**Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination against Older Australians and Australians with Disability**

# Submission No 186

**Name** Joanna Maxwell

**Submission made by**

☒ Older Australian in work

☒ Business/employer

☒ Academic/social policy practitioner

# Submission regarding Older Australians / Australians with Disability / Both

### **Your experience**

**Have you (or the person you are submitting on behalf of) experienced employment discrimination?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Did you take any action in relation to the employment discrimination you experienced?**

Yes

No

**Please tell us more, for example, what action you took and how effective you felt it was; or why you chose not to take any action.**

**Did your experience of employment discrimination impact on your participation in the workforce? (For example, did you have to stop work, change jobs or take sick leave?)**

Yes

No

**Please tell us more**

### **Barriers**

**Do you think older Australians/Australians with disability face barriers when they look for work or are in a job?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**If yes, or not sure, what do you think these barriers might be?**

refusal to interview, refusal to hire, and denial of promotion and other things like training while they are employed.

**Does employment discrimination have an impact on gaining and keeping employment for older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Are there any practices, attitudes or laws which discourage or prevent equal participation in employment of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Please tell us more**

Our pervasive youth culture, lack of awareness about what the experienced economy can bring to the workforce,

**What are the incentives and disincentives for older Australians/Australians with disability to work?**

**Incentives:**

**Disincentives:**

### **Good practice**

**Are there examples of good practice and workplace policies in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability?**

Yes

No

Not sure

**Please tell us of examples of good practice in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work that you are aware of.**

See submission

### **Solutions**

**What action should be taken to address employment discrimination against older Australians/Australians with disability?**

**What should be done to enhance workforce participation of older Australians/Australians with disability?**

**What outcomes or recommendations would you like to see from this National Inquiry?**

# FORM 2: Business or Employer Submission

### **About you**

**What is your role within your organisation?**

☒ Owner

☐ Manager

☐ Human Resources Manager

☐ Other

**If other, please tell us your role within your organisation**

**Is employment discrimination a barrier for older Australians/Australians with disability who are willing to work?**

☒Yes

☐No

☐Not sure

**If yes, is employment discrimination a barrier (please tick all that are relevant):**

☒ While working in a job

☒ While looking for work

☒ While dealing with recruitment companies

**Please tell us more**

**What is your experience of recruiting and/or employing older Australians/Australians with disability?**

### **Barriers**

**Do you think older Australians/Australians with disability face barriers when they look for work or are in a job in your business/industry?**

☐Yes

☐No

☐Not sure

**Please tell us more**

**Does employment discrimination have an impact on older Australians/Australians with disability gaining and keeping employment in your business/industry?**

☐Yes

☐No

☐Not sure

**Please tell us more**

**Are there any practices, attitudes or laws which discourage or prevent equal participation in employment of older Australians/Australians with disability in your business/industry?**

☐Yes

☐No

☐Not sure

**Please tell us more**

**What are the incentives and disincentives for your business/industry to employ and retain older Australians/Australians with disability?**

**Incentives**

**Disincentives**

### **Good practice**

**Are there examples of good practice and/or workplace policies for employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work in your business/industry?**

☐Yes

☐No

☐Not sure

**Please tell us examples of good practice in employing and retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in work in your business/industry that you are aware of.**

**What works well in recruiting and/or retaining older Australians/ Australians with disability in your business/industry?**

### **Solutions**

**What would help your business/industry employ and retain older Australians/Australians with disability?**

**What action should be taken to address employment discrimination against older Australians/Australians with disability?**

**What outcomes or recommendations would you like to see from this National Inquiry?**

**WILLING TO WORK ENQUIRY SUBMISSION**

Joanna Maxwell

25November 2015

It seems to me that there is plenty of well-publicised research about the problems in this area, certainly in my field of the experienced economy (less attractively termed ‘ageing workforce’ or ‘older workers’).

I have chosen to offer the enquiry some examples of good practice in the experienced economy area – innovative or just sensible – that may assist when you turn the discussion towards ‘what can we do?’. I have included footnotes where possible, and would be happy to expand on my comments if that is useful.

**1. SENIORPRENEURSHIP**

This is increasingly being seen as an avenue for improving paid work opportunities for this cohort. A recent Australian report had these key findings[[1]](#endnote-1):

**1.2 KEY FINDINGS**

**WHAT IS THE SCOPE OF SENIOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN AUSTRALIA?**

1. Outstanding senior entrepreneur activity in Australia — \_the entrepreneurship activity rate of 8% for the age group 55–64 in Australia is approximately 3% above the average of innovation-driven economies, and represents the fastest growing segment of entrepreneurship. Thirty-four per cent of young firms in Australia are led by senior entrepreneurs. The average age of owners of young firms in Australia is 45, while the average age of senior entrepreneurs is 57. Senior entrepreneurs work fewer hours per week compared to younger entrepreneurs (18.5 to 23 hours), have more industry experience (13.25 to 7.5 years), invest more in their business ($1,487,000 to $272,000) and earn greater profits ($264,000 to $115,000).

**WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF SENIOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN AUSTRALIA?**

2. Positive economic and social benefits — \_these include: participation in the workforce and economy; maintaining an active lifestyle, achieving personal and family goals and work–life balance; providing satisfaction through networks, start-up activities, growing the business and financial rewards; providing an alternative to employment and unemployment; and overcoming discrimination in the workforce.

3. Motivations of senior entrepreneurs — \_an active lifestyle, achieving personal or family goals, and work–life balance motivate seniors in their entrepreneurial intentions and endeavours.

4. Seniors’ attitudes towards entrepreneurship — attitudes include payment for achievements, use of personal creativity, and wishing to be one’s own boss.

5. Skills needs of senior entrepreneurs — senior entrepreneurs are confident that they have the business and technical skills necessary to engage in start-up activities.

6. Opportunities — Australian seniors view entrepreneurship as an opportunity in different ways, such as a late-career alternative, an attractive work–life balance option, in light of the lack of other employment options, or due to the necessity to supplement income.

7. Success and satisfaction with entrepreneurship — this can be measured by seniors’ involvement in start-up activities, growth of their business, their financial rewards, and desired lifestyle.

8. Engagement — Senior entrepreneurs’ participation and networking is achieved through mentorship and role models, at dedicated events and networks, and through contact with other start-ups.

9. Barriers — a ‘comfortable’ job is a barrier to start-up. The complexity of administrative procedures also deters start-up activity amongst seniors.

10. Benefits experienced by senior entrepreneurs — these include: social capital and experience; advantages of later life; and higher levels of human, social and financial capital. Entrepreneurship also facilitates seniors’ life adaptations through goal achievement, building resilience and helping to adapt to changes.

11. Education and training — despite their confidence in their own skills and abilities education and training may give seniors the skills to start and remain self-employed, and can become enablers to successful start-up activities and connect them with like-minded individuals.

12. Government support — this can aid senior entrepreneurs by providing awareness programs, promoting benefits of senior self-employment, giving tax concessions for seniors, and facilitating free or subsidised start-up training.

13. Self-reflections of senior entrepreneurs — not everyone is an entrepreneur; society’s perception of seniors can affect stereotype behaviour.

**2. SUCCESS STORIES**

**Vita Needle, USA:**

Located in Massachusetts, Vita Needle employs about 35 production workers. Of these, 95% are part-time senior citizens. The oldest employee is 100 and the average age of their workforce is 74. The company has been the subject of documentaries and research studies in several countries – all indicating the employees are happy, paid and productive. Moreover, the company has turned around its profitability.[[2]](#endnote-2)

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**Taylors Wines, SA**

Taylors Wines has not actively sought to recruit mature age workers. Even so, half of the workers at the winery are aged 55 or more, and 70% are 45 years old or more. The average length of tenure for all workers is 9.8 years. ‘We have done our best to balance operational needs with the needs of our workforce and this means that many stay on. Our goal is to attract, retain and develop quality people. By no means are the mature age workers in Taylors a "last resort" option'.[[3]](#endnote-3)

**Marks & Spencer, UK**

Marks & Spencer has:

• 33% employees over 50;

• over 4000 employees with more than 25 years service;

• 1 employee who has completed over 50 years service; and

• an employee who was recruited at age 80.

Marks & Spencer's approach has numerous business benefits, including retaining highly effective staff, increased loyalty of employees who value choice to work longer, use of performance management in an identical way for workers of all ages - and one of the lowest employee turnover rates in UK retail.[[4]](#endnote-4)

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**Case Study: BMW, Germany**

Five years ago, managers at Bayerische Motoren Werke AG realised that with Germany's greying population the average age of their workers would jump from 41 to 46 by 2017. So they decided to make it happen sooner. In 2007, the luxury automaker set up an experimental assembly line with older employees to see whether they could keep pace. The production line in Dingolfing, 50 miles northeast of BMW's Munich base, features hoists to spare ageing backs, adjustable-height work benches, and wooden floors instead of rubber to help hips swivel during repetitive tasks.

The verdict: Not only could they keep up, the older workers did a better job than younger staffers on another line at the same factory. Today, many of the changes are being implemented at plants across the company. [[5]](#endnote-5)

**3. TRAINING**

**Positive Signs** (extract from research into training needs for older workers, conducted in 2015 as part of a Masters of Education)

There are some signs that the level of discrimination against older workers is levelling off or even dropping, with one recent Australian study finding 13% of workers reporting workplace age discrimination in 2015, down from 28% in 2012 (FSC – CBA Older Workers Report 2015, p. 8). There is no ‘silver bullet’ here, but promoting success stories and case studies is helpful both as a counter to negative attitudes and a guide to strategies that have proved successful.

While acknowledging that management attitudes play a part, Liu, Courtenay & Valentine (2011 passim.)[[6]](#endnote-6) focus on participants. Their model gives trainers ’a guideline as to what to reinforce and what to eliminate in their programs’ by managing ‘motivators’ (such as self-efficacy or a belief in oneself, social support understanding the benefits, and career goals) and ‘deterrents’ (workload and program barriers). This focus by an employer on what older workers want from training, and what gets in their way, is promising.

A number of case studies show specific projects that have promoted older worker training and job satisfaction and retention. Frerichs et al. (2012)[[7]](#endnote-7) describe a German technology manufacturer who uses a competence matrix to record older workers’ knowledge and skills (including technical, general, leadership and social skills), for use in training and transfer of knowledge. All workers have access to training, and it forms part of job reviews (p. 671). And leveraging the preference for informal, tailored training solutions, they use on-the-job skills or literacy training for blue-collar workers, driver training, mentoring relationships, upscaling to fill an identified new position, often combined with flexible work practices (Frerichs et al. 2012, pp.671-3).

Intergenerational learning and skill transfers (young and old working together) allow all workers to benefit. Successful strategies include two-person teams with one older and one younger worker, placing desks opposite each other, sending an older and younger worker out together on all calls to clients, arranging for older workers to pass on skills formally and informally, reverse mentoring where younger workers teach older ones, especially in technological areas (Frerichs et al. 2012, p.671; Findsen and Formosa 2011, pp. 173-5)[[8]](#endnote-8).

There are a number of fields where it is difficult for older workers to continue with their original career, for health or other reasons. Ballet dancers are an obvious example, and Frerichs et al. (2012) report a practice in the UK where professional dancers are offered in-house retraining and upskilling during their dance career, so they can move into allied arts fields, obtain a Master’s degree and access other opportunities. It is funded by public grants and a level from dance employers (pp.672-3). This model could easily be extended to other occupations with a natural use-by date, such as manual trades, professional sportsmen and women and others.

Findsen and Formosa (2011) describe programs in Finland, Japan, France and Sweden that support workers towards learning, assessing competencies, providing tutors and matching workers to suitable jobs among other initiatives (p.134-6).

The United States has numerous programs to help older adults retrain for a new career, whether because of unemployment, physical limitations or a desire to do something different. There are private colleges, community colleges, charities, universities and others with government funding, helping older workers retrain either so they can find a job after a period of unemployment or segue into a ‘giving back’ job, such as EncoreU (2015)[[9]](#endnote-9). Several programs fast-track people into careers that in-demand, such as teaching or aged care workers, and many successful US programs link the training to internships with local employers, such as The WorkPlace in Connecticut’s Platform to Employment program (2015)[[10]](#endnote-10) or otherwise assist trainees to find employment.

These empirical studies show that it is possible to break barriers, meet the needs of older workers and create a win-win for employers and employees of all ages.

**4. OTHER DATA**

A 2014 Merrill Lynch survey in the US found that ‘nearly three out of five retirees launch into a new line of work’.[[11]](#endnote-11) In Australia, a 2011 government report agreed that many older people seek to start new careers, as ‘they want to add variety to their current work by engaging their untapped talent.’[[12]](#endnote-12)

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There is clear evidence that support and trained guidance makes a measurable difference to success. An MIT Sloan School of Management 2014 study on older long-term unemployed workers found that those who had support from a career coach or a group were significantly more likely to have found work during the study period, and also found the unemployment experience less damaging to their sense of self.[[13]](#endnote-13)

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As Jane Figgis points out in 2012 research for NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research), ‘One of the most effective ways to support encore career learners is to ensure that their trainers and lecturers understand how to work effectively with a multi-generational group of students and that the trainers appreciate older learners’ dislike of being ‘taught’ or patronised.’[[14]](#endnote-14)

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‘With multiple generations you get the benefits of an older, more experienced generation as well as the youth's knowledge of the current technology and trends. In a way they complement each other.' [[15]](#endnote-15)

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‘Older workers are the key people in ensuring the knowledge transfer to organisations and younger people is achieved effectively. Over the last decade, there have been many examples of knowledge, wisdom, and [even] the history of an organisation being let go in the flight to youth by many workers.' [[16]](#endnote-16)

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‘Increasing the workforce participation of older workers has been identified as one of the top two

reforms that will enhance productivity and boost the supply of workers…the Australian Institute of Management believes that it is time for employers to take advantage of the contribution that older workers can make.' [[17]](#endnote-17)

1. Maritz, P.A., Zolin, R., de Waal, G.A., Fisher, R. (2015). Senior Entrepreneurship in Australia: Active Ageing and Extending Working Lives. *National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre,* Melbourne, Australia. (29 May 2015) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. PBS NewsHour, ‘Manufacturer Vita Needle finds investment in older workers turns a big profit', PBS NewsHour, 2 January 2013,

   http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/business-jan-june13-makingsense\_01-02/ [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Nick Mellow, Human Resource Manager, Taylors Wines. Age Friendly Workplaces: Case Studies - the benefits of employing older workers, SafeWork SA, 2014 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Employer case studies: Employing older workers for an effective multi-generational workforce, UK Department of Work and Pensions, 2013 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-09-06/bmw-never-too-old-assembly-insures-against-lost-engineers [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Liu, S., Courtenay, B.C. & Valentine, T. 2011, Managing older worker training: a literature review and conceptual framework, *Educational Gerontology*, 37:12, pp. 1040-1062. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Frerichs, F., Lindley, R., Aleksandrowicz, P., Baldauf, R. & Galloway, S. 201), Active ageing in organisations: a case study approach, *International Journal of Manpower*, Vol. 33 Iss. 6, pp. 666 -684. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Findsen, B. & Formosa, B. 2011, *Lifelong learning in later life*, Sense Publishers, The Netherlands. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. EncoreU 2015, viewed 2 October 2015, <https://encore.org/encoreu/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. The WorkPlace in Connecticut, Platform to Employment program 2105, viewed 22 October 2015, <http://www.workplace.org/training-and-education>. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Merrill Lynch and Age Wave, Work in Retirement, Myths and Motivations: Career reinventions and the new retirement workscape, 2014, p. 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. *Realising the Economic Potential of Senior Australians, Part 2: Enabling opportunity*, Advisory Panel on the Economic Potential of Senior Australians, 2 November 2011, p. 42. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. K. Harrington Hayes, ‘Facing down long-term unemployment’.*Quarterly Journal of the Life Planning Network*, summer 2014, p. 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Figgis, op. cit, p. 32. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Gensler Report - Strategies For The Intergenerational Workplace By Kate Kirkpatrick, Steve Martin,

    Sandi Warneke [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Robert Critchley in his Australian paper, The Ageing Workforce - To Rewire Or Rust, 2006 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Australian Institute Of Management, Engaging And Retaining Older Workers, 2013 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)