

Increasing Innovation and Flexibility in Social Service Delivery

Australian Report back to Industry Partners April 2013

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Welcome

This report is our first major output from the *Increasing Innovation and Flexibility in Social Service Delivery* project which was launched in late 2011 and which is funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) and our industry partners the National Employment Services Association (NES), Jobs Australia (JA) and WCIG.

The report describes the results of our 2012 Australian survey of frontline staff working in the employment sector. This is the third time we have surveyed Australian frontline employment services staff. We began our survey work in 1998, at the point at which privatisation was first seriously considered in this country, and abroad. Our survey affords us a unique insight into Australia's evolving, contracted employment system. It also allows us to understand how policy decisions made in Canberra translate into on-the-ground service delivery.

This report is based upon our third survey, which was carried out in the second half of 2012. It therefore reflects frontline practice within Job Services Australia. It describes how frontline staff decide how to work with clients; when to issue sanctions; where frontline staff look to find jobs; and how they perceive the jobseekers they work with. It also describes who the frontline staff are; where do they work? What is their sex, age, are they a member of a union, and how many years have they worked in the sector?

We hope you enjoy this first report and we look forward to sharing the findings from our UK survey, in coming months.

Acknowledgments

This research would not have been possible without the generous support of our research partners: NES, JA and WCIG. The research team would also like to acknowledge the funding received from the ARC through a Linkage Grant.

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

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Introduction

Increasing Innovation and Flexibility in Social Service Delivery is a three year Australian Research Council (ARC) funded research project. It builds on work undertaken previously under the auspice of the *Activating States* project. Information about *Activating States*, including research outcomes, are freely available online at: http://www.ssps.unimelb.edu.au/research/projects/employment_services.

The aim of the current project is to investigate the relationship between the state as purchaser and regulator of core social services and the innovative potential of private agencies that design and deliver these public goods, with a special emphasis on the delivery of employment services. The project is comparing local approaches to innovation with methods deployed in other countries, with the aim of creating a better understanding of how regulatory oversight and flexible service delivery can be skilfully balanced to ensure optimal outcomes for jobseekers.

The Australian report back to industry represents the first major project outcome. In the coming months, we will produce an industry report for the UK, and a third report that compares findings between Australia and the UK.

The Method Section describes how the 2012 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 and repeated in 2008. The adaptation process involved a mix of site visits to employment services providers, discussions with industry professionals, and extensive consultation with project partners.

The Findings section of the report is broken into discrete subsections which describe different aspects of the Australian employment sector. These 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, this 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 Participation Reports (PRs). This 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, the priority agencies place on achieving a speedy outcome, the flexibility of the service offered to job seekers, and the level of commitment frontline staff have towards the agency they work for. Finally, in the last findings section, *Perceptions of the Employment System*, Table XVII is presented. This table contains answers to 31 questions concerning how client-facing employment services staff conceptualise their job, the sector, their agency, and jobseekers.

Method

Survey Adaptation

The survey instrument used in this study was adapted from a questionnaire designed by Mark Considine in 1998 and incorporated a number of standard measures used in other studies. The findings from the 1998 survey are published in Mark Considine's book *Enterprising States: the public management of welfare-to-work* (2001). The survey was repeated in 2008. The 2008 survey was developed following extensive field research by Siobhan O'Sullivan. In 2008 the survey was conducted online for the first time. A copy of the industry report for 2008 is available free online at: http://www.ssps.unimelb.edu.au/research/projects/employment_services/activating-states.

The 2012 survey instrument closely resembles the 2008 questionnaire. In developing both the 2008 and 2012 version of the survey, consistency was a principle concern. To develop the 2012 survey Siobhan O'Sullivan again conducted extensive field research, including visits to a range of employment services offices, meetings with agency management, attendance at industry conferences, culminating in a meeting with our industry partners. Where changes were made to the survey they were primarily done in response to changes in industry practice or language use.

The Survey Instrument

The survey comprised of around 100 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; first prize: a tablet; second prize: a \$250 Coles Myer gift voucher and third prize: a \$100 iTunes gift voucher.

The survey was completed online. A private company was contracted to host the survey and eligible frontline staff were sent instructions on how to enter the survey, via an email sent directly from their manager, into their email inbox. Each participating agency was provided with a unique pathway into the survey. That pathway took the form of an agency specific hyperlink. The survey was open to all participating agencies for a period of two weeks. The survey was filled out in September and October 2012, with some agencies commencing earlier than others.

Participation Parameters

The survey was designed to be completed by frontline employment services staff working under a Job Services Australia (JSA) 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. Questions at the beginning of the survey were designed to screen out ineligible participants. Frontline staff from 26 employment agencies were invited to participate in this research. A diverse range of agencies were approached to be part of the survey. In many cases the agencies that participated in 2012 were also part of the project in 2008.

Participant Profile

Once the file cleaning was complete, 1264 usable survey responses remained. This represents an almost 50% survey response rate out of 2624 potential respondents from 26 participating agencies. An overview of the sample is shown in Table I.

Table I Sample Overview

	Number	Percentage
Not-for-profit participating agencies	18	69.23
For profit participating agencies	7	26.92
Other participating agencies	1	3.85
Total participating agencies	26	
Potential not-for-profit respondents	1817	69.26
Potential for-profits respondents	727	27.71
Potential Other respondents	80	3.03
Total potential respondents ¹	2624	
Actual not-for-profit participants	882	69.7
Actual for-profits participants	316	25
Actual Other participants	50	4.0
Actual “agency type unknown” participants	16	1.3
Total actual participants	1264	45.16

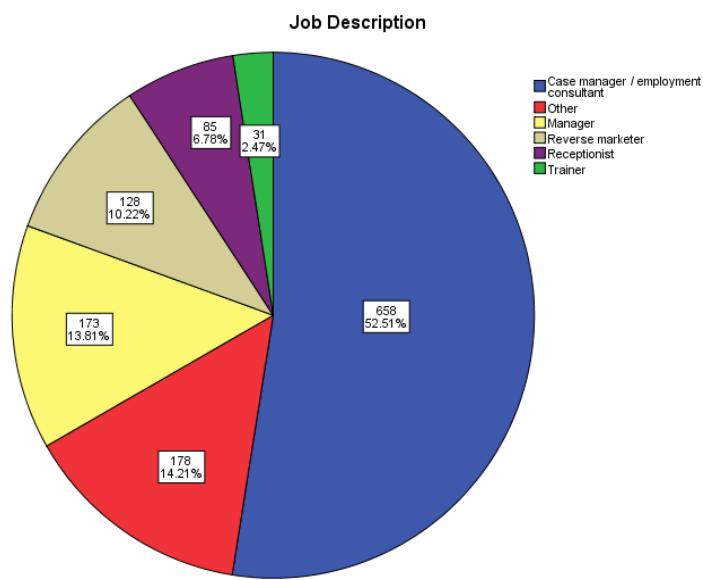
¹ One agency was unable to provide us with a potential sample size. We have therefore excluded that agency when calculating the response rate.

Findings

The Employment Sector Workforce

Survey participants were asked to indicate the job that they performed as an employment services professional. As shown in Figure I, more than half of frontline staff are case managers or employment consultants (52.5%). The other positions held by survey participants, in descending order, are: managers (13.8%); reverse marketers (10.2%); receptionists (6.8%); and trainers (2.5%). One hundred and seventy eight respondents reported their role was not included as an option in the questionnaire. The respondents who selected 'other' were asked to state their role. A range of responses were provided including work experience coordinators, team leaders, sales support, retention consultants, post-placement support officers/consultants, and Indigenous mentor/program coordinators.

Figure I Job Description



The employment sector is dominated by female frontline staff (77.0%) and almost all staff working in the sector work on a full-time basis (88.2%) while only 11.8% work part-time (see Table II). The majority of respondents do not speak a language other than English at home (83.7%) while only a relatively small proportion do speak another language at home (16.3%).

The survey results suggest some level of job stability with more than half of the respondents indicating that they have worked with their current employer for between one and five years (55.1%). However, only 23.2% of respondents had worked with their current employer for more than five years while 44.4% indicated that they have worked in the employment sector for more than five years. The results also suggest that the majority of employees are not members of a trade union (93.8%).

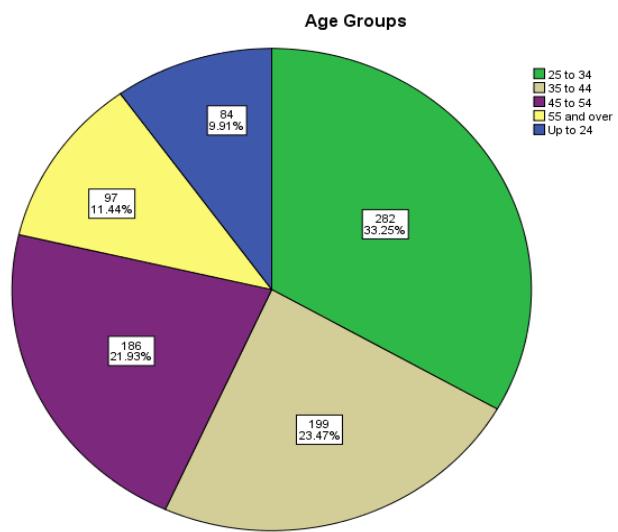
The employment sector continues to make strong use of information technology with almost 80% of respondents indicating that they are always logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers while less than 7% are either sometimes or never logged on when interviewing clients.

Table II Employee Profile

	Number	Percentage
Full-time/part-time work		
Work full-time	1097	88.2
Work part-time	147	11.8
Gender		
Female	654	77.0
Male	195	23.0
A language other than English spoken at home		
Yes	137	16.3
No	702	83.7
Years worked in the employment sector		
Less than 1 year	102	12.0
1 – 5 years	369	43.6
More than 5 years	376	44.4
Years worked for current employer		
Less than 1 year	182	21.7
1 – 5 years	462	55.1
More than 5 years	195	23.2
Employees who are members of a union		
Yes	52	6.2
No	788	93.8
Computer use		
<i>Always</i> logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	762	79.5
<i>Most of the time</i> logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	132	13.8
<i>Sometimes</i> logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	47	4.9
<i>Never</i> logged on and accessing a computer while interviewing job seekers	17	1.8

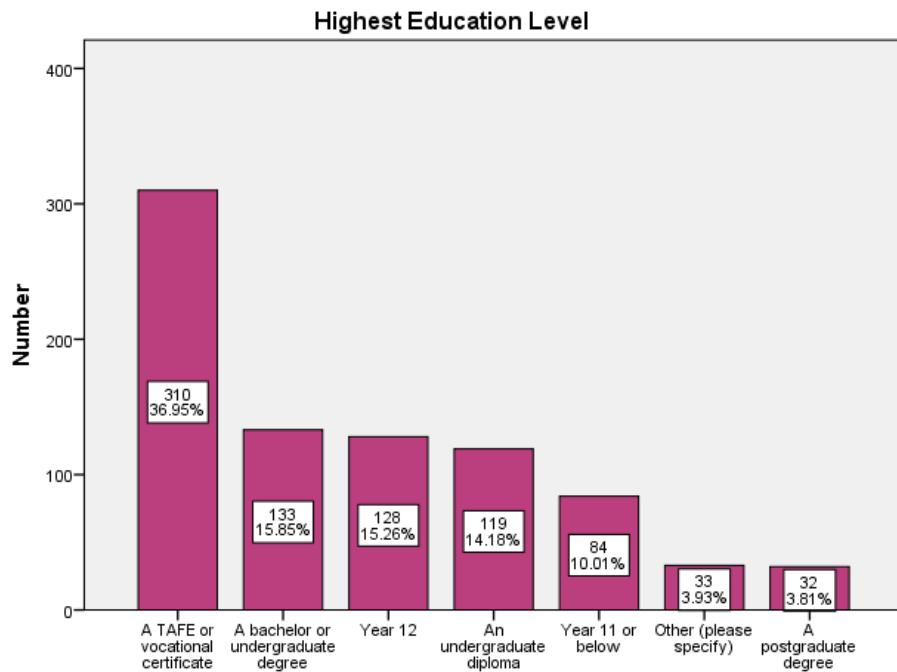
As shown in Figure II, the majority of survey respondents are aged between 24 and 35 years (33.3%) closely followed by employees aged between 35-44 (23.4%) and 45-54 (21.9%). The smallest proportion of Australian employment professionals are either 24 years (9.9%) or over 55 years (11.4%).

Figure II Age groups



The survey also asked frontline employment services staff to indicate their highest level of education. The largest proportion of frontline staff have a TAFE qualification or vocational certificate (36.9%) followed by, in descending order, an undergraduate degree (15.9%), completion of Year 12 (15.3%), an undergraduate diploma (14.2%), and completion of Year 11 or below (10.0%). The smallest proportion indicated that they have a postgraduate degree (3.8%).

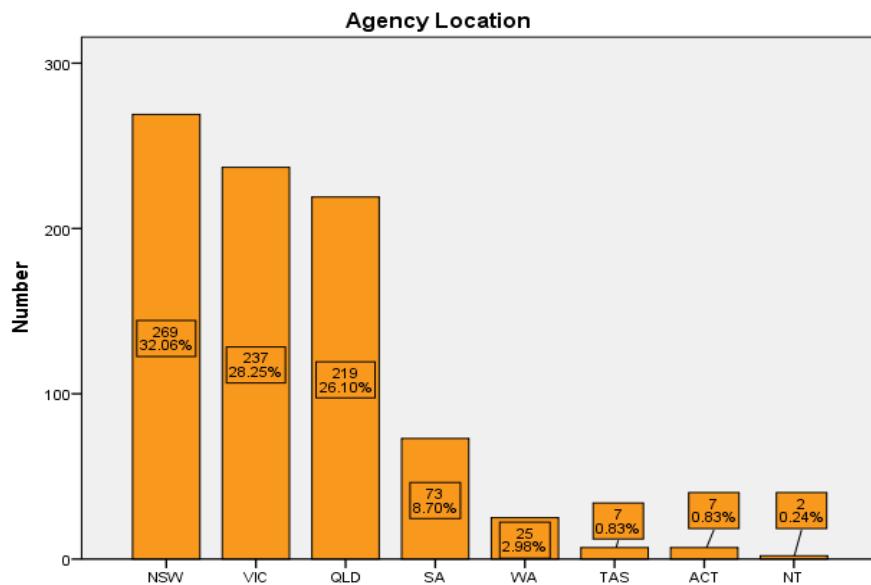
Figure III Highest education level



Employment Sector Agencies

Most respondents work in an office in NSW (32.0%), followed by Victoria at 28.3%, then, in descending order, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, the ACT, and the Northern Territory (see Figure IV).

Figure IV Agency location



The survey results highlight a marginal difference between the number of respondents that work in metropolitan areas (46.5%) and those that work in regional centres (49.9%) while only a small proportion work in remote locations. The average (mean) number of staff working in an office is 11.0 though the standard deviation indicates a considerable variance in office size (see Table III).

Survey participants were asked if their office provides special services to particular target groups. The majority reported they do not provide special services (64.5%) while only 35.5% reported that they do provide these services.

The results also indicate only a slight variance in the proportion of frontline staff that received formal in-house training (52.6%) compared to the staff that received informal training by colleagues (59.6%). A small proportion of respondents had not received any training (8.4%) while 19.7% received formal training run by an external trainer.

Table III Agency Profile

	Number	Percentage
Location type		
City/metropolitan area	389	46.5
Regional centre	418	49.9
Remote location	30	3.6
Offices with special services for particular target groups		
Yes	434	35.5
No	790	64.5
Training prior to commencing work		
Formal training run in-house	644	52.6
Formal training run by an outside trainer	241	19.7
Informal training by colleagues	730	59.6
No training	103	8.4
Other	113	9.2
Number of staff in the office	Mean	Standard Deviation
Including all types of staff (n= 1231)	11.02	8.556

Working with Jobseekers

The survey reveals an almost even distribution with respect to the different benefit streams received by clients. The average (mean) number of clients that are estimated to receive Stream 4 payments is 28.59. The proportion of clients that are estimated to receive either Stream 1, 2, or 3 is 23.31, 24.91 and 23.19 respectively. While there is not a significant difference in the average number of clients receiving these streams, the standard deviation indicates a considerable variance in the average number of clients receiving these benefit streams.

Respondents were asked to indicate the proportion of jobseekers that are easier to place versus those that are more difficult to place using a scale of 1-4, where 1 is easier to place and 4 is more difficult to place. As shown in Table IV, the highest proportion of clients are either more difficult to place (35.6%) or difficult to place (21.1%). As such, the 'difficult to place' responses constitute over 50% of jobseekers compared to the combined percentage of 43.3% of jobseekers that are easier to place.

The survey also asked frontline staff to indicate the proportion of clients that they believe would prefer to be on benefits rather than work to support themselves and their families. As shown in Table IV, the result indicates that, on average, 41.4% of jobseekers would prefer to be on benefits. Survey participants were also asked to estimate the number of jobseekers that were either participating in an activity, seeking employment without participating in an activity, receiving support after being placed in a job or program, or not participating in an activity and not looking for work. The largest proportion of clients are participating in an activity only (33.2%) closely followed by those looking for work but not participating in an activity (31.8%). The two smallest groups were those who receive support after being placed in a job or program (18.3%) and those that are neither participating in an activity nor not looking for work (16.8%).

In order to gauge the monitoring of jobseekers by frontline staff, survey participants were asked to indicate the proportion of clients that staff follow either closely, somewhat, a little or not at all. The largest proportion of clients are followed closely

(57.3%) while 22.7% are followed somewhat. The smallest groups were the clients who were followed a little (12.1%) and those that are not followed at all (7.9%). Respondents were also asked to estimate the proportion of clients that do not comply with their obligations. The results indicate that, on average, 35.6% of jobseekers do not comply with their obligations.

Table IV Job Seeker Profile

	Mean	Standard deviation
Proportion of clients that are estimated to receive (n=986)		
Stream 1	23.31	29.616
Stream 2	24.91	18.939
Stream 3	23.19	16.953
Stream 4	28.59	24.472
Don't know		
Proportion of clients perceived to have a mental health problem (n=1083)		
	38.97	26.052
Percentage of job seekers not complying with their obligations		
Percentage (n=944)	35.63	21.663
Percentage of job seekers that are followed (n=959)		
Closely	57.29	29.729
Somewhat	22.68	18.425
A little	12.14	14.712
Not at all	7.89	18.182
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=891)	41.41	22.285
Proportion of job seekers that are easier to place versus more difficult to place (n=1040)		
1 (easier to place)	21.55	20.670
2	21.78	13.169
3	21.07	11.402
4 (more difficult to place)	35.60	23.817
Estimated number of job seekers that are (n=1002)		
Participating in an activity	33.19	20.472
Looking for employment but not participating in an activity	31.80	20.598
Receiving support after being placed in a job or program	18.25	16.415
Not participating in an activity and not looking for work	16.77	15.745

Working as an Employment Services Professional

On average, survey respondents reported having a caseload of 114.2 clients with a standard deviation of 50 clients. This suggests that while the average caseload per staff member is just under 115 clients, some staff have a significantly larger caseload while others have a significantly smaller caseload. As shown in Table V, frontline staff were asked to estimate the number of jobseekers seen on an average day and reported an average of 9 clients per day with a standard deviation of 7.0.

The survey asked how many clients had been placed in work in the last month and in the last year. Respondents reported that, on average, 8.1 people have been placed in work in

the last month and 79.2 had been placed in the last year. This represents an average of 29.2% of the caseload per staff member in the last year. However, the standard deviation indicates a significant variation in the number of clients placed in work in the last year.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents (63.8%) reported that they use a client classification tool in deciding how to work with clients while 36.2% do not use a tool at all.

Table V Working with Job seekers

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Current caseload (n=770)	114.21	50.006
Number of job seekers seen on an average day (n=1154)	9.12	7.011
Estimated number of people placed in work in the last month		
People placed in work (n=755)	8.10	6.514
Percentage of caseload (n=748)	9.71	13.200
Estimated number of people placed in work in the last year		
People placed in work (n=510)	79.23	70.166
Percentage of caseload (n=512)	29.24	23.509
Use of a client classification Tool	Number	Value percentage
Used when deciding how to work with clients	657	63.8
Not used	373	36.2
Not applicable to the position	n/a	n/a

Employment services professionals are influenced by various factors in determining what activities are recommended for each job seeker. The questionnaire asked frontline staff to indicate the influence of a range of factors in determining these activities. The results shown in Table VI indicate that the need to get a quick outcome (41.1%) and the need to substantiate a case for sanctioning (39.4%) are somewhat influential. However, labour market demand (31.5%), availability of labour market program vacancies (31.0%), access to funds for special assistance (24.4%) and the consultants' own judgement (24.6%) were very influential in determining activities for jobseekers.

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= 989)	9.7	45.8	32.8	11.7
Other assessment results (n=988)	6.0	42.8	37.8	13.5
My own judgment (n= 990)	3.3	25.5	46.6	24.6
Job seeker's preference for activities (n= 991)	2.0	25.8	52.7	19.5
Labour market demand (n=992)	2.2	22.2	44.2	31.5
Availability of labour market program vacancies (n= 991)	2.3	22.7	44.0	31.0
Access to funds for special assistance (n= 993)	5.1	29.8	40.7	24.4
Need to substantiate a case for sanctioning someone (988)	14.6	39.4	32.2	13.9
Need to get an outcome quickly (994)	20.1	41.1	26.6	12.2

Table VII shows regularity of contact between employment services frontline staff and various service providers, excluding contact associated with assisting a jobseeker obtain a job interview. The results show that frontline staff are in regular contact with employers with 36.5% 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 fifty percent (48.9%) of staff said that they are in contact with another office in their organisation on a daily basis. However, the results indicate that frontline staff 'never' contact local media (66.7%), local government (37.7%) or local service clubs (32.4%). Some respondents did indicate regular, weekly contact with schools and universities (21.8%), training providers (47.6%), and welfare agencies (35.2%).

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= 970)	48.9	32.1	10.0	3.4	3.4	2.3
Officials from a government department (n=967)	9.6	32.5	20.6	9.7	14.3	13.3
Local government (n=960)	2.3	6.8	15.3	14.4	23.5	37.7
Welfare agencies (n=965)	11.6	35.2	26.2	8.7	9.7	8.5
Employers (n=972)	36.5	35.2	15.3	3.7	4.7	4.5
Training providers (n=973)	22.5	47.6	18.6	4.3	3.7	3.3
Another employment agency (n=967)	6.4	29.9	30.6	10.4	13.1	9.5
Local service clubs (n=963)	1.7	8.5	16.1	18.4	22.9	32.4
Schools and universities (n=964)	4.8	21.8	25.6	16.1	14.8	16.9
Local media (n=967)	1.3	2.9	3.7	9.0	16.3	66.7

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 (42.6%). The second biggest component of

their time is spent on contract compliance to meet government reporting and administrative requirements (23.4%). The remainder of their time is distributed between working with employers (12.4%), working on other tasks (9.9%), at internal staff meetings (6.4%), and working with other service providers (5.4%). Respondents were also asked how many meetings or interviews they conduct with job seekers outside their office. The average response was 1.68 meetings per week are conducted elsewhere.

As shown in Table VIII, the two most important sources of information about the local labour market is from the newspaper in hardcopy (82.1%) and from within the staff member's own organisation (80.8%). The next most popular sources of labour market information, in descending order are: online sources such as seek.com (71.3%), the staff member's own experience (68.3%), direct contact with employers (65.8%), government departments (53.1%), another organisation (22.2%), and other sources (9.0%). Thirteen respondents said they do not have information about the local labour market.

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 (56.3%) reported that they have never been asked to provide feedback to government in the last 6 months. Survey respondents were also asked their opinion concerning the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' (DEEWR) evidence requirements. The results indicate that 62.2% of survey participants feel that the amount of evidence required by DEEWR is 'excessive' while 34.4% feel it is 'fair enough'. Less than one percent of those surveyed thought the amount of evidence required by DEEWR is inadequate (0.7%).

In relation to the IT system, the largest proportion of respondents (69.4%) feel it provides them with adequate information to do their job. Furthermore, just over half of all survey respondents work in an office that does not have an incentive scheme (55.3%).

Table VIII The employment services workplace

	Mean	Standard deviation
Proportion of time per week spent (n=991)		
In direct contact with job seekers	42.59	24.128
Working with other service providers	5.37	6.276
Working with employers	12.40	17.647
On contract compliance to meet government reporting/administration requirements	23.35	17.882
On internal staff meeting	6.39	5.538
On other tasks	9.90	12.322
Number of weekly meetings with job seekers conducted outside the office (n=964)		
Number of weekly meeting	1.68	5.484
Sources of information about the local labour market	Number	Percentage
From within the organisation	755	80.8
From government departments or organisations	496	53.1
Own experience	638	68.3
Newspapers (hard copy)	767	82.1
Direct contact with employers	615	65.8
From another organisation	207	22.2
From online sources such as seek.com	666	71.3
Other	84	9.0
No information about the local labour market	13	1.4
Regularly of feedback to government in the past six months		
Often	58	6.0
Several times	81	8.4
A few times	283	29.3
Never	544	56.3
The amount of evidence required for each client is		
Excessive	527	62.2
Fair enough	291	34.4
Inadequate	6	0.7
Not relevant to my job	15	1.8
Don't know	8	0.9
Is enough accurate information available via the IT system?		
Yes	586	69.4
No	255	30.2
I don't use the IT system	3	0.4
Does your office have a bonus or incentive scheme?		
Yes	372	44.8
No	458	55.2

Respondents were asked to identify which out of four statements best reflects the priorities in their office (Figure V) and their own personal priorities (Figure VI). In Figure V, the largest proportion of respondents thought that the priority in the office is meeting the targets set by management (54.7%) followed by knowing the rules and procedures (36.9%). A significantly smaller proportion of respondents felt that competing with other service providers (5.3%) or maintaining strong contacts (3.2%) reflect the priorities in their office. When the same four statements were presented in terms of the participants' own personal priorities, the results were slightly different. As shown in Figure VI, the priority for the largest number of participants is knowing the

rules and office procedures (49.5%) followed by meeting the targets set by management (37.8%). Similar to the results shown in Figure V, the two lowest personal priorities are strong contacts outside of the organisation (8.3%) and competing with other service providers (4.3%).

Figure V Office priorities

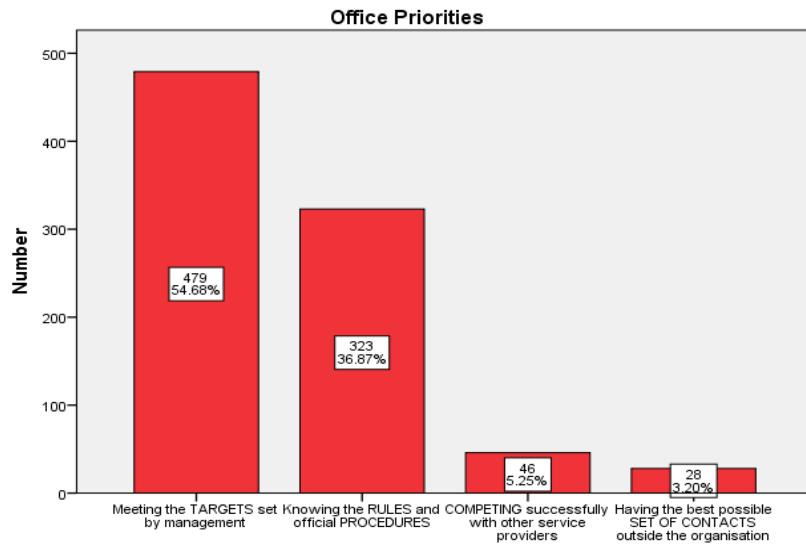


Figure VI Personal priorities

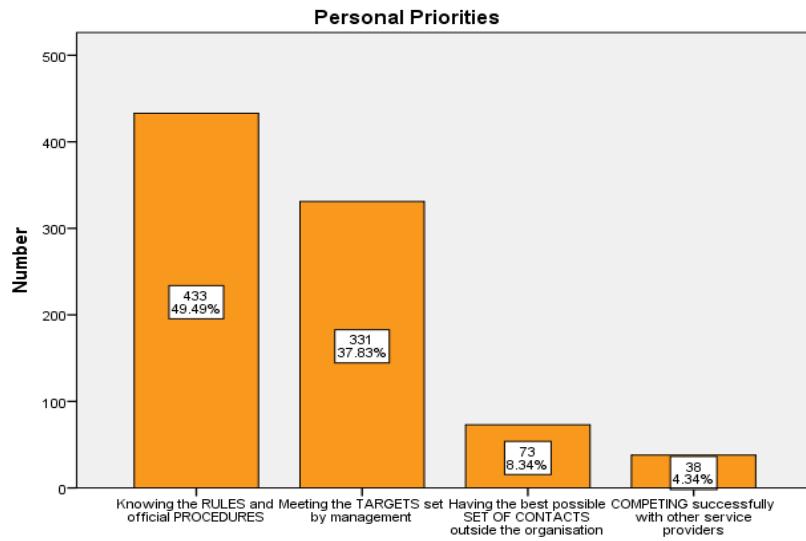


Table IX provides information on external meetings. Almost two thirds of survey respondents reported that they do not attend work related meetings outside their own organization (60.4%). Of the 39.6% who do attend external meetings, these meetings most commonly occur on a monthly basis (45.1%) while 14.7% occur weekly.

Table IX External meetings

	Number	Percentage
Do you attend work related meetings, outside your own organisation, with professionals from other employment agencies?		
Yes	330	39.6
No	503	60.4
How often does this group meet?		
Weekly	48	14.7
Monthly	125	38.3
Bi monthly	65	19.9
Quarterly	58	17.8
Less than quarterly	30	9.2

Table X contains the results on how much say frontline staff have in relation to a range of workplace factors. These factors include how the job is done, the order in which tasks are performed, and how they engage with clients. The results indicate that staff have a good deal of say on all factors particularly on how they engage with clients (41.6%), the order in which tasks are performed (39.4%), and the speed at which work is performed (35.6%).

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=830)	5.9	27.6	26.1	31.0	9.4
The order in which tasks are performed (n= 828)	3.9	17.4	19.6	39.4	19.8
Speed at which work is performed (828)	6.8	16.7	25.6	35.6	15.3
Changes to how the job is done (n=827)	10.4	24.5	26.6	28.7	9.8
How clients are engaged with (827)	3.5	14.6	18.0	41.6	22.2

Frontline staff were also asked how well informed they believe they are about various aspects of their job. The results shown in Table XI indicate that staff believe they are very well informed with respect to what is to be done (46.3%), the priority of work to be done (43.8%) and policies and procedures (41.7%). Overall, staff believe they are quite well informed on all factors including technical knowledge (39.0%), how they are supposed to do their job (37.5%), and how well the job is done (37.4%).

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=829)	46.3	36.7	12.8	3.6	0.6
Policies and procedures (n=827)	41.7	38.5	13.2	5.7	1.0
Priority of work to be done (n=828)	43.0	41.3	11.6	3.3	0.8
How well the job is done (n=828)	33.6	37.4	16.5	8.5	4.0
Technical knowledge (n=826)	28.9	39.0	20.1	9.9	2.1
How you are supposed to do the job (n=824)	33.9	37.5	18.4	8.0	2.2
Money value of your interactions with each job seeker (n=827)	31.1	32.2	19.2	10.9	6.7

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 (89.4%). Failing to attend a job interview was also seen as a serious offence with 87.2% of respondents stating they would issue a PR if that occurred. The next most common reasons for evoking sanctioning powers, in descending order, are: when a jobseeker refuses a suitable job offer (85.4%); when a jobseeker fails to commence an employment or training program (84.6%); when a jobseeker voluntarily leaves a job (80.1%); when a jobseeker is dismissed from a job or training program (73.7%); when a jobseeker fails to contact the office (72.7%); when a jobseeker fails to apply for a suitable job (71.3%); and when a jobseeker leaves a training course (71.2%).

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=875)	73.7
A job seeker refuses to apply for a suitable job (n=878)	71.3
A job seeker refuses a suitable job offer (n=879)	85.4
A job seeker fails to commence an employment program or training course (n=878)	84.6
A job seeker leaves a training course (n=873)	71.2
A job seeker fails to contact our office (n=883)	72.7
A job seeker fails to attend a job interview (n=883)	87.2
A job seeker voluntarily leaves a job (n=875)	80.1
A job seeker fails to keep an appointment with my office (n=0)	N/a
A job seeker does any of these for a second time (n=878)	89.4

A range of reasons were given as to why frontline staff may decide not to issue a Participation Report (PRs). The most popular response, as shown in Table XIII, was that the jobseeker is normally a good client and a verbal warning would be more suitable (69.0%) followed by that the case could not be substantiated (61.9%) and the jobseeker agreement was not specific enough (44.2%). A small proportion of staff decide not to issue a PR out of fear for personal safety (9.2%). The results also show that on average

6.53 clients were issued with a Participation Report in the last two weeks with less than half of the PRs issued to Centrelink being upheld (46.0%).

Table XIII Participation Reports (sanctions) Continued

Participation Reports (PRs) NOT filed for the following reasons	Number	Percentage
The case can't be substantiated	585	61.9
The job seeker agreement was not specific enough	418	44.2
Fear for personal safety	86	9.1
Sanctions are often overturned	248	26.2
Sanctioning is not an incentive to compliance	77	8.1
Avoiding a reputation for being too tough	7	0.7
The office does not encourage Sanctioning	11	1.2
The penalties are too harsh on the job seeker	19	2.0
The job seeker is normally a good client and it is more effective to issue a verbal warning only	652	69.0
Number of clients sanctioned in the last two weeks (n=914)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Number of clients	6.53	11.952
Proportion of sanctions that are upheld (n=889)		
Proportion upheld	45.98	31.295

Factors Influencing Employment Services Agencies and how Staff do their Job

The results in Table XIV reveal that frontline staff generally view Australian employment services as effective. While only 10.1% of respondents stated that the system is 'very effective', 33.3% and 18.6% of respondents rated the system as 'effective'. The response to the question 'how effective is the current employment services system in getting jobseekers off benefits' shows that only 14.1% believe the system to be 'very effective'. However, the results also show that 23.7% and 11.1% believe the system to be 'effective' compared to 3.2% and 9.4% who believe it is 'not effective'.

Table XIV also highlights the level of job satisfaction amongst frontline staff as well as the extent to which their job is routine and dictated by the IT system. The results with respect to job satisfaction were fairly evenly spread with a combined percentage of 36.4% indicating that they are satisfied. However, only 7.8% of respondents indicated that they were 'very satisfied' while 11.9% indicated that they were not very satisfied. The results also indicate that frontline staff tend to view the job that they perform as routine with 14.7% reporting that it is 'very routine' followed by a combined percentage of 57.3% reporting that it is 'routine'. In terms of the IT system, the results indicate that frontline staff believe that the system dictates how they do their job. Less than 2% of respondents stated that the IT system dictates how they do their job to a 'small extent' while 22.7% stated that the system dictates how they do their job to a 'large extent'.

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= 923)	0.9	4.4	10.6	22.1	33.3	18.6	10.1
How effective is the current employment services system in getting job seekers off benefits? (n=914)	3.2	9.4	18.7	29.5	23.7	11.1	4.4
	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=829)	7.8	17.6	18.8	16.5	14.6	12.7	11.9
	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=831)	14.7	29.0	28.3	17.8	6.7	2.6	0.8
	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 dictates how you do your job? (n=830)	1.8	4.0	9.8	19.9	22.3	20.5	22.7

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 30.3% strongly disagreed with this statement, 6.8% strongly agreed, and 18.7% had a neutral response. Respondents were also asked if their agency tends to focus on raising education and skills amongst jobseekers or on helping jobseekers get a job as quickly as possible. The results indicate that 33.7% of respondents had a neutral response followed by 16.3% who believed that quick job placement was a greater priority in their office compared to 6.9% who stated that raising skill levels was the priority. This result was confirmed by the subsequent question in Table XV, which asked whether management would encourage a job seeker to take a low-paying job, or encourage them 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 (68.8%). Less than half of one percent of respondents stated that they felt management would be more likely to encourage the job seeker to stay on benefits. Respondents also stated that there is a tendency to not be lenient in the use of Participation Reports with 19.6% reporting that their office encourages staff not to be lenient while 2.6% stated that they are encouraged to be lenient.

Table XV Views on how Agencies Carry out their Business

	Percentage	1 Strong 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=915)	6.8	3.7	8.2	18.7	15.0	17.4	30.3	
	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=914)	16.3	9.3	12.5	33.7	13.5	7.9	6.9	
	1 Take the job and leave the benefits	2	3	4	5	6	7 Stay on benefits and wait for a better opportun ities	
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=900)	68.8	15.3	7.6	6.8	0.8	0.4	0.3	
	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=897)	1.7	5.9	8.2	17.3	25.8	16.3	14.8	
	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=883)	19.6	20.6	19.7	29.9	5.9	1.7	2.6	

In the results shown in Table XVI, survey participants 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 jobseeker. The results were not dissimilar to those

presented in the table above, with 63.6% of frontline staff saying they would encourage the job seeker to take the job while only 0.4% would encourage clients to remain on benefits.

The largest proportion of survey participants assumed a neutral position (39.9%) when asked 'which is more often to blame if a person is on benefits: lack of effort on their part or circumstances beyond their control'. Of those that did take a strong position, 9.1% stated that a lack of effort on the part of the jobseeker is a significant factor while 3.0% believe it is a result of circumstances beyond the jobseekers control.

The largest proportion of survey respondents also believe that a 'great deal' of the decisions they make about jobseekers is determined by standard program rules and regulations with a combined percentage of 53.5% of participants selecting this option. However, there was more variation in the spread of views with respect to the amount of leeway staff have in deciding what programs or activities to assign jobseekers with over a quarter of respondents (25.4%) selecting a neutral position. Of those that did take a strong position, 9.6% reported a great deal of leeway while 5.3% reported very little leeway. Despite the variation in these results, survey participants reported that they were willing to exert extra effort on behalf of their organisation (32.2%) while only 2.0% indicated that they are not willing to exert extra effort.

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=910)	63.6	16.3	9.9	6.7	2.2	0.9	0.4
	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=897)	9.1	10.4	21.5	39.9	12.3	3.8	3.0
	1 Very little	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=893)	0.2	0.8	3.2	17.9	24.3	26.4	27.1
	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=887)	5.3	6.0	10.5	25.4	25.7	17.6	9.6
	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=835)	32.2	27.7	17.5	13.8	3.8	3.0	2.0

Perceptions of the Employment System

Table XVII shows the results from questions that asked frontline staff about how they do their job, what they think about the Australian employment system, and how they work with jobseekers. 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 30.5% strongly agreed, and 53.4% 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 19.3% strongly agreeing, and 46.4% 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 22.3% strongly disagreeing with the statement 'the lines of authority are not clear in my work' (question vi) and a further 49.3% also disagreeing. In turn, respondents agreed that their supervisor does know a lot about the work being done on a day-to-day basis (53.3%) and 59.1% stated that when they come across something not covered by the procedural guide, they refer it to their supervisor (see question xv).

The largest proportion of respondents indicated that the goal in their work is to find the middle-ground between the needs of jobseekers, employers, and the social security system with 20.9% strongly agreeing and 50.9% agreeing with this statement. Respondents also indicated that they are cognisant of the business imperatives operating in their agency with 34.4% strongly agreeing, and 50.4% 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=888)	9.8	30.6	20.9	31.6	7.0
ii) I consider myself to be an advocate for the client/job seekers' rights (n=885)	13.0	45.9	34.1	5.3	1.7
iii) Public servants have special responsibilities which are different from other service delivery staff (n=884)	13.3	49.2	23.5	11.5	2.4
iv) Governments should do more to help job seekers (n=886)	14.8	31.9	30.9	18.8	3.5
v) I find that issuing Participation Reports (sanctions) can really damage your reputation with job seekers and others in the employment field (n=854)	2.9	13.5	20.1	44.3	19.2
vi) The lines of authority are not clear in my work (n=852)	3.3	10.1	15.0	49.3	22.3
vii) I do not like my competition (internal or external) to know how I go about getting my results (n=852)	3.3	14.0	35.4	33.5	13.8
viii) My job can be done by following a few basic rules (n=849)	6.4	36.3	14.5	30.5	12.4
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=852)	10.6	49.6	18.9	17.6	3.3
x) My supervisor knows a lot about the work I do day-to-day (n=853)	25.8	53.3	10.0	7.5	3.4
xi) The really important rules in this job are the ones to do with obtaining assistance from other organisations	2.4	15.2	43.1	32.0	7.3

(n=847)					
xii) In my job, I am NOT influenced by numerical targets (including star rating) (n=850)	3.3	12.7	15.1	43.1	25.9
xiii) The main thing I have to do in this job is gain the trust of the job seeker (n=850)	19.3	46.4	19.3	12.9	2.1
xiv) Our organisation has targets for certain types of job seekers (n=847)	22.3	52.8	13.6	9.0	2.4
xv) When I come across something not covered by the procedural guide, I refer it to my supervisor (n=851)	28.8	59.1	6.5	4.9	0.7
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=852)	20.9	50.9	17.4	9.6	1.2
xvii) I use a lot of personal judgement to decide what is best for each job seeker (n=855)	16.4	51.8	22.5	7.3	2.1
xviii) Before reporting a job seeker for non-compliance, I would always consider which classification group they belonged to (n=851)	10.9	40.8	20.9	19.5	7.9
xix) I like to keep my own records and files on job seekers and programs (n=834)	17.1	40.4	17.9	19.2	5.4
xx) Our computer system tells me what steps to take with job seekers and when to take them (833)	6.6	43.8	24.4	22.0	3.2
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=836)	27.0	60.0	7.7	4.2	1.1
xxii) To get job seekers to pay attention I often remind them that enforcing compliance is part of my job (n=832)	12.6	54.1	19.0	12.5	1.8
xxiii) My job is determined by goals set elsewhere (n=835)	9.3	45.7	26.7	16.4	1.8
xxiv) More and more the objective in this job is to maximise the organisation's financial outcomes (n=834)	22.9	42.4	21.1	11.4	2.2
xxv) I think the objective in this job is to shift the maximum number of job seekers off benefits (n=835)	30.5	53.4	10.7	4.6	0.8
xxvi) I use our information technology system to track priority job seekers (n=833)	13.8	51.1	23.6	10.0	1.4
xxvii) I do tend to take note of those actions with job seekers that will generate a payable outcome for the office (n=831)	13.6	52.8	21.3	10.3	1.9
xxviii) All my job seekers receive a similar service (n=835)	21.1	54.0	9.6	12.8	2.5
xxix) I am often asked to suggest ways to improve things (n=835)	13.4	48.3	24.2	10.1	4.1
xxx) I am aware that my organisation pays attention to the income I generate by placing job seekers (n=836)	34.4	50.4	11.8	2.5	0.8
xxx) If an official from another	17.0	43.0	25.3	8.9	5.8

employment organisation asked for help in using the computer, I would help them (n=834)					
xxxi) In my job, job seekers are organised into formal and informal priority groups (n=835)	5.0	28.7	34.6	23.0	8.6

Conclusion

This report demonstrates a great deal about life at the frontline of the Australian employment sector. Much analysis of the sector focuses on policy decisions, funding arrangements, and the compliance regime. We therefore trust that the insight afforded by this survey – in which we ask frontline staff directly how they perform their job – has been of interest.

In coming months we will report back on our survey of UK frontline employment services staff. That will be followed by a third report which will demonstrate how the experience of frontline staff differs between Australia and the UK.

This project will also generate a number of academic publications, including journal articles, a book and conference papers. To follow the project simply keep an eye out on our webpage: http://www.ssps.unimelb.edu.au/research/projects/employment_services.