

**Submission by the Employment Strategies Council (Brisbane North) Inc. to
the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment,
Education and Workplace Relations on**

**“An Inquiry into Issues Specific to Workers over 45 years of Age Seeking
Employment or Establishing A Business Following Unemployment”**

The following information is provided in addition to the Employment Strategies Council's previous submission to the Standing Committee on unemployment in over 45s. This perspective has been provided by the **Queensland Council of Unions**. (Grace Grace, Assistant Secretary of QCU is a member of the Employment Strategies Council).

During 1999 the ADCQ conducted an Age Discrimination phone in which has helped to identify a number of significant issues in relation to workers over 45 years of Age seeking employment, following unemployment.

Seventy-Six per cent of people who participated in the phone-in either experienced or witnessed alleged age discrimination in the workforce. Unemployed persons over 45 report age as the most single obstacle to finding employment.

The issues are relatively easy to categorise. Broadly speaking they fall under the following headings:

- age stereotyping
- early retirement policies
- technological changes

Each of the categories contributes in some way to age discrimination and the issues which effect workers over 45.

Age Stereotyping

The issue of age stereotyping presents the greatest obstacle to workers over the age of 45.

Forty-three percent of employers consider age to be an important consideration when recruiting staff. The assumptions associated with older workers are that they are less flexible, less enthusiastic and less motivated.

Other assumptions about older workers are that they are unable to change, difficult to retrain and conservative. These assumptions often serve as barriers when older workers are seeking employment. It is the responsibility of employers and co-workers to acknowledge these stereotypes and attempt to rethink their perceptions.

Instead of perceiving older workers as difficult and conservative an acknowledgement of their experience should be given by their colleagues and prospective employers. Older workers deserve recognition of the maturity and commitment that they bring to employment.

Early Retirement Policies

Other issues that face older workers is the establishment of early retirement practices. As superannuation funds allow access to monies at the age of 55. This has allowed the practice of broadening the definition of older workers and therefore justifying labour force restructuring. In a 1994 Queensland study 7% of employers surveyed regarded workers between the ages of 36-40 as older workers, while 43% of employers viewed 55 as a reasonable age limit for employees. To improve perceptions of the definition of "older" workers a review of early retirement provisions may assist.

Technological Changes

In days of developing technologies older workers suffer from the misperception that they are unable to be effective in the workforce due to their inability to accommodate emerging technologies. It has been suggested that applicants over age 40 without computer skills have greater difficulty in gaining employment. From an employers perspective there appears to be an unwillingness to train mature aged workers in the use of information technology. The result of this is that older workers can lose the opportunity to obtain or improve valuable skills.

An inability to access training in technological changes provides a further hindrance to access employment by older workers.

To overcome the perception that older workers without IT skills are unemployable, the mature unemployed suffer from the financial expense of training and are often still overlooked due to age stereotyping.

In summary a number of obstacles face older employees. These include age stereotyping, technological advances and early retirement policies. To overcome these hurdles mature workers often suffer financial and personal hardship. They advise mechanisms to hide their age and modernise their skills. To be able to compete effectively in the labour force societal perceptions of older workers must change.