



## Employers' experiences and attitudes to hiring mature age workers

A number of factors have contributed to the increase in mature age employment (those aged 55 years and over), including the ageing of the population, the rise in the Age Pension eligibility age, and a change in social attitudes towards people working beyond traditional retirement ages. Many mature age Australians are also extending their employment as a result of financial considerations, living longer, being healthier into later life and being willing and able to work for longer than ever before.

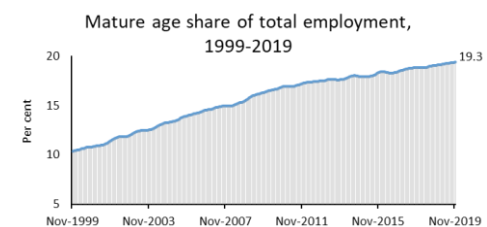
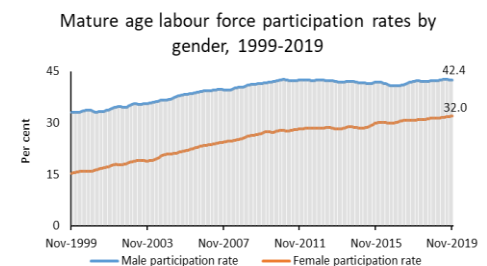
As part of its *Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences*, the Department asked employers in a range of regions for their perspectives and experiences hiring mature age workers.<sup>1</sup> Almost half of the businesses contacted had a mature age job seeker approach them or apply for a position in their business in the last two years. Of these employers, almost two thirds reported hiring a mature age applicant.

### Recent trends

Over the last 20 years, labour force participation for mature age people has increased steadily, with the mature age female participation rate rising strongly, from 15.3 per cent in November 1999 to 32.0 per cent in November 2019. The mature age male participation rate rose from 32.9 per cent to 42.4 per cent over the same period.

Mature age workers now represent nearly one fifth of total employment, with the share almost doubling in the last 20 years. Employment growth has been particularly strong for females and they now account for 45.5 per cent of mature age employment (up from 35.1 per cent in November 1999). While some are returning to the workforce later in life, the strong increase needs to be viewed in the context of the ageing population, with workers 'taking their jobs with them' as they move into the mature age cohort.<sup>2</sup>

The unemployment rate for mature age people is lower than their younger counterparts, but once unemployed, mature age people face challenges re-entering the workforce. Their average duration of unemployment is 77 weeks compared with 48 weeks across all age groups. Furthermore, 35 per cent of unemployed mature age people are long-term unemployed (52 weeks or more) compared with 24 per cent across all age groups.<sup>3</sup>



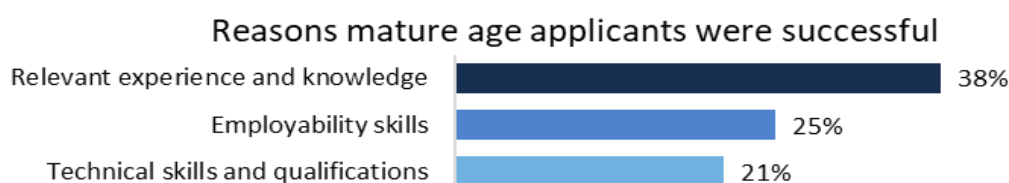
### Tips for mature age job seekers

- ✓ **Do a skills stocktake** – identify what skills you have and whether they are transferable and relevant to the jobs you are applying for.
- ✓ **Sell your experience, knowledge, technical and employability skills** – employers proactively look for and value these highly in potential employees, which will give you a major edge in your job search!
- ✓ **Make sure you widen your job search** – there are many hidden jobs that are not formally advertised. Consider checking social media for job ads and engaging employers directly for work you are interested in.
- ✓ **Apply for jobs that you have the skills and experience for** – stay current and consider taking up relevant training to ensure your skills are up to date.
- ✓ **Create a great résumé** – get help, advice or go online to create a professional, modern and targeted résumé.

## Mature age workers have valuable experience and employability skills

Mature age workers commonly bring extensive life and work experience, knowledge and skills, which are assets to business and can often fill gaps in mentoring or coaching.

More than one third of employers stated that mature age job seekers were successful in securing positions because of their experience and knowledge. A quarter of employers mentioned employability skills as a key reason for selecting a mature age job seeker. Employers cited reliability, levels of maturity, good attitude and work ethic as key attributes that were highly valued and sought after. One in five employers also stated that mature age applicants were successful getting the job because of the technical skills and qualifications they brought to the job.



***“The applicant’s level of skills and experience and passion for the industry – we didn’t actually have a position available, but he was so outstanding we created a position for him.”***

*(Capital Region, Retail, IT Sales and Support)*

## What can mature age job seekers do to improve their job prospects?

When asked how mature age job seekers could improve their job prospects, nearly one third of employers encouraged further training. This ensures skills and qualifications are relevant and meet the needs of prospective employers. A quarter of employers also suggested that to improve their chances, mature age job seekers apply for jobs for which they have relevant experience.

***“When you are looking at someone older, you are not looking at seeing them grow into the position, you are looking at putting them straight in. They really need to be work ready for your particular enterprise. You are looking for a background of exactly that skillset.”***

*(North West Tasmania, Wholesale, Horticultural Products)*

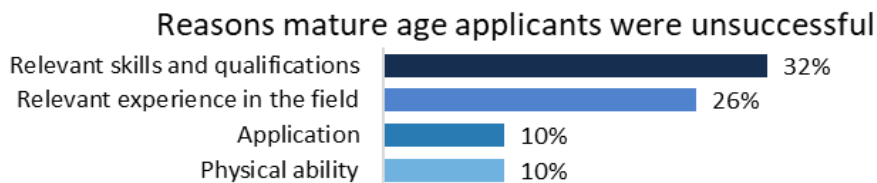
Around one in ten employers stated that applicants were unsuccessful due to a poor job application, interview or initial first impression. At the same time, there is strong competition for vacancies, with an average of 19 applicants per vacancy advertised on the internet and/or in newspapers.<sup>4</sup>

Mature age job seekers need to ensure the content, grammar and presentation of their résumé and job application stand out to employers. It is essential for applicants to consider their skills and strengths and explain how these can directly benefit the business when approaching or interviewing with prospective employers. It is crucial that mature age job seekers highlight their strengths to potential employers especially given the competitive nature of the jobs market.

***“They interviewed well and had the skills and experience that we were looking for.”***

*(Barwon, Health Care and Social Assistance, Crisis Support Telephone Services)*

Despite the perception that some mature age people can't adapt to the use of technology in the workplace, only 3 per cent of employers surveyed reported a lack of IT or computer skills as reasons why mature age job seekers were unsuccessful (while not directly comparable, this was a more common reason given in the Department's 2014 research on employer perspectives on mature age workers). Overall, many employers maintained that age was no barrier to recruitment, unless roles were physically demanding, as was the case for around one in ten employers in this survey.



Employers cited that timing was crucial, as positions were not always available. Applicants should persist with engaging employers and may need to compromise on their expectations. Being flexible about the type of work they are looking for, the hours and remuneration will improve job seekers' chances of securing employment with prospective employers.



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<sup>1</sup> The Department surveyed 2,508 employers in 10 regions: NSW: Murray Riverina, Mid North Coast; ACT: Capital Region; VIC: Barwon; SA: Northern West Country, Mid North SA; WA: Great Southern Wheatbelt. Employers were asked if they had experience hiring mature age workers (aged 55 years and over) and if so, what made mature age job seekers successful or unsuccessful in their job search. This builds on findings from an earlier survey in 2014 which covered other regions, mainly NSW and QLD.

<sup>2</sup> ABS Labour Force Survey, Australia, November 2019, trend data.

<sup>3</sup> ABS Labour Force Survey, Australia, October 2019, 12-month averages of original data.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Survey of Employers' Recruitment Experiences, Australia, 2018-2019.

**Resources:**

Find this report under Employers' Recruitment Insights on the Labour Market Information Portal:

<http://lmip.gov.au/>

Australian Jobs publication: <https://australianjobs.employment.gov.au/>

Guide to Australian careers: <https://joboutlook.gov.au/>