



Australian Government



Jobs and Skills Australia

# Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey

Concepts, methods, and questionnaire

March 2026



# Contents

<b>Overview</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Survey Methodology</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Scope</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Sample selection</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Data Collection</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Data quality and security</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Weighting</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Data coding and reporting</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Industry coding.....	5
Occupation coding .....	5
Geographical statistical areas .....	5
<b>Main indicators</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Recruitment rate .....	6
Recruitment difficulty rate.....	6
Expectations for increase in staffing levels over the next 3 months .....	6
<b>The REOS Questionnaire</b> .....	<b>7</b>
The impact of COVID-19 in March 2020.....	7
Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey Questionnaire: February 2026 .....	8

# Overview

Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) conducts the *Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey* (REOS) to monitor recruitment activity and conditions across Australia. The REOS surveys employers across Australia, with over 10,000 businesses responding to the survey throughout the year. Data are published on the Jobs and Skills Australia website (<https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/recruitment-experiences-and-outlook-survey>) including a monthly report summarising key trends (the 'Recruitment Insights Report') together with a companion data file. Spotlights are also produced in most months, which aim to highlight particular aspects of REOS data that are not published on a regular basis. Alongside the regular monthly survey, bespoke modules are added to provide deeper insights into emerging issues or to respond to stakeholder needs.

The survey collects information on employer recruitment activity, recruitment difficulty and staffing outlook – all important indicators to help policy makers and analysts to monitor and understand current and emerging labour market conditions. Data are released as close to collection as possible, providing an almost real-time view of recruitment activity across Australia.

## Survey Methodology

### Scope

The scope of REOS includes all Australian employers with five or more staff. Some practical considerations, including the need to minimise respondent burden, narrow the scope slightly. The following types of businesses are excluded, either due to risks involved with approach (for non-emergency related needs), inability to distinguish between hiring/placing of staff, specific religious sensitivities, or whereby recruitment is centralised and would be deemed too onerous to collect reliable accurate information:

- Emergency Services (e.g. ambulance stations, fire stations/brigades),
- Recruitment or labour hire agencies,
- Places of worship,
- Government Schools, and Departments,
- Local Councils (e.g. local government agencies, council libraries).

### Sample selection

The survey sample is created from a list of businesses provided by IncNet. This private sector company maintains a detailed register of Australian businesses and associated contact details for business managers and recruitment personnel.

A stratified random sample is selected from the IncNet list of businesses biannually. Businesses in this sample are stratified by Greater Capital City and Rest of State regions<sup>1</sup>, industry group<sup>2</sup>, and business size<sup>3</sup>.

An additional sample is added, which is roughly 5 per cent of the main sample and comprises workplaces that are subsets of larger businesses. These are commonly franchises or where businesses have many different locations that recruit separately.

To reduce the burden on survey participants, the surveying of individual respondents is limited to once per year.

## Data Collection

The REOS uses computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) technology with a core set of questions asked each month, including:

- Current employee levels and recent changes
- Recruitment and retention difficulties
- Recruitment methods used; and
- Future staffing expectations.

From time to time, questions are added to the survey for a short period to collect information on issues of policy interest.

The REOS CATI system presents interviewers with a sequence of questions that vary depending on the employer's responses. This automated question selection process significantly reduces the time taken to complete the questionnaire, to between 3 and 7 minutes, depending on businesses' recent recruitment activity.

The REOS survey typically achieves a response rate of over 30 per cent.

## Data quality and security

Every effort is made to ensure the data from REOS is of a high quality. Great care is taken in the design and testing of the questionnaire, the training of interviewers, and in the quality control procedures at all stages of data processing.

Calls are recorded for quality assurance purposes and to facilitate qualitative analysis. Monitoring occurs regularly to ensure that the sample conforms to the survey design with weekly tracking of the number of survey participants against industry and region targets to ensure sufficient responses are received for each stratum.

Rigorous data validation processes are undertaken by staff, which include:

- checking response logic and format of responses, through both automated logic checks, using excel formulae, and manual validation following detailed validation instructions (which are updated on a regular basis),

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<sup>1</sup> Greater Capital City and Rest of State regions for each State and Territory, although the Australian Capital Territory is considered wholly "Greater Capital City" – 17 regions in total. The regions follow the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Edition 3,

<sup>2</sup> Industry division based on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC), 2006, Version 2.0

<sup>3</sup> Businesses are separated by whether they have less than 20 staff, or 20 or more staff.

- reviewing final interviewer comments, actioning any amendments or adjustments as needed,
- recoding 'Other' responses appropriately using best-fit approach,
- listening to recorded calls for any contentious data issues which cannot be addressed simply through data alone,
- final data quality assurance by an adjudicator, to provide final approval of all data validation

Individual responses to the REOS remain confidential to relevant personnel within Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) and are stored on secure storage drives. De-identified REOS data are also stored securely in the JSA data lake, through Microsoft Azure Storage.

The privacy of data collected is protected by the Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth).

## Weighting

Results from the REOS, while published as percentages, are not calculated based on record counts. Rather, each record is allocated a weight such that weighted results corrects for known biases and enables meaningful comparisons.

Data are weighted on a monthly basis to be representative of Australian businesses as a whole<sup>4</sup>. Monthly weights are calculated separately for each stratum – State/Territory and Greater Capital City/ Rest of State (15 regions) and employer size (2 categories, less than/ at least 20 staff) such that the sum of weights of each stratum will match the distribution of businesses across Australia<sup>5</sup>. Some stratum may be combined for the purposes of weighting where the monthly sample size is inadequate for weighting in all 30 stratum (15 regions and 2 categories of business size) to be done separately.

Raw REOS data may be impacted by these factors:

- Bias and coverage issues in the sample frame: some industries are over-represented in the sample frame (e.g. retail and hospitality) while others are less represented (e.g. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and the Administrative and Support Services industries)
- Response rate variations: some businesses are easier to contact and elicit responses from the appropriate person at that business, than others. This can be dependent on business size, business type (industry) and location.
- Adjustments for region size: the sample size for smaller regions has been deliberately increased (relative to large metropolitan areas) to allow meaningful analysis and to ensure confidentiality of responses in smaller areas. When producing findings at the national, state/territory, and capital city/rest of state levels, the disproportionate contribution of regional responses is adjusted.
- Seasonal factors, given that seasonal adjustment is not possible at this point.

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<sup>4</sup> REOS weighting aims to match the distribution of businesses detailed in ABS [Counts of Australian Businesses, Entries and Exits, 2024-25](#).

<sup>5</sup> The number of monthly respondents to REOS is insufficient to include an industry breakdown in the weighting stratum. Ongoing monitoring of the monthly sample, however, ensures that the general distribution of the respondents will align with the Australian distribution.

## Data coding and reporting

Data collected in the survey are coded and reported according to ABS classifications. The following sections outline specific coding and reporting processes for several data aspects.

### Industry coding

- Industry is defined by the [Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification \(ANZSIC\)](#), 2006, Version 2.0.

The provided survey sample includes industry information (codes, and industry sectors).

On a weekly cycle, assigned staff validate each record's industry classification using best available public evidence (official websites preferred; reputable registries/directories as supporting sources). For each record, coders either confirm the inherited code, or make amendments. Any change from prior coding is flagged automatically with previous codes retained in the original survey sample list.

Validated records are exported and imported into a Unit Record File (URF) as the final, authoritative classification of industry information for businesses.

### Occupation coding

- Occupation is defined by both:
  - the [Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations \(ANZSCO\)](#), 2022, and;
  - the [Occupation Standard Classification for Australia \(OSCA\)](#), 2024.

As part of the survey, businesses that recently recruited report the occupation they recruited for, captured in free text (title) and, where prompted, key duties. These responses are auto- or manually coded to the OSCA classification at 6-digit level and a maintained 6-digit concordance to ANZSCO 2022.

Interviewers code each response to a 6-digit OSCA occupation, using best-fit approach. Based on the selected OSCA code, ANZSCO is auto-derived via the concordance in most cases.

### Geographical statistical areas

- Geographical statistical areas are defined by the [Australian Statistical Geography Standard \(ASGS\) Edition 3](#), July 2021.

Statistical geographic areas are derived from the postcode reported for each business. As part of the survey, the interviewers will confirm each businesses postcode and, if required, record the amended postcode. Postcodes serve as the primary geographic identifier and are used to determine a suite of Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) areas – including LGA, SA3, SA4, Employment Region (ER), Greater Capital City Statistical Area (GCCSA), and Remoteness Area (ARIA) classifications. These postcodes are processed consistently across all records to ensure uniform geographic assignment.

# Main indicators

The Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey collects a wide variety of information on employers' behaviour regarding recruitment. In particular, the REOS releases data on the following key indicators:

## Recruitment rate

The recruitment rate is a measure of recruitment activity and is the proportion of employers either currently recruiting or who had recruited in the previous month. It is calculated by dividing the number of employers who recruited or were attempting to recruit by the number of employers that responded to the survey question (excluding 'unsure' responses). While it broadly reflects the level of recruitment activity and is a relatively stable indicator, it does not account for the number of vacancies.

## Recruitment difficulty rate

The 'recruitment difficulty rate' is the proportion of recruiting employers who experienced difficulty hiring. As businesses may have conducted several or concurrent recruitment rounds, this indicator focusses on the most recent recruitment round in the previous month. The indicator is calculated as the number of employers who recruited or are recruiting and reported difficulty, divided by all employers who recruited or are recruiting (excluding 'unsure' responses).

There are many reasons for recruitment difficulty, including:

- Location: in remote areas, recruitment difficulty is often higher
- Type of occupation: some jobs are consistently more difficult to recruit for and employer expectations, such as for applicants to have relevant industry experience or particularly skills and qualifications, can limit the potential field of applicants

## Expectations for increase in staffing levels over the next 3 months

Employers' expectations regarding staffing levels over the next 3 months is a measure of employer confidence and sentiment regarding the labour market or the broader economy. A higher share of employers expecting to increase staffing levels over the next 3 months is therefore an indicator of stronger confidence, both at the business level and across the labour market as a whole.

It is calculated as the percentage of employers who expect to increase staff over the next 3 months divided by all employers. While it provides a good indication of confidence, it should be noted that employers can be optimistic when reporting their intention to increase staff.

# The REOS Questionnaire

Prior to 2020, the *Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences (SERE)* and its predecessors had been running for over a decade. Initially, the survey was undertaken in selected regions in response to the need for detailed information at a regional level.

The survey was later expanded to cover all Employment Regions (note that Employment Regions were designed by the Department at the time to support the delivery of government employment services, namely Job Services Australia followed by Workforce Australia). The purpose was to collect timely information on conditions at a regional level to supplement other sources.

In 2019, the methodology of the survey was reviewed as the regional approach did not provide nationally representative information in a timely manner. In January 2020, a new approach was implemented that allowed representative data at the national and state/territory levels to be reported at quarterly intervals.

## The impact of COVID-19 in March 2020

In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the labour market, it became apparent that it was not possible or appropriate to conduct recruitment surveys, as many industries were not recruiting (or operating), and many employers were facing uncertainty about the future. The survey was suspended, with a new survey introduced, focussing on the impacts of COVID-19 on businesses and their staffing profile. The COVID-19 questionnaire was adapted over the subsequent 6 months as the pandemic progressed and the content modified to reflect emerging challenges.

In August 2020, emphasis shifted from COVID-19 to a focus on recruitment activity and the difficulties that employers were experiencing, through the Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey (REOS). Many of the core questions from the former SERE were re-introduced while key questions continued to capture the impacts of the pandemic. Since August 2020, the core questions within the REOS have remained largely unchanged, allowing for more consistent reporting.

## Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey Questionnaire: February 2026

The questionnaire below does not include interviewer prompts. The survey uses complex sequencing to ensure employers are only asked questions that are tailored to their circumstances. The sequencing has not been included in the questionnaire below.

Some minor adjustments may occur from time to time to respond to changing labour market conditions. Additional modules are sometimes included in the survey to address specific areas of research. These modules vary depending on the research topic and are therefore not included here.

### Business Demographics

**How many people are actively employed working at this business?**

1. Two or more - specify
2. Sole trader
3. Unsure
4. Business is in the process of closing down
5. Business is closed down

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**Has this number increased, decreased or remained the same over the last month?**

1. Increased
  2. Decreased
  3. Remained the same
  4. Unsure
- 

### Core questions

**Have you hired or replaced any staff in the past month?**

1. Yes – hired new staff in the past month
2. No
3. Unsure

**Are you actively recruiting to hire new staff?**

1. Yes – hired new staff in the past month
2. No
3. Unsure

**Have you hired or replaced any staff in the past 3 months?**

1. Yes- hired new staff in the past 3 months
2. No
3. Unsure

**What are the reasons your business did not need to recruit over the last 3 months?**

1. Fully staffed and no need for more staff right now
  2. Managing with existing staff despite gap
  3. Stopped recruiting due to repeated difficulty or lack of success
  4. The cost of hiring staff is too high
  5. Economic uncertainty (e.g. inflation, interest rates)
  6. Budget or financial constraints including funding uncertainty
  7. Prefer to outsource or use contractors
  8. Seasonal work/workforce
  9. Downsizing staff numbers
  10. Preparing to close
  11. Other – specify
  12. Unsure
-

## Core questions

**And what occupation have you most recently hired or replaced staff for? What are their duties?**

1. Occupation details - specify
2. Duties - specify
3. Unsure
4. Apprentice
5. Trainee
6. Graduate

**And what occupation are you actively recruiting for? What are their duties?**

1. Occupation details - specify
2. Duties - specify
3. Unsure
4. Apprentice
5. Trainee
6. Graduate

**How many vacancies are you (were you) trying to fill for this occupation/[say name of occupation]?**

1. Number of positions: specify
2. Unsure

**(For this occupation,) how many of these vacancies did you fill?**

1. All
2. Some – specify
3. None
4. Unsure

**How long ago did you first start trying to fill this vacancy?**

1. One week or less
2. More than 1 week, up to 2 weeks
3. More than 2 weeks, up to 1 month
4. More than 1 month, up to 6 weeks
5. More than 6 weeks, up to 3 months
6. More than 3 months, up to 6 months
7. More than 6 months
8. Continuous, successful and quick recruitment
9. Continuous but difficulty and time-consuming recruitment
10. Unsure

**From when you first started looking, how long did it take to fill this vacancy?**

1. One week or less
  2. More than 1 week, up to 2 weeks
  3. More than 2 weeks, up to 1 month
  4. More than 1 month, up to 6 weeks
  5. More than 6 weeks, up to 3 months
  6. More than 3 months, up to 6 months
  7. More than 6 months
  8. Continuous, successful and quick recruitment
  9. Continuous but difficulty and time-consuming recruitment
  10. Was not trying to fill a vacancy/position made for applicant
  11. Unsure
-

## Core questions

### Is (was) this a new position or a replacement for staff who recently left?

1. New position
2. Replacement
3. Both
4. Unsure

### Is (was) this a casual or non-casual position?

1. Casual (do not receive paid holiday or sick leave entitlements)
2. Non casual
3. Both casual and non-casual
4. Unsure

### Is (was) this position full-time or part-time hours?

1. Full-time hours
2. Part-time hours
3. Both full-time and part-time hours
4. Unsure

### How did you try to fill this vacancy/these vacancies?

1. Word of mouth
  2. Employer approached applicant/poached
  3. Directly approached by jobseeker
  4. Newspaper
  5. Advertised / promoted within business
  6. Workforce Australia
  7. Recruitment Agency
  8. Labour Hire
  9. Sign in window/billboard
  10. Education Institution (incl. high school, university, TAFE)
  11. Other methods - specify
  12. Unsure (including unsure - head office)
  13. Company Website
  14. SEEK
  15. Indeed
  16. LinkedIn
  17. Workforce Australia (online jobs board)
  18. Other Internet (incl Newspaper sites) - specify
  19. Unsure which internet
  20. Facebook
  21. Instagram
  22. Other social media – specify
  23. Unsure which social media
-

## Core questions

### Which method did the successful applicant/s apply through?

1. Internet excluding company websites
2. Company websites
3. Social Media
4. Word of mouth
5. Employer approached applicant/poached
6. Directly approached by jobseeker
7. Newspaper
8. Advertised/ promoted within business
9. Workforce Australia
10. Recruitment Agency
11. Labour Hire
12. Sign window/ billboard
13. Education Institution (incl. high school, university, TAFE)
14. Other methods – specify
15. Unsure

### Is this a paid or unpaid service?

1. Paid
2. Unpaid
3. Unsure

### Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the assistance provided by this agency?

1. Satisfied
2. Dissatisfied
3. Unsure

### Why were you not satisfied with the service?

1. Applicants lack personal traits/ qualities
2. Skills of applicants do not match job
3. Agency lacked suitable applicants
4. Applicants don't want to work
5. Poor customer service from Workforce Australia
6. Other (please specify)

### Overall, would you say that it was difficult to fill this vacancy?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Unsure

### What were the reasons you found it difficult to recruit for this occupation?

1. Applicants lack technical skills
2. Lack of suitable applicants
3. Lack of applicants
4. People don't want to work/only applying for Centrelink
5. Lack of overseas/migrant workers
6. Too many overseas applicants
7. Location e.g., remote or regional
8. Undesirable working conditions/hours/wages
9. Applicants lack experience
10. Applicants lack employability skills (communication skills, personal presentation)
11. Lack of training for the industry
12. Competition for staff
13. Accommodation
14. Other reason – specify
15. Unsure

## Future staffing/ Biggest risks

**What do you think your staffing numbers will look like over the next three months?**

1. Increase
2. Remain the same
3. Decrease
4. Decrease - closing down
5. Unsure

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**Thinking about all aspects of your business, what (if anything) is your SINGLE greatest concern in the next 3 months?**

1. No Concerns
  2. Lack of demand for products or services/ economy
  3. Recruitment or retention diff/ Skill shortages
  4. Health related concerns (sick with cold/flu, mental health, burnout with working more hours etc)
  5. Supply chain issues
  6. Costs
  7. Cash Flow
  8. Keeping up with demand for products or services
  9. Government regulations/ red tape
  10. Other concerns -specify
  11. Unsure
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