

22 November 1999

Issues Specific to Workers Over 45 Seeking Employment

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to your Inquiry.

The attachments indicate a few possible action areas for your consideration.

1. An outline of the psychological stages that unemployed experience suggests that government assistance would be best to focus on critical time periods (ie. 1-4 months of job loss or transition).
2. Existing support schemes need to be examined for “discrimination” (eg. Eligibility criteria for CentreLink career counselling services).
3. Overseas initiatives for mature age workers could be examined and pilot programs by employers and government agencies encouraged (eg. European initiatives).
4. Employers need to be encouraged to implement career management actions (eg. career programs for employees in later stages of career), and take a proactive and longer term approach to workforce planning.

I have also listed a general range of issues from an organisational, individual and community perspective. The range of these issues suggest that our community would benefit by government dealing with the causes as well as the symptoms. I hope that the Inquiry will focus on the longer term and take a systemic view of the issues.

I look forward to seeing creative and experimental government initiatives for Mature Workers that require key stakeholders to work collaboratively to build a sense of community and optimism for the future.

Yours sincerely

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[Attachments not reproduced]

Some Issues -

The many reasons for all key stakeholders to be involved and proactive in harnessing the talents and skills of this country.

1. Organisational perspective

- Skills shortages are inevitable in the future (aging of the workforce, knowledge based economy)
- Failure to recognise the economic imperative for workforce diversity
- Longer term workforce planning is seldom undertaken. Ways to build staffing flexibility need to be explored
- Short term staffing solutions are preferred yet perilous (downsizing impacts on morale and productivity, lack of commitment from contingent workforce)
- Management skills are lacking (few with management qualifications, poor people management skills - emotional intelligence)
- Little commitment to a learning and development culture (demise of the training guarantee), even though flexibility, innovativeness and speed of response will be important in the future
- Preference for government incentives to introduce changes rather than being socially responsible and proactive
- Human resource management focussed on operational efficiency rather than strategic business needs. Human resource information systems data not used for forward planning and projections.
- Lack of career support for employees (except for outplacement). Ignorance of career issues at various life stages.
- Lack of flexible arrangements and phase out possibilities for retiring not explored and hindered by legislation (eg. superannuation))

2. Individual perspective

- Resistance and lack of understanding of the new career contract and new career skills needed (traditional expectations of job security)
- Insufficient personal awareness, and lack of responsibility for ongoing learning and skills development (understanding the link to financial security and reality of periods of being out of work, reliance on employer)
- Ageism and discrimination by media, employers, recruiters
- Increasing expense of formal training hindering self-development efforts (course fees)
- Government programs for unemployed continuing to focus on permanent ongoing work as the only option (perpetuating traditional outdated paradigms)
- Lack of support for a portfolio mix (eg. for professionals - part-time work, consulting, teaching combinations). Lack of acceptance of these combinations and ways for switching between different kinds of work.
- Out of date definition of "unemployed" - ABS statistics don't tell the real story.

Some Issues continued

- Lack of career education about work options - *find a team* (be an employee, subcontractor) versus *build a team* (become a business owner)
- Lack of government support for the broader range of work options possible nowadays and a safety net
- Knowledge of new kinds of jobs and work. Suitability of mature workers for new kinds of jobs (call centres)
- Lack of specialised support during critical stages of unemployment for mature workers

3. The community perspective

- Lack of awareness and recognition that the dynamics of the world of work are changing and people will be changing career roles and will be out of work more often during their working lives
- Respect and valuing of knowledge and experience of mature workers (mentors, role models, advisors)
- Reactive rather than proactive educational institutions
- Impact on families, breakdown and generational effects
- Availability and level of support networks - role of government, local government and community?
- Isolation, despair - health and well being costs for the community
- Respect for and involvement of mature workers in the design of support mechanisms (eg. career resource centres - linked to local community)

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