



Job change

The Australia at Work study¹ allows for the tracking of job change or mobility. Around four-fifths (82%) of people who were employed in 2009 were still working in the same job or business when they were interviewed again in 2010.²

For those who were not in the same job in both 2009 and 2010, 12% had moved to a different job or business while only 5% were not working at the time of being interviewed in 2010.

Why did people change jobs?

Around three-quarters (74%) of people who ceased their last job within the last 12 months said they did so *voluntarily* (i.e. left their job) while the balance (26%) said they did so *involuntarily* (i.e. lost their job). Not surprisingly, a degree of constrained choice appears to have been involved for some who reported voluntary job change. When we re-classified the data using ABS categories for main reason for changing jobs, we find that two-thirds (67%) more appropriately fell into the voluntary job change category and one third (33%) fell into the involuntary job change category, Table 1.

¹ The *Australia at Work* study is being conducted by the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council's Linkage Grant scheme and the industry partner is Unions NSW. Further financial support is provided by CFMEU Energy & Mining Division, CFMEU ACT Branch, NSW Nurses' Association, the Police Federation of Australia, the SDA, the CEPU, the QLD Nurses Federation and the Nurses Federation (Victorian Branch). *The study* is a five-year longitudinal telephone survey of people who were aged 16 to 58 years and in the Australian labour force in March 2006 (i.e. prior to the implementation of the *Work Choices* legislation on 27 March 2006). New entrants and re-entrants to the labour force after March 2006 were not 'in-scope' for the study.

² Care should be exercised when comparing or combining the data from this study with that from other sources, especially the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The distinctive feature of the *Australia at Work* study is it that has been tracking the same group of 8,343 workers who were either at or looking for work in March 2006. These statistics have been corrected to ensure that when the findings are scaled up to create estimates of the situation in Australia at large they are representative of this population. This means the estimates sometimes differ to those provided by the ABS, but are usually very close. The differences primarily arise because the *Australia at Work* study has gone back to the same people each year whereas the ABS generally gets a fresh sample each time a survey is conducted. The *Australia at Work* data exclude information on very young workers (ie those too young to be in or seeking paid employment in March 2006) and very old workers (ie those approaching retirement age at that time). Further technical details as well as substantive findings arising from the *Australia at Work* study can be found at: <http://www.australiaatwork.org.au/index.php>.

Among those who changed jobs voluntarily, we can see that work or business related factors influenced their decisions to change jobs, where around one-quarter (25%) said they 'got a better job', a further one-fifth (21%) said the changed jobs because of the 'unsatisfactory working arrangements' in their former job and 4% left to start a new business.

Among those who were forced to change jobs, retrenchment (21%), end of seasonal or temporary work (7%) and dismissal (4%) were cited as work or business related reasons. A small proportion (less than 1%) of people left their job due to ill health. While not statistically significant due to the small number of responses, it is still interesting to note that almost half (48%) of the people who said they were dismissed believed that their dismissal was 'unfair'.

The main reasons people gave for changing jobs is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1, Main reason for job change, 2010, per cent

Voluntary job change		67%
<i>Work & business related</i>		
Got a better job	25%	
Unsatisfactory work arrangements	21%	
Start a new business	4%	
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>50%</i>	
<i>Life course transition</i>		
Family reasons	12%	
Study	4%	
Retirement	1%	
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>17%</i>	
Involuntary job change		33%
<i>Work & business related</i>		
Retrenched	21%	
Seasonal/temporary work	7%	
Dismissed	4%	
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>32%</i>	
<i>Non-work related</i>		
Ill health	*1%	
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>*1%</i>	
Total (n=672)	100%	100%

* Cell size is less than 20

Source: *Australia at Work*, Waves 3 & 4 (2009 to 2010), all employed persons in 2009 who changed jobs between being interviewed in 2009 and when interviewed again in 2010 (n=672)

What do our findings suggest?

For participants in the *Australia at Work* study, most job change between 2009 and 2010 arose from job or labour market dynamics as opposed to transitions in the life course. Quality of working life does not just depend on getting a job (as opposed to being unemployed) and 'work-life balance' issues. It also depends on the quality of current jobs and movements from job to job. To date these dimension of job quality and transition have not received the attention they deserve.