

A snapshot of the availability of jobs has shown limited employment opportunities for disadvantaged job seekers, indicating the need for a new approach to getting these people into work, a report prepared for Anglicare Australia says.

[The snapshot](#) looks at the kind and numbers of jobs available and whether these are sufficient for those with limited skills and experience.

Undertaken in May, it used three federal government sets of data: the Australia and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO), a typology of all potential positions in the labour market; the Employment Department's Internet Vacancy Index (IVI), which examines the distribution of advertised positions by skill level; and the Job Seeker Classification Index (JSCI), that classifies people using government funded employment services according to the barriers they face to entering the workforce.

The analysis finds "that in a tight and competitive jobs market, there are simply not enough job vacancies for people with limited skill, education or experience".

The proportion of higher skill level available jobs has increased over the past decade, while the proportion for those with lower skills and experiences has declined, and the divide is growing. In May, the Employment Department's vacancy report showed 37% of advertised positions were at the top skill level, and just 13% at skill level 5, the lowest.

"The department's own Jobactive data for unemployed jobseekers shows there are more than five disadvantaged jobseekers for every vacancy at skill level 5 across Australia. In South Australia there are more than nine and in Tasmania ten and a half."

The analysis found a growing preference for level 4 (the second lowest skill level) over level 5 positions. Some 27% of advertised vacancies were for level 4 positions, compared with 13% for level 5.

“This suggests disadvantaged jobs seekers could really benefit from high quality training and experience in paid work, both for the obvious capacity reasons and as a positive signal to employers.”

But even if all disadvantaged job seekers were to reach level 4 skill, there would still be two for every advertised job, the analysis says. Also, “given the substantial growth in part-time rather than full-time employment and the record number of underemployed people looking for more work, people with higher level skills will also be competing for these jobs”. The report notes that Australia has its highest level of underemployment on record.

It says policies that force people into job search activities and penalise them for not complying “are not constructive,” and calls for rethinking by government, support services and employers to help disadvantaged jobseekers get into employment.

One suggested course is targeting public and private investment at the creation of entry-level or low-skill positions. “There is no shortage of situations where community development work has been the bridge between community well-being and improved educational and employment outcomes,” the report says, instancing some projects in remote Indigenous communities and the work of Infoxchange with young public housing tenants in Melbourne.

The usual screening process for employment recruitment works against disadvantaged job seekers, with employers making assumptions based on a person’s education experience and skills, the report says. This “signalling divide” means disadvantaged job seekers have little opportunity to signal the positive attributes they do possess that could benefit the employers in the long term.

“The greatest ground for people with limited skills can be gained through supported employment programs” which give the opportunity to promote the strengths of candidates and counter some of the negatives of the “signalling divide”.

“The snapshot also highlights how much the situation varies in different parts of Australia. This study suggests it is time for a major investment in job creation and skill development in both Tasmania and South Australia, as disadvantaged job seekers in those states face the greatest competition for relevant jobs, largely due to the changed industrial landscape.”

Punitive approach won't work for the most disadvantaged job seekers: Anglicare

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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