SEEK Economist Insights

seek

Seasonality Report

When is the best time to search for talent or a job?

Not all months are created equal

This insight uses SEEK data to highlight times throughout the year when hirers across different industries are more likely to be looking for workers and when candidates are likely to face the most or least competition for roles.

Hirers are generally going to face the most competition in August, with more ads on SEEK on average in August than across other months of the year but with applications down in August relative to their annual peak each January. This also means job seekers looking in August are going to face less competition with fewer other applicants and more roles available, resulting in applications per ad being generally lower in August. However, the peak month for ads on SEEK and the best time for job seekers to search isn't the same across all industries, which is discussed further below.

With more people searching for work each January, we tend to see unemployment increase in January and then employment jump in February. These patterns seen across the broader Australian labour market data are touched on at the end of this Insight.

When do hirers advertise the most jobs?

The total number of job ads on SEEK has peaked in August each year on average since 2016, ignoring the COVID affected years 2020 to 2022. Although job ads are also typically well above average in May. The August peak may reflect the timing of the financial year in Australia, with governments and businesses reassessing their staffing needs in the new financial year and staff leaving following annual performance reviews and bonus payouts, creating vacant positions.

Ads are generally at their lowest level for the year in December. The public and school holidays in December and early January likely make it a more difficult time to recruit and onboard new employees than other times of the year.
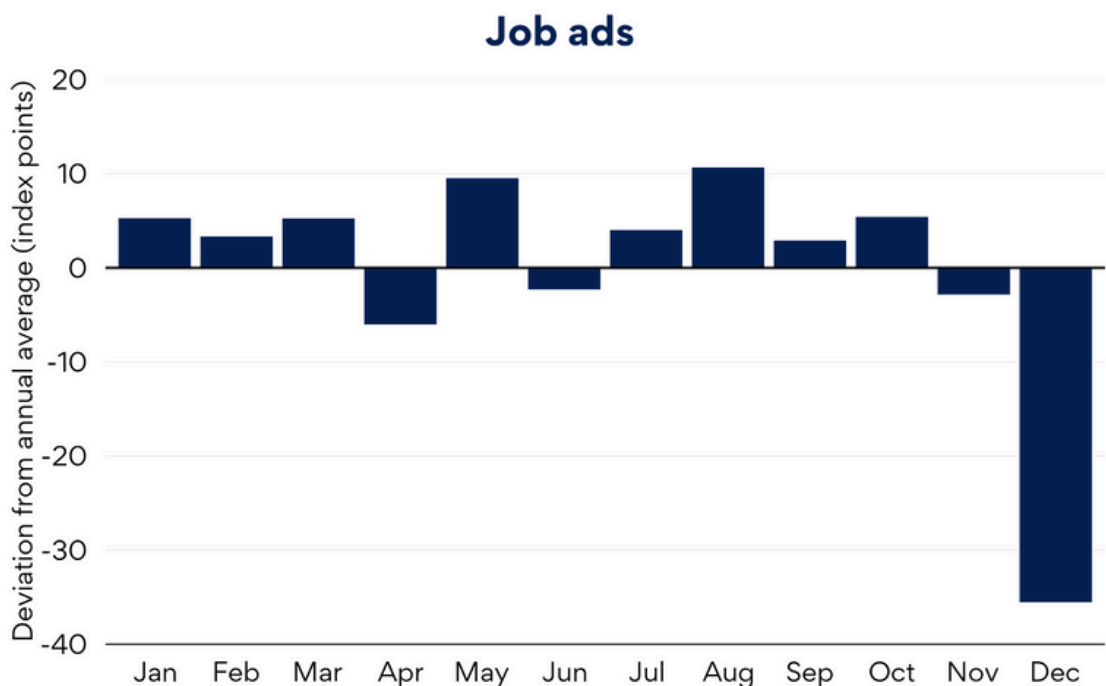
Job ads

Note: Average deviation from annual average by month for years 2016 to 2024, excluding 2020 to 2022.
Source: SEEK

January typically sees a large rebound in ads, which remain above average until April. Easter occurs in April most years accompanied by school holidays, so, as in December, it can be a more difficult time to recruit and onboard new employees. Ads generally rebound again in May, with the level of job ads in May not too different from their typical level in August.

Broadly speaking the seasonal pattern in job ads means there are going to be more potential positions for job seekers in May and August than at other times of the year, although the position may not necessarily be in the job seeker's area of interest, with some industries posting more job ads at other times of the year.

Some industry classifications have notably different job ad posting patterns from the aggregate. For example, Sales job ads generally peak in January, although May generally has a similar level of job ads for this industry. For industries with more consistent and growing demand, like Healthcare & Medical, the difference between peak ad months and the average is not as large as it is for more seasonal industries.

Table: Peak month for ads by SEEK Classification

SEEK Classification	Peak month	SEEK Classification	Peak month
Sport & Recreation	Aug	Sales	Jan
Retail & Consumer Products	Oct	Consulting & Strategy	Aug
Advertising, Arts & Media	May	Construction	May
Hospitality & Tourism	Oct	Banking & Financial Services	May
Administration & Office Support	May	Mining, Resources & Energy	Aug
Government & Defence	Aug	CEO & General Management	May
Education & Training	Nov	Design & Architecture	May
Marketing & Communications	May	Manufacturing, Transport & Logistics	Oct
Accounting	May	Real Estate & Property	Feb
Community Services & Development	Aug	Trades & Services	Aug
Information & Communication Technology	May	Legal	May
Insurance & Superannuation	May	Science & Technology	May
Human Resources & Recruitment	May	Engineering	May
Farming, Animals & Conservation	Aug	Healthcare & Medical	Aug
Call Centre & Customer Service	May		

Note: The table is sorted in order of deviation from annual average, with classifications on the left exhibiting a peak further above their annual average than those on the right.
Source: SEEK

Retail & Consumer Products is a classification with a slightly more unique seasonal pattern. Its job ads typically jump in August and stay elevated until November, consistent with hiring in preparation for the peak retail sales periods, ads then fall more in December than for other classifications. Job ad volumes in the closely related Hospitality & Tourism classification follow a similar seasonal pattern. These patterns mean that there are more opportunities for job seekers in these industries in August through to October than at other times of the year and finding a job in December may prove more difficult.
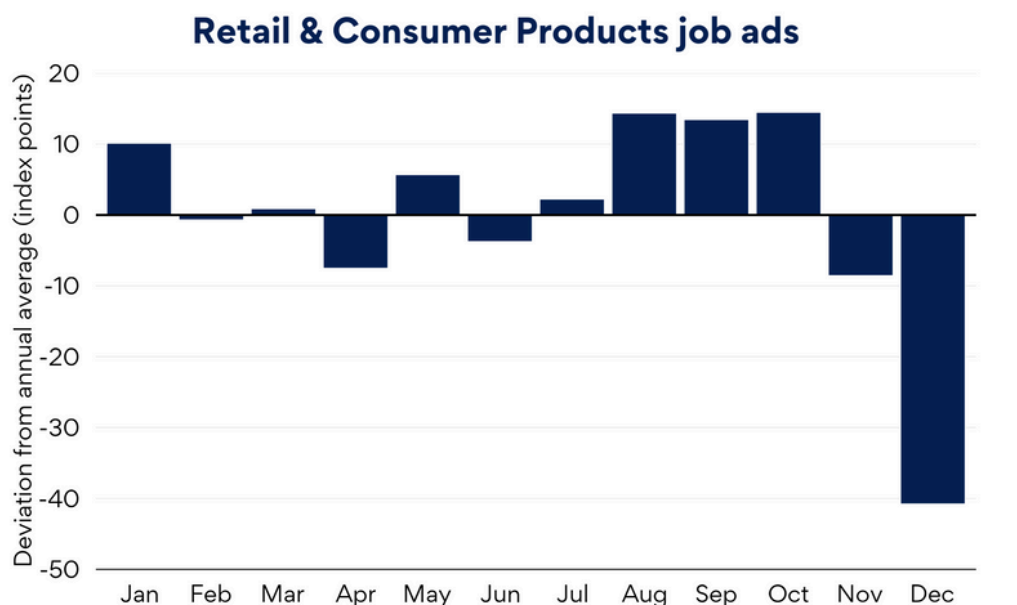
Note: Average deviation from annual average by month for years 2016 to 2024, excluding 2020 to 2022.
Source: SEEK

Education & Training job ads peak later in the year than job ads for other classifications, with ads remaining below their annual average until May in most years and then picking up in August before peaking in October.

Who is posting job ads also varies across the year, with SEEK's Small to Medium Enterprises (SME) customers posting more ads in January on average. In contrast, Recruiters have historically posted less ads in January, with their volumes tending to peak in May. SEEK's Corporate and Government customers have generally posted more ads in August than any other month.

When do we see the most applications?

Usually, the number of applications for roles on SEEK tends to peak each January and then broadly declines over the rest of the year.

Month-to-month fluctuations in the total number of applications generally follows the number of ads on site, so that there are less applications than average in April than at other times of the year.

Although total applications fluctuate at similar times to job ads, they don't increase and decrease to the same degree, so the average number of applications per ad broadly declines across the year before increasing in November and December when job ads decline more than applications.
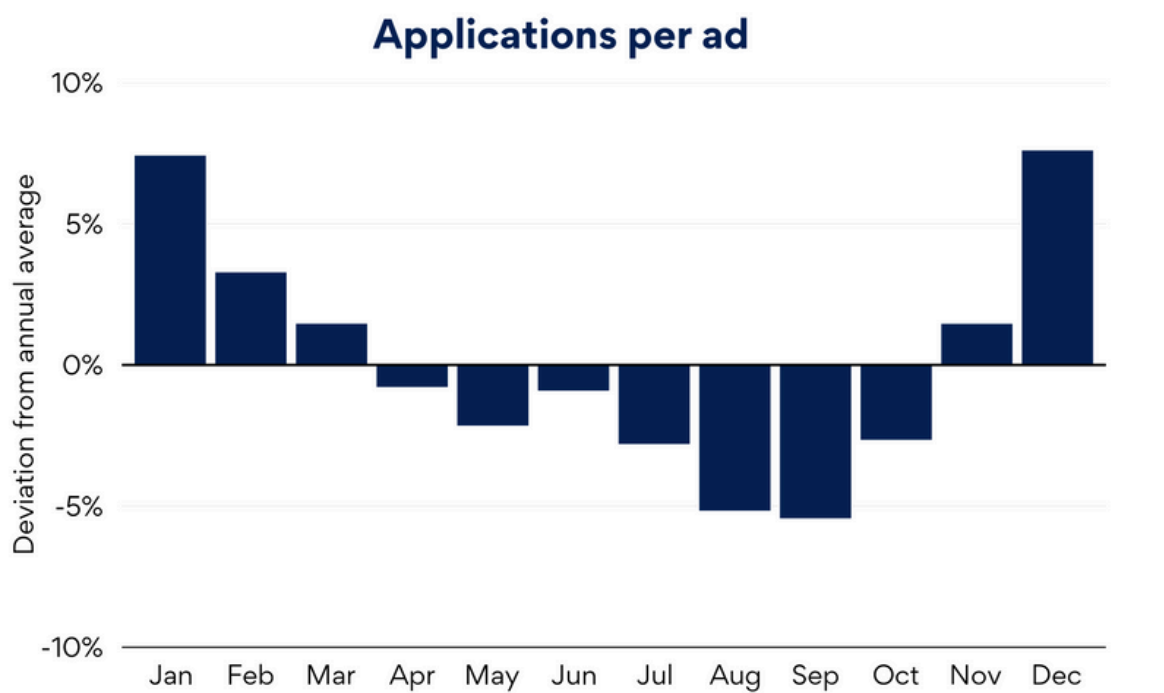
Note: Average deviation from annual average by month for years 2016 to 2024, excluding 2020 to 2022.
Source: SEEK

So, those applying for jobs in January are likely to face much more competition than those who apply for jobs later in the year. Similarly, finding a job in December is likely to be difficult with applicants competing for fewer jobs. Historically there have been around 5% less applications per ad in August and September than on average across the year.

Applications per ad typically peak in January and December for almost all of SEEK's different industry classifications, with Retail & Consumer Products the one exception. This suggests that job seekers after a retail job for the Christmas holiday period who are only just beginning their search in November are going to find it tough.

Table: Peak and trough months for applications per ad by SEEK Classification

SEEK Classification	Trough	Peak	SEEK Classification	Trough	Peak
Hospitality & Tourism	Sep	Dec	Design & Architecture	Aug	Jan
Sport & Recreation	Sep	Jan	Sales	Sep	Dec
Advertising, Arts & Media	May	Dec	Insurance & Superannuation	Sep	Dec
Call Centre & Customer Service	Aug	Dec	Human Resources & Recruitment	Aug	Dec
Administration & Office Support	Aug	Dec	Marketing & Communications	Jul	Dec
Trades & Services	Sep	Dec	Government & Defence	Aug	Dec
Education & Training	Sep	Jan	Science & Technology	Apr	Jan
Mining, Resources & Energy	Aug	Jan	Information & Communication Technology	Apr	Dec
Legal	Apr	Jan	CEO & General Management	Nov	Dec
Healthcare & Medical	Sep	Jan	Consulting & Strategy	May	Dec
Manufacturing, Transport & Logistics	Sep	Dec	Accounting	Apr	Mar
Community Services & Development	Aug	Dec	Engineering	Apr	Jan
Farming, Animals & Conservation	Sep	Jan	Construction	Sep	Jan
Retail & Consumer Products	May	Nov	Banking & Financial Services	Sep	Dec
Real Estate & Property	Aug	Jan			

Note: The table is sorted in order of the deviation in the trough from annual average, with classifications on the left exhibiting a deviation in applications per ad further below their annual average than those on the right.
Source: SEEK

There will be less competition for roles when applications per ad are below average. For most industries this is in August or September. Again, Retail & Consumer Products stands out from other classifications, with applications per ad generally at their lowest in May.

Several of the industries associated with professional services, such as Legal, Science & Technology, Information & Communication Technology and Accounting have their trough in applications per ad each year in April or May. Making this time of year one of the best times to search for a new role in these industries, especially in May when there are an above average number of job ads but not as many applicants.

# Seasonality and the broader Australian economy

Seasonality and seasonal adjustment

This Insight has used original data that has not been adjusted for regular seasonal patterns. To better understand the underlying direction the economy is moving in and to allow for like-for-like comparisons across different periods, economists often adjust data for regular patterns. For example, retail spending always jumps in December due to Christmas, making it difficult to determine whether the pick-up in spending represents a stronger consumer and pick-up in activity or simply reflects the typical Christmas uplift. The typical jump also makes it difficult to compare the increase between November and December to changes in spending between any other two months in the year. Regular patterns that align with the calendar are referred to as seasonal patterns and statisticians and economists apply seasonal adjustment to remove regular seasonal movements. Indeed, when you hear economists talking about economic activity or the labour market, the number they are looking at is probably a seasonally adjusted one. One key exception to this is the Consumer Price Index (CPI), where economists focus on the non-seasonally adjusted number.

At SEEK, we also seasonally adjust the data in our regular SEEK Employment Report and SEEK Advertised Salary Index. This is useful for comparisons over time and understanding the direction of movement of job ads and advertised salaries, but it is less useful for job seekers who are more likely to want to know when hirers are searching for talent and for hirers who want to know when more job seekers are searching. Looking at the non-seasonally adjusted data rather than the seasonally adjusted data, as done in this Insight, helps to highlight these periods of the year.

Seasonal patterns in the broader Australian labour market.

Broader Australian labour market data also exhibits several seasonal patterns, with larger movements at the start and end of each calendar year in general. For example, total hours worked decline notably every January as more people take annual leave. [1] Employment also typically declines notably in January, while the number of people who are outside the labour force increases. The increase in those outside the labour force likely reflects a lot of people choosing to retire at the end of the previous year, or people not searching for work over the Christmas holiday period consistent with the drop in applications seen in December on SEEK. The number of unemployed also increases most years in January. Seasonal adjustment typically smooths out these regular patterns so economists, policy makers and other stakeholders can compare different points in time more easily.

Employment

Source: ABS
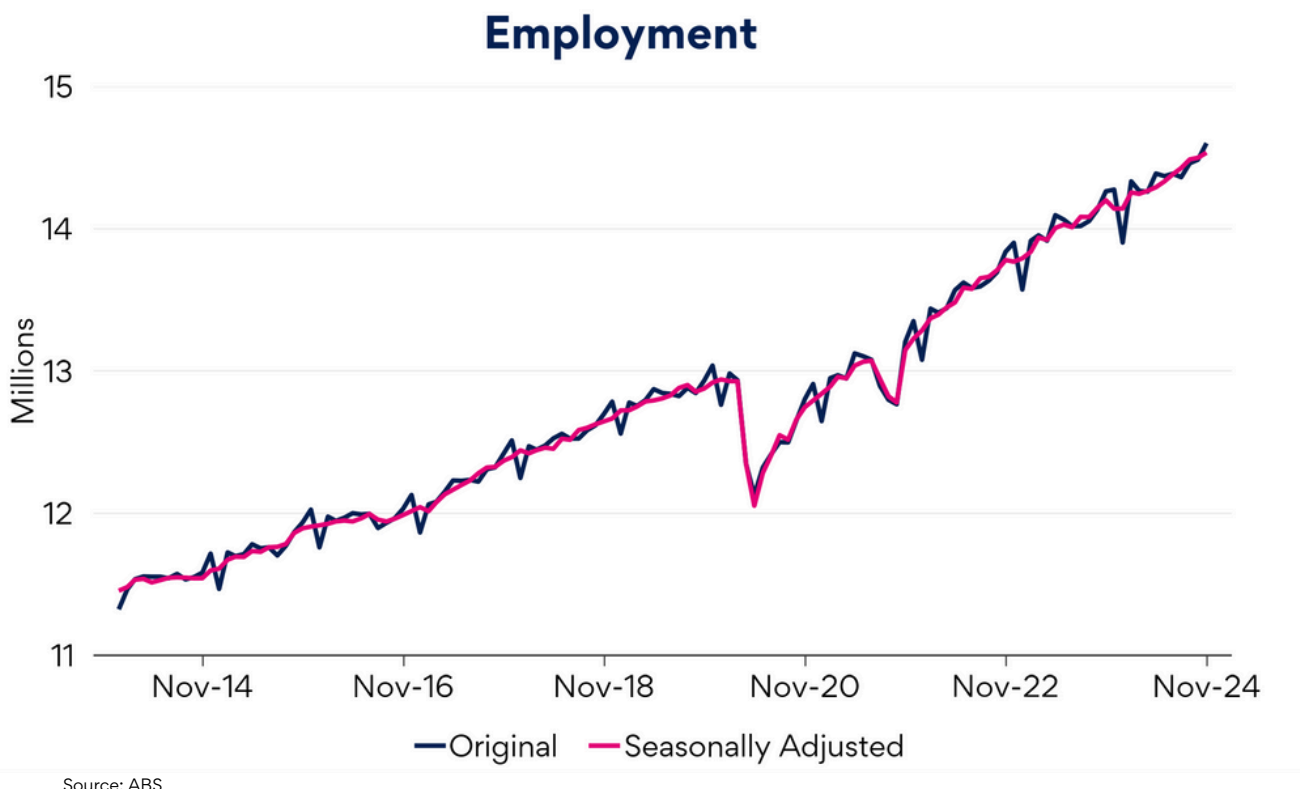
[1] The Labour Force Survey generally reflects activity at the beginning of each month but can include the end of the previous month, with the survey conducted during the two weeks beginning on the Sunday between the 5th and 11th of each month and responses intend to reflect the week prior to the survey.

Following the typical decline in January, employment historically bounces back in February. Employment has declined by around 290,000 each January since 2016, ignoring the COVID affected years 2020 to 2022, while employment has increased by 270,000 on average each February over the same period. However, no such swing is apparent when examining the seasonally adjusted equivalent with an average seasonally adjusted increase of 26,000 in January and an average seasonally adjusted increase of 27,000 in February.
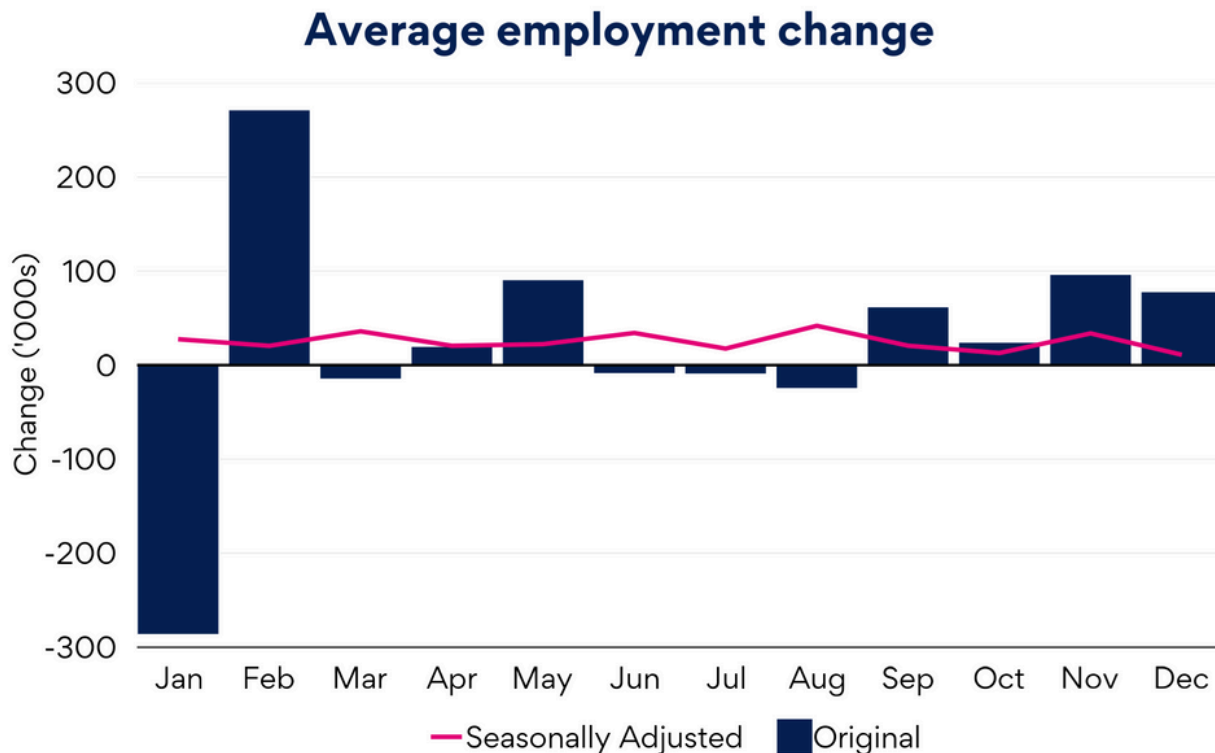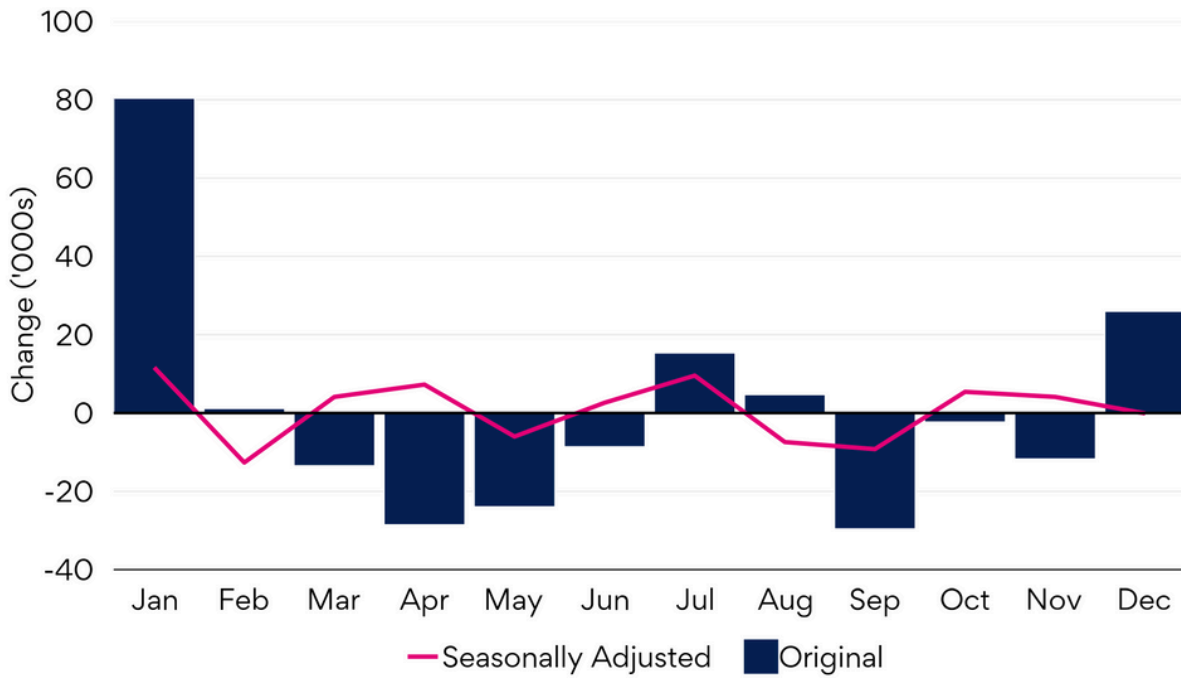
Average employment change

Note: Average monthly employment change for years 2016 to 2024, excluding 2020 to 2022.
Source: ABS< SEEK

The large increase in employment in February each year is consistent with the pick-up in job ads seen on SEEK in January but also with above average advertising in September and October. As some recruitment processes take several weeks and individuals can be required to give multiple weeks' notice, starting a new role in the new calendar year is often a good option for new employees and businesses.

The number of unemployed increases notably each January, consistent with the jump in the number of applications we see on SEEK at the start of the year. Younger people account for a large share of the increase in unemployed between November and January in most years. This is in part driven by school leavers and university graduates who completed their studies towards the end of the previous year, beginning to search for work in December and January. The number of unemployed decreases the most in April and September on average.

Average unemployment change

Note: Average monthly employment change for years 2016 to 2024, excluding 2020 to 2022.
Source: ABS, SEEK

These large movements from month to month are not as apparent when looking at the seasonally adjusted data. Some other longer cyclical patterns are also more apparent when looking at the original data. The timing of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) changes from year-to-year, which can result in cyclical fluctuations that are harder to see in the seasonally adjusted data. For example, in 2024 the January LFS data reflected the two weeks beginning 31 December 2023 and ending 13 January 2024, while in 2025 the January data will reflect the two weeks beginning 5 January 2025 and ending 18 January 2025. As a result, we are likely to see a smaller employment decline in the original data but a large employment increase in the seasonally adjusted data this January.

Employment change in January
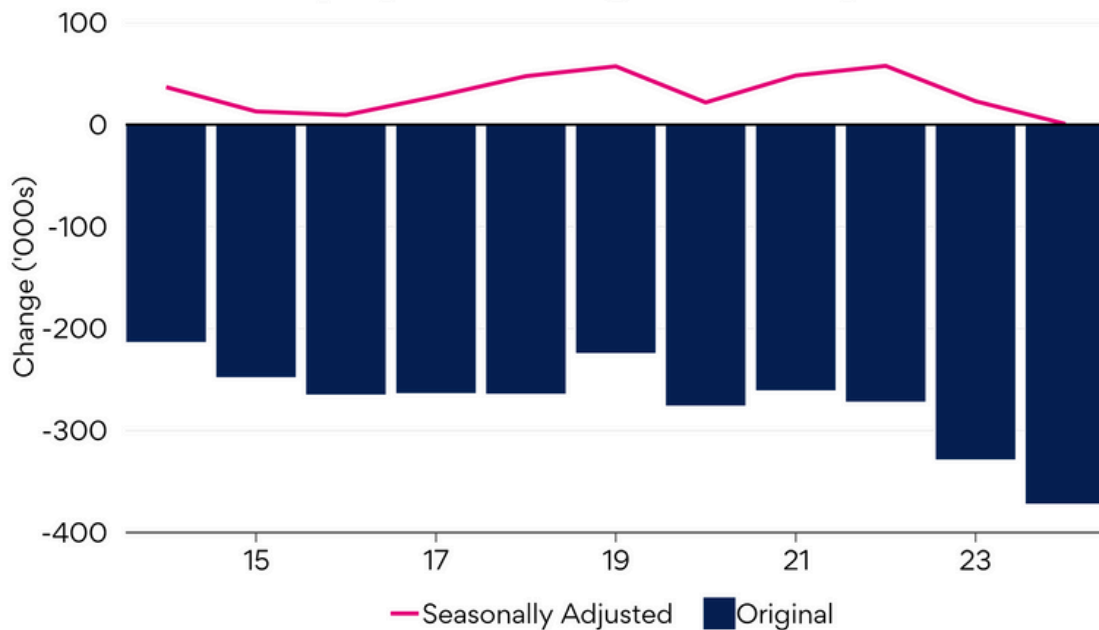
Source: ABS, SEEK

Thank you

About Blair Chapman, PhD

Dr Blair Chapman is SEEK's Senior Economist. Blair undertakes economic analysis and forecasting of the Australian and New Zealand economies and labour markets. He leverages SEEK's data to develop unique insights about the Australian economy.

Blair's economic analysis and forecasting skills have been honed across both private and public organisations including ANZ, Deloitte Access Economics, the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). While at the RBA, Blair was their representative on the ABS's Labour Statistics Advisory Group for several years.

Blair holds a PhD in Economics from Johns Hopkins University where his studies concentrated on macroeconomics and labour. He completed his undergraduate studies at Monash University, where he majored in Economics, Econometrics and Accounting.

About SEEK

SEEK is a market leader in online employment marketplaces in Australia, New Zealand and across South-East Asia, with minority investments in China, South Korea and a number of other countries.

SEEK leverages its unique data and technology to create innovative solutions and insights into the future of work, while protecting its customers' privacy and using data ethically.

SEEK has approximately 400,000 hirer relationships and facilitates 40 million candidate relationships.