



REGISTRATION AND INFORMATION PROVISION: Findings from the 2002 Job Seeker Survey

Registration at Centrelink is the first step for many job seekers to gain access to employment assistance services. For each job seeker on an allowance, their levels of disadvantage and corresponding access to the various forms of assistance is determined through a series of questions which Centrelink staff ask. This series of questions make up the Job Seeker Classification Instrument. Centrelink registration is the point at which job seekers gain much of the knowledge with which to understand and access services such as those provided through Job Network. Registration is also the point at which job seekers are provided with explanations of Mutual Obligation and made aware of their responsibilities. Through interaction with staff, the interview and information seminars, a wealth of information is exchanged.

The process of registering at Centrelink as looking for work is one which calls for effective communication methods. This includes sensitivity to the circumstances and both immediate and longer term needs of individuals requiring information and assistance.

A significant investment is made in continually monitoring and assessing registration processes. This has included refining and revising processes to improve efficiency and effectiveness of registration for job seekers and for Centrelink operations. Centrelink and DEWR have trialled and reviewed alternative methods of registration (such as registering electronically to minimise the number of hard copy forms job seekers need to complete) and are constantly updating processes and procedures to improve the registration process.

Particular attention is drawn to registration processes which recorded a decline in job seeker satisfaction in the 2002 survey. While still high

(72%), the satisfaction level is the lowest recorded in the five years since Centrelink's creation.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the issues surrounding registration and the changes in customer views over time. This paper focuses on the key issues relevant for registration from job seekers' perspectives. It discusses job seeker survey results relating to different service elements including the registration interview, information seminars, perceptions of staff and the quality of information provided. The paper concludes with a summary of key messages from the research.

While this paper covers a specific area of interest, the survey covers a wide range of topics, some of which will be explored in more detail in other papers. More information on other research papers can be obtained from the Department's contact officers listed below.

SURVEY METHODS:

The 2002 Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink) Survey (JSECL) was conducted from 7 Feb–11 Mar 2002 using computer assisted telephone interviewing. Interviews were conducted with 3,018 job seekers who had registered with and/or contacted Centrelink in the previous 6 months. Specific survey sampling methods were used and the responses have been weighted to provide results that are representative of all job seekers. As population estimates, the survey results are subject to statistical error. Where differences are reported they are significant at the 95% confidence interval. Demographic and equity group variables have been taken from administrative data. Further information on survey methodology can be obtained from the DEWR contact staff:

Shane Compton (02) 6121 6394 or
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REGISTRATION WITH CENTRELINK

Registering as looking for work

Registration is the process of going in/signing up at Centrelink for government allowance and/or 'to register' as looking for work. The process may involve an interview with Centrelink staff, an information session/seminar and/or filling out forms or completing a questionnaire which is facilitated by the Centrelink staff member and entered directly into the computer system. The interview/questionnaire serves to establish the person's entitlements to payments and to services.

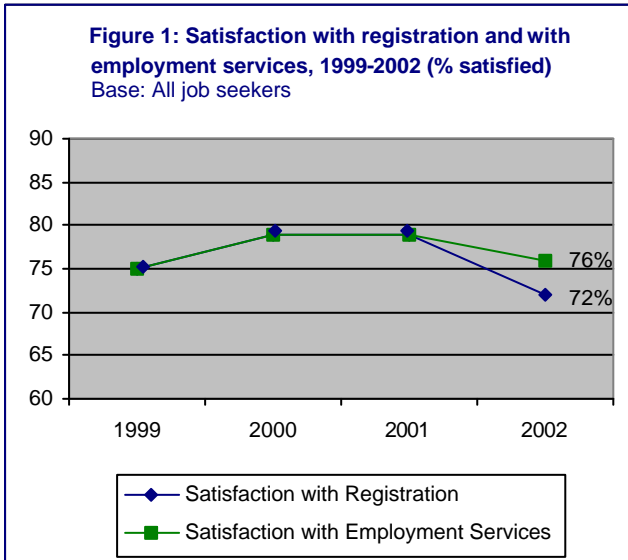
The registration process should provide the job seeker with all the relevant information to be able to look for work including information about access to touchscreens and self help facilities and contact details for approaching Job Network members. A job seeker may be eligible for a number of different services through Job Network and this is determined at the registration interview with Centrelink. The registration process is also used to outline the rules and responsibilities for job seekers, including the process of signing a Preparing for Work Agreement and establishing future Mutual Obligation activities where appropriate.

Overall satisfaction with registration processes

Overall satisfaction with the services received at registration has declined somewhat since 2001 and stands at its lowest point since 1999 (72%). For many job seekers registration may be the most significant service experience they recall from their dealings with Centrelink, particularly for recently registered job seekers. The level of satisfaction with registration mirrored that of overall satisfaction with employment services until 2002 (see Figure 1). Satisfaction with registration services remains a key driver of overall satisfaction with employment services.

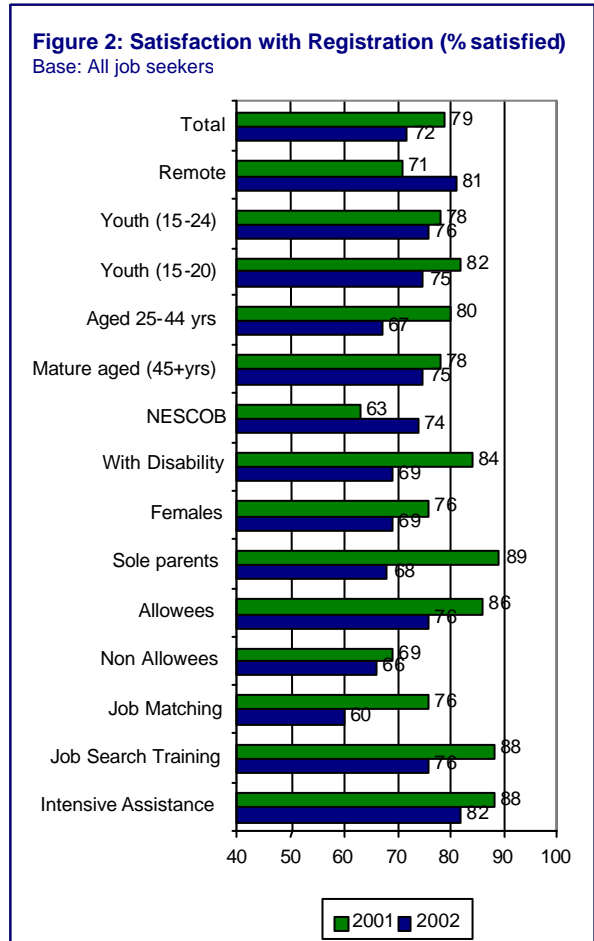
Satisfaction with registration has fallen across almost all subgroups of job seekers with the exception of those from a non English speaking country of birth (NESCOB) and those in remote areas. There are some groups however, for whom satisfaction levels have declined markedly including sole parents, those with a disability and those aged between 25 and 44 years. Those who are receiving Job Matching services are less satisfied at 60% (down from 76% in 2001) compared to those in Intensive Assistance (82%).

Figure 1: Satisfaction with registration and with employment services, 1999-2002 (% satisfied)
Base: All job seekers



Satisfaction results were **consistently** lower than previous years across all states with only NSW and SA maintaining a similar level to 2001 figures and all other states showing a significant decrease (comparative figures for ACT and NT are not available as the estimate is based on a small number of job seekers).

Figure 2: Satisfaction with Registration (% satisfied)
Base: All job seekers



Reasons for dissatisfaction

Analysis of previous survey data has shown that some key drivers of satisfaction with registration are:

- staff giving the time and attention needed;
- staff taking individual needs and situations into account; and
- the usefulness of registration in helping the job seeker to look for work.

Two of these key measures have shown a decline in 2002. In particular, the proportion of job seekers feeling that individual circumstances are being considered has been declining over recent years indicating job seekers' expectations about individualised servicing are not being met. Analysis of these service aspects are presented in more detail on pages 4 and 6.

Changes in services provision as well as changes in job seekers' expectations of services can equally affect satisfaction results. Elements of the registration process and key related issues are explored in the remaining sections of the paper to provide some insight into the declining satisfaction figures.

CHANGES IN POLICIES AND PROCESSES

As registration is the point at which staff explain rules and responsibilities to job seekers, the interview has necessarily changed with the introduction of new policies such as those under the Mutual Obligation initiative. Changes in registration processes and the introduction of new policies and procedures may have impacted on job seekers' perceptions of registration and expectations of services.

The majority of job seekers on an employment related job seeker allowance (Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance (Other) (NSA/YA(Other))) were satisfied with registration (77%), an increase from 69% in 2001.

A significant decrease in satisfaction occurred for those aged between 25 and 34 years (76% to 67%) which is the age group affected at the time of the survey by changes to eligibility requirements for Mutual Obligation.

Relationships between these changes in processes and job seeker perceptions of Centrelink services may warrant further investigation.

THE REGISTRATION PROCESS

Registration interview

The registration interview is the key element of the registration process. This involves Centrelink staff assessing job seeker needs using the Job Seeker Classification Instrument and determining eligibility for allowances and employment services.

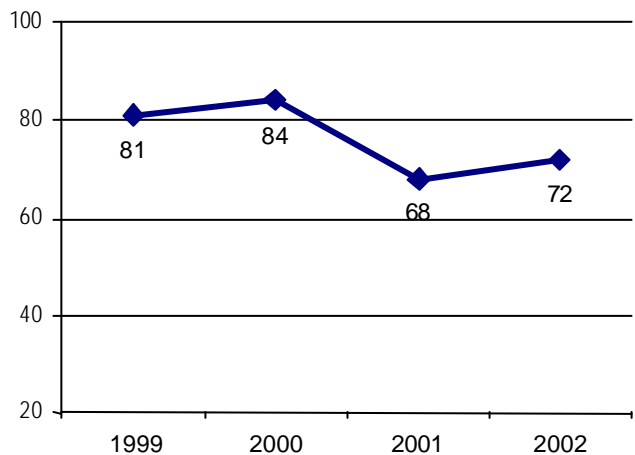
Refinements to the registration process have been initiated by both Centrelink and DEWR over recent years. The registration interview is well recognised as the key information point for job seekers and revisions to procedures and trials of alternative methods have been undertaken to both increase efficiency of the process and to increase understanding and retention of information for the job seeker.

Waiting times for interviews

The registration interview may be conducted on the same day that the job seeker approaches Centrelink, or it may be scheduled for a later time. At the time of the survey three quarters of those registered (74%) recalled having had an interview as part of their registration process, comparable to 77% in the 2001 survey. Women and those from non English speaking backgrounds were least likely to remember being interviewed.

Amongst those who stated they had had an interview in the last 6 months, 72% were satisfied with the length of time they had to wait for an interview, an improvement on 2001 but lower than 2000 and 1999 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Satisfaction with Waiting Times for Registration Interview (% satisfied), 1999-2002
Base: All job seekers who recalled having an interview



STAFF SERVICES

Feeling comfortable

An important element of being able to accurately address a job seeker's need for assistance is having all the facts available. The more at ease job seekers are the more likely they are to provide all the facts, particularly in relation to more sensitive issues.

In addition, if a job seeker understands why the interview is important it may encourage them to assist Centrelink staff more fully. Four in five job seekers (81%) agreed that Centrelink staff explained to them that their information was used to help work out the level of support they were entitled to. Those aged 35-54 years, those with a disability and those living in very remote areas were the most likely to disagree that this had been explained to them.

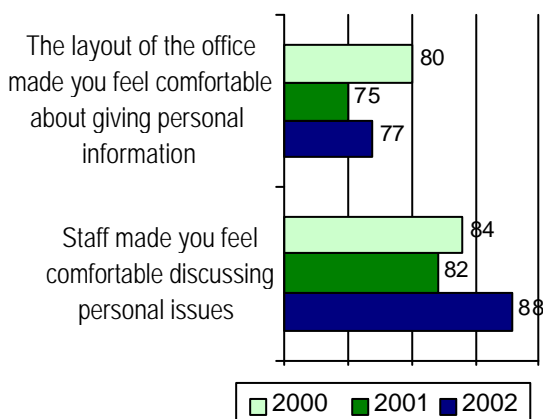
Job seekers need to be open and honest with Centrelink and feel free to discuss personal issues in this environment in order to get the best access to assistance. Particularly in the early days of the implementation of Job Network, anecdotal evidence from Job Network members suggested that job seekers would reveal information to them that they had not revealed to Centrelink. This is still continuing to some extent and in some cases this can affect the job seekers' eligibility for services.

Centrelink has made considerable changes in the registration process over recent years including the introduction of computer aided registration to limit the written forms job seekers need to complete, to ask questions in a standardised format and to assist the service officer in easily navigating the questions required for assessing eligibility.

In general, job seekers felt comfortable discussing personal issues at the registration interview and there were slight improvements in job seekers' perceptions in this area from previous years (see Figure 4) particularly for the role played by staff.

Figure 4: Feeling comfortable (% agree)

Base: All job seekers



Others were uncomfortable with the interview questions themselves:

- The questions were none of their business/they didn't need to know some things; and
- Uncomfortable with information being asked.

Enhancements have been made to Centrelink office environments over the years to provide an environment in which job seekers feel more comfortable discussing personal issues. Despite this, fewer job seekers in 2002 (77%) felt that the office layout made them comfortable giving information than did in 2000 (80%).

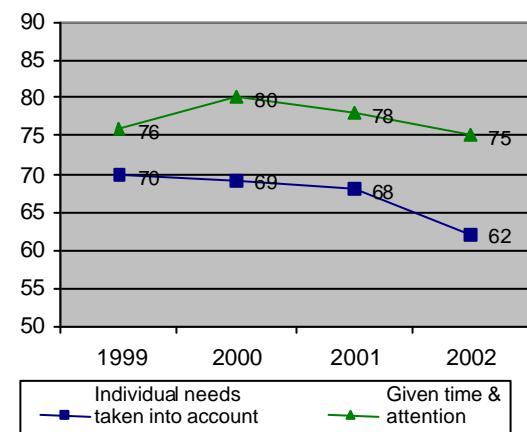
The main reasons job seekers felt uncomfortable with the office environment were that desks were too close to each other/ too open; and there was not enough privacy.

Individualised services

Job seeker ratings of staff were lower for 2002 than for previous years with only 62% of job seekers feeling that their individual needs and situations were taken into account (Figure 5).

Ratings were lowest in 2002 for those aged 45-54 yrs (54%) particularly when compared to those under 25 who were most satisfied with the individualised service (70%). Ratings were also low for those people with a disability (56%), those people not on allowance (55%) and women (59%). Those on NSA/YA(Other) had higher ratings (69%).

Figure 5: Aspects of staff services at registration (% agree) Base: All job seekers



INFORMATION SEMINARS

The information job seekers are required to receive and comprehend at registration can be overwhelming. Previous studies have highlighted the benefits of alternative strategies to assist job seekers to retain more of the information received at registration.

In 2001 Centrelink undertook an evaluation of claim processes including reviewing effectiveness of different mediums for presenting information. The review examined a process of holding information seminars before the registration interviews, looked at the information provided in the interview itself and reviewed the impact of the written material provided.

Results of this study are documented in the report to Centrelink, *Evaluation of Centrelink Job Seeker New Claim Processes, Seminars and Related Support Materials*. The study found that the majority of job seekers (75%) who attended a seminar before the interview agreed that *“it was helpful to go through the seminar before the interview because I could ask better questions at the interview”*. Customers who attended a seminar were also more likely to display intended behaviours indicating core messages were being understood by job seekers. The study also found that:

“The new claim interview is still the primary point of contact for new customers and therefore the key source of core messages. As such, the quality of the delivery of core messages needs to be maximised during this key interaction with the new customer.”, (Newton, Wayman, Chong and Associates, 2001).

While the registration interview was the primary source from which job seekers received information, the information seminar was an important secondary source and served to further reinforce messages. Those who attended an information seminar were more likely to display the intended behaviours such as adhering to activity test requirements, connecting with services and avoiding breaching penalties.

Less than half the respondents in the 2002 Job Seeker Survey (43%) said they had attended an information seminar. This is a significant increase from 2001 figures where only 28% of job seekers recalled attending an information seminar.

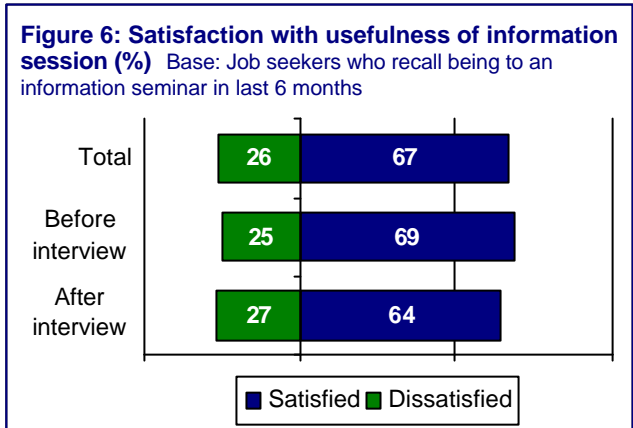
Of those attending an information seminar in 2002, 41% had been to one before their registration interview and 55% after the interview. Two-thirds

were satisfied with the usefulness of the information session, while one-quarter said they were dissatisfied.

Figure 6 shows that there is little difference in the perceived usefulness of the information seminar between job seekers who attended before the interview and those who attended after.

The main reasons for saying the seminar was not useful were:

- No new information/already knew what they told us;
- Not useful/not helpful/waste of time; and
- Information was inappropriate/irrelevant.



The 2002 Job Seeker Survey shows that those job seekers who attended an information seminar had greater recall of employment services information, were more likely to find registration useful in helping them look for work and were more satisfied with registration services (Table 1). Note: those who attended seminars were more likely to be on a NSA/YA(Other) and therefore more likely to be affected by activity testing and Mutual Obligation.

Table 1: Recall of employment services information by attendance at an information seminar (% agree/satisfied) Base: Job seekers who recall being to an information seminar in last 6 months

	Attended seminar	
	Yes	No
Employment services information:		
Registration is useful	60	52
Satisfaction with registration	75	69
Aware of self help facilities	93	76
Aware of Mutual Obligation	73	43
Aware of Job Matching	73	61
Explained how to contact JN	90	75
Good understanding of JN services	79	66
Encouraged to use JN for matching	90	76

INFORMATION ON EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

As the gateway to services, it is important that Centrelink registration provide job seekers with a good understanding of the employment services available including Job Network, how it can help them and how they can access these services.

Is registration useful for job seekers?

Registering at Centrelink as looking for work is the first step for job seekers to get assistance to help them look for work. The proportion of job seekers believing that registering at Centrelink was useful in helping them to look for work increased in 2001. The upwards movement, however, was reversed in 2002, see Figure 8.

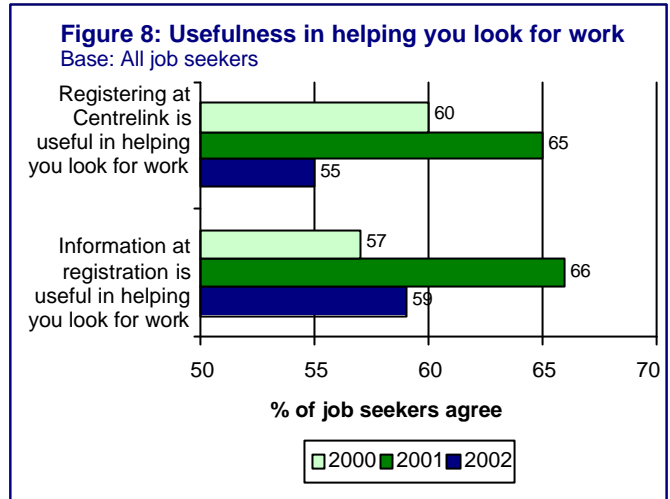
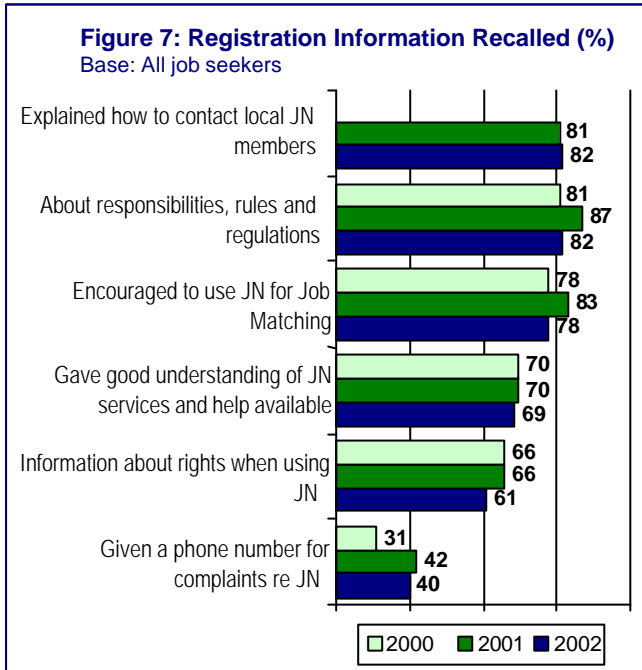


Figure 7 above shows the types of information job seekers recalled receiving from Centrelink. The most frequently recalled concepts were job seekers' responsibilities and the rules and regulations as well as how to contact Job Network members. Job seekers were in relatively strong agreement that they were encouraged to use the Job Network. Job seekers were least likely to recall receiving information regarding job seekers' rights, with only three in five agreeing this had been explained to them.

Information about self help facilities

In addition to knowing about Job Network, it is important that job seekers leave Centrelink registration with knowledge of the different types of services available to help them find work, including touchscreens and self-help facilities in Centrelink. As Table 2 shows, the majority of registrants recalled being told about touchscreens and self-help facilities.

Table 2: Recall of Job Search Information (% agree) Base: All job seekers

Job seekers recalled that Centrelink told them about..	2000	2001	2002
Touch screens	82 ¹	83	78
Self help facilities	82 ¹	76	77

¹ Touchscreens & self help facilities questions combined in 2000

The level of Job Network service job seekers have been referred to is associated with their perception of the usefulness of Centrelink services in helping them look for work. Those in Job Matching services were less likely to feel that registration was useful and much of the decline from 2001 is amongst job seekers in this service group, where 62% found Centrelink registration useful in 2001 and only 39% in 2002, see Table 3.

Table 3: Registration is useful by service type (% agree) Base: All job seekers

Job Network Service Type	2001	2002
Job Matching	62	39
Job Search Training	72	64
Intensive Assistance	71	73

Job seekers who go on from their registration experience to connect with Job Network for more intensive employment services such as Job Search Training or Intensive Assistance may feel they have received greater assistance from the system and therefore feel that Centrelink was a useful step in their search for work. Those who are only participating in Job Matching services, however, may not be told as much about the full range of services. As a result, they may not feel the help they are receiving is as useful as their Intensive Assistance and Job Search Training counterparts.

The survey showed that particular groups of job seekers view Centrelink registration differently:

- Those with **higher levels of education** (post secondary school qualifications) were less likely to feel that registering at Centrelink was useful in their search for work (49%). This is possibly because of the knowledge they may already have about job seeking obtained through their education as well as the nature of the jobs they may be looking for and the associated job search activities. Alternatively, it may be because those with higher level of education are less likely to access Intensive Assistance or Job Search Training, which is associated with the belief that registering with Centrelink was useful. Information provided by Centrelink on touchscreens, self-help facilities and even Job Network may appear to be less relevant and therefore less useful to these job seekers. Over half (59%) of recent registrants were job seekers with lower levels of education and/or qualifications and these were more likely to find registration useful in their search for work (60%).
- Those job seekers who were **employed** at the time of the survey were less likely to feel that registration at Centrelink was useful in helping them look for work (50% compared to 61% of those still unemployed). Previous research has found this to be a common view amongst those who have found employment. Job seekers may attribute little significance to the assistance they received and are more likely to say that they found the job themselves, even though providers may have helped with support or facilities for job search.

- Those in **remote areas** were more likely to find Centrelink registration useful compared to job seekers in areas with greater access to other services and infrastructure. This may be due to the lack of services available in remote areas and therefore a greater reliance on government services. Metropolitan based job seekers, however, may have both greater access to alternative facilities or avenues for looking for work and higher expectations about what they could be provided with.

Job seekers' expectations about employment services are a consideration in developing communication messages. While job seekers need to leave the registration process with a clear idea of the employment services available and be encouraged to use them, they need to be clear that Centrelink does not actually find them a job.

The greatest reason for dissatisfaction with employment services overall is that Centrelink did not get the job seeker work (39% of dissatisfied job seekers). This, together with numerous qualitative research findings, shows that some job seekers confirm to have unrealistic expectations about Centrelink's role in helping job seekers get work.

"I thought it was just like the old CES where they had the case managers and the jobs on the board – I just thought Centrelink was the CES but just now on computer"

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

Information is useful

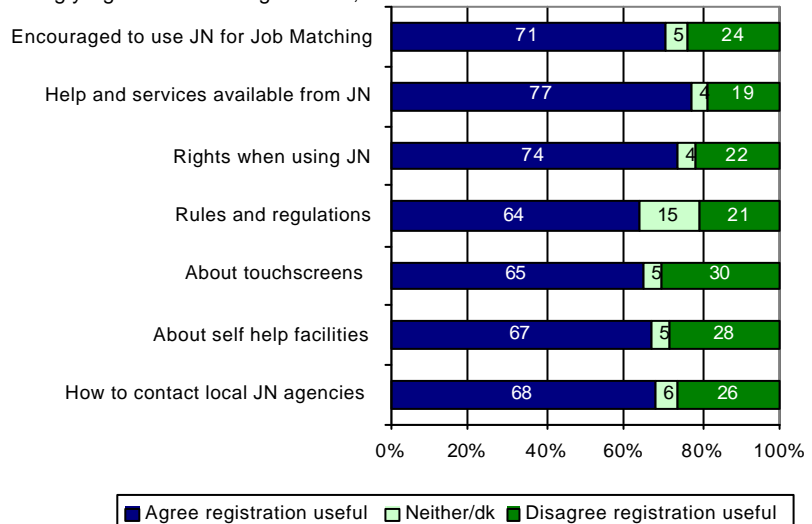
The majority of job seekers who could recall information given to them at registration were also in agreement that registration was useful in helping them look for work.

Those job seekers who **strongly** agreed that they were told about **employment service information**, were two to three times more likely to feel that registration was useful in helping them to look for work than other job seekers.

Figure 9: Information recalled by usefulness of registration (%)

Base: All job seekers

Strongly agreed that at registration, Centrelink staff told them...



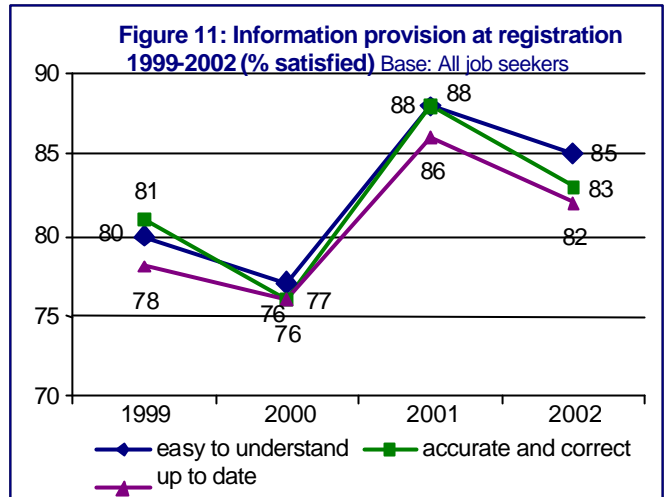
QUALITY OF INFORMATION

The 2002 Job Seeker Survey measures job seekers' perceptions of the accuracy of information received at registration, how up to date it was and whether job seekers felt it was easy to understand.

While job seekers may not be fully aware of the true accuracy of the information given to them at registration, the survey measures their perception of accuracy. It serves as an indication of their feelings towards the organisation and the staff they have dealt with.

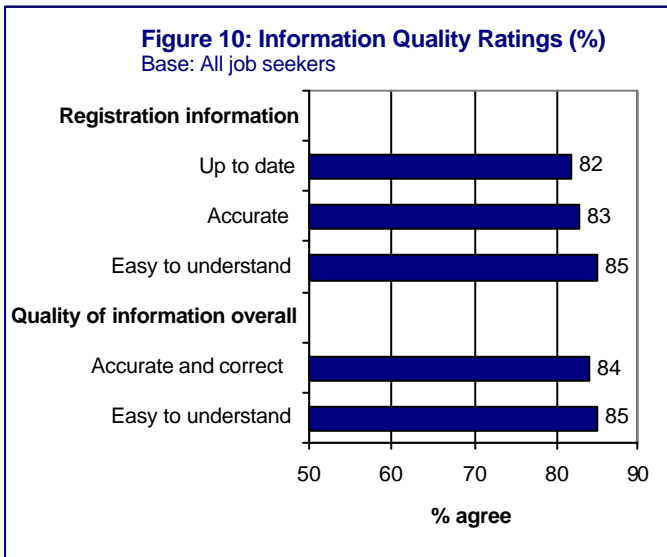
Experiences such as receiving apparently conflicting information from different staff, having errors in letters sent to them etc, can influence job seekers' perceptions and impact on their confidence in the service and feelings about the competency of the organisation.

While individual Centrelink staff may have little control over such instances, the consistency of good service across service points and the confidence in the services are real considerations for job seekers. The quality of information received in general is rated highly by job seekers (Figure 10). These high results reflect a positive view of services.



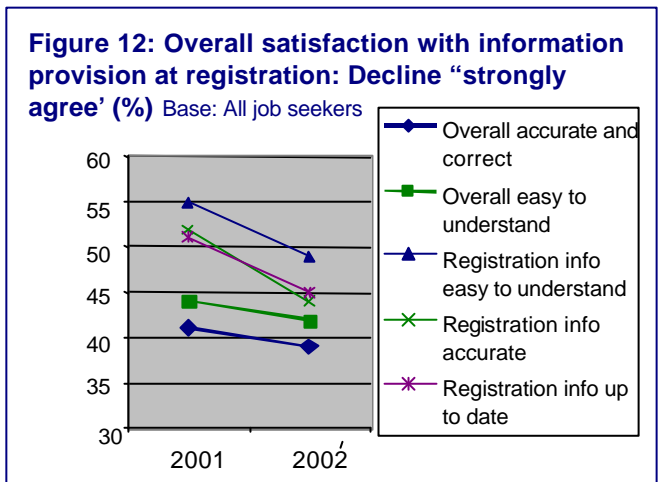
While the results for information provision remain very positive (above 80%) this service aspect may require attention to prevent a decrease in customer satisfaction of a greater magnitude in the future.

A key warning signal of potentially declining satisfaction is when the 'strongly agree' component of overall satisfaction begins to decline (Figure 12).



Information received at registration, however, has shown volatility over the past four years (see Figure 11).

The main reason for this is the marked change in figures recorded in 2000 that appear to be going in the opposite direction to the overall information indicators.



Information was rated highly for all groups of job seekers, with the majority of sub groups (youth, mature aged, women, NESCOB and those with a disability) feeling that information was easy to understand. While job seekers felt information was easy to understand other survey results indicate that job seekers are not always getting the correct message. Many job seekers felt that registration was not useful and had lower recall of employment services information than recall of information about rules and regulations which apply to them.

SUMMARY: KEY MESSAGES FROM THE RESEARCH

As registration processes continue to evolve with changing policies and procedures, understanding job seeker views of the services at registration continues to be an important component of service improvement. The 2002 Job Seeker Survey presents some mixed results with regard to registration services.

While information and staff qualities are generally rated highly, job seekers are less likely to be satisfied with services received at registration and less likely to feel that registering at Centrelink is useful in helping them to look for work than they were a year ago. Some key findings are summarised below.

- Information seminars appear to be related to increased knowledge and greater feelings of satisfaction with services, confirming what other studies have found; that **information seminars** are a worthwhile service component. While this may be the case, only around half of recent registrants recalled attending an information seminar. Understanding why this is and increasing recall and perhaps attendance will have flow-on effects to improved knowledge and satisfaction.
- Efforts made by staff to help job seekers feel comfortable have been successful with ratings of these aspects of services high. Job seekers, however, were less likely to feel that **staff considered their individual needs and personal situations**. This indicator has decreased significantly since last year and is also highly related to overall satisfaction with registration services. Efforts to improve the individualised nature of the delivery of services may be useful in improving this key aspect of service.
- Improvements can be made to the perception job seekers have about the usefulness of Centrelink registration, which has declined across a range of job seeker groups. This is another key service element which drives overall satisfaction with registration services. Although this has decreased for all job seekers, those who are not eligible for as many services (or payments) have the lowest levels of agreement with registration usefulness. Those on Job Matching and job seekers not on allowance have particularly low levels of agreement. Communication strategies may be able to address poor perceptions and work towards **managing the expectations** of these job seekers.
- Recall of employment services information was associated with higher ratings of registration usefulness. Working towards greater emphasis, understanding and retention of **employment services information ie emphasising what is available** (particularly for Job Matching clients) may assist in improving job seeker views. Information seminars may also play a useful role here.
- Further improvements can be made through **continuing to seek feedback** from job seekers on the registration process and information products, monitoring expectations and information needs as policies and processes change. More indepth research may be needed to fully understand job seeker views on these issues.
- The 'strongly agree' component of overall satisfaction has declined since 2001. This is a key warning sign of potentially declining overall satisfaction and is something which should be monitored.