

## Governance innovations in employment services and active labour market policies

*The proposed stream relates to the thematic areas of social administration, labour market developments, and unemployment. It also overlaps with one of the two core themes of the conference, 'The application of Big Data, AI, algorithms and Automatic Decision Making (ADM) in social policy administration.'*

**Stream Description:** The new public governance of activation and employment services is the subject of far-reaching and ongoing reforms. Recent decades have seen the acceleration of New Public Management-oriented models that draw on market competition, performance measurement, and results-based payment models to drive efficiency, innovation and service improvement. Meanwhile, the client groups that employment services are expected to work with have become more diverse, as more and more groups, including lone parents and people with disability have become targeted for activation. This has required employment services to adapt their approaches and integrate a greater range of partner organisations into how they work with clients. Employer-engagement in active labour market programs is recognised as increasingly critical to successfully reintegrating citizens into employment (van Berkel et al. 2017), while many of those now targeted for activation face complex challenges that require coordination between multiple agencies from across different sectors (e.g. housing, addiction services, education, child care).

In the context of employment services faced with such complexity (of providers, clients, and stakeholder networks), the suitability of governance modes that are anchored in competition and financialised performance accountability is increasingly questioned. It is argued that accountability instruments need to be reconfigured based around principles of co-production (Lindsay et al. 2018), network governance (Carter 2019), and public management models that embrace learning and 'the complexity of the real world' (Lowe et al. 2020). Yet, thus far, the application of these more collaborative governance models has largely been confined to the local level, and to programs targeted at niche cohorts such as lone parents. Their capacity to be scaled up to the national level remains untested.

This stream invites contributions that consider how governance and accountability instruments might be adapted to these challenges. We specifically welcome papers that link both the 'what' and the 'how' question of providing employment services and activation programmes:

- Is there an evolution from a single mode of governance towards a multiple mode combining characteristics from all three modes of governance, i.e. hierarchy, markets and networks? What does it imply for the interaction with other actors on the labour market?
- What contribution can governance and accountability mechanisms make to new services? How do governance and accountability mechanisms shape service targeting? What are the negative and undesirable effects?
- How do different accountability instruments affect the capacity of employment services to support new client cohorts, such as migrants, asylum seekers, and those displaced by the Covid crisis?
- How can governance mechanisms be reconfigured to enable multi-actor network and cross-sectoral partnership approaches within employment services?
- How is the application of big data, AI, and automated decision-making shaping the capacity of agencies to personalise employment services and coordinate multi-actor networks of support?

### References

- Carter, E. (2019) 'More than marketised? Exploring the governance and accountability mechanisms at play in Social Impact Bonds', *Journal of Economic Policy Reform*, DOI: 10.1080/17487870.2019.1575736.
- Lindsay, C., Pearson, S., Batty, E., Cullen, A-M, Eadson, W. (2018) 'Co-production as a route to employability: Lessons from services with lone parents', *Public Administration*, 96 (2), 318-332.
- Lowe, T., French, M., Hawkins, M., Hesselgreaves, H., Wilson, R. (2020) 'New development: Responding to complexity in public services—the human learning systems approach', *Public Money & Management*, DOI: 10.1080/09540962.2020.1832738

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