

Mature age unemployment in Queensland

This document contains additional statistical information to supplement Section 2.0 of the Queensland Government submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations inquiry into specific issues to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment or establishing a small business following unemployment.

The attached tables highlight the main points made pertaining to mature age employment growth, lower unemployment rates for the mature aged yet higher incidence of very long term unemployment.

Table 1 provides comparative details of labour force status by age cohort for Queensland and the rest of Australia. This table indicates the extent to which higher labour force participation in Queensland translates to higher unemployment rates. This table also shows that the mature aged face lower unemployment rates than younger age groups. For example the average unemployment rate for all mature age workers over the 12 month period to August 1999 was 5.3% compared to 8.2% for all Queensland workers. The highest rate among the mature age groups was 6.7% in the 55-59 age bracket. In contrast the rate for 15-19 year olds was 19.6%.

Table 2 provides employment growth shares for each age cohort, relative to their labour market share, for Queensland and Australia over the 12 month period to September 1999. These data show employment growth for the mature age cohort to be almost double (58.4% in Queensland and 59.5% in rest of Australia) their labour market share (30.6%). In Queensland, mature age males are experiencing slightly higher employment growth rates (29.4% above labour force share) relative to the rest of Australia (27.1%). For females, however, the situation is reversed (25.0% above share in Queensland compared with 31.3% above share in rest of Australia).

Tables 3a through 3c show for males, females and persons respectively, their unemployment shares by age relative to their share of the labour force. These data show consistently that mature age unemployed are under-represented in terms of their share of the labour market. However, when broken down by duration of unemployment, mature aged are over-represented in terms of the very long-term unemployed only. This is true for males and females and in both Queensland and the rest of Australia. In Queensland, the deviation from labour force share (10.2%) is almost double that for the rest of Australia (5.2%).

These official statistics are inconclusive in terms of providing a complete assessment of the mature age workforce, but highlight areas requiring further investigation in order to develop appropriate policy responses to assist the existing mature age unemployed and to prevent a re-occurrence in future generations.

The main areas requiring further analysis are:

- Identify the significant factors contributing to the strong growth in mature age employment, and to what extent is this growth attributed to the age cohort effect, due to the aging population.

- With a lower overall unemployment rate why is it that mature age job losers have a greater likelihood of becoming very long term unemployed?
 - to what extent are the mature aged over-represented in terms of unskilled job losers?
 - do redundancy payments reduce job search activity, increasing the risk of long term unemployment?
 - is poor retirement planning a significant factor contributing to the number of mature age re-entrants into the labour market?
 - to what extent do these numbers reflect a bias towards youth in government programs targeting assistance to the very long term unemployed?
- Is this a long or short-term problem? What proportion of current prime age workers are at risk of becoming long term unemployed? What are the risk factors?

Table 1: Labour force status by age [Not reproduced]

Table 2: Relative employment growth shares by age [Not reproduced]

Table 3a: Relative unemployment shares by age, Males [Not reproduced]

Table 3b: Relative unemployment shares by age, Females [Not reproduced]

Table 3c: Relative unemployment shares by age, Persons [Not reproduced]