

We're back to work

Fewer seek benefits as jobs pick up

Employment | James Dowling

THE wheel has turned on the explosion of out-of-work Whitehorse residents seeking unemployment benefits, but experts have watered down the positive results and fear more jobs will fall.

For the first time since the global financial crisis, the Box Hill and Ringwood Centrelink offices recorded falls in the number of people seeking youth or Newstart allowances.

The Ringwood office, which takes in residents from Whitehorse's east, saw a 9.4 per cent drop in people seeking benefits in August – the equivalent of 204 people – while Box Hill recorded a 6.8 per cent drop (147 people).

Before August, the number of people seeking benefits this year had increased each month, with Ringwood ballooning from 1183 in August 2008 to 2197 in July 2009 and Box Hill increasing from 1373 to 2012 in the same period.

Deakin University economics associate professor Mehmet Ulubasoglu said the improved result showed jobseekers had more confidence in the economy, but he believed unemployment had not bottomed out.

“There is generally a lag in unemployment and economic productivity,” Mr Ulubasoglu said.

“We may have seen the bottom point of the economic crisis, but given the lag unemployment may drop again.”

But Mr Ulubasoglu predicted businesses would begin re-hiring by the end of the year.

Robert Pears, the Ringwood manager of Sarina Russo Job Access, said his agency was still inundated with people looking for more work.

“I think people are finding casual and part-time jobs but not getting full-time work,” Mr Pears said.

Box Hill accountant Ken Huang said many of his clients in retail and restaurants had been re-hiring since the beginning of the year.

But Mr Huang said local importers had been badly affected by the Australian dollar's dive last year and the costs of goods had remained high despite the dollar's recovery.