

# End the Australian government's brutal exploitation of the poor



**To: Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Tony Burke**

**Subject: 'Mutual' Obligations and Employment Services Programs**

**Prepared by: AUWU Committee of Management (Tracey Smallwood, Jeremy Heywood, Daniel Levy, Raquel Araya and Jeremy Poxon) in conjunction with academic researchers Theresa O'Brien and David O'Halloran**

**Critical date: 30/06/2022, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Australian welfare recipients**

## Recommendations

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <b>PRIORITY: Instruct</b> the Department Secretary to cease requiring persons to enter into new Employment Pathway Plans (EPPs) indefinitely.<br><b>Result: Indefinitely suspends 'Mutual' Obligations</b>   | Agreed/<br>Not agreed/<br>Please discuss   |
| <i>If recommendations suspending 'Mutual' Obligations are agreed</i><br>2. <b>PRIORITY: Instruct</b> the Department Secretary to ensure no person receives an overall lower size and amount of payments as a result of the adoption of recommendations which suspend 'Mutual' Obligations.<br><b>Result: Payments arising from EPP exemptions are accounted for</b>   | Agreed/<br>Not agreed/<br>Please discuss   |
| 3. <b>PRIORITY: Agree</b> to immediately abolish the existing compulsory privatised Employment Services system and replace it with a return to the purely voluntary, publicly administered Commonwealth Employment Service.<br><b>Result: 'Mutual' Obligations abolished, employment services become voluntary</b>  | Agreed/<br>Not agreed/<br>Please discuss   |
| 4. <b>PRIORITY: Agree</b> that all system changes and reviews must be co-designed by welfare recipients with lived experience at each level of the current systems.<br><b>Result: Decisions are made with welfare recipients</b>  | Agreed/<br>Not agreed/<br>Please discuss   |
| <i>If recommendations 1 and 3 are <u>not</u> agreed</i><br>5. <b>Instruct</b> the Department Secretary to cease requiring persons to enter into new EPPs for 1 year.<br><i>And</i><br>6. <b>Agree</b> to conduct a full Departmental review into the suitability and fitness-for-purpose of the existing Employment Services programs, whether delivered under the previous model or via the incoming New Employment Services Model (NESM).<br><b>Result: 'Mutual' Obligations suspended while Department determines if existing Employment Services programs are fit-for-purpose</b> | Agreed/<br>Not agreed/<br>Please discuss<br><br>Agreed/Not agreed/<br>Please discuss |
| <i>If recommendations 1, 3, 5 and 6 are <u>not</u> agreed</i><br>7. <b>Instruct</b> the Department Secretary to cease requiring persons to enter into new EPPs for a period of 6 months.<br><i>And</i><br>8. <b>Agree</b> to pause the rollout of the NESM and conduct a full Departmental review into the suitability and fitness-for-purpose of the NESM.<br><b>Result: 'Mutual' Obligations suspended while Department determines if New Employment Services Model is fit-for-purpose</b>  | Agreed/<br>Not agreed/<br>Please discuss<br><br>Agreed/Not agreed/<br>Please discuss |
| <i>If recommendations 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 are <u>not</u> agreed</i><br>9. <b>Instruct</b> the Department Secretary to cease requiring persons to enter into new EPPs for a period of 3 months.<br><i>And</i><br>10. <b>Agree</b> to conduct a full Departmental review into the suitability and fitness-for-purpose of the incoming NESM.<br><b>Result: 'Mutual' Obligations suspended and the Department conducts a review to determine if the NESM is fit-for-purpose while it rolls out</b>  | Agreed/<br>Not agreed/<br>Please discuss<br>Agreed/Not agreed/<br>Please discuss     |
| <i>If Employment Services Programs continue to be compulsory</i><br>11. <b>PRIORITY: Agree</b> to establish a robust industry Ombudsman, independent of the Department, with the mandate and power to immediately suspend the licences of providers behaving poorly.<br><b>Result: Providers will now face accountability for poor behaviour</b>  | Agreed/Not agreed/<br>Please discuss   |
| 12. <b>PRIORITY: Urge</b> the Albanese government to raise all income support payments to a minimum of the Henderson poverty line (currently \$88 a day).<br><b>Result: Welfare recipients given monetary support to improve wellbeing which would lead to increased employment outcomes</b>  | Agreed/Not agreed/<br>Please discuss   |

## Background

- Until the 1980s, Employment Services were administered by the Commonwealth Employment Services (CES) as a public good, with income support equal to the Henderson Poverty Line (Appendix C, Item 1).
- Hawke-Keating government (1983-1996) introduces 'reciprocal' work and activity tests as part of their "Newstart" initiative, now known as 'Mutual' Obligations (Appendix C, Item 2).
- Keating government (1995) advocates widening the gap between unemployment payments and minimum wage to incentivise finding of employment (Appendix C, Item 4).
- Keating begins privatising CES arguing competition will increase service quality (Appendix C, Item 5).
- Howard government introduces "Work for the Dole" (WfD) in 1997 and begins requiring welfare recipients to participate in the program from 1998 (Appendix C, Item 7).
- Howard government cuts employment services funding in half and abolishes the last of the CES in 1998, fully marketising Employment Services (Appendix C, Item 9).
- Rudd-Gillard government (2007-2013) transfer single parents (Appendix C, Item 10) and people with disability (Appendix C, Item 11) en masse to lower Newstart payment, and introduce automated data-matching between Centrelink and the ATO (Appendix C, Item 12).
- Abbott government (2015) massively scales up WfD program (Appendix C, Item 13).
- Josh Park-Fing dies on Work for the Dole site in 2016 (Appendix C, Item 15).
- Abbott-Turnbull government (2013-2019) removes human oversight from ATO-Centrelink data-matching and perpetrates 'Robodebt' on welfare recipients, automatically raising illegal and invalid debts along with various threats and menacing enforcement actions (Appendix C, Item 15).
- Reports emerge of welfare recipients committing suicide after receiving debts and harassing enforcement actions (Appendix C, Item 16).
- In response to COVID-19 pandemic, Morrison government (2020) implements emergency measures including the Coronavirus supplement temporarily lifting income support payments above the Henderson poverty line, and lengthy suspension of 'Mutual' Obligations (Appendix C, Item 17).
- Morrison government (2020-2021) gradually winds down 'Mutual' Obligations suspensions, and reduces Coronavirus supplement in stages until fully removed in mid-2021 (Appendix C, Item 18).
- Morrison government (2021) increases base-rate of JobSeeker by \$50 per fortnight, the first increase in real terms to the payment since the 1994 Keating government (Appendix C, Item 18).
- Court approves \$1.8 billion settlement for "shameful Robodebt failure" (Appendix C, Item 21).
- Morrison government (March 2022) passes legislation in a guillotine motion along with 13 other bills, with support of Labor opposition, enabling the New Employment Services Model on last sitting day of their term (Appendix C, Item 19).
- Albanese government (June 2022) slashes Centrelink call centre resources in the month before majorly overhauled new model is set to begin (Appendix C, Item 20).
- AUWU Advocacy team (June 2022) flooded with dozens of inquiries from people confused and worried about a new system they have heard little or nothing about.

## Key Issues

The system of 'Mutual' Obligations, starvation payments and privatised Employment Services does not lead to greater employment outcomes

- ABS data in 1997 shows CES outperforming private provider job matches 6-to-1 (Appendix C, Item 6).
- Contemporaneous research from Abbott era shows WfD remains ineffective (Appendix C, Item 14).
- As part of O'Halloran's research, the Australian Unemployed Workers' Union Rating Scale (AUWURS) survey was developed to rate the quality of service providers based on the experiences of unemployed workers. A rollout of this survey by the AUWU in 2022 has found that providers across the board score just 2 out of 5, on average, from hundreds of responses (Appendix C, Item 23). **Failing to implement our priority recommendations, and proceeding with these same providers receiving licenses will result in the same poor service quality.**
- Among the hundreds of comments of the AUWU Workforce Australia/PBAS survey (350+ total responses), not a single one referred to the capacity of Workforce Australia to provide support to increase worker employability or capacity to get a job (Appendix B, p. 3). The quantitative results also bear this out, as despite the high level of uncertainty, 96.6% of responses expect 'some' or 'severe' negative impact from at least one of the issues presented. The mean number of severe impact responses per respondent was 6.3 of a possible 12 (Appendix A, p. 4). **The overwhelming impact of proceeding with the new system is seen as severe and negative.**
- The Online Employment Services Trials are not representative of the population of people moving into the NESM, as they explicitly excluded people who were likely to struggle to find a job. Per the OEST Evaluation Report (Appendix C, Item 28), only those in Stream A with a low JSCI score were eligible, meaning those considered most likely to find a job, and those newly registered. Long-term unemployed people and people who were already in the system were not included, which may be why the outcomes (e.g. Figure 3.4 in the OEST Evaluation, Appendix C, Item 28) appear more positive than the results of the AUWU survey.
- The outcomes of the trials do not indicate an improvement in quantitative outcomes such as exits from income support within 39 weeks, where the comparison group had 41% exit compared to 35.7% among the OEST participants

(statistically significant at  $\alpha=0.1$ , though elsewhere in the report such as Figure 4.1 a significance threshold of 0.05 is used, indicating that this difference may not pass the lower threshold). There was no detectable difference between the OEST participants and the comparison group in their exit from employment services within 39 weeks. **It is feared opening up the system to groups with less favourable entry criteria will produce further negative outcomes.**

- Peer-reviewed research from David O'Halloran et al. (2021) concludes that the employment services programs predicated on 'Mutual' Obligations have been widely ineffective, and that the privatised provider system has become a monopsony leading directly to poor outcomes. **O'Halloran finds that the proposed NESM has not learned these lessons and will likely repeat these same failures and lead to poor employment outcomes (Appendix C, Item 22).**

### The system harms people

- Multiple reports from 1990s indicate CES employees were opposed to penalising their clients because it would harm them, and was at odds with their desire to help clients (Appendix C, Item 3).
- People compelled to engage with Employment Services are living on payments which amount to little more than 50% of the Henderson Poverty Line for a single unemployed adult (Appendix C, Item 26).
- Howard-era research immediately shows WfD actually has adverse effects on participants (Appendix C, Item 8).
- When the COVID supplement was introduced and 'Mutual' Obligations were suspended, research (Klein et al., March 2021) found that mental health and wellbeing went up for more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of people surveyed, and that they actually spent more time looking for work than before the pandemic began (Appendix C, Item 24). **When the system was de facto abolished, the net benefits to all were huge and these policy settings should now be re-introduced permanently.**
- Large fears in AUWU Workforce Australia/PBAS survey results regarding getting support for new digital system, just as Centrelink slashes call centre support resources. 72.4% of responses (Appendix A, p. 4) indicated that the lack of digital support would have some or severe negative impact on them.
- Concern NESM will be more punitive, or fail to account for personal circumstances, can be observed in the 78.5% of responses which saw some or severe negative impact due to perceived increase in the burden of activities to be completed, and 83.5% anticipating point requirements will not be adapted to their circumstances (Appendix A, p. 4).
- Common thread of feelings of acute mental health distress including suicide and self-harm. Nine comments made explicit reference to suicide. More than 150 comments made reference to harm to individuals. (Appendix B, p. 1). **Proceeding with NESM is likely to intensify harms already felt by people in the existing system.**
- Research into studying the variations of policy settings during the pandemic and comparing them to previous settings, Klein et al. (November 2021) found that "Poverty is policy-induced", "policy understandings of productivity and work are limited", "long-standing punitive narratives around people accessing social security are stigmatising, counterproductive and not based in reality", and that "the toll of current policy settings on physical and mental health is alarming" (Appendix C, Item 25). **In light of these findings, ignoring our priority recommendations and continuing with any welfare system which retains these policy settings will lead to direct harm to hundreds of thousands of people – and on the Department's, Minister's and Government's heads be that harm.**

### NESM rollout will see reputational damage increase for Department and flow to incoming government

- Survey responses indicated communications of NESM rollout has been botched, with 43.4% (Appendix A, p. 3) of respondents having not received information about how they will interact with the new system.
- Furthermore, 52.7% of respondents were unsure about the impact of one or more statement of concern, particularly regarding their placement in the online system where 35.2% were unsure about whether their preference was respected, and 39% unsure if their new provider would be inconvenient, likely indicating that they were unaware of who that would be (Appendix A, Table 3). Among the comments, most indicated that the respondent did not understand the incoming system, nor had they received information on it.
- High distrust of government automated decision-making after robodebt debacle has shown up in the survey results. "Government automation fears" had the highest mean priority of concern among the 12 statements (3.77) in Table 3, and 93.2% of responses indicated anticipating either some or severe negative impact as a result of automation (Appendix A, Figure 3). Explicit comments to this effect were frequent and include "After the Robodebt debacle I don't trust the automated system in any way." (Appendix B, p. 4) **Direct further harm to Department reputation is very likely.**
- Large degree of association of new online system with Robodebt, widely believed to have contributed to multiple suicides. Among the comments many drew parallels between PBAS and the automated debt system, with one respondent saying that "robodebt is being replaced with 'robotask.'" (Appendix B, p. 2)
- Shock and disappointment that a Labor government would implement this comes across in a number of comments: "This system coming in..... as a Labor voter myself completely astounds me – if this system actually takes place I have no faith at all in what is called 'Democracy' in Australia" (Appendix B, p. 4). **Failing to avert the disaster that Workforce Australia is expected to be is likely to greatly damage the reputation of the Albanese government. A major part of Labor's election campaign featured Albanese's story about his upbringing in welfare. The electorate is beginning to realise the current welfare system is vastly more cruel than the one he grew up in, and rightly expects he will address this discrepancy and not pull the ladder up behind him (Appendix C, Item 27).**

## List of Appendices

Appendix A - AUWU Workforce Australia and Points-Based Activation System Survey - Quantitative Analysis  
Prepared by Theresa O'Brien BA, BMath, BMathAdv(hons)

Theresa attained a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Linguistics in 2014, a Bachelor of Mathematics in Mathematics and Statistics in 2018, a Bachelor of Mathematics Advanced (hons) with distinction in Mathematics in 2019 and is currently studying for an Master of Science (Research) in Biology at UNSW. They moonlight as a statistical consultant, lecturer, tutor, and podcaster. During their undergraduate study they lived on Youth Allowance.

Appendix B – AUWU Workforce Australia and Points-Based Activation System Survey - Qualitative Analysis  
Prepared by David O'Halloran

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David O'Halloran is an occupational therapist with more than 35 years' experience in disability employment and vocational rehabilitation services including direct service delivery, program management, project management and policy development at a local, national and international level. David's PhD research at Monash examined the reasons why nearly 4 million appointments are missed with Australian employment service providers every year.

<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David-Ohalloran-3>

Appendix C - Assorted figures and quotes from a wide range of media, government and research publications

# AUWU Workforce Australia and Points-Based Activation System Survey

## Quantitative Analysis

Theresa O'Brien

June 2022

In June 2022 the Australian Unemployed Workers Union (AUWU) put out a survey – the Workforce Australia and Points-Based Activation System Survey (WA-PBAS) – to people engaged in the JobActive system as part of their unemployment benefits mutual obligations. This report details a quantitative analysis of Questions 2, 3, and 4 of that survey.

The code used for this analysis can be found at:

<https://github.com/Tess-LaCoil/WorkforceAusSurvey>

## 1 Survey Design

The WA-PBAS survey was delivered through a webform using the survey service Typeform. The survey instrument consists of five questions:

- Q1. Consent for data sharing.
- Q2. Information about the respondent's interaction with Workforce Australia.
- Q3. A ranked choice of 12 issues by priority constructed from enquiries AUWU has fielded about Workforce Australia.
- Q4. A 5-point impact scale for the same 12 issues with slight re-phrasing of the statements.
- Q5. An open comment box.

The groups in Q2 regarding how the respondent will be in contact with Workforce Australia and Employment Services are:

- A: I have been placed with the same provider I had in JobActive after the transition to Workforce Australia
- B: I will be transferred from my old JobActive provider to a new Workforce Australia provider.

- C: I had a JobActive provider, but I have been placed in Workforce Australia’s online services.
- D: I am newly enrolled in Employment Services and have been assigned a provider in Workforce Australia’s “enhanced” in-person services.
- E: I am newly enrolled in Employment Services and have been placed in Workforce Australia’s online services.
- F: I have not received this information yet.
- G: I will not be in the Workforce Australia program.
- H: Other (textbox available).

Respondents answering with G were not offered the other questions to complete, while responses which did not provide a text answer along with H were also excluded.

In Q3 statements with a higher priority were given smaller numerical values, 1 for top priority, 12 for least importance.

The scale for question 4 was:

- 0: No impact
- 1: Mild inconvenience
- 2: Some negative impact
- 3: Severe negative impact

Unsure: Respondent unable to identify the impact.

In the data processing step ‘Unsure’ answers were re-coded with the numerical value -1. For analysis of the severity of impact as a numerical value the ‘Unsure’ responses were excluded from the data.

The statements for Q3 and Q4, a short title, and the sub-question number assigned to each statement are given in Table 1.

In comparing the numerical values assigned to responses in Q3 and Q4 it is important to keep in mind that the ordering is different, with smaller values in Q3 representing more importance, and larger values in Q4 representing greater impact.

## 2 Sampling

The survey was conducted as a convenience sample. Participants were contacted by AUWU through social media (Twitter, Facebook) and the AUWU mailing list. Word-of-mouth may have also brought people in to the survey sample. As such, it is possible that the respondents to this survey represent people who have had a more negative experience of the JobActive system which has pushed them towards contact with the AUWU.

A very important structural feature to the sample is that as the survey is completed online it is less accessible to those who have unreliable internet, and inaccessible to those without

any internet. As such, those most impacted by lack of access to internet infrastructure will not be represented in this survey.

There were 447 responses to the survey, 96 of which did not complete Q3 or Q4. Of these 4 were in group H which had the option to continue with the survey if they offered a text response, and the other 92 were group G who were exited from the survey. After non-responses were excluded  $n = 351$  responses were left for analysis.

### 3 Analysis Methodology

Due to time constraints it was not possible to do a thorough analysis of the relationship between the group identified in Q2 and the responses to Q3 and Q4. A breakdown of the percentage of responses in each group for Q2 is provided.

For Q3, I provide charts to demonstrate the distribution of rankings for each response and the mean rank of the responses as summary statistic ([Bargagliotti et al., 2021]). As the sample size is large, it is reasonable to expect that the mean for an individual statement is approximately normally distributed by the Central Limit Theorem. To identify whether there is a statistically significant difference between at least two of the responses I use the test of marginals ([Anderson, 1959]), and provided both the test result and the marginal distribution data in Table 2. As the ranks from the same response are not independent this is preferred to a one-way ANOVA.

In the analysis of Q4 I present stacked percentage column charts to indicate the composition of responses, and histograms of the impact severity which exclude the ‘Unsure’ answers as further visual aid. The median severity is used as a summary statistic for this data as the histograms indicate skewed distributions, with the ‘Unsure’ responses not counted towards the median impact. It is less useful to apply the Central limit theorem in the case of Q3 as there are only 4 possible response values. The number and percentage of ‘Unsure’ responses to each question is also provided as it is useful to interpret whether the Workforce Australia system has been effectively communicated.

## 4 Results

As cross-question inference was not performed, results are separated into questions. Table 4 provides some statistics for Q3 and Q4 with reference to the statements in Table 1.

### 4.1 Q2: Interaction with Workforce Australia

Q2 gave an overview of how the respondents interacted with Workforce Australia. Table 5 gives statistics for the number and percentage in each. Some 194 respondents (43.4%) in group F indicated that they had not received information on how they would be interacting with Workforce Australia after the transition to that system. Of the people newly enrolled in Employment Services (D and E), all 8 had been placed into the online services stream, alongside the 12 people in group C. The 85 people in group B who indicated they would be moving to a different provider may be a result of providers shutting down during the transfer to Workforce Australia.

## 4.2 Q3: Priority of Concerns

As Figure 1 indicates, there are varying distributions of ranks for the different statements in Q3. A lower mean priority means that the respondents consider the statement to be less important. The most prominent concern was government automation, closely followed by concerns about the points-based activation system, being penalised due to difficulties with the online system, and being excluded from the consultation process that went into the Workforce Australia transition.

The results of the test for marginals were a test statistic

$$\frac{(12 - 1)Q^2}{12} = 6243.02,$$

which is asymptotically  $\chi^2$ -distributed with  $(12 - 1)^2 = 121$  degrees of freedom. The associated 1-sided  $p$ -value was less than  $2 \times 10^{-16}$ , so we reject the null hypothesis of uniform marginal distributions at any standard  $\alpha$  threshold. As such, we have evidence that there are differences in typical rank between at least two of the statements. While this is not a very strong statement, and pair-wise comparisons were not done due to time constraints to let us identify where the differences are, we can surmise that government automation is much more of a concern for the respondents than their new provider of whether they are going into the online or in-person system.

The statements in Q3 are grouped into 4 themes as detailed in Table 1. The mean overall ranks were 4.52 for trust in government, 6.84 for the points and payments statements, 7.63 for the online system, and 9.63 for placement decisions. Concern about policy decisions and communication problems stands out with the high priority given to statements related to trust in government, while respondents are less concerned for the specifics of how they interact with the system.

## 4.3 Q4: Anticipated Impact

The overwhelming outcome of Q4 is that respondents typically anticipate severe negative outcomes from the transition to Workforce Australia. Table 3 gives the frequencies and percentages of responses to each issue. Of the responses, 91.2% had at least one statement given a 3, with the mean number of 3s per response at 6.3. Figures 2 give the distribution of the number of 3s per respondent. A further 4.4%, for a total of 96.6%, had at least one 2 or 3, with Figure 3 showing the distribution of these. In reverse, we see that 3.4% of respondents do not anticipate any impact beyond mild inconvenience. Half of the respondents – 52.7% – indicated that they were unsure about the impact of at least one statement. Figure 4 show the number of ‘Unsure’ responses per respondent.

To get a handle on the composition of responses for individual questions, I utilised stacked percentage bar charts. Figure 9 gives the results for all questions, and it is clear that the anticipated severe impact was over 70% for several.

Figure 5 gives the results for the statements associated with the points system. Most respondents anticipate severe negative impact from the transition to PBAS, and relatively few are unsure about the likely effects.

In Figure 6 we can see that while reliable internet is a concern for more than 25%, it is the system and its propensity to impose financial penalty due to technical difficulties which



is of most concern among these questions. The absence of digital support is also of great concern to half of the respondents, with a further 20% seeing some negative impact from lack of support infrastructure.

Figure 7 indicates that fear of government automation dominates the responses, with more than 70% of respondents anticipating severe negative impact as a result, and 92.3% anticipating some or severe negative impact as a result. The lack of information which appears as uncertainty in other questions can also be seen here in the 87.2% of respondents who anticipate some or severe negative impact as a result of the lack of communication. Exclusion from consultation is not quite as concerning as the other two in this section, but more than 40% anticipating a severe impact should not be dismissed.

The results for statements regarding placement decisions are in Figure 8. Uncertainty is the defining feature here, though among those who are not unsure, digital preference being respected is a concern. As Table 4 indicates, nearly 40% of responses were unsure about whether their new provider would be inconvenient, and a further 34% were unsure whether their preference for online or in-person services was ignored, indicating that they are not properly informed about how they will interact with the Workforce Australia system.

Figure 10 shows histograms of the impact level for each statement with the unsure responses removed. These are ordered by the median response and make it easy to identify that for the majority, 8 of the 12 with median 3, severe impact is anticipated by most participants.

## 5 Limitations

The convenience sample means that the responses may be more inclined to negative experience with and perception of the welfare system. Likewise, the structure of the survey itself leaves limited opportunity for positive statements as it is focused on concerns and negative impact. There may be other sources of information which indicate that some people have a positive experience with Workforce Australia and the PBAS, however it is quite clear that a great many people are deeply concerned about it.

Time constraints have limited the statistical inference that this report details. There are likely relationships between responses that have not been explored, including those between the group identified in Q2 and responses in Q3 and Q4, as well as relationships between the chosen priority for a given statement in Q3, and the anticipated severity of impact for the same in Q4. The broad descriptive analysis which indicates that respondents either expect a substantial negative impact on their lives or are very uncertain remains sound for the population of participants.

## References

- [Anderson, 1959] Anderson, R. (1959). Use of contingency tables in the analysis of consumer preference studies. *Biometrics*, 15(4):582–590.
- [Bargagliotti et al., 2021] Bargagliotti, A. E., Martonosi, S. E., Orrison, M. E., Johnson, A. H., and Fefer, S. A. (2021). Using ranked survey data in education research: Methods and applications. *Journal of School Psychology*, 85:17–36.

| No. | Title                            | Statement   | Grouping                     |
|-----|----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| 1   | Exclusion from consultation      | The government did not consult me about the development of this new program   | Trust in government          |
| 2   | Government automation fears      | The government uses automated decision-making about my life   | Trust in government          |
| 3   | Reliable internet access         | Compliance with the system requires reliable internet   | Navigating the online system |
| 4   | Lack of communication            | I haven't been properly informed about the changes and how the new system will work                                   | Trust in government          |
| 5   | New provider inconvenient        | My provider is closing down and I have been referred to a new provider that is too far away or otherwise inconvenient | Placement decisions          |
| 6   | Previous activities insufficient | The same activities which previously satisfied my mutual obligations will not amount to 100 points                    | Points and payments          |
| 7   | Uncertain target fairness        | I won't be able to have my points target fairly reduced to account for my life circumstances                          | Points and payments          |
| 8   | Digital preference ignored       | I would prefer digital services but I have been referred to a provider instead  | Placement decisions          |
| 9   | System induced penalties         | Being penalised with lost payments because of difficulties with using the online system                               | Navigating the online system |
| 10  | Digital support lacking          | It will be difficult to get support from the Digital Contact Centre   | Navigating the online system |
| 11  | Missed points debt               | Having to complete a missed month of points in addition to my next month's points in order to regain my payment       | Points and payments          |
| 12  | Gaining 100 points               | I won't be able to gain 100 points each month   | Points and payments          |

Table 1: Numbered statements for Questions 3 and 4.

|       |           | Rank      |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |            |            |  |
|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|--|
| No.   | 1         | 2         | 3         | 4         | 5         | 6         | 7         | 8         | 9         | 10        | 11         | 12         |  |
| Q3.1  | 50 (14.2) | 58 (16.5) | 34 (9.7)  | 55 (15.7) | 31 (8.8)  | 30 (8.5)  | 29 (8.3)  | 21 (6.0)  | 19 (5.4)  | 17 (4.8)  | 4 (1.1)    | 3 (0.9)    |  |
| Q3.2  | 75 (21.4) | 45 (12.8) | 65 (18.5) | 51 (14.5) | 28 (8.0)  | 40 (11.4) | 16 (4.6)  | 18 (5.1)  | 8 (2.3)   | 4 (1.1)   | 0 (0.0)    | 1 (0.3)    |  |
| Q3.3  | 2 (0.6)   | 6 (1.7)   | 6 (1.7)   | 7 (2.0)   | 33 (9.4)  | 27 (7.7)  | 21 (6.0)  | 34 (9.7)  | 30 (8.5)  | 38 (10.8) | 41 (11.7)  | 106 (30.2) |  |
| Q3.4  | 34 (9.7)  | 42 (12.0) | 43 (12.3) | 23 (6.6)  | 35 (10.0) | 39 (11.1) | 62 (17.7) | 38 (10.8) | 21 (6.0)  | 10 (2.8)  | 2 (0.6)    | 2 (0.6)    |  |
| Q3.5  | 2 (0.6)   | 3 (0.9)   | 2 (0.6)   | 2 (0.6)   | 5 (1.4)   | 4 (1.1)   | 15 (4.3)  | 60 (17.1) | 51 (14.5) | 62 (17.7) | 82 (23.4)  | 63 (17.9)  |  |
| Q3.6  | 25 (7.1)  | 27 (7.7)  | 41 (11.7) | 26 (7.4)  | 39 (11.1) | 26 (7.4)  | 24 (6.8)  | 34 (9.7)  | 68 (19.4) | 27 (7.7)  | 13 (3.7)   | 1 (0.3)    |  |
| Q3.7  | 37 (10.5) | 37 (10.5) | 30 (8.5)  | 23 (6.6)  | 33 (9.4)  | 27 (7.7)  | 27 (7.7)  | 29 (8.3)  | 26 (7.4)  | 63 (17.9) | 17 (4.8)   | 2 (0.6)    |  |
| Q3.8  | 12 (3.4)  | 4 (1.1)   | 9 (2.6)   | 5 (1.4)   | 9 (2.6)   | 4 (1.1)   | 8 (2.3)   | 14 (4.0)  | 30 (8.5)  | 71 (20.2) | 130 (37.0) | 55 (15.7)  |  |
| Q3.9  | 56 (16.0) | 58 (16.5) | 42 (12.0) | 42 (12.0) | 32 (9.1)  | 33 (9.4)  | 33 (9.4)  | 24 (6.8)  | 16 (4.6)  | 6 (1.7)   | 7 (2.0)    | 2 (0.6)    |  |
| Q3.10 | 4 (1.1)   | 7 (2.0)   | 5 (1.4)   | 10 (2.8)  | 13 (3.7)  | 18 (5.1)  | 20 (5.7)  | 22 (6.3)  | 48 (13.7) | 39 (11.1) | 52 (14.8)  | 113 (32.2) |  |
| Q3.11 | 9 (2.6)   | 15 (4.3)  | 28 (8.0)  | 47 (13.4) | 45 (12.8) | 69 (19.7) | 66 (18.8) | 37 (10.5) | 22 (6.3)  | 10 (2.8)  | 1 (0.3)    | 2 (0.6)    |  |
| Q3.12 | 45 (12.8) | 49 (14.0) | 46 (13.1) | 60 (17.1) | 48 (13.7) | 34 (9.7)  | 30 (8.5)  | 20 (5.7)  | 12 (3.4)  | 4 (1.1)   | 2 (0.6)    | 1 (0.3)    |  |

Table 2: Frequency and percentage table for Q3. The values given in parentheses are the percentage responses which gave that question the rank of the column.

| No.   | Rating      |            |              |             |             |
|-------|-------------|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
|       | Unsure      | None       | Inconvenient | Some        | Severe      |
| Q4.1  | 22 (6.27)   | 16 (4.56)  | 45 (12.82)   | 113 (32.19) | 155 (44.16) |
| Q4.2  | 8 (2.28)    | 3 (0.85)   | 16 (4.56)    | 67 (19.09)  | 257 (73.22) |
| Q4.3  | 25 (7.12)   | 86 (24.5)  | 87 (24.79)   | 51 (14.53)  | 102 (29.06) |
| Q4.4  | 7 (1.99)    | 5 (1.42)   | 33 (9.4)     | 74 (21.08)  | 232 (66.1)  |
| Q4.5  | 137 (39.03) | 90 (25.64) | 45 (12.82)   | 30 (8.55)   | 49 (13.96)  |
| Q4.6  | 41 (11.68)  | 14 (3.99)  | 22 (6.27)    | 55 (15.67)  | 219 (62.39) |
| Q4.7  | 22 (6.27)   | 4 (1.14)   | 32 (9.12)    | 46 (13.11)  | 247 (70.37) |
| Q4.8  | 120 (34.19) | 64 (18.23) | 50 (14.25)   | 51 (14.53)  | 66 (18.8)   |
| Q4.9  | 15 (4.27)   | 14 (3.99)  | 48 (13.68)   | 60 (17.09)  | 214 (60.97) |
| Q4.10 | 27 (7.69)   | 19 (5.41)  | 51 (14.53)   | 79 (22.51)  | 175 (49.86) |
| Q4.11 | 24 (6.84)   | 7 (1.99)   | 19 (5.41)    | 49 (13.96)  | 252 (71.79) |
| Q4.12 | 22 (6.27)   | 10 (2.85)  | 20 (5.7)     | 51 (14.53)  | 248 (70.66) |

Table 3: Frequency and percentage table for Q4. The values given in parentheses are the percentages.

| No. | Title                            | Q3 Mean | Q4 Median | Q4 Unsure (%) |
|-----|----------------------------------|---------|-----------|---------------|
| 1   | Exclusion from consultation      | 4.6     | 2         | 22 (6.27)     |
| 2   | Government automation fears      | 3.77    | 3         | 8 (2.28)      |
| 3   | Reliable internet access         | 9.06    | 1         | 25 (7.12)     |
| 4   | Not properly explained           | 5.19    | 3         | 7 (1.99)      |
| 5   | New provider inconvenient        | 9.67    | 1         | 137 (39.03)   |
| 6   | Previous activities insufficient | 6.08    | 3         | 41 (11.68)    |
| 7   | Uncertain target fairness        | 6.03    | 3         | 22 (6.27)     |
| 8   | Digital preference ignored       | 9.61    | 2         | 120 (34.19)   |
| 9   | System induced penalties         | 4.42    | 3         | 15 (4.27)     |
| 10  | Digital support lacking          | 9.44    | 3         | 27 (7.69)     |
| 11  | Missed points debt               | 5.81    | 3         | 24 (6.84)     |
| 12  | Gaining 100 points               | 4.32    | 3         | 22 (6.27)     |

Table 4: Summary statistics for Questions 3 and 4. The Q4 median excludes ‘Unsure’ responses.

| Response | A   | B     | C    | D | E    | F     | G     | H    |
|----------|-----|-------|------|---|------|-------|-------|------|
| Count    | 21  | 85    | 12   | 0 | 8    | 194   | 92    | 35   |
| Percent  | 4.7 | 19.02 | 2.68 | 0 | 1.79 | 43.40 | 20.58 | 7.83 |

Table 5: Q2 group responses.

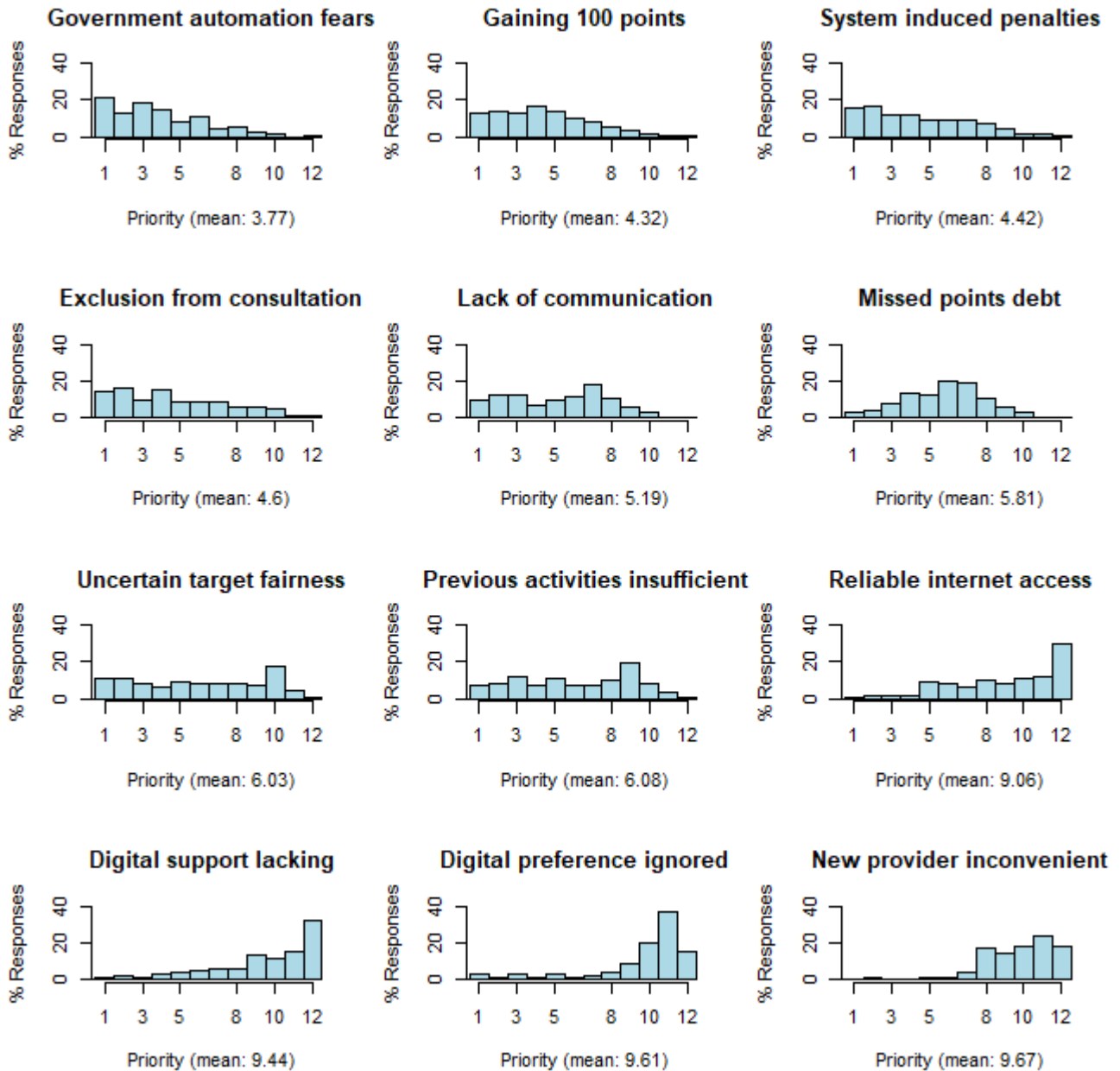


Figure 1: Histograms of responses to Q3.

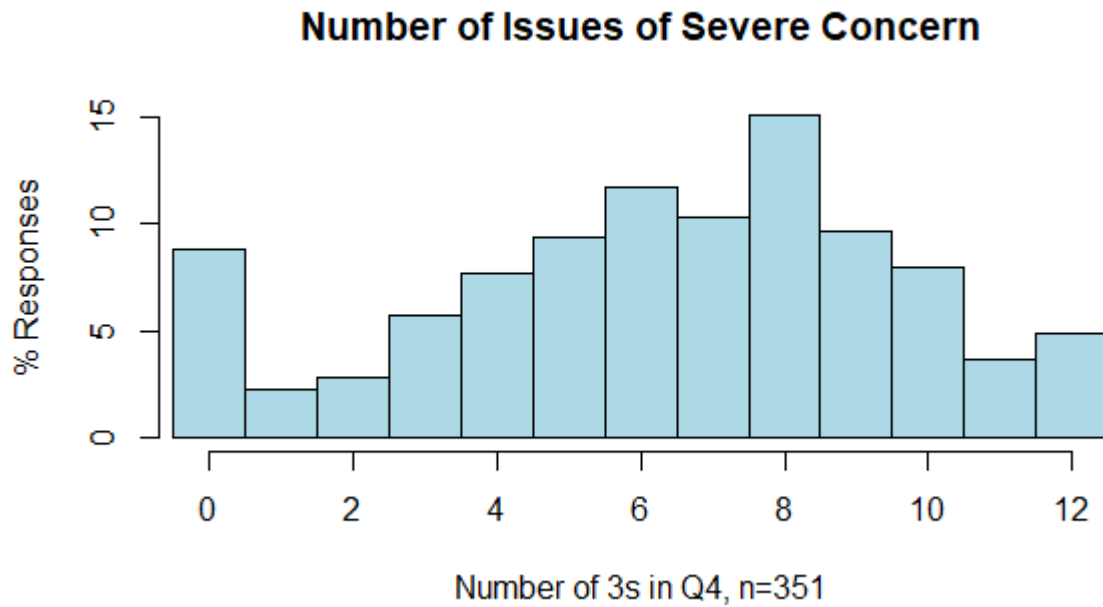


Figure 2: Histogram of number of ‘Severe’ answers to Q4 per response.

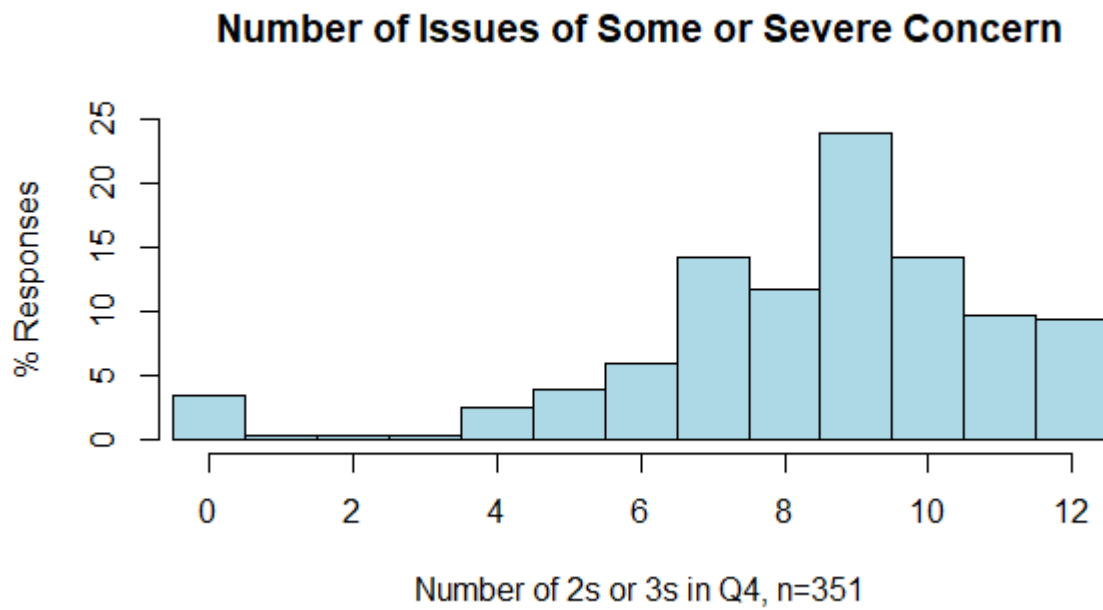


Figure 3: Histogram of number of ‘Some’ or ‘Severe’ answers to Q4 per response.

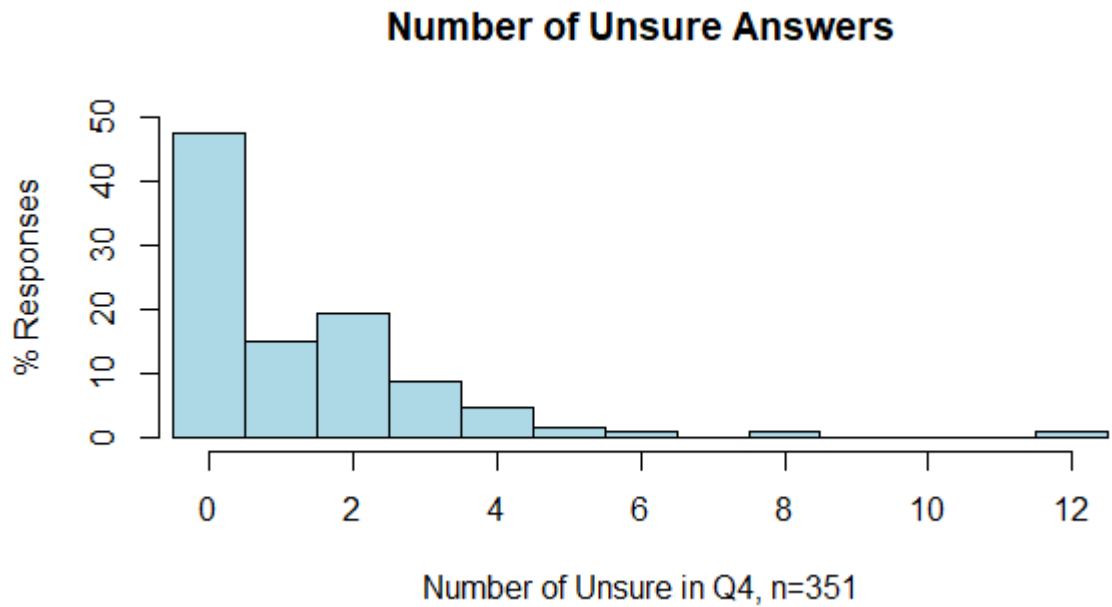


Figure 4: Histogram of number of 'Unsure' answers to Q4 per response.

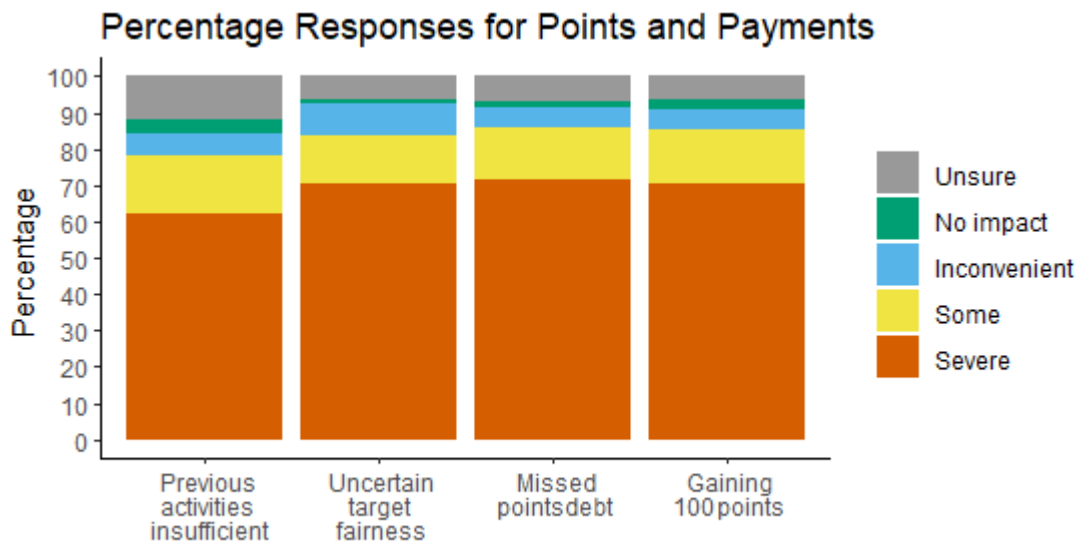


Figure 5: Stacked column chart for statements related to the point system.

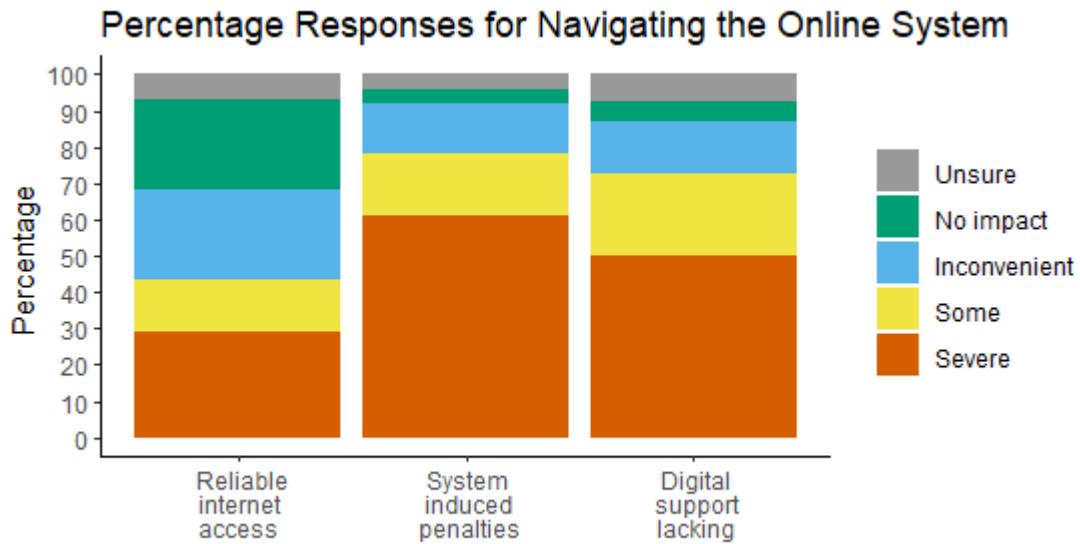


Figure 6: Stacked column chart for statements related to the online system.

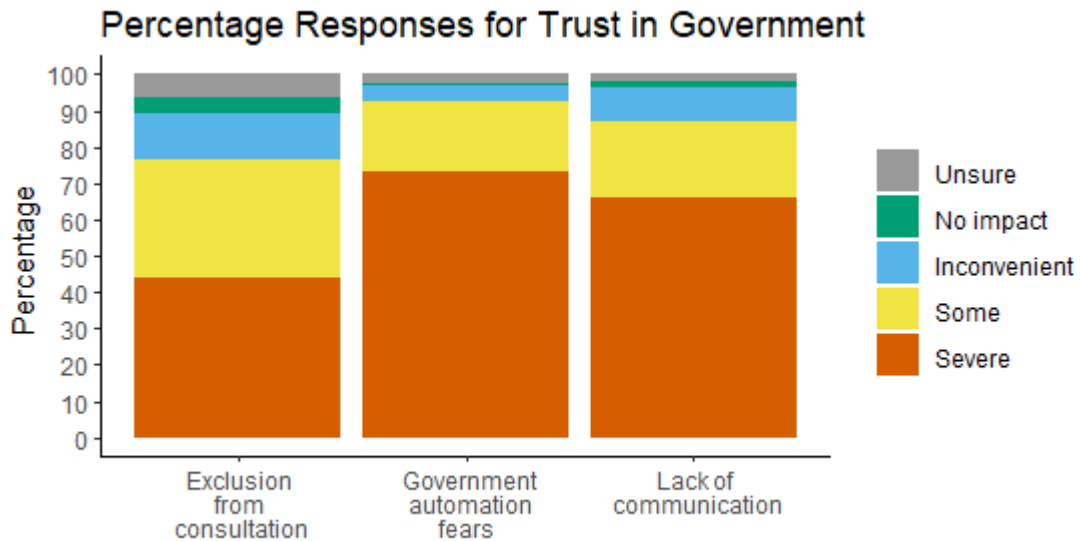


Figure 7: Stacked column chart for statements related to government and providers.



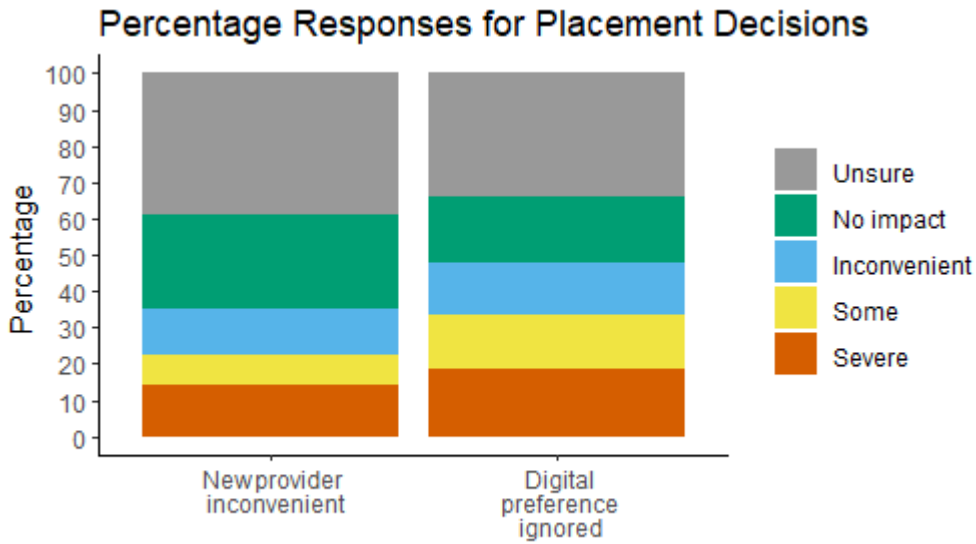


Figure 8: Stacked column chart for statements related to placement decisions.

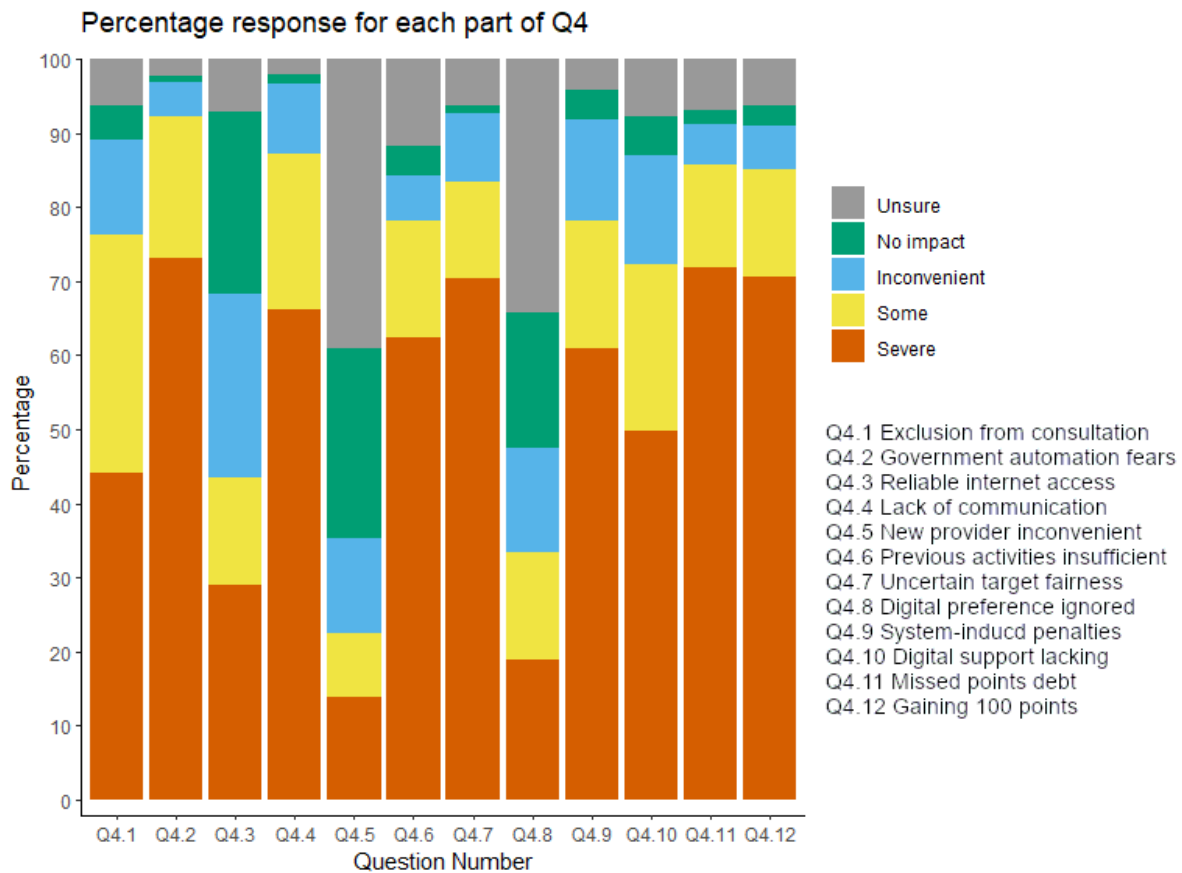


Figure 9: Stacked column chart of all parts of Q4.

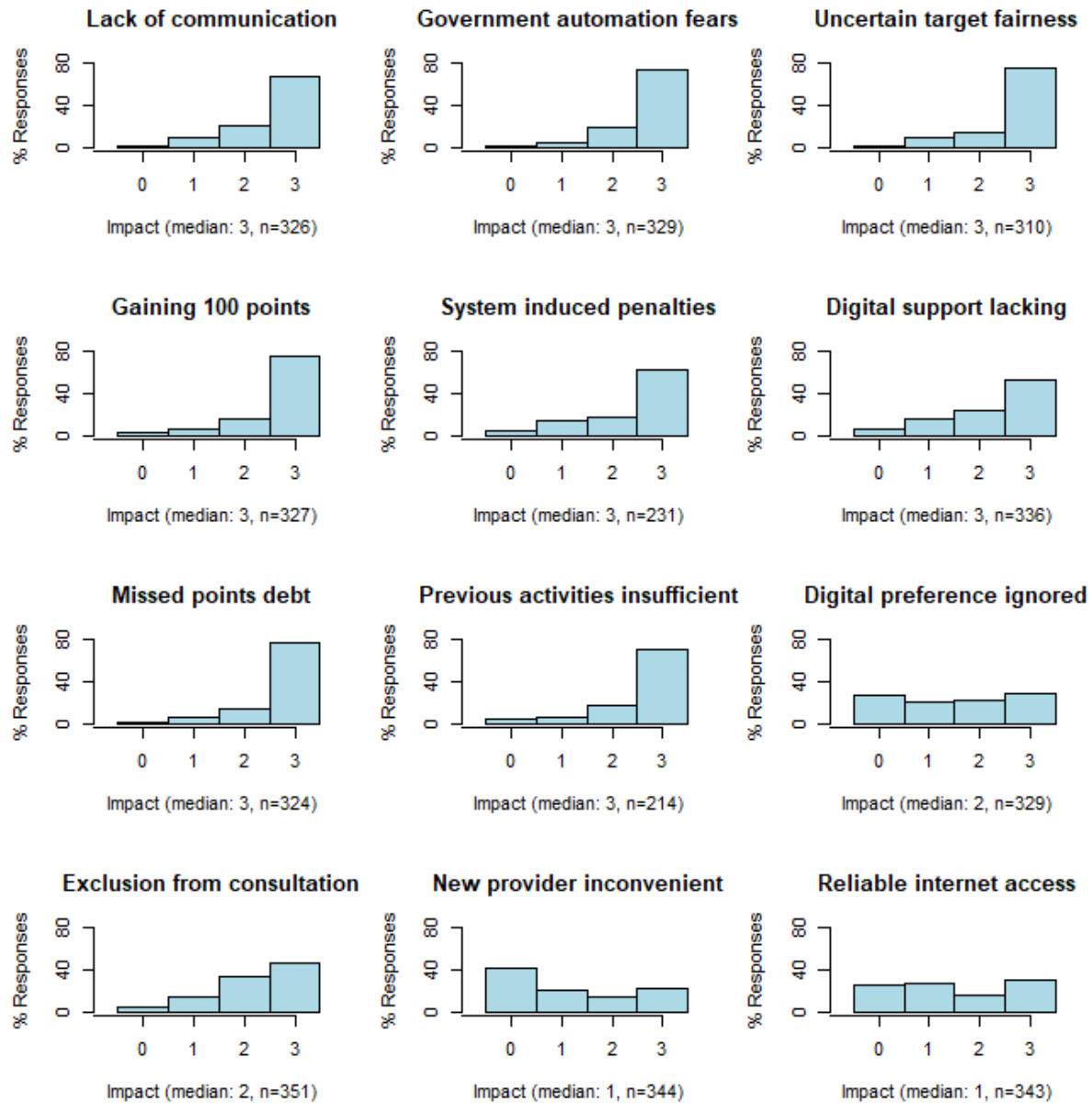


Figure 10: Histograms of responses to Q3, 'Unsure' responses have been removed.

# AUWU Workforce Australia and Points-Based Activation System Survey - Qualitative Analysis

David O'Halloran  
June 2022

In June 2022 the Australian Unemployed Workers Union (AUWU) put out a survey – the Workforce Australia and Points-Based Activation System Survey (WA-PBAS) – to people engaged in the jobactive system as part of their unemployment benefits mutual obligations. The survey was advertised on the Union's website, its Facebook page, which has more than 22,000 followers, and its Twitter account, which has more than 7,000 followers. Surveys were anonymous and participation was voluntary. To emphasise the anonymous nature of the survey, no demographic data (age grouping, gender, and type of employment service) was collected. Participants were advised that their personal information would not be shared but that their responses would be used to inform a submission to the Minister for Employment.

This report details a qualitative analysis of Question 5 of that survey. The use of verbatim quotes throughout the report are for purposes of illustration of the analytical points and generally represent the balance of feeling in the overall responses. In choosing quotations to use in this way, preference was given to those that were expressed succinctly.

## Survey Design

The WA-PBAS survey was delivered through a webform using the survey service Typeform. The survey instrument consists of five questions:

- Q1. Consent for data sharing.
- Q2. Information about the respondent's interaction with Workforce Australia.
- Q3. A ranked choice of 12 issues by priority constructed from enquiries AUWU has fielded about Workforce Australia.
- Q4. A 5-point impact scale for the same 12 issues with slight re-phrasing of the statements.
- Q5. An open comment box.

A quantitative analysis for Questions 2,3, and 4 is presented in a separate quantitative analysis report.

289 participants offered additional comments, which were analysed using a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). The purposes for using an inductive approach are to condense raw textual data into a brief, summary format; and to develop a framework of the underlying structure of experiences that are evident in the raw data. The general inductive approach provides an easily used and systematic set of procedures for analysing qualitative data that can produce reliable and valid findings.

Every comment expressed negative sentiment about the new system that can be categorised into three broad themes – many responses covered all three themes:

1. Concern about individual harms (150+ comments)
2. System Failure (180+ comments)
3. Reputational harm. (40+ comments)

It is also important to note that concerns were expressed about the Points Based Activation System (PBAS), Workforce Australia Online and those continuing with face-to-face services.

## **Theme 1: Individual harm.**

The overriding sentiment expressed in many, if not most responses is a sense of fear and being overwhelmed by the system. Strong negative sentiment was expressed in use of terms such as ‘harm/hurt’, ‘terror/fy/ing’, ‘fear/fright’ and ‘punish/ment/ing’ (45 mentions). Suicide was explicitly mentioned in nine responses:

*“...I have told my psychologist because if this happens it will put me at risk of suicide. I am so so scared I am going to end up in that dark place again and I don't want to go back there...”*

*“The mere thought of PBAS has made me feel suicidal and I've started self-harming again after not having done so in 4 years.”*

Many respondents reported being apprehensive about the impact of the changes on their wellbeing:

*“This system is designed to dehumanise people instead of helping them. You're killing people. You're killing them and you don't care because you've designated them as undesirable.”*

If the intention of Workforce Australia is to provide unemployed workers with a greater flexibility in managing mutual obligations, this does not appear to be the message received.

Perhaps of greatest concern were the number of respondents who suggested that harm was an intended consequence of the changes:

*“The unemployed ... can't endure more pointless automation. This is a system created with contempt and disregard for the wellbeing of the employed. At best it's created out of incompetence, maliciousness at worst.”*

We are concerned that there appears to be a widespread and established belief that harm is not merely an unintended consequence of Workforce Australia, but that it is an acceptable outcome of a designed system. Many respondents also drew parallels between PBAS and the “Robodebt” scheme:

*“'robodebt' is being replaced with 'robotask'.”*

## **Theme 2: System Failure**

Rather than improving Australian’s capacity to choose, get and keep work, some respondents said they believed that Workforce Australia and especially PBAS will not help, and even interfere with their existing work:

*“I am sick and tired of being treated like a criminal by the gov't simply because I have lost employment due to circumstances beyond my control. What I really need is genuine and practical help to find new relevant employment, with that in place I believe I would be out of work for less than 2 weeks to a month. Instead, I am left to struggle with this system and will be surely out of work for 3 months, possibly up to 12 months or more”*

*“I can't get my head around it. There's zero incentive to work under this scheme, and if my employer gets wind of me interviewing elsewhere - even if it's just to get points, that's my job gone anyway. And then if I say no to an interview that's inappropriate, my payment is in jeopardy.”*

Most respondents reported that they do not understand the system that is about to start, nor have they received information about it:

*“I do not believe My Job Provider has a handle of this new system ... Today I received a letter by snail-mail advising of an appointment ..., to attend an appointment with the job provider. I knew a new process was coming, but this [AUWU's email] is the first I have seen anything about this.”*

A consistent theme is the lack of information about system changes. If the Department of Employment has a communication strategy for Workforce Australia, our evidence suggests that it is too late or if it has happened then it has failed to achieve its intended audience.

Of particular concern were the comments from people who had circumstances such as health problems, living in flood affected areas, being over 55 or 60, and having a disability. Responses from such participants suggested that they did not know how the changes were going to affect them and that they believed their circumstances would not be managed appropriately. Furthermore, many suggested that PBAS has been designed to punish them:

*“Yes, for my circumstances, there is no information. I am [over 60] and work part time, over 40 hours a fortnight. Am I going to be expected to attain 100 points? There are many questions unanswered, and the confusion and lack of information is causing much uncertainty and anxiety.”*

*“I have no information and fear the whole system will make the hoops we must jump through now just because we lost our jobs even more unbearable. I am [over 60] and really, is this a life? I am homeless since the floods, no chance now of renting. Give us a break.”*

The key functions of employment services are to improve unemployed workers' capacity to get a job or to improve their employability. Not a single comment referred to the capacity of Workforce Australia to even provide these functions let alone any improvement in them.

As noted above parallels with the Robodebt scheme were frequent:

*“After the Robodebt debacle I don’t trust the automated system in any way.”*

In short, unemployed workers already appear to have little trust in the utility, trustworthiness, and fairness of employment services. Workforce Australia appears to be destined to worsen this.

### **Theme 3: Reputational harm**

It was noteworthy that several comments associated the implementation of Workforce Australia with the incoming government. While some clearly understood that this is an inherited policy from the previous government, some respondents believed that the incoming government needed to act urgently:

*“...I am astonished that now with a Labor government that a system such as this will be in place. This is why many voters did not want Labor in a majority government perhaps This system coming in..... as a Labor voter myself completely astounds me – if this system actually takes place I have no faith at all in what is called ‘Democracy’ in Australia”*

*“...Thought a Labor 4government was for the poor downtrodden compared to Liberal but I’m sorely mistaken.”*

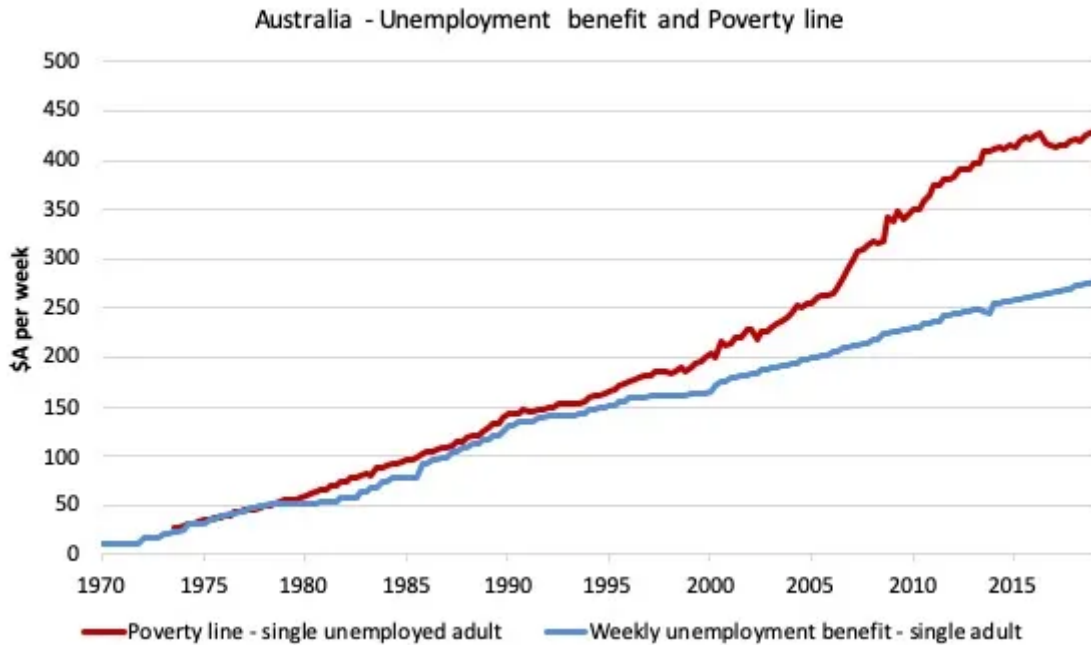
The damage done to the Australian Government’s reputation by the Robodebt scheme has been widely reported (Braithwaite, 2020; O’Donovan, 2019; Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2022). It is apparent from these comments that Robodebt is likely to pale in comparison to the potential reputational damage to the Australian Government by Workforce Australia.

### **References**

- Braithwaite, V. (2020). Beyond the bubble that is Robodebt: How governments that lose integrity threaten democracy. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 55(3), 242-259.
- O'Donovan, D. (2019). Righting the wrongs of robodebt. *Eureka Street*, 29(23), 11-13.
- Senate Community Affairs References Committee. (2022). Accountability and justice: why we need a Royal Commission into Robodebt.
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American journal of evaluation*, 27(2), 237-246.

Appendix C - Assorted figures and quotes from a wide range of media, government and research publications:

- 1) Graph showing the gap between unemployment benefits and the Henderson poverty line beginning to widen during the Hawke-Keating government. Figure retrieved on 13/06/2022 from: <http://bilbo.economicoutlook.net/blog/?p=42819>



- 2) Passage of academic text describing the institution of mutual/reciprocal obligations introduced during the Hawke-Keating government. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from: [https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/downloads/working\\_paper\\_series/wp2000n04.pdf](https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/downloads/working_paper_series/wp2000n04.pdf)

strengthened over time. Since 1989, a system of mutual/reciprocal obligation was instituted which required all unemployment benefit recipients to accept any reasonable offer of a job, a labour market program or a training position. Accordingly, some of the responsibility for reporting a failure to comply with the work test, or mutual obligation was given to case managers. Not surprisingly, unemployed and less skilled job seekers tended to be over-represented among CES clientele compared with the general job seeker population.<sup>5</sup>

- 3) Passage quoting multiple reports from the 90s, including a 1991 ANAO report, showing CES staff at odds with the directive to penalise clients and subject them to hardship. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from: <http://bilbo.economicoutlook.net/blog/?p=13314>

### Resistance

The CES staff who had the benefit of training and specialist development via the Norgard reforms, who understood how unemployment impacts on individuals, of the structural changes underway in the labour market, of the need to empower unemployed people to motivate them, and so forth, were appalled at the ignorance of employment officer trade-craft embodied in these initiatives. This was acknowledged in a report of a conference of Employment Office Managers in 1988:

“ There was a major attitudinal problem on the part of the staff:

“A large number of CES Officers see themselves as being there to assist the client. They believe work [activity]-testing does not assist clients and therefore it should not be done, as it will create hardship for clients when they lose their benefit. It appears they have failed to accept or understand the change of philosophy that DEET is taking”

DEETs new initiatives failed to generate the breaches and hence the promised expenditure savings. In 1991 the Australian National Audit Office looked for the reasons and presented parliament with a report entitled The Administration of the Work Test for Unemployment Benefit, Report No. 10., which drew attention to DEET's view that there were significant divergences of opinion between senior management and the operational staff.

“ The belief of incompatibility between work testing and the job placement role of the CES was acknowledged as prevalent within the CES network, but was not a belief shared by senior management. However, CES attitudes to activity testing were recognized as being a possible impediment to the successful implementation of the Newstart strategy, and were addressed in the first phase of Newstart training as part of the package titled ‘Thinking AES’ [Active Employment Strategy] (ANAO, 1991, para 1.7.5.)

- 4) Passage in Paul Keating's “Working Nation” advocating unemployment payments substantially below wages. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from: [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/publications/tables/papers/HSTP04547\\_1993-95/upload\\_pdf/4547\\_1993-95.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search="White%20Paper%20Employment"](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/publications/tables/papers/HSTP04547_1993-95/upload_pdf/4547_1993-95.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=)

**Providing each partner with his or her own individual income support will mean that, for each person, the available unemployment allowance will be substantially less than full-time wages. Widening the gap means a greater incentive to work.**



- 5) Passage in Paul Keating's "Working Nation" white paper announcing the beginning of the privatisation of the Commonwealth Employment Service. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
[https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/publications/tables/HSTP04547\\_1993-95/upload\\_pdf/4547\\_1993-95.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search="White%20Paper%20Employment"](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/publications/tables/HSTP04547_1993-95/upload_pdf/4547_1993-95.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=)

- the building of a competitive market with public and private sector agencies for the provision of case management and other labour market services;
- establishment of a new body, separate from the Commonwealth Employment Service, to be known as the Employment Service Regulatory Agency (ESRA), to promote the development of community and private sector case managers and to ensure fair competition between the CES and other agencies;

- 6) Passage of academic text explaining ABS survey data shows CES outperforming private providers in successful job matches by a factor of more than 6 to 1. retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
[https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/downloads/working\\_paper\\_series/wp2000n04.pdf](https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/downloads/working_paper_series/wp2000n04.pdf)

Most successful job placements for people who were not previously employed however, occur regardless of the activities of either type of placement service. From 1982 to 1997, the Australian Bureau of Statistics survey of job attainment indicated that the CES was instrumental in the successful job match of about 10 per cent of cases, while private employment agencies were involved in less than 2 per cent. The 1998 survey

- 7) Work for the Dole timeline of legislation, retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
[https://www.aph.gov.au/About/Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/Publications\\_Archive/archive/dole](https://www.aph.gov.au/About/Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/archive/dole)

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>WfD Legislation introduced to Parliament</b><br>19 March 1997      | Federal Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, The Hon. Dr David Kemp, MP - introduces the legislative framework for WfD to Parliament. Media release No. K10/97 - <i>Work for the Dole Legislation</i> .   |
| <b>WfD Pilot announced</b><br>13 May 1997                             | A 12-month WfD pilot scheduled to commence from September 1997. The pilot is funded at \$21.6 million and will enable 10,000 participants, between the ages of 18 and 24, who have been unemployed for at least six months, to take part in the pilot. Media release No. K24/97 - <i>Work for the Dole Initiative</i> .   |
| <b>WfD Pilot commences</b><br>3 December 1997                         | A total of 22 WfD projects commenced by 3 December 1997 with more than 300 participants. Media release No. K82/97 - <i>Work for the Dole Starts Today</i> .   |
| <b>Enhanced Mutual Obligation Requirements</b><br>28 January 1998     | Enhanced Mutual Obligation arrangements announced for 18 to 24 year olds. From 1 July 1998 all young unemployed people who have been receiving unemployment payments for six months will be required to undertake an additional activity in return for receiving payments. Media release No. K4/98 - <i>Unemployed young people to take responsibility for their own future</i> .   |
| <b>WfD Pilot expanded</b><br>14 April 1998                            | New WfD projects announced to start between August 1998 and February 1999. These projects are expected to involve 25,500 participants. Media release No. K23/98 - <i>New Work for the Dole Projects</i> .   |
| <b>Formal Mutual Obligation requirements announced</b><br>12 May 1998 | The Government announces it will spend \$465.5 million over the coming four years to assist young unemployed people find work. Key elements of the package are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expansion of work for the dole</li> <li>• New literacy and numeracy programmes</li> <li>• Additional places for young people under Job Network</li> <li>• New career counselling programs.</li> </ul> Media release No. K36/98 - <i>\$465.5 million to assist youth to find jobs</i> . |
| <b>New Mutual Obligation requirements start</b><br>1 July 1998        | All 18-24 year olds who have been unemployed for six months or more must participate in an additional approved activity in order to receive full unemployment benefit. Media release No. K52/98 - <i>New Mutual Obligation Requirements Start Today</i> .   |

- 8) Passage of academic text showing adverse effects of WfD program, published in 2004 shortly after the launch of the program. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
<https://rest.neptune-prod.its.unimelb.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/00b9ba4e-af4d-54ad-a828-d915729a090d/content>

The main conclusion from the study is that there appear to be quite large significant adverse effects of participation in WfD. For example, for the group of matched WfD participants it is found that the difference in fortnights on NSA payments between WfD participants and non-participants in the first 6 months after start of spell on WfD is 0.99 fortnights. More detailed analysis of exit from payments suggests that there is an adverse effect of WfD on exit from payments associated directly with the period of participation in WfD, but that there is partial catch-up by WfD participants after the conclusion of WfD.

- 9) Passage of academic text describing the final dismantling of the CES in May 1998. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
[https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/downloads/working\\_paper\\_series/wp2000n04.pdf](https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/downloads/working_paper_series/wp2000n04.pdf)

Following a change of government in March 1996, the Labor Government labour market programs were formally abolished and a complete re-organisation of the existing placement and case management services were announced. From 1 May 1998 the CES was abolished, the DSS was re-structured and the majority of placement and case management services was formally tendered. Funding for all employment related services was cut by about half.

- 10) News article announcing transfer of single parents from Parenting payment onto lower Newstart by Gillard government. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/how-the-poor-are-shunted-into-deeper-poverty-just-for-political-capital-20130103-2c74b.html>

On the morning of Prime Minister Julia Gillard's famous misogyny speech, she pushed \$728 million in cuts to the single-parent payment through the caucus, affecting mainly poor single mums. This is systemic misogyny.

- 11) News article announcing tightening of DSP eligibility criteria by Rudd government. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
<https://www.smh.com.au/national/tough-new-rules-for-support-pension-eligibility-20100511-uv32.html>

The tougher rules are expected to cut the number of newcomers on the DSP by 7550 in 2011/12, with a further 9912 and 7945 in the following two years. The new regime will also save taxpayers \$383 million over four years.

- 12) Media release announcing automated data-matching between ATO and Centrelink. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
<http://federal.governmentcareer.com.au/archived-news/welfare-debt-recovery-process-to-be-automated>

A new data matching initiative between Centrelink and the Australian Taxation Office is expected to claw back millions of dollars from welfare recipients who have debts with the Australian Government.

Minister for Human Services Tanya Plibersek said the new initiative will enhance Centrelink's debt recovery ability and is expected to recover more than \$71 million over four years.

Beginning on July 1 this year, Centrelink and the ATO will automatically match data on a daily basis as a way of cross-checking former welfare recipients who have a debt with the Commonwealth.

- 13) News article describing Abbott government instituting mandatory 25 hours per week WfD for welfare recipients aged 18-49. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/work-for-the-dole-is-inefficient-and-unreasonable-and-should-be-dismantled-across-20160215-gmumzb.html>

Work for the Dole was expanded last year to put more requirements on the unemployed in regional areas, something which ACOSS said targets mostly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

All adults between 18 and 49 who are receiving income support are required to work for the dole for at least 25 hours a week.

- 14) Newspaper article explaining ANU research finds Work for the Dole has negligible effect on job placement. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/work-for-the-dole-has-little-effect-on-finding-work-review-20160211-gmrpvw.html>

"It is estimated that in the short-term [work for the dole] resulted in an additional 2 percentage point increase in the probability of job seekers having a job placement controlling for other characteristics (from a low baseline of 14 per cent)," researchers from the Australian National University's Social Research Centre concluded.

- 15) News article of Josh Park-Fing's death. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
<https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/at-work/family-mourns-larrikin-josh-parkfing-killed-in-a-tragic-accident-while-working-for-the-dole/news-story/5db56cad4e3a0adcd0b44d35304a45ed>

A QUEENSLAND family is searching for answers after 18-year-old Josh Park-Fing was killed while working for the dole.

Braving a tough regional jobs market, Josh was embarking on what should have been the start of his adult working life when he took a rubbish-collecting placement at the Toowoomba Showgrounds.

But the Meringandan teen's life was cruelly cut short when he fell from a trailer and suffered a fatal head injury on April 19.

- 16) News article reporting on robodebt factors believed to have led to a person's suicide. Retrieved on 13/06/2022 from:  
<https://www.9news.com.au/national/centrelink-robodebt-class-action-suicide-mum-of-rhys-cauzzo-joins-calls-for-robodebt-apology/1e6a458c-04d3-4135-8096-9b9b045fafbf>

Mr Cauzzo was living with depression and anxiety before the debts came along, but after being hounded by debt collectors for months, it was the financial pressure that finally tipped her son "over the edge", Ms Miller said.

- 17) Extract from Parliament website, retrieved on 14/06/2022:  
[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp2021/ChangesCOVID-19SocialSecurity](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp2021/ChangesCOVID-19SocialSecurity)

## Background to the COVID-19 Economic Response social security measures

In March 2020 the Government announced two packages of measures as part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The social security measures included in these packages included:

- two \$750 lump sum payments to some social security and veterans' payment recipients<sup>[2]</sup>
- a Coronavirus Supplement of \$550 per fortnight to recipients of JobSeeker Payment, Parenting Payment, Youth Allowance, Farm Household Allowance, Special Benefit, Partner Allowance, Widow Allowance and student payments and<sup>[3]</sup>
- improved access to income support through changed eligibility criteria for JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance; and the waiver of the assets tests and some waiting periods for certain payments.<sup>[4]</sup>

On 30 March the Government also announced a relaxation of the partner income test, lowering the rate at which payment rates are reduced due to partner income.<sup>[5]</sup>

In response to the pandemic, the Government suspended mutual obligation requirements, such as job search requirements, for certain payment recipients until 8 June 2020.<sup>[6]</sup>

The economic impact of COVID-19, combined with the measures to expand eligibility to social security, saw the number of people in receipt of the main income support payments for the unemployed (JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance (Other)) double from around 820,000 in December 2019 to 1,640,000 at the end of May 2020.<sup>[7]</sup> At the end of June 2020, a total of around 2.2 million social security payment recipients were receiving the Coronavirus Supplement.<sup>[8]</sup>

18) News article on removal of Coronavirus supplement and reinstatement of Mutual Obligations.

Retrieved on 14/06/2022 from:

<https://www.9news.com.au/national/when-the-coronavirus-supplement-payment-is-ending-explained/647a519d-6ada-4ce7-a129-45ec5c50891c>

The coronavirus supplement ends on March 31, 2021.

The new JobSeeker rate will therefore start from April 1 at \$620.80 a fortnight, equating to \$310.40 a week, or just over \$44 a day.

When compared to pre-pandemic levels, the increase results in a real-world increase of \$4 a day for recipients.

19) From Guardian live blog. Retrieved on 14/06/2022 from:

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/live/2022/mar/30/australia-news-live-blog-federal-budget-josh-frydenberg-scott-morrison-nsw-victoria-qld-weather-floods-covid-coronavirus?page=with:blo>

[ck-6243d7f38f089a0d9a4eb5df](#)

30 Mar 2022 15:40



Paul Karp

The Senate is currently hearing valedictories from **Sam McMahon** and then **Kim Carr**.

The Senate has agreed to vary its business to deal with a whopping great list of legislation today.

The list is:

- Treasury Laws Amendment (Cyclone and Flood Damage Reinsurance Pool) Bill 2022
- Treasury Laws Amendment (Cost of Living Support Other Measures) Bill 2022
- Excise Tariff Amendment (Cost of Living Support) Bill 2022
- Social Security Legislation Amendment (Streamlined Participation Requirements and Other Measures) Bill 2021
- Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Pension Loans Scheme Enhancements) Bill 2021
- Social Security Amendment (Improved Child to Adult Transfer for Carer Payment and Carer Allowance) Bill 2022
- National Security Legislation Amendment (Comprehensive Review and Other Measures No. 1) Bill 2021
- Security Legislation Amendment (Critical Infrastructure Protection) Bill 2022
- National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Participant Service Guarantee and Other Measures) Bill 2021
- Road Vehicle Standards (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Amendment Bill 2022
- Australian Research Council Amendment Bill 2021
- Offshore Petroleum (Laminaria and Corallina Decommissioning Cost Recovery Levy) Bill 2021 Treasury Laws Amendment (Laminaria and Corallina Decommissioning Cost Recovery Levy) Bill 2021
- Criminal Code Amendment (Firearms Trafficking) Bill 2022
- Mitochondrial Donation Law Reform (Maeve's Law) Bill 2021.

If they're not dealt with in two hours, they'll all be put to a vote one after the other.

That's quite a pre-election office cleanout.

The Senate returns for estimates committee hearings on Thursday, Friday and into next week - although **Scott Morrison** may call the election first.



Updated at 15:43 AEDT

- 20) From news article in the Guardian. Retrieved on 14/06/2022 from:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jun/12/warning-over-centrelink-call-centres-as-services-australia-slashes-contracts>

Guardian Australia has learned the agency last week informed its outsourced “service delivery partners” it was cutting the “workload” sent to these four firms by about 30%.

21) News article from the Guardian. Retrieved on 14/06/2022 from:

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/11/robodebt-court-approves-18bn-settlement-for-victims-of-governments-shameful-failure>

A “shameful chapter” in public administration has led to the federal court approving a settlement worth \$1.8bn between the commonwealth and victims of the Coalition’s robodebt scheme.

22) Passages from PhD dissertation of David O’Halloran, retrieved on 14/06/2022 from:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337058400\\_Australian\\_employment\\_services\\_Help\\_or\\_hindrance\\_in\\_the\\_achievement\\_of\\_mutual\\_obligation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337058400_Australian_employment_services_Help_or_hindrance_in_the_achievement_of_mutual_obligation)

## Abstract

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**The concept of mutual obligation underpins Australian employment services. In return for receiving income support, there are three elements of mutual obligation: to actively seek work; to improve one's competitiveness in the labour market; and to contribute to the community. Failing to undertake mutual obligation activities results in sanctions, usually unemployment benefit suspension or cancellation. In the year 2017/18, one mutual obligation activity, compulsory employment service provider appointments, accounted for more than 93 per cent of sanctions. The study reported here explores unemployed and recently employed workers' experiences of appointments and their attitudes to the concept of mutual obligation. The findings are that unemployed workers say appointments have little utility for advancing elements of mutual obligation and are psychologically harmful. Non-attendance may be a form of self-protection although seeking a medical exemption or dropping out of the system altogether also appears to be a common self-protection strategy. We also find that non-attendance at appointments cannot be conflated with a negative attitude to mutual obligation and that unemployed workers want services that are effective and psychologically positive to help them to fulfil their mutual obligations.**

At present, based on the information available about the New Employment Services Model, it appears that the future of employment services will continue to replicate the broader discourse that all unemployed workers don't want to work, and that maximum effort needs to be placed on making sure that unemployment is genuine, for fear of creating 'welfare dependency' and 'welfare-cheats'. As a result, unfortunately there is little evidence to suggest that the balance of employment services' functions will 'un-skew' from its focus on the assessment of genuine unemployment in the next iteration of employment services - the NESM.

23) AUWU ROAR App snapshot. Retrieved from AUWU website on 14/06/2022:

<https://auwu.org.au/roar-app>

|   | Entity Name   | Overall Company Rating <span>↑</span>  | Number of Ratings... |
|---|---|--|----------------------|
|    | HELP Employment & Training  |  1.54   | 8                    |
|    | Jobs Statewide Employment So...   |  1.6    | 11                   |
|    | MAX Employment  |  1.83   | 30                   |
|    | CVGT Australia Ltd  |  1.86   | 6                    |
|    | Status Employment Services  |  1.86   | 7                    |
|    | Workskil Australia  |  1.91   | 18                   |
|    | APM Employment Services   |  1.93   | 62                   |
|    | Sarina Russo Job Access   |  1.97   | 21                   |
|    | AimBig Employment   |  2      | 8                    |
|    | Job Prospects   |  2      | 13                   |
|    | Jobfind Centres Australia Pty Ltd   |  2.01   | 8                    |
|  | atWork Australia  |  2.02 | 14                   |
|  | The Salvation Army Employmen...   |  2.08 | 13                   |
|  | MatchWorks  |  2.15 | 28                   |
|  | TURSA   |  2.18 | 7                    |
|  | WISE Employment Ltd   |  2.2  | 8                    |
|  | Epic Employment Service Inc   |  2.25 | 5                    |
|  | Campbell Page Limited   |  2.31 | 5                    |
|  | The Maxima Group Incorporated   |  2.64 | 5                    |
|  | Sureway Employment and Traini...  |  2.68 | 6                    |
|  |  CoAct |  2.82 | 10                   |
|  | Asuria  |  3.08 | 8                    |
|  | OCTEC Limited   |  3.32 | 5                    |



24) Results graphics from Klein et al. (March, 2021) research. Retrieved on 14/06/2022 from: <https://www.cfecfw.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Social-security-and-time-use-during-COVID-19-Report-Treating-Families-Fairly-2021.pdf>

Both the Supplement and the suspension of mutual obligations allowed people to engage further in employment-related activities (see Figure 3).

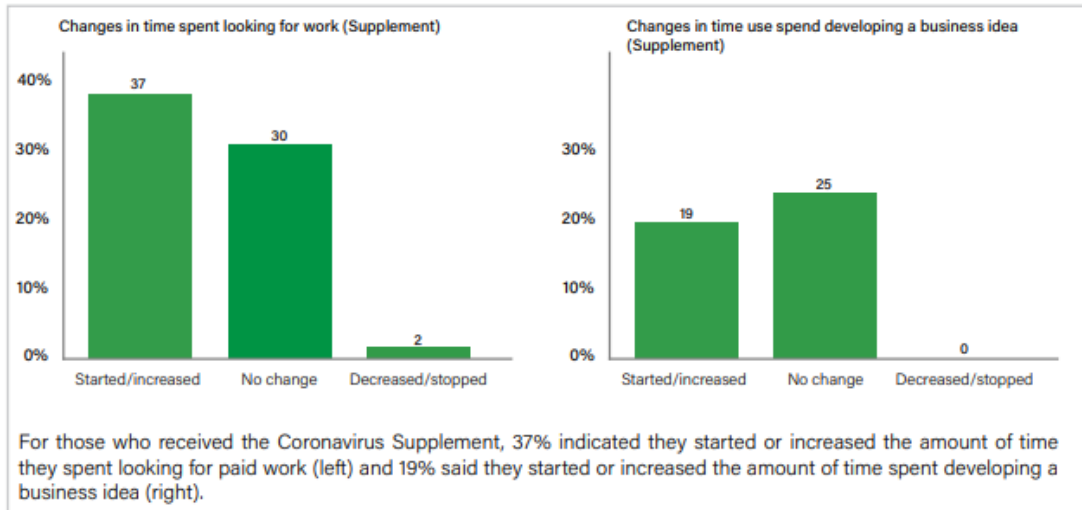


Figure 3: Changes in time spent looking for paid work (left) and developing a business idea (right) for those receiving the Supplement

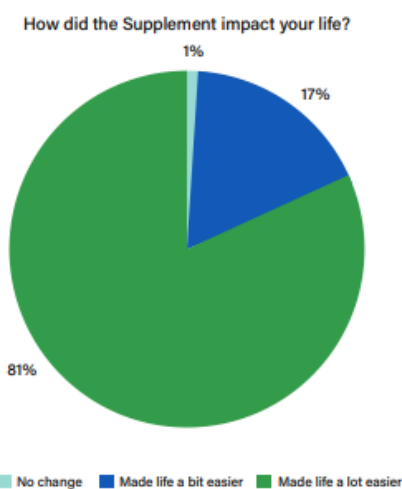


Figure 21: Responses from people who received the Coronavirus Supplement to the question, "How did the Supplement impact your life?" (n = 92)

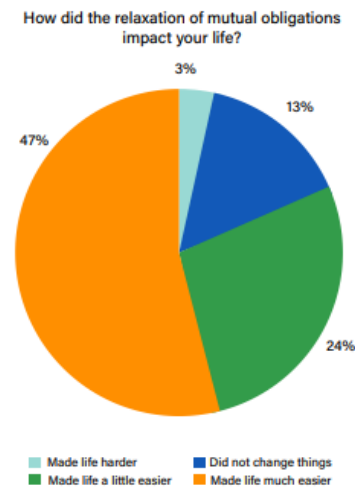


Figure 23: Responses from people who had mutual obligations suspended to the question, "How did the relaxation of mutual obligations impact your life?" (n = 38)

25) Per journal article of Klein et al. (November 2021) retrieved on 14/06/2022 from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ajs4.196>

- 26) Per the Henderson poverty line figure published for a single, unemployed adult published in the latest March quarter 'Poverty lines' report from the Melbourne institute. Retrieved on 14/06/2022 from: <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/publications/poverty-lines>
- 27) From Guardian article, retrieved on 14/06/2022 from: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/28/single-mothers-hope-anthony-albaneses-upbringing-might-spur-change>

It's late on Saturday night and a jubilant **Anthony Albanese** is on stage at an RSL club in Sydney's inner west with a message for families like Leilani Sinclair's.

“It says a lot about our great country that a son of a single mum who was a disability pensioner, who grew up in public housing down the road in Camperdown, can stand before you tonight as Australia's prime minister,” **he says**, emotion etched on his face.

Meanwhile, Sinclair is in Canberra with her two boys, settling into a new home on the outskirts of the capital, about 20 minutes' drive from parliament house.

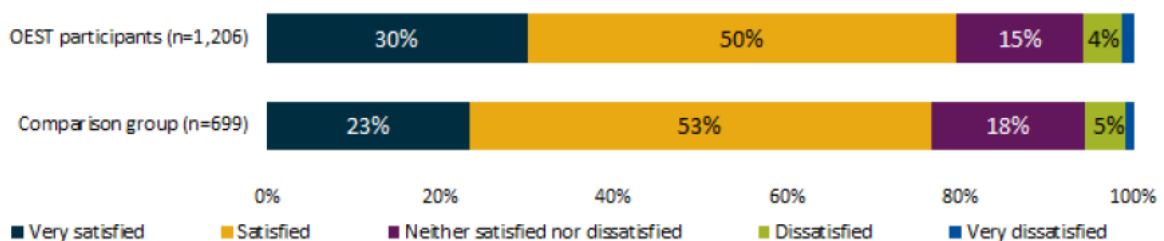
Like Maryanne Albanese, Sinclair is a single mother. Her sons are 12 and eight. She moved into public housing in Canberra this month after two years in crisis accommodation and four long years on the waiting list.

Sinclair hopes her boys will have options: something lacking in her life on the jobseeker payment, paid at the sub-poverty-line base rate of \$46 a day - a benefit the new government has not committed to raising.

“All I want for my kids is that they get an education,” she says.

- 28) Taken from Online Employment Services Trial evaluation report. Retrieved on 14/06/2022 from: <https://www.dese.gov.au/employment-research-and-statistics/resources/online-employment-services-trial-evaluation-report>

**Figure 3.4 Satisfaction with the jobactive website – OEST participants and comparison group**



Source: 2019 quantitative research survey