Best ABS figures show unemployment has dropped to 4.9 per cent. Illustration: Karl Hilfinger

Unemployment at work

It's not just Victoria that has recorded a sharp drop in unemployment. Victoria recorded a sharp drop to 5.3 per cent, which is more consistent with recent trends; and Queensland's rate was 5.1 per cent. Reflecting the strong conditions in Western Australia thanks to the mining boom, its unemployment rate was 3.8 per cent. South Australia was 5.2 per cent.

So how does the Australian job market compare with the international market?

Unemployment at 4.9 per cent puts us at the lower end of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. Only Austria (4 per cent), South Korea (3.7 per cent) and Japan (4.5 per cent) have lower rates. China has a low official rate (4 per cent), although due to data-collection methods it is not strictly comparable.

Our rate is comparable with the European powerhouse Germany's (5.6 per cent). We are performing better than the US (8.1 per cent) and Britain (8.2 per cent).

At the other end, Spain (24.1 per cent) and Greece (21.7 per cent) have unemployment levels not seen in Australia since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Our relatively strong performance is attributed to a strong mining sector, government fiscal stimulus during the first phase of the GFC, adjustments to monetary policy by the Reserve Bank, a flexible workforce, a strong banking system and absence of a big housing bust.

Despite the lower unemployment figures, there are a little more than 800,000 people looking for work. So where is the best state or territory for job seekers to look for work?

The ACT is the best place, with 1.5 job seekers to each vacancy as at February. This is followed by WA (1.9) and the Northern Territory (2). The most difficult market is Tasmania, with 10.9 job seekers for each vacancy. NSW (4.1), Victoria and Queensland (both 4.6) fall in the middle. SA is a little higher.

There are signs of some strengthening. The ABS found job vacancies were slightly in February, up 0.3 per cent.

Tools of the Trade

MP3 player

Name: Katie Manitas
Job: Yoga studio owner
Where: Jivamukti Yoga, Sydney
Why is it important? The style of yoga I teach specifically features music. Sound vibration is a big part of the teachings of yoga. We chant om at the beginning of class but that's only the tip of the iceberg. The iPod changed my life! Using it, I can build a playlist choreographed to exactly what I want to teach. Back in the good old days, I had to carry one of those zip-up bags of CDs around and change them as I went. It was like being a DJ without decks.

What do your colleagues think? There's a lot of discussion about whether music is appropriate. Many people say yoga should be a quiet experience. That's how yoga was traditionally practised but I'm not really a traditionalist. I'm about East meets West and the ancient meeting the contemporary.

Unusual moment? There's always the risk that you have your selection of songs but you forget what's coming next, or the iPod will flip out and play something random. I do have some non-yoga-friendly things on my iPod; or a lecture might blow out at an inappropriate moment.

How much does it cost? About $279 for an iPod classic, although any iDevice does the job. Of course, you could use other MP3 players but why would you? Steve Jobs was the coolest guy; he was a yogi, a vegan and had an incredible design aesthetic. He was a genius.

Sue White