



News Release

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Digital career advisor boosts prospects for jobless, study suggests

A new online search tool could improve job seekers' prospects by offering them career advice as well as a list of vacancies.

An algorithm creates a personalised selection of alternative jobs to one they originally searched for, based on users' transferrable skills and previous career paths.

Researchers say that, compared with existing tools, which suggest a relatively narrow list of related jobs to a user's preferred career, the new tool alerts job seekers to a broader range of career options. These include ones they might not realise they are able to apply for.

A group testing the tool increased its number of job interviews by 44 per cent, a study found.

Researchers at the Universities of Edinburgh and Gothenburg and the European University Institute ran a randomised control trial with 300 job seekers in Edinburgh.

Participants were invited to use a conventional search engine for 12 weeks. They were asked to seek jobs using keywords related to their preferred career, which generated a relatively restricted list of vacancies.

After four weeks, half of the group was offered the new alternative search engine that listed vacancies for other occupations they could consider beyond their original search. These suggestions were based on data showing career shifts that other people with similar skill sets had previously made.

The alternative search engine also flagged the demand for particular occupations in a particular area.

This additional information prompted users to significantly change the jobs they applied for, resulting a boost in the number of interviews by almost half.

The tool proved particularly beneficial for the long-term unemployed and those who initially searched narrowly. The latter group, for example, secured twice as many interviews as their equivalents using the conventional tool.

Experts say the new tool is a low-cost way to encourage jobless people to broaden their search for work, rather than more coercive, labour-intensive strategies such as monitoring applications or imposing sanctions.

The study is part of a project called MacCaLM, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. It is examining how failures in labour and financial markets can cause problems for the wider economy.

Professor Philipp Kircher, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Economics, said: "Until recently many job search websites, including those run by governments, have not provided much help to job seekers, despite many job seekers having to look for alternative types of employment in a rapidly changing economic environment."

"This new tool gives job seekers information in a simple and cost-effective format and it seems to greatly improve their ability to attract interest from employers. We hope this will improve the way job search platforms are structured."

The study has been published in *The Review of Economic Studies*.

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