



Improving the employment prospects of mature age job seekers

There are 80,000 unemployed mature age people aged 55 years and over across the country, an increase of 12 per cent over the year to January 2015.¹ Once unemployed, mature age people face challenges re-entering the workforce as their average duration of unemployment is 69 weeks, compared with 42 weeks across all age groups. Further, around one third of unemployed mature age people are long-term unemployed (52 weeks or more) compared with 22 per cent across all age groups. At the same time, the labour market is subdued and competition for vacancies is high, with an average of 17 applicants per vacancy advertised on the internet and/or in newspapers.²

In view of the challenges faced by mature age people in gaining employment, the Department of Employment, as part of its *Surveys of Employers' Recruitment Experiences*, asked employers what could be done to improve the employment prospects of mature age people.³ This paper provides an overview of employers' suggestions as well as information on selected Australian Government initiatives that encourage the employment of mature age job seekers.

Employer responses

Many employers highlighted the skills, experience, reliability, strong work ethic and communication skills that mature age people bring to the workplace. However, other employers said that regardless of age, mature age people need to have the relevant skills, experience and the physical fitness (where necessary) required of any prospective employee.

The suggestions provided by employers relating to training, job search and improvements to employer attitudes are summarised below.

Up-skilling/Training

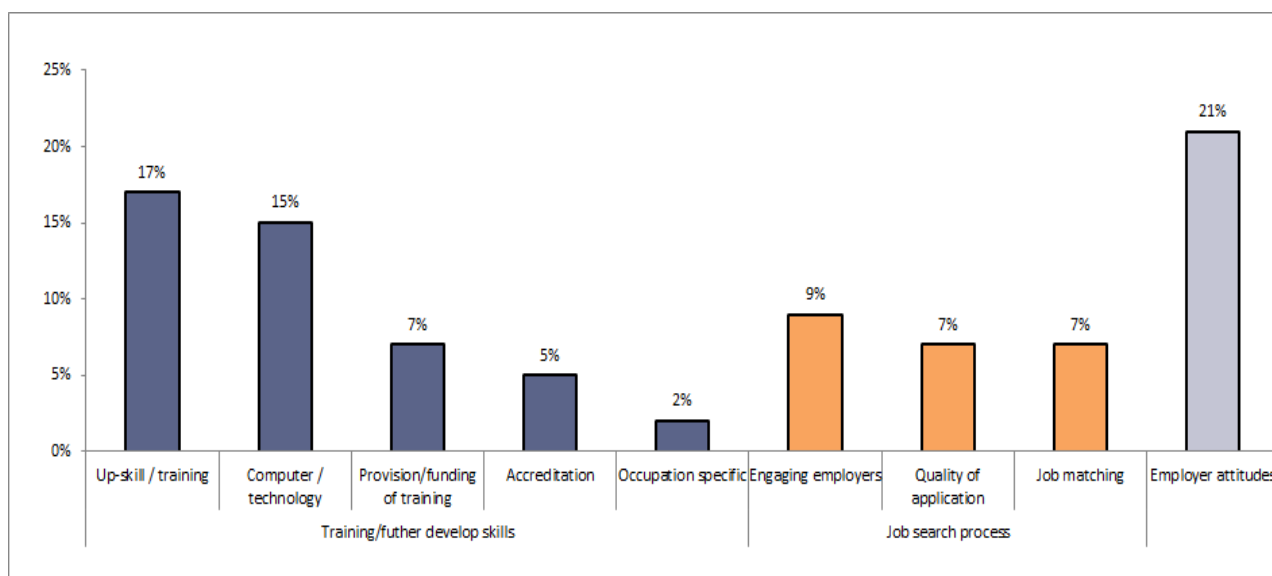
The importance of mature age people ensuring that their skills are up-to-date was raised by almost 17 per cent of employers, with many suggesting that additional training may be required. The need to improve computer and technology skills was raised by 15 per cent of employers. Around 5 per cent of employers recommended that mature age people should consider gaining accreditation for their existing skills, while a small proportion suggested that occupational specific training, such as a certificate course, would assist.

¹ ABS, *Labour Force, Australia*, January 2015, 12 month averages.

² Department of Employment, *Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences* – combined data all regions surveyed in the 12 months to December 2014.

³ The survey collected responses from 924 employers across five regions from June to September 2014.

Chart 1: Employer suggestions to improve the employment prospects of mature age people⁴



Job search

Many employers commented on the importance of the job search process and suggested a range of strategies that mature age people should adopt. Some 9 per cent of employers suggested that mature age job seekers should actively engage with employers by approaching them in person for job opportunities. Others (7 per cent of employers) said that mature age job seekers need to focus on the quality and relevancy of their job applications. A further 7 per cent suggested that mature age job seekers need to identify their skills and experience and match them to the job for which they are applying. Some employers commented that mature age people have many transferable skills, such as interpersonal and customer service skills, and they need to emphasise them in their job search.

Improving employer attitudes and practical assistance

A significant proportion of employers (21 per cent) suggested that greater effort is required on the part of employers themselves to consider the benefits of mature age workers and to be more flexible in their workplace arrangements, such as the hours of work they offer mature age people. The importance of employers changing their own attitudes towards mature age people was raised as was the role of awareness campaigns that promote the strengths and positive attributes of mature age workers.

Many employers also talked about the importance of government financial assistance, through wage subsidies for example, to assist them with employing mature age people.

⁴ Not all employers surveyed provided suggestions. Responses may be coded into more than one category.



Australian Government Initiatives Relevant to Employer Responses

The Australian Government continues to encourage all employers to engage in a national conversation about the benefits of mature age workers. Some of the current initiatives, relevant to employer responses in the survey, are below.

The Australian Government introduced the Restart Wage Subsidy on 1 July 2014, to provide support to employers who employ and retain eligible job seekers who are 50 years of age or older, unemployed and on income support for six months or more. An employer will receive up to \$10 000 (GST inclusive) in assistance over two years. National advertising began in February 2015 to promote Restart and highlight the experience that mature age workers bring to a role. This is the second phase of an advertising campaign that was originally launched by the Australian Government in July 2014. Further information is available on the [Experience Pays](#) website, employment.gov.au/restart-wage-subsidy or email Restart@employment.gov.au.

The 'Power of Oldness' campaign was launched by the Age and Disability Discrimination Commissioner and the Minister for Employment in August 2014, to promote the benefits of mature age workers. Highlighted benefits in the campaign include reliability, experience, work ethic and leadership. The campaign video is available at www.powerofoldness.com

The Australian Government has currently endorsed 479 best practice employers in the recruitment and retention of mature age staff (aged 45 years and over) through the Australian Governments Corporate Champions programme. More information on the endorsed employers is available at: employment.gov.au/corporatechampions

