



Contractualism, Employment Services and Mature-Age Job Seekers: The Tyranny of Tangible Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

Mature age unemployment has only recently started to attract the same degree of attention from researchers and policy makers as youth unemployment. This development is fuelled by the government's increasing recognition that, for a variety of reasons, it is advantageous to keep older people in the workforce. Rates of mature-age unemployment are increasing. One driver is the frequent mismatch between the skills of older workers and the demands of the contemporary labour market. A second driver is the mismatch between the priorities and mode of operation of current labour market programs and the specific needs of older jobseekers. We argue that older unemployed people have quite specific job search and job training needs compared with other groups. We draw on empirical research on the job placement system in South Australia to show that agency capacity to address the specific needs of mature workers is constrained under the current policy regime. Without significant changes to the way employment services are managed — change away from a rigid focus on tangible outcomes — mature-age jobseekers will continue to be disadvantaged in finding employment.

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