

The Auditor-General
Audit Report No.39 2001–02
Performance Audit

Management of the Provision of Information to Job Seekers

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

Australian National Audit Office

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of Australia 2002

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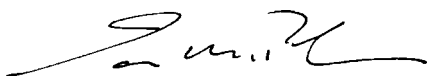
Canberra ACT
4 April 2002

Dear Madam President
Dear Mr Speaker

The Australian National Audit Office has undertaken a performance audit in the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations in accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*. I present this report of this audit, and the accompanying brochure, to the Parliament. The report is titled *Management of the Provision of Information to Job Seekers*.

Following its tabling in Parliament, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's Homepage—<http://www.anao.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely



Ian McPhee
Acting Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

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Abbreviations/Glossary

Abbreviations

ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
BPA	Business Partnership Arrangement between DEWR and Centrelink
BPRG	Business Partnership Review Group
Centrelink	Commonwealth Service Delivery Agency, an independent statutory authority in the Social Security portfolio with responsibility for the integrated service delivery of Commonwealth social welfare payments and services under purchaser/provider arrangements.
CSC	Customer Service Centre (Centrelink)
CSO	Customer Service Officer (Centrelink)
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
IES	Integrated Employment System (DEWR's mainframe application system that is used to store information on job seekers and support the operation of employment arrangements).
JobSearch	Provides public access to the National Vacancy Database through a network of touch screen kiosks and a web site.
JSCI	Job Seeker Classification Instrument
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
PBS	Portfolio Budget Statements
VCW	Value Creation Workshop

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

Introduction

1. The unemployed and job seekers require accurate and timely information about their rights, including income support, the range of services available to them and their obligations resulting from the Government's *mutual obligation* policy.
2. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and Centrelink are the two Commonwealth government agencies chiefly involved in the delivery of a range of services to the unemployed and job seekers.
3. Consistent with the Government's policy objectives, DEWR develops employment service programmes and also purchases a range of services from Centrelink for delivery to the job seekers throughout Australia. In addition, DEWR purchases services from employment service providers known as the Job Network. Job Network is a group of organisations, both profit and not-for-profit, that specialises in finding jobs for job seekers. Job seekers are, in the main, referred to Job Network by Centrelink.
4. The services which DEWR purchase from Centrelink include the following:
 - registration, assessment and classification of job seekers;
 - provision of information to job seekers;
 - referral of job seekers to employment services; and
 - provision of employment self help facilities.
5. Through its network of 310 Customer Service Centres (CSCs), and 28 linked call centres, Centrelink is the initial contact point for most job seekers and is responsible for the unemployment registration process. Around one million unemployment registrations, including for those who register more than once, are completed each year.
6. Centrelink provides information on employment services including:
 - job seekers' rights and obligations;
 - Job Network;
 - employment opportunities in the region; and
 - providers with expertise about specific job opportunities.
7. DEWR has put in place a number of services to help job seekers get back to work or overcome barriers which may prevent them finding sustainable

employment. While Centrelink facilitates access to these services, it is the contracted Job Network members who run the services which provide the following:

- Job Matching—gathering employers’ vacancies and matching job seekers to these jobs;
- Job Search Training—training on job search techniques to prepare job seekers to apply for jobs; and
- Intensive Assistance—individually tailored help for job seekers most at risk of becoming long term unemployed.

8. In addition to Job Network services, there is a range of other activities job seekers can access to help meet their *mutual obligation* requirements, including Work for the Dole.

9. This audit focused on the management of the provision of employment services information to job seekers. DEWR’s research indicates that job seekers regard information provision as one of the most valued elements of employment services provided by the government. Important to understanding the context for this audit is the fact that information provision is not treated by either DEWR or Centrelink as a discrete programme, or budget line item (cost centre). Rather it is one of the activities delivered concurrently with, and as a part of, other activities or services, for example, registering a job seeker for income support or referring a job seeker to a Job Network member.

Audit objectives, scope and focus

10. The objective of the audit was to assess the administrative effectiveness of DEWR’s management of the provision of information on employment services to job seekers. In order to achieve this objective, the audit examined whether:

- DEWR has adequately determined the information that should be provided to job seekers;
- DEWR and Centrelink have developed an effective means of providing information to job seekers;
- DEWR has adequate means of assuring that information to job seekers is being delivered effectively by Centrelink; and
- DEWR has an adequate feedback loop that allows continuous improvement in the provision of information to job seekers.

11. For the purpose of this audit, job seekers have been defined as individuals who are looking for work, and are registered as unemployed. Depending on

their personal circumstances, job seekers may or may not be eligible for income support.

12. The audit examined DEWR's and Centrelink's management of the provision of employment services information to job seekers up to the point where they are referred to organisations that specialise in finding jobs for job seekers.

13. The audit did not examine the issues surrounding the assessment and referral of job seekers to Job Network members; these processes may be subject to an audit in the future. The ANAO notes that the Productivity Commission's recently published draft report of the *Independent Review of Job Network*¹ discusses the adequacy of information provided to job seekers to make an informed choice of employment services provider.

14. The audit fieldwork was conducted in the then Department of Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB). As a result of the administrative arrangements of 23 November 2001, the management of employment services functions previously undertaken by DEWRSB became the responsibility of DEWR. Accordingly, the audit conclusions and findings related to departmental matters were directed to DEWR.

Overall Conclusion

15. The ANAO concluded that DEWR's management of the provision of employment services information to job seekers from the time they start looking for a job until they are referred to a Job Network member is generally effective. The ANAO notes that the Productivity Commission's draft report addresses job seeker choices and will provide insights and inform DEWR's strategies for enhancing the adequacy of information available to assist job seekers make an informed choice of Job Network member.

16. DEWR has conducted research that identifies job seekers' characteristics, attitudes and expectations of service, and how these factors should shape the information provided to meet job seekers' needs. This research has been augmented by Centrelink's research, which focuses on more operational matters, such as evaluations of how particular information products and services are delivered.

17. DEWR and Centrelink have developed an effective means of providing information to job seekers, which contributes to the overall departmental outcome of an efficient and equitable labour market that links people and jobs, and promotes the transition from welfare to work. DEWR service requirements

¹ Productivity Commission 2002, *Independent Review of Job Network* (Draft Report), Ch. 8.

are developed and negotiated with Centrelink. A Business Partnership Arrangement (BPA) formally establishes the range of services to be provided to job seekers. One of the services specified is the provision of information to job seekers. The BPA outlines the objectives of the services, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and monitoring and reporting standards.

18. The department has put in place a performance measurement framework that allows it to monitor whether information is being delivered to job seekers effectively by Centrelink. This performance information is reported to appropriate levels of management of both DEWR and Centrelink. There is an opportunity, however, for DEWR and Centrelink to develop jointly some common performance indicators. These indicators would not only allow for an assessment of Centrelink's performance in providing information to job seekers but also act as intermediate outcomes for DEWR on how information provision contributes to the department's overall outcome of providing services to job seekers. Such performance indicators would augment the current KPIs that are process oriented.

19. In addition, DEWR is developing feedback mechanisms that will help to continually improve the provision of information to job seekers. However, the department is currently under-utilising research data by focusing only on Centrelink's monthly performance against KPIs. The ANAO suggests that job seeker research be considered at joint meetings (both strategic and operational) between DEWR and Centrelink and suitable action taken on recommendations drawn from this research to improve management effectiveness.

Key Findings

Effective management of the provision of information to job seekers

20. DEWR and Centrelink are undertaking complementary research which identifies job seekers' characteristics, attitudes and changing behaviours as well as how those attitudes and behaviours shape the most appropriate information to meet job seekers' needs at various stages in their use of government employment services.

21. DEWR and Centrelink have jointly developed and negotiated the specifications of employment services, including the provision of adequate information to job seekers. These specifications, along with appropriate performance measures, are detailed in the BPA. Centrelink has used a combination of training programmes and guidance materials, made available to customer service staff through Centrelink's internal electronic communication system, to make the BPA operational. DEWR seeks to ensure that Centrelink's operational guidance remains consistent with policy intent by reviewing Centrelink's training programmes and guidance materials as they are being developed.

22. DEWR and Centrelink have a robust process for monitoring and reporting performance in providing quality information services to job seekers with KPIs which measure customer satisfaction with, among other things, information provided at registration as well as the quality of that information. These KPIs focus on process, and there is an opportunity for some joint performance indicators to be developed by DEWR and Centrelink to show how the process contributes to the achievement of DEWR's departmental outcome.

23. Although there is a need for DEWR and Centrelink to develop performance indicators which provide an indication of how information provision for employment services contributes towards the overall departmental outcome, data to support these indicators is already collected.

24. The Business Partnership Review Group (BPRG)—consisting of senior officers from DEWR and Centrelink—evaluates Centrelink's performance by focusing on Centrelink's monthly performance against KPIs rather than assessing trends over time and highlighting joint solutions to service delivery issues. As a result, research data collected by DEWR and Centrelink and findings from the DEWR–Centrelink–Job Network Partnership Programme presented to the BPRG are not utilised fully.

The process of providing information to job seekers

25. The range of information products and the use of multiple channels (telephone, written material, visiting Centrelink offices and use of the internet) to provide information to job seekers meets their identified preferences in dealing with Centrelink. Information is provided to job seekers by Centrelink during on site visits and through written material. The other two channels, telephone and internet, require job seekers to actively seek information themselves.

26. DEWR and Centrelink research indicates that there is an issue with the timing of the provision of adequate information to job seekers. Job seekers focus on what is immediately important to them. At initial contact, this is invariably whether they would qualify for income support payments and, if so, when their payments would begin. Therefore, information provided on employment services and job search techniques, at the claim interview and information seminar, may not be sufficiently understood and/or absorbed by job seekers.

27. DEWR conducts annual surveys of job seekers' satisfaction with government employment services. The provision of adequate information to job seekers is an important part of this survey. Generally, these surveys suggest that job seekers are satisfied with the information they receive. There are some issues relating to the currency of jobs listed on JobSearch, which links job seekers to the national vacancy database. In this light, DEWR should consider strengthening the monitoring of JobSearch and reminding Job Network members, on a regular basis, of their contractual responsibilities to maintain the currency of job vacancies on JobSearch.

28. DEWR's qualitative and quantitative surveys indicate that job seekers clearly receive messages about their obligations in return for income support, but have a much lower recall of their rights to complain about the service they receive or to appeal a decision. The ANAO considers that DEWR and Centrelink, in consultation with peak bodies, should examine ways to increase job seekers' awareness of their rights.

29. DEWR's research indicates that there is some confusion amongst job seekers about the respective roles of Job Network and Centrelink in assisting them to find a job. The ANAO suggests that Centrelink should consider clearly highlighting the respective roles of Centrelink and Job Network to job seekers more pro-actively to better manage job seekers' expectations.

Recommendations

The ANAO's recommendations and DEWR's and Centrelink's abbreviated responses are set out below. More detailed responses are contained in the body of report.

Recommendation

No.1

Para. 2.46

The ANAO recommends that DEWR gains full benefit from job seeker research by ensuring that:

- research by both DEWR and Centrelink is considered by the Business Partnership Review Group;
- research reports, where appropriate, identify areas for improvements and how they are to be progressed; and
- the Business Partnership Review Group minutes clearly state what action is to be taken on issues discussed at the meeting, when it is to be completed, and who is responsible.

DEWR response: Agreed.

Centrelink response: Agreed.

Recommendation

No.2

Para. 3.28

The ANAO recommends that DEWR:

- reminds Job Network members on a regular basis of the latter's contractual responsibilities to maintain the currency of the jobs on JobSearch; and
- actively monitors the currency of vacancies on the JobSearch database.

DEWR response: Agreed.

Recommendation

No.3

Para. 3.41

The ANAO recommends DEWR and Centrelink, in consultation with peak bodies, identify ways to increase job seekers' awareness of their rights, and the agencies' obligations in this respect.

DEWR response: Agreed.

Centrelink response: Agreed.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

1. Background

Introduction

1.1 Individuals who choose to use Government employment services to assist them to enter or re-enter the workforce have to be aware of their rights and their obligations. Government policy is that in return for the right of access to employment services, including income support, job seekers have an obligation to contribute to the community. This policy, termed *mutual obligation*, means that most job seekers must actively look for work, accept suitable employment offers and undertake additional activities to improve their employment prospects. The penalty for these job seekers not meeting this obligation can mean a reduction in income support, termed a breach.

1.2 Accordingly, the unemployed and job seekers require accurate and timely information about their rights, including income support, the range of services available to them and their obligations resulting from the Government's policy of *mutual obligation*.

The role of Government agencies

1.3 The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and Centrelink are the two Commonwealth government agencies primarily involved in the delivery of a range of services to the unemployed and job seekers.

1.4 Consistent with the Government's policy objectives, DEWR develops employment services programmes and also purchases a range of services from Centrelink for delivery to the job seekers throughout Australia. In addition, DEWR purchases services from employment service providers known as Job Network. Job Network is a group of organisations, both profit and not-for-profit, that specialises in finding jobs for job seekers. Job seekers are, in the main, referred to Job Network by Centrelink.

1.5 DEWR has developed a number of services to help job seekers get back to work or overcome barriers which may prevent them finding sustainable employment. While Centrelink facilitates access to these services, Job Network members run the services which include:

- Job Matching—gathering employers' job vacancies and matching job seekers to these jobs;
- Job Search Training—training on job search techniques (for example, resumes and interview techniques) to prepare job seekers to apply for

jobs and give them the skills and confidence to perform well when speaking to employers; and

- Intensive Assistance—individually tailored help for job seekers most at risk of becoming long term unemployed and other disadvantaged job seekers to address any employment barriers and place them in jobs.

1.6 In addition to Job Network services there are a range of activities job seekers can access to help meet their *mutual obligation* requirements, including Work for the Dole.

1.7 Through its network of 310 Customer Service Centres (CSCs), and 28 linked call centres, Centrelink is the initial contact point for most job seekers and is responsible for the unemployment registration process. Around one million unemployment registrations, including those who register more than once, are completed each year.

1.8 Centrelink also provides information on employment services including information on:

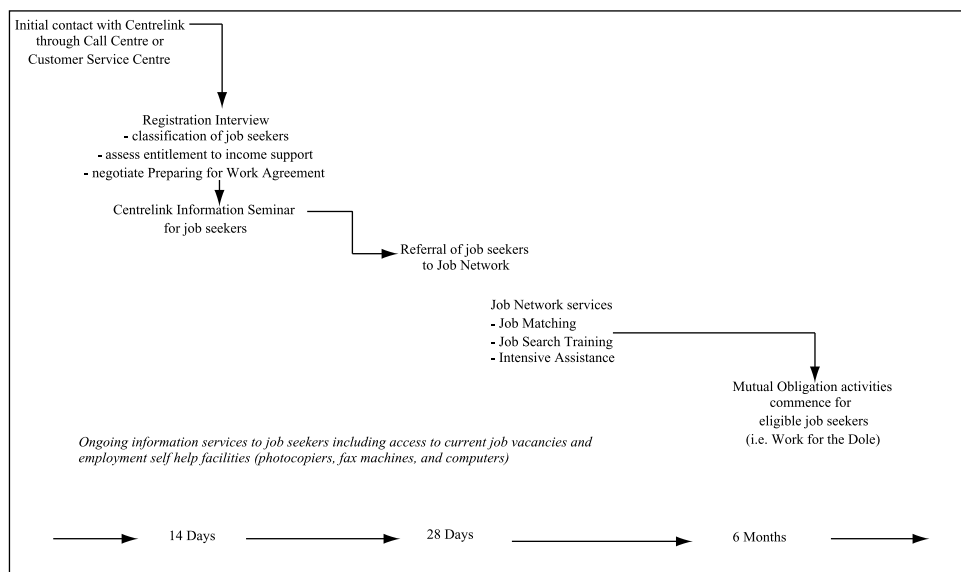
- job seekers' rights and obligations;
- Job Network;
- employment opportunities in the region; and
- providers with expertise about specific job opportunities.

1.9 The provision of information to job seekers is one of a number of interrelated employment services DEWR purchases from Centrelink. The total price paid for these services is around \$110 million per annum.

1.10 The way that job seekers access Government employment services is shown diagrammatically below in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Process for job seekers accessing employment services



Source: DEWR-Centrelink Business Partnership Arrangement.

Audit Approach

The focus of the audit

1.11 For the purpose of this audit, job seekers have been defined as individuals who are looking for work, and are registered as unemployed. Depending on their personal circumstances, job seekers may or may not be eligible for income support.

1.12 The audit examined DEWR's and Centrelink's management of the provision of employment services information to job seekers up to the point where they are referred to organisations that specialise in finding jobs for job seekers.

1.13 The audit did not examine the issues surrounding the assessment and referral of job seekers to Job Network members; these processes may be subject to an audit in the future. The ANAO notes that the Productivity Commission's recently published draft report of the *Independent Review of Job Network*² discusses the adequacy of information provided to job seekers to make an informed choice of employment services provider.

² Productivity Commission 2002, Ch. 8.

1.14 The audit also did not specifically examine the communication and management issues associated with payments/benefits/allowances for unemployed people.

1.15 The audit fieldwork was conducted in the then Department of Employment Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB). As a result of the administrative arrangements of 23 November 2001, the management of employment services functions previously undertaken by DEWRSB became the responsibility of DEWR. Accordingly, the audit conclusions and findings related to departmental matters were directed to DEWR.

Audit Objectives

1.16 The objective of the audit was to assess the administrative effectiveness of DEWR's management of the provision of information on employment services to job seekers. In order to achieve this objective, the audit examined whether:

- DEWR has adequately determined the information that should be provided to job seekers;
- DEWR and Centrelink have developed an effective means of providing information to job seekers;
- DEWR has adequate means of assuring that information to job seekers is being delivered effectively by Centrelink; and
- DEWR has an adequate feedback loop that allows continuous improvement in the provision of information to job seekers.

Audit Methodology

1.17 The audit approach included interviews with DEWR National Office staff and examination and analysis of records. The audit team visited one DEWR State Office (Sydney).

1.18 The audit team interviewed staff at Centrelink's National Support Office and Area Office (West Victoria). The team also examined service delivery by observing information seminars and job seeker interviews, and by interviewing staff at three Centrelink Customer Service Centres (Liverpool, Mildura, and Swan Hill). Service delivery at a Centrelink Call Centre (Sydney) was also examined through interviews with staff and listening to calls from job seekers.

1.19 In addition, the audit team consulted with the Rules Simplification Taskforce, established by the Minister for Family and Community Services to examine ways of simplifying the requirements for clients accessing Centrelink.

1.20 The audit team also consulted with key stakeholders including the National Employment Services Association, Jobs Australia, and Welfare Rights.

1.21 The audit team conducted focus groups with a small number of job seekers in both metropolitan and rural centres to gain an understanding of the qualitative issues associated with the provision of information to job seekers.

1.22 A consultant, Ms Margaret Goode, was engaged as a member of the ANAO audit team. Her contribution covered all aspects of the audit.

1.23 The audit was conducted in conformance with ANAO auditing standards at a cost of approximately \$295 000.

Structure of the report

1.24 The remainder of the report is structured along the following lines:

- Chapter 2—examines DEWR's management of the provision of information to job seekers. Key elements include: DEWR research of job seeker information needs; the development of an effective framework for information provision; monitoring and reporting of performance; and how feedback is used to improve the process.
- Chapter 3—examines the process for the provision of information to job seekers and how the management framework discussed in Chapter 2 works in practice.

2. Effective Management of the Provision of Information to Job Seekers

This chapter examines DEWR's management of the provision of information to job seekers. Key elements include: DEWR research of job seeker information needs; the development an effective framework for information provision; monitoring and reporting of performance; and how feedback is used to improve the process.

Introduction

2.1 The ANAO sought to determine the effectiveness of DEWR's management framework for the provision of information to job seekers. The key elements which contribute to the effective management of the provision of information to job seekers include:

- research to determine job seekers information needs;
- developing an effective means of providing information to job seekers;
- monitoring and reporting on performance; and
- feedback from monitoring and research to improve future provision of information to job seekers.

Research to determine job seekers' information needs

2.2 Information on the employment services available to job seekers should be designed to assist them to enter and return quickly to the workforce and/or to make the best choice of services and service providers to enhance their chances of finding a job. The 1997 ANAO/Management Advisory Board *Better Practice Guide Quality in Customer Service* suggests that agencies should understand the needs and expectations of customers to ensure that work efforts focus on the factors which matter most to customers.

2.3 Based on better practice principles the ANAO sought to determine whether DEWR had:

- undertaken job seeker (customer) needs research;
- examined the way that job seekers access information; and
- determined who needs what information.

Customer needs research

2.4 In 1997, a qualitative survey of job seekers was conducted by the then Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA). This report outlined the core elements of service that contribute to job seekers' perceptions of service quality. DEWR used the report as a basis for the questions in its annual Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Surveys. The survey seeks to measure job seekers perception of the quality of service they receive from Centrelink.

2.5 In 2001, DEWR conducted a smaller qualitative study of job seekers to provide their feedback to help in the revision of the survey.

2.6 Both the 1997 and 2001 research highlighted that job seekers regard information provision as one of the most valued elements of employment services provided by government. It also highlighted a number of expectations that job seekers had about the provision of employment services. The ANAO noted that the results of the research have been used by DEWR to develop the Service Quality Monitoring programme, which is a major tool in monitoring Centrelink's service delivery.

2.7 DEWR research is complemented at an operational level by Centrelink research and evaluation work. Centrelink examines the performance of individual Customer Service Centres (CSCs) and call centres, and in 2001 evaluated information provision methods. Centrelink uses Value Creation Workshops (VCWs) to gain data on customer satisfaction and need on its complete range of services, including employment services. Centrelink has conducted over 1000 VCWs since 1997 involving more than 16 000 customers and 16 000 staff.

Job seekers' access to information

2.8 DEWR research identified that the majority of job seekers prefer to deal with Centrelink in person at CSCs, and they exercise this preference where they can. Around one quarter of job seekers use the telephone as their preferred method of dealing with Centrelink. For job seekers in remote areas the proportion using telephone is slightly higher.

2.9 Mail and internet, the other two means of communicating available to job seekers, are used by only a small proportion of job seekers.

Research into information needs

2.10 In mid-2001, DEWR initiated research to identify the attitudinal segments in the job seeker population. Job seekers with different attitudes may be

influenced by different motivational levers and have different service needs.

2.11 DEWR advised that the research identified two key dimensions that differentiate job seeker segments: the motivational level of job seekers; and the level of limitation in terms of the type of job, or job search methods, job seekers are prepared to try. The research is still in progress but already indicates the service needs and the information requirements for the job seeker segments. Once fully tested, the research may indicate the most appropriate information to meet the needs of each job seeker, and when that information might best be delivered to be relevant to their particular circumstances.

Developing an effective means of providing information to job seekers

2.12 DEWR purchases employment services including the provision of information to job seekers from Centrelink. In considering whether DEWR had developed an effective means of providing information to job seekers, the ANAO expected that:

- DEWR and Centrelink would have in place an arrangement that specifies the services to be purchased from Centrelink; and
- Centrelink would have processes to translate the high level specification of such an agreement into operational guidance for its staff.

Specifying what services DEWR requires of Centrelink

2.13 A Business Partnership Arrangement (BPA) has been developed which provides for DEWR to purchase services, including the provision of information to job seekers, from Centrelink. The BPA specifies:

- the products and services to be provided, including the provision of information to job seekers;
- performance measures and reporting mechanisms;
- funding provisions; and
- arrangements agreed upon to manage particular issues.

2.14 The current BPA covers three years (1999–2002) and is reviewed annually. The BPA will be renewed in 2002.

2.15 DEWR develops, and agrees with Centrelink, *Policy Guides* to provide information to staff in DEWR and Centrelink on the services specified in the BPA.

Process to translate specification of required services into operational guidance

2.16 To make DEWR policy operational, Centrelink uses a combination of training programmes and guidance materials. Much of this material is made available to customer service staff through Centrelink's intranet (an internal electronic communication system). In the development of training material, Centrelink seeks DEWR's input at the national level as a way of ensuring that operational guidance remains consistent with policy intent. Centrelink has recently conducted training programmes, which cover the provision of information to job seekers, for around 7000 Customer Service Officers.

2.17 In 2000, Centrelink produced a document—*Must dos*—that links the tasks that Centrelink staff should be undertaking in their day-to-day work if Centrelink is to meet its Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The document was designed to assist Centrelink Customer Service Officers consolidate their work into consistent practices to meet the KPIs and provide a high level of customer satisfaction. DEWR became aware of the document in March 2001 and in April 2001, having examined the document to ensure that the policy intent of the KPI's was being applied, provided comments on the document. The ANAO suggests that Centrelink ensures there is a formalised process for seeking DEWR's input into training material, which makes policy operational, to ensure that the policy intent is applied correctly.

2.18 At the state level, DEWR and Centrelink staff advised that a combination of formal and informal interaction between DEWR State Offices and Centrelink Area Offices provide the means of ensuring that service delivery is consistent with policy intent.

Monitoring and reporting on performance

2.19 Performance information should be directly linked to the organisation's goals, and should be geared to measure and/or assess the achievement of specific policy outcomes and outputs. Performance information should assist stakeholders and management to draw well informed conclusions about performance. Such information should provide a sound contribution toward management decision making. The articulation of appropriate performance measures is particularly important in a purchaser/provider environment where the customer, in this case the job seeker, is at arms length from the purchaser.

2.20 The ANAO examined the mechanisms and processes established by DEWR to ensure that information was being delivered effectively to job seekers. The ANAO expected that DEWR would have:

- established a range of performance measures; and
- developed a framework for performance monitoring and reporting.

Performance measures

2.21 The services that DEWR purchases from Centrelink are detailed in the BPA. There are KPIs attached to these services. The KPIs most applicable to the provision of information to job seekers are as follows:

- KPI 1 that measures the proportion of job seekers satisfied with services delivered by Centrelink (including those in remote and rural areas, and job seekers in special groups) for the following components of service:
 - overall employment related services;
 - services and information received at registration;
 - understanding of *mutual obligation* and Preparing for Work Agreements;
 - waiting times for teleservicing, interviews and at the counter service;
 - the quality of information provided; and
 - the accessibility and condition of employment self help facilities.
- KPI 2 that measures the proportion of job seekers that register within seven days of their first contact with Centrelink. Job seekers need to be registered quickly so they can be referred to further programmes and services, as soon as possible. The time taken to register a job seeker is, therefore, an important indicator.

2.22 There are benchmarks set for the desired performance level for most of the KPIs. For the KPIs relevant to provision of information to job seekers, the benchmarks are as follows:

- for KPI 1, the benchmark for customer satisfaction with overall services is 80 per cent; and
- for KPI 2, the DEWR benchmark for proportion of job seekers registered within seven days of first contact with Centrelink is 80 per cent, and 95 per cent of job seekers registered within 14 days of first contact with Centrelink.

2.23 DEWR informed the ANAO that the benchmark for KPI 1 was chosen because it is a commonly accepted benchmark for customer satisfaction surveys. The measure is the job seekers' satisfaction with the service provided. Centrelink has a Customer Charter that offers broad commitments to customer service.

However, the Charter does not contain actual service standards, such as waiting times for telephone or counter services.³

2.24 Centrelink's performance against the commitments in the Customer Charter are reported in the Centrelink *Annual Report* using data from Centrelink customer satisfaction surveys. It is important to note that these surveys cover all Centrelink's customers, not just job seekers. The 2000-2001 Centrelink *Annual Report* highlights that of the customers surveyed:

- 86 per cent were satisfied with the range of ways that they were able to contact Centrelink⁴;
- 69 per cent found information was easy to understand⁵;
- at least 70 per cent found that information was accurate⁶; and
- at least 65 per cent found that the information provided was consistent.⁷

2.25 In relation to KPI 2, the registration of job seekers within seven days of first contact with Centrelink, the achievement was only 63 per cent in 2000–2001 compared to the DEWR benchmark of 80 per cent. During the course of the audit the ANAO suggested that DEWR and Centrelink consider reviewing the benchmark given the lack of achievement in 2000–2001. DEWR informed the ANAO that all KPIs and benchmarks will be revised during the development of the BPA for 2002–2003.

Moving to outcome focused measures

2.26 The ANAO considers the performance measures contained in the BPA concentrate on process, or satisfaction with a process, rather than achievement of an outcome—namely a job seeker finding a job. Given that DEWR is purchasing a process from Centrelink, process focused KPIs are appropriate. Nevertheless, it is important to monitor how the process contributes to the achievement of the Departmental Outcome of an efficient and equitable labour market that links people and jobs and promotes the transition from welfare to work. This contribution can be termed an intermediate outcome.

2.27 There is an opportunity, therefore, for DEWR and Centrelink to develop jointly some common performance indicators which would not only allow for an assessment of Centrelink's performance in providing information to job

³ DEWR has a Service Charter which sets out service standards for mail, telephone and personal visit contact.

⁴ Centrelink National Customer Satisfaction Survey, November 2000.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Centrelink CSC Customer Satisfaction Survey, November 2000.

⁷ Centrelink Call Centre Customer Satisfaction Survey, November 2000.

seekers but should also act as intermediate outcomes for DEWR in showing how information provision contributes to the Department's overall outcome in providing services to job seekers.

2.28 The ANAO found that DEWR and Centrelink already collect data which provides an indication of achievement of intermediate outcomes about information provision for employment services which, in turn, contributes towards the overall departmental outcome.⁸

2.29 To measure intermediate outcomes DEWR and Centrelink should consider using existing data including:

- usefulness of information provided in getting a job; and
- appropriateness of the information to the job seekers' needs.

Performance monitoring and reporting

Reporting performance

2.30 Monthly monitoring and reporting of performance is conducted at a national level in the Business Partnership Review Group (BPRG). The BPRG—consisting of senior officers from DEWR and Centrelink—evaluates Centrelink's performance against KPIs, highlights emerging issues, and provides advice on policy developments.

Service quality monitoring

2.31 DEWR has developed the Service Quality Monitoring Programme which is designed to provide overall measures of satisfaction with Centrelink services, including the provision of information, along with specific measures of satisfaction for special groups.

2.32 At the heart of the Programme is the annual Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey. The survey, first conducted in 1998, is based on the findings of the customer need analysis in 1997 and measures what job seekers believe is important. In performing the survey, approximately 3500 telephone interviews are conducted with job seekers who have had contact with Centrelink during the previous six months. The sample is designed to provide nationally reliable data against KPI 1 and data for special groups.

2.33 The Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey is to be further enhanced with DEWR's development and use of a Customer Satisfaction Index. DEWR advised the ANAO that the index has the potential to enhance both the reliability of the measure of customer satisfaction, and the

⁸ 'Linking people to jobs and promoting the transfer from welfare to work'.

usefulness of customer satisfaction data for understanding performance and management decision making about what, if any, changes to services might be appropriate. The index is a composite measure of satisfaction that includes all the elements that contribute to satisfaction and, therefore, overcomes the limited reliability of a single question as a measure of overall customer satisfaction. To arrive at the index, weights are given to attributes that contribute to overall satisfaction with services. The weights have been derived from DEWR qualitative research.

Complaints processes

2.34 In addition to the performance monitoring undertaken by the two organisations, customer complaints provide another form of information about the performance of Centrelink.

2.35 Centrelink has developed a Customer Service Charter that provides standards which Centrelink staff must adhere to in dealings with customers. Centrelink has also established a Customer Feedback Service, a requirement of the BPA, to capture customer complaints. Complaints are analysed to identify issues and, where appropriate, changes are made to provide better service. Feedback is captured through free call numbers to the local Centrelink Area Office, feedback cards at CSCs, and through the Centrelink web site.

2.36 Each quarter Centrelink provides DEWR with a report on the number of complaints, and suggestions received about policy and procedural matters relating to DEWR programmes.

2.37 Complaints that relate to Job Network services are referred to DEWR's Job Network Customer Service Line which is used by job seekers who wish to make complaints about their dealings with a Job Network member.

Feedback to improve the provision of information to job seekers

2.38 Performance information and other relevant sources of feedback should be used to improve the provision of information to job seekers. The ANAO expected DEWR would have:

- developed processes with Centrelink and Job Network members to gain an understanding of how the employment system is operating; and
- used data from job seeker research and assessed trends over time.

Partnership Programme

2.39 The ANAO recommended, in the *Management of Job Network Contracts*⁹ performance audit report tabled in 2002-2001, that consideration be given to establishing a senior group that meets regularly during the year to bring together representatives of employment services (Job Network) providers, Centrelink and DEWR as part of better strategic and operational communications. Centrelink, DEWR, and the National Employment Services Association (NESA) addressed this recommendation by establishing a Partnership Programme in 2001.

2.40 The aim of the Programme is to strengthen the partnership between Centrelink, DEWR and contracted service providers through improved awareness and understanding of one another's operating environment and issues. The Programme seeks to examine ways to improve the operating environment in such areas as communication, information management, work processes and systems, and service delivery standards.

2.41 As part of the Programme, site visits have been carried out and a follow-up workshop conducted where observations from the site visits were discussed. The findings of the Programme are reported to the executive of both DEWR and Centrelink. Initial indications suggest that the Programme has been beneficial for developing a better understanding of the issues and constraints facing all parties involved. However, progress on the issues raised by the Programme is limited as recommended action is mostly confined to 'for consideration' by DEWR.

Making the most of job seeker research information

2.42 DEWR's Labour Market Policy Group (LMPG) undertakes extensive monitoring each year including the Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey. The data collected in the survey is presented in two reports: a summary and a main report. The main report contains substantial detail and commentary. The commentary includes suggestions or recommendations for service improvement based on the survey data and supported by DEWR qualitative work.

2.43 The LMPG recognises that, given the volume of data provided in the reports, it is often difficult for programme areas to readily assimilate all the information. The LMPG has, therefore, provided presentations on the results of the surveys to DEWR policy areas and the BPRG. The ANAO considers, however, that the reports and presentations would provide more impetus for change if they provided detail on how the recommendations for improvement should be progressed.

⁹ Australian National Audit Office 2000, *Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business: Management of Job Network Contracts*, Auditor-General Report No. 44, 1999-2000, ANAO Canberra, p. 21.

2.44 The BPRG provides the framework to consider the results of job seeker research. There remains scope to formalise the presentation of both DEWR and Centrelink job seeker research and evaluation findings to these forums. Discussion could then occur on the questions or issues, which the research and evaluation findings may raise, and what action will be taken to improve certain areas.

2.45 The minutes of the BPRG meetings indicate that feedback presented to the Group, which would allow for continuous improvement, is often overlooked. The focus is on monthly performance rather than assessing trends overtime and highlighting joint solutions to service delivery issues.

Recommendation No 1

2.46 The ANAO recommends that DEWR gains full benefit from job seeker research by ensuring that:

- research by both DEWR and Centrelink is considered by the Business Partnership Review Group;
- research reports, where appropriate, identify areas for improvements and how they are to be progressed; and
- the Business Partnership Review Group minutes clearly state what action is to be taken on issues discussed at the meeting, when it is to be completed, and who is responsible.

DEWR response:

2.47 Agreed. The Department's Evaluation and Programme Performance Branch will continue to present relevant research to the Business Partnership Review Group (BPRG). As is current practice, where improvements are identified through research, policy and programme areas will develop and implement an appropriate strategy. The Evaluation and Programme Performance Branch will engage in monitoring activities to confirm whether the strategy is delivering the expected improvements. A follow-up action plan will be included in the minutes of future BPRG meetings, which will document issues, responsibility, and the expected completion date. The plan will be reviewed at each BPRG meeting. However, responsibility for implementation of action will continue to rest with the relevant policy and programme areas of the individual agencies.

Centrelink response:

2.48 Agreed. Research undertaken by both DEWR and Centrelink into the needs of job seekers should be considered jointly by both organisations. The BPRG represents an existing inter-agency forum, which could consider this task.

Conclusion

2.49 DEWR and Centrelink are undertaking complementary research which identifies job seekers' characteristics, attitudes and changing behaviours as well as how those attitudes and behaviours shape the most appropriate information to meet job seekers' needs at various stages in their use of government employment services.

2.50 DEWR and Centrelink have jointly developed and negotiated the specifications of employment services, including the provision of adequate information to job seekers. These specifications, along with appropriate performance measures, are detailed in the BPA. Centrelink has used a combination of training programmes and guidance materials, made available to customer service staff through Centrelink's internal electronic communication system, to make the BPA operational. DEWR seeks to ensure that Centrelink's operational guidance remains consistent with policy intent by reviewing Centrelink's training programmes and guidance materials as they are being developed.

2.51 DEWR and Centrelink have a robust process for monitoring and reporting performance in providing quality information services to job seekers with KPIs which measure customer satisfaction with, among other things, information provided at registration as well as the quality of that information. These KPIs focus on process, and there is an opportunity for some joint performance indicators to be developed by DEWR and Centrelink to show how the process contributes to the achievement of DEWR's departmental outcome.

2.52 Although there is a need for DEWR and Centrelink to develop performance indicators which provide an indication of how information provision for employment services contributes towards the overall departmental outcome, data to support these indicators is already collected.

2.53 The Business Partnership Review Group (BPRG)—consisting of senior officers from DEWR and Centrelink—evaluates Centrelink's performance by focusing on Centrelink's monthly performance against KPIs rather than assessing trends over time and highlighting joint solutions to service delivery issues. As a result, research data collected by DEWR and Centrelink and findings from the DEWR-Centrelink-Job Network Partnership Programme presented to the BPRG are not utilised fully.

3. The Process of Providing Information to Job Seekers

This chapter examines the process for the provision of information to job seekers and how the management framework discussed in Chapter 2 works in practice.

Introduction

3.1 In examining the process of providing information to job seekers, the ANAO considered:

- information products and channels to provide information to job seekers;
- job seeker satisfaction with information provision; and
- stakeholder feedback and peak body research.

3.2 The ANAO recognises that DEWR and Centrelink are unable to exercise control over a number of factors which influence job seekers' ability to comprehend the information that is provided to them. Receptiveness to information is often influenced by the job seekers' personal circumstances, including their ability to understand the written material provided. Factors such as homelessness and substance dependency sometimes mean job seekers focus on what income support they will receive rather than looking for a job.

Information products and channels to provide information to job seekers

3.3 The information provided to job seekers should meet the identified needs and expectations of job seekers. The information should also convey the messages that the Government wants job seekers to understand.

3.4 The ANAO's analysis of information products and channels (Appendix 2) shows that the identified needs of customers have largely been addressed through the different forms of information which DEWR and Centrelink make available to job seekers.

3.5 DEWR and Centrelink have adopted a strategy for information provision to job seekers that uses multiple communication channels, which allow for different preferences amongst job seekers for accessing and receiving information.

3.6 The channels currently used for the provision of information to job seekers and the information products provided through these channels is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Information channels and products

Information channel	Information product
On-site (face-to-face)	Registration interview Information seminar DEWR Job Network video (screened in Centrelink CSCs) JobSearch (available at CSCs through touch screen kiosks)
On paper	Brochures and pamphlets including the following: <i>Job Seekers Guide and Diary</i> <i>The Facts for Under 18 Year Olds</i> <i>Welcome to Centrelink</i> <i>Looking for Work</i> <i>Career Counselling</i> <i>Employment Update</i> <i>Future Directions</i> <i>Youth Allowance Guide</i> <i>Employment services information translated into 42 languages</i>
On-line	JobSearch web site DEWR web site Centrelink web site
On call	Centrelink call centres with 1800 and 1300 lines for employment services. Also dedicated indigenous and multilingual call centre lines.

Source: ANAO analysis. For further details see Appendix 1.

3.7 As can be seen in Table 1, Centrelink provides job seekers with information in the first two channels, whereas for the second two channels the job seeker must actively seek information for themselves. Greater detail about the information provided through these channels is contained in Appendix 1.

3.8 The ANAO considers the use of multiple channels an effective strategy for information provision as it accommodates the differing preferences and circumstances of job seekers.

Job seekers satisfaction with information provision

3.9 The 2001 DEWR Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey indicates that 79 per cent of job seekers surveyed were satisfied with the overall employment services provided by Centrelink. Within the level of service job seekers can expect from Centrelink, as outlined in the BPA, the DEWR benchmark for overall job seeker satisfaction is 80 per cent.

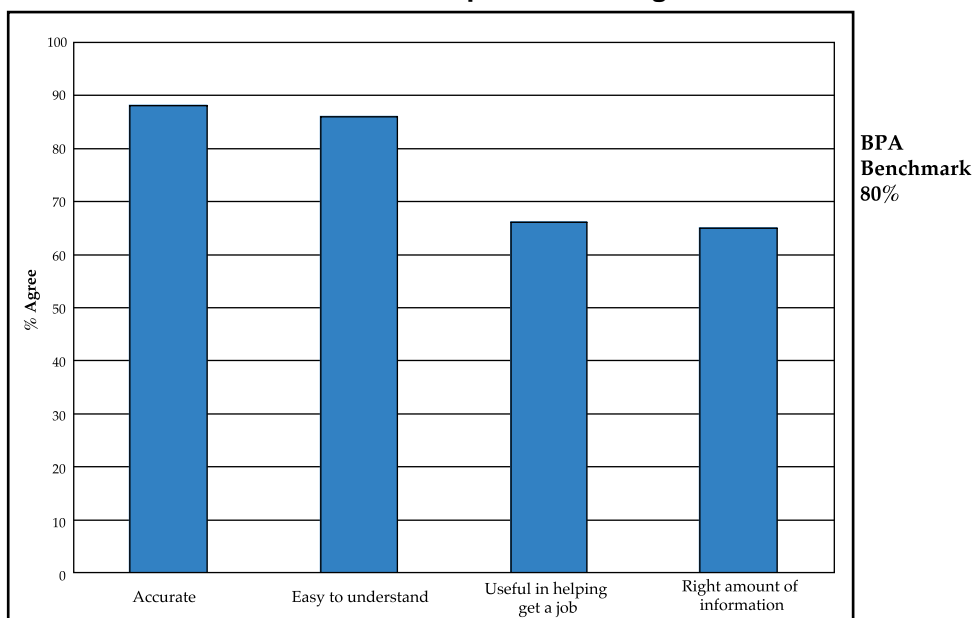
3.10 The following section discusses job seeker satisfaction and perceptions with the information provided at two key stages in the employment services process—the registration interview and the information seminar. Greater detail of the information provided to job seekers at these two points in the process is contained in Appendix 1.

Information received at registration

3.11 The 2001 DEWR survey indicates that job seeker satisfaction levels with the information received during registration were higher than the DEWR benchmark of 80 per cent. At the registration interview, job seekers are provided with a large amount of information on employment services, and Job Network members and services. The information is provided in the form of letters, brochures and pamphlets and may also be given verbally to job seekers by Centrelink staff. Figure 2 below indicates that a high proportion of job seekers find the information accurate and easy to understand.

Figure 2

Satisfaction level with information provided at registration



Source: 2001 DEWR *Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey*

3.12 One of the concerns of using the job seekers' views on the accuracy of information at the registration interview as a measure of satisfaction is that they are unlikely to know how accurate information is unless they come across some conflicting information later on.

3.13 In relation to this concern, Centrelink has a number of measures in place to help ensure that the information provided to job seekers is accurate. These measures include:

- information products are checked with DEWR before publication;
- Centrelink Customer Service Officers have been trained and provided with on-line tools and resources to prompt them to provide certain information to job seekers;
- Centrelink undertook 47 'mystery shopper' surveys as a trial in 2000;¹⁰ and
- Centrelink call centres use silent monitoring to check the accuracy of information provided by Centrelink call centre staff.

¹⁰ The survey methodology included Centrelink staff and research consultants having a customer service interaction at the CSC and rating specific areas of the CSC including signage, pamphlet racks, facilities and queue management.

3.14 While job seekers agreed the information provided to them was accurate and easy to understand, a lower proportion (66 per cent) of job seekers agreed that the information received at registration was useful in helping them to look for work.

Information received at information seminars

3.15 The DEWR-Centrelink BPA requires Centrelink to provide group information seminars for all activity tested job seekers. Attending the seminar is compulsory for all activity tested job seekers.¹¹ The seminars are given by Centrelink staff and can be attended by a Job Network member who provides information about Job Network services.

3.16 The 2001 DEWR Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey found that only 28 per cent of job seekers recalled attending an information seminar within the previous six months. Of those job seekers who recalled having attended an information seminar, 80 per cent were satisfied with the usefulness of the seminar overall.

3.17 Similarly, of those job seekers who recalled attending an information seminar, many recalled receiving information on how to contact Job Network members (88 per cent) and that they had a choice of Job Network member (93 per cent). However, only 48 per cent of job seekers said that a Job Network member had given a presentation at the seminar. In 2000, DEWR reported that where a Job Network member did give a presentation, 85 per cent of job seekers reported this as useful.

3.18 The ANAO conducted four group interviews with 30 job seekers. Those job seekers that attended an information seminar which a Job Network member was present confirmed that the Job Network member's presence was useful as job seekers were able to make the distinction between the services offered by Centrelink and Job Network members.

3.19 Although there is no contractual obligation for Job Network members to attend information seminars, DEWR should consider how to encourage increased attendance of seminars by Job Network members, given the value gained by job seekers when a Job Network member does attend.

Information on JobSearch

3.20 DEWR manages JobSearch which provides public access to the National Vacancy Database through an internet website and through a network of over

¹¹ The activity test requires job seekers to make a reasonable effort to find suitable work and improve their opportunities to find work.

2400 touch screen kiosks located in Centrelink offices and Job Network members premises. The touch screens provide information on Job Network members and services, and on jobs that are available in the job seeker's area and around Australia. JobSearch has around 50 000 current vacancies at any one time. The information is also available on the JobSearch web site, which is administered and maintained by DEWR.¹²

3.21 DEWR advised the ANAO that JobSearch users, including all Job Network members and employers who place job vacancies, must comply with the JobSearch terms and conditions which require vacancies listed to:

- be fairly and adequately described;
- be valid and meet trade practices requirements;
- meet award wages; and
- meet state/territory/federal laws.

3.22 Each vacancy lodged on JobSearch must have a cut-off date. DEWR aims to achieve consistency in the information displayed and has processes for removing vacancies after a cut off date. However, employers and Job Network members have a contractual responsibility for preparing the descriptions of jobs and for keeping the entries current.

3.23 DEWR surveys of job seekers satisfaction indicate that most job seekers (up to 97 per cent) find the touch screen units which provide access to JobSearch easy to use. However, the survey results highlighted some issues with the currency of the information.

3.24 The 2000 DEWR Survey of Job Seeker Satisfaction with Centrelink Services highlighted that 37 per cent of job seekers found that the job shown as vacant was not available when they contacted the Job Network member or the employer.¹³ By the time of the 2001 survey, this percentage had reduced to 25 per cent. The currency of jobs listed on JobSearch was also noted as a problem in the group interviews of job seekers conducted by the ANAO. Job seekers told the ANAO that the problem meant wasted effort applying for a job that was no longer vacant.

3.25 In response to the above finding, DEWR informed the ANAO that:

The results are the perceptions of job seekers and not necessarily a reflection on the accuracy of JobSearch. It may be the case that job seekers applying for inappropriate jobs are told the job is no longer available as this is perceived as easier rather than explaining why the job seeker is not appropriate.

¹² DEWRSB 2001, *Job Network Evaluation: Stage 2*, p. 21.

¹³ DEWRSB 2000, *Survey of Job Seeker Satisfaction with Centrelink Services* (Main Report), p. 31.

3.26 Research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),¹⁴ and DEWR's *Submission to the Independent Review of Job Network*¹⁵ in January 2002, highlighted unintended incentives which may lead to inaccuracies in JobSearch.¹⁶ The OECD reported that some Job Network members may inappropriately delay listing vacancies or post inadequate information in an attempt to refer and place their own clients to these vacancies.¹⁷ In its submission to the Independent Review, DEWR noted it had taken steps to counter this behaviour including audits and tracking the length of time between vacancy listings and job seeker referrals¹⁸.

3.27 The Productivity Commission's recently published draft report of the *Independent Review of Job Network*¹⁹ noted that the touchscreens could provide more information about Job Network members so that job seekers were able to make an informed choice on which providers to use.

Recommendation No 2

3.28 The ANAO recommends that DEWR:

- reminds Job Network members on a regular basis of the latter's contractual responsibility to maintain the currency of the jobs on JobSearch; and
- actively monitors the currency of vacancies on the JobSearch database.

DEWR response:

3.29 Agreed. There are a number of mechanisms already in place to ensure the currency of vacancies on JobSearch. Vacancies are inactivated once the referral limit set by the Job Network member is reached. Any vacancy lodged by Job Network members that has not been modified or has not had a referral for 30 days is automatically inactivated. For vacancies lodged from a source other than a Job Network member the job will be automatically inactivated at the conclusion of 32 days.

3.30 Job Network members are subject to a Code of Conduct designed to produce the best outcomes for job seekers and employers. The Department ensures that DEWR Contract Managers take an active role in monitoring

¹⁴ OECD 2001, *Innovations in Employment Practices: The Australian Way*, Paris.

¹⁵ In late 2001, the Productivity Commission commenced an independent review of the Job Network and invited interested people or organisations to make a written submission.

¹⁶ Job Matching fees are paid to the Job Network member who successfully places a job seeker in a vacancy not the Job Network member who acquires and advertises the vacancy on JobSearch.

¹⁷ OECD 2001, pp. 131.

¹⁸ DEWR 2001, *Submission to the Independent review of Job Network*, pp. 56–57.

¹⁹ Productivity Commission 2002, Ch. 8.

positions lodged by all Job Network members, ensuring compliance with the Code of Conduct and JobSearch Terms and Conditions and will increase the focus on this activity.

Timing of information provision

3.31 DEWR and Centrelink job seeker research indicates that there is a major issue with the timing of the provision of information to job seekers. At initial contact with Centrelink, job seekers tend to focus on issues of immediate concern to them, that is whether they qualify for income support payments and when payments would begin. The job seekers the ANAO spoke to indicated that until these elements of service are secured they would find it difficult to absorb other information.

3.32 DEWR and Centrelink are taking steps to overcome the issue of timing. After trials in several areas, the current BPA has been amended to allow information seminars to be held before the registration interview. Centrelink's recent evaluation of the new claim processes has indicated that seminars held before the registration interview appear to be more effective, and recommended that this should become the standard in most cases.

3.33 Although DEWR and Centrelink are attempting to overcome some of the issues of timing of the provision of information to job seekers, the ANAO considers that a seminar held before the registration interview may not completely address individual job seekers' immediate concerns of whether they qualify for income support. There is a risk, therefore, that job seekers will not absorb the employment services information provided in the seminar. In addition, the Productivity Commission's draft report²⁰ noted that, although the trials of basic provision of information about Job Network members to job seekers has yielded a very high level of choice, it remained to be seen how informed the choices were.

Job seekers rights and obligations

3.34 The initial contact between Centrelink and job seekers is an important opportunity to provide information on the rights and obligations of job seekers. Research by DEWR and Centrelink, and the group interviews conducted by the ANAO, indicate that most job seekers are well aware of their obligations and responsibilities. This is mainly because job seekers focus on what they need to do to receive income support, and keep it by avoiding breaching their obligations. However, very few job seekers could recall their rights as a customer.

²⁰ *ibid.*

3.35 The research, noted above, indicates that the reason many job seekers perceived the key messages Centrelink is sending is about obligations and potential penalties (breaches) was due to the repeated message of ‘what to do to avoid trouble’.

3.36 The 2001 DEWR Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey found that nearly 90 per cent of job seekers agreed that they were told about their responsibilities and the rules and regulations that applied to them. However, there is widespread misunderstanding of the customer’s right to complain, and the process by which they can do so, with only 20 per cent of job seekers able to recall being told by Centrelink about the Customer Service Charter (up from 15 per cent in 2000).

3.37 Centrelink is required by the BPA and *Policy Guides* to inform customers of the complaint process, namely how, when, where, and to whom they can make complaints and suggestions for improvements to service. Job seekers are informed of this during the registration interview. Information and complaint procedures are detailed in the back inside page of the *Future Directions* publication giving these issues little prominence.

3.38 In the 2001 DEWR survey, only 22 per cent of job seekers recalled being told about how to make a complaint, should they want to, compared to 31 per cent in 2000. Approximately 19 per cent of job seekers wanted to make a complaint about the way that Centrelink provides employment services, although only 6 per cent actually made a complaint.²¹

3.39 While most job seekers are aware of their obligations, recent research by the National Welfare Rights Network²² indicates that those job seekers who are most disenfranchised (eg. homeless and/or drug dependent) are more likely to breach their obligations due to the nature of their circumstances.

3.40 The ANAO considers that DEWR and Centrelink should examine how best to increase job seekers’ awareness of their rights to address the wide difference in job seekers’ understanding of their rights and obligation.

Recommendation No 3

3.41 The ANAO recommends DEWR and Centrelink, in consultation with peak bodies, identify ways to increase job seekers’ awareness of their rights and the agencies’ obligations in this respect.

²¹ DEWRSB 2001, *Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey* (Main Report), p. 26.

²² Welfare Rights Centre Sydney 2001, *Breaching the Safety Net*, p. 15.

DEWR response:

3.42 Agreed. In addressing the recommendation, DEWR is, as part of the development of Employment Services Contract 3, revising the Code of Conduct (for Job Network Members and Community Work Coordinators). As part of this process the department will seek input from all stakeholders, including the National Employment Services Association, providers, job seekers (through focus groups), and other interested parties.

Centrelink response:

3.43 Agreed. Centrelink will continue work with DEWR and the Job Network to improve customers' awareness of the services which Centrelink and the Job Network provide, and their rights and obligations in relation to these services. The need for consistent information delivery between the respective organisations is a theme we will continue to pursue in partnership with DEWR.

Managing job seeker expectations of Centrelink and Job Network

3.44 There is some confusion amongst job seekers about the respective roles of Centrelink and Job Network.

3.45 The 2001 DEWR Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey²³ notes that of those job seekers dissatisfied with the overall employment services provided by Centrelink (21 per cent of those surveyed), a third (34 per cent) reported that Centrelink had not provided help to get a job. This represents an increase over the 2000 figure of 24 per cent. The Survey report notes that this result suggests that there has been an increase in the proportion of job seekers confusing Centrelink's role with the role of the Job Network members. This confusion was also covered in DEWR qualitative research²⁴ where the following comments were typical of job seekers:

I thought they (Centrelink) would help you look for work

They're supposed to be there to help you find a job—aren't they?

3.46 Most of the publications of both Centrelink and DEWR distinguish the respective roles of Job Network and Centrelink and also describe services and programmes available from each. However, job seekers can not always hold the information given in one part of a publication, as they continue to try to

²³ DEWRSB 2001, p. 5.

²⁴ DEWRSB 2001, *Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey: A Qualitative Report*, p. 10.

absorb further information. The information provided to job seekers covers their identified needs, and the priorities of the Government. However, timing issues and the volume of information are impediments to some job seekers understanding the roles and responsibilities of Centrelink and Job Network.

3.47 DEWR produced marketing kits to help Job Network members better promote their services but the underlying expectation gap that many job seekers have-that Centrelink will get them a job-has not been completely addressed. Managing customers' expectations is largely the service provider's responsibility. Centrelink, in consultation with the DEWR Job Network management sections, may wish to test with some job seekers whether a simple 'where to from here' brochure or sheet might be useful in guiding job seekers through the employment services system. This may help highlight the respective roles of Centrelink and Job Network in those processes.

3.48 The system of payments and services is relatively complex and job seekers will be confused, especially in their early encounters with the system, by what each agency does. Nevertheless the ANAO suggests that all possible references, such as publications and web sites have the respective roles of Job Network members and Centrelink CSC's displayed with the differences highlighted.

Conclusion

3.49 The range of information products and the use of multiple channels (telephone, written material, visiting Centrelink offices and use of the internet) to provide information to job seekers meets their identified preferences in dealing with Centrelink. Information is provided to job seekers by Centrelink during on site visits and through written material. The other two channels, telephone and internet, require job seekers to actively seek information themselves.

3.50 DEWR and Centrelink research indicates that there is an issue with the timing of the provision of adequate information to job seekers. Job seekers focus on what is immediately important to them. At initial contact, this is invariably whether they would qualify for income support payments and, if so, when their payments would begin. Therefore, information provided on employment services and job search techniques, at the claim interview and information seminar, may not be sufficiently understood and/or absorbed by job seekers.

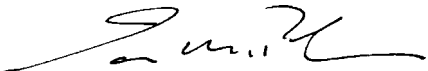
3.51 DEWR conducts annual surveys of job seekers' satisfaction with government employment services. The provision of adequate information to job seekers is an important part of this survey. Generally, these surveys suggest that job seekers are satisfied with the information they receive. There are some issues relating to the currency of jobs listed on JobSearch, which links job seekers to the national vacancy database. In this light, DEWR should consider

strengthening the monitoring of JobSearch and reminding Job Network members, on a regular basis, of their contractual responsibilities to maintain the currency of job vacancies on JobSearch.

3.52 DEWR's qualitative and quantitative surveys indicate that job seekers clearly receive messages about their obligations in return for income support, but have a much lower recall of their rights to complain about the service they receive or to appeal a decision. The ANAO considers that DEWR and Centrelink, in consultation with peak bodies, should examine ways to increase job seekers' awareness of their rights.

3.53 DEWR's research indicates that there is some confusion amongst job seekers about the respective roles of Job Network and Centrelink in assisting them to find a job. The ANAO suggests that Centrelink should consider clearly highlighting the respective roles of Centrelink and Job Network to job seekers more proactively to better manage job seekers' expectations.

Canberra ACT
4 April 2002



Ian McPhee
Acting Auditor-General

Appendices

Appendix 1

Information products and services

Information provided on-site (face-to-face)

Information provided at registration interview

1. At initial contact with Centrelink, either in person or by phone, job seekers will have their details recorded on the Integrated Employment System (IES)²⁵ by a Centrelink Customer Service Officer. The job seeker will be given a Job Seeker Identification Number and provided with information about Job Network.
2. All job seekers must have a full face-to-face interview to finalise registration by completing the job seeker's records in IES. While this may not occur at the initial contact it should happen within seven days of the initial contact. KPI 2 measures whether this occurs.
3. At the full interview Centrelink asks each job seeker questions to determine if they are at risk of becoming long term unemployed by using the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI). The JSCI is a classification tool that estimates the level of disadvantage the job seeker faces in the labour market relative to other job seekers. Those eligible are then referred to Intensive Assistance.
4. Those job seekers registering for income support (Newstart or Youth Allowance) are asked to sign a Preparing for Work Agreement (PFWA). The PFWA is an Activity Agreement under the Social Security Act 1991 that requires a job seeker to undertake certain activities in exchange for income support. The PFWA is a government policy which is detailed in the Business Partnership Agreement between FaCS and Centrelink. At this stage, job seekers are given information about their rights and obligations associated with any forms of assistance. The ANAO notes that the Rules Simplification Taskforce, a joint FaCS and Centrelink Ministerial taskforce, found that the provision of information to job seekers should be streamlined according to job seekers' needs.
5. At the interview job seekers are also provided with a considerable amount of information on employment services and Job Network members and services. The information is provided in the form of letters, brochures and pamphlets and may also be given verbally to job seekers by Centrelink staff.

²⁵ While Centrelink has access to IES it is owned and maintained by DEWR.

Group information seminar

6. The DEWR—Centrelink BPA requires Centrelink to provide group information seminars for all activity tested job seekers. Attending the seminar is compulsory for all activity tested job seekers. At the seminar:

- Job Network members are to have the opportunity to explain their services;
- job seekers can lodge their preference and exclusions of Job Network members;
- job seekers receive comprehensive information about Job Network and employment programmes and how to access appropriate services;
- job seekers are made aware of their obligations and rights and the complaints mechanism; and
- job seekers are shown how to use the self help facilities.

7. Centrelink has sought to make the seminars consistent across all their offices by developing a video, which is played during the seminar. The video was released in July 2000. The seminar is designed to take about 40 minutes but is reported to run, often, to 60 minutes because of the amount of information that is to be covered.

8. The arrangements for involvement of Job Network members in the information seminar vary across the country. Some Job Network members report that there are not enough seminars for them to attend, and in other areas, the Job Network members choose not to attend, even though invited. There is no contractual obligation for Job Network members to make a presentation at these seminars. While DEWR recognises the involvement of Job Network members is beneficial and good practice, it is also recognised that flexibility in local arrangements is necessary.

DEWR Video-Get working with Job Network

9. The Job Network video, *Get Working with Job Network*, produced in February 2001, provides basic information on the process which job seekers must go through, the self help facilities in Centrelink, tips on how to look for work and the services offered by Job Network. In developing the video DEWR commissioned a consultant to gain feedback from job seekers about the best method of providing information. A focus group with a small number of job seekers was used to identify what information was important to job seekers and how the video could best convey DEWR Job Network information.

Centrelink video—Preparing for Work

10. This video was produced with the aim of achieving, through playing it at all information seminars, some consistency in the information provided to job seekers. It covers similar material to that covered in the DEWR video but puts more emphasis on rights and obligations and less on methods of job hunting, particularly through using JobSearch.

Information provided on paper

11. DEWR produces a *Guide to Job Network* for job seekers and pamphlets on the programmes available.

12. DEWR has also produced marketing kits for Job Network members to help them promote their services and therefore provide greater exposure of Job Network to job seekers. Marketing training was provided to 645 Job Network member staff in October and November 2000.

13. *Future Directions* is the main publication that Centrelink provides to job seekers to explain the services of Centrelink and Job Network. The publication provides advice on how to find work and improve job prospects, explains *mutual obligation*, and details job seekers rights. In developing the publication Centrelink market tested the contents with job seekers to ensure that the product was user friendly. Centrelink also sought comment from DEWR to ensure the publication was consistent with other information provided to job seekers.

Information provided on line

Australian Job Search (JobSearch)

14. JobSearch is provided by DEWR and provides public access to the National Vacancy Database through a network of over 2400 touch screen kiosks that are located in Centrelink offices, Job Network sites and other locations throughout Australia. The information is also available on the JobSearch web site which is administered and maintained by DEWR.

15. JobSearch provides access to around 50 000 current vacancies at any one time. From 1999 to the time of this audit the JobSearch web site was consistently rated within the top 25 of all Australian web sites visited. It is the most visited Australian government web site and one of the leading employment web sites.²⁶

16. As well as vacancies, JobSearch also provides information on Job Network services, Work for the Dole projects, seasonal work and other government employment initiatives.

²⁶ DEWRSB 2001, *Job Network Evaluation: Stage 2*, p. 21.

17. Vacancies can be searched by location and by occupation. Job seekers can build a resume and load a detailed search list on to the site for automatic searching. JobSearch also has labour market information available from DEWR. With this capacity, JobSearch meets the identified needs not met by other products.

18. JobSearch contains comprehensive information about Job Network members including; contact details, performance evaluations, and information of the performance of Job Network members placing people in jobs. JobSearch provides a valuable link to Job Network, in addition to being a vital vacancy database.

DEWR web site

19. While this site is not intended primarily as a source for job seekers, it does have links to the JobSearch, Australian Careers, and Australian Workplace pages. Furthermore, it offers access to the Employment Services Network which includes Job Network, Centrelink, and pages for each of the major employment programmes.

Centrelink web site

20. The Centrelink web site, similarly to the DEWR site, is not primarily intended as an information channel for job seekers. However, it also provides access to all the employment sites of government agencies, as well as access to income support information.

Information on-call

Centrelink Call Centres

21. Providing access to information is important at initial contact. Approximately 40 per cent of new contacts by job seekers occur through the Centrelink call centres. Also, access to Centrelink by phone is important when distance or mobility makes attendance at a Centrelink Customer Service Centre difficult.

22. An estimated 60 per cent of job seekers who had made contact with Centrelink in the six months prior to the customer satisfaction survey, had contacted Centrelink by phone.²⁷ Calls to Centrelink have been increasing at about 20 per cent per year.²⁸ To handle the demand for services over the phone Centrelink has the largest call centre network in Australia with:

²⁷ DEWRSB 2001, *Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey* (Main Report), p. 21.

²⁸ Senate Estimates CA 167 (Feb 2001).

- 28 permanent sites;
- 4300 staff; and
- 25 million calls answered per year.

23. Not all the calls and customer service officers relate to employment services; pensions and other income support account for the greater part of the calls. Employment services has a dedicated free phone number (there are also numbers for appointments and multilingual services).

24. Because of the continual increase in the volume of calls to call centres, Centrelink has tried to make the initial contact with call centres as efficient as possible by implementing the *Accessing Centrelink* initiative. At the end of the process, job seekers are issued an identification number which allows them immediate access to Job Matching services. Job seekers still have to attend a face-to-face interview with a Centrelink CSO to finalise registration by applying the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI). Call centre staff can arrange an appointment time for the job seeker to complete the registration process.

25. Conducting initial registration on the phone has meant the average call time has increased. Centrelink analysis indicates that other employment services calls are also becoming more complex. Centrelink must achieve a balance between job seekers preference for not having multiple dealings with Centrelink, and DEWR's policy of getting job seekers access to job network services as quickly as possible. Currently 78 per cent of enquiries are addressed in the first call to Centrelink.

Appendix 2

Analysis of information channels and products

Information provided on-site (face-to-face)

1. The ANAO analysed the information services and products to assess if they met job seekers needs, as identified in DEWR and Centrelink research.

Table A1

Information provided to job seekers on-site against identified needs

Expectations and needs related to information provision	Registration interview	DEWR Video	Information seminar	C/L video
Help them find a job	✓	✓	✓	✓
Offer access to short programmes which will make them more employable	✓	✓	✓	
Information about what to do next – how best to use service providers and programmes	✓	✓	✓	✓
Information pertinent to a vacancy and the sought industry				
Information on current job markets as well as on providers assistance programmes – up to date and complete				
Easy access to and good information about vacancies		✓	✓	✓
Resources to assist in applying for jobs (equipment) and staff assistance with applications and CVs		✓	✓	✓
Job seeker obligations	✓	✓	✓	✓
Job seekers rights	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: ANAO analysis

2. Industry and vacancy specific information is not provided through the on-site channels.

Information provided on paper

3. Table A2 highlights how the various DEWR and Centrelink publications meet these identified customer needs and shows that the information provided on paper is generally well directed to identified job seeker needs.

Table A2**Information provided to job seekers on paper against identified needs**

Expectations and needs related to information provision	Guide to Job Network	Job Seekers guide 2001	Job Seekers guide & diary	The facts for under 18 year olds	Welcome to Centrelink	Looking for work	Career Counselling	Employment Update	Future Directions	Youth Allowance guide
Help them find a job	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	
Offer access to short programmes which will make them more employable	✓	✓				✓			✓	
Staff with expertise					✓			✓	✓	
Information about what to do next—how best to use service providers and programmes	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓
Information pertinent to a vacancy and the sought industry										
Information on current job markets as well as on providers assistance programmes—up to date and complete								✓		
Easy access to and good information about vacancies		✓								
Resources to assist in applying for jobs (equipment) and staff assistance with applications and CVs	✓	✓						✓	✓	
Job seeker obligations	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Job seeker rights	✓	✓		✓					✓	✓

Source: ANAO analysis

4. As with the information provided on-site (face-to-face), the only element of customers' needs that is not met by the publications, is information on current job markets and current vacancies. This is because information can not be provided cost effectively in brochures or other paper publications because the information goes out of date rapidly. Several publications however give information about where to find such information, pointing job seekers to newspapers or searching JobSearch.

Information provided on-line

5. Information provided on-line, particularly JobSearch, meets those identified needs which are not met by other information products.

Table A3

Information provided to job seekers on-line against identified needs

Expectations and needs related to information provision	JobSearch	DEWR website	Centrelink website
Help them find a job	✓	✓	✓
Offer access to short programmes which will make them more employable		✓	✓
Information about what to do next – how best to use service providers and programmes		✓	✓
Information pertinent to a vacancy and the sought industry	✓	✓	
Information on current job markets as well as on providers assistance programmes – up to date and complete	✓	✓	
Easy access to and good information about vacancies	✓	✓	
Resources to assist in applying for jobs (equipment) and staff assistance with applications and CVs		✓	✓

Source: ANAO analysis

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