

Employment Issues Facing Mature Age Workers and Jobseekers in Tasmania

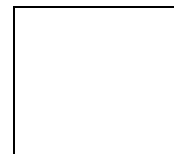


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A project coordinated by the Office of the State Service Commissioner as an
objective of the

Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005

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The views expressed in this report are those of the contributors and are not necessarily those of the Government of Tasmania.

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1. Executive Summary

In December 1999 the State Government released the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005* (TPPA). One objective of this plan was to:

“Conduct research into employment issues for older people in Tasmania including unemployment, access to training and promotional opportunities, compulsory retirement, discrimination on the basis of age and models of inclusive practices for mature age workers”.

It was decided that the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Division of Employment Policy, now Office of the State Service Commissioner, would coordinate a project in consultation with the Employment Working Party from the TPPA, including a pilot study, involving the distribution of a questionnaire to investigate issues relating to mature age workers and mature age jobseekers in Tasmania. For the purpose of this report “mature age” refers to people 45 years of age and above.

Following background research, a questionnaire was developed and distributed to 214 organisations, in both the public and private sectors, on a State-wide basis to four stakeholder groups: employees, employers, employment agencies and mature age jobseekers (unemployed). The return rate for the pilot survey was 21%.

Mature age workers and jobseekers were found to make up a section of the Tasmanian community that has remained largely hidden when it comes to discussions about unemployment. In addition, the nature of mature age unemployment is long-term, which brings with it considerable financial and psychological difficulties.

Results indicated that mature age workers and jobseekers in Tasmania face very similar issues to their counterparts throughout Australia. The Tasmanian population, however, is ageing more rapidly than the rest of Australia, and therefore issues relating to employment for mature age people are of great importance, as it is anticipated that in the near future the mature age group will make up a significant proportion of the working population.

Mature age jobseekers are further burdened by negative perceptions held by employers. Many of these perceptions are not based on fact and are better described as negative stereotypes or ‘myths’ (see right of page). Negative employer attitudes were identified by the pilot survey as the greatest barrier to mature age employment in Tasmania.

Recommendations were developed by the Employment Working Party in consultation with the stakeholders of the pilot study. It is suggested that a multi-sectorial approach should be taken regarding the implementation of the recommendations, reflecting the finding that the question of employment issues facing older Tasmanians is a community issue that needs to be addressed at a number of levels.

--The Myths --

Mature age workers:

- × Require more time off, use more sick leave and have increased absenteeism due to health problems
- × Are overqualified and are therefore unlikely to remain in the job
- × Lack flexibility in terms of the hours they are able to work
- × Are less presentable/attractive than youth, especially for front counter or reception work
- × Are more expensive to employ compared to juniors
- × Are more expensive to insure as more prone to injury causing increased workers compensation premiums
- × Have outdated skills and lack technological knowledge and skills, particularly in IT.
- × Are harder to train and are not willing to retrain
- × Are not willing to change

--The Reality --

Mature age workers:

- ✓ **Have lower absenteeism than younger workers. Many businesses have reported a reduction in absenteeism due to illness or injury when they have recruited mature age workers**
- ✓ **Have fewer accidents per employee hour than younger workers**
- ✓ **Have better judgment and critical thinking abilities**
- ✓ **Have higher productivity than younger workers**
- ✓ **Are often engaged by a task, have improved concentration and work to improve their skills**
- ✓ **Are willing to take up training opportunities – a Drake survey indicated 86% of mature age workers are more than happy to under go training**
- ✓ **Have greater company loyalty and if provided with training will stay with the organisation that trained them as long as the organisation will let them**
- ✓ **Have considerable wisdom, knowledge and experience which provides an excellent mentoring asset**
- ✓ **The over-50 age group has the fastest uptake of internet usage – myths about mature age workers not being able to adapt to technology are no longer valid**

Source: see page 25

2. Introduction

In December 1999 the State Government released the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005* as part of The International Year of Older Persons. The plan outlined 80 strategies endorsed by government and suggested initiatives for community organisations, businesses and local government, as well as ideas for individuals, towards positive ageing. In developing the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005*, extensive community consultations were held to elicit the major issues and concerns for older people and for the community as the population ages. These consultations included over 250 organisations responding to a Discussion Paper on positive ageing issues and community meetings with over 250 people throughout Tasmania.

Throughout the consultations, issues pertaining to mature age workers and unemployed people were often raised. Respondents felt that specific strategies and policies needed to be put in place to enhance mature age workers' continuing participation in the workforce and to support mature age unemployed people. An Employment Working Party (See Appendix 1.) was established to recommend strategies to be included in the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005*. The Employment Working Party, however, was unable to suggest strategies to deal with issues pertaining to mature age workers and unemployed people in Tasmania, as no current data specific to Tasmania was available. The Employment Working Party recommended that research on issues pertaining to mature age workers and mature age unemployed people specific to Tasmania was required.

As part of the Objective in the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005* "To increase the participation of older Tasmanians in recreation, paid work and voluntary activities"¹ the government proposed to:

Conduct research into employment issues for older people in Tasmania including unemployment, access to training and promotional opportunities, compulsory retirement, discrimination on the basis of age and models of inclusive practices for mature age workers. ²

This research was assigned to the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005* and hence the above strategy were endorsed by Cabinet in November 1999.

2.1 Key Outcomes and Outputs of the Project

The following is a list of outputs and outcomes for the research project that were mutually agreed on by DPAC and DHHS:

- (i) Current research on issues pertaining to mature age workers and mature age unemployed people in Tasmania.
- (ii) Recommendations on actions to deal with the issues identified through the research.

¹ Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005, p 13

² Ibid

- (iii) Greater awareness in Tasmania of the issues relating to mature age workers and mature age unemployed people.
- (iv) Cooperation amongst key government and community stakeholders in identifying issues pertaining to mature age workers and mature age unemployed people in Tasmania.

2.2 Research Plan

It was decided that the Office of the State Service Commissioner would undertake the research, with the support of the DHHS Seniors Bureau. In order to provide the key outcomes and outputs it was decided that a pilot study would be conducted, involving the distribution of a questionnaire to survey perceptions relating to mature age workers and mature age unemployed people in Tasmania.

The Pilot Study

- 1 Aim: To provide a “snapshot” of the situation for mature age workers and mature age unemployed people in Tasmania.
- 2 Stakeholders: Employees (mature age workers), mature age unemployed people, employers and employment agencies
- 3 Instrument: Qualitative questionnaire
- 4 Distribution area: State-wide
- 5 Distribution targets – Industry groups: Aged Care, aquaculture, finance, hospitality, information technology, insurance, manufacturing, mining, public sector, retail.

Interim Report

An interim report was to be finalised by January 2001. The aim of the interim report was to examine issues facing mature age workers and mature age unemployed people in Tasmania, including background research on the national situation for mature age workers and unemployed people, the provision of data specific to Tasmania, and the presentation of the results of the pilot study. It was decided that recommendations would not be made on the findings of the interim report alone, and that it was more appropriate to hold a workshop, including representation from each from the stakeholder groups as well as the members of the Employment Working Party, to develop recommendations.

Workshop

- 1 Aim: To develop recommendations based on the findings of the Interim Report on Issues Facing Mature Age Workers and Mature Age Unemployed People in Tasmania.
- 2 Participants: Stakeholder groups involved in the pilot study: employees, employers, unemployed, employment agencies, the Employment Working Party.
- 3 Duration: One day.

Final Report

The final report incorporates the interim report, details of the workshop and recommendation development process and presents recommendations as finalised by the Employment Working Party.

Note: For the purpose of this report “mature age” refers to people 45 years of age and above.

3. Recommendations

Preface

Following the workshop, working party members met to finalise the recommendations, using the key themes and suggestions made at the workshop. A theme consistently raised in the *Interim Report on Issues Facing Mature Age Workers and Mature Age Unemployed People in Tasmania*, the workshop following the report and the Information Session was the issue of the shortage of jobs in Tasmania and the need for job creation. Addressing the issue of the need for job creation in Tasmania was considered beyond the scope of this report. However, all recommendations should be interpreted with the need for job creation as a prevailing factor.

⇒ Recommendations relating to the promotion of issues relating to mature age employment and unemployment

It is recommended that:

- A promotional campaign that involves all key stakeholders be developed to promote the positives of mature age workers and dispel myths and negative stereotypes.
 - The campaign should promote the value of having mature age people in the workplace.
 - A significant myth that needs to be dispelled is that mature age people are “anti-information technology”.
- In conjunction with key stakeholders, the option of a specific Government Office or Department for dealing with issues relating to employment and unemployment for all sectors of the community (not just the public sector) be explored.
- Organisations promote the skills that mature age workers have to offer in terms of strategic planning, for example corporate knowledge, human relations, judgment and critical thinking.

⇒ Recommendations relating to training and work experience

It is recommended that:

- The link between training courses and employment be promoted as a key policy issue.
- Training providers and employers include work placement programs as part of training courses for mature age jobseekers.
- Existing information relating to skills desired by employers be used/analysed to develop a whole-of-Government and key stakeholder approach to identify current and future skills needs in order to provide relevant training to mature age jobseekers.

Recommendations relating to training (continued)

It is recommended that:

- Training be provided for mature age jobseekers in using the Internet as a jobsearch tool.
- The provision of employment programs such as traineeships for mature age jobseekers be investigated.
- Links with organisations that may be able to provide work experience for mature age jobseekers be investigated.
- Organisations be encouraged to provide work experience for mature age jobseekers.
- Training be provided on the general selection process that occurs when applying for a job. For example, writing the application and addressing selection criteria, presentation at interview, and appropriate referees.

⇒ Recommendations relating to skills recognition

It is recommended that:

- A method of formally recognising mature age jobseekers' current competencies be developed - for example, a "skills passport" or other certification.
- Ways to formally recognise competencies be developed, including the promotion of Recognition of Prior Learning and Recognition of Current Competencies, across all sectors and mature age jobseekers be informed about the process.
- The processes of Recognition of Prior Learning and Recognition of Current Competencies be investigated with the aim of minimising costs for mature age jobseekers and other stakeholders to gain access to these services.
- Employers recognise work skills acquired through volunteer and unpaid work.

⇒ Recommendations relating to support for mature age jobseekers

It is recommended that:

- Career information and counselling, and awareness of their availability, be offered to mature age jobseekers.
- Support groups for mature age jobseekers be developed and resourced.
- Government consider including in job advertisements whether a job is a result of a restructure and/or if somebody is currently fulfilling the duties in an acting capacity.

Recommendations relating to support for mature age jobseekers (continued)

- Organisations consider adopting flexible work practices for mature age workers, such as working from home, part-time and phased retirement.
- Options be explored for providing assistance to help mature age jobseekers maintain self-esteem and motivation.

Recommendations: Formulation and Aims for Implementation

The recommendations for this report were finalised by members of the Employment Working Party of the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005*, following consultation with stakeholders of the project during the course of a one-day workshop. As stated previously, members of the Employment Working Party represented a number of Tasmanian organisations and community groups including Unions Tasmania, the Tasmanian Council of Social Service, The Council on the Ageing, the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Working Women's Centre and a number of State Government Agencies. As a result of the wide community representation in the Employment Working Party, it was decided that recommendations should be implemented using a multi-sectorial approach in recognition of the finding that the question of employment issues facing older Tasmanians is a community issue that needs to be addressed at a number of levels within the Tasmanian community.

4. Background

The last two decades of the 20th Century have seen transformation in the nature of work. Driven by technological change and innovation in the ongoing quest for improvements in productivity, the nature of work has altered with a shift in focus from primary industries such as mining and manufacturing to tertiary activities such as retail, hospitality and personal services³. These trends have gone hand in hand with improvements in population health, increases in education levels and less reliance on manual labour through the support of modern technology, which have contributed to a larger mature age workforce that possesses enhanced capacity for work beyond what, in the past, has been considered retirement age⁴.

Changing labour market dynamics have resulted in disruption to traditional work options and employment patterns for many people, but in particular those of mature age. Mature age workers have been in the forefront of major restructuring initiatives, which have often involved the widespread use of retrenchment processes and severance payments⁵. Such large scale retrenchments and downsizing of organisations have contributed to the early retirement of many able workers. This loss of older workers from the workforce is occurring at a time when the “economy is expanding, work hours are increasing and skill shortages exist in some industries”⁶.

Forcing mature age workers from the labour market has been described as an “expensive”⁷ manner in which to restructure enterprises, both socially and economically. Premature retirement of workers increases the number of people dependent on a shrinking taxation revenue base⁸ and results in a significant loss of knowledge, skills and experience. Socially, involuntary unemployment brings with it the difficulties of having no work and, particularly for mature age people, may bring extra burdens due to family responsibilities and commitments. On the other hand, employment of older workers raises tax revenues at the same time as reducing welfare spending, providing economic benefits for the individual and the nation⁹.

4.1 Demographic Trends: Australia

Australia, like many industrialised countries, has experienced an increase in the proportion of older persons in the population (See Figure 1)¹⁰. In 1901, 37% of the population were aged under 15 years of age and by 1998 this proportion had fallen to around 21%. Conversely, the proportion of the population aged 65 years and over has increased markedly, from 4% of the population in 1902 to 12% in 1998.¹¹

Demographics show that Australia’s workforce is ageing. Rapid decline in birth rates and increases in life expectancy have seen fewer young people entering the workforce, while the first of the baby-boom generation are turning fifty years of age.

³ Minister for Aged Care, *Employment for Mature Age Workers Issues Paper*, The National Strategy for an Ageing Australia, 1999

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Hayward H. *Older Workers: Do they have a Future?* A paper presented at the Inaugural National COTA Congress, Adelaide, 1999

⁷ Minister for Aged Care, *Employment for Mature Age Workers Issues Paper*, The National Strategy for an Ageing Australia, 1999

⁸ Mission Australia, 2000, *No use by date*, An advocacy statement on mature age workers and unemployed

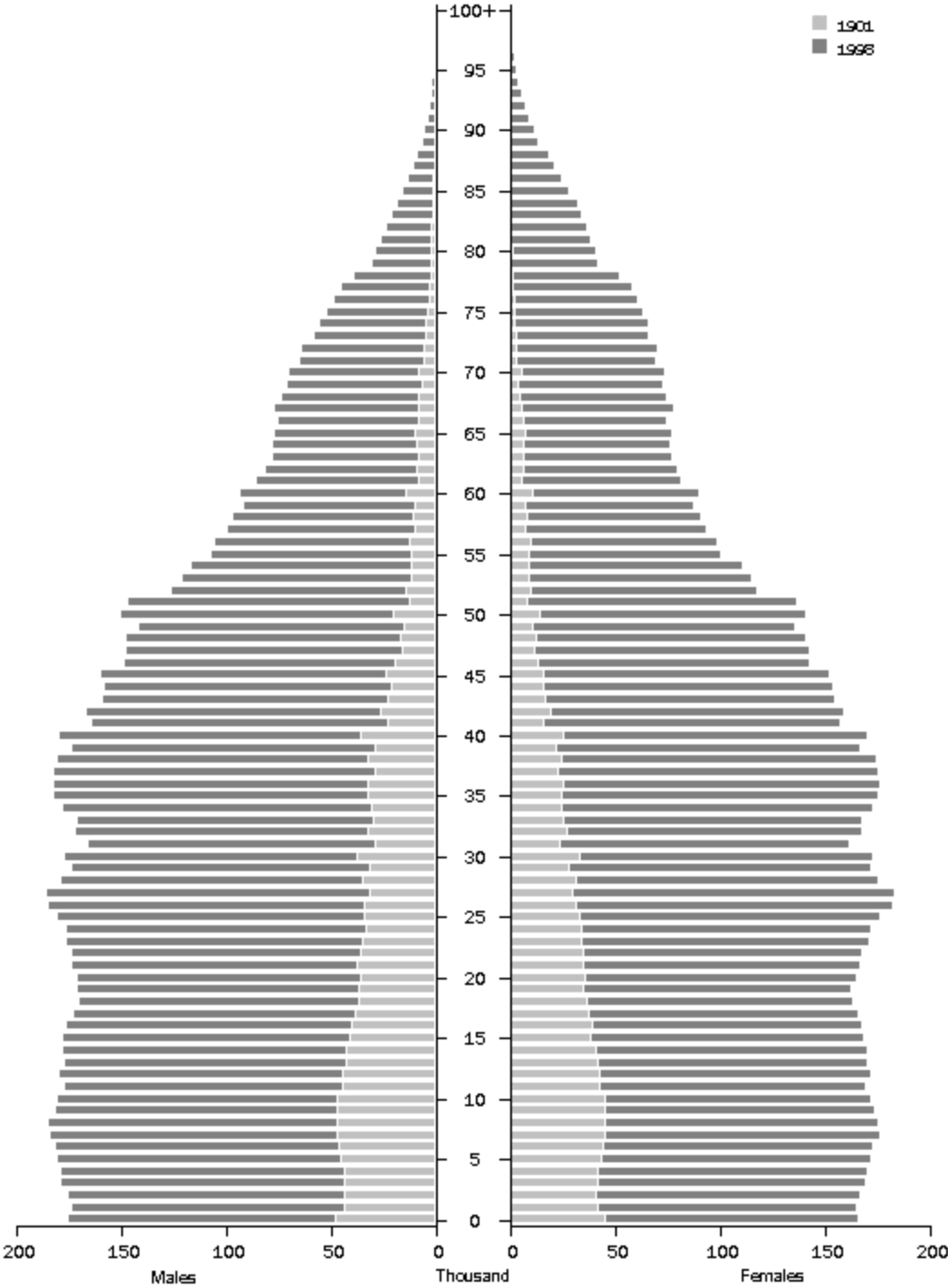
⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ www.abs.gov.au

¹¹ www.abs.gov.au

Figure 1

Since the turn of the century the population at all ages has grown significantly, but it has also aged. This is illustrated in Figure 1 for the years 1901 and 1998.



Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000, www.abs.gov.au, (3201.1)

Australia's population was 13 million people in 1971 and is projected to grow to approximately 25.4 million by 2051¹². While population growth was around 1.6% in 1971, it had trended down to around 1.2% in 1999 and is predicted to fall to just over 0.1% by 2051¹³. Based on these projections, whilst the working age population currently grows by 170 000 people each year, during the 2020s the working age population is expected to grow by only 125 000 for the entire decade¹⁴. This is coupled with the fact that, while today there are 2.3 million people over 65 years of age, or 12% of the total population, by 2021 there will be 4.0 million, or 18%. By 2041, 25% of the population will be aged over 65 years of age while in 2051 projections estimate 30% of the population will be aged over 65 years of age¹⁵ (See Figures 2 and 3).

When compared internationally, Australia's population to age ratio follows a similar pattern to that found throughout the developed world. Along with Canada, New Zealand and the United States, Australia has a lower level of ageing than many European countries. In 1995, 12% of Australians were aged 65 years and over compared with 18% in Sweden, 17% in Italy, and 16% in the United Kingdom and Greece. Other countries (especially many in the Asia/Pacific region) have lower proportions of older people than Australia.¹⁶

4.2 Demographic Trends: Tasmania

Population trends in terms of ageing in Tasmania follow the general curve for the rest of Australia. However, they are markedly more pronounced. While the state with the highest proportion of people aged 65 years of age and older is currently South Australia, with 14%, Tasmania closely follows, together with New South Wales and Victoria, with 13% of the population over 65 years of age.

Over the next 50 years it is predicted that the proportion of the older population will increase in every state, in particular in Tasmania. By 2051 it is expected that the proportion of people over 65 years of age in Tasmania will be between 30% and 39%, compared to 28-32% in South Australia (See Figures 2 and 3)¹⁷. This trend is perhaps best demonstrated by examining median age. In 1999 the median age of the Tasmanian population was 36.1 years, while it is predicted that in 2051 the median age for Tasmania will be 51 years¹⁸. This figure for Tasmania is three years greater than that of the state with the second oldest predicted median age for 2051, South Australia (48 years), and nearly six years greater than the national predicted median age of 44.1 years¹⁹. Figures 4 and 5 show the median ages for Australian states in 1999 and predictions for 2051.

Tasmania is currently experiencing negative population growth. While Tasmania's population was 470 000 in 1999, this figure represents a population decline of 1400 for the period 1998-1999. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates in its population projections for 1999 that by 2051 Tasmania's population will have reduced to 310 000.

Minister for Aged Care, *Employment for Mature Age Workers Issues Paper*, The National Strategy for an Ageing Australia, 1999

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ www.abs.gov.au

¹⁷ ABS, 2000, Australian Social Trends

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

Figure 2: Age composition of Australian population 1999

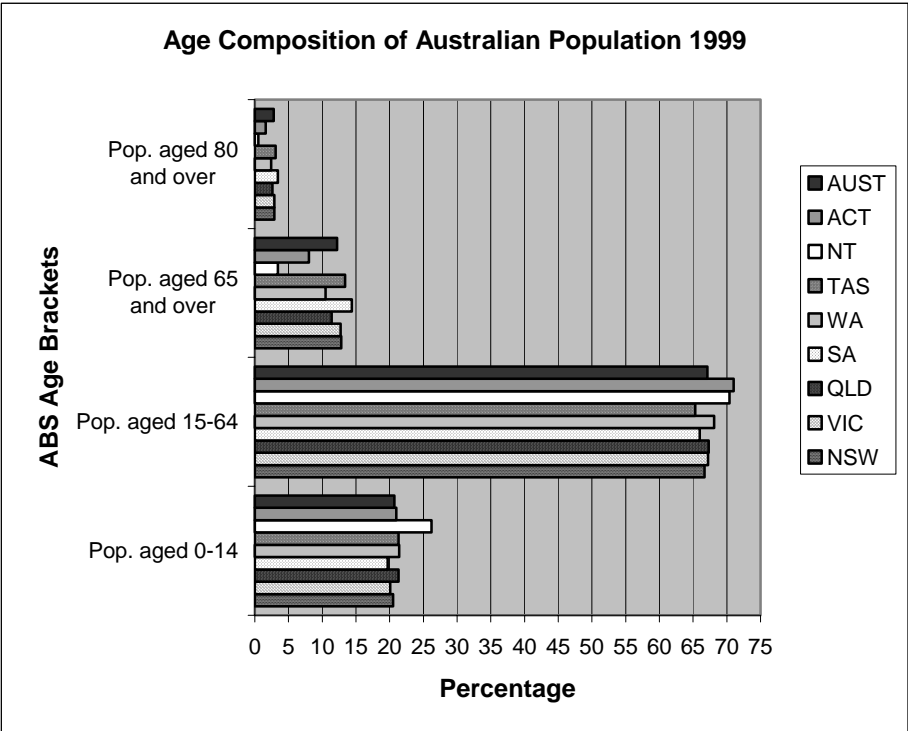
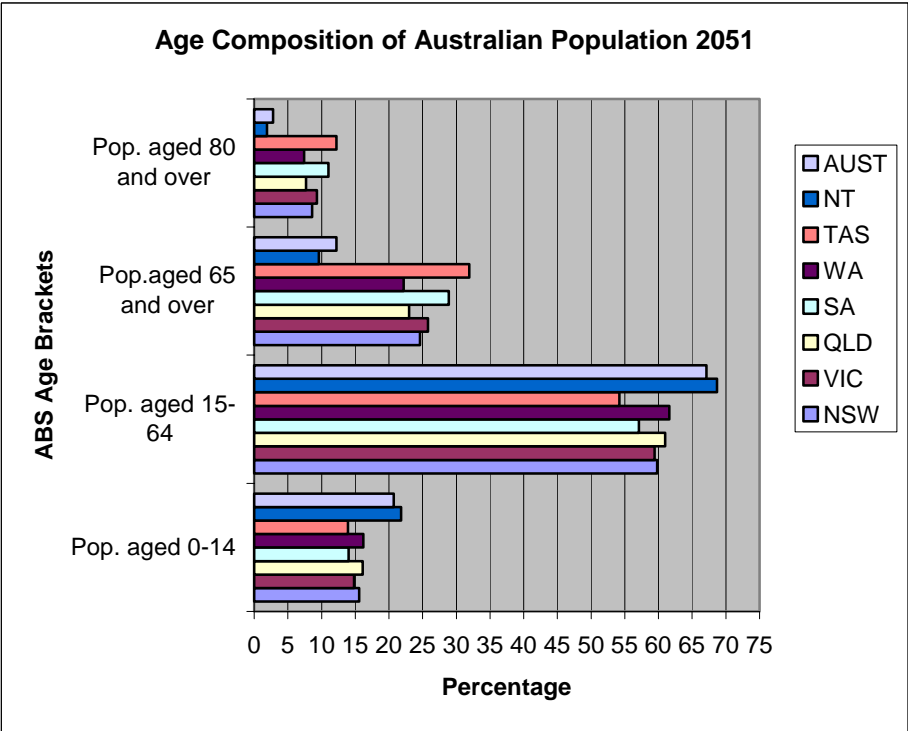


Figure 3: Age composition of Australian population projected for 2051



Source: ABS, 2000, Australian Social Trends

Figure 4: Median age of State and total population for 1999

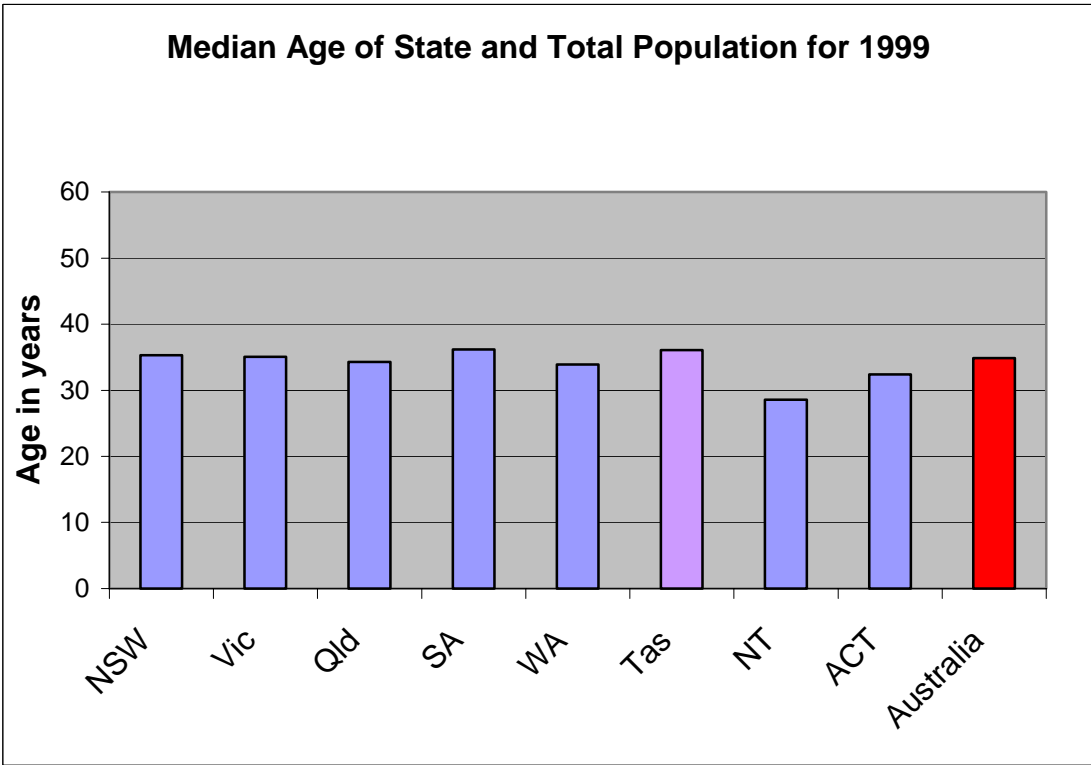
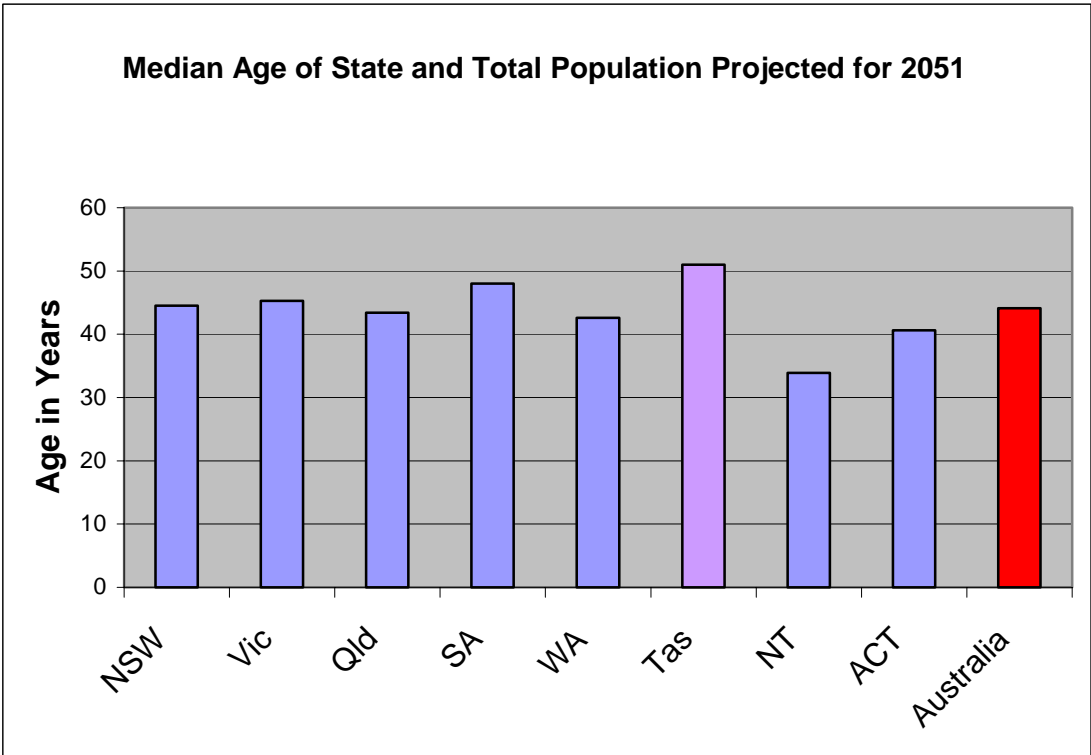


Figure 5: Projection of median age of State and total population for 2051



Source: ABS, 2000, Australian Social Trends

The expectation that Tasmania will have a smaller, older population in the near future highlights the importance of issues relating to employment for mature age people, as it is anticipated that the mature age group will make up a significant proportion of the working population.

4.3 Tasmania: Employment and Unemployment

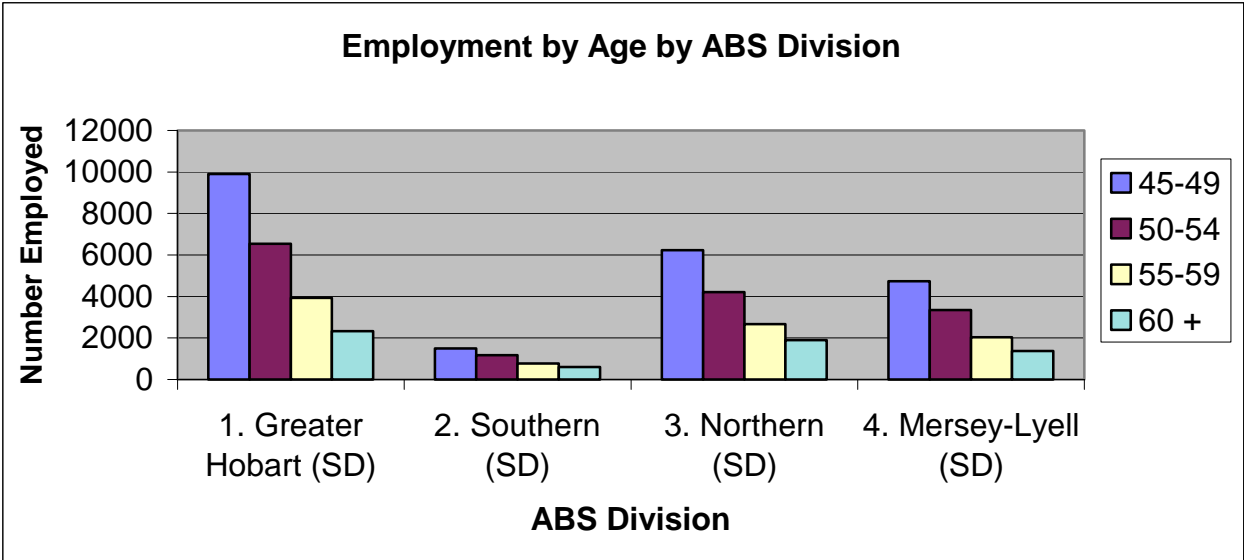
Both census and labour force statistics are reported in this publication. Whilst the same definitions of ‘employed’ and ‘unemployed’ are used for both census and labour force data collection, labour force data is based on a sample of the population, unlike the census which enumerates the entire population, hence differences may occur between the two in overall figures. Although census data may be more truly representative, as it is now four years since the last census was held (1996), labour force statistics relevant to August 2000 have also been included.

1996 Census Data

Employment

In 1996 the number of Tasmanians employed was 176 348. Of this total figure, 53 234 (30%) were aged 45 years and older. Figure 6 shows a breakdown of employment figures for age brackets 45-49, 50-54, 55-59 and 60+ for the four ABS statistical divisions of Tasmania.

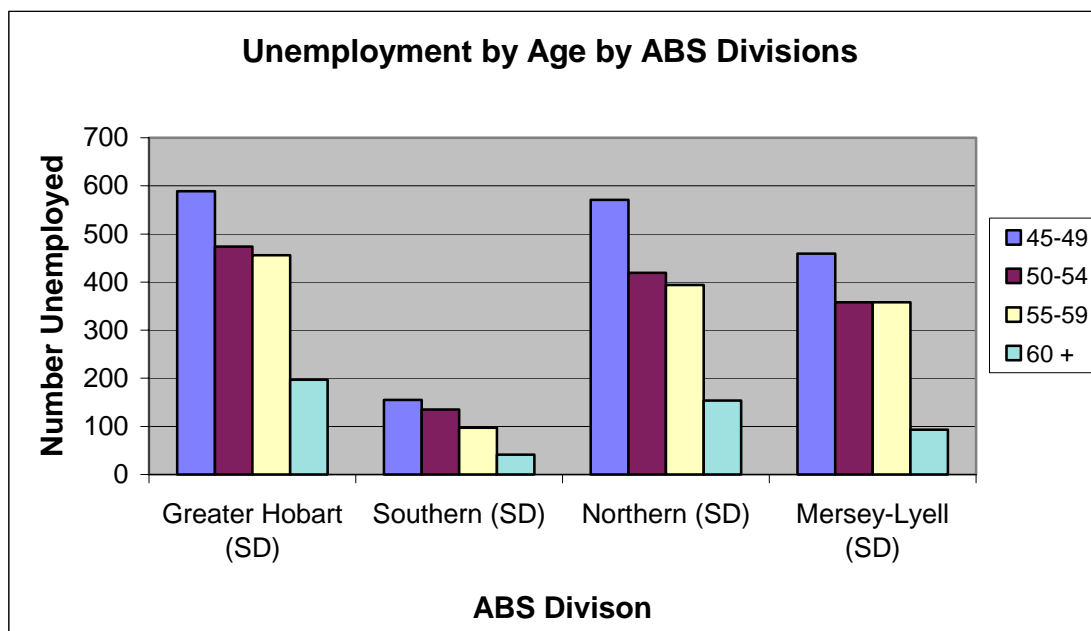
Figure 6: Employment figures for age brackets 45-49, 50-54, 55-59 and 60+ for the four ABS statistical divisions of Tasmania



Unemployment

In 1996 the number of unemployed Tasmanians was 22 442. Of this total figure, 4 950 (22%) were aged 45 years and older. Figure 7 shows a breakdown of unemployment figures for age brackets 45-49, 50-54, 55-59 and 60+ for the four ABS statistical divisions of Tasmania.

Figure 7: Unemployment figures for the four ABS statistical divisions of Tasmania

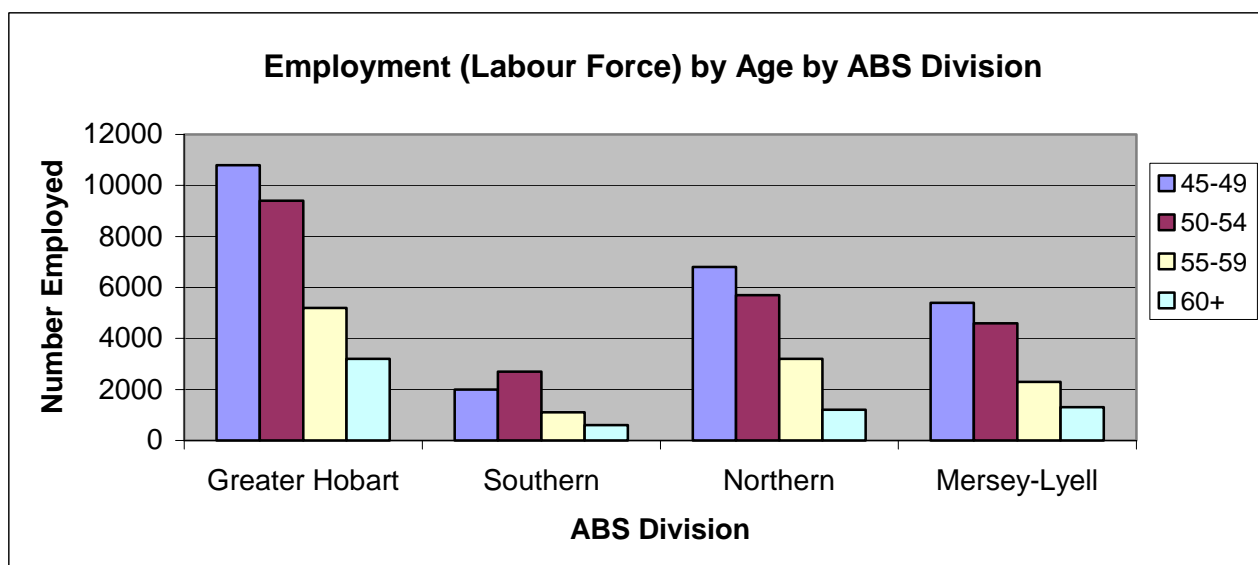


Labour Force data – August 2000

Employment

Labour force statistics for August 2000 indicated that the total number of people employed in Tasmania was 196 700. Of this total figure, 65 500 (33%) were aged 45 years or older. Figure 8 shows a breakdown of labour force employment figures for age brackets 45-49, 50-54, 55-59 and 60+ for the four ABS statistical divisions of Tasmania at August 2000.

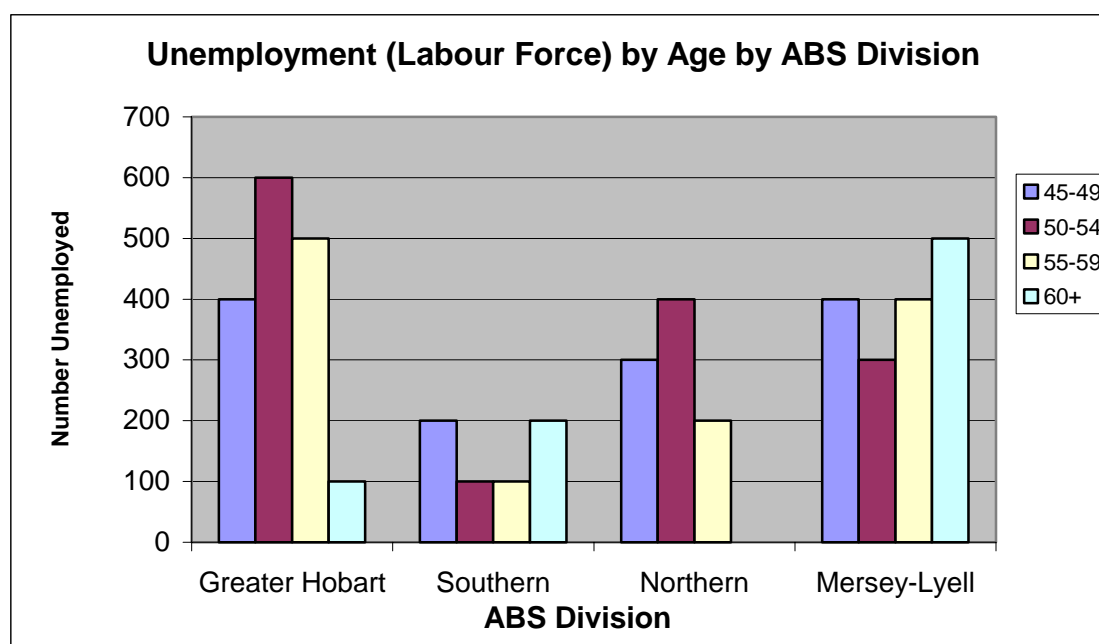
Figure 8: Labour force employment figures for the four ABS statistical divisions of Tasmania



Unemployment

Labour force data for August 2000 showed the total number of unemployed Tasmanians was 21 800. Of this total figure, 4 700 (21%) were aged 45 years of age or older. Figure 9 shows a breakdown of labour force unemployment figures for age brackets 45-49, 50-54, 55-59 and 60+ for the four ABS statistical divisions of Tasmania at August 2000.

Figure 9: Labour force unemployment figures for the four ABS statistical divisions of Tasmania



4.4 Distribution of Mature Age Unemployment in Tasmania

While total mature age unemployment for Tasmania represented 22% of total state unemployment (based on 1996 census data) some areas of Tasmania experienced much higher levels of mature age unemployment than others. 1996 census data was collated to show mature age unemployment for local government areas in Tasmania (see Table 1). In 1996 mature age unemployment was highest in the Central Highlands (36%) and lowest in Brighton (14%).

4.5 Employment and Occupation Categories for Tasmanian Statistical Divisions

The Australian Bureau of Statistics occupational category classifications indicate that in 1996 the majority of employed Tasmanians 45 years of age and older in the Greater Hobart Division worked as intermediate clerical and service workers, followed by education professionals (see Figure 10). In contrast, the majority of Tasmanians employed in the Southern Division were employed as farmers and farm managers, followed by labourers (see Figure 11). For the Northern Division, farmers and farm managers were the largest occupation group of employed Tasmanians 45 years of age and older, followed by elementary sales and service workers, intermediate clerical and services workers and education professionals (see Figure 12). For the Mersey-Lyell Division farmers and farm managers were also the largest occupational group, followed by elementary sales and service workers, intermediate clerical and services workers and education professionals (see Figure 13).

Table 1: Mature age unemployment for local government areas of Tasmania

Tasmanian Local Government Areas	% of Mature Age Unemployment
Brighton (M)	14.00
Hobart (C)	16.60
Launceston (C)	20.77
Huon Valley (M)	20.82
Devonport (C)	21.03
Kentish (M)	21.08
Kingborough (M)	21.51
Central Coast (M)	21.68
Burnie (C)	21.89
Clarence (C)	22.16
Circular Head (M)	22.22
Glenorchy (C)	22.64
Waratah/Wynyard (M)	22.70
King Island (M)	22.85
Southern Midlands (M)	23.37
Latrobe (M)	23.76
George Town (M)	24.05
Sorell (M)	24.42
West Tamar (M)	25.12
Derwent Valley (M)	25.56
Meander Valley (M)	26.42
Tasman (M)	27.27
Dorset (M)	27.90
West Coast (M)	28.27
Break O'Day (M)	28.87
Northern Midlands (M)	29.54
Flinders (M)	30.00
Glamorgan/Spring Bay (M)	30.04
Central Highlands (M)	36.20
Total mature age unemployment for Tasmania	22.05

Source: ABS 1996 Census

Figure 10: Occupational categories for the Greater Hobart Statistical Division

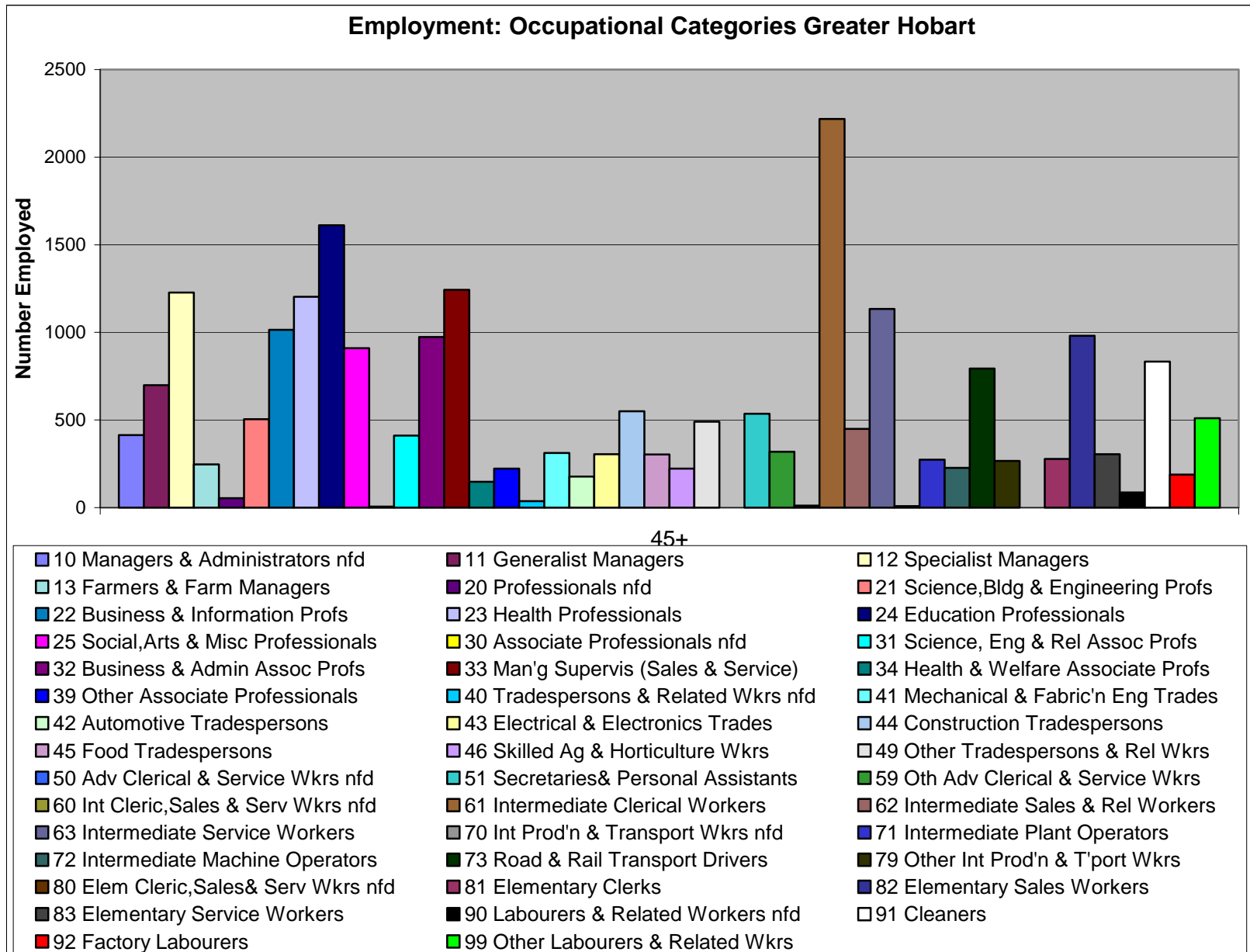


Figure 11: Occupational categories for the Southern Statistical Division

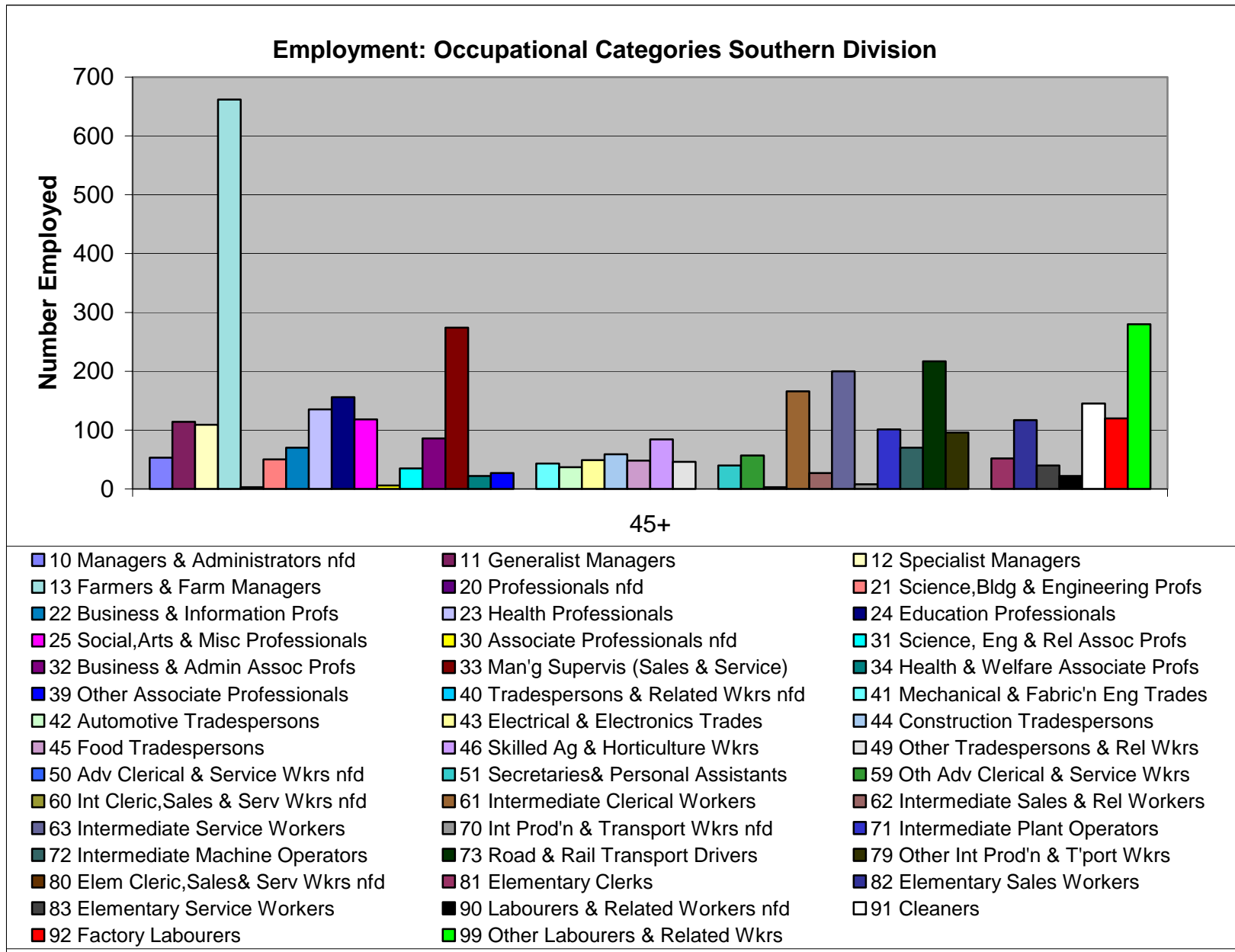


Figure 12: Occupational categories for the Northern Statistical Division

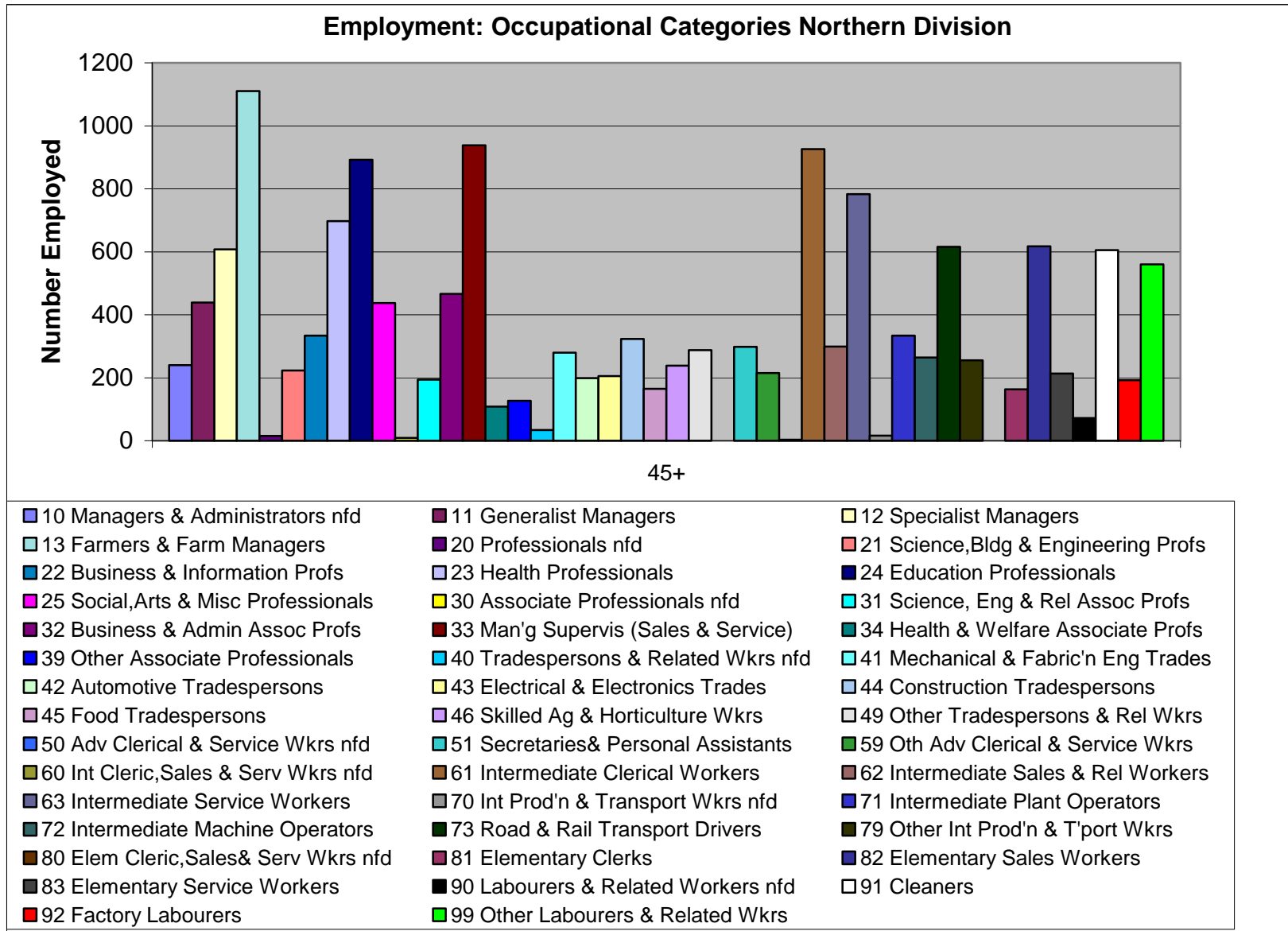
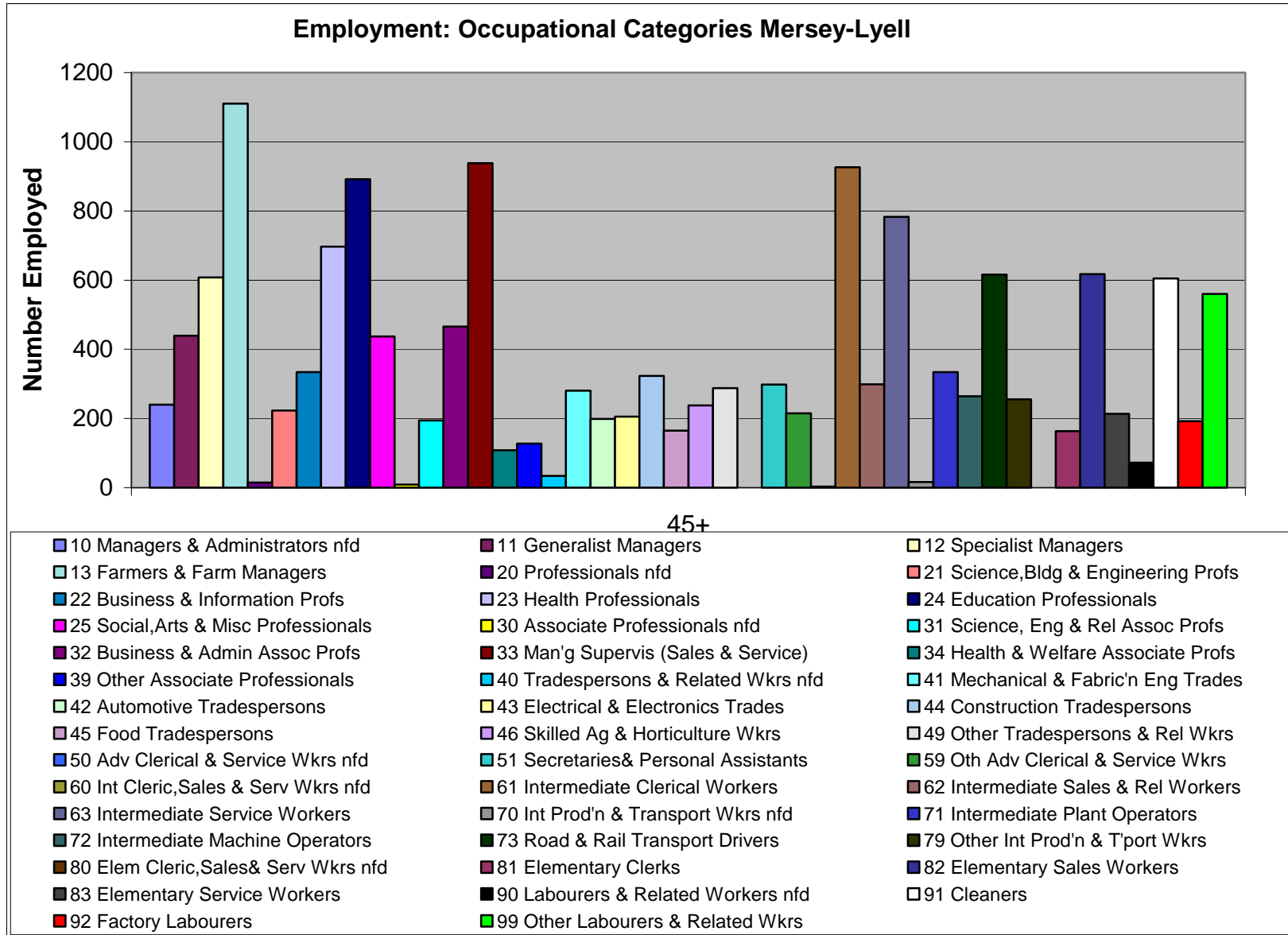


Figure 13: Occupational categories for the Mersey-Lyell Statistical Division



4.6 Healthy Communities Survey Tasmania 1998

Employment Satisfaction

The *Healthy Communities Survey* was conducted in Tasmania in 1998 and was designed to measure the health and wellbeing of the adult Tasmanian population²⁰. The survey was developed and conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services, Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Unit, after wide consultation with the community, departmental staff, the University of Tasmania, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, and the Institute of Family Studies.

One issue investigated by the *Healthy Communities Survey* was the level of satisfaction of individuals with regard to different aspects of their employment. Based on the raw data from the *Healthy Communities Survey*, Table 2 shows levels of satisfaction for employed Tasmanians 45 years of age and older (1998) in relation to six aspects of their employment. From Table 2 it can be seen that the majority of Tasmanian workers 45 years of age and older, who completed the *Healthy Communities Survey*, were satisfied with the number of hours they worked, the flexibility of their working hours, the level of responsibility held at work, their relationship with their employer/supervisor, job security and the level of respect given to them at work.

Table 2: Levels of satisfaction for six aspects of employment for Tasmanian workers 45 years of age and older

Aspect of employment	Number of responses	% Satisfied	% Unsatisfied
Number of hours worked	2138	85%	15%
Flexibility of working hours	2038	90%	10%
Level of responsibility held	2180	94.5%	5.5%
Relationship with employer/supervisor	1950	93%	7%
Job security	1908	78%	22%
Respect at work	2115	92%	8%

Responses to the Tasmanian *Healthy Communities Survey* from employed males and females 45 years of age and older were similar in relation to job satisfaction for each of the six abovementioned aspects of employment. Figures 14 to 19 show male and female responses in relation to employment satisfaction in graphical format. While male and female responses were very similar, the most visible difference between male and female responses can be seen for satisfaction related to perceived job security, where 82% of females 45 years of age and older indicated they were satisfied with the security of their job, compared to 75% of males 45 years of age and older.

²⁰ Health and Wellbeing Outcomes Unit, Department of Health and Human Services, Tasmania, First Results of the *Healthy Communities Survey*, 1998.

Figure 14: Satisfaction for the number of hours worked by gender for mature age workers in Tasmania who responded to the *Healthy Communities Survey, 1998*

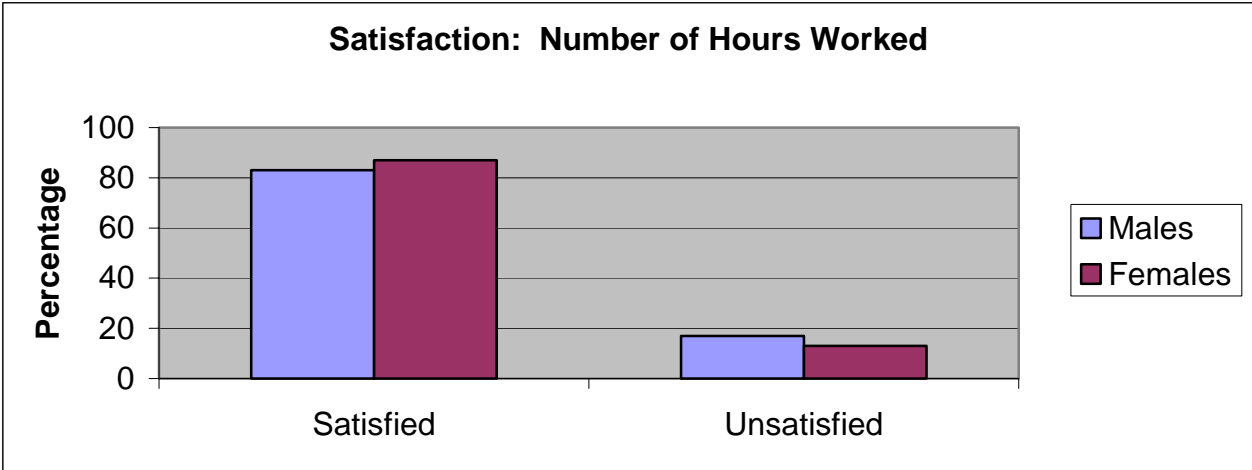


Figure 15: Satisfaction for flexibility of working hours by gender for mature age workers in Tasmania who responded to the *Healthy Communities Survey, 1998*

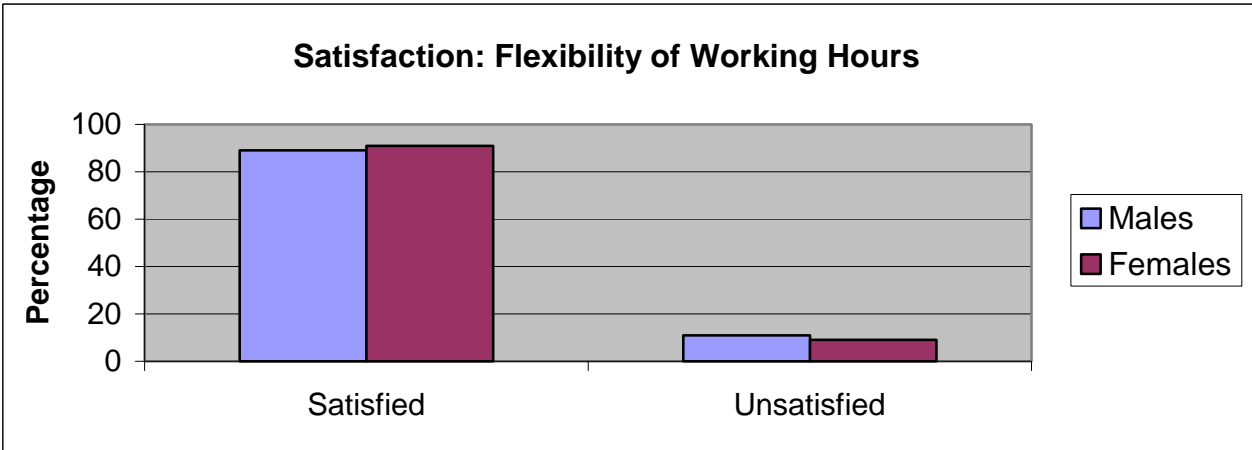


Figure 16: Satisfaction for level of responsibility at work by gender for mature age workers in Tasmania who responded to the *Healthy Communities Survey, 1998*

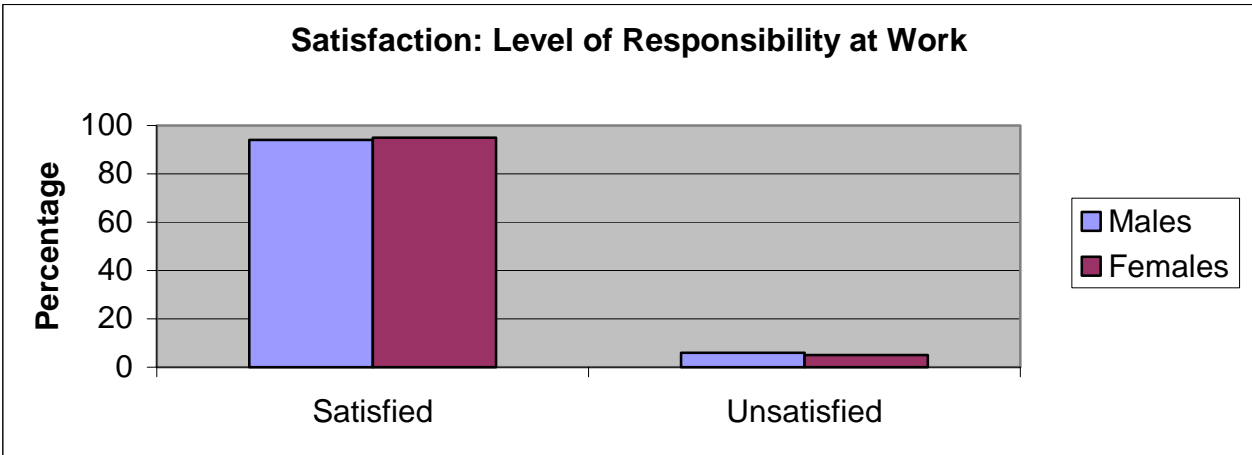


Figure 17: Satisfaction for relationship with employer/supervisor by gender for mature age workers in Tasmania who responded to the *Healthy Communities Survey, 1998*

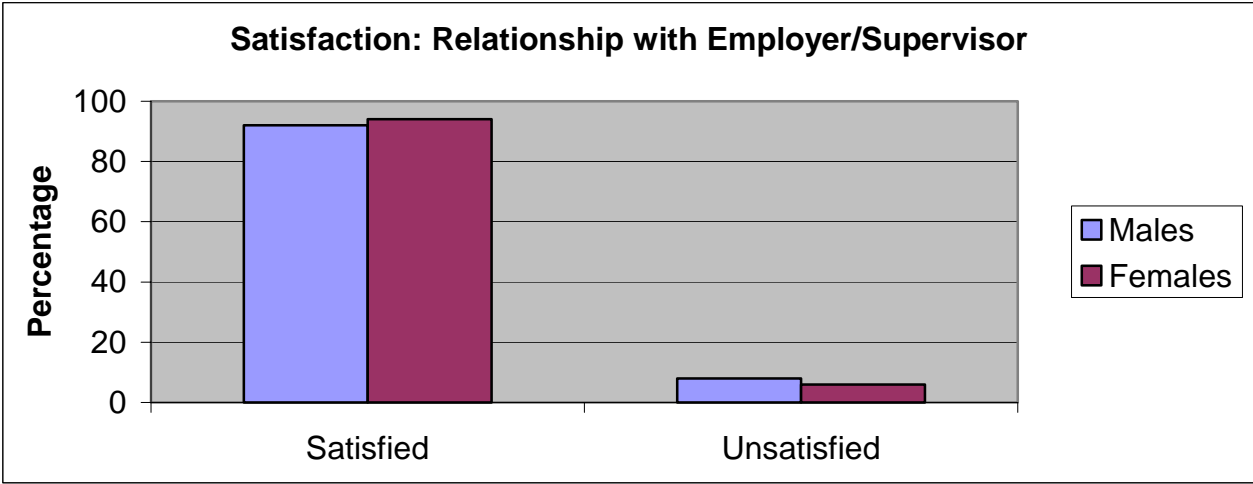


Figure 18: Satisfaction for job security by gender for mature age workers in Tasmania who responded to the *Healthy Communities Survey, 1998*

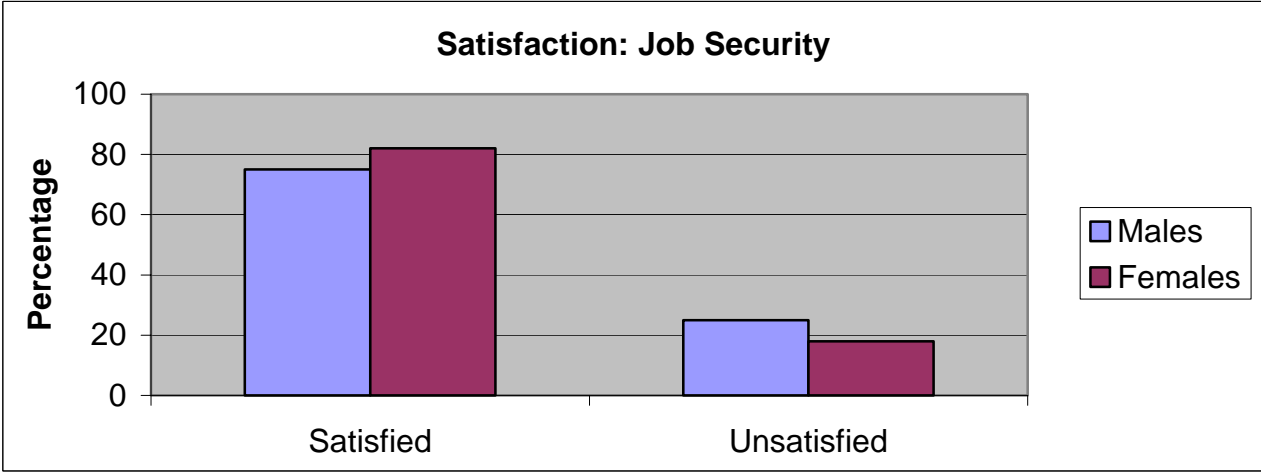


Figure 19: Satisfaction for level of respect at work by gender for mature age workers in Tasmania who responded to the *Healthy Communities Survey, 1998*



5. Issues Facing Mature Age Workers

5.1 Research on Mature Age Workers and the Ageing Workforce

The issue of Australia's ageing workforce and the situation for mature age workers and mature age unemployed people has gained momentum during the past two years. A significant amount of research has been conducted at the Federal Government level, as well as research and advocacy for the issue by numerous non-governmental organisations and academics. The result of such research has been that issues relating to older workers and the ageing workforce have emerged in public policy agendas in a variety of ways²¹. In particular, the following reports have provided detailed research and initiatives:

- *Age Counts*, the report of the inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations into issues for older workers, released in August 2000.
- *Older Australians: A Working Future?* Volume 10 of *Strategic Ageing*, Council on Ageing and Committee for Economic Development of Australia, 2000.
- *No 'use by date'*, an advocacy statement on mature age workers and unemployment, Mission Australia, 2000.
- *Age Matters, a report on age discrimination*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, May 2000.
- *The National Strategy for an Ageing Australia, Employment for Mature Age Workers Issues Paper*, The Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP, Minister for Aged Care, November 1999.

5.2 Long-term Unemployment

Australia's population and workforce is ageing. As a result of factors such as a declining birth rate and increased longevity, in the future mature age workers will form a much larger proportion of the Australian workforce than they do at present. Australia's workforce is predicted to grow by 13.8% between 1998 and 2008, to just over 10.5 million people, of which the 45-64 year age group is expected to contribute over 65% of growth²². The issue of an ageing workforce set within the context of rapid economic and technological change has seen mature age workers diversely affected by the subsequent outcomes. While at one level mature age workers have improved their overall position in the Australian labour market, at the same time economic forces and industry restructuring has seen many older workers retrenched or made redundant. For those mature age workers who lose their jobs, many are likely to experience long periods of unemployment or be forced into an early retirement.

A feature of many modern economies, including Australia, has been a preference in the labour market for recruiting younger workers²³. This trend, combined with labour market forces such as the downsizing of workforces, a practice which has largely affected mature age workers, has raised questions about wasting the opportunities and skills of mature age workers at a time when the economy is expanding, work hours are increasing and skills shortages already exist in some industries²⁴. As well as the economic implications of skills shortages and increased numbers of people accessing income support due to forced retirement, the premature loss of older workers from the workforce has enormous social consequences - in particular, long-term unemployment.

²¹ Council on the Ageing, 2000, *Older Australians: A Working Future? Strategic Ageing, Vol 10, 2000*

²² Minister for Aged Care, *Employment for Mature Age Workers Issues Paper*, The National Strategy for an Ageing Australia, 1999

²³ Council on the Ageing, 2000, *Older Australians: A Working Future? Strategic Ageing, Vol 10, 2000*

²⁴ Hayward, H. 1999. National Council on the Ageing Congress Program and Abstracts, p. 21

Mature age workers make up a section of the community that has remained largely hidden when it comes to discussions about unemployment. Labour market research indicates that the under 25 years and over 45 years age brackets are the two most disadvantaged groups in Australia. However a higher proportion of people over 45 years of age are being classified as 'more disadvantaged' and in need of intensive assistance²⁵. One of the most important aspects of mature age unemployment is its lengthy nature and the reality that long-term unemployment increases with age.

In August 2000 the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia released a report entitled *Age Counts: An inquiry specific to mature age workers*. The report was based on the findings of an inquiry held by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, which received 275 submissions from 187 parties nationwide²⁶. The Committee's inquiry grew out of concern for the difficulties faced by mature age people in trying to re-enter the workforce following unemployment. The *Age Counts* report found that long-term unemployment has devastating effects, both economic and social, on older workers. While on a national basis the rate of mature age unemployment has been much lower than the rate of youth unemployment, the *Age Counts* report highlighted that in 1999 the number of mature age people classified as long-term unemployed (48.7%) was over double the number of young people classified as long-term unemployed (23%)²⁷. In 1999 nearly 37% of unemployed people aged 45 to 64 years had been unemployed for two years or more, compared to 13.2% of unemployed people under 45 years of age²⁸.

Loss of income at this later stage in life can result in a run-down of savings, assets, superannuation and, for many, a compromised standard of living. The economic impact of becoming unemployed at an older age is often severe, with many mature age people having the responsibility of caring for ageing parents, and for dependent children as they spend more time in education, and have the demands of a mortgage and other expenses. Income deprivation caused by long-term unemployment also provides a barrier to regaining employment, due to an inability to afford necessities for jobseeking such as presentable clothing for interviews and transport costs.

In addition to the financial difficulties brought about by unemployment, one of the most striking effects of unemployment highlighted in the *Age Counts* report was the psychological devastation that unemployment brought to those who had lost their job. The Committee found that, as well as the shock of job loss, self-esteem was particularly affected after months of trying to secure another job, with the result that many mature age jobseekers felt "alone, forgotten and undervalued for their skills and knowledge"²⁹. Another significant cause of psychological hardship brought by unemployment is social isolation, caused by the loss of personal contacts through work, which for many people forms an important part of their social network. Further, social isolation creates a barrier to regaining employment as it deprives the individual of the ability to network and find out about potential jobs.

The *Age Counts* report indicated that financial and psychological hardship for mature age unemployed people could further be exacerbated when, facing the prospect of unemployment, individuals may invest their savings in a small business which, if it fails, may further compound the financial and psychological damage which resulted from losing their job.

²⁵ Mission Australia, 2000, *No "use by date"*, an advocacy statement on mature age workers and unemployment.

²⁶ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, 2000, *Age Counts*, An inquiry into issues specific to mature age workers

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid, p 4

Discouraged workers

Discouraged workers are those people who would like to be able to work but have given up looking, as they believe they will not be able to find it. Mature age people make up 63% of all discouraged workers, and the ratio of discouraged workers to the unemployed for mature age people is much higher than for younger people³⁰. The higher rate of discouraged workers in the mature age groups is one reason why recorded unemployment is lower than for younger people.

5.3 Age Discrimination

According to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2000) age discrimination occurs where “an opportunity is denied to a person solely because of his or her chronological age and is irrelevant to the person’s ability to take advantage of that opportunity”³¹. Common practice in Australia and internationally is to use age as a proxy for many desired characteristics such as fitness, financial viability, responsibility, honesty and skill³². The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission reports that discrimination against older people in employment is the issue most frequently raised in submissions to the Commission’s inquiry on age discrimination³³.

There is now a growing amount of research that suggests that many older workers feel that they have been discriminated against on the ground of age (See Drake Consulting Group, 1999, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (EEWR) Inquiry submission, and the *Age Counts* report available at www.apf.gov.au/house/committee/eer/OWK/index.htm). Many people in their 40s and 50s report that they have experienced age discrimination at work, or while looking for work. Surveys and qualitative research indicate that many Australian employers do not see employee maturity in itself as a critical factor for business success and survival and, in fact, older workers are often incorrectly perceived to be inflexible, lacking appropriate skills and less productive than their younger counterparts.

Drake Management Consulting conducted research in which over 500 senior executives and human resources managers nationwide were questioned about their age preferences when it comes to recruiting, retrenching, training and executive staff. Results showed that 62% of organisations make the majority of their recruitment selections from the 31-40 age group, while only 23% indicated they would make their first selections from the over-40 age group³⁴. Astoundingly, none of the 500 respondents to the survey indicated they would choose to employ people as executives or managers aged in their fifties (see Figure 20).

When it comes to retrenchment, however, research by Drake Management Consulting demonstrated a trend opposite to that for recruitment. 64.5% of the 500 respondents for the survey indicated that the 50 years and over age group would be their first choice for retrenchment, followed by 22% selecting the 41-50 age group, and 11% the 31-40 age group (see Figure 21)³⁵.

³⁰ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000, *Age Matters*, A Report on Age Discrimination, Commonwealth of Australia

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

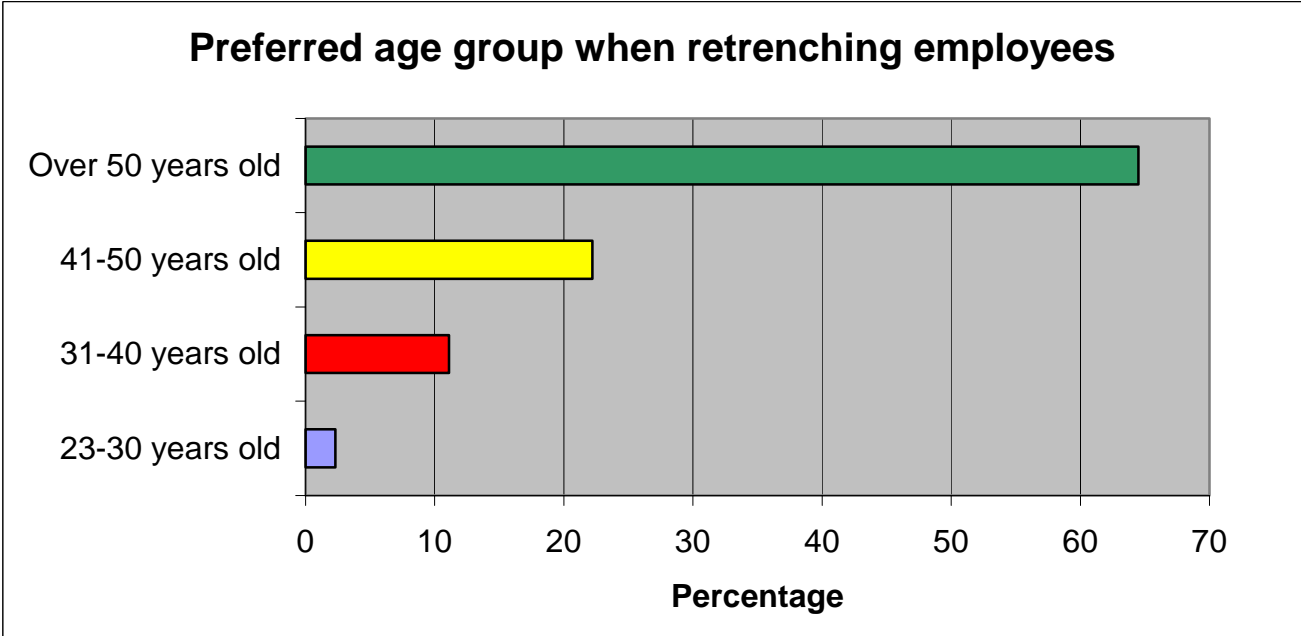
³⁴ Drake Consulting Group, 1999, House of Representatives Inquiry submission, www.apf.gov.au/house/committee/eer/OWK/index.htm

³⁵ Drake Consulting Group, 1999, House of Representatives Inquiry submission, www.apf.gov.au/house/committee/eer/OWK/index.htm

Figure 20: Results of Drake Consulting Group, 1999, national survey of senior executives and human resource managers indicating preferred age group for recruitment



Figure 21: Results of Drake Consulting Group, 1999, national survey of senior executives and human resource managers indicating preferred age group for retrenchment



5.4 Negative Employer Attitudes

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on EEWR received numerous submissions indicating that negative employer attitudes significantly contributed to mature age unemployment. The EEWR Inquiry heard that many employers held misconceptions such as that the skills of mature age workers were outdated, that older people are harder to train and that mature age people are technologically not competent³⁶. Other common misbeliefs held by employers include the idea that mature age workers are unreliable due to health problems, take more sick leave, lack flexibility, are more prone to injury, are overqualified and unlikely to remain in the job³⁷.

Ironically, employers who hold such inaccurate stereotyped ideas about mature age workers may miss out on financial and organisational benefits. Recent research has shown that mature age workers take less time off due to injury or illness, have fewer accidents, lower rates of absenteeism and often have higher productivity than younger workers³⁸. Dr Libby Brooke of La Trobe University recently estimated that employing someone aged 45 years of age or older cost \$1956 a year *less* than employing a younger person, when recruitment, training, absenteeism and work injury costs are taken into account³⁹. Apart from financial savings, mature age workers offer significant benefits to an organisation (see Table 3 for the “Myths” and the “Reality” of mature age workers). As a director of an outplacement firm specialising in advising senior executives about career transition commented, mature age workers offer four key benefits:

“they know the business backwards, as they are an integral part of the wisdom of the tribe; they can provide a different perspective; they are an excellent mentoring asset for the whole company; and, if they were to be lost to rival companies, there is considerable potential for competitive advantage to be lost”⁴⁰

5.5 Difficulties at the Recruitment Level and the Role of Employment Agencies

According to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, recruitment is the main area where older workers experience age discrimination⁴¹. Discrimination at the point of recruitment is particularly brutal for older unemployed jobseekers, with over two thirds of unemployed jobseekers over 55 years of age reporting that the most difficult problem they faced in trying to find work was being considered ‘too old’ by employers⁴². The *Age Matters* report⁴³ highlighted that unemployed people can become discouraged at employment agencies even before applying for a job. In the report, mature age unemployed people expressed feelings such as they felt “parked” or put on the shelf by employment agencies, and many believed employment agencies had profiles of the sort of people employers were looking for, thus there was automatic discrimination built into the processes of the employment agencies⁴⁴.

³⁶ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, 2000 *Age Counts*, An Inquiry into issues specific to mature age workers.

³⁷ Human Resources, “Baby boomers: a recruiters ‘grey’ area”, Issue 1.5, 2000, pp 13-15.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The Age, Thursday October 12, 2000.

⁴⁰ Business Review Weekly, November 3, 2000, pp 62-64

⁴¹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000, *Age Matters*, A Report on Age Discrimination, Commonwealth of Australia

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid, p 21

Table 3: The Myths and the Reality of the Mature Age Worker

----The Myths ----
<p>Mature age workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> × Require more time off, use more sick leave, and have increased absenteeism due to health problems × Are overqualified and are therefore unlikely to remain in the job (will look for something better) × Lack flexibility in terms of the hours they are able to work × Are less presentable/attractive than youth, especially for front counter or reception work × Are more expensive to employ compared to juniors × Are more expensive to insure as are more prone to injury causing increased workers compensation premiums × Have outdated skills and lack technological knowledge and skills, particularly IT skills × Are harder to train and are not willing to retrain × Are not willing to change
---- The Reality ----
<p>Mature age workers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Have lower absenteeism than younger workers. Many businesses have reported a reduction in absenteeism due to illness or injury when they have recruited mature workers ✓ Have fewer accidents per employee hour than younger workers ✓ Have better judgment and critical thinking abilities ✓ Have higher productivity than younger workers ✓ Are often engaged by a task, have improved concentration and work to improve their skills ✓ Are willing to take up training opportunities – a Drake survey indicated 86% of senior workers are more than happy to undergo training (<i>Age Counts</i>, 2000, p 105) ✓ Have greater company loyalty and if provided with training will stay with the organisation that trained them as long as the organisation will let them ✓ Have considerable wisdom, knowledge and experience, which provide an excellent mentoring asset ✓ The over-50 age group has the fastest uptake of internet usage – myths about mature age workers not being able to adapt to technology are no longer valid

Source: Mission Australia, 2000, *No 'use by date'*, An advocacy statement on mature age workers and unemployment
 The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2000, *Age Counts*, An inquiry into issues specific to mature age workers.
 Human Resources, Issues 1 & 5, 2000, pp 13-15

During the year 2000, Mission Australia produced *No 'use by date'*, an advocacy statement on mature age workers and unemployment, based on research conducted at Mission Australia's Mission Employment and training centres around Australia. The result was a report on mature age employment from the perspective of the Job Network provider. A telling finding of the *No 'use by date'* report was that almost half of the agency representatives sampled agreed that opportunities for promotion tend to be reduced as an employee gets older, and nearly half the sample said they would rarely send anyone over 40 years of age to a job interview⁴⁵. The report also highlighted that, as most job agencies are paid based on job placements made, the problem of mature age workers being 'put on the shelf' may be exacerbated, as agencies are placed in competition with one another⁴⁶.

5.6 Access to Training and the Lack of Targeted Employment Programs

According to Mission Australia's report *No 'use by date'*, it is the perception of many mature age workers that, despite the ongoing pattern of long-term unemployment and other characteristics, government has ignored the issue of targeted employment programs for unemployed people of mature age. While small programs exist in two states: the Mature Age Workers' Program in New South Wales and the Don't Overlook Mature Experience (DOME) project in South Australia, the focus of the majority of training programs remains directed towards youth unemployment⁴⁷. In addition, the *Age Counts* report indicated that unemployed people who had undertaken training and further education were still disadvantaged without relevant work experience.

In theory, mature age workers and unemployed people have similar access to training and education through providers such as TAFE and universities. However, very few training programs are tailored to the needs of the over 45-age group⁴⁸. A Mission Australia submission to the *Age Counts* inquiry highlighted that many mature age people are not eligible for government financial assistance and are forced to take out loans to pay for training and study. If such training does not translate into a job upon completion, this creates further hardship for the individual due to the increased debt caused by the loan.

5.7 Summary

The fact that Australia's population is ageing cannot be ignored. The 'baby boomer' generation is fast approaching the traditional age of retirement and it is expected that, when they do retire, Australia will face shortages of skilled employees. Statistically, mature age employment has increased by 43% over the last ten years, contributing to 75% of total employment growth. However, much of the growth in mature age employment has occurred as 'baby boomers' have taken their established jobs and careers with them as they have moved into older age groups⁴⁹.

Despite the fact that some Australian industries are already suffering from skills shortages, the loss of mature age workers from the labour market continues to be a growing problem with many negative economic and social consequences. While the rate of mature age unemployment in Australia is lower than the rate of unemployment at younger age levels, the true number of mature age unemployed people remains hidden. Due to a high level of mature age discouraged jobseekers and people who decide to retire if they are unable to find work,

⁴⁵ Mission Australia, 2000, *No use by date*, An advocacy statement on mature age workers and unemployed

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, 2000 *Age Counts*, An inquiry into issues specific to mature age workers.

unemployment statistics fail to capture a large number of mature age people who by choice would be working, but are not classified as unemployed.

The *Age Counts* report observed that many mature age unemployed people found the hardest thing to cope with was the impression that “no-one cared about their plight”⁵⁰. With government and employer focus directed towards youth unemployment, the *Age Counts* report found that an overwhelming number of mature age unemployed persons felt that:

“Employers, society and government had abandoned them in a rapidly changing work environment that they do not fully understand”⁵¹

Changing labour market dynamics have seen mature age workers in the forefront of major restructuring initiatives, involving the widespread use of retrenchment processes and severance payments. Becoming unemployed at an older age has a greater financial effect than for younger people, as older jobseekers have less time to make up the shortfall in earnings before retirement⁵². In addition, the social and psychological costs of becoming unemployed brings devastation to many people of mature age who find themselves without a job. Self-esteem is particularly degraded, which has a flow-on effect on the person’s life making the search for employment even harder.

Numerous barriers exist that make things particularly difficult for mature age people trying to re-enter the workforce following unemployment. Access to training is often limited due to financial constraints, as many mature age people are not eligible for government support and few employment programs are tailored to cope with relevant work experience for those of mature age. Age discrimination and negative perceptions held by employers based on incorrect stereotypes create significant obstacles for unemployed people of mature age trying to get a job, despite there being little or no evidence to support such negative stereotypes and, in fact, much research has emerged indicating the significant benefits of employing mature age workers. In addition, negative perceptions held by employers can filter through to the employment agency level, with the result that mature age people are not sent to job interviews on the basis of perceived failure as they do not fit the employer’s desired employee ‘profile’.

At present the reality for mature age unemployed people is that they face a difficult task in finding a job following involuntary unemployment through such factors as redundancy, retrenchment and time away from the workforce for reasons such as raising a family. This trend continues to occur despite there being no doubt that experienced and well trained mature age workers are a valuable resource to any organisation and the fact that some Australian industries are already experiencing skills shortages in specialised areas. Increasing recognition and understanding of the impact of Australia’s ageing population on its workforce is required to help increase the participation of mature age people in employment for both economic reasons, such as maintaining an adequate tax revenue basis in the facing of a shrinking workforce, and social reasons, such as individual health status, psychological wellbeing and the ability to make decisions on lifestyle.

Research indicates that mature age workers are being routinely discriminated against on the basis of their age. Such discrimination is illegitimate and generally based on misperceptions and incorrect stereotyping. Mature age workers need to be recognised as having valuable skills and experience and be given the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the Australian workforce. In addition, it must be kept in mind that Australia’s population is

⁵⁰ Ibid p 4

⁵¹ Ibid p 4

⁵² Ibid

ageing. In the face of a serious shortage of workers under 45 by 2002 and almost zero growth in the working age population by 2020, Australia can no longer afford to underestimate the value of mature age workers. As stated in a recent cover story in *Business Review Weekly*, “old” could now be the key to success in the “new” economy.⁵³

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Initial Research

In line with the commitment given in the *Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005* the Department of Premier and Cabinet, with the support of the Department of Health and Human Services, began conducting initial research into issues facing mature age workers and mature age unemployed people based on a review of available literature. Although a significant amount of literature was available on a national basis, little or no information could be found that was specific to Tasmania.

Given there was already a noteworthy amount of research occurring on a national basis regarding the situation for mature age workers, it was mutually agreed that the Department of Premier and Cabinet would conduct a pilot study for Tasmania, involving a questionnaire, to provide a ‘snapshot’ of the situation for mature age workers and mature age unemployed people in Tasmania, which could then be placed in the context of the available national research.

6.2 Questionnaire Construction

As an appropriate instrument relevant to Tasmanian mature age workers and mature age unemployed could not be located, a qualitative questionnaire was constructed to specifically meet the research outcomes identified in the introduction. The questionnaire was designed based on issues identified as relevant by, and in consultation with, the Employment Working Party with the assistance of staff from the Strategic Analysis Division of the Department of Health and Human Services.

After consideration of costs, timeframe and distribution issues, a postal survey method was selected. The choice of a mailed self-rated survey brought with it some important considerations including length, scope, complexity and language and comprehension issues. Reply-paid, return-addressed envelopes were provided with each survey for ease of survey return.

6.3 Pilot Study

Given time constraints, it was not feasible to conduct a pre-test on focus or other groups. However, the questionnaires were developed in consultation with the Employment Working Party, which included representatives of Government, union and community groups. The Working Party was regularly forwarded samples from each survey for comment and adjustments were made as appropriate.

The pilot study was conducted on a State-wide basis, with emphasis on encapsulating a wide cross-section of industry groups. Industry groups included the public sector, aged care, aquaculture, finance, the hospitality sector, information technology, insurance, manufacturing, mining and retail. Survey distribution in the State Service occurred via Human Resource Managers in all Agencies. Distribution was based on ten employees in each Agency as well

⁵³ *Business Review Weekly*, November 3, 2000, p 64.

as the last ten Chairs of selection panels for interviews, to represent employers. In total, 240 questionnaires were distributed within the public sector.

Survey distribution to organisations in the private sector occurred via a letter to the manager of operations requesting participation in the study by completing an “employer” questionnaire and giving “employee” questionnaires to willing staff. To managers we sent a ‘package’ containing a number of questionnaires relative to the size of the organisation, each with instructions and reply-paid, return-addressed envelopes. In total, 181 organisations in the private sector were sent the survey package, with 1 186 surveys distributed altogether.

Survey packages were distributed to 33 employment agencies around Tasmania. The package included a letter to agency managers requesting participation in the study by completing the ‘employment agency’ questionnaire, as well as distributing the ‘unemployed’ surveys to any mature age unemployed clients who were willing to participate. In total, 33 ‘employment agency’ and 165 ‘unemployed’ questionnaires were distributed.

6.4 Survey Returns

The pilot study had a response rate of 21%. Table 4 shows the number of returns from each of the stakeholder groups. Given the qualitative nature of the instrument, and the fact the study was conducted on a ‘pilot’ basis, the response rate provided adequate data to provide a ‘snapshot’ of the situation for mature age workers and mature age unemployed people in Tasmania.

Table 4: Survey returns for the 4 stakeholder groups

Stakeholder group	Government	Private	No. of surveys returned
Employers	68	29	97
Employee	78	97	173
Employment agencies	NA	NA	8
Unemployed	NA	NA	15
Total	NA	NA	294
Total Response Rate	NA	NA	21%

7. Analysis and Results

7.1 Employee Questionnaires

Demographic characteristics

In total, 173 employee questionnaires were returned. Of this number, 77 respondents were female and 96 were male. Table 5 shows demographic characteristics for employees surveyed who responded to the questionnaire.

A particular aim of the pilot study was to gain a State-wide ‘snapshot’ of employment issues for mature age people, which involved the distribution of questionnaires to numerous locations around Tasmania. Results for survey returns were quite pleasing, with surveys being returned from the North, South, East and West of the State (see Table 6 for geographical locations of survey returns). In total, surveys were returned from 13 industry

Table 5: Employee Survey Respondent Demographic Characteristics

VARIABLE	RESPONSE CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES (n=173)
Sex	Female	45.5%
	Male	55.5%
Age groups (years)	45-49	37%
	50-54	44%
	55-59	15%
	60-69	4%
	70-79	0
	80 or more years	0
Language spoken at home	English	100%
	Other	0
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status	Yes	1%
	No	99%
Highest education level	No formal schooling	0
	Primary school	0.5%
	Year 10	37.5%
	Year 11	2%
	Year 12	6%
	Certificate course/Traineeship	9%
	Apprenticeship or Business Certificate	10%
	University Degree or tertiary qualification	25%
	Higher Degree	7.5%
	Don't know	0.5%
	Other	2%
Employment	Full-time	86%
	Part-time	13%
	Casual	1%

Table 6: Geographical Location and Number of Surveys Returned

Location	No. of Surveys Returned
Cambridge/Mt Rumney/Seven Mile Beach	1
Deloraine	1
Eaglehawk Neck	1
George Town/Low Head	1
Grindelwald/Legana	1
Huntingfield	1
Invermay/Newnham/Mowbray/Rocherlea	1
Latrobe	1
Nubeena/White Beach	1
Queenstown	1
St Helens	1
Taroona	1
Tullah/Boat Harbour	1
Zeehan	1
Cygnets/Verona Sands	2
Devonport	2
Fern Tree/Margate/Tinderbox/Snug/Leslie Vale	2
Lauderdale	2
Sandy Bay/Dynnyrne	2
Sorell/Nugent/Orielton/Pawleena	2
Bruny Island/Sandfly/Pelverata	3
Burnie	3
Clarendon Vale/Rokeby/Oakdowns	3
Epping	3
Kings Meadows/Glen Dhu/South Launceston	3
Mt Nelson	3
Wynyard	3
Austins Ferry/Berriedale/Chigwell/Claremont	4
Boyer/Bronte Park/Brodys Marsh	4
Evandale/Ben Lomond/Blessington	4
Old Beach/Otago/Risdon	4
Rosebery/Primrose	4
Triabunna/Swansea/Orford	4
Bridgewater/Brighton/Southern Midlands	6
New Town/Lenah Valley	6
South Hobart	6
Ulverstone	6
Kingston	8
Moonah/Lutana/Derwent Park	8
Glenorchy/Goodwood/Montrose	9
Hobart	9
East Launceston/Newstead//Prospect/Ravenswood/ Riverside/St Leonards	10
Blackmans Bay	11
Lindisfarne/Geilston Bay/Rose Bay	11
Bellerive/Howrah/Rosny/Mornington/Montagu Bay	13

sectors including agriculture, forestry and fishing, mining, manufacturing, construction and trade services, retail and wholesale trade, accommodation, cafes and restaurants, transport and storage, finance and insurance, property and business services, State government, health and community services (non-Govt.), cultural and recreation services, personal and other services (including police). The number of surveys returned for each industry sector is displayed in Figure 22.

Method of obtaining employment

Question 11 of the “employee’s” survey investigating how employees found their current job indicated that the majority of respondents found their current job by directly approaching their employer. Replying to advertisements in the newspaper, friend and family contacts and employment agencies were also important methods of job sourcing. Figure 23 displays percentages for how respondents found their current employment. Responses classified as “other” included such methods as “approached by employer”, “company transfer” and application through the State Service Gazette. It should be noted, however, that many respondents to the survey had been working in their current position for over ten years (59%) and so their method of job procurement may not be as relevant in today’s environment.

Length of time in current employment

Survey results indicated that 59% of employees had been in their current position for 10 years or longer, 11% for 7 to 10 years, 9% for 4 to 6 years, 12% for one to 3 years and 5% percent for both 7 to 11 months and 6 months and under.

Perceptions of retirement – age expected to ‘retire’

As can be seen in Figure 24, 37% of employees thought they would retire between the ages of 55 and 59 years and 33% of employees expected to retire between the ages of 60 and 64 years. This result showed that 70% of all employees who responded to the survey expected to retire at what is considered the ‘traditional’ age period of between 55 and 65 years of age.

Participation in unpaid volunteer work

Of the employees who responded to this survey, 31% undertook unpaid volunteer work in such areas as neighbourhood watch, sporting clubs, fundraising, volunteer firefighting and the Church.

Job satisfaction

Respect at work: 90% of survey respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the level of respect they received at work. 14% indicated they were not satisfied with the amount of respect they received. Although respondents were encouraged to state why they were not satisfied with respect levels, the majority declined to do so.

Responsibility at work: Slightly fewer employees were satisfied with their level of responsibility at work (88%) than were satisfied with their level of respect. 17% of employees were unsatisfied with levels of responsibility at work and three surveys had blank responses. Reasons stated for dissatisfaction with responsibility level at work included the desire for “challenge”, feeling capable of more and desiring greater responsibility. Three surveys were returned with blank responses to these questions.

Figure 22: Survey Returns By Industry Sector for Employees

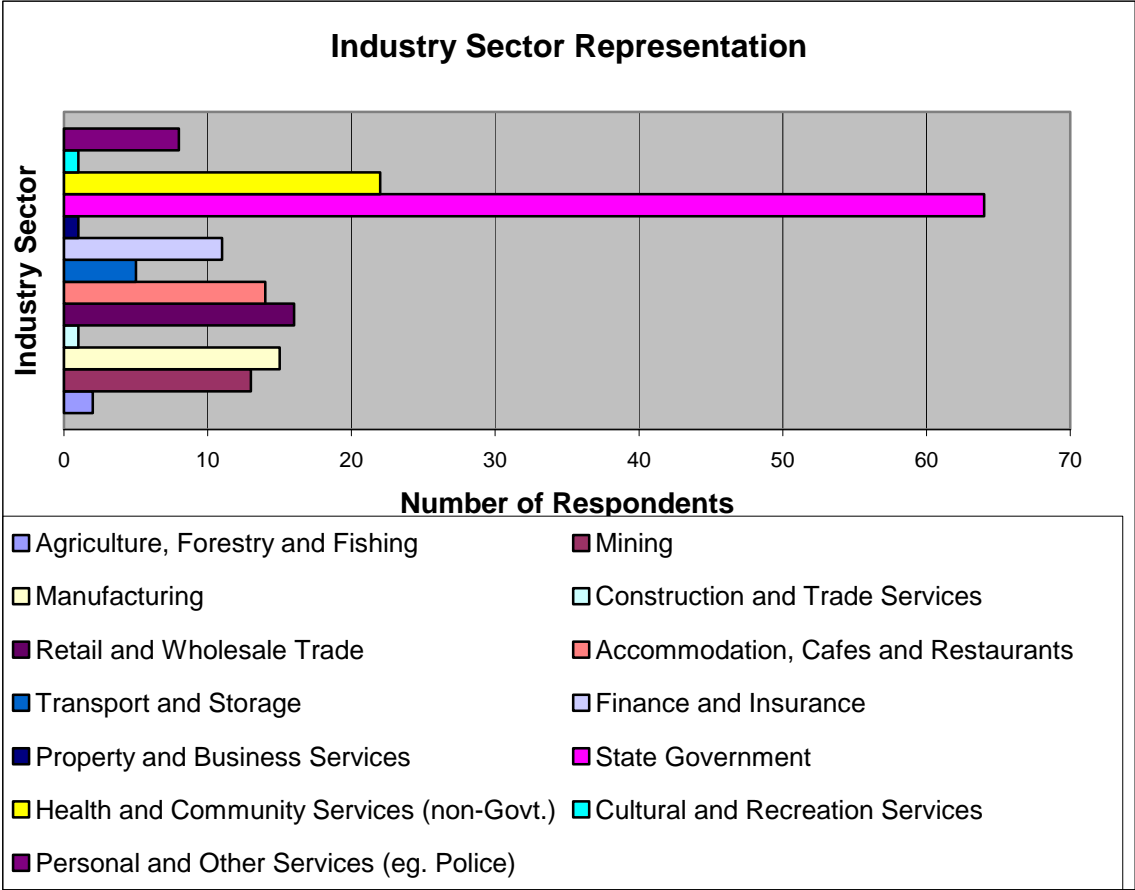


Figure 23: Method of Finding Current Employment

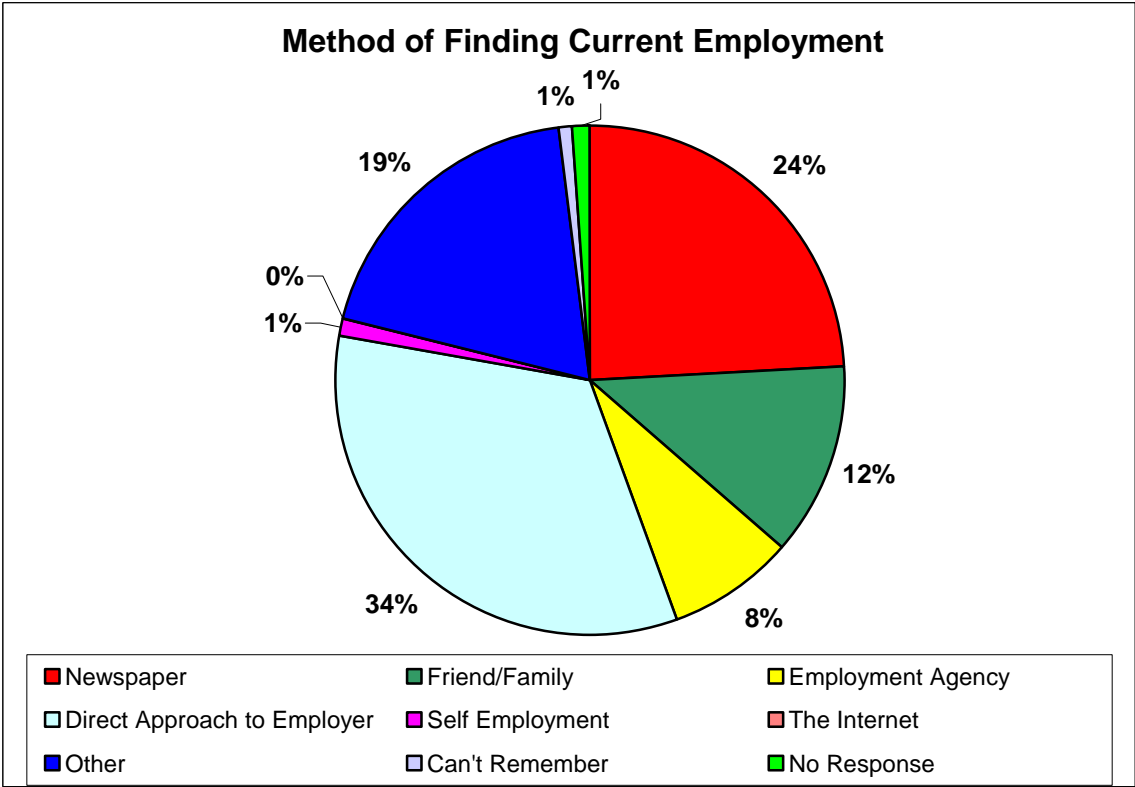
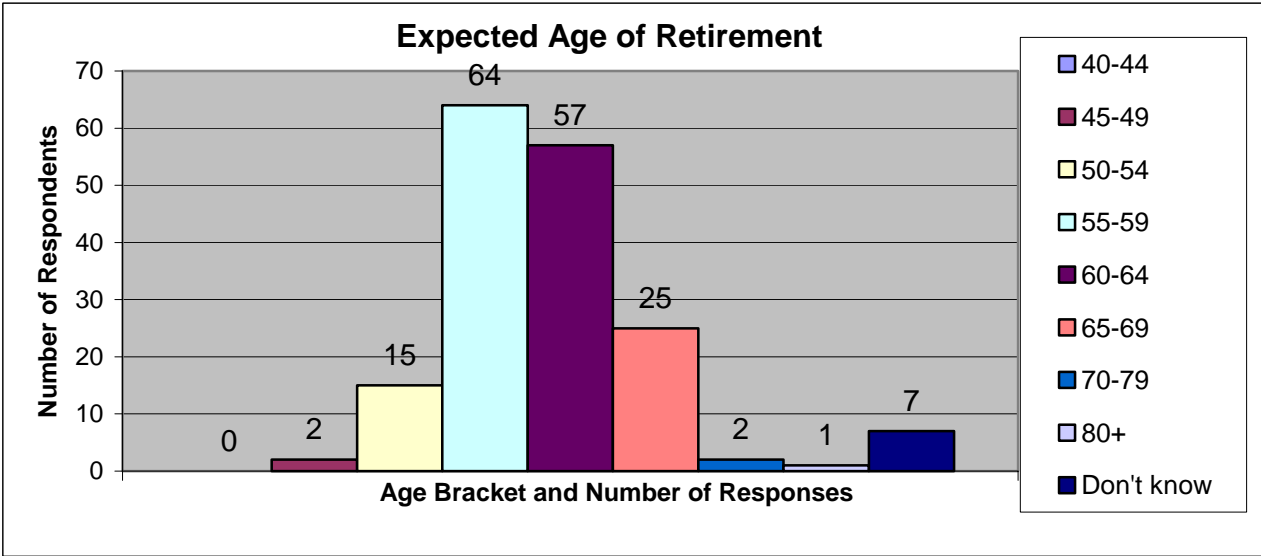


Figure 24: Expected Age of Retirement for “Employee” Survey Respondents



Job security

While 68% of survey respondents felt secure about their jobs, 30% felt vulnerable to processes such as retrenchment and forced redundancy. Of the 30% of respondents who indicated they felt insecure about their employment, 50 chose to comment about why they felt this way. The most significant reason cited was ‘organisational change including company downsizing’ (24%), followed by the ‘poor current economic climate’ (20%). Other listed reasons included being in a temporary position (16%), ‘performance pressure/pressure to obtain a budget’ (16%), age (6%) and the perception that ‘no one’s job is secure these days’ (6%). Various other reasons made up the remaining 6% of comments.

Computer skills

Close to 9 % of survey respondents indicated they had never used a computer. Table 7 shows respondents’ self-rated level of skill for using the Internet, e-mail, word processing, spreadsheets and databases.

Table 7: Self-reported information technology skill level: Number of responses per category

	Above Average	Average	Below Average	(No response)
The Internet	27	69	57	5
Word processing	47	76	32	3
E-mail	35	59	57	7
Spreadsheets	50	86	19	3
Databases	22	62	63	11
Never used a computer	15			

As can be seen in Table 7, an average of 58.2% of survey respondents self-rated themselves as having either average or above average skills in the listed information technology categories. This finding demonstrates the fallacy of the stereotype that mature age workers lack skills in information technology, with only 9% of the surveys respondents indicating they had never used a computer, and in the categories of spreadsheets and word processing 70 – 79% of respondents indicated their skills were average or above average.

How valued mature age workers feel in their workplace

The majority of employees who responded to the survey indicated that they felt valued in their workplace, with 93% of respondents able to list attributes and qualities that they felt their employer or supervisor valued about them at work. Approximately 48% of respondents felt that there were elements of their work that their employer or supervisor did not value or give accreditation for.

Retirement age

Does your workplace have a compulsory retirement age?

A total of 42% of respondents indicated that their workplace had a compulsory retirement age. Of that 42%, 95% of employees said that the retirement age at their workplace was 65 years of age. 5% of respondents indicated the retirement age at their workplace were 60 years of age. A total of 38% of surveyed employees reported their workplace did not have a compulsory retirement age and 20% of respondents did not know if their workplace had a compulsory retirement age.

Employee perceptions of interviews

Being interviewed by a person 10 years younger than yourself

This question was included to investigate how mature age workers would feel about being interviewed for a promotion by a person of a younger age, which would be the likely situation for many mature age workers both applying for promotion and attempting to re-enter the workforce. When asked how they would respond to being interviewed by a person who was 10 years their junior, the majority of respondents, 66%, indicated they would not have a problem with this. A total of 10% of respondents said they would have no problems provided that certain conditions were met, such as the interviewer being professional and experienced, and 9% of survey respondents indicated they had already experienced this situation. Table 8 displays percentages of responses for all employees surveyed. Only 8% of respondents said they would feel uncomfortable/embarrassed/hesitant (see Table 8).

Being interviewed by a person more than 10 years younger than yourself

Responses to this question were very similar to the above-mentioned question. Slightly fewer respondents, 63%, indicated they would not have a problem with being interviewed by a person more than 10 years their junior. 13% of surveyed employees gave conditional responses and 2% indicated they had already experienced being interviewed by somebody more than 10 years their junior. A greater number of employees indicated they would feel uncomfortable/embarrassed/hesitant being interviewed by someone more than 10 years their junior (12%) than by someone up to 10 years their junior (8%) (see Table 9).

Table 8: Employee responses in relation to being interviewed by a person 10 years their junior

Response	Percentage
OK/No problems/Fine	66%
OK/No problems/Fine conditional eg. “providing the interviewer is professional and experienced”	10%
Nervous	1%
Acceptable	2%
Uncomfortable	5%
Embarrassed	1%
Depends on the interviewer	1%
Hesitant	1%
Have experienced this	9%
Don’t know	1%
No response	3%

Table 9: Employee responses in relation to being interviewed by a person more than 10 years their junior

Response	Percentage
OK/No problems/Fine	63%
OK/No problems/Fine conditional eg. “providing the interviewer is professional and experienced”	13%
Nervous	1%
Reasonably comfortable	1%
Acceptable	1%
Uncomfortable	9%
Embarrassed	1%
Depends on the interviewer	1%
Hesitant	1%
Have experienced this	2%
Don’t know	3%
No response	4%

Discrimination in the workplace

A total of 89% of respondents indicated that they had not ever experienced discrimination in their workplace because of their age. Seventeen (or 10%) of respondents reported that they had experienced discrimination in their workplace because of their age. All of these respondents described their experiences, which are displayed in Table 10. There were two blank responses to this question.

Table 10: Descriptions of discrimination experienced in the workplace

Q. Have you ever experienced discrimination in your workplace because of your age?	
Responses:	
1	<i>“Missed out on positions when my age is advised. (Not where I am now in the private sector)”.</i>
2	<i>“I returned to Tasmania 1999 because of family reasons and, despite my exemplary employment record in senior management positions and in nationally significant projects, I found the employment doors were tightly shut because of my age (anyone over 40 is stereotyped as over the hill, not trainable in new technology and thought and having lower productivity levels) and my religion (Catholic -the Masonic Handshake/Protestant Axis remains strong in Tasmania). All people are individuals and the stereotyping is ridiculous and insulting in the extreme”.</i>
3	<i>“Comments about being "old and past it", exclusion by younger staff from social functions, not being considered for a promotion or more responsible position because considered I was too old”.</i>
4	<i>“Slight comment very rare”.</i>
5	<i>“Not in public sector. However have been passed over for jobs in hospitality industry because of age and also a job promoting mobile telephones in Sydney”.</i>
6	<i>“Divisional manager implied that all I was doing was marking time until retirement because I had no desire to apply for a position in Hobart”.</i>
7	<i>“Some younger employees make out like you don't know what is going on or laugh at your age etc. only minor jesting though”.</i>
8	<i>“Not directly, but when one is overlooked - there is always the suspicion that it is due to age”.</i>
9	<i>“Based on age and gender”.</i>
10	<i>“A general view by senior people that the organization should be younger. General comments that people over 40 do not have the drive or energy”.</i>
11	<i>“Lack of career opportunities - younger people are promoted even though I am more qualified and more experienced. BUT - is never overt. Always indirect discrimination but very apparent”.</i>
12	<i>“There have been personality clashes between myself and my manager who seems to have an attitude because of my age (or perhaps my experience or attitude which are a function of my age). My manager has been dismissive of me to the point of rudeness, has excluded me from unit discussion of work projects, has treated me like a rookie, which has reduced my effectiveness within the unit.”</i>

Responses: (continued)

- 13 *“Discrimination in terms of performing certain tasks because I don’t fit the department profile as a public face”.*
- 14 *“Made to feel uncomfortable because of lack of speed, memory etc- this comes from ages 30 to 40. Not a big thing but there all the same”.*
- 15 *“Not directly but comments are made about staff over forty too old for the job such as too set in ways, and don't have degrees”.*
- 16 *“Call me paranoid, but: I have had a feeling for a few years that I have reached the end of my career - yet, I still offer more than most around me. Since 45 I have not expected promotion and have had to accept downgrading in status, respect and any prospect of promotion. But I know of many who are worse off so I don't dwell on this or wish to overstate it. I work in a responsible position and bring my own skills to it. If others don't give full credit that is unfortunate but beyond my control”.*
- 17 *“Employers from time to time have discriminated on many things in an attempt to move people on. Discrimination on the basis of age has been based on the fact that too much knowledge/experience is a threat and should not be encouraged”.*

Training

Were you offered any training or skills development at work during the last year?

In total, 84% of surveyed employees were offered some kind of training or skills development at work during the past year. Only a small percentage (14%) were not offered training, while 2% did not know whether they were offered training or skills development.

During the past year have you wanted to participate in a training program but been unable to do so?

This question may have been unclear in its wording, as there were 32 blank responses. In total, 31 respondents, or 22% of the respondents that answered this question, indicated that they had wanted to participate in a training program at work but had been unable to do so. The two major reasons for inability to participate were having “no time” and training not being available to them “in their position” (see Figure 24).

The number of respondents who wanted to participate in training and were able to do so was 91, or 65% of employees who answered this question. The number of employees who were able to participate in training but did not want to was 19, or 13%. The two major reasons for employees not wanting to participate in training were having “no time” and considering the training as “not relevant” to their work (see Figure 25).

Would you be willing to participate in a training or skills development program at work?

A total of 166 (or 96%) of employees who responded to the survey indicated they would be willing to participate in training or skills development at work. The number of employees who said they would not be willing to participate in training was 5, or 3%. There were 2 blank responses to this question. Reasons for employees not being willing to participate in training included “I’ve been there done that for the last 20 years”, “I don’t wish to take on additional skills”, “I have the required skills to carry out other duties” and “I am happy with what I am doing now”.

Figure 25: Cited reasons for inability to participate in training at work

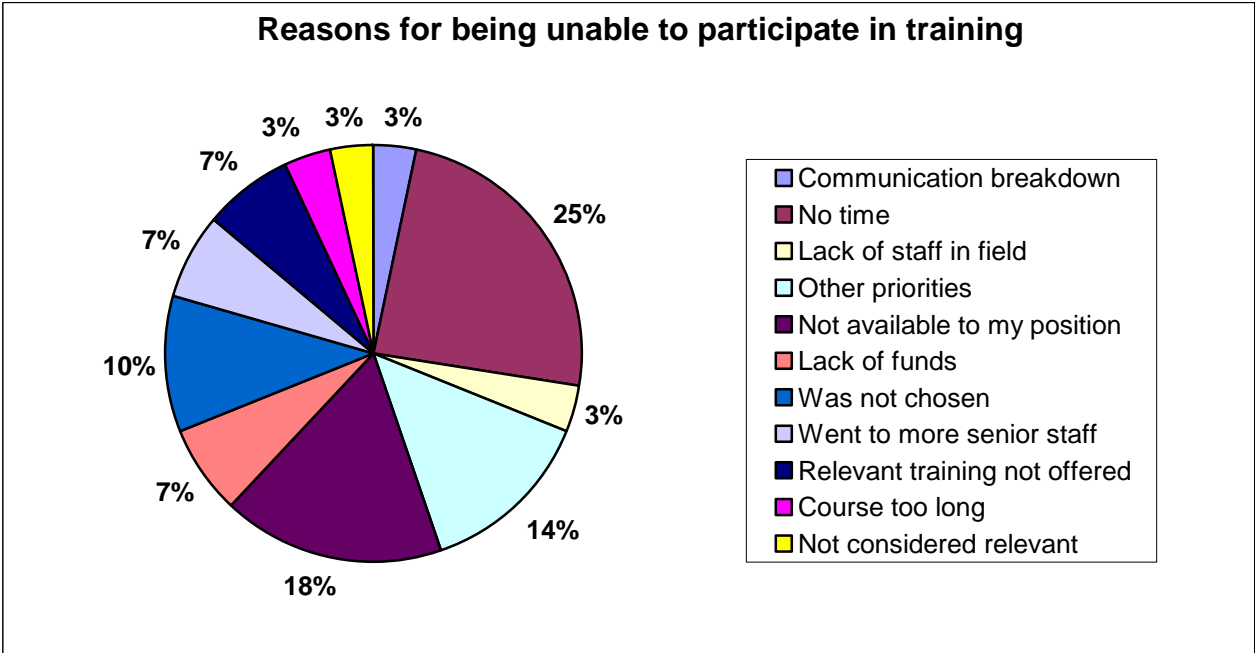
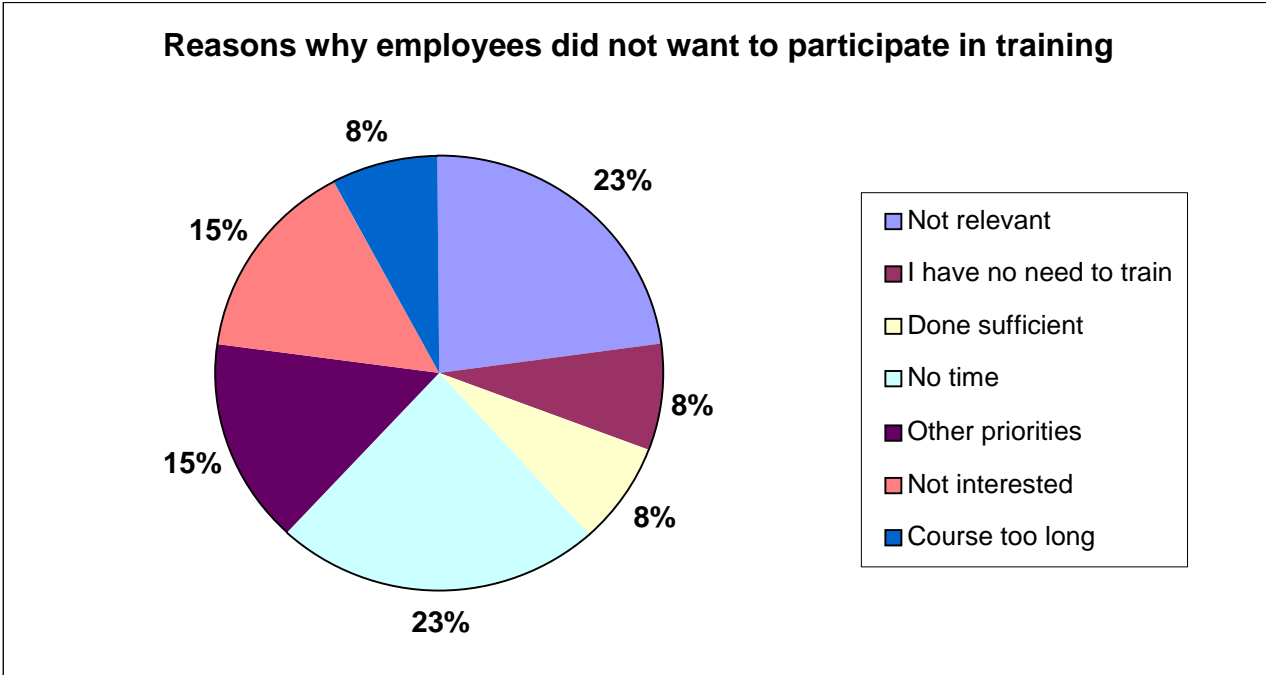


Figure 26: Cited reasons for not wanting to participate in training at work

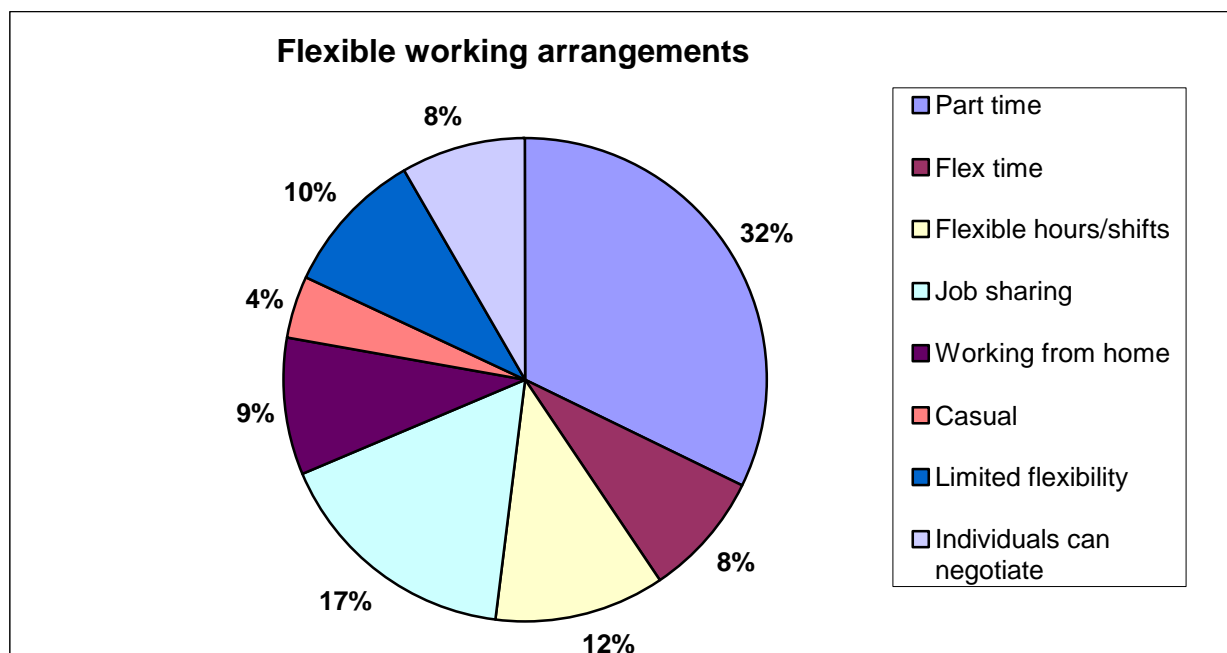


Flexible working arrangements

Does your workplace provide flexible working arrangements?

A “don’t know” option was not included for this question. 5 blank responses were received, with two respondents writing “don’t know” next to the question. Overall, 123, (or 71%) of employees indicated that their workplace did have flexible working arrangements. Employees were asked to specify what flexible working arrangements there were in their workplace (if any) and the results are displayed in Figure 27.

Figure 27: Type of flexible working arrangements available



What could be done to help people 45 years of age and over to find employment in their chosen occupation?

The response rate to this particular question was 81%, with 33 respondents choosing not to answer. Responses ranged from one-line suggestions to long and detailed accounts of personal experiences, and suggestions based on these experiences. Responses were analysed as to content and grouped into six main subject areas. The six subject areas are as follows: “*mature age workers need to:*”, “*mature age workers need access to:*”, “*employers and organisations need to:*”, “*government needs to:*”, “*perceptions of market forces and business principles:*” and “*other perceptions:*”.

Approximately 40% of respondents who answered this question indicated that general training would help mature age workers to find employment, thus making training the most popular suggestion. Training areas suggested included business skills such as book keeping, multi-skilling, and training in areas of demand by industry. The second most popular suggestion was to educate employers, with 24% of respondents suggesting this option. By way of educating employers, respondents suggested options such as dispelling myths about mature age workers, promoting the benefits of employing mature age workers and profiling success stories of companies who had employed mature age workers and benefited in return.

A number of respondents (15%) said that employers needed to value age and experience as positive qualities and as potential benefits to their organisation. Numerous employees who answered this question felt that too much emphasis was placed on degree or diploma qualifications and not enough credit was given to those with years of practical experience and knowledge. Another area many respondents considered to be important was for mature age workers to maintain and build their sense of self-worth or self-esteem. Approximately 12% of respondents suggested helping individuals to build their “self belief” would help them to find employment.

The following figures display responses to the question “what could be done to help people 45 years of age and over to find employment in their chosen occupation?” grouped by five of the six subject areas mentioned above.

Figure 28: Categorized responses: “Mature age workers need to”

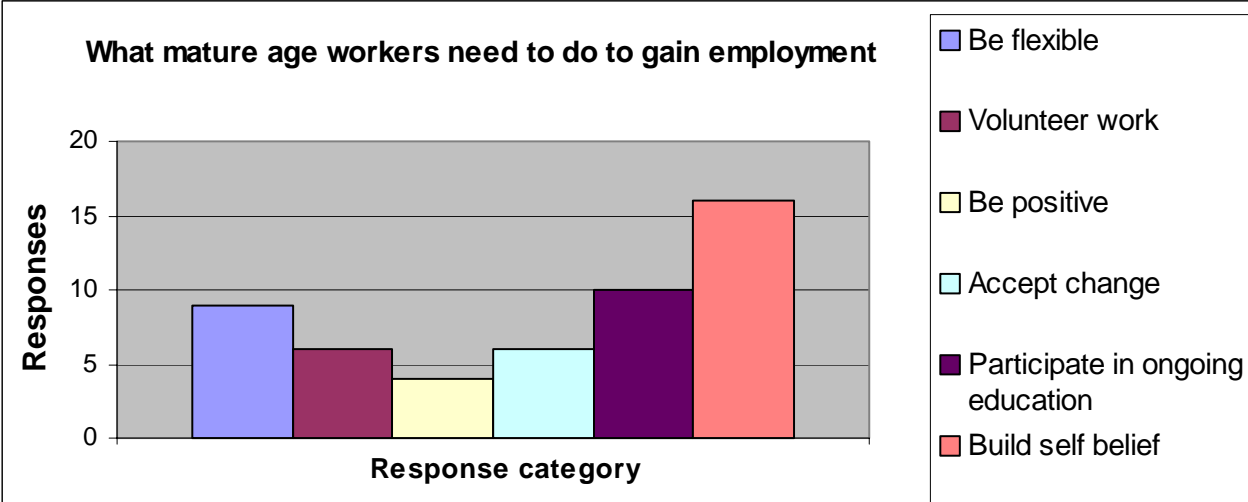


Figure 29: Categorized responses: “ Mature age workers need access to”

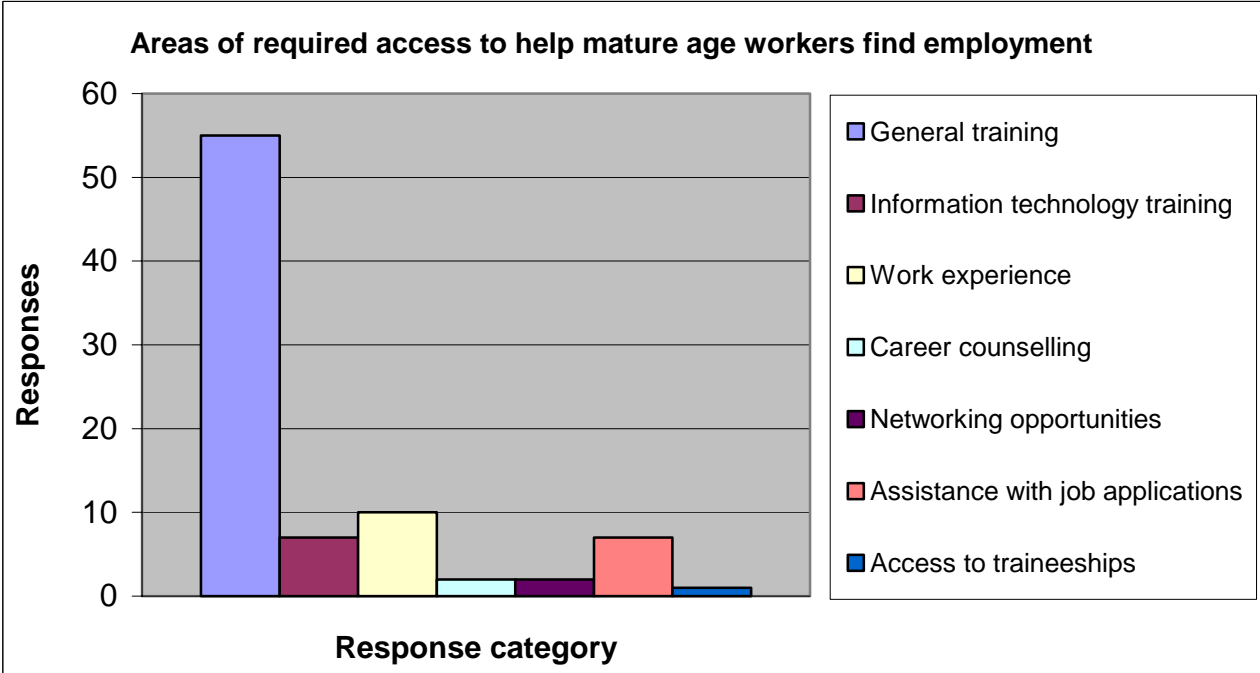


Figure 30: Categorised responses: “Employers and organisations need to”

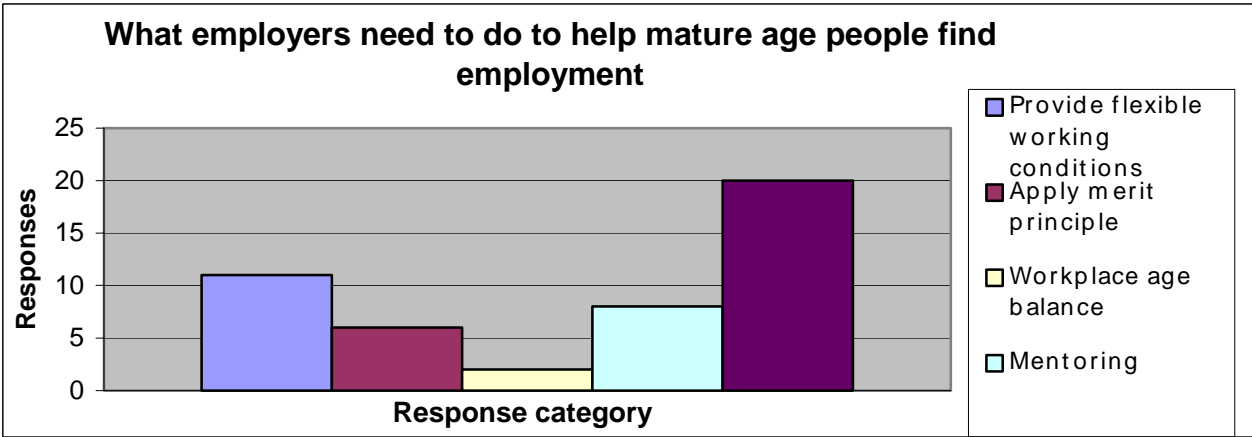


Figure 31: Categorised responses: “Government needs to”

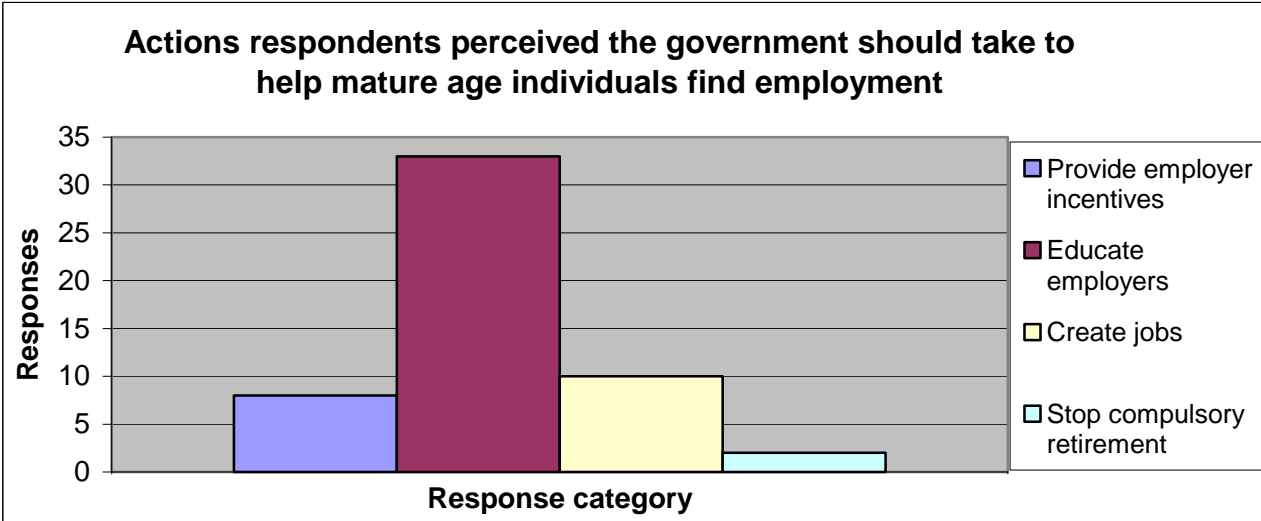
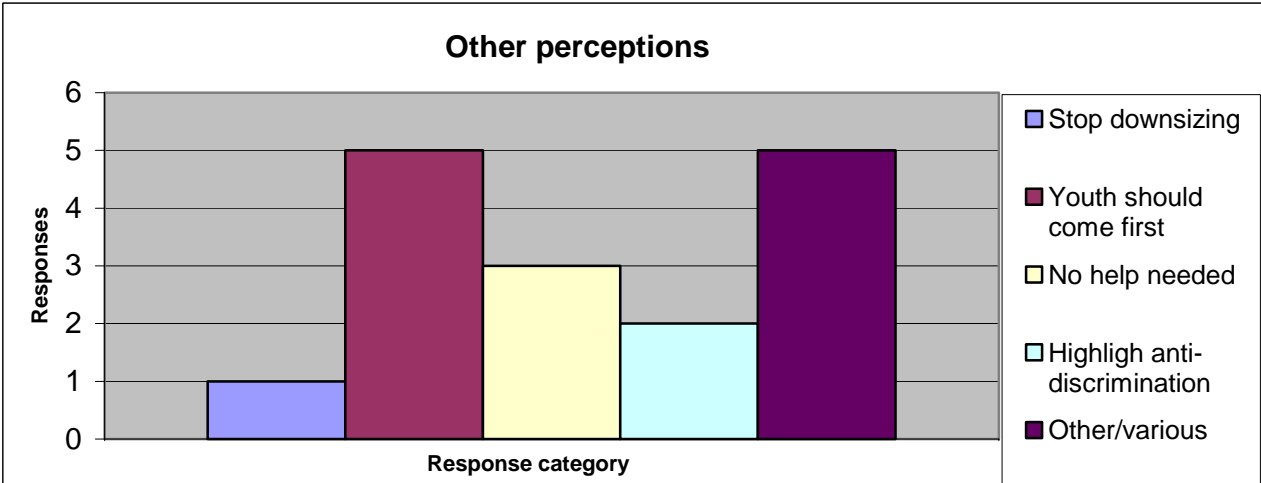


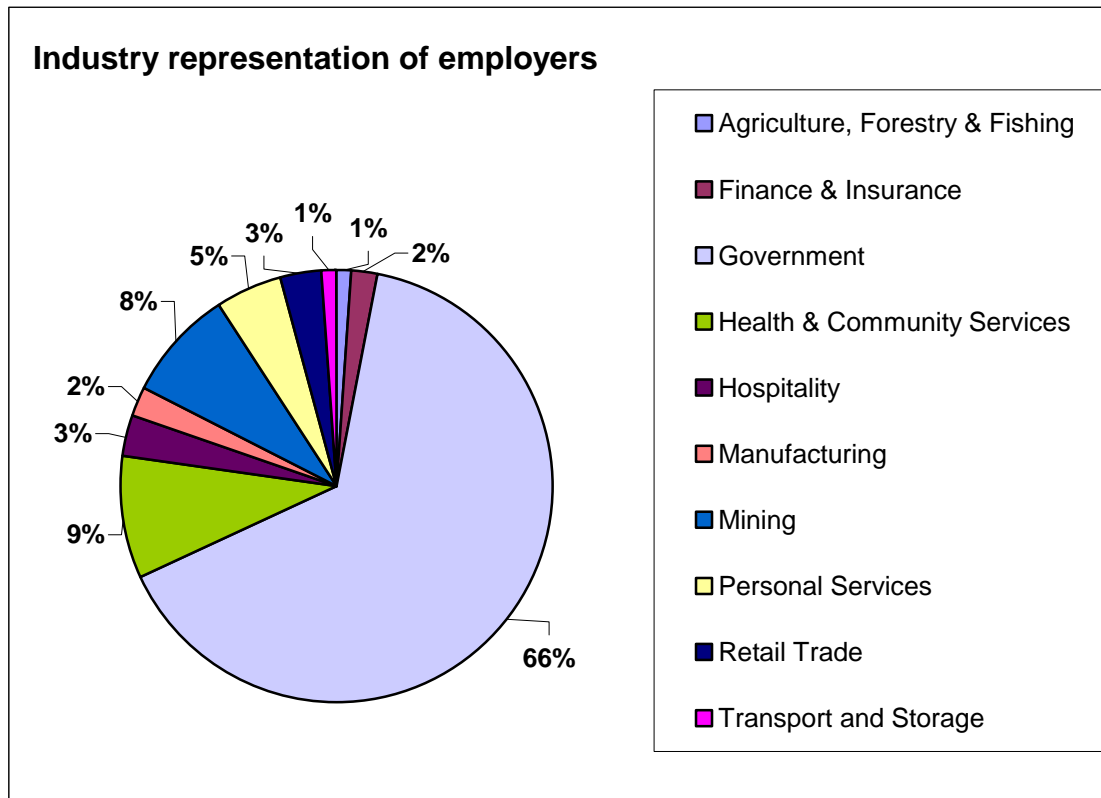
Figure 32: Categorised responses: “Other perceptions”



7.2 Employer Questionnaires

The majority of employers who participated in this study represented the government sector, amounting to 66% of total employer survey returns. This number represented a return rate of 57% for government sector employers. The health and community services sector and the mining industry represented the other two largest areas of industry participation. Figure 33 displays participating industry sectors and the percentage of overall participation.

Figure 33: Industry sectors and percentage of employer participation



Compulsory retirement, staff training and flexible work hours

Employers were asked to indicate whether their workplace maintained a compulsory retirement age. The response rate to this question was 95%, with 55% of employers indicating there was a compulsory retirement age at their workplace. Of the employers who stated a compulsory retirement age was used in their organisation, 96% reported the retirement age applied was 65 years.

All but one employer who responded to this question reported that training and/or personal development programs were offered to staff. A total of 84% of employers reported that training and development was offered to all staff, with 12% stating that training was made available on a needs basis. One percent of employers reported training was available only to management and similarly one percent of employers stated training was available only to younger, i.e. below mature age, staff.

In addition, employers were asked whether their organisation allowed flexibility in hours worked, such as flex time, part-time work or working from home. In total, 85% of employers indicated flexible working conditions were available, with part-time work being the most common option. Job sharing was the second most available option, cited by 24% of employers. Table 11 shows details of employer responses to questions on compulsory retirement, staff training and flexible work hours.

The benefits of providing education and/or training to mature age workers

Employers were asked to comment on what they believed to be the benefits and disadvantages of providing training to mature age workers in their organisation. Given the importance of training in today’s work environment and that a common myth related to mature age workers is that they are difficult to train, this question was included to examine employers’ perceptions on this issue. Employer responses to the benefits of providing training are shown below in Figure 34, and perceived disadvantages in Figure 35.

Figure 34: Employer perceived benefits of providing training to mature age employees

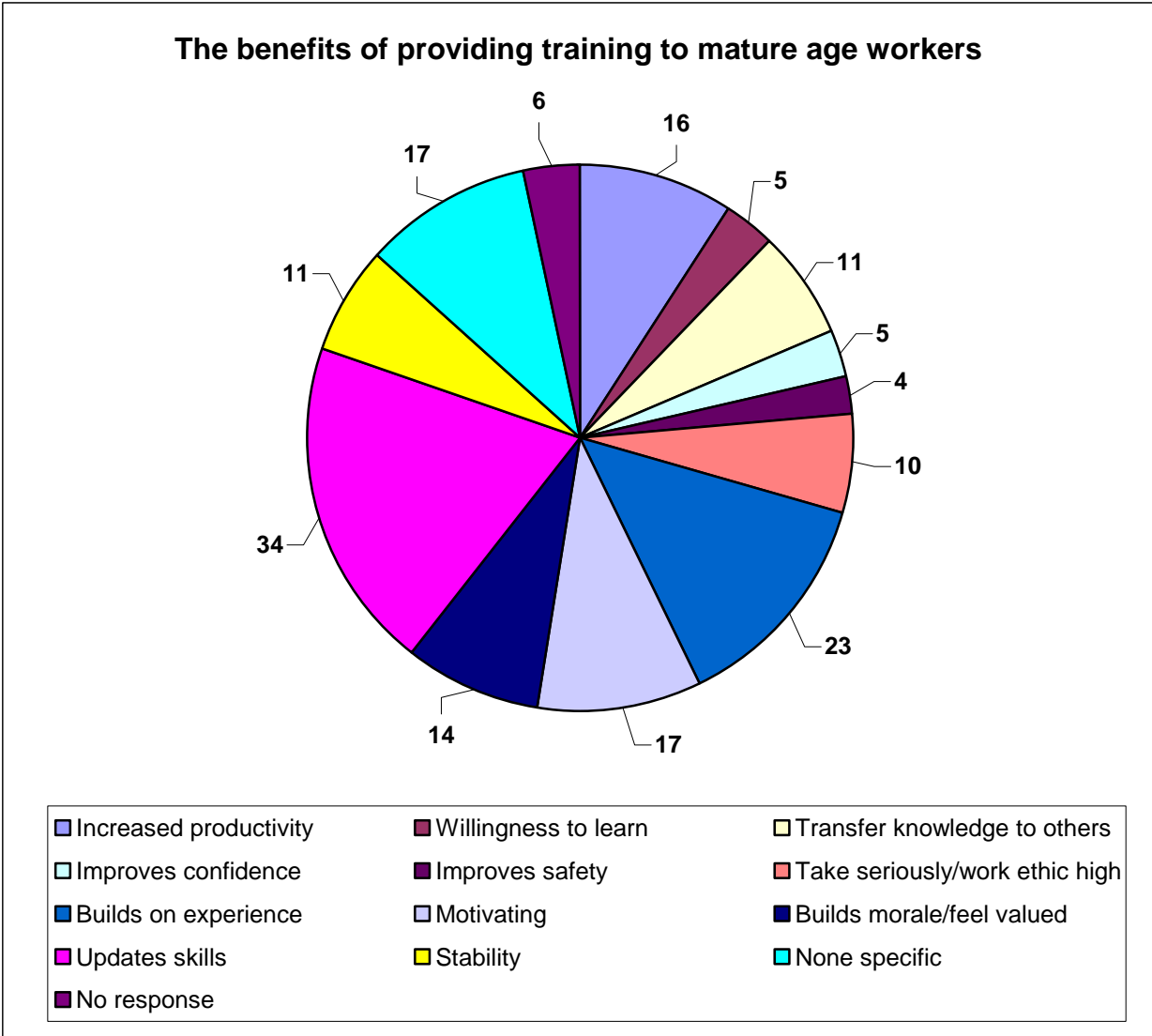


Figure 35: Employer perceived disadvantages of providing training to mature age employees

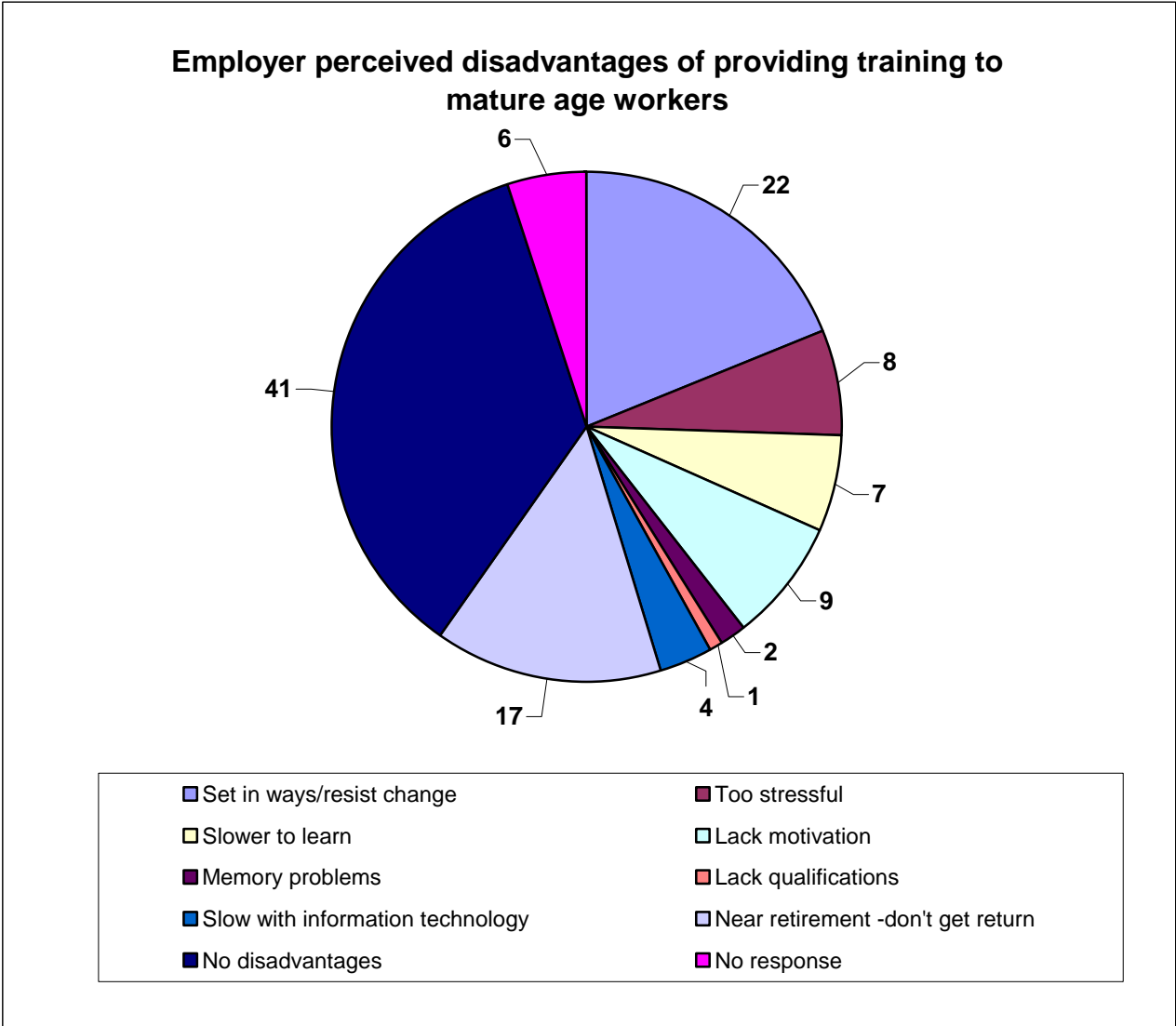


Table 11: Employer responses regarding compulsory retirement, training and flexibility of work hours

VARIABLE	RESPONSE CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE
Compulsory retirement age	Yes	55%
	No	40%
	No response	5%
What is the compulsory retirement age-if applicable	65 years	96%
	60 Years	4%
Are your staff offered training and/or personal development programs?	Yes	99%
	No	1%
Which staff are offered such training/development?	All staff	84%
	Management only	1%
	On a needs basis	12%
	Younger staff only	1%
	No response	1%
Does your organisation provide flexible working conditions?	Yes	85%
	No	14%
	No response	1%
Type of flexible conditions available to staff	Part-time	76%
	Flex-time	4%
	Casual	12%
	Job Share	24%
	Working from home	1%
	Leave without pay	7%
	Flexible hours	2%

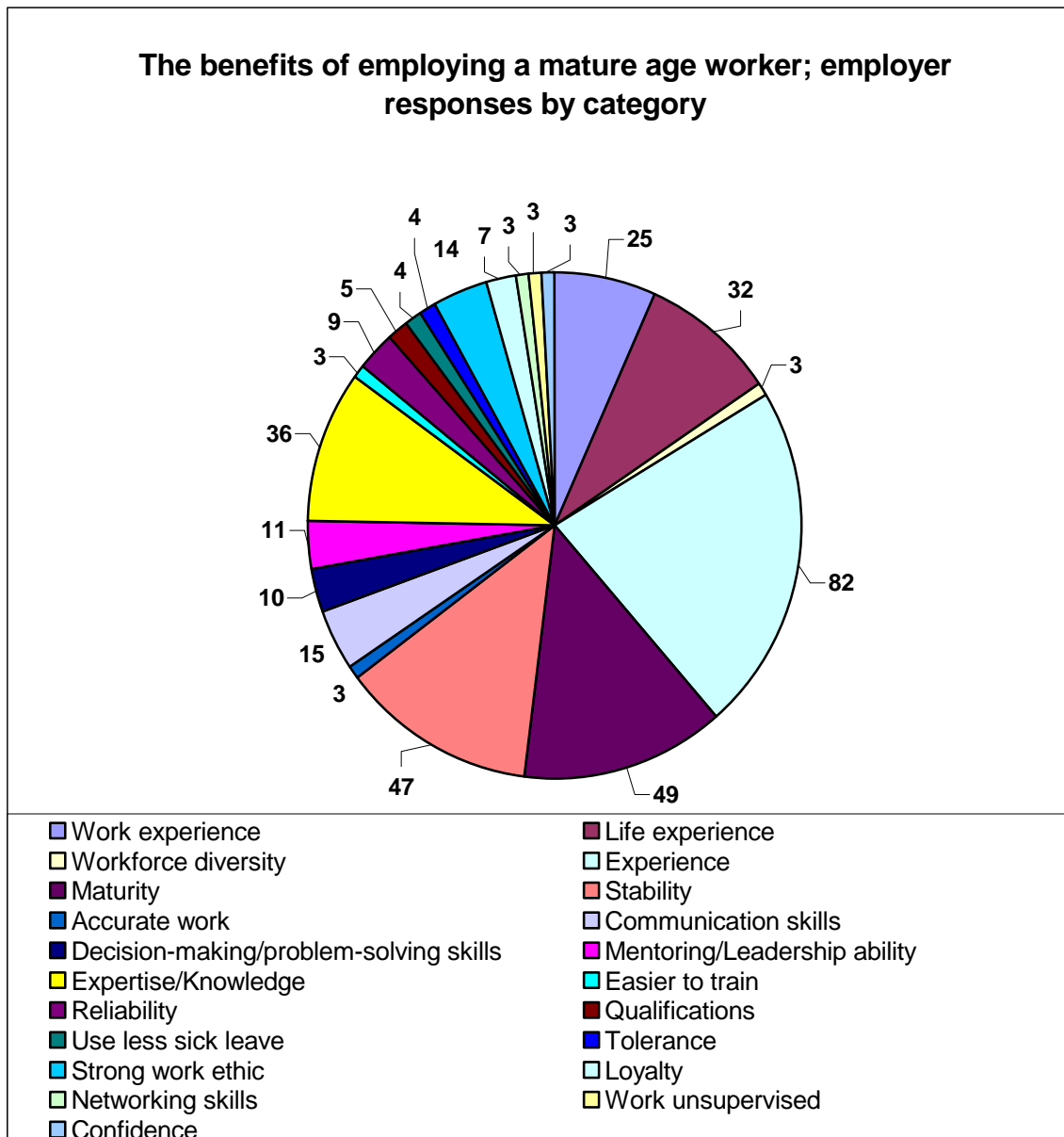
Please note -figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number

The benefits of employing an individual of mature age

When asked what were the benefits of employing a person 45 years of age or older in an organisation, employers indicated numerous positive attributes, with each employer who responded to this question listing, on average, three benefits for their organisation. The most commonly reported benefit of employing a mature age worker was general experience, cited by 85% of employers. A further 33% of employers specified that “life experience” was of significant value and 26% of employers stated that work experience was a particular benefit.

Two other commonly mentioned benefits of employing mature age workers were “maturity”, cited by 51% of employers, and “stability”, listed by 49% of employers. The term “stability” referred to such factors as being able to concentrate more on work due to fewer out-of-work issues, and many employers indicated the mature age workers as having a more stable social and family life. Figure 36 shows numbers employer responses listing the benefits of employing mature age workers grouped by category.

Figure 36: Employer perceptions: benefits of employing a mature age worker, responses by category

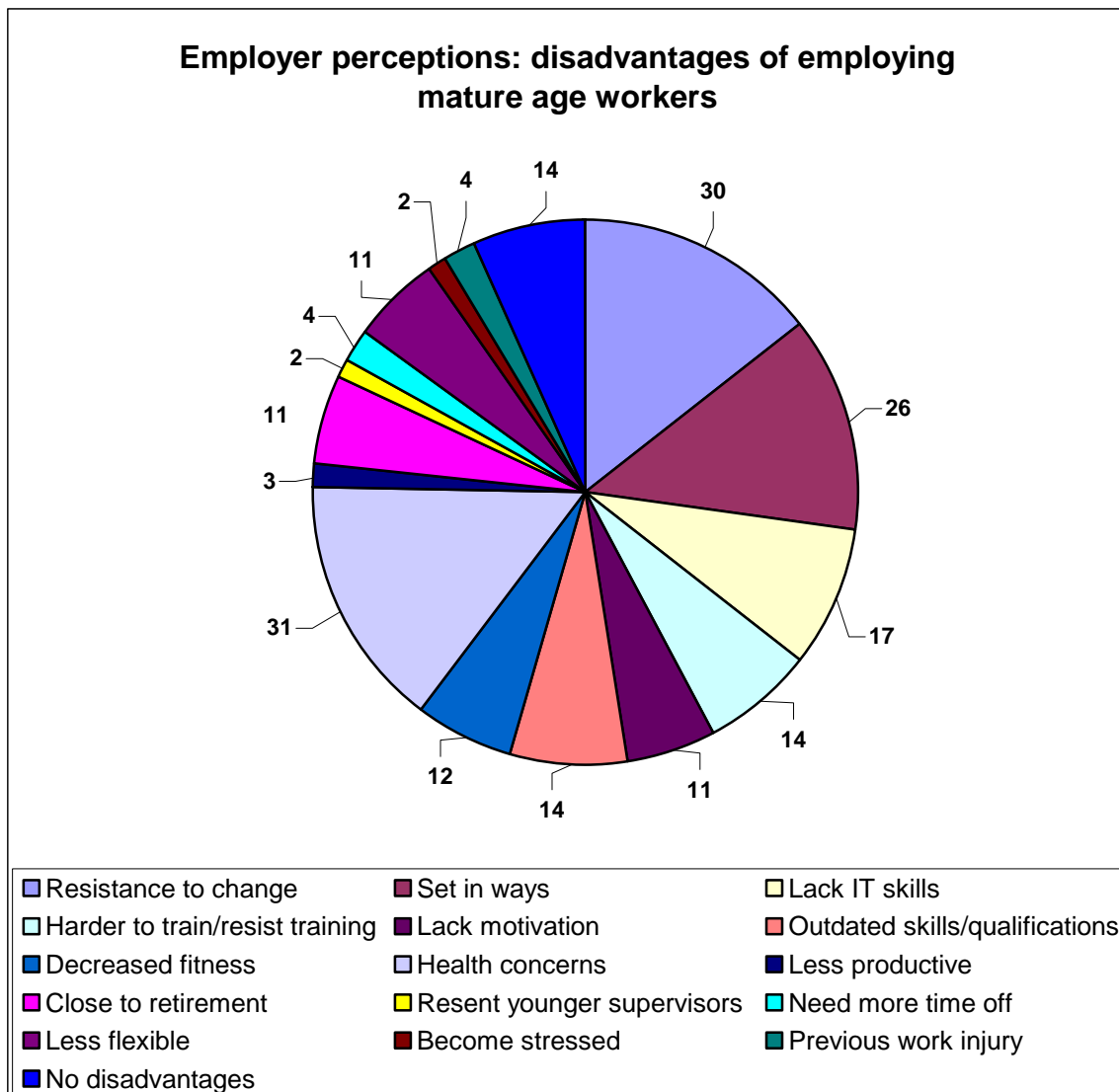


Employer perceived disadvantages of employing an individual of mature age

The primary concerns of employers regarding the employment of mature age workers related to perceptions that mature individuals were “resistant to change”, cited by 31% of employers, and “set in their ways”, cited by 27% of employers. Concerns about health and decreased fitness also accounted for 32% of employer perceptions of mature age workers. A number of employers (18%) also perceived that, in general, mature age workers lacked information technology skills which would be a disadvantage in their workplace.

Approximately 15% of employers commented that there were no disadvantages in employing a person of mature age. Figure 37 shows employer responses with regard to perceived disadvantages of employing mature age workers, grouped by category.

Figure 37: Employer perceptions: disadvantages of employing mature age workers, responses by category



Consideration of age with regard to promotion

Research by Drake Management Consulting indicated that a “young culture” appeared to dominate many areas of Australia’s industry (in particular, banking and finance, the public sector and business service organisations) with the result that many people over 45 years of age were forced out of the workplace to make way for much younger individuals such as high-flying graduates who were “fast tracked” into senior positions⁵⁴. Related to this finding, a question was included in the questionnaire that asked employers if there were any circumstances in which they would take a person’s age into account when considering them for a promotion.

The response rate to this question was 99%. The majority of employers (75%) reported that there were no circumstances in which they would use age as a factor when considering a person for promotion. Some employers included reasons for their answer such as:

“Age is irrelevant. Knowledge, skill, qualifications, experience and potential is the issue. However, a person-job fit is perhaps a better description, i.e. the right person for the position taking all characteristics into account.”

“I would apply merit principle and age would not be considered an issue.”

“Age is not a factor. Other factors are, such as: potential leadership skills, problem-solving analytical skills and work ethic.”

“None - contrary to Equal Employment Opportunity policy.”

“None. All applicants are employed based on experience, attitude, communication skills, customer service skills and teamwork.”

“None. Would be considering demonstrated ability, capacity for growth and positive attitude.”

The remaining 25% of employers who responded to this question reported various reasons for including age as a factor. The most commonly cited reason was if a person was close to retirement age, cited by 10 employers. Succession planning was reported by four employers as a reason for considering a person’s age with regard to promotion and three employers said they would take a person’s age into account for a job that involved physical work. Two employers commented that being of mature age would be a positive factor in applying for a promotion, due to maturity and experience. Their responses are tabled below:

“If two people were equal on merit would favour the older person on the basis of loyalty or institutional knowledge.”

“Where seniority of role is relevant.”

Other cited reasons for taking age into account were a person’s attitude towards training, development potential, previous work injuries, health issues, and the amount of energy a person was perceived to have. Responses that include reasons for considering age in relation to promotion are shown in Table 12.

⁵⁴ Drake Consulting Group, 1999, House of Representatives Inquiry submission, www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/eer/OWK/index.htm

Table 12: Employer reasons for taking age into account when considering a person for promotion

<p align="center">Q. Under what circumstances would you take a person’s age into account when considering a member of staff for promotion?</p>
<p align="center">Examples of responses:</p>
<p><i>“Not an issue unless the person indicated they intended to retire in the very near future or the job required a longer term commitment. However, I have never had to do this - my experience is that people approaching retirement age do not tend to apply for promotion”</i></p> <p><i>“Nil, unless retirement is reasonably close”</i></p> <p><i>“The impact on the organisation. If somebody has indicated that they intend to retire shortly, this would impact on promotion”</i></p> <p><i>“When the person is 64 (65 = retirement age)”</i></p> <p><i>“Only if close to retirement; new training requirements for the job vs. possible tenure”</i></p> <p><i>“Very unlikely in any circumstances. But a person 1-2 years from retirement and the promotion was competitive with younger applicants with similar merit, then believe on balance would promote younger candidate”</i></p> <p><i>“Expected time left in full-time work, the desire to achieve, lead by example, the pressure and stress that may be associated with the position”</i></p> <p><i>“How long the position would be filled for i.e. short strategic goals or long-term, person about to retire etc”</i></p> <p><i>“Only in the context of track record and willingness to participate in training to keep skills up to date. The longer it is since a person undertook training - could be interpreted as the less likely a person is to take training - the older you get without participating the less likely you will”</i></p> <p><i>“Health issues - are they relevant. Amount of sick leave previously taken. Previous worker's compensation”</i></p> <p><i>“Relevance of job requirements and tasks required, health problems especially back problems”</i></p> <p><i>“Only if the position required a physical energy level the person could no longer sustain”</i></p> <p><i>“Where physical strength and energy level are important”</i></p> <p><i>“Potential for development - it is a vital component for promotion and age becomes an issue if a selection panel considers that a person has reached the peak of that ability and has little potential for development”.</i></p>

What could be done to help people 45 years of age and over to find employment in their chosen occupation?

The response rate to this question was 84%, with 16 employers choosing not to respond. A variety of suggestions were made, with the five most common suggestions being:

1. Provide education/training on the job-application process; how to research a job, how to write a resume and address selection criteria (32%).
2. Provide career counselling and help people to do a skills audit (20%).
3. Change employer attitudes, that is, educate employers about the myths and the reality of employing people of mature age (17%).
4. Provide training in interview techniques (17%).
5. Encourage and assist people to update, maintain or gain qualifications (17%).

Responses were grouped into five categories: *Training and services required*, *Support needed*, *Individual responsibilities*, *Required employer actions* and *Required government actions*. Responses are displayed by category in Figures 38 to 42.

Figure 38: Training and services required by unemployed mature age workers

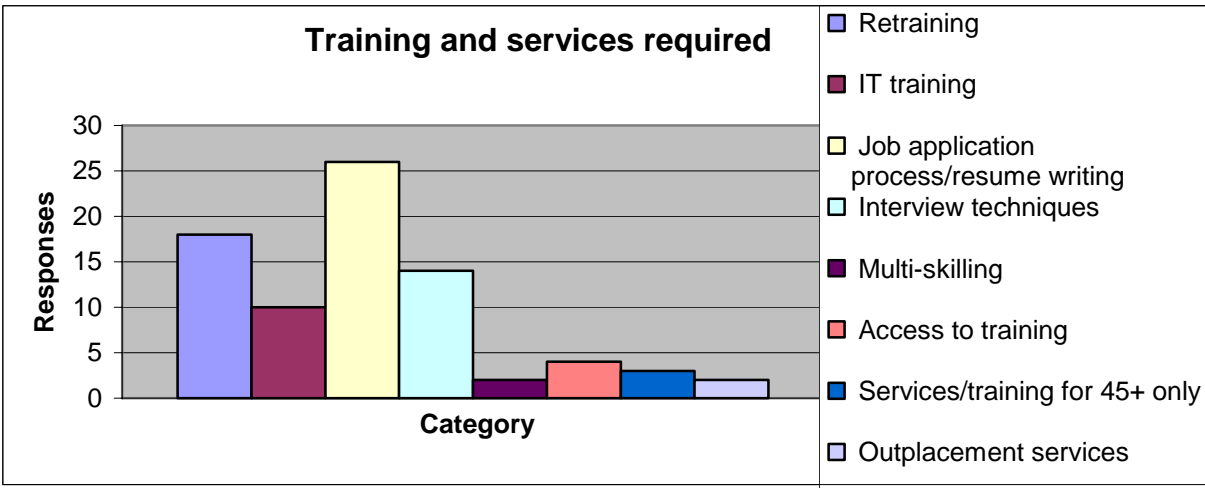


Figure 39: Support required by unemployed mature age workers



Figure 40: What individual mature age workers and unemployed can do to help in attempts to find employment

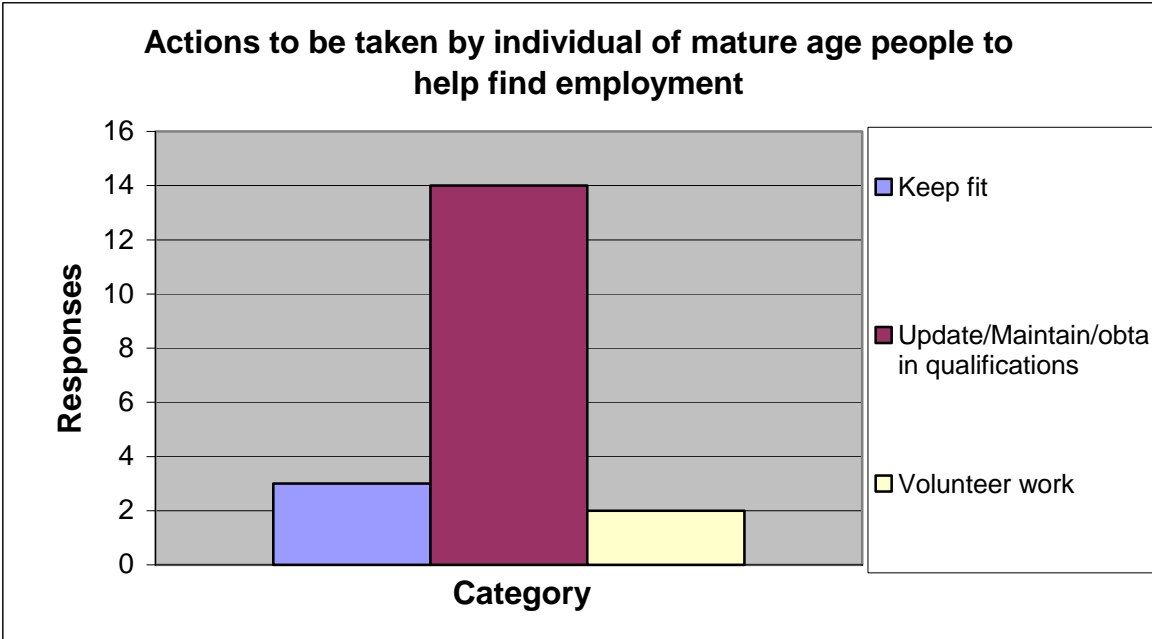


Figure 41: Required employer actions to help mature age people to find employment

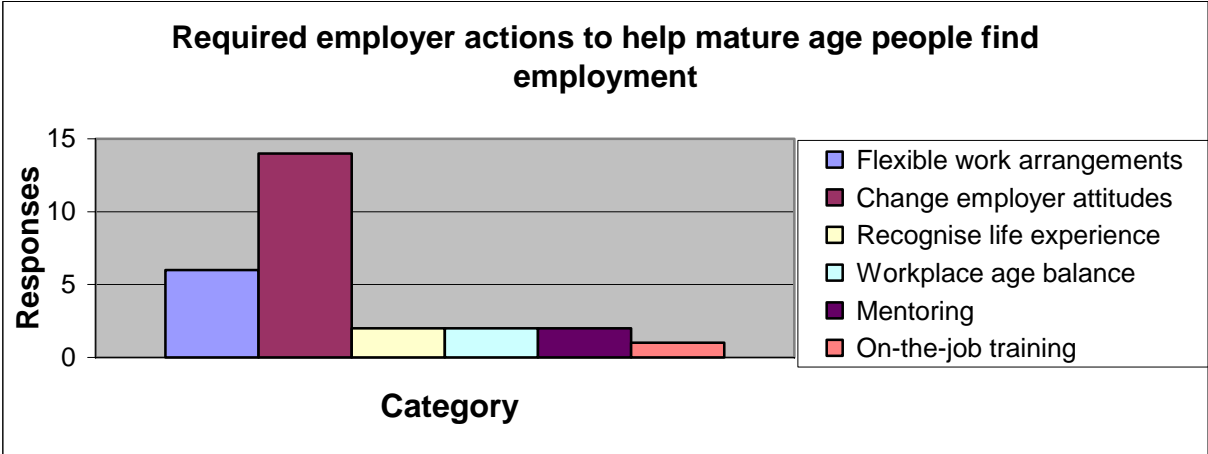
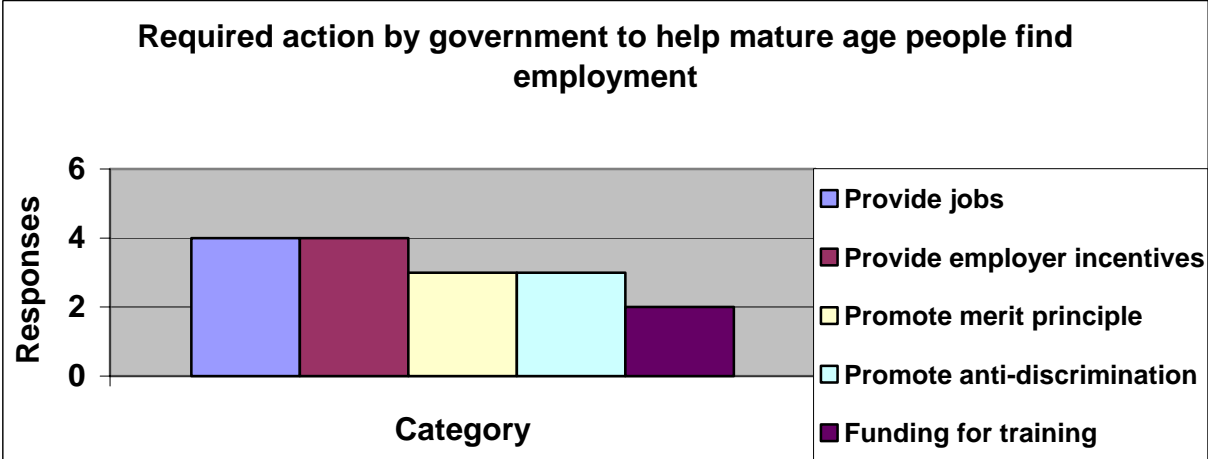


Figure 42: Required government actions to help mature age people to find employment



7.3 Employment Agency Questionnaires

Participating employment agencies: Clientele and funding

In total eight employment agencies participated in the pilot study, a response rate of 24%. Table 13 displays a profile of participating employment agencies, including location, clientele and funding.

Table 13: Participating employment agency profiles

<i>Location</i>	<i>Clientele</i>	<i>Funding</i>
Launceston	Businesses.	Customers, clients.
Launceston	Unemployed people and employers.	Commonwealth Government.
Rosny Park	A group training company: Provide training and community services for and with businesses and the unemployed. Linked to Jobnet.	Federal Government. Private fee for service. Office of Vocational Education and Training.
Rosny Park	Unemployed people most referred through the "Job Network". Employers seeking recruitment services.	Federal Government.
Hobart	Commercial businesses: State and Federal Government Agencies and Departments.	Part-funded by Federal Govt. but strive to be financially 'self-sufficient' through charging fees and undertaking Govt.-funded contracts.
Hobart	Businesses. Employed people wishing to change jobs. Unemployed people.	By sales.
Ulverstone	We are a Group Training (Employment) Company that also delivers Job Network, NASS and CSP Services. All category businesses throughout the State as well as job seekers utilize our services.	Primarily via hourly charge rates levied for the apprentices/trains we employ. However, joint State/Commonwealth and project specific funding is also received.
Hobart	Businesses. People wishing to change jobs. People looking for temporary or casual jobs.	Private investment.

How do you think employers perceive job seekers 45 years of age or older?

Employment agencies were asked to comment on how employers perceived mature age jobseekers. Results were varied, with generally negative findings. One employment agency representative commented that employers generally perceived mature age jobseekers in a positive light, and another commented that it depended entirely on the job at hand. In addition, it was reported that the community service sector particularly welcomed mature age workers. The remainder of comments are as follows:

“Generally speaking as over the hill, too difficult to train, over experienced, too fixed in their ways, likely to be sick or prone to claims”

“Depends on industry, some perceive that the over 45s are set in their ways”

“Can’t teach an old dog new tricks”

“May be considered too expensive”

“Generally: Seen as too old, that is, past their “use by” date. Often employers consider it better to get a younger person and train them their way rather than try to “teach an old dog new tricks”

“Specifically: Some individuals with good skills in demand will always get work due to their particular experience. Depends on whether it is a buyers or sellers market.

Some developing occupations particularly those involving part-time or casual workers (e.g. security, cleaning) will attract and employ older workers.”

Do mature age people face barriers that make it difficult for them to find employment?

All eight employment agencies agreed that barriers exist that make it difficult for mature age workers to find employment. The most significant barrier facing mature age individuals trying to find employment reported by employment agencies was ‘negative employer perceptions’, encapsulated in the quote below:

“Employer perceptions (mature age workers are) Too old, set in ways, won't give value for money, won't get long service. Lack of IT skills, not as comfortable with computers, PCs, computer systems, etc. May be slower, less adaptable to IT changes, etc”.

Another barrier identified by a number of employment agencies was the loss of self-esteem that people suffer after being unemployed for long periods. This time out of the workforce results in a loss of networking skills and may result in people feeling left behind and lonely, as quoted below:

(People who have been out of the workforce feel) “Loneliness – feel ashamed and have forgotten how to network – they feel left behind in technology.”

Agency representatives also reported that some people who have been unemployed for long periods develop ‘negative attitudes’ towards finding work and may refuse to take on work that may be at a lower level to what they are used to doing. Similarly, some people refuse to look for work in other areas, severely limiting their chances of becoming re-employed.

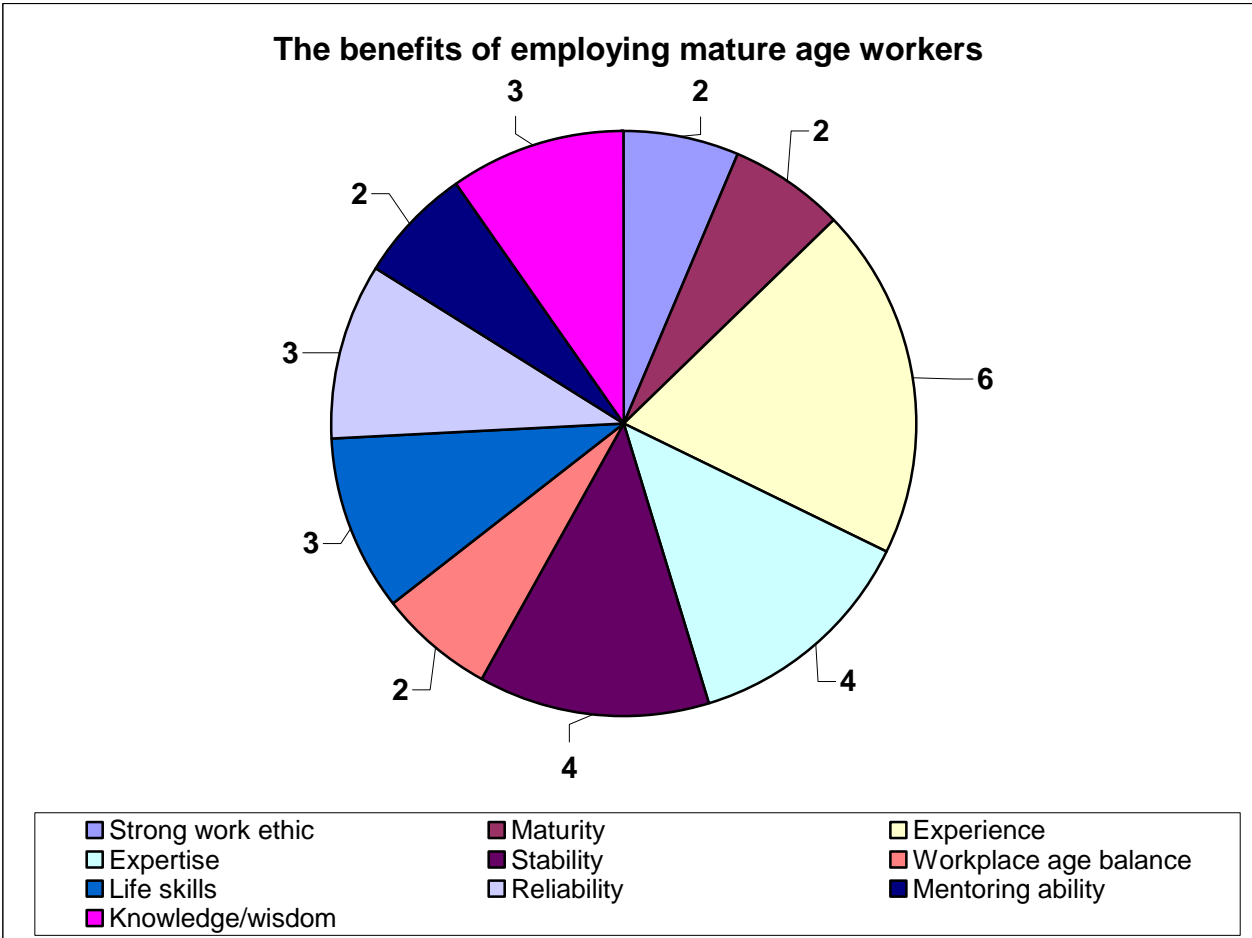
A difficulty faced by individuals who have become unemployed after a long period of employment is that their qualifications and skills may be out of date. In particular, employment agencies representatives referred to skills in information technology, which has become a necessary requirement for most workplaces today. In addition, many people who have been in the workforce for a long time may have started work immediately after or before finishing school and as such have no official qualifications, which adds to the difficulties of finding work – as reported by an agency representative:

Education often stopped when they left school – many are reluctant to invest in further education. Therefore skills often lag behind younger colleagues.

What are the benefits for businesses/organisations in employing people 45 years of age or older?

Employment agency representatives were asked to comment on what they believed the benefits were for businesses and organisations employing people 45 years of age or older. The response rate on this question was 100%. The most common responses were “Experience” and “Stability”, followed by “Expertise” and “Life skills”. Figure 43 displays responses in graphical format.

Figure 43: The benefits of employing mature age workers as reported by employment agency representatives



Do you think there are any disadvantages for businesses/organisations in employing people 45 years of age or older?

In total, six employment agency representatives reported they thought there were disadvantages for businesses or organisations employing people 45 years of age or older, and two reported no disadvantages. Disadvantages cited by agency representatives included the costs of retraining, that some individuals were ‘set in their ways’ and would be difficult to train, that some individuals may have a problem with working under the authority of a younger person, that many mature age people lack information technology skills, and health and fitness issues related to age that were relevant to industries involving physical labour.

Training

Benefits and disadvantages of providing training for mature age workers and unemployed

All agency representatives reported there were benefits in providing training for mature age workers and unemployed people. The most commonly reported benefit was that, given the large amount of experience that many mature age workers hold, this provides a strong base on which to build training, and thus training may be more effective for mature age individuals as they will be able to better apply knowledge gained in training to a wider range of situations.

A total of five employment agency representatives reported there were no disadvantages in providing training for mature age workers and unemployed people, while three agency representatives believed there were disadvantages. Disadvantages of providing training related mainly to unemployed people, with two agency representatives expressing concern that some training was given for “training’s sake” alone, without providing any real benefit to unemployed people in terms of finding a job. Also highlighted was that unemployed people can become “socially reliant” on training as a source of social contact, which may result in loneliness or depression when the training ends and the person does not find work. The benefits and disadvantages of providing training to mature age workers and unemployed people as reported by employment agency representatives are displayed in Table 14.

Table 14: The advantages and disadvantages of providing training for mature age workers and unemployed people

Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>Strong experience base to build training on</p> <p>Provides an upgrade of skills</p> <p>Provides stimulation and motivation</p> <p>Increases information technology knowledge</p> <p>A source of networking</p> <p>Builds self-esteem</p> <p>Mature age people tend to take training seriously and are focussed</p> <p>Helps manage organisational change</p>	<p>May be slower to train mature age people</p> <p>Some mature age people resist change</p> <p>Training for training’s sake only provides disillusionment</p> <p>May create social reliance</p> <p>Must have a job outcome or is no use</p>

What specific training programs do you think would help a person 45 years of age or older to find employment?

Agency representatives were asked to identify training areas that they believed would help mature age jobseekers to find employment. In addition, agency representatives were asked if some industry sectors had a particular demand for mature age workers and if there were any industry sectors in which it was particularly difficult for mature age workers to find work. Responses are displayed in Table 15.

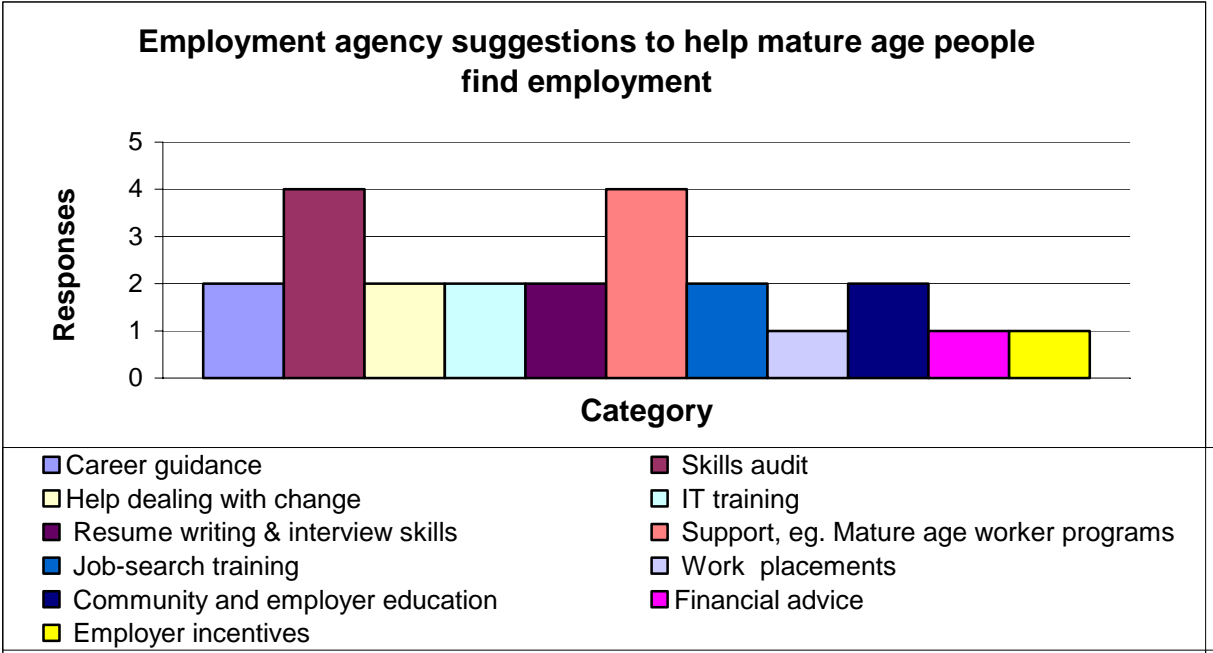
Table 15: Employment agency suggestions for areas of training, areas of demand for mature age workers and areas of difficulty in finding employment for mature age workers

Training areas suggested	Industry sectors demanding mature age workers	Industry sectors in which it is difficult for mature age workers to find employment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer-service skills • Security work training • Business record-keeping • Job-application skills: including resume-writing and addressing selection criteria • Interview training • Self-marketing • A training/networking “club” so people in same situation could socialise and help each other • Community services skills, eg. carer training • Information technology training • Personal development, eg. self-esteem building • Learning to manage change • Occupational Health and Safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community services such as aged care • Security work • Ship building • Book keeping especially for small business • Factory hand work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electronics industry • Information technology • Promotional work • Retail sales • Call centres

What could be done to help people 45 years of age and over to find employment in their chosen occupation?

The response rate to this question was 100%. A number of suggestions were made, one of the most popular being to help mature age individuals seeking work to conduct a skills audit, that is, assess what skills and qualifications individuals hold in order to create a starting point to start looking for work or gain new direction. Another common response was to provide mature age people seeking work with support such as programs designed specifically for mature age workers including such services as career counselling, financial advice and help with networking. Figure 44 displays employment agency suggestions with regard to helping mature age people find employment.

Figure 44: What can be done to help mature age people find employment



7.4 Unemployed Group Questionnaires

Mature age unemployed people were accessed through employment agencies. All employment agencies were provided with questionnaires to be distributed to any of their unemployed clients who were willing to participate in the pilot study. In total, 14 unemployed mature age people returned a questionnaire. All except one of the unemployed respondents were male and all respondents were aged between 45 and 69 years (see Table 16). All demographic characteristics for the unemployed group are displayed in Table 16.

Period of unemployment

The average number of months that respondents reported being unemployed was 29 months. This figure is skewed, however, by the fact that one person reported being unemployed for the last 15 years. Without taking this individual into account, the average number of months unemployed for the group was 17 months. Unemployed figures for respondents are shown in Table 17.

Table 17: Unemployed group: length of time unemployed

Number of months unemployed	Number of respondents
180	1
48	1
42	1
24	2
20	1
12	3
10	1
8	1
4.5	1
3	1
1	1

Table 16: Unemployed survey respondent demographic characteristics

VARIABLE	RESPONSE CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES (n=14)
Sex	Female	14% (1)
	Male	86% (13)
Age groups (years)	45-49	22%
	50-54	36%
	55-59	27%
	60-69	15%
	70-79	0
	80 or more years	0
Language spoken at home	English	100%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status	Yes	0
	No	100%
Highest education level	No formal schooling	0
	Primary school	0
	Year 10	29%
	Year 11	14%
	Year 12	14%
	Certificate course/traineeship	14%
	Apprenticeship or Business Certificate	29%
	University Degree or tertiary qualification	0
	Higher Degree	0
	Don't know	0
Other	0	
Post Codes	7007	2.5%
	7009	2.5%
	7011	2.5%
	7248	2.5%
	7250	36%
	7264	2.5%
	7268	2.5%
	7275	14%

Table 16: Unemployed survey respondent demographic characteristics (continued)

VARIABLE	RESPONSE CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES (n=14)
Post Codes	7310	2.5%
	7325	2.5%
Volunteer work undertaken	Yes	43%
	No	57%

Previous occupation

All respondents reported they had previously had a paid job. Occupations included:

“Lift mechanic, seasonal worker/forklift driver, self-employed, Santa, cleaners, contractor in energy business, sales consultant x 2, administration officer x 2, cleaner x 2, clothing sales on commission, bricklayer, landscape designer, manager in a government department”

Participants were asked to report whether their previous occupation was full-time, part-time, casual or “other”. In total, six respondents used to work full time, two worked part-time and four worked casually. Two respondents chose the “other” category but specified their answers with the result that one worked on a contract basis and the other was self-employed.

Manner of unemployment

Respondents were asked to indicate how they became unemployed. Four options were listed: 1) redundancy or retrenchment, 2) retirement, 3) left work to care for another person(s), 4) left work for other reasons, please specify. One respondent reported he became unemployed due to retrenchment, while all other respondents indicated they left work for “other reasons” (option 4) (see Table 18).

Table 18: Responses to the “Left work for other reasons” category

“Work discontinued”
 “The Court took my driving licence”
 “Contract finished”
 “Went overseas, company was putting off staff”
 “Disagreement with employer ethics”
 “Boss went bankrupt”
 “Being self-employed on commission, basically all my money went out on expenses”
 “Lower back problems – had to stop”
 “\$6 per hr from casual employer of several years left me bankrupt”
 “Spouse obtained position in Tasmania. I was a resident in Victoria and unable to get a transfer to Tasmania”
 “Meniers disease affected my ability to deal with heights” (was a lift mechanic)

Type of work wanted

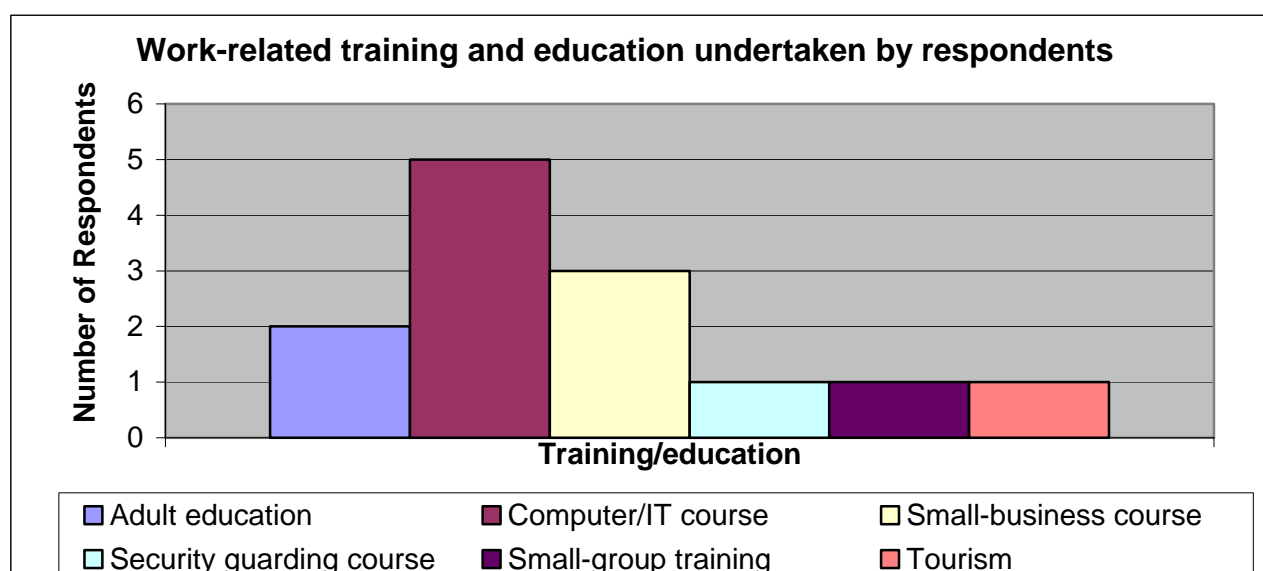
All respondents indicated they had looked for paid work during the four weeks prior to receiving the survey. The majority of respondents (10) were looking for full-time work, while three respondents were looking for casual work and one for part-time work.

Training and education

Work-related education or training

A total of 78.5% of respondents reported that during the past five years they had undertaken work-related education or training. Five respondents indicated they had done a computer course or some form of information technology training. Three respondents reported doing a small-business course, while two listed “adult education” in general. In addition, 43% of the unemployed group reported doing unpaid volunteer work such as coordinating a community online access centre, bus driving and City Mission work. All work-related training and education undertaken by respondents can be seen in Figure 45 (excluding volunteer work).

Figure 45: Work-related training/education undertaken by respondents in last five years



The advantages and disadvantages of providing education and/or training to people 45 years or older who are looking for work

Respondents were asked to list what they considered to be advantages and disadvantages of the participation in training and or education programs of mature age people who were looking for work. In general, respondents were positive about training, citing numerous benefits. In particular, the conceptions that participation in training keeps a person abreast of new technologies and modern work practices and that training helps one be more competitive were mentioned by a number of respondents.

Disadvantages of providing training and education to mature age people who were looking for work were also reported. The two main areas of disadvantage recognised by respondents were that training is of no use unless it leads to a job and that employer prejudice towards older people means that training is irrelevant if employers won't employ people of mature age. The advantages and disadvantages of training/education as reported by respondents is displayed in Table 19.

Table 19: The advantages and disadvantages of mature age jobseekers participating in training or education programs

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
<p><i>“Assistance to a 'disadvantaged' group”</i></p> <p><i>“Training is excellent – it keeps one in touch with changes in the workplace both professionally and socially”</i></p> <p><i>“Many people 45+ have not been exposed to IT. Today's jobs need this knowledge. A lot of 45+ people are quite capable of combining experience with educated knowledge”</i></p> <p><i>“Keeping abreast of modern practices”</i></p> <p><i>“Education and training are essential to be competitive in the workforce”</i></p> <p><i>“Gives motivation for a more interesting life in the autumn of one's experience”</i></p> <p><i>“Helps lift self-esteem and encourages you to keep your brain active. Employers are not interested in employing older people if youth have equal qualifications”</i></p> <p><i>“They will be job ready”</i></p> <p><i>“Gives confidence to people who go to these programs”</i></p> <p><i>“People with a lot of life and work experience would be able to continue to contribute to our society and their own enjoyment of life”</i></p> <p><i>“May equip them with additional skills that could be beneficial to potential employers”</i></p> <p><i>“Widens their scope of competitiveness”</i></p>	<p><i>“Employers are prejudiced against over 45s”</i></p> <p><i>“Too often training is of no use if it is not pertinent to the local industry base. Many manufacturing firms have closed or downsized their workforce thus reducing any possibility of recruiting staff”</i></p> <p><i>“If they have no hope of getting work”</i></p> <p><i>“Training needs to bring benefits. If square pegs are compelled to fit round boxes, self-esteem is dashed and anxieties compounded and older people are further impoverished”</i></p> <p><i>“Education and training brings some benefits BUT training has left me in distressing debt for months. In contrast, unrecognized efforts have delivered tangible benefits”</i></p> <p><i>“You could be trained all you want, but if people think you are too old that is it”</i></p>

What specific training programs would help a person 45 years of age or older find a job?

The major areas of required training as identified by respondents were job-application skills including searching and researching a job, resume-writing and interview techniques, general workplace skills, such as word processing, and training in information technology, such as commonly used computer programs. Training in small business skills was also suggested as an option. Participants also expressed a need for support in the area of “personal development”, suggesting training in motivation and self-esteem building would also be useful.

One respondent suggested participation in government-funded programs such as “work for the dole” would be helpful, and even better to have similar programs designed specifically for mature age jobseekers. In addition, work experience was identified as a key area of necessity. An insightful comment made by one respondent was that education and training needed to be

tailored to the participant's level of skills and education to be effective, and another commented that the use of jargon and acronyms in training was a problem (see below):

“Training must be aimed at the level of education of the persons in training. Many unemployed people are from rural backgrounds and many never completed grade 10. Literacy and numeric in this area is poor and many children are deprived of education due to family pressures to stay home and work on the family farm instead of attending school”

“Programs need to be explained in simple English with the avoidance of jargon and acronyms”

Perceptions of interviews

Being interviewed by a person 10 years younger than yourself

Similarly to the “employee questionnaire”, this question was included to investigate how an unemployed person of mature age would feel about being interviewed for a job by a person notably younger than themselves, as this may be the situation for many mature age unemployed people applying for jobs. When asked how they would respond to being interviewed by a person who was 10 years their junior, 79% of respondents indicated they would have “no problems” with this situation. Two respondents reported that it would “depend on the person interviewing” them and one respondent reported they would feel “nervous”.

Being interviewed by a person more than 10 years younger than yourself

Slightly fewer respondents (71%) indicated they would have “no problems” with being interviewed by someone more than 10 years their junior. One respondent commented he would not have a problem being interviewed by someone more than 10 years his junior. However, “*if the person was in their 20's or early 30's I would feel quite uncomfortable and possibly selfconscious*”. Another respondent reported “*I dread young people exercising power over me – those with high qualifications and little or no experience*”.

Perceptions of employers and discrimination in the workplace

How mature age jobseekers feel they are perceived by employers

While one respondent reported that in some cases mature age jobseekers are perceived by employers as “stable, reliable and conscientious”, the majority of respondents indicated that employers have negative perceptions of mature age people seeking work. The most commonly reported perceptions that the respondents felt employers had of mature age jobseekers was that they were “too old, past their use by date or a liability”. All responses to this question are displayed in Table 20.

Discrimination at work or while trying to get work

All but one respondent reported that they had experienced discrimination either in the workplace or while trying to get work. All respondents described their experience of such discrimination. Almost all respondents considered that, although not overtly stated (as to do so would be illegal in many cases), the majority of employers/recruiters were only looking to employ younger people. Two respondents reported being openly told the employer/recruiter was looking for a younger person. Accounts of respondents' experiences of age discrimination are displayed in Table 21.

Table 20: How respondents feel employers perceive mature age jobseekers

Positive perceptions
<i>“In some cases they see them as stable, reliable and conscientious”</i>
Negative perceptions
<p><i>“Some are reluctant to employ you if in that age group”</i></p> <p><i>“Out of date and as a liability”</i></p> <p><i>“Depends on employer’s background: Is the person able to change, is the person here for a long-term commitment”</i></p> <p><i>“Employers are skeptical of 45+ age group who say they are honest, reliable and trustworthy as they think why are they unemployed”</i></p> <p><i>“Employers don't believe that 45 + age group can do an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay”</i></p> <p><i>“Employers don't count past experience and work history as positives”</i></p> <p><i>“As liabilities”</i></p> <p><i>“Past their use by date”</i></p> <p><i>“Too old for the job”</i></p> <p><i>“A stigma exists with an age barrier and over this age you never get to an interview so that people can see what you are like”</i></p> <p><i>“Too old”</i></p> <p><i>“No long-term future even though people often hire for short-term jobs”</i></p> <p><i>“Lacking in flexibility, capability and capacity for work”</i></p> <p><i>“More difficult to relate to than younger people”</i></p> <p><i>“Friends tell me that employers are annoyed by older people seeking work because they are required to. Employers have sent me on my way politely or ignored me”</i></p> <p><i>“Not competitive”</i></p> <p><i>“Short term”</i></p> <p><i>“Prone to health-induced absences”</i></p> <p><i>“Inflexible”</i></p> <p><i>“As having less potential than a younger person, both in high-tech learning ability and physical aptitude”</i></p>

Table 21: Discrimination of the basis of age as experienced by survey respondents either at work or while trying to find work

Responses
<i>“In an interview the attitude against an older worker was apparent”</i>
<i>“I have applied for some positions and been told "we are looking for someone a little younger - sorry””</i>
<i>“Have applied for jobs asking for experience only to see jobs go to 18-20 year olds”</i>
<i>“A straight answer has been received on numerous occasions that a younger person was actually being sought for the job”</i>
<i>“After an interview at a local factory I was under the impression that I would gain employment. After returning to see the employment officer I was fobbed off - 'no vacancies at the moment'. The job was a vegetable production factory and most of the work was manual even on minimal wages. Although I was not told I was too old, I could read between the lines”</i>
<i>“Missing out because of age – an 18 year old was hired (obviously because of his 10 years experience)” (sic)</i>
<i>“I have applied for several positions where I felt I was well qualified, highly skilled and experienced, but in every case the position was offered to a much younger jobseeker”</i>
<i>“Answered an advert in the paper for a training call centre – was asked my age. I was told they would get back to me by Friday but they didn't and I would have missed out on the course”</i>
<i>“You do not get interviews”</i>
<i>“Always unspoken and therefore subjective – however I believe that age discrimination occurs frequently when applying – “Employers want younger persons”</i>
<i>“Work for the dole has a ring of penalty. Ministerial statements demonize unemployed people, institutionalizing a new class of untouchables. Lack of understanding for personal difficulties. Threats of Centrelink penalties create anxiety”</i>
<i>“Not being chosen for training on advanced high-tech equipment, while younger colleagues were consistently being picked”</i>

Barriers facing mature age unemployed people trying to find employment

All unemployed individuals (100%) who returned the survey reported that they thought numerous barriers existed that make it difficult for unemployed people of mature age to find employment. The most commonly reported barrier was “employer attitudes”, relating to perceptions such as:

<i>“While employers won’t be blatant enough to come straight to the point of telling one that one is too old, in a high % of unsuccessful applications this is very much the case”</i>
<i>“Most employers would either employ a junior or perceive that a 1-2 year degree far outweighs 25+ years experience”</i>
<i>“People/employers only want younger people. The days of a gold watch at 65 are long gone – look around you in the shops or anywhere – we do not exist unless self-employed”</i>

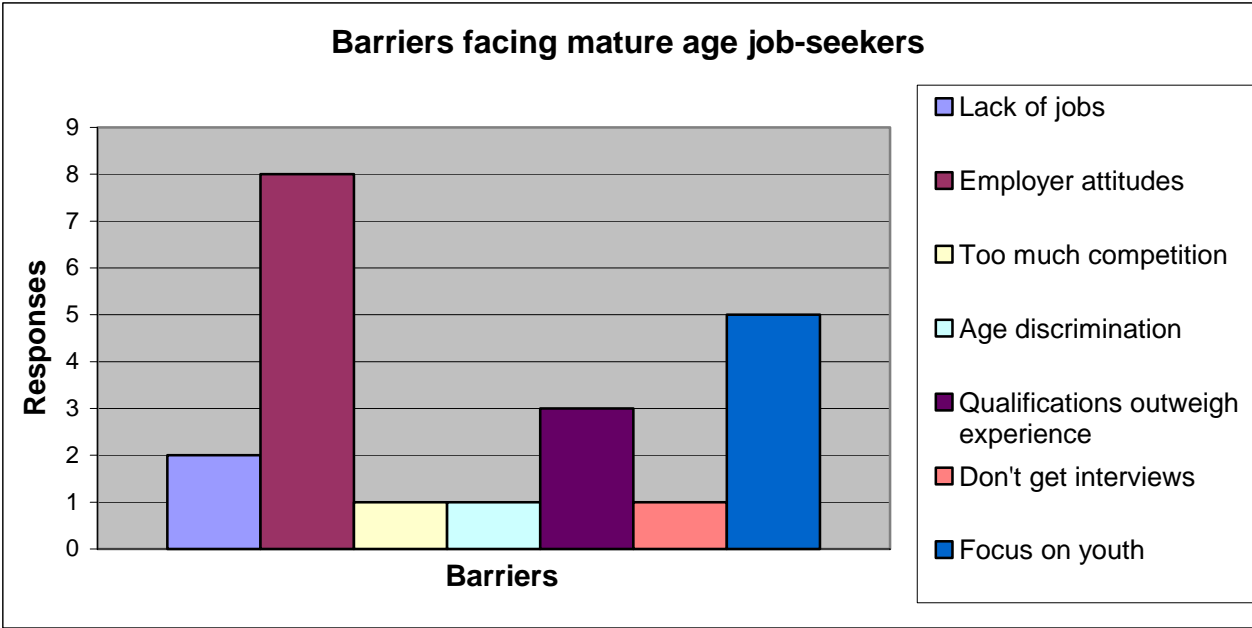
The second most commonly reported barrier was the perception that society and government only “focus on youth” for issues such as employment and education. Comments included:

“Government promotes jobs for the youth – work for the dole etc. Traineeships are not generally available for over 45s and employers make the most of Government subsidies to employ youth at minimum expense to themselves. More experienced skilled workers can't compete”

“Continual propaganda from Government, media and other employers that we must solve the problem of youth unemployment, that there is something wonderful about retiring at age 50-55. We need to solve the problem of how we utilize people's time and the associated rewards”

All responses in relation to perceived barriers for mature age jobseekers are displayed in Figure 46.

Figure 46: Perceived barriers for mature age jobseekers



Qualities and actions a mature age person needs to have/take to be “job-ready”

Qualities needed to be “job-ready”

Respondents were asked to list qualities that they felt mature age jobseekers needed to have in order to be job-ready. The four most commonly reported qualities were ‘work experience’(5)⁵⁵, ‘flexibility’(3), ‘accepting of change’(3) and ‘information technology skills’(3). Other qualities listed included having ‘an employment history’(1), ‘motivation’(1), ‘confidence’(1), ‘small-business skills’(1), ‘enthusiasm’(1), ‘training’(1), ‘fitness’(1) and ‘perseverance’(1).

⁵⁵ Number in bracket denotes how many respondents listed the quality

Actions a mature age person needs to take to be job-ready

Respondents were asked to list actions that they felt mature age jobseekers needed to take in order to be job-ready. The three most common suggestions were to “undertake training or education”(4), “maintain and update skills”(3) and “keep positive”(3). Other suggestions included “develop resume and job application skills”(2), “work on interview techniques”(1), “undertake information technology training”(1), “keep motivated”(1), “get some work experience”(1), and “remain up-to-date with current work practices”(1). Two individuals responded that there was nothing a mature age person could do to make themselves “job-ready”, with one respondent commenting that their advice for a mature age jobseeker would be to “Look younger and lie about your age” which, although humorous, would appear painfully true for many mature age jobseekers.

Computer skills

All respondents indicated that they had used a computer before. Table 22 shows respondents’ self-rated level of skill for using the Internet, e-mail, word processing, spreadsheets and databases.

Table 22: Self-reported information technology skill level: Number of responses per category

	Above Average	Average	Below Average	(No response)
The Internet	2	7	5	0
Word Processing	2	7	3	2
E-mail	5	3	4	2
Spreadsheets	1	3	9	1
Databases	1	4	8	0
Never used a computer	0			

What could be done to help people 45 years of age and over to find employment in their chosen occupation?

The response rate to this question was 100%. Due to the smaller number of respondents in the unemployed group (14), it was possible to include each individual response in its entirety. This was deemed appropriate considering that mature age jobseekers who are currently unemployed are a considerable disadvantage for finding employment without current work experience, and that the average period of unemployment for this sample was 17 months, which is classified as ‘long-term unemployment’ using the ABS classification of 52 weeks or longer⁵⁶. All responses are listed in Table 23 (some respondents listed more than one suggestion).

⁵⁶ ABS (2000) Australian Social Trends 2000, p 112.

Table 23: Unemployed group: Advice on what could be done to help mature age people find employment

Responses
<p><i>“Assistance in HOW to look for work and to prepare an application”</i></p> <p><i>“Make Government Agencies and Politicians more aware of our needs and remind them we are not lepers. I think that more could be done for mature age persons in Govt. Departments and Agencies. Only the creation of REAL jobs will help anyone find employment”</i></p> <p><i>“Redress of people unsuccessful in obtaining a position. Jobs and positions are still openly based on WHO you know, not What you know”</i></p> <p><i>“As our population ages and our youth leave to work on the mainland then this leaves only the ageing to do the work”</i></p> <p><i>“Many aged workers could be taken into employment on a buddy system to work alongside a skilled/semi skilled worker to gain work experience. This could be done as a work for the dole system. Aged persons and other persons cannot always get work in their chosen field so it comes back to training for the labor market demand, not training”</i></p> <p><i>“Very little”</i></p> <p><i>“Encourage employers that there is a need for experience and well trained staff in their organizations and they have much to offer. There seems to be a perception that our age group can't grasp new technology etc”</i></p> <p><i>“Most CEO's of companies are over 45 yet they continue to be of service. It is a pity they can't understand that the rank and file over 45 can still be of service”</i></p> <p><i>“Change the way employers think about people over the age of 45”</i></p> <p><i>“Remove the stigma associated with age”</i></p> <p><i>“In my case retraining. When I had to stop bricklaying and I could get around again ok - for some months I couldn't walk too well”</i></p> <p><i>“Promote that people over 45 have a useful contribution to make and address the idea of retiring at 50 –55”</i></p> <p><i>“Encourage and validate self employment as an option”</i></p> <p><i>“Drop penalties for bona fide people”</i></p> <p><i>“Stop use of negative labels and stigmas eg "Dole Bludger" e.g. “Politicians”</i></p> <p><i>“Solicit genuine motivation, existing skills and aspirations and (jobseekers) be flexible”</i></p> <p><i>“Determine levels of commitment away from home i.e. try to find sustainable level”</i></p> <p><i>“Lower financial barriers to education and training”</i></p> <p><i>“There appears to be a stigma attached to the engagement of mature age people. Educating employers to accept the many positive benefits of employing older people would be a major benefit”</i></p> <p><i>“Aggressive marketing by job network providers who appear to only be interested in placing those whose skills are easy to sell. They pay lip service to the more mature aged people. I have been unable to obtain reference to a single position during the 6 months I have been a job seeker with a number of job network providers”</i></p> <p><i>“Investigate mature age work programs e.g. Green Corps”</i></p>

8. Conclusions

Mature age people who are retrenched or made redundant or who have been unemployed for a long time face considerable difficulty in becoming re-employed. Mature age workers make up a section of the community that has remained largely hidden when it comes to discussions about unemployment, in part due to the significant number of people who decide to ‘retire’ upon becoming unemployed, and are therefore excluded from unemployment statistics. In addition, the nature of mature age unemployment is long-term, which brings with it considerable financial and psychological difficulties.

It is a well-known fact that Australia’s population is ageing. While today there are 2.3 million people over 65 years of age, or 12% of the total population, by 2021 there will be 4.0 million, or 18%. By 2041, 25% of the population will be aged over 65 years of age while in 2051 projections estimate 30% of the population will be aged over 65 years of age⁵⁷. As Australia’s population ages, so does the age of its workforce. Demographic factors such as decline in birthrates and increases in life expectancy have seen fewer young people entering the workforce, while the first of the baby boom generation are turning fifty years of age.

At the same time, changing labour market dynamics have resulted in disruption to traditional work options and employment patterns for many people, but in particular those of mature age. Mature age workers have been greatly affected by the widespread use of retrenchment processes and severance payments⁵⁸. Such large-scale retrenchments and downsizing of organisations have contributed to the early retirement of many able workers of mature age despite the fact that this loss of older workers from the workforce is occurring at a time when the “economy is expanding, work hours are increasing and skill shortages exist in some industries”⁵⁹.

The ability for people of mature age to find work or become re-employed in Australia is further hindered by numerous ‘myths’ that surround mature age workers, causing employers to have negative perceptions about workers of mature age, with the result that they do not want to employ them. These myths permeate both the public and private sectors and in some cases are so entrenched that even organisations that try to help mature age jobseekers, such as employment agencies, are affected by them. For example, in a survey conducted by Mission Australia over half the sample of employment agencies reported that they would rarely send a mature age worker to a job interview⁶⁰ given the negative perceptions that employers were known to hold towards mature workers.

The situation for mature age workers and mature age unemployed people in Tasmania appears to match the trend for the rest of Australia. Tasmania’s workforce and population in general are ageing, and there have been numerous occurrences of downsizing, retrenchments and redundancies. While Tasmania currently has the second oldest population in Australia, behind South Australia, predictions for the next 50 years show Tasmania’s median age to be 51 years, three years older than that of the state with the second oldest predicted median age, South Australia (48 years), and nearly six years greater than the national predicted median age of 44.1 years.

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Hayward H. *Older Workers: Do they have a Future?* A paper presented at the Inaugural National COTA Congress, Adelaide, 1999.

⁶⁰ Mission Australia, 2000, *No use by date*, An advocacy statement on mature age workers and unemployed

The fact that Tasmania's population is predicted to age at a greater rate than the rest of Australia reinforces the salience of issues facing mature age workers. With labour shortages already evident in some industries, Tasmania may have to rely more strongly on the skills of mature age workers in the near future. It is therefore important to retain older, experienced workers in the workforce, given the predicted labour shortages as fewer young people enter the workforce to replace the older people who leave it.

In addition, factors such as dependent children staying at home for longer with parents as they engage in further study may result in people needing to be able to work for longer periods of time, and not leave the workforce at the 'traditional' retirement age of between 55 and 65. Factors such as improved living conditions have seen people maintain the ability to work to older ages, and compulsory retirement by age 65 is fast becoming irrelevant. This trend, however, is not necessarily matched in employment conditions – for example, 96% of Tasmanian employers who responded to this survey indicated that their organisation maintained a compulsory retirement age of 65 years.

8.1 General Overview of Findings

Employees

The sample of mature age workers currently employed said that they were satisfied with their work, but felt that employers held negative attitudes towards mature age workers. In total, 17% of employees reported they had experienced discrimination at work because of their age. Thirty percent of employees felt vulnerable to processes such as retrenchment and forced redundancy. In terms of training, the sample provided evidence of the fallacy of the 'myth' that mature age workers are set in their ways and refuse to be trained, with 96% of respondents reporting they would be willing to participate in training.

When employees were asked what could be done to help mature age workers find employment, training was the most popular suggestion. Suggested training areas included business skills such as by bookkeeping, multi-skilling, and training in areas of demand by industry. The second most popular suggestion was to educate employers and to try to change negative perceptions, such as by dispelling myths about mature age workers, promoting the benefits of employing mature age workers and profiling success stories of companies who had employed mature age workers and benefited in return.

Numerous employees felt that too much emphasis was placed on degree or diploma qualifications and not enough credit was given to those with years of practical experience and knowledge, and that employers needed to value experience. Another area many respondents considered to be important was for mature age workers to be given support to help them maintain and build their sense of self-worth or self-esteem.

Employers

The sample of employers was skewed due to the majority being from the public sector (66%), but the results are still useful and interesting. All employers listed numerous benefits gained from employing and training mature age workers. At the same time, however, the majority of employers also listed numerous disadvantages of employing and training mature age workers. Most of the disadvantages reported by the sample of employers match with the negative 'stereotypes' reported in numerous studies on mature age workers, such as that mature age workers are 'set in their ways', 'harder to train', 'use more sick leave' and are 'prone to injury'. Whether these comments are based on the direct experience of the employers or on

their perceptions alone can not be shown in results, but their comments reinforce what are described as the “myths” about mature age workers.

When asked if they would take age into account when considering a person for promotion, the majority of employers (74%) indicated they would not consider age. The remaining 26% reported age would be a consideration, in particular how close the person was to ‘retirement age’. Two employers reported that they would view age as a positive factor in consideration for promotion. The fact the majority of the sample were public sector employers, who must apply the principles of merit and equal employment opportunity, may have affected responses to this question. While the majority of employers reported that they would not take age into account when considering somebody for promotion, most employers listed numerous disadvantages associated with employing and training people of mature age. The fact that most employers reported such disadvantages suggests it is possible that such negative perceptions may inadvertently affect their decisions.

The majority of employers surveyed reported they considered it valuable to training staff of mature age, and 84% of the sample reported that training was provided to all staff in their organisation. The biggest concern held by employers with regard to training mature age workers was about people who were close to ‘retirement age’, that is 55 years, as it was conceived money would be wasted if the person retired shortly after receiving training. While this may be true, it should also be pointed out that younger people may provide even shorter tenure as they seek ‘better’ jobs and move in and out of different organisations. It has been found that mature age workers have greater company loyalty than younger workers and, if provided with training, are likely to stay with that organisation for the long haul.

When employers were asked what could be done to help mature age workers find employment the most commonly reported suggestion was “to provide education and training on the job application process” – how to research a job, write a resume, address selection criterion and participate in a job interview. Numerous employers also felt that career counselling would help people’s employment prospects, in particular helping people to do a skills audit, so they knew what type of jobs to apply for and to reinforce the importance of training and education. Seventeen percent of employers also commented that some employers needed to be educated about the myths and the reality of employing people of mature age.

Employment agencies

Employment agencies were asked to comment on how employers perceived mature age jobseekers. Results were varied, with generally negative findings. All employment agencies agreed that barriers exist that make it difficult for mature age workers to find employment, with the most significant barrier considered to be ‘negative employer perceptions’. Another barrier identified by a number of employment agencies was the loss of self-esteem that people suffer after being unemployed for long periods.

Employment agency representatives reported that some people who have been unemployed for long periods develop ‘negative attitudes’ towards finding work and may refuse to take on work that may be at a lower level than what they are used to doing. Similarly, some people refuse to look for work in areas that are different to where they were previously employed, severely limiting their chances of becoming re-employed.

Training was identified as a positive step towards mature age workers finding employment. Suggested areas of training outlined by employment agencies included customer service, job-

application skills, bookkeeping skills, self-marketing and training in information technology. The importance of work experience in addition to training was also stressed, with concern expressed that some training was given for “training’s sake” alone, without providing any real benefit to unemployed people in terms of finding a job. Also highlighted was that unemployed people can become less “socially reliant” on training as a source of social contact, which may result in loneliness or depression when the training ends and the person does not find work.

Employment agencies identified industries that had a particular demand for mature age workers. These included community services such as aged care, security work, ship building and bookkeeping, especially for small business and factory hand work. Industries identified as difficult for mature age people to access included the electronics industry, information technology, promotional work, retail sales and call centres.

To help mature age workers find employment, employment agencies in similar vein to employers, suggested career counselling in terms of assessing what skills and qualifications individuals hold in order to create a starting point to start looking for work or gain new direction. Another common response was to provide mature age people seeking work with support such as programs designed specifically for mature age workers, including such services as career counselling, financial advice and help with networking.

Unemployed

The sample of unemployed people in the pilot study could be classified as long-term unemployed. The average number of months of unemployment for the sample was 17, over six months longer than the 12 months specified by the ABS as a classification of long-term unemployment.

The sample of unemployed people reported that they felt employers perceived mature age jobseekers as “too old, past their use by date or as liabilities” and that, even if you had experience or recent training, such employer perceptions made being of mature age a significant barrier to employment. All but one respondent reported that they had experienced discrimination either in the workplace or while trying to get work. Almost all respondents considered that, although not overtly stated (as to do so would be illegal in many cases), the majority of employers/recruiters were only looking to employ younger people.

The majority of the unemployed sample had participated in work-related training during the last five years and felt that training was beneficial. At the same time, however, respondents reported that, if you did not receive at least work experience or a job at the end of training, it was a waste of time and only made things worse by giving a sense of false hope, and often incurring significant financial costs. Unemployed participants identified numerous qualities that a person needed to have in order to be ‘job-ready’, including being ‘accepting of change’, ‘information technology skills’, being ‘flexible’, ‘positive’ and ‘showing perseverance’ – which show congruence with qualities identified by employers as valuable in employees. However, unemployed participants said that if an employer had negative perceptions of being of mature age ‘that was that’ and that there was nothing that they could do.

When asked what training programs they thought would help mature age jobseekers, needs identified by unemployed participants included job-application skills (such as searching for and researching a job, resume-writing and interview techniques), general workplace (skills such as word processing) and training in information technology (such as commonly used computer programs). Training in small-business skills was also suggested. Unemployed

participants also expressed a need for support in the area of “personal development”, suggesting training in motivation and self-esteem building would also be useful.

When asked what could be done to help people of mature age find employment, the most common suggestion from unemployed participants was to remove the stigmas associated with older age and, in particular, to educate employers on the advantages of employing workers of mature age. Those surveyed perceived that youth unemployment was the major focus of society and government and that mature age unemployment needed to have its profile raised as an important issue. Programs designed specifically for mature age jobseekers were suggested as one option to address the problem, including schemes similar to “work for the dole” and apprenticeships for mature age people to provide work experience and build skill levels. Mentoring programs were also suggested as a means for people to pass on their knowledge and wisdom to younger staff and at the same time remain in employment for longer periods creating a niche for workers of mature age.

9. The Recommendation Development Process

The Interim Report addressed issues facing mature age workers and mature age unemployed people in Tasmania, including background research on the national and international situation for mature age workers and unemployed people, Australian demographic trends, data and information specific to Tasmania and the results of the pilot study.

As detailed in the Interim Report, it was a decision of the Employment Working Party that recommendations would not be based on the findings of the Interim Report alone, and that it was more appropriate to set up a focus group including representatives of each of the stakeholder groups of the pilot study as well as the members of the Employment Working Party to develop a set of recommendations. Following further discussion, it was decided that a workshop to examine the key findings of the Interim Report group would be a more productive method to develop recommendations. This process is detailed below.

10. Workshop to Develop Recommendations

A workshop involving stakeholders of the pilot study on issues facing mature age workers and unemployed people in Tasmania was held at the Glenorchy City Library on 4 June 2001. The aim of the workshop was to examine the major findings of the Interim Report with a view to producing recommendations for the final report. Participants in the workshop totalled 21 and represented a number of groups and organisations including mature age jobseekers, employees, public and private sector employers, Unions Tasmania, the Tasmanian Council of Social Service, the Council on the Ageing, employment agencies and the State Government. The workshop was very productive, allowing stakeholders to initially comment on the findings of the Interim Report and at the final stage successfully identify key themes and suggestions for recommendations.

The workshop identified four major areas for which recommendations were required – promotion of issues relating to mature age employment and unemployment, training and work experience, skills recognition, and support. The following tables display a transcript of the key issues identified at the workshop and suggestions for recommendations.

Promotion of Issues Relating to Mature Age Employment and Unemployment

Issue	Suggestion(s)
Dispel negative stereotypes and promote positives of employing mature age people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Promotional campaign involving all key stakeholders to dispel negative stereotypes to be developed → Explore the option of a specific Government Office/Department for dealing with employment issues for all sectors (not just public employment)
Dispel myths that mature age people are “anti –IT”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Promote the fast take-up of IT training and Internet usage of older people → If available, profile an organisation/business in IT that has successfully taken on mature age people and highlight benefits
Promote value of mature age workers in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Organisations/businesses to promote the value of mature age workers “in house” eg. profiles, mentoring

Training and Work Experience

Issue	Suggestion(s)
Training can be seen as useless as it often does not lead to a job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Training providers to demonstrate links between training courses and employment → Training providers and employers to develop work placement programs (possibly linked to training) for mature age jobseekers
Training needs to be in areas desired by employers (Particular focus on IT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Survey employers to find out which skills are desirable, in particular survey IT skill needs
Training needs to be delivered at level appropriate to the skill level of the client	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Flexible training courses required so clients can participate according to their competency level
Training in IT needed particularly in using the Internet as a job-search tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Training in IT generally → Specific Internet training → Information/training on how to use the Internet to search for jobs, eg. sites where jobs are listed
Lack of work experience opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Investigate links with volunteer organisations to gain work experience → Encourage organisations to take on volunteers
Training in ‘promoting self’ in terms of job applications and interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Apply for Federal funding for the provision of training in this area for mature age jobseekers. This should be provided free of charge to mature age jobseekers.

Skills Recognition

Issue	Suggestion(s)
Mature age jobseekers need help in deciding which jobs are best suited to them	→ Careers counselling from qualified career counsellors for mature age jobseekers
Greater Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC) is required as many jobs now have essential qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Promote RPL and RCC across all sectors → Investigate ways to formally recognise competencies → Inform mature age jobseekers of current procedures for how to have prior learning/competencies recognised → Investigate possibility of providing RPL, RCC at little or no cost to mature age jobseekers
Promote the role of mentoring, eg. to retain corporate knowledge	→ Research and promote ways to include option for mentoring in organisational planning, recognising the skills and corporate knowledge older workers can offer
Volunteer work needs to be recognised	→ Investigate role of volunteer work in Tasmanian community

Support

Issue	Suggestion(s)
Mature age jobseekers need help in deciding which jobs are best suited to them	→ Careers counselling from qualified career counsellors for mature age jobseekers
Isolation is a barrier to mature age jobseekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Develop and resource support groups for mature age unemployed/jobseekers → Investigate possibility of using Online Access Centres for support group meetings as would have opportunity to use the internet for job searching
Mature age jobseekers require assistance in applying for jobs, eg. different requirements such as selection criteria, resumes, work experience history, interview skills, etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Employment agencies to provide more accurate information about what an employer is looking for and suggest the best method of application → Government to consider advising at the time of advertising whether a job is a result of a restructure and/or if somebody is acting in the position
Self-esteem/motivation building required Loss of confidence/motivation due to numerous 'knock backs'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Self-esteem/motivation building sessions delivered free of charge → Employment agencies to suggest all options while looking for employment such as volunteer work to help build confidence

Information Session

Following the workshop, an information session on the project was delivered to residents of the North West Coast at the Ulverstone Civic Centre. The information session was held due to significant interest in the project from North West Coast (NWC) residents. It provided an update on the progress and direction, of the project, including the key themes identified at the workshop, as well as giving NWC residents opportunity to comment. The information session was received well by those who attended and comments from the session are listed below.

Training and Support

- Life experience needs to be valued and recognised
- Mature age jobseekers need work experience not just training
- Support networks for mature age jobseekers needed
- Information on and support needed for self-employment
- People can't afford to update their skills and qualifications
- Too much focus on IT – not all jobs require IT skills
- Employment agencies need to have a better, more 'human', relationship with clients
- Mentoring possibilities need to be developed

Job Creation

- Job creation needed in Tasmania
- Industries such as mining, where people work 50 hour+ weeks and may not want to, could create more jobs by making, for example, 30 hour weeks
- Federal Government trainee and apprenticeship schemes should be developed for older workers
- Businesses should be subsidised to employ mature age and other unemployed people
- Small business needs support, especially in small towns, to be able to keep employing people
- Spending money is going to poker machines rather than small business in many small Tasmanian towns – small business is suffering and unable to create jobs
- Tourism needs to be promoted much more on the NW Coast – opportunities for job creation
- Need investment in Tasmania – have to spend to grow
- Make Spirit of Tasmania cheaper or free to encourage tourists to come to Tasmania
- Significantly decrease payroll tax for small business

Recruitment Issues

- Younger people in senior positions in business/Government don't recruit older people – older people are perceived as a threat
- You can have too much experience – perceived as threatening or that there is some negative reason for why you have worked in many areas
- Even if you remove dates from your resume to disguise your age and you manage to get an interview, as soon as you walk in the door you are struck off the list
- Today IT skills are used to 'weed people out', ie. they are often not required for the job but are used as a screening mechanism

Other issues

- Nepotism a problem in Tasmania
- Employment legislation such as workers compensation and maternity leave are burden to employers – a disincentive to employ people

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Appendix 1. Participants

Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing 2000-2005

Employment Working Party

Lynne Fitzgerald	Unions Tasmania
Lis de Vries	Tasmanian Council of Social Service
Sue Diley	Working Women's Centre
Ann French	Department of Education
Sonni Azzopardi	Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Bill Flassman	Council on the Ageing
Tony Martin	Department of Premier and Cabinet
Robert Henderson	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
Linda Jamieson	Department of Health and Human Services
Robert Pearce	Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources

Additional members

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Kate Webber	Office of the State Service Commissioner
Noel Mundy	Mission Australia
Nick Behrens	Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
John MacKean	Council on the Ageing

Appendix 2. Acknowledgments

The Office of the State Service Commissioner would like to thank the following people for their contributions towards this report:

Linda Jamieson	Seniors Bureau, Department of Health and Human Services
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