

Submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry

Issues specific to workers over 45 years of age seeking employment, or establishing a business, following unemployment.

Background

Jobs East is the Area Consultative Committee for Melbourne's East. The region encompasses the six local government areas of Boroondara, Whitehorse, Manningham, Knox, Yarra Ranges and Maroondah.

In 1996 Jobs East became aware of increasing anecdotal evidence that suggested older workers were facing particular disadvantage and hardship in maintaining or re-establishing employment. In response Jobs East established a research project aimed at profiling the issues and trends which were affecting older workers and their continued participation in the labour market.

The aim of the research was to fully understand the issues and opportunities to provide the basis from which Jobs East could develop a regional response.

The research report 'Profiting From Maturity' (Attachment 1), released in March 1998, identified wide spread discrimination amongst Australian businesses in the recruitment, training and redundancy or retirement of older workers.

These findings emphasised the need for a shift in the national perception of the capacity and value of older workers.

SUMMARY OF JOBS EAST INITIATIVES RELATED TO OLDER WORKERS

The Australian Employers Convention - *Promoting Age Balance in the Workforce*

On completion of the Profiting From Maturity Jobs East was critically aware that the success of a regional response to the issues affecting older workers would be governed by the broadly held perceptions of older workers.

Unlike other developed countries Australia did not appear to have a national forum to discuss the issues associated with older workers. To provide a forum for these discussions Jobs East and a number of business, government and academic partners have formed the Australian Employers Convention (Attachment 2) to promote discussion of the benefits of an age balanced work force.

A sample of the draft marketing material for the Convention is supplied in Attachment 2.

Research Projects to Support the Australian Employers Convention

Jobs East has entered into research partnerships with the Victorian State Government Department of Human Services, the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria and

The Lincoln Gerontology Centre at La Trobe University. Three areas of research are currently underway.

1. The use and efficacy of age discrimination legislation in employment.
2. The economic cost to the nation and the individual of the displacement of people aged over 45 years from the workforce.
3. The cost benefits to employers of an age balanced workforce.

Human Resource Management Tools

A number of human resource management tools are in draft format. The tools aim to provide employers with a systematic approach to understanding the issues associated with the ageing workforce and the current policies, perceptions and practices of their business relevant to the employment of older workers. A draft copy of the first tool is provided in Attachment 3.

Opportunities Presented by the Trend to Outsourcing.

As part of the research process Jobs East held a number of focus groups to discuss the issues and trends associated with older workers. One focus group of senior representatives from large recruitment agencies identified that the trend to outsourcing is a key opportunity in an otherwise bleak landscape for older professional and para-professionals.

In response Jobs East has developed a directory of business service consultants for the region to provide the tool to profile the contractors in this sector and to establish the criteria for success and their business development support needs. A summary of the findings is currently being compiled and will be forwarded to the Committee on completion.

ABS Data

A review of ABS data relevant to trends associated with the employment of older workers has been undertaken by Jobs East over the past month. The quantity of data is vast and a full analysis is yet to be completed. The data is supplied in Attachment 4.

Development of Case Studies of Best Practice in the Employment of Older Workers

Jobs East is working with four businesses to review their current policies and practices in relation to the employment of older workers. The review will support the development of a focused project in each business to develop new policies and practices which promote age balance in their workforce. The case studies will be used to promote the practices that allow business to benefit from the skills and experience of older workers.

Regional Seminars for Older Jobs Seekers

In response to the high level of need for practical information about what jobs are available in Melbourne's East and how older workers should position for these jobs, Jobs East is currently developing a seminar kit which will provide a day of presentations and workshops for older job seekers.

The kit will be available to ACC's and other agencies who provide service to this sector.

The development of the regional seminars is in response to the high level of expressed need by older people in Victoria. In the experience of Jobs East many older job seekers are ineligible for Job Network or state government assistance.

The level of demand for information of this type was expressed in March 1998 when Jobs East took part in talk back session on ABC radio 3LO to promote a seminar for older job seekers as part of the launch of Profiting From Maturity. The switch board could not cope with the high number of calls and the seminar was closed for bookings after four hours as the 250 person capacity had been reached.

Summary

The opportunity for people over the age of 45 to participate in the labour market is critical from a business, government and individual perspective. However, entrenched attitudes about the capacity of older workers and the expectation of early retirement amongst individuals must be addressed if that opportunity is to be realised.

Unprecedented ageing of the workforce, particularly against a scenario of sustained economic growth, predicates the sound business sense of ensuring that the skills and experience of older workers are fully capitalised by business.

The cost to the nation of the continued trend of displacement of workers over the age of 45 years is economically and socially unsustainable. It is an issue for which business, government and the individual must be prepared to take responsibility.

Intervention prior to displacement from the labour market is critical. ABS redundancy data starkly profiles the lack of opportunity for displaced older workers to reenter employment.

The challenge is to create an awareness of the issues associated with older people and their participation in the labour market in a way which highlights the opportunities as well as the imperative.

Attachments are not reproduced.