



Research into employment barriers for  
mature age Australians  
Final Report

Department of Education, Skills and Employment

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“Research suggests that an extra 3% in workforce participation by people aged 55 and over would lead to a \$33 billion boost to Australia’s GDP. Organisations not implementing strategies to prevent age bias can miss out on the skills and capabilities from employees of all ages. This can have detrimental effects on productivity, morale and skills retention and transfer. Organisations lose the benefits of supporting and nurturing a multigenerational workforce. Yet ageism remains an accepted and normalised prejudice, underpinned by powerful stereotypes and assumptions which lead to exclusion, marginalisation and inequality.”

(Australian Human Rights Commission (2021) What’s age got to do with it?  
A snapshot of ageism across the Australian lifespan)

## Executive summary

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (the department) commissioned Outpost Consulting to undertake research into the employment of mature age workers (defined as workers aged 55+) from an employer perspective – specifically, to investigate the capacity and willingness of Australian businesses to employ workers in this age cohort, the barriers businesses perceive as preventing them employing or retaining older workers and possible solutions to these barriers.

The research was conducted through a combination of a brief review of recent literature, an employer poll, interviews with employers and recruiters, and an online Delphi process with experts in this field.

More than 300 employers, recruiters and experts participated in the research.

### Key research findings

The results of the employer poll indicate:

- Employers see the benefits of employing and retaining mature age workers and feel that they have moderate capability to do so, but they also reported that employment of mature age workers was only moderately important to their reputation, suggesting a lack of social norms (i.e. societal expectations) to drive positive behaviour.
- Difficulties experienced by employers around recruiting and retaining mature age workers relate to physical capabilities and risk of injury, higher wage costs, lack of up-to-date skills, challenges in finding or attracting them, and the attitudes of mature age workers themselves.
- Small businesses and those operating only in regional areas experience the greatest difficulties with recruiting and retaining mature age workers and are less likely to see employment of mature age workers as having an impact on their organisation's reputation.
- Large businesses and those that operate across both metropolitan and regional locations are more likely to recruit and retain mature age workers than their counterparts.
- Subsidised training for mature age workers, financial incentives and support from recruitment agencies to find suitable workers are most likely to influence organisations to actively recruit and retain mature age workers.

The interviews show:

- Employers and recruiters have many positive perceptions about mature age workers, including valuing their knowledge and experience, their level of reliability, responsibility and work ethic, their ability to mentor or pass on knowledge to younger workers and the fact that they were likely to stay in their role for longer than younger employees.
- Both employers and recruiters had similar views on the positives of employing mature age workers, recognising the experience and knowledge they bring.
- Negative perceptions still exist though, with interviewees noting that many employers hold views that mature age workers are slower, less productive, less innovative and less able to use technology than their younger counterparts.

- Both employers and recruiters reported experiencing barriers of higher salary costs, reduced physical abilities (for certain occupations) and a lack of up to date skills among mature age workers and job seekers. The salary barrier was a particular theme among recruiters.
- Employers and recruiters tend not to give age the same kind of deliberate attention they give to other workforce diversity characteristics.
- Labour shortages may prompt some employers to look to older workers more than they traditionally have. However, some employers experienced difficulty in finding potential mature age employees.
- While interviewees did not offer examples of good practice in the recruitment of mature age workers, several reported that they are actively implementing practices to help retain their older workers. These include flexible work options, a structured transition to retirement program, a mature age employee network, and training and upskilling of mature age employees.

The Delphi process found:

- Participating experts agreed that workplace factors (such as negative perceptions and stereotypes, ageism, lack of flexible and age-friendly work options and lack of consideration of age as part of diversity and inclusion policies) are having a significant negative impact on the employment of mature age workers – more so than systemic or individual factors.
- Awareness raising strategies (such as myth-busting and promoting the benefits of age-diverse workplaces) were considered to have the potential to make the biggest difference to the employment of mature age workers.
- Support for mature age workers and job seekers to access training and upskilling was also seen to have the potential to make a significant difference to the numbers of mature age people being employed.
- A number of policy and funding changes were noted as having the potential to moderately increase the numbers of mature age workers being employed, including the creation of lifelong learning policies, changes to workers' compensation policies and financial incentives or subsidies for employers taking on mature age workers.

## Conclusions

The research shows that despite valuing many of the benefits mature age workers bring to the workplace, Australian businesses perceive or experience the following factors as creating barriers to employing and retaining workers as they age:

- persistent ageism and negative stereotypes
- lack of societal expectations around mature age employment and an ageist societal culture more broadly
- lack of consideration of age as part of diverse and inclusive workplaces
- higher salary costs
- lack of up-to-date skills among mature age workers
- declining physical abilities and increasing risk of injury and concern about workers' compensation penalties

- lack of confidence contributing to declining mental health
- challenges in mature age workers and employers finding each other.

While most of these barriers have been well documented in existing literature, the difficulties expressed by some employers in finding mature age workers to employ has received less attention.

The research also highlights the solutions that participating employers, recruiters and experts believe are likely to have the greatest impact on the employment of mature age workers:

1. Subsidised or supported access to training and upskilling opportunities, as well as increased flexible working arrangements that are suitable for mature age people and of lifelong learning policies
2. Financial support in the form of subsidies, tax incentives and coverage for workplace injury
3. Awareness raising to help challenge assumptions and biases and bring about cultural change, as well as to educate employers about the benefits of mature age employment and age-diverse workforces
4. Education and practical support for implementing age-friendly work practices
5. Assistance for mature age individuals and employers to find each other, including support from recruitment agencies and tailored career advice and support services for mature age individuals
6. Encouragement for organisations to consider mature age workers as part of diverse and inclusive workplaces, for example through creation of age diversity targets, promotion of good practice and potential use of organisational procurement levers by individual businesses.

## Recommendations

These research findings have led to the following high level recommendations, which are expanded on in the Recommendations at p41 below:

### Rethink skills

1. Further promote skill-related programs focusing on industry sectors where mature age workers are more likely to need support.
2. Remove barriers for mature age workers to participate in ongoing learning, for example by adopting actions from the [Digital Transformation Skills Strategy](#)<sup>1</sup>.

### Address costs

3. Research barriers to employers taking up existing financial incentives (where this has not already been done) and identify potential solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Digital Transformation Skills Strategy was developed by the Digital Transformation Expert Panel established by the Australian Industry and Skills Committee. For further information, see <https://digitalskillsformation.org.au>

### Support matching

4. Engage key stakeholders who support job seekers and employers to tailor solutions for mature age job seekers in areas of labour market shortage.

### Create cultural change

5. Support employers to become more age-friendly and age-aware through a behavioural change or social marketing strategy.

## Introduction

The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (the Department) commissioned Outpost Consulting to undertake research into employment barriers for mature age Australians.

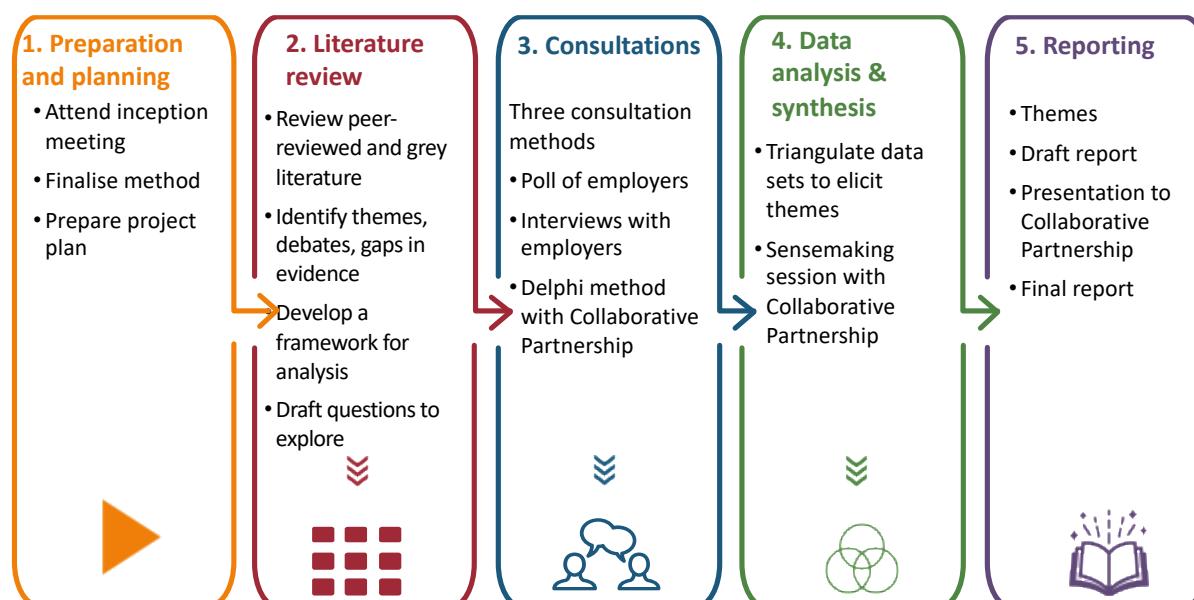
The research project ran from April to August 2021 and gathered primary data on:

- the capacity and willingness of businesses to employ older workers, and
- perceived barriers among businesses to employment of this cohort, and
- possible solutions to these barriers.

This final report presents the findings of the research activities and makes recommendations for addressing barriers and increasing opportunities for mature age employment.

## Methodology

The project was conducted in five stages as represented in the diagram below. Further details of the methodology for Stages 2, 3 and 4 are provided below the diagram.



### Stage 2 - Desk research

A review of national and international peer-reviewed and grey literature about employment barriers for mature age people was undertaken in April 2021. The literature review drew on academic databases, the VOCED database, government reports and reports and analysis recommended by the Department to identify themes, debates and gaps in evidence.

The literature review was used as the basis for developing a research framework for the analysis of the findings and for drafting questions to explore in each of the three consultation processes. The research framework provides a structure for the systematic analysis of data from different methods, across and within employer cohorts.

A copy of the research framework can be found in Attachment B.



### Stage 3 - Consultations

Three consultation methods were conducted concurrently to achieve both broad and deep coverage of the issues and make best use of the knowledge and experience of experts.

#### Method A: Poll of employers (broad consultation)

The first method was a short, anonymous, online poll targeting businesses of all sizes and types. The poll included three demographic questions, four multiple choice questions, plus a single, optional, open-ended question. A copy of the poll questions is included in Attachment A.

A total of 293 responses were received. The poll used a convenience sample, drawing on industry networks and contacts to circulate the survey link across a range of stakeholder groups. As with much social research, the costs and timelines did not permit undertaking probability sampling. The aim of the poll was to gather a range of attitudes and perceptions to triangulate with the other research methods, rather than achieve findings generalisable to the overall population of employers.

#### Method B: Interviews with employers (deep consultation)

The second method was a series of in-depth interviews with employers and recruiters. The interviews targeted the Human Resources Manager or similar for larger organisations, and the business owner for smaller businesses. They included representatives of a range of:

- small, medium and large businesses
- recruitment agencies
- different industry sectors – primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary.

Twenty four interviews were conducted. This included 17 employers, six recruiters and one representative of an employer peak body. The selection of interviewees was based on a convenience sample, with interviewees sourced through industry networks and contacts. Specific industry networks were targeted to achieve views across a range of employer groups. For example, regional industry networks assisted in recruiting regional businesses.

A copy of the interview questions can be found at Attachment A.

#### Method C: Delphi process (expert consultation)

Members of the Collaborative Partnership on Mature Age Employment (the Partnership)<sup>2</sup>, along with a selection of other experts on mature age employment were invited to participate in an online forum using a Real-Time Delphi survey platform. The platform invited participants to provide anonymous feedback to questions presented by the researchers. As each individual responded to the questions, they were presented with the responses of the rest of the group. At this point they were able to provide further feedback in the form of a response to others' answers, or by refining or elaborating on their own contributions. Further contributions could be made across the six week period that the survey was open.

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<sup>2</sup> The Collaborative Partnership on Mature Age Employment was established by the Australian Government in 2018 to help promote the benefits of employing older workers. The Partnership is chaired by the Age Discrimination Commissioner and comprises representatives of the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and Business peak bodies, and other experts.

Nine participants contributed to the Delphi process.

A copy of the Delphi questions can be found at Attachment A.

#### **Stage 4 – Data analysis and synthesis**

The responses from the employer poll were cleaned to remove responses that did not answer the questions thoughtfully (that is, incomplete, straight-line, nonsensical or very short response time). Responses to each question were analysed for all employers, as well as for key demographic cohorts – small, medium and large employers, and employers based in metropolitan areas, regional areas and both.

The interview findings were analysed using a qualitative analysis tool called QDA Miner Lite<sup>3</sup>. Interview transcripts were coded against themes in the research framework. Emerging variables were added, and some were merged or recoded to pick up on new findings. A coding frequency analysis identified which themes were most prominent.

The Delphi findings were analysed using the Calibrum ‘Surveylet’ software<sup>4</sup>. The findings were analysed to the level of consensus among participants for each question and the question comments were reviewed to understand the reasoning behind participants’ answers.

Following analysis of the data, these same people who were invited to participate in the Delphi process were invited to be part of a sensemaking session. In this session, participants were presented with the research findings and invited to reflect on the data and to test the interpretations made by the research team.

A total of 20 people participated in the sensemaking session, including representatives of the Partnership, academics and departmental staff.

Note that, due to sampling constraints, this research is primarily qualitative, and should not be generalised to the overall employer population.

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<sup>3</sup> QDA Miner Lite is qualitative data analysis tool used to conduct thematic analysis of unstructured text

<sup>4</sup> Surveylet is software which allows consensus building with real-time feedback including, trend analysis, predictive analytics, sentiment analytics and other features

## Research findings

### The employer poll

#### Summary of findings

- Employers see the benefits of employing and retaining mature age workers and feel that they have moderate capability to do so, but there are a lack of social norms (i.e. societal expectations or unwritten rules) to drive positive behaviour in employment of this cohort and employers report difficulties in employing older workers.
- Difficulties experienced by employers around recruiting and retaining mature age workers relate to physical capabilities and risk of injury, higher wage costs, lack of up-to-date skills, challenges in finding or attracting them, and the attitudes of mature age workers themselves.
- Small businesses and those operating only in regional areas experience the greatest difficulties with recruiting and retaining mature age workers and are less likely to see employment of mature age workers as having an impact on their organisation's reputation.
- Large businesses and those that operate across both metropolitan and regional locations are more likely to recruit and retain mature age workers than their counterparts.
- Subsidised training for mature age workers, financial incentives and support from recruitment agencies to find suitable workers are most likely to influence organisations to actively recruit and retain mature age workers.

#### About the poll

The employer poll was designed to provide a snapshot of what Australian businesses thought about employing mature age Australians (aged 55+). Specifically, we were seeking to understand:

1. their behavioural propensity to employ mature age workers and
2. what strategies would most influence them to recruit and retain mature age workers.

Behavioural propensity was measured using Ferrier's propensity matrix.<sup>5</sup> The matrix plots motivation to perform a behaviour against ease of performing that behaviour. The more motivated a person is to perform the behaviour (in this case, to employ and retain mature age workers) and the easier it is to do so, the higher the behavioural propensity.

In Ferrier's model, **motivation** is measured in terms of:

- **Incentives:** will they be rewarded for the behaviour and to what extent? (In this research we asked about the extent to which mature age workers benefit the organisation)
- **Social norms:** is there a level of societal expectation for undertaking the behaviour? (In this research we asked about how important mature age workers are to organisations' reputations)

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<sup>5</sup> Ferrier, A. (2014) *The Advertising Effect: how to change behaviour*. Oxford University Press.

**Ease** is measured in terms of:

- **Ability:** do they have the capability to do the behaviour? (In this research we asked people to rate their organisation’s capability at recruiting and supporting mature age workers)
- **Opportunity:** does the environment allow the behaviour to happen? (In this research we asked about how easy it is to find and retain suitable mature age workers)

## About the respondents

As illustrated in Tables 1–3 below, respondents to the poll included a mix of business sizes, locations and industries across the 19 Australian (ANZSIC) industry sectors. Please note that when the findings are stratified by industry, the number of respondents in some of the subgroups is quite low and therefore should not be taken as representing the views of the industry sector as a whole.

The Health Care and Social Assistance and Retail Trade industry sectors, which currently employ the largest numbers of people in Australia and are projected to do so into the future, accounted for almost a quarter of respondents.

These two sectors also employ the largest numbers of women in Australia.

The traditionally male-dominated industry sectors of Manufacturing and Construction accounted for 17% of respondents, while the Professional, Scientific and Technical Services industry sector accounted for 7% of respondents.

**Table 1. Business size of poll respondents**

Organisation size <sup>6</sup>	% of respondents	Number of respondents
Small (0-19 employees)	47%	138
Medium (20-199 employees)	30%	88
Large (200+ employees)	23%	67
Total		293

**Table 2. Locations of poll respondents**

Location in which organisation operates	% of respondents	Number of respondents
Metropolitan (capital city)	49%	144
Regional (not capital city)	33%	98
Both metropolitan and regional areas	17%	51
Total		293

<sup>6</sup> These categories are based on Australian Bureau of Statistics definitions of business size. However, we have combine micro and small business in a single category (which the ABS also does at times)

Table 3. Industries of poll respondents

Main industry in which business operates	% of respondents	Number of respondents
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3%	8
Mining	2%	7
Manufacturing	12%	36
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	2%	5
Construction	5%	16
Wholesale Trade	3%	9
Retail Trade	13%	39
Accommodation and Food Services	3%	9
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	4%	11
Information, Media and Telecommunications	4%	12
Financial and Insurance Services	5%	14
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	1%	4
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	7%	21
Administrative and Support Services	2%	7
Public Administration and Safety	4%	12
Education and Training	5%	15
Health Care and Social Assistance	11%	33
Arts and Recreational Services	2%	6
Other Services	10%	29
<b>Total</b>		<b>293</b>

## Detailed findings

### Motivation to employ mature age workers

#### Incentive

To test respondents' incentive to employ mature age workers, they were asked "to what extent do you agree that mature age workers benefit your organisation?" They provided their response via a sliding scale of zero to 10, with zero being strongly disagree and 10 being strongly agree.

Overall, there was considerable agreement among respondents that mature age workers do benefit their organisation, with an average response of 7.3 and a median response of 8.

However, the level of agreement across different types of organisations was not consistent. As illustrated in Table 4, large organisations see slightly more benefit in mature age workers than small organisations, and organisations located in both metropolitan and regional locations see slightly more benefit than those located in metropolitan only or regional only locations.

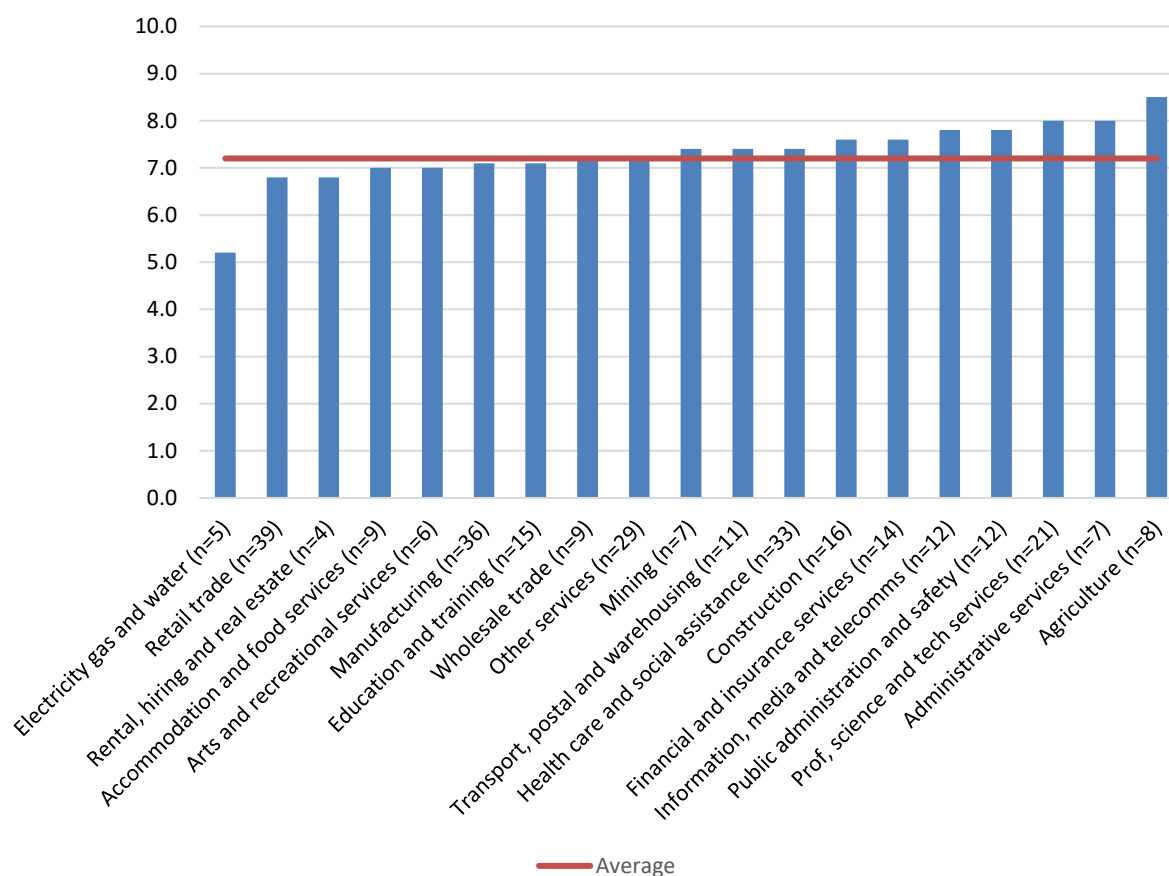
**Table 4: Extent of agreement that mature age workers benefit the organisation, by size and location (n=293)**

Size of organisation		Location of organisation	
Small	7.1	Metropolitan	7.2
Medium	7.2	Regional	7.3
Large	7.9	Metro and regional	7.9

The extent to which organisations saw benefit in employing mature age workers also varied by industry. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, respondents from the Agriculture, Administrative and Support Services, and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services sectors are mostly likely to see the benefits.

When considering the industry breakdowns, note that the numbers from each industry are small, and the number of responses for some industries (including Administrative and Support Services and Agriculture) are particularly low. Therefore, this data should be treated with caution.

Figure 1: Extent of agreement that mature age workers benefit the organisation, by industry (n = 293)



Some of the responses to the final open-ended question highlight the benefits seen by respondents.

“We have found mature aged employees are more skilled, reliable and committed.”  
(respondent from Construction industry)

“They are stable good workers.” (respondent from Manufacturing industry)

“We appreciate the input and different life experience of both younger and mature workers.” (respondent from Information, Media and Telecommunications industry)

“Very important as in my industry they have the knowledge.” (respondent from Health Care and Social Assistance industry)

“They benefit the community that I work with by providing a different perspective to the younger staff.” (respondent from Health Care and Social Assistance industry)

It is interesting to note that the industries that see benefit and those that see less benefit are not distinguished in this data by whether they are blue collar or white collar, or generally physical or desk-based. However, the industries that employ large numbers of younger people – Retail (average workforce age 32 years) and Accommodation and Food Services (average workforce age 26 years)<sup>7</sup> – appear to see less benefit than those industries with average or older workforces. Among those

<sup>7</sup> Australian Government Labour Market Information Portal [www.lmip.gov.au](http://www.lmip.gov.au) Accessed 24 June 2021

industries that see more benefit, Agriculture has an average workforce age of 46 years, Administrative Services' average age is 39 years, which is the same as the average for the whole workforce, and Professional Services' is 38 years. Electricity, Gas and Water seems to be an exception as the workforce age for this industry is above average at 41 years<sup>8</sup>, yet they are relatively neutral on the benefit of older workers. However, the number of responses is low.

### Social norms

To test how social norms (i.e. societal expectations or unwritten rules) impact on employment of mature age people, respondents were asked "is it important to your organisation's reputation to employ mature age workers?". They provided their response via a sliding scale of zero to 10, with zero being 'not important at all' and 10 being 'extremely important'.

Overall, mature age workers seem to be neither important, nor unimportant to organisation's reputations, with an average response to this question of 5.8 and a median response of 6.

As illustrated in Table 5, importance to reputation decreases significantly with organisation size. Organisations that were located in both metropolitan and regional locations rate the level of importance slightly higher than those located in only metropolitan or only regional locations.

**Table 5: Importance to organisation's reputation of employing mature age workers by size and location (n=292)<sup>9</sup>**

Size of organisation		Location of organisation	
Small	5.3	Metropolitan	5.9
Medium	6.0	Regional	5.6
Large	6.6	Metro and regional	6.1

Figure 2 illustrates that employing mature age workers is most important to organisational reputation for the Information, Media and Telecommunications, Financial and Insurance Services, Wholesale Trade, and Health Care and Social Assistance industry sectors and least important to Agriculture, Arts and Recreational Services and Construction.

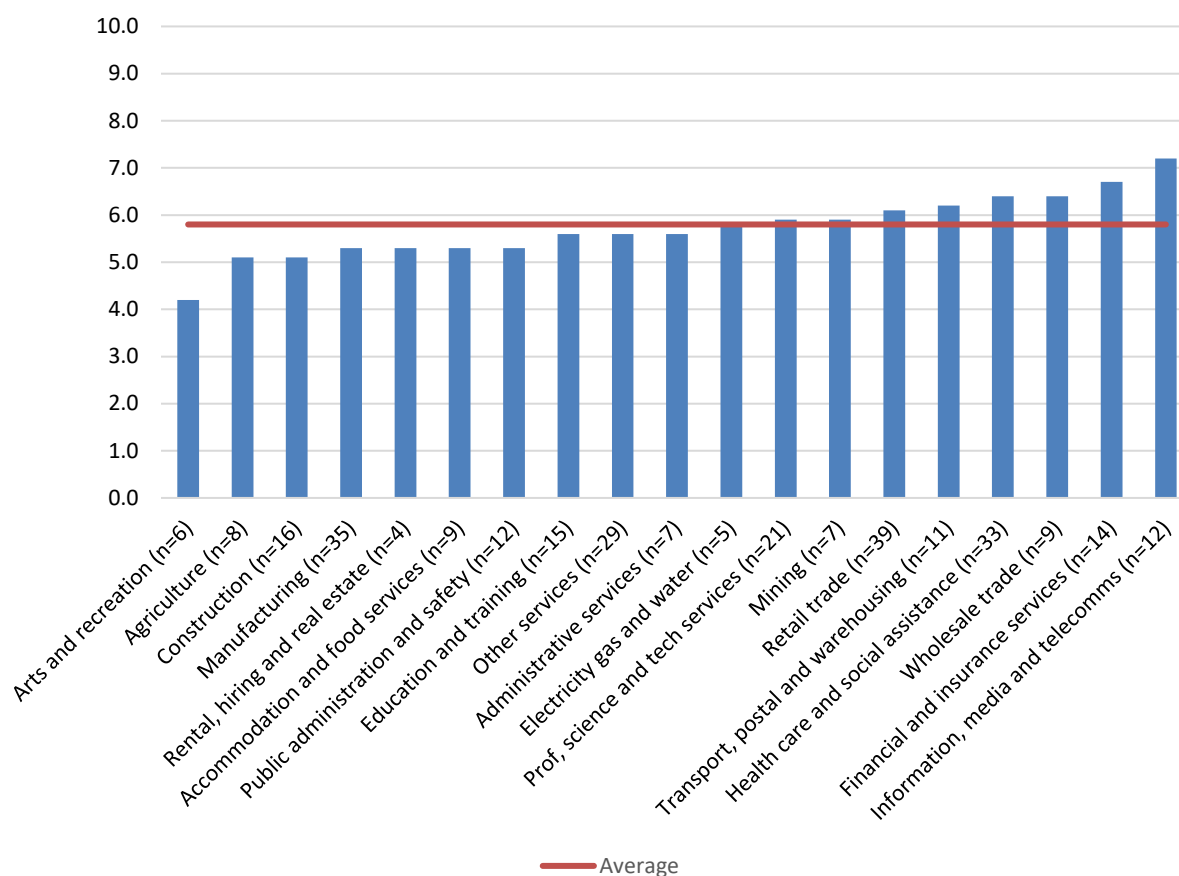
Once again, data on industry sectors with low response numbers should be treated with caution.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> N.B. one respondent skipped this question and the questions on ability and opportunity to employ mature age people



Figure 2: Importance to organisation's reputation of employing mature age workers, by industry (n=292)



Once again, responses to the final open-ended question illustrate different attitudes along the spectrum:

“Our target demographic is largely mature, so it is of significant importance that mature workers are well represented within our people base.” (respondent from Health Care and Social Assistance industry)

“There is definitely a generalisation attached to older workers in the arts and events industry, that they are out of touch with current programming and trends.” (respondent from Arts and Recreational Services industry)

### Ease of employing mature age workers

#### Ability

To understand whether organisations felt they had the ability to employ mature age workers, they were asked “how capable is your organisation at recruiting and supporting mature age workers?”. They provided their response via a sliding scale of zero to 10, with zero being ‘very poor’ and 10 being ‘excellent’.

Respondents felt that their organisations were reasonably capable in recruiting and supporting mature age workers, with an average response of 6.7 and a median response of 7.

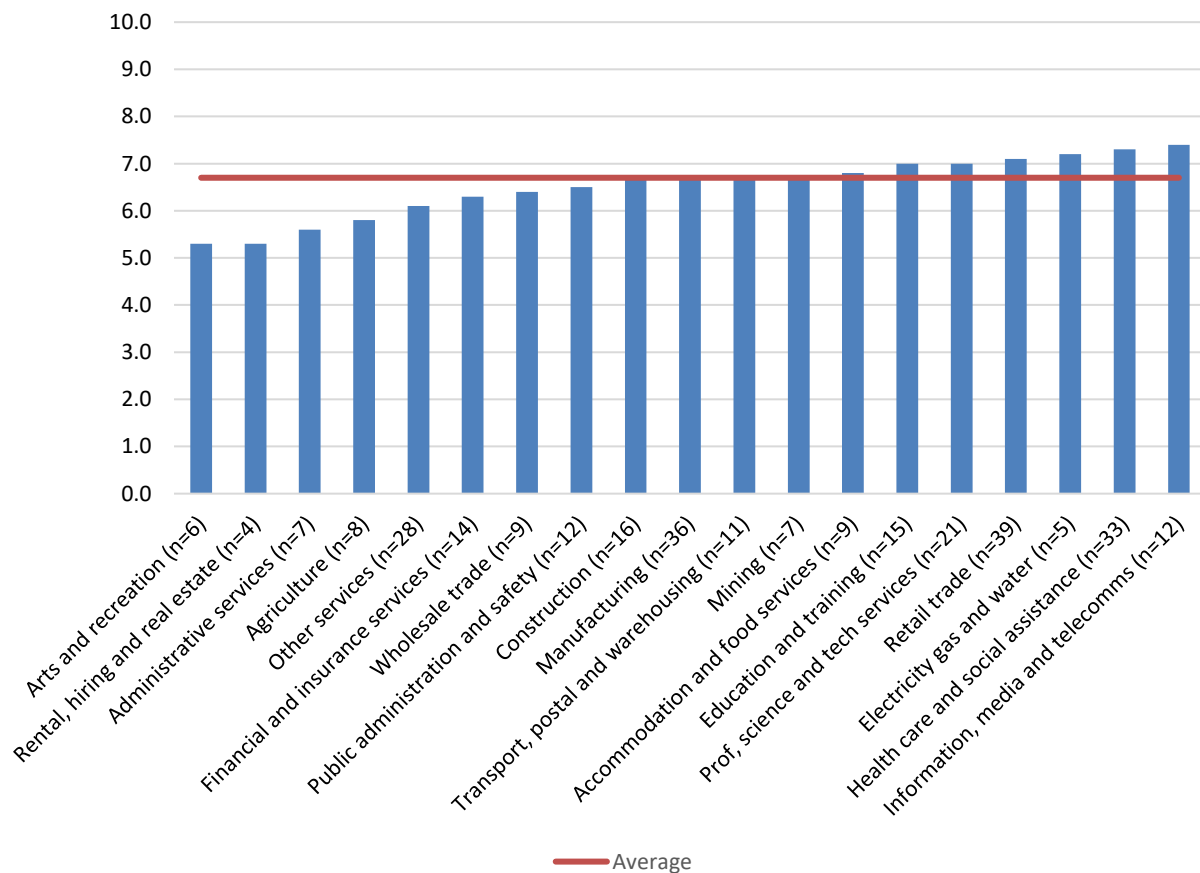
Perceptions of capability were fairly consistent across organisational sizes and locations (see Table 6).

Table 6: Capability of organisations to recruit and retain mature age workers, by size and location (n=292)

Size of organisation		Location of organisation	
Small	6.6	Metropolitan	6.7
Medium	6.9	Regional	6.8
Large	6.6	Metro and regional	6.4

As illustrated in Figure 3, the industries which felt the most capable in recruiting and retaining mature age workers were Information, Media and Telecommunications, Health Care and Social Assistance, and Electricity, Gas and Water. Those that felt they were less capable were Arts and Recreational Services, Rental, Hiring and Real Estate, and Administrative Services. The low number of responses should be taken into account for these industries.

Figure 3: Capability of organisations to recruit and retain mature age workers, by industry (n=292)



## Opportunity

To understand the level of opportunity organisations felt they had to employ mature age workers, respondents were asked “how easy is it to find and retain mature age workers?”. They provided their response via a sliding scale of zero to 10, with zero being ‘very difficult’ and 10 being ‘very easy’.

Overall, organisations appear to find employing neither difficult, nor particularly easy, with an average response to this question of 5.5 and a median response of 5.

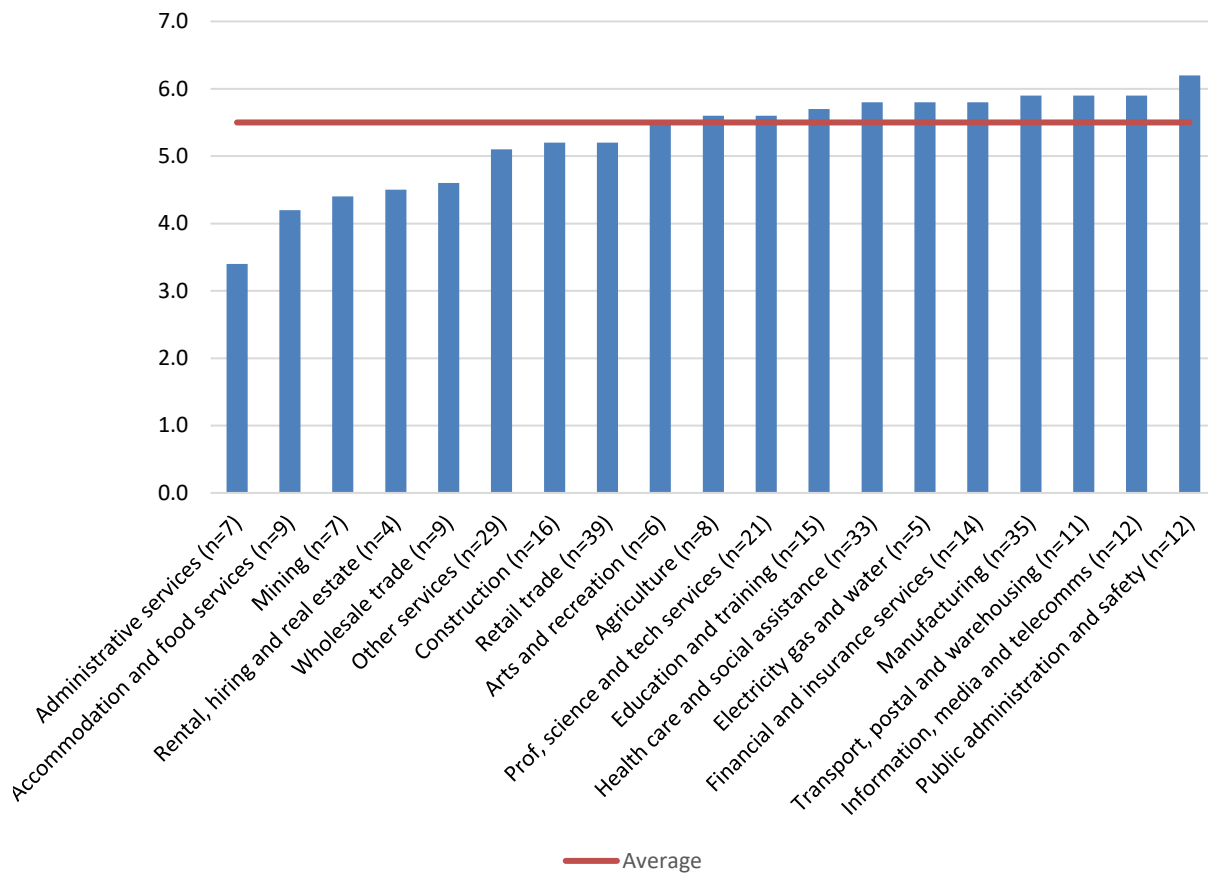
There was greater difference between different types of organisations in response to this question than for the previous questions. As illustrated in Table 7, large organisations find it notably easier to find and retain suitable mature age candidates than small or medium organisations do, and organisations with a metropolitan presence find it easier than those located in regional only locations.

**Table 7: Level of ease to find and retain suitable mature age workers mature age workers, by size and location (n=292)**

Size of organisation		Location of organisation	
Small	4.9	Metropolitan	5.6
Medium	5.8	Regional	5.0
Large	6.1	Metro and regional	5.8

There was also significant difference across industry sectors. As illustrated in Figure 4, the respondents from the Public Administration and Safety industry find it easiest to locate and retain suitable mature age workers. Respondents from Information, Media and Telecommunications, Transport, Postal and Warehousing and Manufacturing industry sectors also find it easier than average, but still not particularly easy. The industries that say they find it hardest to locate and retain mature age workers are Administrative Services, Accommodation and Food Services and Mining.

Figure 4: Level of ease to find and retain suitable mature age workers, by industry (n=292)



Responses to the final open-ended question highlighted a number of issues contributing to difficulty in finding and retaining mature age workers.

Difficulty in finding or attracting them:

“Probably an underutilised work group but not sure in how to get in touch with them.” (respondent from Agriculture industry)

“To me the best help would be knowing where to find them.” (respondent from the Other Services industry)

“It is very difficult to recruit mature age workers since many do not have the desire to work in remote locations (where they are needed most in my business).” (respondent from Manufacturing industry)

Wages:

“Mature aged workers have a strong work ethic and are more capable of thinking for themselves, unfortunately even when unskilled there is a need for higher wages which may not be possible when younger more skilled employees are on site.” (respondent from Construction industry)

“The biggest issue is the Salary comparison to any previous senior roles the person may have relative to the role that is being sought. Sometimes we assume that the person wouldn't be interested in a lower-level role, but that may not be the case.”  
(respondent from Professional, Scientific and Technical Services industry)

#### Physical capability:

“Ours is a heavy steel fabrication workshop and it takes its toll on the workers after a lifetime in the industry. Despite being willing to keep them on and keeping the knowledge and experience in the business, there are no 'light' options especially in a small business like ours.” (respondent from Manufacturing industry)

“For our industry can be quite physical and doesn't necessarily suit someone in advancing years. That said all age demographics can struggle, the emphasis is on ability, not age or gender.”  
(respondent from Mining industry)

“I myself am over 55 and I find the job to be too physically demanding now. If you are going to make people work to an older age you must make positions that are not too strenuous. I do find the younger employees that I hire are the worst though. I would rather an older employee every time if only their bodies could keep pace.”  
(respondent from Retail industry)

“Workers Compensation costs do not recognise that older workers carry increased risk of age-related fair wear and tear and any carries a prejudicial weight on the new employer rather than a pro rata pool scheme or other. Back strains, worn joints being earned through life or other places.” (respondent from Manufacturing industry)

#### Skills and capabilities:

“The difficulty in retaining mature age workers is the difficulty of adopting new technologies.” (respondent from Other Services industry)

“It can be difficult to employ them as our area of focus is very modern.” (respondent from Information, Media and Telecommunications industry)

“We are happy to employ mature age workers as they tend to bring a wealth of experience, but the challenges lay in the ability to keep up with the technology side of the business.” (respondent from Retail industry)

“We have recruited and retained mature age workers because they provide experience and fill skill gaps. We would be interested in using mature age workers in childcare and kinder but there are qualification barriers and a perception that this is work for young people.” (respondent from Public Administration and Safety industry)

#### Worker attitudes:

“Recruiting mature age workers is not, to me, restricted by my own attitudes, but more often those of the workers themselves. They themselves can express feelings of being untrainable, they can expect more remuneration (\*much\* more) than more skilled younger workers... and they can be obstinate where younger workers can actively seek self-improvement. I still employ a diverse range of employees on

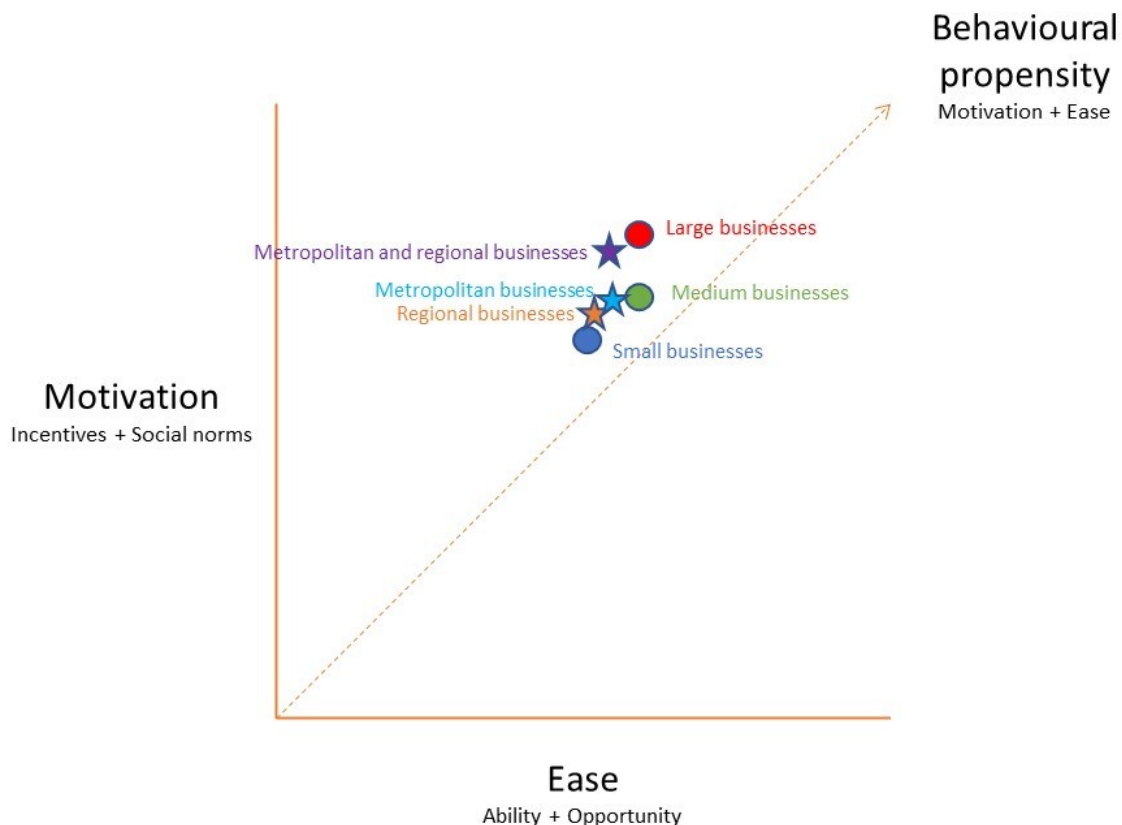
principle, but this advice to some older job seekers might be beneficial.”  
(respondent from Professional, Scientific and Technical Services industry)

### Propensity to employ mature age workers

The combination of the four dimensions discussed above creates behavioural propensity. Figure 5 plots the behavioural propensity of the organisations responding to the poll, based on size and location. According to Ferrier, the further organisations are along the dotted line, the more likely they are to undertake the behaviour – in this case, to employ mature age workers.

Overall, poll respondents sit to the left of the dotted line, meaning they are relatively motivated but do not necessarily find it easy to employ mature age workers. In other words, organisations are more willing than able. Large businesses and those that operate across both metropolitan and regional locations are most likely to recruit and retain mature age workers. Small businesses are slightly less motivated and find the recruitment and retention of mature age workers the most difficult.

Figure 5: Behavioural propensity of businesses to recruit and retain mature age workers, by location and size



A comparison of the scores for each of the four dimensions (Table 8) highlights where different strategies might make a difference to the employment of mature age workers. For example:

- All organisation cohorts could benefit from initiatives that help to make the employment of mature age workers more of a social norm, and even more so for small businesses and

regional only based businesses. Initiatives that increase the incentive or highlight the benefits of employing mature age workers could also help to make it more of a social norm.

- All organisation cohorts could benefit from initiatives that increase the opportunity to employ and retain mature age workers by making it easier. Once again, this is particularly so for small businesses and regional only based businesses.
- Initiatives that help to build the knowledge and skills of organisations in recruiting and retaining mature age workers would also be of benefit across the board.

**Table 8: Comparison of dimensions of behavioural propensity to employ mature age workers, by size and location (n=292)**

Organisation cohort	Motivation		Ease	
	Incentives	Social norms	Ability	Opportunity
Small businesses	7.1	5.3	6.6	4.9
Medium businesses	7.2	6	6.9	5.8
Large businesses	7.9	6.6	6.6	6.1
Metropolitan only businesses	7.2	5.9	6.7	5.6
Regional only businesses	7.3	5.6	6.8	5
Metro and regional businesses	7.9	6.1	6.4	5.8
<b>Average across all respondents</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>5.4</b>

### Strategies to increase recruitment and retention of mature age workers

Respondents were asked to select their top three of a list of 12 strategies that would most influence their organisation to actively recruit and retain mature age workers.

Interestingly, the top five strategies all align with increasing the ease of employing mature age workers, by addressing elements of the ‘ability’ and ‘opportunity’ dimensions of behavioural propensity.

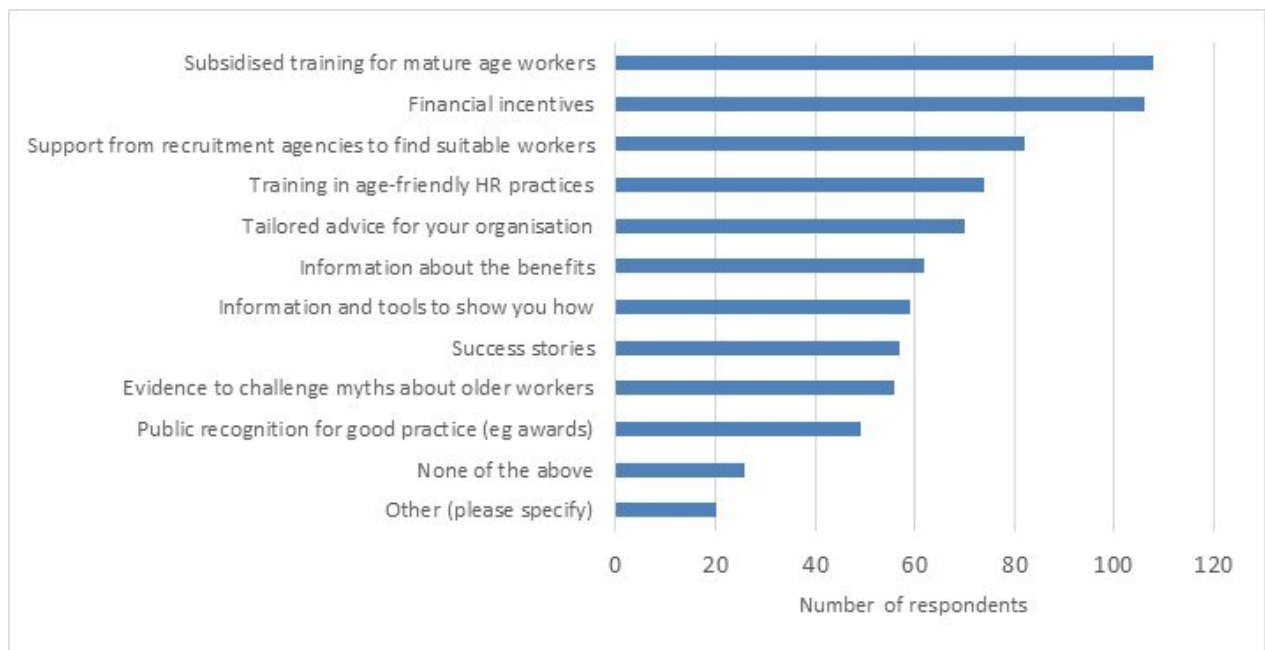
As illustrated in Figure 6, the most influential strategies were ‘subsidised training for mature age workers’ and ‘financial incentives’ with 37% and 36% of respondents respectively, selecting these strategies in their top three. Such strategies could potentially increase organisations’ opportunity to employ mature age workers by addressing issues around the higher salaries and lack of up-to-date skills among these workers.

‘Support from recruitment agencies to find suitable workers’ was also influential with 28% of respondents selecting this in their top three. This could also help to increase organisations’ opportunity to employ mature age workers.

Some 25% of respondents selected ‘training in age-friendly HR practices’ and 24% selected ‘Tailored advice for your organisation’, both of which could help to increase organisations’ ability to employ mature age workers.

Of the 20 respondents who selected 'other' strategies, nine referred to elements that would help address issues around physical abilities and risk. This included workers compensation exemptions, support with injuries and addressing myths around increased injury levels of older workers. Five of the responses related to finding suitable mature age workers who have up-to-date skills and the remainder with suggestions such as pay as you go (PAYG) exemptions, availability of accommodation in a regional area and use of merit selection procedures.

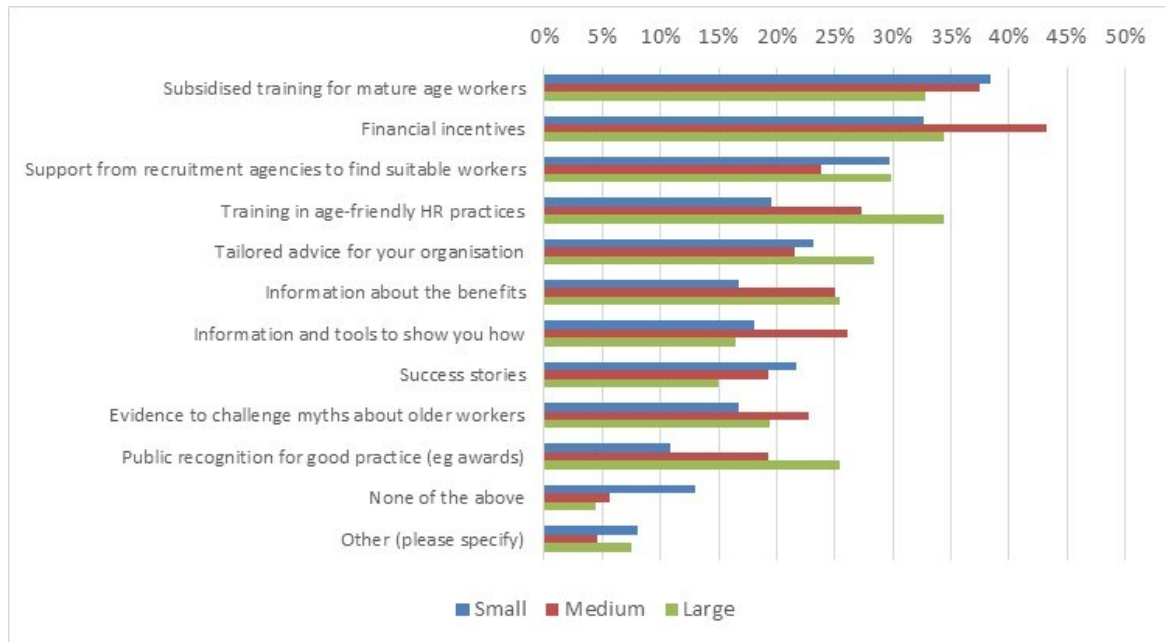
Figure 6: Preferred strategies to increase recruitment and retainment of mature age workers (n=293)



Preferences vary by organisation size. As illustrated in Figure 7, medium-sized businesses are most motivated by financial incentives and subsidised training. Large businesses are most motivated by training in age-friendly human resource (HR) practices, financial incentives and subsidised training, and are more interested in tailored advice and public recognition of good practice than their small and medium counterparts. Small organisations are most motivated by subsidised training and financial incentive, and are more interested in success stories or not motivated by any of the strategies, compared to other sized organisations.

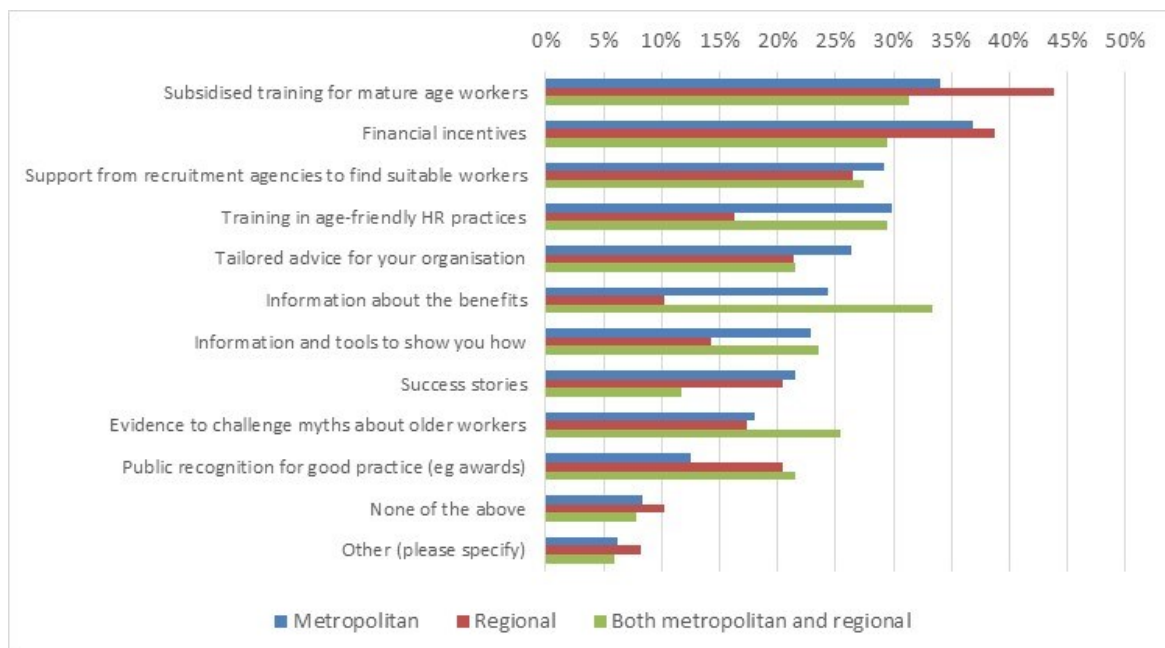


Figure 7: Preferred strategies to increase recruitment and retention of mature age workers, by size of business (n=293)



Analysis by location (Figure 8) shows that regional businesses are most motivated by subsidised training for mature age workers and financial incentives. The businesses that operate in both metropolitan and regional locations are particularly interested in having information about the benefits of employing mature age workers, as well as subsidised training. They are also more interested in evidence to challenge myths than other types of organisations. Metropolitan businesses are interested in financial incentives and subsidised training, as well as training in age-friendly HR practices and support from recruitment agencies.

Figure 8: Preferred strategies to increase recruitment and retention of mature age workers, by location of business (n=293)



## Interviews with employers and recruiters

### Summary of findings

- Employers and recruiters have many positive perceptions about mature age workers, including valuing their knowledge and experience, their level of reliability, responsibility and work ethic, their ability to mentor or pass on knowledge to younger workers and that they are likely to stay in their role for longer than younger employees.
- Both employers and recruiters had similar views on the positives of employing mature age workers.
  - The strongest positive perception among recruiters was that mature age workers are experienced and carry a lot of knowledge. Two of the six recruiters mentioned their reliability, honesty and work ethic and two also mentioned the benefit of using mature age workers for mentoring younger workers. Two recruiters focussed on their maturity and emotional intelligence.
  - Employers also recognised their experience, maturity, emotional intelligence and knowledge but also focussed on the fact that they stay in their roles for longer and five employers said that mature age workers are important because they reflect your customer base and build trust in your brand.
- Negative perceptions still exist though, with interviewees noting that many employers hold views that mature age workers are slower, less productive, less innovative and less able to use technology than their younger counterparts, as well as sometimes being stuck in their ways and not able to fit in with younger teams.
- Both employers and recruiters reported experiencing actual barriers of higher salary costs, reduced physical abilities (for certain occupations) and lack of up to date skills among mature age workers and job seekers. The salary barrier was a particular theme among recruiters.
- Employers and recruiters tend not to give age the same kind of deliberate attention they give to other workforce diversity characteristics.
- Labour shortages may prompt some employers to look to older cohorts of workers than they traditionally have. However, some employers experienced difficulty in finding potential mature age employees.
- Whilst interviewees did not offer examples of good practice in the recruitment of mature age workers, several reported that they are actively implementing practices to help retain their older workers. These include flexible work options, a structured transition to retirement program, a mature age employee network, and training and upskilling of mature age employees.

### About the interviews

The purpose of the interviews was to gather more detailed information about views and experiences of a range of employers and recruiters (who are a proxy for employers). The interviews focused on the barriers and enablers for employing mature age workers, as well as identifying any particular good practices in recruitment and retention.

## About the respondents

A total of twenty-four interviews were conducted. Seventeen were employers, six were recruiters, and one was an employer peak body.

There was a range of industries represented by interviewees, including:

Hospitality and Tourism	Aerospace and Maritime	Construction
Business	Agriculture	Education
ICT	Meat processing	Chemicals
Timber	Advertising	Recruitment
Maintenance	Health	Architecture and surveying
Government	Engineering	Graphic arts

Interviewees also represented a range of organisation sizes, from large multi-national companies to small businesses. Four of the interviewees were representing regionally based organisations, while others had both a metropolitan and regional presence.

## Detailed findings

Analysis of the interviews highlighted seven key themes, which are explored below.

Generally, organisations have positive perceptions of mature age workers...

Twelve of the 24 interviewees made the point that mature age workers are experienced and carry a lot of knowledge. About half also said mature age workers are reliable, responsible and have good work ethic. Employers also value that they are likely to stay their role for longer and that they are able to transfer knowledge to or mentor younger employees. Some employers noted that having mature age workers allows them to reflect their customer base and build trust in their brand.

“Mature people don’t need hand holding in the main. They come with a skill set and they can get in and do the role pretty quickly”

...but negative perceptions remain significant

A third of the interviewees referred to perceptions that mature age workers are not as fast-moving and are less productive and less innovative than younger workers and even more referred to perceptions that mature age workers aren’t good with technology. Other commonly mentioned perceptions were that mature age workers can be stuck in their ways and may not fit well with young or well-established teams.

A handful of interviewees also noted that mature age employees are not able to perform highly physical roles, cost more than younger workers and may not stay in the role long term.

“The older the person is, sometimes it is a bit more difficult to bring them around”

“So they’ve got to be the right temperament and personality that’s happy to sort of slot into the existing office culture, rather than come in and completely overhaul it, which can often be a problem.”

“I might be concerned that that a mature age worker might have fixed opinions about how to do things and might not be open to constructive feedback from a younger manager... I might worry that they’re not up to date with technology ... or won’t have the energy to keep up.”

“... their physical abilities, I think there’s an issue there in, I don’t know whether we can or whether it’s possible to actually manage and support those people from a physical perspective, or if it is just human nature, your body will wear out.”

Eight interviewees said they had observed ongoing ageism in the workplace, and some have noted age bias among recruiters.

### **Age isn’t a focus in recruitment and some recruitment practices may be excluding older workers**

The majority of interviewees said that they didn’t have workplace initiatives targeted at mature age workers, but this was mostly because age wasn’t a focus in recruitment. Some employers said they sometimes specifically target other diverse groups, but not mature age workers. Most employers said that skills are more important than the age of the person and their focus is on finding the right fit for the role, whatever the age.

“We don’t do anything in particular to mature age workers but what we do is a lot of work around diversity and inclusion”

“We’re neither proactive nor resistant.”

“It’s a bit implicit. We’re more explicitly conscious of gender and cultural diversity”

“I think when people generally talk about diversity, (mature age) is not necessarily one at the front of mind.”

Eleven of the interviewees noted that labour shortages are driving the need to look for a broader pool of workers and that this could help to increase the chances of mature age workers being employed.

“We can’t afford to be ageist, we have such a demand for talent and very specific talent, and we’re not the only ones. We fight in a tight labour market.”

“Everyone’s talking about talent drought, like there’s no workers. So I can’t believe that we’re still talking about bias for mature age people, when everyone can’t get people. So it’s like, well, if you can’t get staff, why aren’t you tapping into mature workers?”

“I think clients will often have this fixed opinion of what suits their business. But as the labour market tightens, they have to relax that somewhat.”

Another interviewee suggested that recruitment processes, such as psychometric testing, can create barriers to mature age people applying for jobs.

“So if someone now said to me – “to get that role, you’ve got to do all these psychometric assessments” - I’d probably just say – “you know what, I’m not going to apply. It’s scary”. So that’s kind of a barrier that a lot of people wouldn’t even think

about. But you know, I think a lot of mature people, especially if they've been out of the workforce and haven't actually studied for a while, they probably struggle with them. And then if you've got, say, a couple of uni grads, or people a few years out of uni that are applying for the same role; they're going to perform much better on those tests, just because their brain is already wired to do them."

### Flexible working arrangements are important

Six employers noted that many mature aged workers have accomplished their main goals and are often looking to contribute something in their last working years, without the stress of full-time, senior-level work.

"They're not coming in to want to be the CEO, they're coming in to do something meaningful"

[A couple working for us] "had high flying jobs and decided they didn't want to do that anymore and wanted to be outdoors. They've been working with us for three years now."

But employers need to be flexible about their job roles and type of work. Many mature aged workers want to access part time or flexible working arrangements due to other commitments, including caring responsibilities. Transition to retirement arrangements also support mature age workers stay in work for longer. At least a quarter of the employers interviewed mentioned different types of flexible arrangements that their organisations offered to mature age workers.

"We're fairly selective on which jobs we give to which person. We wouldn't expect them to climb trees all day but there are lots of other jobs that use their skills. We incorporate them [the mature age worker] into the planning to help decide what would suit them."

"I think when employing older workers, you need to have ongoing conversations, show care and flexibility. For example, if they need to attend appointments or need to change shifts around to suit their energy/capacity. But they can also be the ones who don't ask and they might not want to admit that they need help or for things to change."

One interviewee also spoke about the effect of changes to New Zealand's legislation that enabled people to retire and draw down a proportional pension, while continuing to work part-time.

"That drove older workers to seek different work, less than full time, less physical work. Maybe it gave them the opportunity and the, I guess, the outlook to say I'm no longer a senior engineer, I'm a crossing guard or I'm a COVID marshal... to do something slightly diverse, take a lesser remuneration but be more open to different appointments and as a consequence of that, they're not penalised financially, in fact, they're mildly rewarded as a consequence of being able to 'double dip' for want of a better word."

## Mature age workers are being excluded by technology requirements

Fifteen of the 24 interviewees commented that low digital literacy is holding mature age workers back, including in terms of the skills required to search for and apply for jobs online. Several also commented that the skills and qualifications of many mature age workers were out of date. However, around a third of interviewees felt mature age employees can keep up with technology if they're supported and given the right tools and a quarter mentioned that their organisation supported upskilling of workers.

"It's easier to teach an older person how to find their way around computer systems, than it is to teach a younger person how to spell."

"We're doing our best to make sure that the 50 plus set are not left for dead in relation to new technology."

"And so as long as they want to keep doing it, there's plenty of continuing professional development available. There's always something new to learn."

Other interviewees suggested that employers and recruiters were overlooking a potentially valuable pool of mature age candidates by focusing so much on technology skills, rather than on identifying transferable skills and training for technology gaps.

"I think [the solution] has to be a preparedness to look at transferable skills.... For me, it's like, the harder thing to train is credibility, trust, maturity, all that, emotional intelligence, all those things you can't actually train for. You can train someone how to use a computer system. But if you look at job advertisements these days, like they're asking for so many different, specific technologies that people need to have experience in. And I think that's how they're probably wiping out most of the mature workers, because they don't have the latest and greatest technology, skills and knowledge. So there needs to be a more of a willingness to get people across technology, because I think that's kind of the biggest barrier."

"...willingness to train I think is a really big one... 'retraining versus retrenching'. Often, that's what happens to people of a mature age. Companies go through all these transformational things, and they just kind of go, "Oh well, we now need people with these skill sets". So it's like, well, instead of getting rid of these people, do some forward workforce planning and actually look at the skills you're going to need in three, five years' time, and start to train your people. Because the world is just changing so rapidly, that you have to actually forward plan."

## Government has a role in upskilling workers, educating the workforce and subsidising employers

The three areas where most interviewees felt government intervention could make a difference was in:

- providing upskilling training to mature age workers to prepare them for the modern workforce

“If we had something that was government funded, because obviously as a small business we can’t afford to be doing it, something in conjunction that upskilled mature age candidates probably also to give them some of that understanding of what the workforce is requiring”

- providing education about the benefits of hiring mature age workers to employers, recruiters and the general workforce, along with advice on how to do it. Some employers need hard data, about how it will help their bottom line. Others need toolkits, case studies and information that myth-busts the stereotypes about older workers.

“Educating the younger workforce as to the benefits of more mature age and what they can bring because there’s generally a stigma around old people”

“I think any information provided to employers on how to best manage the older workforce would be useful and about what rules and regulations there are. ...we need a lot of casual workers and a lot who are retired may be interested in the extra work. We need to know the rules around the pension.”

- providing incentives to employers to take on or retain mature age workers, with minimal red tape to access them.

“Money talks. If the government was to offer money for mature age workers, that would probably be, I think, the biggest start”

“Incentives, I think, are the thing that drive business. They need to see something that will give them that benefit. Tax breaks for age worker ratios, perhaps, instead of just for capital expenditure.”

Some, however, felt that employment subsidies aren’t appropriate and don’t work.

“If the reason you picked this person is because you picked up a government subsidy, it’s almost against everything that we’re trained to do”.

Others remarked that financial incentives appear to drive some employer’s behaviour, implying it may not drive their own, or added caveats such as – if financial incentives are offered, they should be for long term employment beyond limited subsidy periods.

### Employers find it difficult to find mature age workers

A few employers said they didn’t know where to find mature age workers looking for work and would appreciate initiatives that link mature age workers with organisations. Industry bodies, local chambers and community organisations were identified by some as good avenues for communicating with employers about mature age workers and where to find them.

“If we can access a pool of quality mature age workers, that’d be good. Somewhere they can register and indicate their skills.”

“We would take on more mature age workers if we knew where to go and get them.”

## Examples of good practice

Interviewees also referred to a range of good practices they were using to employ and retain mature age workers. These included:

- **Collecting and analysing data** – two interviewees spoke about using workforce data (including employee satisfaction surveys) to identify patterns and tell a story. Data was also noted as being really important in monitoring trends among mature age workers and identifying where retention strategies need to be focused to ensure skills are not lost from the organisation.
- **Structured transition to retirement programs** – one interviewee mentioned that their organisation had recently implemented a structured transition to retirement program and stressed the importance of making such programs transparent and visible to all employees. It also helps the organisation to ensure that they don't lose valuable knowledge from the organisation due to people retiring.

“Those skill sets are really critical for us; to make sure that when people do go, we've got every last skerrick of that knowledge out of their heads.”

- **Focusing on flexibility, inclusion and diversity for everyone** – several interviewees spoke about focusing on flexibility, inclusion and diversity across the whole of the workforce. Supporting employee well-being regardless of their age is considered to be good practice. It was also noted that research has shown that what people want from work at different ages is more similar than it is different, and includes meaningful work and a place where they can learn and grow.

“And when you think about it, issues of flexibility, issues of wellbeing, issues of job satisfaction, they're important to you, whatever your age, really. And so I think that's been an important shift in our strategies over the last three to five years. Rather than having a whole lot of policies designed for very specific cohorts of people, we've tried to speak more broadly to the sector.”

“I think there's probably potentially a message there that we tend to focus on the differences, or have a deficit view, as opposed to what binds us together as a workplace, and really appreciating the commonalities that sit behind it.”

- **Training and upskilling** – several interviewees spoke about training programs offered to mature age workers to help them retrain for different roles or to upskill in new technologies. One organisation has a 'reverse mentoring' program for older employees in which younger employees mentor them in use of digital technology. The aim of the program is to upskill employees in a fun way (as opposed to putting them through a formal training program, which can be daunting) as well as to build relationships between older and younger employees.

“...we are conscious of the fact that nobody gets left behind. And that the older workers are just as comfortable with tools and work processes involving digitalisation.”



“We are actually recruiting anyone and we're offering upskilling because there's just such a shortage of staff at the moment”

- **Employee-driven initiatives** – one interviewee spoke about the establishment of an employee network for 50+ employees. Its aim is to empower mature age employees of the company to speak up about their ongoing development needs and ensure they continue to have meaningful work. It is also working to change understanding, education, and policy, which in turn will help to change culture.

## The Delphi online forum

### Summary of findings

- Participating experts agree that workplace factors (such as negative perceptions and stereotypes, ageism, lack of flexible and age-friendly work options and lack of consideration of age as part of diversity and inclusion policies) are having a significant negative impact on the employment of mature age workers – more so than systemic or individual factors.
- Awareness raising strategies (such as myth-busting and promoting the benefits of age-diverse workplaces) were considered to have the potential to make the biggest difference to the employment of mature age workers.
- Support for mature age workers and job seekers to access training and upskilling was also seen to have the potential to make a significant difference to the numbers of mature age people being employed.
- A number of policy and funding changes were noted as having the potential to moderately increase the numbers of mature age workers being employed, including creation of lifelong learning policies, changes to workers compensation policies and introduction of financial incentives or subsidies for employers taking on mature age workers.

### About the Delphi

The purpose of the online Delphi forum was to consult with experts on the barriers to employment for mature age workers and the solutions most likely to have an impact on addressing these barriers. The online process allowed each participant to see and provide feedback on the responses of other participants. It also provided the researchers with an understanding of the level of consensus in views across the experts, identification of where there is convergence of opinion and where ideas differ and information on why this is the case.

### About the respondents

Nine experts participated in the online forum. Most only made one contribution, but three respondents returned to the survey three or four times to update their feedback in relation to other responses. The participants included members of the Partnership as well as researchers with expertise in the employment of mature age workers.

## Detailed findings

Workplace factors have the greatest negative impact on the employment of mature age workers

Participating experts were asked to rate the extent to which systemic factors, workplace factors and individual factors negatively impact on the willingness and ability of employers to recruit and retain mature age workers.

Whilst participants agreed that systemic factors (such as pension/retirement/tax structures) and individual factors (such as lack of current skills/qualifications) have a moderate impact on mature age employment, they felt that it was workplace factors that impact more significantly.

These workplace factors include:

- Persistent negative perceptions and stereotypes about older workers – such as being less flexible, less compliant, more expensive, unable to use technology, reluctant to undertake training and less likely to align with the culture of an organisation
- Lack of flexible and age friendly work practices (due to award restrictions, beliefs that flexible work arrangements are too hard or too expensive to implement, or unwillingness among employers to consider alternative arrangements)
- Lack of consideration of age as a criterion in diversity and inclusion policies
- Ageism in the workplace (where people are defined by their age and not their skills, attributes and contributions) and lack of social norms around employing older workers

Systemic factors noted as impacting on employment of mature age workers included:

- Lack of access to affordable lifelong learning and a training system weighted towards young people, which impacts on the skills of older workers and the willingness of employers to employ them
- Eligibility for pension and impacts on superannuation (which affects the supply side of mature age employment)
- Lack of exposure to examples of successful mature age workers
- Workers compensation cut off ages
- An ageist culture in which society values younger people over older, creating both conscious and unconscious bias
- Unions protecting workers but inadvertently reducing opportunities for flexibility in jobs
- Structural changes in labour market – more contracting, less employment.

Individual factors noted as impacting on employment of mature age workers included:

- Older workers not applying for jobs, possibly due to lack of confidence and previous encounters with ageism
- Decreased confidence and mental health, which can be impacted by ageist stereotypes
- Salary expectations that are too high
- Lack of up to date skills and qualifications (especially technological skills) and/or the need to retrain in new industries/occupations to respond to changing labour market.

## Strategies focused on system level changes could make a moderate difference

Participating experts were asked about the extent to which systemic level strategies, such as changing legislation, changing policies and funding and placing obligations on employers to recruit and/or implement age-friendly practices, would make a difference to the employment of mature age workers.

There was agreement that each of these types of strategies would make a moderate difference, with greater consensus around the potential for policy and funding changes to bring about change.

In relation to policy and funding changes, participants felt that:

- Lifelong learning policies were needed, including reducing the cost of further training, education and skills development (beyond initial qualifications), but that this would be a longer term strategy for bringing about change.
- In the shorter term, incentives or subsidies for employers to take on mature age workers may make more of a difference and help to fast-track the normalisation of mature age employment – but this would need to be closely monitored. However, some participants felt that incentives or subsidies wouldn't be enough to counteract negative perceptions of older workers among employers and may even create perceptions there is something wrong with older people
- Changes to workers compensation policies, to protect employers from penalties related to work-related injury and illness for older workers may encourage some employers to “give mature age workers a go”.
- Support for mature age workers to take on mentoring roles without having to change job descriptions of pay grades could be an effective strategy.

There were mixed views about the potential impact of changes to legislation (such as to retirement/pension age or access to benefits), with a third of participants believing this would have minimal impact. Participants noted the following options as having potential to make a difference:

- Legislation allowing mature age workers to continue to work without being financially disadvantaged (e.g. by enabling the combining of work with an aged pension)
- Strengthening and raising awareness of the Age Discrimination Act and processes.

There were also mixed views about the value of placing obligations to recruit mature age workers or implement age friendly workplace practices on employers. Three participants believed this would have minimal benefit, five felt the benefit would be moderate and one saw it as a significant lever.

Points raised include:

- Creating obligations would imply there is something wrong with older workers. Creating awareness of the benefits and business case for hiring mature age workers would be a better and cheaper strategy

- Such strategies would not be received well by business and would have little impact beyond the government sector
- Procurement-led obligations could raise visibility of the issue, help to normalise employment of mature age workers and reduce negative bias over the longer term
- This type of strategy would require understanding of which sectors of the labour market should be targeted
- If obligations were created they should be based on overall workplace diversity, not just age.

#### At the workplace level, awareness raising strategies could make a significant difference

Participating experts were asked about the extent to which workplace level strategies, such as awareness raising, education for employers and specialist recruitment services, would make a difference to the employment of mature age workers.

Of all the strategies put forward for consideration in the Delphi forum, awareness raising (such as through myth busting negative perceptions of mature age workers, promoting the benefits of age-diverse workplaces, or publicly recognising good practice) received the highest level of consensus on its potential to bring about change. Six of the eight respondents to this question felt that it would make a significant difference to the employment of mature age workers, with the remaining three rating it as having potential to make a moderate difference.

In relation to awareness-raising, participants said:

- There is a need for a sustained public and workplace education and information campaign to challenge myths and stereotypes and raise awareness of ageism and its impacts
- Widespread awareness campaigns (through both social media and general media) also need to highlight the significant, demonstrated benefits of employing older workers and having multi-generational teams in the workplace, as well as normalising mature age work by showcasing progressive practice
- There is also a need for political leadership to promote the importance, contribution and normality of age-diverse workplaces and labour forces.

In relation to other potential workplace level strategies:

- Half of the respondents felt that education for employers would make a significant difference, including expansion and sharing of an evidence base and innovative practices. Others felt that education would be less effective than awareness raising and that showcasing and promoting good practice through employers' peer networks and relationships was more persuasive. Those that were supportive suggested that education would be most effective at the manager level, as educating decision-makers is the key to bringing about wider cultural change. Educating unions was also suggested.
- Whilst this research is focused on strategies for changing employer behaviour, one respondent noted that educating employees about their entitlements, such as their right to request flexible working arrangements, would be helpful

- Participants were somewhat cautious about the potential effectiveness of specialist recruitment services, with half believing this would have minimal impact and the other half saying it would have a moderate impact. Some suggested that private sector services that specialised in mature age workers could make a difference (and already do exist), but would need to ensure that they weren't creating stigma around older workers. Others suggested that all recruitment services should be trained and held accountable for non-discriminatory practices.

At the individual level, supported access to training and upskilling could make a significant difference

Participating experts were asked about the extent to which individual worker/jobseeker level strategies, such as supported access to training/upskilling, supported access to career development services and increased availability of training/upskilling options and career development services, would make a difference to the employment of mature age workers.

There was a high level of agreement across participants that supporting access to training and upskilling for mature age workers and job seekers (particularly in relation to technology use), would make a significant difference to their employment. They further noted:

- Support for training and upskilling is vital for all workers, not just those who are mature age. The training system should provide cheaper access to second and third qualifications to enable upskilling and reskilling for new industry sectors or roles
- Support for training is particularly helpful for those moving into jobs requiring more technological skills. However, a couple of participants stressed that 'the tech gap' among mature age workers is a myth and that people should stop perpetuating this stereotype.

Increasing the availability of training/upskilling options for mature age people was seen as having the potential to make a moderate difference and received a high level of consensus across respondents. One participant noted that targeting of training to older workers was important, another felt that there was greater need for re-skilling than upskilling and another noted that availability of training has particularly declined in regional Australia.

There was a low level of consensus about the potential for supported access to career development services to make a difference, with some seeing this as having minimal difference, some seeing it as moderate and some seeing it as significant. Participants responses ranged from concerns that such a strategy would require significant resources to achieve an impact, through to it being a valuable strategy that could make a measurable difference for relatively low cost.

There was greater consensus though about the moderate difference that could be made by increasing the availability of career development services for mature age workers. One participant suggested that tailored services for this age group could be a game changer. Others noted that ageism can be internalised, with individuals thinking that they are too old, they have had their chance or that younger people have more to offer. Therefore, education and awareness raising campaigns that address internalised ageism are important, as are career development services that help to address confidence and mental health issues for this cohort.

One suggestion was to expand the current Skills Checkpoint for Older Workers program (available to workers or recently unemployed people aged 45-70) to provide mature age workers with career development support.

Another suggestion was to implement programs to help to connect mature age workers/job seekers with employers, as many older workers do not have strong business networks that can draw upon to help them transition into new career options.

## Implications of the research findings

Comparison of the findings across the three types of research highlights several common themes.

### There are numerous barriers to the employment of mature age workers

Whilst many employers see the benefits of employing mature age workers, there are ongoing barriers to this occurring. The barriers expressed in at least two of the three research methods were:

- persistent ageism and negative stereotypes
- lack of social norms around mature age employment and an ageist societal culture more broadly
- lack of consideration of age as part of diverse and inclusive workplaces
- higher salary costs
- lack of up-to-date skills among mature age workers
- declining physical abilities of older workers and increasing risk of injury and concern about workers compensation penalties
- lack of confidence possibly contributing to declining mental health among mature age workers
- challenges in mature age workers and employers finding each other.

### Employers and experts have similar perceptions about what might make a difference to the employment of mature age workers

Table 9 below illustrates the strategies identified by employers and experts mostly likely to have an impact on the employment of mature age workers. Although they are not directly comparable as different questions were asked in the different research methods, they do provide an indication of where solutions might be focused.

**Table 9: Preferred strategies for increasing employment of mature age workers**

<b>Employer poll</b> (most influential strategies)	<b>Employer interviews</b> (most commonly mentioned strategies)	<b>Delphi expert forum</b> (strategies that would make the greatest difference)
1. Subsidised training	1. Educating employers and recruiters about benefits and challenging assumptions and biases	1. Awareness raising
2. Financial incentives	2. Financial incentives (e.g. subsidies and tax incentives)	2. Supported access to training/upskilling
3. Support from recruitment agencies	3. Resources, networking and mentoring to support changed practice	3. Changes to policies and funding
4. Training in age-friendly HR practices	4. Funding for upskilling and retraining	4. Increased availability of training/upskilling options for mature age people

5. Tailored advice	5. Support to link mature age workers and employers	5. Education for employers / Increased availability of career development services for mature age people
6. Information about the benefits	6. Including mature age workers in diversity/inclusion considerations	6. Creation of obligations to recruit mature age workers or implement age-friendly workplace practices

Although they are expressed in slightly different ways and have been prioritised in slightly different orders, there are several common strategies that have been identified across all three of the research methods. These are:

1. Subsidised / supported access to training and upskilling opportunities, as well as increased options that are suitable for mature age people and creation of lifelong learning policies
2. Financial support in the form of subsidies, tax incentives and reductions in workers compensation costs/penalties
3. Awareness raising to help challenge assumptions and biases and bring about cultural change, as well as to educate employers about the benefits of mature age employment and age-diverse workforces
4. Education and support for implementing age-friendly work practices
5. Assistance for mature age individuals and employers to find each other, including support from recruitment agencies and tailored career advice and support services for mature age individuals
6. Encouragement for organisations to consider mature age workers as part of diverse and inclusive workplaces, for example through creation of age diversity targets, promotion of good practice and potential use of procurement levers.

## Different strategies might be needed for different cohorts

The research findings suggest that when considering solutions to remove barriers to the employment and retention of mature age workers, different strategies may be more effective with some cohorts than others – including cohorts of different business sizes, locations and industry sectors.

### Business size and location

Whilst subsidised training and financial incentives came out at the top of the list for all sized businesses that responded to the poll, the preferences that followed varied across organisational size.

For example, medium and large businesses are interested in ‘training in age-friendly HR practices’ and ‘information about the benefits’ of employing mature age workers, while these were not rated as influential by small businesses. Small businesses were much more interested in ‘success stories’ than medium and large organisations, while medium sized businesses rated ‘information and tools to show you how’ as being more influential than did the other two cohorts.

Small businesses are the least likely to employ mature age workers. Tailored strategies may be needed to influence their willingness to employ mature age workers and to make it easier for them to do so.

Several of the interviewees who were small business owners already employed mature age workers and were interested in employing more. However, they experienced difficulties in finding them. So small businesses might also be a useful cohort to target with initiatives to help connect mature age job seekers with employers.

Organisations based solely in regional areas are the second least likely to employ mature age workers. At the same time, conversations in the sense-making workshop highlighted that regional businesses are struggling with finding workers. This suggests that strategies are particularly needed in regional areas to help align the supply of mature age workers with available employment opportunities.

Organisations with a regional presence and large businesses were also more interested in public recognition for good practice (such as awards) than other cohorts, which suggests that perceptions of being 'socially responsible' employers might be beneficial to their reputations. Focusing specific strategies on these cohorts could be a way of increasing social norms around employment of mature age workers.

### Industry sector

Declining physical capability among older workers is more of an issue in some industries than in others. As noted in some of the comments from respondents to employer polls, some employers would like to retain older employees, but the nature of the work makes this impossible.

Research conducted by the Australian National University highlights that workers who engage in manual work are "likely to accumulate more chronic health conditions over time due to the physical demands of their working lives". At the same time many of these workers "have low levels of accumulated savings, superannuation and other financial assets that force them to remain working". Similar issues exist for workers in the caring and service industry sectors.<sup>10</sup>

This suggests that employers in physically demanding industries (such as Construction or Hospitality and Retail) would benefit from initiatives that help them support mature age workers to transition to other less physically-demanding roles, or to transition to new industries and occupations. This may involve support for upskilling or reskilling.

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<sup>10</sup> Christine LaBond, Cathy Banwell, Melanie Pescud, Tinh Doan & Lyndall Strazdins (2020): Blue collar timescapes: work, health, and pension eligibility age for mature age Australian bus drivers, Critical Public Health, DOI: 10.1080/09581596.2020.1846684



## Recommendations

The research findings point towards four key areas in which efforts to reduce the barriers to employment of mature age workers are likely to be most effective.

### 1. Rethink skills

The research has highlighted that mature age workers are valued for their experience and knowledge, their reliability, responsibility and work ethic. Most of these are attributes that cannot be trained for.

At the same time, the research found that a lack of up-to-date skills and declining physical abilities are two of the biggest barriers to mature age employment. These are issues that can be addressed through training and career development and transition support.

In other words, mature age workers have the attributes that employers are seeking, but need some additional skills or new types of skills to help them to remain employable.

This suggests that strategies to remove barriers related to skills and physical abilities should focus on:

- upskilling – to enable individuals to develop additional skills to use in their current role or industry, particularly digital technology related skills
- reskilling – to provide individuals with new skills that enable them to transition to a different role or industry
- support for career development and transition – to help both individuals and employers rethink how their existing skills and knowledge might best be utilised and supplemented to create ongoing employment opportunities – either in their current role, or in a new or altered role, or in an entirely new industry.

The research shows strong support for these strategies, with subsidised training, increased access to training and increased availability of career development services for mature age individuals rating highly as effective or influential strategies.

Discussions in the sense-making session also highlighted the value that could be gained by supporting both employers and individuals to think more broadly about skills and capabilities and identify where these might be transferable to new roles and industries.

There are existing programs and strategies that could be leveraged to further support upskilling, reskilling and career development and transition for mature age individuals and their employers.

For instance, the Australian Government's Skills Checkpoint for Older Workers program<sup>11</sup> is a free service for people aged 45-70 who are currently employed, or recently unemployed. The program supports individuals and employers by conducting tailored assessment of existing skills and providing advice and guidance on transitioning into new roles within their current industry or pathways to a new career. Participants are also given a Career Plan, referral to relevant education

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<sup>11</sup> <https://skillscheck.com.au/>

and training options and access to a co-funded \$2,200 Skills and Training Incentive to help them reach their employment goals.

Individuals also have access to Skills Match<sup>12</sup>, an online interactive tool that enables workers to input the jobs they have done and see the different types of jobs and careers where those skills are transferable.

The Expert Panel on Digital Transformation also released their Digital Transformation Skills Strategy earlier this year.<sup>13</sup> Whilst the strategy is driven by the increasing levels of digitalisation and automation across workplaces, its focus is on a comprehensive strategy for upskilling and reskilling existing workers to ensure they are not 'left behind'. Many of its recommended actions are directly relevant to the types of support needed by mature age workers, such as:

- creation of a comprehensive national lifelong learning policy with a strong focus on the existing workforce
- growing the investment pool for upskilling/reskilling of the existing workforce
- a national information campaign on the imperative, opportunities and benefits of upskilling/reskilling and lifelong learning
- establishing a long-term program of independent trusted advisors that work with individual enterprises to drive best practice in workforce development and employee support
- establishing a nationally agreed approach to learner support for existing workers that is available before, during and after training and directly tackles the barriers to successful lifelong learning, including skills assessment, tailored career development support, career and learning pathway information, financial support and learning support.

#### Recommendation 1.

**High level:** Further promote existing programs and initiatives, focusing on industry sectors where mature age workers are more likely to need support.

**In detail:** Further promote existing programs and initiatives as a means of:

- supporting mature age workers to remain in the workforce, and
- helping employers and individuals to think more broadly about the application of existing skills and knowledge to new or modified job roles or new industry sectors.

Give particular attention to industry sectors where mature age workers are more likely to need support to transition to new roles or industries (for example, industry sectors with roles that have higher physical demands such as retail, hospitality, construction and manufacturing).

#### Recommendation 2.

**High level:** Remove barriers for mature age workers to participate in ongoing learning, for example by adopting actions from the Digital Transformation Skills Strategy.

<sup>12</sup> <https://joboutlook.gov.au/career-tools/skills-match/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://digitalskillsformation.org.au/>

**In detail:** Adopt actions from the Digital Transformation Skills Strategy (related to upskilling and reskilling of existing workers), which might be pursued for the benefit of mature age employment. In particular, focus on removing barriers to existing workers participating in ongoing learning, including facilitating access to funding for additional qualifications and skill sets and ensuring that learning opportunities are provided that are tailored to the needs of mature age learners.

## 2. Address costs

Financial incentives were rated highly by employers involved in the research as a means of influencing behaviour. However, experts had mixed view on their potential effectiveness.

The literature also reports mixed findings about wage subsidies. Subsidies such as Restart (a financial incentive of up to \$10,000 available to qualifying businesses that employ eligible job seekers who are 50 years of age or older) do not necessarily overcome employers' concerns about long term job seekers<sup>14</sup> and can sometimes reinforce negative stereotypes, but they can also help individuals to get a foot in the door and challenge the stereotype.<sup>15</sup>

Recent research of jobactive conducted by the department notes that although employers consistently report being primarily concerned with finding the right person for the job — the right fit for their organisation — and often state that wage subsidies do not impact on their decision to hire, the data shows that subsidies can make a difference in employing someone once they make a shortlist.<sup>16</sup> The evaluation also shows that in some cases, wage subsidies are used to negotiate an increase in the working hours, to engage the employee on a permanent basis instead of a casual basis, to provide training or to cover the costs of a 'buddy' while they learn the job.<sup>17</sup>

Given that one of the barriers to employment of mature age workers raised frequently in this research was the high wage costs of mature age workers, there could be a place for targeted subsidies to offset this issue for mature age job seekers.

Research has shown that employers who are already engaging with employment services are generally aware of wage subsidies and jobactive providers have been promoting their availability<sup>18</sup>. However, the level of awareness among the broader employer population is unknown.

There are other types of costs and incentives mentioned by research participants, including the cost of workers compensation penalties and the potential for tax incentives for employers that meet target ratios of mature age employees. Some interviewees also mentioned that employers and individuals are not always aware of the rules around being able to access part pension while continuing to work some hours.

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<sup>14</sup> Bowman, D & Randrianarisoa, A (2018) Missing the mark: employer perspectives on employment services and mature age jobseekers in Australia. Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Victoria

<sup>15</sup> Departmental research 2015

<sup>16</sup> Departmental research 2019

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Departmental research 2015

The nature of this research does not allow us to make specific recommendations around incentives. However, the importance placed on financial incentives by research participants suggests that it is an area for further investigation.

### Recommendation 3.

**High level:** Research barriers to employers taking up existing financial incentives (where this has not already been done) and identify potential solutions.

**In detail:** Conduct research with employers to:

- test awareness and accessibility of existing financial incentives for employing mature age workers (where this has not already been done), and
- investigate the potential for additional incentives or financial levers to increase mature age worker employment and retention.

### 3. Support matching

A somewhat surprising finding of the research was that some employers struggle to find mature age workers to employ and that there would be value in initiatives that help employers and mature age workers to find each other.

Discussions in the sense-making workshop suggest that lack of confidence which can contribute to declining mental health can discourage mature age individuals from applying for jobs. Interviews with employers also identified that modern recruitment practices can result in mature age individuals being excluded from job opportunities. For example, some employers use psychometric testing, which can be daunting for mature age job seekers who do not have recent experience with assessment processes. Others use practices such as giving existing employees bonuses for referring new potential candidates, which tends to favour younger employees with larger networks of peers seeking work.

There may be more that can be done to assist individuals with advice on how to navigate modern recruitment processes and provide support and referrals for improving the confidence and mental health of mature age job seekers through intermediary organisations such as employment services, recruitment agencies and programs like Skills Checkpoint for Older Workers mentioned above.

There may also be more systematic ways of connecting mature age job seekers with employers who are seeking to employ this valuable group of workers. For example, engaging employment services and recruitment agency staff with specialist expertise in supporting mature age workers and creating specific jobs boards or similar for mature age workers.

#### Recommendation 4.

**High level:** Engage key stakeholders who support job seekers and employers to tailor solutions for mature age job seekers in areas of labour market shortage.

**In detail:** Work with intermediaries such as employment services providers, recruitment agency peaks and providers of other employment-related programs to:

- ensure that tailored supports and referrals are being provided to mature age job seekers to assist with mental health issues, confidence in seeking employment, confronting potential ageism among employers, and developing skills in modern recruitment processes
- assist mature age job seekers to identify their existing skill sets and determine their transferability to other jobs in the labour market
- educate and assist employers to implement age-friendly recruitment practices and flexible job design and work arrangements that support age-diverse workplaces
- explore the potential for development of tailored approaches for employers and mature age job seekers to find each other.

#### 4. Create cultural change

Cultural change takes time and requires multifaceted approaches to changing hearts and minds, habits and systems.

Raising awareness and educating employers and recruiters about age-related barriers and biases were seen by interviewees and experts as effective strategies for increasing the employment of mature age workers. Such strategies could help to dispel myths and change social norms around older workers. However, to be effective, they would need to be combined with systemic changes (such as changes to policies and funding arrangements) that help to remove other barriers.

There currently exists a unique opportunity to capitalise on labour shortages being experienced across various industries and locations in Australia, due in part to decreased availability of migrant workers, by presenting mature age workers as part of a solution. These shortages offer a strong and time-limited driver for encouraging employers to think more broadly about their pool of potential employees and skills by considering the benefits of employing mature age workers.

The research findings suggest that promotion of the benefits of age diverse workplaces and the inclusion of age diversity as part of diversity and inclusion practices in organisations may be more effective than focusing specifically on the benefits of mature age workers.

The report recently released by the Australian Human Rights Commission highlighted the prevalence of ageism across adults' lifespans and the fact that ageist attitudes and behaviours can lead to age

discrimination<sup>19</sup>. Raising awareness of ageism and promoting the value of age diverse workplaces could help to challenge ageist attitudes and behaviours in workplaces.

Promotion efforts could include raising awareness of the availability of existing resources and training opportunities to support employers to implement age-friendly recruitment practices and to create age-diverse workplaces.

These efforts then need to be combined with some of the individual, systemic and workplace level strategies mentioned above in order to bring about cultural change.

#### Recommendation 5.

**High level:** Support employers to become more age-friendly and age-aware through a behavioural change or social marketing strategy.

**In detail:** Develop and implement a behaviour change/social marketing strategy aimed at encouraging and supporting employers to implement age-friendly recruitment practices and create age-diverse workplaces, including:

- Raising awareness of the availability of pool of experienced, willing and able workers who can help to fill current and emerging labour shortages
- Raising awareness of ageism (across the lifespan) and challenging ageist attitudes and assumptions
- Promoting the evidence-based benefits of age-diverse workplaces
- Raising awareness of available resources about age-diverse employment practices (for example the *Investing in Experience Toolkit* published by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment on the Mature Age Hub<sup>20</sup>) and supporting employers to use them
- Promoting and recognising good practice by employers
- Creating links between different government strategies and initiatives to remove barriers to mature age employment.

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<sup>19</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2021) What's age got to do with it? A snapshot of ageism across the Australian lifespan

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.dese.gov.au/mature-age-hub/resources/mature-age-information-employers-investing-experience-tool-kit>

## Attachment A. Consultation questions

### Employer poll questions

1. What is the size of your organisation?
  - Small (employing 0-19 people)
  - Medium (employing 20-199 people)
  - Large (employing 200+ people)
  
2. Where is your organisation located?
  - Metropolitan area (capital city)
  - Regional area (not capital city)
  - Both metropolitan and regional areas
  
3. What industry does your organisation primarily operate in?
  - A — Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
  - B — Mining
  - C — Manufacturing
  - D — Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services
  - E — Construction
  - F — Wholesale Trade
  - G — Retail Trade
  - H — Accommodation and Food Services
  - I — Transport, Postal and Warehousing
  - J — Information Media and Telecommunications
  - K — Financial and Insurance Services
  - L — Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services
  - M — Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
  - N — Administrative and Support Services
  - O — Public Administration and Safety
  - P — Education and Training
  - Q — Health Care and Social Assistance
  - R — Arts and Recreation Services
  - S — Other Services
  
4. To what extent do you agree that mature age workers (aged 55+) benefit your organisation?  
[ten point scale from minimal benefit to significant benefit]
  
5. Is it important to your organisation's reputation to employ mature age workers?  
[ten point scale from not at all important to extremely important]
  
6. How capable is your organisation at recruiting and supporting mature age workers?  
[ten point scale from not at all capable to extremely capable]
  
7. How easy is it to find and retain suitable mature age workers?  
[ten point scale from very difficult to very easy]

8. Which of the following would most influence you to actively recruit and retain mature age workers in your organisation?

Select your top three from the list below:

- Financial incentives to take on an unemployed mature age person
- Information about the benefits
- Evidence to counter common negative perceptions (e.g. that mature age workers are more likely to be ill or injured, or find it harder to learn)
- Information and tools
- Tailored advice for my organisation
- Support to find suitably skilled mature age workers (e.g. through recruitment agencies or Jobactives)
- Training in age-friendly recruitment and management practices
- Success stories from other organisations
- Public recognition for good practice (e.g. awards)
- Access to subsidised training for mature age workers
- None of the above
- Other – please specify

9. Do you have any comments about recruiting and retaining mature age workers?

### **Employer in-depth interview questions**

1. Tell me a little bit about your organisation – location, size, industry etc.
2. What does your organisation do now in relation to the recruitment of mature age workers? What gets in the way or presents barriers? (or for good practice employers - Was there anything that made it easier to set up or implement these practices?)
3. What does your organisation do now in terms of retaining mature age workers? What gets in the way or presents barriers? (or for good practice employers - Was there anything that made it easier to set up or implement these practices?)
4. What might encourage your organisation to do more to recruit and retain mature age workers? (or for good practice employers - What might encourage other organisations to do more to recruit and retain mature age workers?)

### **Recruiter in-depth interview questions**

5. Tell me a little bit about your organisation – location, size, customer base etc.
6. Does your agency/service make a special effort to recruit mature age workers? If so, what is the main driver for this?
7. What does your agency/service do in relation to the recruitment of mature age workers? Is there anything that makes it difficult to place these workers with employers? Is there anything that makes it easier?



8. Does your agency/service work with employers to support them in retaining mature age workers? What seems to work and what are the challenges?
9. What role could employment agencies/services take to support employers in recruiting and retaining more mature age workers? What would support you in doing this?

## Delphi questions

1. To what extent are the following factors negatively impacting on the willingness and ability of Australian employers to recruit and retain mature age workers?
  - Systemic factors (such as pension/retirement/tax structures, industrial relations arrangements, access to lifelong learning and career guidance)
  - Workplace factors (such as inflexible working arrangements, negative perceptions of older workers, lack of age-friendly workplace practices)
  - Individual factors (such as lack of current skills/qualifications, lack of understanding of career management and the labour market, reluctance to undertake training)

[participants rated each item as 'minimal' 'moderate' or 'significant']

Are there any factors not listed above that negatively impact on the willingness and ability of Australian employers to recruit and retain mature age workers (aged 55+)?

[free text response]

2. To what extent would the following systemic level strategies make a difference to the numbers of mature age workers being employed in Australia?
  - Changes to legislation (for example, in relation to retirement/pension age, access to unemployment/sickness/disability benefits)
  - Changes to policies and funding (for example, in relation to lifelong learning and career guidance, incentives/subsidies for employing mature age workers)
  - Creation of obligations to recruit mature age workers or implement age-friendly workplace practices (for example, through Government procurement policies, or setting of targets)
  - Other – please specify

[participants rated each item as 'minimal' 'moderate' or 'significant']

Are there any other systemic level strategies that you think would make a difference to the numbers of mature age workers (aged 55+) being employed in Australia?

[free text response]

3. To what extent would the following workplace level strategies make a difference to the numbers of mature age workers being employed in Australia?

- Combating negative perceptions of mature age workers
- Raising awareness of the benefits of employing mature age workers and having age-diverse workplaces
- Recognising and rewarding good practice
- Providing subsidies for training mature age workers
- Providing incentives for employing mature age workers
- Establishing specialist recruitment services for mature age workers (through recruitment agencies and/or Jobactive providers)
- Educating employers about age-friendly recruitment and management practices (for example, through resources, training, mentoring and advice)
- Other – please specify

[participants rated each item as 'minimal' 'moderate' or 'significant']

Are there any other workplace level strategies that you think would make a difference to the numbers of mature age workers (aged 55+) being employed in Australia?

[free text response]

4. To what extent would the following individual level strategies make a difference to the employability of mature age workers?

- Supporting access to training/upskilling (particularly in relation to technology use)
- Supporting access to career development services (for example, to improve career management and job search skills, to gain individual career advice)
- Increasing the availability of training/upskilling options tailored for mature age people
- Increasing the availability of career development services tailored for mature age people
- Other – please specify

[participants rated each item as 'minimal' 'moderate' or 'significant']

Are there any other individual level strategies that you think would make a difference to the numbers of mature age workers (aged 55+) being employed in Australia?

[free text response]

## Attachment B. Research Framework

Topic/issue	What do we already know about this?	What don't we know?
<b>The capacity and willingness of businesses to employ older workers</b>		
<p>Willingness to employ older workers and capacity to implement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age-diverse recruitment processes to attract older workers</li> <li>• Age-friendly work practices to manage and retain older workers and an age-diverse workforce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age discrimination is more often reported by older job seekers, rather than those already in employment. However, existing mature age workers do also report issues of lack of promotional opportunities and training, and lack of valuing of contributions<sup>i</sup></li> <li>• There appears to be a growing understanding among businesses of the value of and need for employment and retention of older workers, but this is not necessarily translating into practice<sup>ii</sup></li> <li>• The latest AHRI survey shows that the large majority of respondents have at least some strategies in place for late career workers (&lt;10% had none of the identified options in place). By contrast, almost a quarter of respondents do not use any age-diverse recruitment practices<sup>iii</sup></li> <li>• Mature age people spend an average of 77 weeks in unemployment, compared with an average of 48 weeks across all age groups. 35% of unemployed mature age people are long term unemployed, compared with 24% across all age groups.<sup>iv</sup> This makes a strong case for ensuring older workers are retained in employment.</li> </ul>	<p>Where are employers placed on a behaviour change scale in terms of motivation and ease?</p> <p>What levers might shift them along the continuum?</p> <p>Does willingness change depending on whether older people are employed/ unemployed?</p>
<p>What is considered to be old?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ABS uses 45+; the OECD uses 54-65; many research reports use 55+ or 55-64</li> <li>• The 2021 AHRI survey found that the largest group of respondents (28%) classify 61-65 as the age where someone becomes an older worker, but this has dropped from 36% in 2018<sup>v</sup></li> <li>• Age discrimination is most commonly reported by people in the 55-64 age group<sup>vi</sup></li> </ul>	

Topic/issue	What do we already know about this?	What don't we know?
<b>Perceived barriers among businesses to employment of this cohort</b>		
Barriers to recruitment of older workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The research identifies two types of barriers to the recruitment of older workers:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Perceptions</b> - that older workers are less productive, lack initiative, are resistant to change, are more likely to be injured or have increased absenteeism due to illness, are more expensive to employ, find it harder to learn/have decreased cognitive ability, are less competent and confident with technology, are less willing to engage in training and career development.<sup>vii viii ix</sup></li> <li>○ <b>Skills and attributes</b> – that older workers lack current skills, qualifications or experience (esp. technology skills), are over-qualified, have poor application/interview skills, cannot meet the physical demands of the work, have salary expectations that too high, are not the right cultural fit <sup>x xi</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Research shows however, that most of the perceptions are myths. The only one supported by empirical evidence is that older workers are less willing to engage in training and career development activities.<sup>xii</sup></li> <li>• 31% of respondents to the 2021 AHRI survey reported that they had no challenges or obstacles to recruiting older workers.<sup>xiii</sup></li> </ul>	<p>What would help to change these perceptions?</p> <p>How can the skills and attributes barriers be addressed?</p>
Barriers to management and retention of older workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research from the European Union has identified three types of barriers to the retention of older workers:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Systemic</b> – such as legislation and tax structures, lack of access to guidance and lifelong learning</li> <li>○ <b>Situational</b> – such as workplace attitudes, lack of ‘age-aware’ human resources practices</li> <li>○ <b>Dispositional</b> – such as individual’s lack of confidence and self-esteem, financial situation or physical and mental health problems <sup>xiv</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>• They cite lack of competence in ‘comprehensive age management strategies’ at the organisational level as a barrier <sup>xv</sup></li> <li>• The 2021 AHRI survey identified that older workers stay working in organisations because of flexible working hours, job satisfaction and phased retirement. 70% of</li> </ul>	<p>To what extent are the barriers in Australia systemic, situational and dispositional?</p> <p>Where should efforts to address these barriers be focused?</p>

Topic/issue	What do we already know about this?	What don't we know?
	respondents indicated that their organisation rarely or never provides training for managers on how to manage different generations. <sup>xvi</sup>	
<b>Possible solutions to these barriers</b>		
Age-diverse recruitment practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AHRI survey identifies the following age-diverse recruitment strategies (and the percentage of respondents using them): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ flexible working arrangements (48.7%)</li> <li>○ ensuring the content of adverts attract the full range of age groups (44.4%)</li> <li>○ training staff with recruitment responsibilities to ensure all recruitment practices are free of age bias (31.4%)</li> <li>○ excluding the date of birth from application forms (36.8%)</li> <li>○ ensuring the location of adverts attracts the full range of age groups (21.4%)</li> <li>○ ensuring recruitment suppliers have a Diversity &amp; Inclusion policy (18.3%)</li> <li>○ briefing recruitment agents to ensure that processes do no disadvantage different age groups (16.2%)</li> <li>○ proactively recruiting older workers into a range of positions (9.7%)</li> <li>○ using mature age specific job boards to advertise vacancies (1.6%) <sup>xvii</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Why aren't employers implementing more of these recruitment strategies?</p> <p>What would it take to change behaviour?</p>
Strategies for managing an age-diverse workforce (i.e. a lifelong approach) and for actively seeking to retain older workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature from the EU is focusing on creation of an age-diverse workforce, rather than just on employing more older workers <sup>xviii</sup></li> <li>• Strategies for making the most of a multigenerational workforce include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Maximising – training needs, mid-life reviews, job rotation and shadowing, action learning</li> <li>○ Maintaining – health promotion and healthy work, support for careers, job design and adaptation, multi-stranded flexible working policy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Why aren't employers implementing more management and retention strategies?</p> <p>What would it take to change behaviour?</p>

Topic/issue	What do we already know about this?	What don't we know?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mobilising – workforce strategy, unbiased recruitment, line manager training, internal mobility <sup>xix</sup></li> <li>● The 2021 AHRI survey identified that the top 3 most commonly strategies in use for retaining older workers were flexible working hours (78%), part-time options (68%) and continued access to training and development (55%). Other strategies included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Long service awards and recognition</li> <li>○ Flexible work locations</li> <li>○ Phased retirement</li> <li>○ Job-sharing options</li> <li>○ Career planning and advice</li> <li>○ Flexible job design policies</li> <li>○ Elderly care leave</li> <li>○ Return-to-work options for retirees</li> <li>○ Grandparental leave</li> <li>○ Loyalty payments <sup>xx</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<p>Incentives for lifelong learning and career development (directly to older workers and/or via employers)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Access to lifelong learning is essential if older workers' skills are not to become outdated (especially given the rate of automation and digitalisation) <sup>xxi</sup></li> <li>● There is a strong link between lifelong learning participation and educational attainment <sup>xxii</sup></li> <li>● Employers can be reluctant to invest in training older workers due to perceived lower returns on investment (but in fact, older workers are most likely to stay than younger workers, making them a better investment) and perceptions that older workers are less able to learn new skills. Research shows that older workers actually have fewer barriers to participation in learning than younger people, but may need different ways</li> </ul>	<p>What would it take for more older workers to access training and career development?</p>

Topic/issue	What do we already know about this?	What don't we know?
	<p>of learning (e.g. longer time, multiple instructional methods) and may need support to overcome lack of confidence in their learning abilities <sup>xxiii</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of access to career development support is also a significant issue for older workers (and adults more broadly). <sup>xxiv</sup> However, some programs do exist such as <i>Skills Checkpoint</i></li> </ul>	
Subsidies for employing and retaining older workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Australian Government currently offers the Restart wage subsidy, which provides eligible businesses with up to \$10,000 to hire and retain employees 50 years and over</li> <li>Research from the Brotherhood of St Laurence found that a wage subsidy for mature age recruits, such as Restart, did not overcome employers' concerns about job seekers who had been unemployed for a long time <sup>xxv</sup></li> </ul>	To what extent does a wage subsidy influence employer behaviour?
Education and awareness raising campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the <i>Investing in Experience</i> toolkit and charter has been distributed to over 10,000 employers across Australia. AiG delivered a series of seminars based on the toolkit and ACCI released and promoted a series of employer guides under the banner 'Employ outside the Box'. A Corporate Champions project was funded in 2012 to assist organisations to review and change their HR practices. It is now defunct. <sup>xxvi</sup></li> <li>Anti-discrimination campaigns often adopt a 'business case' approach, highlighting the commercial benefits of employing older workers, but this can unintentionally reinforce stereotypes about age <sup>xxvii</sup></li> </ul>	<p>Has any research been done on the impact of these resources and programs?</p> <p>How aware are employers of such practices?</p> <p>To what extent does this influence behaviour?</p>
Legislation and policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EU member nations have used legislation to increase employment of older workers in various ways, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raising the statutory pension age</li> <li>Increasing the age for having the right to unemployment benefits</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Would any of these legislative/policy levers be feasible in Australia?

Topic/issue	What do we already know about this?	What don't we know?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reducing incentives for early retirement</li> <li>○ Increasing the pension benefits according to the number of years worked</li> <li>○ Sickness/disability benefit reform</li> <li>○ Anti-discrimination legislation Obligation to have active age management policies in the workplace</li> <li>○ Obligation to hire an older worker <sup>xxviii</sup></li> <li>● New Zealand ranks 2nd in the OECD for employment of older workers, with nearly 40% of citizens working until age 70. This is attributed to a range of factors including strong anti-discrimination legislation and low rates of discrimination, changes to superannuation and having no official retirement age <sup>xxix</sup></li> </ul>	
Rewards and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Government sponsored awards for 'age management best practice' in organisations has been put forward as a potential strategy for improving the age diversity of workplaces <sup>xxx xxxi</sup></li> </ul>	Would this make a difference to employer behaviour?
Targets/benchmarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Including age diversity clauses in public tenders is another possible strategy <sup>xxxii</sup></li> </ul>	Is this feasible in Australia?
Working with recruitment agencies and Jobactives to boost employment of older workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The literature has frequent reference to the need for better older worker knowledge and practice among recruitment agencies and Jobactive services <sup>xxxiii xxxiv</sup></li> <li>● Qualifications for employment services staff do not include a focus on working with older workers <sup>xxxv</sup></li> <li>● There is at least one organisation in Australia focusing exclusively on employment of older workers (called <i>Older Workers</i>) <sup>xxxvi</sup></li> </ul>	What could be feasibly done in this space?



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- <sup>i</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2015) *National Prevalence Survey of Age Discrimination in the Workplace – 2015*. Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney
- <sup>ii</sup> OECD (2020) *Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce: Living, Learning and Earning Longer*. OECD Publishing, Paris
- <sup>iii</sup> Australian HR Institute (2021) *Employing and retaining older workers*. Australian HR Institute and Australian Human Rights Commission
- <sup>iv</sup> Department of Employment, Skills and Family Business (2020) *Employers' experiences and attitudes to hiring mature age workers*
- <sup>v</sup> Australian HR Institute (2021) *Employing and retaining older workers*. Australian HR Institute and Australian Human Rights Commission
- <sup>vi</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2015) *National Prevalence Survey of Age Discrimination in the Workplace – 2015*. Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney
- <sup>vii</sup> Kulik, C., Perera, S., Cregan, C. (2016) Engage Me: The Mature-Age Worker and Stereotype Threat. *Academy of Management Journal*. 2016; 59 (6):2132-2156
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- <sup>ix</sup> Patrickson, M., & Ranzijn, R. (2004). Bounded choices in work and retirement in Australia. *Employee Relations*, 26(4), 422–432
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- <sup>xi</sup> Department of Employment, Skills and Family Business (2020) *Employers' experiences and attitudes to hiring mature age workers*
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- <sup>xiii</sup> Australian HR Institute (2021) *Employing and retaining older workers*. Australian HR Institute and Australian Human Rights Commission
- <sup>xiv</sup> Cedefop (2015) *Increasing the value of age: guidance in employers' age management strategies*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop research paper; No 44
- <sup>xv</sup> EU-OSHA, Cedefop, Eurofound and EIGE (2017) *Joint report on Towards age-friendly work in Europe: a life-course perspective on work and ageing from EU Agencies*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg
- <sup>xvi</sup> Australian HR Institute (2021) *Employing and retaining older workers*. Australian HR Institute and Australian Human Rights Commission
- <sup>xvii</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xviii</sup> OECD (2019) *Working Better with Age, Ageing and Employment Policies*, OECD Publishing, Paris
- <sup>xix</sup> OECD (2020) *Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce: Living, Learning and Earning Longer*. OECD Publishing, Paris
- <sup>xx</sup> Australian HR Institute (2021) *Employing and retaining older workers*. Australian HR Institute and Australian Human Rights Commission
- <sup>xxi</sup> Kapetaniou, C. (2019) *Becoming Future Fit: What we know about adult learning across Europe*. Nesta, London
- <sup>xxii</sup> EU-OSHA, Cedefop, Eurofound and EIGE (2017) *Joint report on Towards age-friendly work in Europe: a life-course perspective on work and ageing from EU Agencies*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Cedefop (2015) *Increasing the value of age: guidance in employers' age management strategies*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop research paper; No 44
- <sup>xxv</sup> Bowman, D & Randrianarisoa, A (2018) *Missing the mark: employer perspectives on employment services and mature age jobseekers in Australia*. Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Victoria
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<sup>xxviii</sup> Cedefop (2015) *Increasing the value of age: guidance in employers' age management strategies*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop research paper; No 44

<sup>xxix</sup> KPMG (2020) *Mature Age Employment: Issues and Barriers*. KPMG, Canberra

<sup>xxx</sup> Australian Law Reform Commission (2013) *Access All Ages—Older Workers and Commonwealth Laws (Final Report)*

<sup>xxxi</sup> Cedefop (2015) *Increasing the value of age: guidance in employers' age management strategies*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Cedefop research paper; No 44

<sup>xxxii</sup> Bowman, D & Randrianarisoa, A (2018) *Missing the mark: employer perspectives on employment services and mature age jobseekers in Australia*. Brotherhood of St Laurence, Fitzroy, Victoria

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> Australian Law Reform Commission (2013) *Access All Ages—Older Workers and Commonwealth Laws (Final Report)*

<sup>xxxv</sup> KPMG (2020) *Mature Age Employment: Issues and Barriers*. KPMG, Canberra

<sup>xxxvi</sup> *Ibid*