



## JOB SEEKER CHOICE OF SERVICE PROVIDER: Findings from the 2002 Job Seeker Survey

The Job Network was established in 1998 as a competitive employment services market for both job seekers and employers. A key element of the competitive design of Job Network is client choice. Job seekers and employers choose the services of particular providers and can 'shop around' for the service that they feel will best meet their needs. Choice is central in making local competition work.

Early research into the implementation of Job Network highlighted the issue of choice and the extent to which the choice driven competitive model was being embraced and used by employers and job seekers.

Despite a central tenet to Job Network being choice, many job seekers are still unclear about their right to choose a provider. Qualitative research found that job seekers approached choosing a provider with a degree of confusion and many found the process daunting. Shopping around for services requires an understanding of the services which are available at each provider and some criteria by which a choice can be made – how do job seekers know what is better?

Job seekers were also limited by a lack of information about Job Network members. Job seekers generally chose Job Network agencies for Job Matching based on available vacancies. Providers of Job Search Training or Intensive Assistance, however, were chosen on practical concerns such as convenient locations or from recommendations. Only relatively recently has performance information on providers become publicly available to assist job seekers with their choice.

The *Job Seeker Evaluation of Employment Services (Centrelink), 2002 Survey*, canvassed issues relating to job seekers' choice of their service provider. This paper draws on the survey data together with qualitative research conducted with job seekers when developing the survey.

### 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:

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This paper aims to provide readers with a greater understanding of the information collected in the 2002 Job Seeker Survey as it relates to job seeker choice and provides an opportunity to look towards the results for directions in service improvement.

This paper presents a discussion of Centrelink services with a particular focus on the key function areas of providing information about recipients' choice of provider and overseeing the referral process to those providers. The paper concludes with a summary and discussion of key messages from the research.

While this paper covers a specific area of interest (choice of provider), the survey covers a wide range of topics, some of which will be explored in more detail in subsequent papers. More information on other research papers can be obtained from the Department's contact officers listed above or from the DEWR Internet site – [www.workplace.gov.au](http://www.workplace.gov.au).

## INFORMING JOB SEEKERS ABOUT CHOOSING PROVIDERS

### Information about choosing service providers

Centrelink informs job seekers about the services they are eligible for and which Job Network members in their local area can provide these services to them. Job seekers are then required to choose their preferred provider and Centrelink officially refers the job seekers to the provider, registering their choice on the administrative system.

Three quarters of survey respondents (76%) recall being told by Centrelink that they could choose a Job Network provider. This was highest amongst Job Search Training participants (92%), a little lower for Intensive Assistance (85%), Work for the Dole (84%), Community Support Programme (82%) and NEIS (77%) participants. Job Matching participants were the least likely to recall been told (52%). Job Matching clients can register with many Job Network members, however, and there is not the same requirement to choose and be referred to one provider.

Job seekers in remote areas were more likely to recall being told they could choose a provider (82% vs 76% non remote), as were males (82% vs 68% of females).

The same overall proportion (76%) recalled being told where they could get information to help them choose a provider. There was little variation by subgroups on this measure.

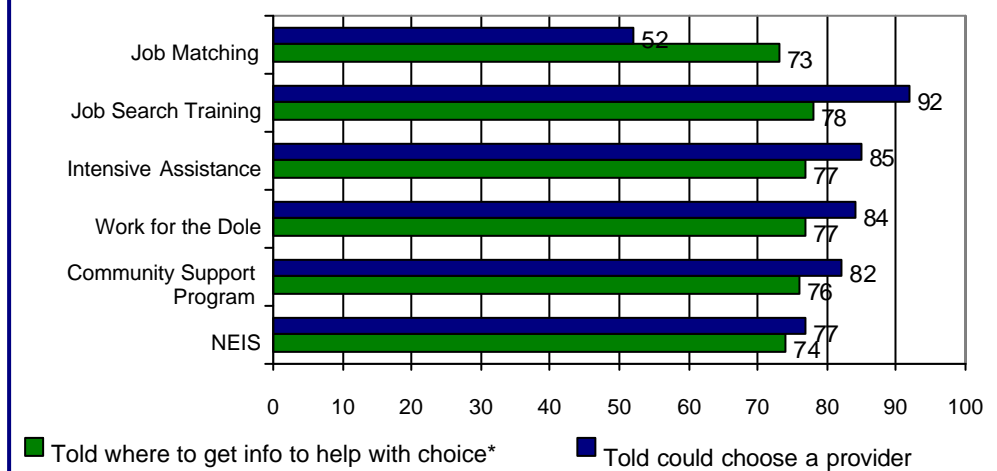
Information on providers is made available to job seekers through a number of sources including the touchscreens. In 2002, 71% of job seekers were aware that information about Job Network members was available on touchscreens, which is a significant increase over previous years. Both awareness of information and use of information through the Internet, are increasing, see Table 1.

**Table 1: Awareness and use of technology for information (%)** Base: Job seekers aware of touch screens in Centrelink offices

	2000	2001	2002
Aware of Job Network member information on touchscreens	54	66	71
Aware information on touchscreens available on the Internet	41	48	60
Have used the Internet to get this information	31	49	53

**Figure 1: Awareness of choice by assistance type, 2002 (%)**

Base: All job seekers. \*Of those job seekers who were told they could choose a provider



**Job seeker recall of referral to Job Search Training and Intensive Assistance**

Job seekers in receipt of either Job Search Training or Intensive Assistance (as defined by administrative data) were asked whether or not they recalled being referred to those services by Centrelink. Just over one half (55% of Job Search Training and 56% of Intensive assistance recipients) recalled being referred.

Recall was lowest amongst the 25-34 year old age group for both types of assistance and was highest for Job Search Training amongst the 55+ age group (71% recall) and amongst 35-54 year olds for Intensive Assistance (62% recall).

This lack of recall of referral indicates that there may be some confusion about the referral process. Job seekers may also be unsure about the available Job Network services. Job seekers in the survey were provided with a description of the service as well as the name of the service (ie Job Search Training and Intensive Assistance). Some job seekers who were recorded as commencing in these services did not recall being referred to them.

Qualitative research also highlighted some confusion about the referral process for job seekers. Some found it difficult to see how Centrelink's role was a "referral".

*"A referral is like a doctor who sends you to the best specialist for your problem. But with Centrelink they just give you a list and they don't tell you which one you should go to. But if you don't pick one in time, they pick one for you."*

**Information given about available choices**

The majority of job seekers who had registered at Centrelink in the previous 6 months recalled information being given to them about Job Network services (Table 2).

Levels were similar to previous years with the exception of encouragement to use Job Network, which decreased slightly on 2001 figures. The proportion of job seekers who recall information about their rights when using Job Network has remained lower than other measures.

**Table 2: Information about Job Network (%)**

*Base: All job seekers*

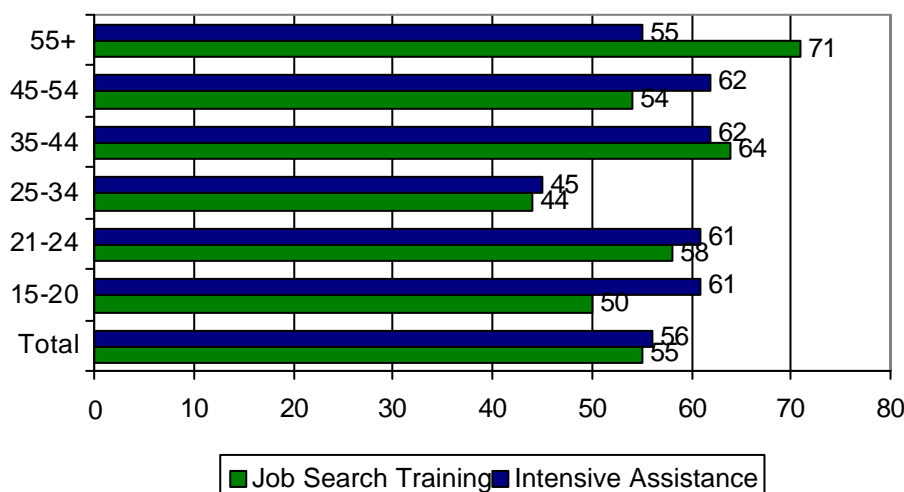
Centrelink staff....	2000	2001	2002
Explained how to contact JNM	-	81	82
Information about your rights when using JN	66	66	61
Gave a good understanding of JN services and help	70	70	69
Encouraged you to use JN for Job Matching	78	83	78

Almost three quarters (73%) of job seekers said they felt they were given enough information to be able to choose a Job Search Training or Intensive Assistance provider. People with a disability were less likely to say they had been given enough information (66% vs 74% non-disabled).

For those who did not feel they had enough information to choose, the survey asked what they felt they needed to be able to make a choice. The most frequent response (59%) was that they would have preferred a better description of the provider.

**Figure 2: Referral to services by age group (%)**

*Base: Job seekers recorded as commencing IA or JST*



Other responses to this question implied that job seekers did not actually feel they had a choice. Of those who said they needed more information to make an informed choice, 30% felt that they did not have a choice, that it was decided for them. See Table 3.

**Table 3: Additional information needed in order to make a choice (%)**

*Base: Job seekers who stated they needed more information to choose a provider*

More information / better description of provider	59
Had no choice/ someone else decided for me	30
More convenient providers	6
Better explanation of intensive assistance process	4

## CHOOSING A PROVIDER

Job seekers are given a set time period to choose a provider; if they fail to do this they are automatically referred through the system and notified of the referral by mail. Previous research has shown that some job seekers may not fully understand this procedure and may not exercise their right to choose because of confusion rather than a conscious decision not to choose.

The available providers in the area and their contracted capacity can also affect a job seeker's choice of provider. Job Network members can experience a shortage of job seekers, that is, places are not all full, meaning a potentially wide choice of providers exists. Alternatively providers can also have too many job seekers wanting to be referred to them and therefore be unable to take any more job seekers at that time. In this scenario choice of provider is more limited.

**Table 4: Reasons for not choosing a provider (%)**

*Base: Job seekers who were referred to JST or IA in last 6 months and didn't choose a provider*

	Job Search Training		Intensive Assistance	
	2001	2002	2001	2002
Chosen for me/ Centrelink chose	-	32	-	27
Letter specified which provider	33	20	56	25
Didn't have time to choose	2	-	-	7
Only had one agency to choose from	4	6	11	7
Didn't know I could choose	35	14	20	6
Still choosing	-	-	-	6
The one I chose wasn't available	-	4	-	5
Didn't know enough about the providers	7	-	7	5
Got a job	-	14	-	5
Didn't want to choose	7	-	3	3
Didn't need to (nfi)	-	7	-	3

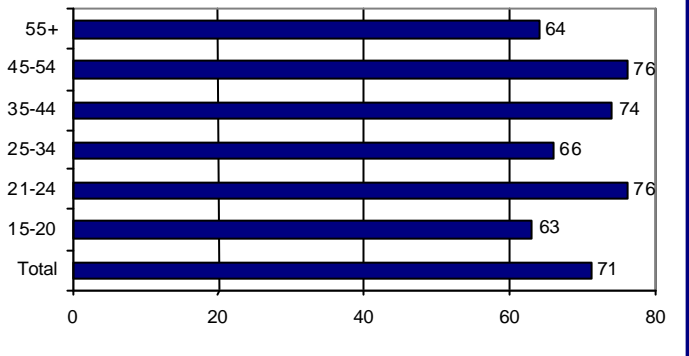
## Making a Choice of Provider

Overall, 71% of job seekers reported that they chose a provider for their Job Search Training or Intensive Assistance. This is lower than levels reported in 2001 where 79% of Job Search Training recipients and 82% of Intensive Assistance recipients recalled having chosen their provider.

In 2002, the youngest age group (15-20 year olds) were least likely to choose a provider (63%), followed by the oldest group (55+) at 64%.

**Figure 4: Proportion choosing a provider (%)**

*Base: Job seekers who were referred to JST or IA in last 6 months*



Reasons for not choosing a provider revolved around a lack of understanding of being given a choice. The major reasons were that:

- they didn't know they could choose;
- the referral letter specified the agency; and
- Centrelink chose a provider for them.

Table 4 shows all reasons for not choosing a provider.

**Reasons for choosing providers**

The most common reason for choosing a particular provider was that it was conveniently located (45%). This was also the most popular reason given in 2000 and 2001.

There has been a decline in the proportion of job seekers stating that they chose their provider because Centrelink referred them (12% and 14% in 2000 and 2001 respectively down to 5% in 2002). This response reflects that the job seeker felt he/she had no input into the referral process (that is, he/she didn't choose), either by failure to choose or by lack of available services, and a reduction in this response is encouraging. Conversely there has been an increase in the proportion of job seekers saying they chose a provider based on previous experience with them or their good reputation, indicating a positive experience or better quality service may be available.

**Table 5: Reason for choosing provider (%)**

*Base: Job seekers who were referred to JST or IA in last 6 months and did choose a provider*

	2000	2001	2002
Conveniently located	42	46	45
Previous dealings with them	6	3	11
Good Reputation / image	8	2	11
Friend/relatives recommended them	6	7	5
Centrelink referred me	12	14	5
Randomly selected	-	-	5
Good service/friendly	-	-	4
Specialised in people like me	3	4	4
Hadn't used them before	-	-	3
Heard of them before (NFI)	-	-	2
Only one available	3	3	2
Told to go there	6	7	2

**Using information on the touchscreens**

Although a far greater proportion of job seekers were aware of information about Job Network members on the touchscreens (71% in 2002) the availability of this information does not seem to have influenced job seeker choice.

Job seekers who were aware of this information were less likely to have chosen their provider, no more likely to have felt adequately informed and only slightly more likely to be satisfied with the information provided to help them choose a Job Network member. This finding indicates that the information included on touch screens is not positively impacting on job seekers.

**Table 6: Choice and awareness of Job Network information on touchscreens (%)**

*Base: Job seekers referred to JST or IA in last 6 months*

	Aware of JNM info on touchscreens	
	Yes	No
Actually chose JNM	68	73
Felt had enough information to choose JNM	73	73
Satisfied with information provided to help choose JNM	78	74

**SATISFACTION WITH INFORMATION ABOUT CHOOSING AN AGENCY**

Overall 74% of Job Search Training and Intensive Assistance recipients said they were satisfied with the information provided by Centrelink to help them choose an agency. Only 14% said they were dissatisfied (3% neither and 9% don't know). Results were similar for both IA and JST clients (Figure 5).

Job seekers in remote areas and in the younger and older age groups were the most satisfied with

**Table 8: Reasons for dissatisfaction with information about choosing an agency (%)**

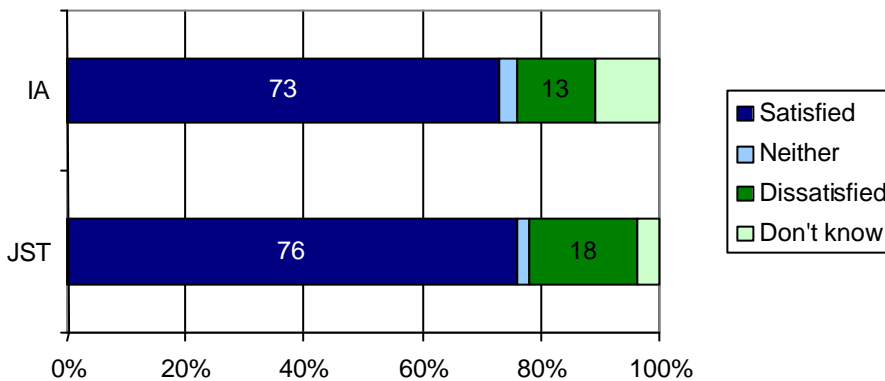
Base: job seekers referred to JST or IA in last 6 months and dissatisfied with information about choosing agency

Lack of information about agency	77
Had no choice	15
Inconvenient location / too far away	8
Poor / unhelpful service	5
Other	2
Don't know	<1

The most common reasons for dissatisfaction were perceived lack of information provided about the agency (77%) followed by not being given a choice in provider (15%). The majority (81%) of those who were dissatisfied with the information were aware of the information about Job Network members available on the touchscreens, but needed more or different information to be better able to make a choice. See Table 9.

**Figure 5: Satisfaction with information to choose agency (%)**

Base: All job seekers referred to JST or IA in last 6 months



information provided to make a choice. Those in the age group 25-34 years were less satisfied with information as were disabled job seekers and those born in a non-English speaking country.

**Table 7: Satisfaction with information to choose agency (%)**

Base: All job seekers referred to JST or IA in last 6 months

Males	75
Females	73
With a disability	69
Non English Speaking Country of birth	63
Aged 15-20	81
Aged 21-24	80
Aged 25-34	62
Aged 35-44	70
Aged 45-54	77
Aged 55+	82
Remote	83
Non Remote	74
Total	74

**JOB SEEKERS IN REMOTE AREAS**

Those in remote areas were more likely to recall being told that they could choose a provider:

Remote - 82%  
Non remote - 76%

Those in remote areas were less likely to feel that they had enough information to be able to choose a provider:

Remote - 68%  
Non Remote - 73%

Job seekers in remote areas were less likely to have actually chosen a Job Network provider:

Remote - 63%  
Non Remote - 71%

### **PILOTING ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF REFERRAL**

Centrelink, DEWR and Job Network members have trialled alternative methods for facilitating job seeker choice of provider in an attempt to increase knowledge of Job Network services and encourage greater job seeker connectivity with Job Network. A trial of Job Network Access Centre advisers (JNAC advisers) in some Centrelink offices involved a staff member who could inform job seekers about Job Network and facilitate job seekers choosing a provider at their interview and even making an appointment with their provider of choice on their behalf.

Centrelink, DEWR and Job Network members interviewed about the pilot process were positive about the effect of this personal intervention on job seekers. While it was not clear that the process increased job seeker knowledge about Job Network, those interviewed felt that job seekers' engagement levels and attitude towards Job Network was more positive. Some felt that job seekers did not 'bother' to inform themselves about Job Network and didn't take advantage of information that was available. A general finding from the pilot, however, was that increasing the amount of information as well as the speed of referral to Job Network meant that Job Network members could meet with job seekers sooner and maintain momentum and enthusiasm. Some involved in the pilot also felt that it improved communication between providers and Centrelink staff.

### **KEY MESSAGES FROM THE RESEARCH**

The research shows that although the majority of job seekers reported choosing their provider, there is some confusion amongst a significant proportion of job seekers about the referral process and about their right to choose a Job Network member.

Results indicate that some job seekers did not feel they had a choice. They felt that the referral letter specified the provider or that Centrelink chose their provider for them.

The proportion of job seekers who do not understand the process or who did not know that they could choose a provider appears to be slightly larger than in previous years.

Centrelink's role in providing an information and referral service can be confusing to some job seekers. While the majority of job seekers recall receiving information about Job Network, how to contact providers and what services are available, the process for referral is not as clear. Qualitative research showed that the term 'referral' is not an expression job seekers easily understand. This term doesn't appear to convey to job seekers the process of choice which is facilitated by Centrelink but does not involve a recommendation by Centrelink.

In the absence of a recommendation from Centrelink staff, job seekers are provided with minimal information about providers.

The majority of job seekers were aware of information about Job Network members on the touchscreens, however, this did not appear to be used in making a choice of provider. The main drivers of choice were reported to be convenient locations for job seekers and previous dealings with them.

### **KEY MESSAGES**

Some areas for strategic development highlighted by the research include:

- improving information about the services available from Job Network;
- improving explanations for job seekers about choosing a Job Network service provider;
- providing more information about different providers to assist job seekers in making a choice;
- reviewing the effectiveness of information and communication methods for informing Job seekers about choice and about Job Network members such as:
  - touchscreens;
  - Internet;
  - information sessions/seminars;
  - personal explanations; and
  - referral letter.
- increasing marketing to job seekers by Job Network members for example, through attendance at Centrelink seminars; and
- increasing communication between Centrelink and Job Network members to facilitate better referral and connectivity.