

Getting welfare to work *flexibility on the frontline?*

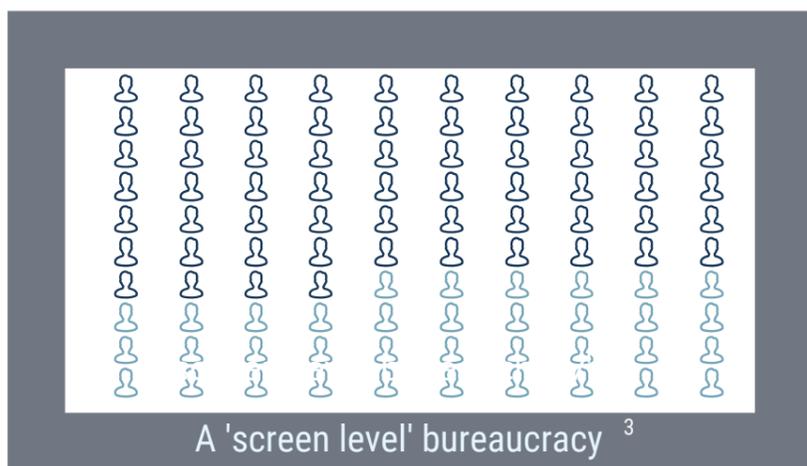
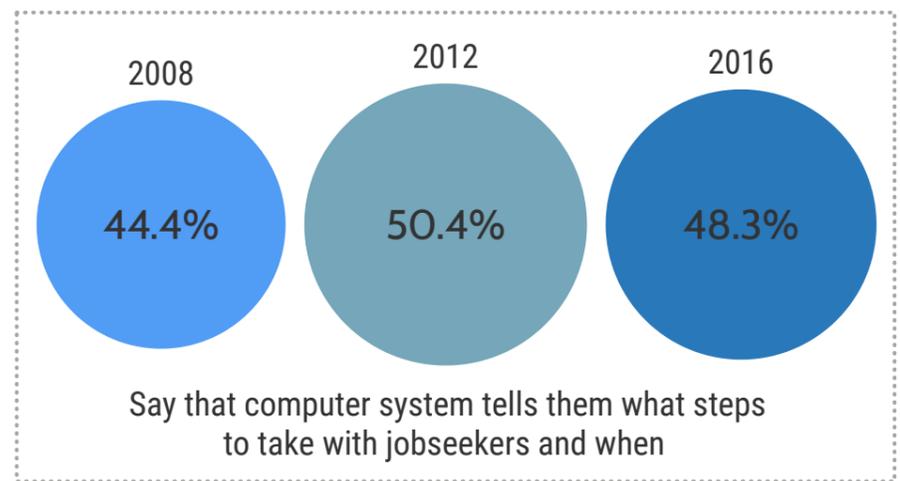
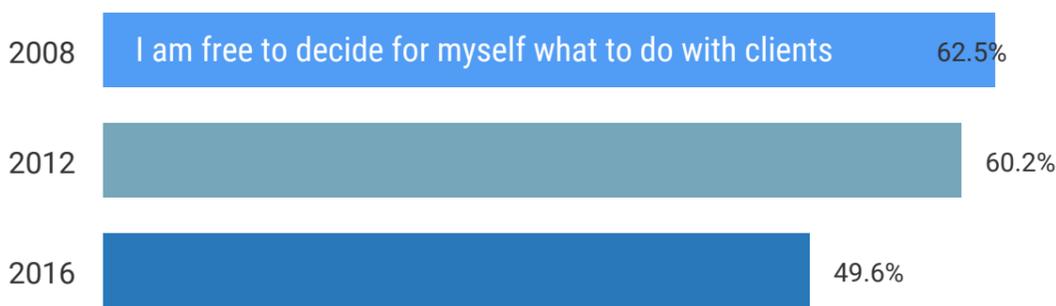
Australia's employment services system has been subject to ongoing reform since the 1990s. In the past decade, this has included two major redesigns: **Job Services Australia** (2009-2015) under Labor and **Jobactive** (2015-2022), introduced by the Coalition Government.

A key aim of each reform was to re-introduce greater flexibility and tailoring into the quasi-market, following the highly standardised system of employment services delivery that had emerged by the end of Job Network (1998-2009).¹

Drawing on surveys of frontline staff run in 2008, 2012, and 2016 our new article, '[Locked-in or locked-out: can a public services market really change?](#)', examines how Australia's employment services system has evolved since Job Network.²

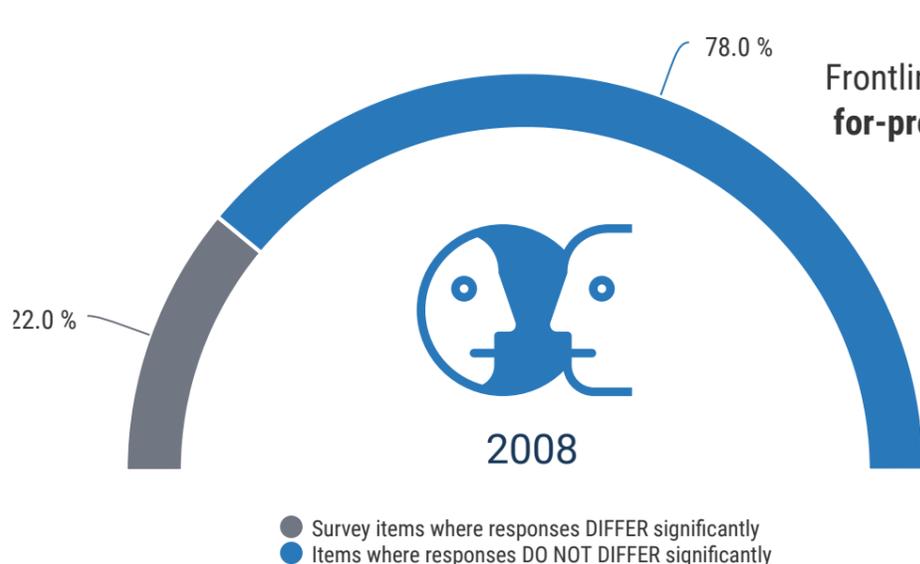
We find remarkable consistency over time but also evidence of:

- **Deepening standardisation** at the frontline
- **Increasing convergence between for-profit and not-for profit agencies** in terms of how they work with jobseekers

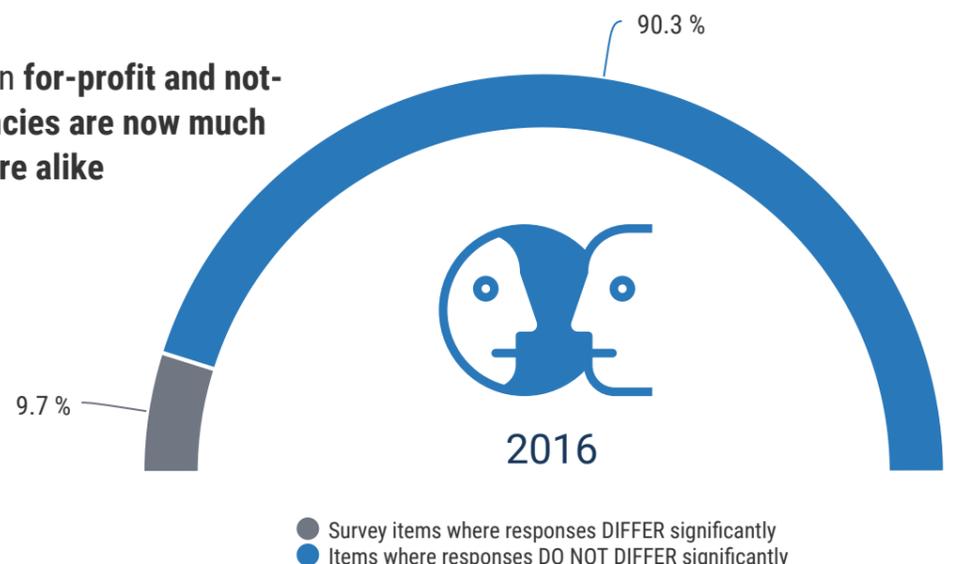


64%

of frontline staff feel that their IT system dictates how they do their job



Frontline staff in **for-profit and not-for-profit agencies are now much more alike**



1. See Considine, M., Lewis, J., and O'Sullivan, S. (2011) 'Quasi-markets and service delivery flexibility following a decade of employment assistance reform', *Journal of Social Policy*, 40(4): 811-833.
2. Considine, M., O'Sullivan, S., McGann, M., and Nguyen, P. (2019) 'Locked-in or locked-out: can a public services market really change?', *Journal of Social Policy*, First View, doi.org/10.1017/S0047279419000941.
3. Bovens, M. and Zouridis, S. (2002) 'From street-level to system-level bureaucracies: How information and communication technology is transforming administrative discretion and constitutional control.' *Public Administration Review*, 62(2): 174-184.

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