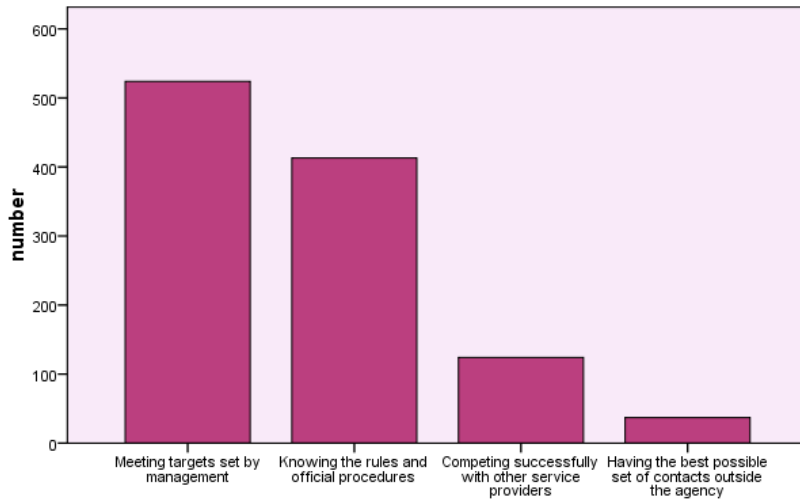


Figure VI Personal priorities

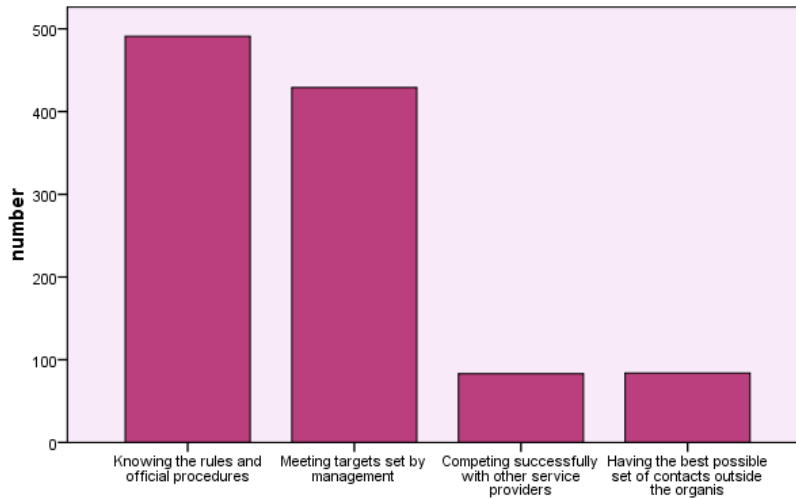


Table IX provides information on external meetings. More than half the people who filled out the survey stated that they do not attend work related meetings outside their own organisation (58.9%). Of those who do attend such meetings, they take place on a monthly basis most commonly (45.1%).

Table IX External meetings

Do you attend work related meetings, outside your own organisation, with professionals from other employment agencies?		
	Number	Percentage
Yes	444	41.4
No	637	58.9
How often does this group meet?		
Weekly	57	12.9
Monthly	199	45.1
Bi monthly	83	18.8
Quarterly	74	16.8
Less than quarterly	28	6.3

Frontline staff were also asked to comment on how much say they have in relation to a range of workplace factors. The results are contained in Table X. Respondents said that they have the largest say concerning how they engage with clients (25.7%), followed by the order in which they perform workplace tasks (23.9%), then the speed at which they work (19.4%), how the job is done (11.4%) and finally changes to how the job is done (11.2%).

Table X Employee influence and work related decisions

	No say at all	Some say	Moderate say	A good deal of say	A very great deal of say
How the job is done (n=1074)	3.5	22.0	24.9	38.3	11.4
The order in which tasks are performed (n=1073)	3.2	11.5	18.6	42.9	23.9
Speed at which work is performed (n=1073)	4.4	15.6	21.2	39.5	19.4
Changes to how the job is done (n=1073)	6.5	21.9	28.0	32.4	11.2
How clients are engaged with (n=1068)	2.3	11.0	16.6	44.5	25.7

Table XI shows how well informed frontline staff believe they are about various aspects of their job. The results show that 51.6% believe they are very well informed about what is to be done, while just under half (49.6%) say they are very well informed about the priorities in their job. A smaller number (45.1%) think they are well informed about policies and procedures, while still fewer consider themselves to be well informed about how well the job is done (38.4%). The areas in which staff feel less well informed are in relation to the money value of their interaction with each client (36.5%) and how they are supposed to do their job (36.3%), and technical knowledge (29.0%).

Table XI How well informed frontline staff are about various aspects of their job

	Very well informed	Quite well informed	Fairly well informed	Somewhat informed	Hardly at all informed
What is to be done (n=1072)	51.6	32.6	11.6	3.5	0.7
Policies and procedures (n=1071)	45.1	35.7	14.3	3.9	1.0
Priority of work to be done (n=1071)	49.6	35.6	10.9	3.2	0.7
How well the job is done (n=1071)	38.4	35.0	17.1	6.3	3.3
Technical knowledge (n=1070)	29.0	38.5	21.2	9.3	2.0
How you are supposed to do the job (n=1067)	36.3	36.9	17.9	7.1	1.8
Money value of your interactions with each job seeker (n=1065)	36.5	29.9	17.7	10.8	5.1

Sanctioning Powers

Table XII shows the circumstances under which frontline employment staff typically issue Participation Reports (PRs) to job seekers. The most common reason for issuing a PR is that a job seeker had behaved inappropriately on two occasions (92.9%). Failing to attend a job interview was also seen as a serious offence, with 90.7% of respondents stating they would issue a PR if that occurred. The next most common reasons for evoking sanctioning powers, in descending order,

were: when a job seeker refuses a suitable job offer (89.3%); when a job seeker voluntarily leaves a job (83.7%); when a job seeker failed to commence an employment program or training course (84.5%); when a job seeker refuses to apply for a suitable job (81.3%); when a job seeker fails to contact the office (79.7%); when a job seeker is dismissed from a job or a training program (72.7%); and finally, when a job seeker leaves a training course (72%).

Table XII Participation Reports (sanctions) are normally filed under the following circumstances

	Percentage
A job seeker is dismissed from a job or a training program (n=961)	72.7
A job seeker refuses to apply for a suitable job (n=970)	81.3
A job seeker refuses a suitable job offer (n=971)	89.3
A job seeker fails to commence an employment program or training course (n=973)	84.3
A job seeker leaves a training course (n=952)	72.0
A Job seeker fails to contact our office (n=981)	79.7
A Job seeker fails to attend a job interview (n=977)	90.7
A Job seeker voluntarily leaves a job (n=963)	83.7
A Job seeker does any of these for a second time (n=966)	92.9

A range of reasons were given as to why a frontline employment services professional may decide not to issue a PR. The most popular response was that the case for a sanction could not be substantiated (70.9%). The next most popular response was that the job seeker is normally a good client and therefore a verbal warning would be more suitable (60.4%), followed by 53.1% of respondents who reported that they would not issue a PR in cases where the job seeker agreement is not specific enough. Full results are shown in Table XIII. Respondents also reported that on average they had issued 5.87 PRs in the past two weeks, while less than half (47.77%) of all PRs issued to Centrelink are upheld.

Table XIII Participation Reports (sanctions) Continued

Participation Reports (PRs) NOT filed for the following reasons	Number	Percentage
The case can't be substantiated	637	70.9
The job seeker agreement was not specific enough	477	53.1
Fear for personal safety	71	7.9
PRs are often overturned	211	23.5
PRing is not an incentive to compliance	71	7.9
Avoiding a reputation for being too tough	5	0.6
The office does not encourage PRing	9	1.0
The penalties are too harsh on the job seeker	39	4.3
The job seeker is normally a good client and it is more effective to issue a verbal warning only	543	60.4
Number of clients sanctioned (PRed) in the last two weeks	Mean	Standard deviation
Number of clients (n=858)	5.87	8.66
Proportion of PRs sent to Centrelink that are upheld		
Proportion upheld (n=831)	47.74	29.81

Factors Influencing Employment Services Agencies and how Staff do their Job

There was a tendency among those who filled out the questionnaire to view Australian employment services as effective. Although only 9.1% of respondents stated that the system is ‘very effective’, 22.3% and 36.5% of respondents rated the system as being largely effective (see Table XIV). The response to the question which asked ‘how effective is the current employment services system in getting job seekers off benefits?’ was less positive, with only 4.1% describing the system as ‘very effective’. However, that question also showed a tendency towards seeing the system as more effective rather than ineffective, with an additional 15.5% and 31.8% seeing it as effective.

Table XIV shows mixed results concerning frontline staff’s level of job satisfaction. While 7.7% of respondents described themselves as ‘very satisfied’, 8.6% are ‘not very satisfied’. However, almost half (49.2%) of respondents were satisfied, while 35.1% were not satisfied, and 15.9% were neither. There was also a strong leaning towards the view that the job frontline staff perform is routine, with 9.3% of those surveyed reporting that their job is ‘very routine’, and 30.3% stating that it tends towards being routine. Respondents also expressed the opinion that the IT system they use dictates how they do their job. Less than 1% thought there was little or no routine. Twenty three percent said that AE3000 dictates how they do their job ‘to a large extent’, 25.7% were in the second strongest grouping, while 20.8% were in the third strongest group. By contrast, only 2% of respondents felt the IT system only plays a small role in directing how they do their job. Full results are shown in Table XIV.

Table XIV Views on the Employment System

	Percentage						
	1 Not effective	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very effective
How effective is the whole employment services system in helping job seekers find a job? (n=1100)	0.3	2.9	7.9	21.0	36.5	22.3	9.1
How effective is the current employment services system in getting job seekers off benefits? (n=1101)	2.3	6.0	14.4	26.0	31.8	15.5	4.1
	1 Very satisfied	2	3	4	5	6	7 Not very satisfied
To what extent are you satisfied with your present conditions of work (pay, hours, promotion etc.)? (n=1002)	7.7	19.6	21.9	15.9	13.9	12.6	8.6
	1 Very routine	2	3	4	5	6	7 Little or no routine
To what extent are the activities that make up your job routine? (n=998)	9.3	30.3	31.0	19.1	6.8	2.9	0.6
	1 To a small extent	2	3	4	5	6	7 To a large extent
To what extent do you feel the IT system you use (AE3000) dictates how you do your job? (n=1065)	2.0	5.4	8.6	14.6	20.8	25.7	23.0

Most frontline staff strongly disagreed with the statement ‘the practice in my agency is to pick out the most capable job seekers and give them the best service’. Table XV shows that 29.4% strongly disagreed with the statement, while only 13.3% had a neutral response. When asked if their agency tends to focus on raising education and skill levels among job seekers, or helping job seekers get a job as quickly as possible, 30.7% sat in the middle, but there was a leaning towards a focus on quick

job placement, with 15.1% of respondents saying that is the greater priority at their workplace. That result is confirmed by the subsequent question in Table XV, which asked whether management would encourage a job seeker to take a low-paying job, or encouraging him/her to remain on benefits until a better opportunity presents. The most popular response was that management would encourage the job seeker to take the low-paying job (62.7%). Only half of one percent of respondents stated that they felt management would be more likely to encourage the job seeker to stay on benefits.

Frontline staff report that their agencies tend to offer job seekers choices about the kinds of service they receive. The results presented in Table XV indicate that 10.2% of respondents believe job seekers are given a great deal of choice, with another 45.6% indicating they things job seekers have choices, while only 1.9% believe they are given none. At the same time, the survey results suggest that leniency is not encouraged with regards to sanctioning procedures. Just over 22% of respondents reported that their office does not encourage them to be lenient in the use of Participation Reports. This is in strong contrast to the 1% of respondents who said their office does encourage leniency.

Table XV Views on how Agencies Carry out their Business

	Percentage						
	1 Strongly agree	2	3	4	5	6	7 Strongly disagree
The practice in my agency is to pick out the most capable job seekers and give them the best service. (n=946)	6.8	5.2	9.4	13.3	12.6	23.4	29.4
	1 To get a job quickly	2	3	4	5	6	7 To raise skill levels
What would you say is the more important goal of your agency: to help job seekers get jobs as quickly as possible OR to raise education or skill levels of clients so that they can get the job they want, in the future. (n=1078)	15.1	12.3	11.5	30.7	14.2	10.7	5.5
	1 Take the job and leave benefits	2	3	4	5	6	7 Stay on benefits and wait for a better opportunity
After a short time attending your service, an average job seeker is offered a low-skill, low-paying job that would make him or her better off financially. Assume he or she has two choices: either to take the job and leave welfare OR to stay on benefits and wait for a better opportunity. What advice would management in your agency give to a client/job seeker of that type? (n=1111)	62.7	18.3	8.2	7.9	1.3	1.2	0.5
	1 None	2	3	4	5	6	7 A great deal
How much does your agency emphasise giving job seekers more choice about the services they receive? (n=1006)	1.9	7.7	11.8	22.8	26.7	18.9	10.2
	1 Not to be lenient	2	3	4	5	6	7 To be lenient
Does your office encourage staff not to be lenient or to be lenient in the use of Participation Reports? (n=1088)	22.1	26.8	17.6	21.3	7.9	3.3	1.0

In the results shown in Table XVI, survey participations were again asked to choose between encouraging a job seeker to accept a low-paying job, or remain on benefits until a better opportunity presents. However, in this case, respondents were not asked what they thought management would advise in such a situation, but rather how they themselves would counsel the job seeker. The results were not dissimilar to those presented in the table above, with 53.9% of frontline staff saying they would encourage the job seeker to take the job, while only 0.7% would encourage him/her to remain on benefits.

Results were more mixed for the question which asked ‘which is more often to blame if a person is on benefits: lack of effort on their part, or circumstances beyond their control?’ Responses to that question tended towards the middle, with 37.5% assuming a neutral position. Of those that did take a strong position, 6.8% stated that the biggest factor was lack of effort on the part of the job seeker, while 2.2% thought it tends to be a result of circumstances beyond their control (see Table XVI).

Frontline staff tended towards seeing the decisions they make concerning how to work with job seekers as being determined by standard program rules and regulation, while there was a bigger spread of views concerning the amount of leeway frontline staff have in relation to deciding what programs or activities job seekers should be assigned to. Almost half (49.6%) of respondents felt they had leeway, 19.0% were neutral, and 31.5% felt they had little leeway to make decisions (see Table XVI). However, despite mixed feelings about their level of autonomy, most respondents reported that they are very willing to exert considerable energy on behalf of their organisation (24%). Only 2.1% of those who completed the survey said they are not very willing.

Table XVI Personal Views of Employment Services Staff

	Percentage						
	1 Take the job and leave benefits	2	3	4	5	6	7 Stay on benefits and wait for a better opportunity
After a short time attending your service, an average job seeker is offered a low-skill, low-paying job that would make him or her better off financially. Assume he or she has two choices: either to take the job and leave welfare OR to stay on benefits and wait for a better opportunity. If you were asked, what would your personal advice to this client be? (n=1117)	53.9	19.9	11.6	8.3	3.2	2.3	0.7
	1 Effort on their part	2	3	4	5	6	7 Circumstance beyond their control
Which is more often to blame if a person is on benefits: lack of effort on their part, or circumstances beyond their control? (n=1095)	6.8	16.2	20.5	37.5	12.0	4.8	2.2
	1 None	2	3	4	5	6	7 A great deal
To what extent are the decisions you make about your job seekers determined by standard program rules and regulations? (n=993)	0.6	1.6	3.8	11.3	26.5	38.0	18.2
	1 Very little leeway	2	3	4	5	6	7 A great deal of leeway
How much leeway do you have in deciding which program or activity your job seekers should be assigned to? (n=1032)	8.7	12.2	10.5	19.0	27.1	17.1	5.4
	1 Very willing	2	3	4	5	6	7 Not very willing
To what extent would you be willing to exert considerable extra effort on behalf of your organisation? (n=859)	24.0	29.1	25.6	12.2	3.5	3.5	2.1

Perceptions of the Employment System

Table XVII shows the results from questions that asked job seekers about how they do their job, what they think about the Australian employment system, and how they work with job seekers. The results for question xii indicate that numerical targets, including Star Ratings, do influence how frontline do their job. These results are further strengthened by question xxv, where 35.4% strongly agreed, and 54.1% agreed, with the statement ‘I think the objective in this job is to shift the maximum number of job seekers off benefits’.

The issue of trust also generated strong responses, with 19.2% strongly agreeing, and 44.8% agreeing with the statement ‘the main thing I have to do in this job is gain the trust of the job seeker’ (see question xiii). Likewise, there was a very strong feeling among respondents that the lines of authority are clearly marked out in their workplace, with 37.5% strongly disagreeing with the statement ‘the lines of authority are not clear in my work’ (question vi) and a further 41.6% also disagreeing. In turn, respondents indicated that their supervisor does know a lot about the work being done on a day-to-day basis (33.3%) and 34.5% stated that when they come across something not covered by the procedural guide, they refer it to their supervisor (see question xv).

The frontline staff who filled out the survey were quick to point out that a successful outcome is usually a team effort, with 36.8% strongly agreeing and 53.0% agreeing with that assertion. Respondents also indicated that they are cognisant of the business imperatives operating in their agency, with 30.2% strongly agreeing, and 53.8% agreeing with the statement ‘I am aware that my organisation pays attention to the income I generate by placing job seekers’ (see Table XVII).

Table XVII Perceptions of the employment system

	Strongly agree	Percentage Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
i) Many of our job seekers will never find open or regular employment (n=1095)	9.4	28.1	17.8	37.3	7.4
ii) I consider myself to be an advocate for the client/job seekers’ rights (n=1087)	12.2	39.3	38.8	8.0	1.7
iii) Public servants have special responsibilities which are different from other service delivery staff (n=1092)	13.8	49.4	18.9	14.7	3.2
iv) Governments should do more to help job seekers (n=1095)	16.1	35.5	28.7	17.1	2.6
v) I find that issuing Participation Reports (sanctions) can really damage your reputation with job seekers and others in the employment field (n=1015)	2.7	12.1	17.0	49.2	19.0
vi) The lines of authority are not clear in my work (n=898)	2.3	9.4	9.1	41.6	37.5
vii) I do not like my competition (internal or external) to know how I go about getting my results (n=897)	4.9	13.9	29.8	33.3	18.1
viii) My job can be done by following a few basic rules (n=897)	11.0	41.1	11.5	24.5	11.8
ix) When it comes to day-to-day work I am free to decide for myself what I will do with each job seeker (n=897)	18.4	44.1	14.8	18.4	4.2
x) My supervisor knows a lot about the work I do day-to-day (n=888)	33.3	48.4	7.8	6.8	3.7
xi) The really important rules in this job are the ones to do with obtaining assistance from other organisations (n=887)	1.7	14.1	37.8	37.2	9.2
xii) In my job, I am NOT influenced by numerical targets (including star rating) (n=887)	4.3	12.3	12.4	46.3	24.7
xiii) The main thing I have to do in this job is gain the trust of the job seeker (n=887)	19.2	44.8	21.0	13.3	1.8
xiv) Our organisation has targets for certain types of job seekers (n=887)	22.0	57.3	11.4	7.1	2.3
xv) When I come across something not covered by the procedural guide, I refer it to my supervisor (n=887)	34.5	56.6	5.3	3.2	0.5
xvi) The goal in this work is to find a middle ground between the needs of job seekers, employers, and the social security system (n=887)	20.0	49.0	16.0	13.4	1.6
xvii) I use a lot of personal judgement to decide what is best for each job seeker (n=887)	17.7	55.4	14.5	10.3	2.1
xviii) Before reporting a job seeker for non-compliance, I would always consider which classification group they belonged to (n=887)	7.8	42.7	18.0	24.2	7.2
xix) I like to keep my own records and files on job seekers and programs (n=887)	9.7	42.8	20.0	20.7	6.8
xx) Our computer system tells me what steps to take with job seekers and when to take them	5.1	42.3	23.8	23.0	5.9
xxi) When you get a good result with job seekers it’s usually a team effort by yourself, trainer, other staff in your office, and the employer (n=886)	36.8	53.0	5.1	3.8	1.2
xxii) To get job seekers to pay attention I often remind them that enforcing compliance is part of my job (n=886)	14.8	56.2	14.3	12.8	1.9
xxiii) My job is determined by goals set elsewhere (n=886)	12.0	41.6	25.6	17.3	3.5

xxiv) More and more the objective in this job is to maximise the organisation's financial outcomes (n=885)	16.7	38.4	23.8	17.5	3.5
xxv) I think the objective in this job is to shift the maximum number of job seekers off benefits (n=884)	35.4	54.1	6.6	3.6	0.3
xxvi) I use our information technology system to track priority job seekers (n=884)	14.0	54.5	21.2	9.3	1.0
xxvii) I do tend to take note of those actions with job seekers that will generate a payable outcome for the office (n=884)	15.7	56.2	18.2	8.4	1.5
xxvii) All my job seekers receive a similar service (n=884)	24.5	54.1	6.7	12.2	2.5
xxviii) I am often asked to suggest ways to improve things (n=884)	15.3	55.8	16.4	9.6	2.9
xxix) I am aware that my organisation pays attention to the income I generate by placing job seekers (n=883)	30.2	53.8	11.7	3.4	0.9
xxx) If an official from another employment organisation asked for help in using the computer, I would help them (n=883)	13.4	50.4	20.0	11.6	4.6
xxxi) In my job, job seekers are organised into formal and informal priority groups (n=883)	3.7	33.5	29.8	26.4	6.6

Conclusion

This study represents an important independent vantage point from which to assess characteristics and changes in the employment services industry, from the frontline of service provision. It shows frontline staff engaged in challenging work, employed in a range of agencies using different methods and techniques.

This first report provides some interesting preliminary findings on the characteristics of the Australian workforce in employment services, the employment service agencies they work in, how staff work with job seekers, the use of sanctioning powers, how staff do their jobs, and their perceptions of the employment system.

In future reports we will compare these findings with those from a study of those who worked in the industry ten years ago to see what has changed. We will also examine differences and similarities in the Australian sample when compared with employment services staff in the UK and the Netherlands.