

Older workers' perspectives on training and retention of older workers: Support document – South Australian construction industry study

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SA construction industry study

Construction industry and the CFMEU

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) is Australia's main trade union in construction, forestry and forest products, mining and energy production. Its members are those working on all major building, and most civil construction projects across the country, as well as members working off-site in brick, tile and pottery manufacturing and in the furnishing trades. The construction industry is a predominantly male-based industry with over 86 percent of men, mainly in the trades and labour occupations of the industry, and over 13 percent of women, the majority of whom are in the clerical and related occupations of the industry. Over 29 percent of the employed persons in 2003 are in the age group 45 and above (ABS 2003).

SA construction industry study

The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Engineering Union (CFMEU) was the industry partner of the researchers and NCVET in this SA construction industry study project.

This study is an effort to discover and analyse workers' viewpoints to inform public and policy debates about that important aspect of the "ageing" workforce issues. While many commentators have argued that older workers will need to be persuaded to continue working longer, the views of older workers have been missing from the public discussion of these issues. Many of Australia's policy analysts in government, industry associations and 'think tanks', politicians and media commentators have argued that since older people make up an increasing share of Australia's population, older workers will need to continue working longer. The views of older workers have been missing from the public discussion of these issues.

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyse older worker's perspectives on training and retention of older workers (aged 45 and above), to determine what training and other complementary policy measures are likely to work best to foster retention of older workers as efficient and effective workforce participants.

This research into the perspectives of older workers (aged 45 and above) on training and retention of older workers encompasses survey-based studies of older workers in three industry categories represented by four union organizations. The research included:

- a national survey of older workers in the finance sector who are members of the Finance Sector Union;
- a Victorian state survey of aged care workers who are members of the Health Services Union of Australia;
- a South Australian survey-based case study of aged care workers who are members of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union in South Australia;

- a South Australian survey-based case study of construction industry workers who are members of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union.

Respondents from these three industry categories consist of older workers in economically and socially important occupations with a VET-sector training base, a balanced gender mix and varied skill profiles, all substantially affected by technological change. The Health Services Union of Australia covers aged care workers in the Eastern states of Australia, and the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union, which covers aged care workers in the South Australia and Western Australia. Aged care workers are a skilled and predominantly middle-aged female health services occupation that will encounter increasing demand as the aged proportion of the Australian population increases. The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union covers a cluster of construction industry occupations with a predominantly male workforce that has a varied skill profile. The occupations are of significant and growing importance as productive contributors to the Australian economy. The Finance Sector Union covers an economically strategic service sector with a more balanced gender mix and a diverse skill profile that is subject to particularly rapid technological change.

Given the impracticality of establishing names and addresses of the total population of older workers in the finance, aged care and construction industries, the target populations for this study were older workers in these industries who are members of four unions. The study is based on a national survey of older workers in the finance sector, a state survey of older workers in the Victorian aged care industry, and survey-based case studies of older workers in the South Australian aged care and construction industries.

The authors greatly appreciated the cooperation of the four unions. The formulation of the survey questionnaire and validation of the interpretation of survey findings was guided by qualitative focus group research. The project team considered the project to be one in which NCVER and participating union organisations had mutually complementary interests. For the union organisations, research that reports older worker's perspectives on training and retention of older workers will inform public policy on a dimension that is frequently over-looked, and NCVER had a report done that is probably otherwise neither affordable nor feasible. A national household survey seeking responses from older workers could avoid this bias, but it would be absurdly inefficient and expensive. The project team regarded union membership lists as the best available base for cost-effective survey research on older worker's perspectives on training and retention of older workers. The project team knew of no practicable alternative source of a population frame with occupation, age and contact details. Without such a means of access, survey research on older worker's perspectives could not be cost-effective and is probably not even practically feasible. Furthermore, the project team did not know of any reason why union membership lists should be systematically biased on any matter of relevance to the subject-matter this research, unlike some other issues (for example) workplace relations policies or political issues, in which such a bias would be a substantial consideration. The overall report's specific findings include particular training needs, and that most workers expect to continue working beyond retirement age, so that increasing retention requires removal of discriminatory policy disincentives, stronger measures against age discrimination, and attitudinal changes in age-related stereotypes. These are matters on which it is likely that most older workers would agree, whether or not they are union members, but some younger people may differ from older people.

Taken together, these three industry categories provided an excellent basis for identifying and analysing older worker's perspectives on training and retention of older workers, in economically and socially important occupations with a VET-sector training base, a balanced gender mix and varied skill profiles that are all being substantially affected by technological change. This research can inform national policy debates by providing older worker's perspectives on what training and other complementary policy measures are likely to work best to foster retention of older workers as efficient and effective workforce participants.

This project methodology involved an inherently ethical approach to the participant older workers. The creative interaction between qualitative and quantitative research in the research design secured the benefits and minimised the effects of the limitations of each type of research. The initial round of focus groups shaped the specific issues addressed in the survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire tested the generalisability of the first round focus group findings. Union membership lists for older workers provided a means of accessing samples of older workers in the three industry categories. The bias involved in surveying union members is unlikely to have had significant effects on issues of the type that this survey addressed. A second round of focus groups validated the interpretations of the survey data by the principal researchers and informed the overall findings of the research project.

The first stage, preparation and qualitative focus group research, consisted of liaison to finalise arrangements for participation by the four industry partners, a literature review of trends in employment and training of older workers, Australian labour market statistics on growing and declining industries, and worker profiles affecting the skill requirements and employment prospects of older workers and preparation of a draft questionnaire instrument. The issues addressed in the project were discussed with three focus groups, each consisting of a small selective sample of older workers from the participating industry partners. This tested the questionnaire for use in Stage 2, particularly the relevance of issues that we proposed to incorporate into the survey questionnaire, and provided input from older workers in the relevant occupation group to go beyond issues suggested by our literature review.

It was generally understood that while it might be precise, it would be entirely misplaced and false precision to purport to impose an arbitrary “one size fits all” definition of “retirement age” on respondents in contexts as diverse as those studied. The respondents could be expected to know the retirement age for people of their gender in their industry and they would respond in terms of what “retirement age” means for them

The second stage, quantitative data collection, consisted of administration of the questionnaire instrument (see Appendix A) to four substantial samples of workers over 45 who are members of one of the four participating unions. In the other three samples, the procedure used for drawing the four survey samples was “systematic sample with a random start” (Babbie, 1990, 83-85). A number was selected by chance from a small set (a number from a small set was drawn from a bowl by an uninvolved person) and that number chosen by chance was used to determine the random start of a sample chosen systematically. The South Australian construction case study was all-inclusive. The samples drawn and the response rates in each of the four surveys or case studies are provided in the following survey samples and response rates table.

Survey samples and response rates

Participating unions	Finance Sector (FSU)	Aged Care (HSU)	Aged Care (LHMU)	Construction (CFMEU)
Scope:	National	Victoria	South Australia	South Australia
% sample size of membership over 45	17%	80%	65%	100%
Sample drawn (letters posted):	2,456	1,500	850	1,800
Returns to sender:	31	11	6	20
Adjusted sample:	2,425	1,489	844	1,780
Valid responses	1070	520	194	242
Response rate:	44.1%	34.9%	23.0%	13.6%

Note: The response rates are calculated as valid responses from the mail-out sample, adjusted for returns to sender.

Nationally, all three industry categories together comprise 21 percent of the total employed persons in the country (ABS 2003). Over 29 percent of employees in the construction industry

sector are aged 45 and over (older workers as defined in this study). With regard to gender, females comprised only slightly more than 13 percent of workers in the construction industry (ABS 2003). The age and gender distribution of the respondents in the South Australian construction sample are comparable with the ABS data.

Post-ready envelopes with the survey questionnaire and reply paid envelopes were prepared by Document Services of the University of South Australia for each of the four samples. “Sticky labels” with the names and addresses of members over 45 years of age were provided by the four unions from which the sample was drawn and labels attached to post-ready envelopes and posted through the University of South Australia mail service. The responses were returned to the School of International Studies at the University of South Australia which did not have a copy of the names and addresses of the people included in the sample. A second mail-out was undertaken in relation to finance sector, the only national sample of union members. This will permit efficient survey administration while safeguarding the confidentiality of individual survey respondents, which is the most important research ethics consideration in surveys.

The third stage, data analysis, consisted of data entry on to Excel spreadsheets of the responses numbered and identified by the union sample in the top left corner of the cover sheet, and subsequent data analysis directed by the researchers of the four union samples, using the SPSS package. Data entry was performed by the Adelaide Business Bureau with full verification of each survey response (two passes and checking of discrepancies).

The fourth stage, preparation of draft reports, consisted of preparation by the researchers of four union draft reports based on the four union survey samples, and focus group reviews, consisting of discussion by the researchers of the survey data and the interpretations placed upon it with three South Australian focus groups, each consisting of a small selective sample of older workers from the participating industry partners, to validate or correct the interpretations placed upon the data by the researchers and to discuss the implications of the survey for the issues addressed in the project.

The fifth stage, completion of final reports, including a comprehensive project report combining four union-specific reports and the overall findings and implications of the research lodged with the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, with the union-specific reports for each of the four participating industry partners becoming supporting documents available separately on the internet.

Quantitative Survey responses

Table 1: Gender of respondents

Gender categories	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Female	5	2.1
Male	234	97.9
Total	239	100.0
Non-response rate	3	1.2

Table 1 indicates the gender mix in the construction sample was a huge majority of males.

Table 2: Age range of respondents

Age ranges	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
45-49	64	26.9
50-54	62	26.1
55-59	56	23.5
60-64	28	11.8
65 and over	28	11.8
Total	238	100.0
Non-response rate	4	1.7

Table 2 indicates the age mix of the respondents in the construction sample

Table 3: Respondent's expectations of dependants beyond respondent's retirement age

Respondent's dependants	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Will have several dependants	8	3.4
Will have one dependant	50	21.0
May have one or more dependants	27	11.3
Will have no dependants	120	50.4
Don't know	33	13.9
Total	238	100.0
Non-response rate	4	1.7

As Table 3 indicates about half of the construction sample did not expect to have dependents beyond retirement age. This low dependency rate might have been expected to lead to a reduced motivation for most respondents to work beyond retirement, but Tables 5 and 13 indicate that this is not the case.

Table 4: Respondent's expectations of retirement accommodation

Respondent's accommodation	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Own home paid off	167	70.2
Own home mortgaged	36	15.1
Renting home	16	6.7
Other	4	1.7
Don't know	15	6.3
Total	238	100.0
Non-response rate	4	1.7

As Table 4 indicates more than two-thirds majorities of the construction sample have or expect to have their home paid off by the time of their retirement, and about an additional fifth will be in mortgaged homes. Like the low dependency rates, high home ownership might have been expected to lead to a reduced motivation for most respondents to work beyond retirement, but Tables 5 and 13 indicate that this is not the case.

Table 5: Respondent's expectations of retirement income

Respondent's income	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Will need a retirement job	41	17.3
May need to work part-time	78	32.9
May work for better lifestyle	52	21.9
Will not need to work	30	12.7
Don't know	36	15.2
Total	237	100.0
Non-response rate	5	2.1

As Table 5 indicates, about one in eight of the construction sample believe or expect that they will not need to work beyond their retirement age. Most of the respondents believe that they will need to work. This suggests that policy does not need to focus on persuading or inducing older workers to continue working.

Table 6: Respondent's awareness of incentives or disincentives to work beyond retirement age

Respondent's awareness	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	30	12.7
No	73	30.8
Don't know	134	56.5
Total	237	100.0
Non-response rate	5	2.1

:

Tables 6 and 7 indicate that for most of the respondents in the construction sample there is a need for much more education of people about the incentives or disincentives to work beyond retirement age.

Table 7: Qualitative response rate on incentives or disincentives to work beyond retirement age

Incentives or disincentives	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Qualitative response given	22	9.1
No qualitative response	220	90.9
Total	242	100.0

Notes: The high non-response rate to this open-ended question was consistent with the low positive response to the previous question.

Qualitative responses by South Australian construction industry respondents to question 7 on incentives to work beyond retirement age included suggestions for tax incentives to reduce debt for a more secure retirement; appreciation of salary sacrificing; and advocacy of reduced tax on withdrawal of superannuation. Responses by South Australian construction industry respondents to question 7 on disincentives to work beyond retirement age included uncertainties about Work Cover beyond 65.

Table 8: Respondent's plans

for activities other than work beyond retirement age

Respondent's plans	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Caring for grandchildren	57	23.6
Home improvements	72	29.8
Travel	150	62.0
Other	60	24.8
No plans	57	23.6
Total	396	NA

Notes: This question permitted respondents to tick more than one option.

Table 8 indicates that for most of the respondents in the construction sample travel is a high priority for retirement activities. This suggests that workers will be seeking flexible working arrangements which will make travel possible, but also provides a motivation for older workers to continue working beyond their retirement age. Family and domestic activities also have substantial support, as literature on retirement indicates. About one in five have no retirement plans, which the literature indicates is usually is a precursor to problems in adaptation.

Table 9: Attitude of colleagues or work-mates towards older workers working beyond retirement age

Perceived attitude	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Very negative	14	5.8
Negative	61	25.4
Don't know	92	38.3
Positive	66	27.5
Strongly positive	7	2.9
Total	240	100.0
Non-response rate	2	0.8

:

Table 9 indicates that for about two in five of the respondents in the construction sample there is ambivalence or uncertainty about the attitude of their colleagues to older workers continuing in work beyond retirement, although only about one in three of the construction sample see their colleagues' attitudes as negative or very negative.

Table 10: Employer's attitude towards older workers working beyond retirement age

Perceived attitude	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Very negative	11	4.7
Negative	31	13.4
Don't know	96	41.4
Positive	85	36.6
Strongly positive	9	3.9
Total	232	100.0
Non-response rate	10	4.1

:

Like Table 9, Table 10 indicates that for more than two in five of the respondents in the construction sample there is ambivalence or uncertainty about the attitude of their employers to older workers continuing in work beyond retirement, although about one in five in the construction sample see their employer's attitude as negative or very negative.

Table 11: Employer attitude to supporting training for older workers beyond retirement age

Perceived attitude	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Very negative	17	7.3
Negative	36	15.5
Don't know	131	56.2
Positive	45	19.3
Strongly positive	4	1.7
Total	233	100.0
Non-response rate	9	3.7

:

Like Table 10, Table 11 indicates that for more than half of the respondents in the construction sample there is ambivalence or uncertainty about the attitude of their employers to older workers continuing in work beyond retirement, although about one in five in the construction sample see their employer's attitude as negative or very negative.

Table 12: Respondent's attitude towards older workers working beyond retirement age

Own attitude	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Very negative	5	2.1
Negative	12	5.0
Don't know	19	7.9
Positive	131	54.8
Strongly positive	72	30.1
Total	239	100.0
Non-response rate	3	1.2

:

Consistent with the post-retirement work expectations reported in Tables 5 and 13, Table 12 indicates that a very large majority of the respondents in the construction sample are personally positive or very positive about older workers continuing in work beyond retirement, with one in fourteen in the construction sample being negative or very negative.

Table 13: Respondent's preferences if working beyond retirement age

Respondent's	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
like different work	54	22.7
like similar work	72	30.3
like to keep my job	67	28.2
will not be working	37	15.5
Don't know	8	3.4
Total	238	100.0
Non-response rate	4	1.7

:

Table 13 indicates that more than half of the respondents in the construction sample would like to continue in their present job or similar work beyond retirement age, and about one in five would prefer different work. About one in seven of the construction sample will not be continuing in work beyond retirement. The construction sample provided slightly different responses when compared with Table 5, but in both a low expectation of ceasing to work entirely.

Table 13A: Q12 Own Attitude & Q13 Work Type Cross-tabulation

			Q13 Work Type					Total
			different work	similar work	keep present job	will not work	don't know	
Q12 Own Attitude	strongly disagree	<i>Count</i>	0	0	0	5	0	5
		<i>% of Total</i>	.0%	.0%	.0%	2.1%	.0%	2.1%
	disagree	<i>Count</i>	3	3	3	3	0	12
		<i>% of Total</i>	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	.0%	5.0%
	neutral	<i>Count</i>	5	5	4	3	2	19
		<i>% of Total</i>	2.1%	2.1%	1.7%	1.3%	.8%	8.0%
	agree	<i>Count</i>	30	37	35	24	4	130
		<i>% of Total</i>	12.6%	15.5%	14.7%	10.1%	1.7%	54.6%
	strongly agree	<i>Count</i>	16	27	25	2	2	72
		<i>% of Total</i>	6.7%	11.3%	10.5%	.8%	.8%	30.3%
Total	<i>Count</i>	54	72	67	37	8	238	
	<i>% of Total</i>	22.7%	30.3%	28.2%	15.5%	3.4%	100.0%	

Notes: There were 4 non-responses, a rate of 1.7%. The Pearson Chi-Square has a value of 42.829, and is significant at 0.000. In the cross-tabulation, 15 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.17.

Table 13A reports a significant cross-tabulation that indicates that in the SA construction industry sample the proportion of respondents who are personally positive or very positive about older workers continuing in work beyond retirement was associated with the respondents' preferences about the type of work they would like to do if they will themselves work beyond the "normal" retirement age.

Table 14 A: Qualitative response rate on respondent's current work

Current work	responses	%
Qualitative response given	82	33.9
No qualitative response	160	66.1
Total	242	100.0

Notes: The high non-response rate to this open-ended question was consistent with the question being conditional upon responses to question 13.

Tables 14A and 14B provide rates of open-ended qualitative response to questions asking respondents who replied in question 13 that they would like different work after they retire to indicate what their present job is and what kind of post-retirement work they would prefer.

Table 14 B: Qualitative response rate on respondent's preferred work beyond retirement

Preferred work	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Qualitative response given	76	31.4
No qualitative response	166	68.6
Total	242	100.0

Notes: The high non-response rate to this open-ended question was consistent with the question being conditional upon responses to question 13.

Qualitative responses by South Australian construction industry respondents to question 14 on each respondent's current work and preferred work beyond retirement included a wide variety of generally practical ideas. There were common references to physical demands of construction industry work; a need to adapt to different roles that used experience with less physical work, including "anything easier". Possibilities included supervision or mentoring, or work as an occupational health and safety officer or building surveyor or a salesman or driver or mechanic or vehicle restoration or process worker or site-cleaner or cleaner or office worker (including bookkeeper) or 'with computers' or as a gardener or landscaper or groundsman or building maintenance or renovation or home handyman or lawn-mowing contractor work. One aspired to become a guidance counsellor. Others mentioned horticulture or aquaculture or beekeeping or nursing or social work or simply 'helping people'. Some respondents wanted to establish their own small business, one proposing a 'home handyman' service. One wanted to become a share trader. Several mentioned becoming a union official or local government councillor. Several referred to sport promotion or coaching, with youth soccer and Australian Rules football being specifically mentioned. A few responses were (rather laboured) attempts at humour.

Table 15: Respondent need training to work beyond retirement age

Respondent's	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	49	24.0
No	139	68.1
Don't know	16	7.8
Total	204	100.0
Non-response rate	38	15.7

In Table 15 more than half of the respondents in the construction sample indicate that they do not, and less than one in three do, require training to continue working beyond retirement age.

Table 16: Qualitative response rate on training needs (of those who answered yes to question 15).

Effective training	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Qualitative response given	49	20.2
No qualitative response	193	79.8
Total	242	100.0

Notes: The high non-response rate to this open-ended question was consistent with the question being conditional upon responses to question 15.

Table 16 provide rates of open-ended qualitative response to questions asking respondents who replied 'yes' in question 15 that they would need training to obtain different work after they retire to indicate what kind of training they would require. Qualitative responses by this sub-group of South Australian construction industry respondents to question 16 included 'train the trainer' training; updates on changing technologies (computers being a particular instance); updates on building codes and regulations; and training in different fields such as aquaculture; occupational health and safety; sports coaching; bookkeeping; and guidance counselling.

Table 17: Availability to the respondent of the types of training required to work beyond retirement

Respondent's	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	29	50.0
No	10	17.2
Don't know	19	32.8
Total	58	100.0
Non-response rate	184	76.0

Notes: The high non-response rate to this question was consistent with the question being conditional upon responses to question 15.

Conditional upon responses to questions 15 and 16, Table 17 indicates that more than half of respondents who indicated that they would need training to obtain different work after they retire reported that the kind of training they would require was available to them, and less than one in five reported that the training they would need was not available to them.

Table 18: Training to increase respondent's productivity in work beyond retirement age

Respondent's	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	45	42.5
No	27	25.5
Don't know	34	32.1
Total	106	100.0
Non-response rate	136	56.2

Notes: The high non-response rate to this question was consistent with respondents being invited to move from question 15 to question 20.

Table 18 indicates that more than half of respondents indicated that they would see value in training to enhance the productivity and effectiveness of older workers who continue to work beyond retirement age, and only about one in ten did not, except in the construction sample where about two in five saw value in training to enhance the productivity and effectiveness of older workers who continue to work beyond retirement age, and about one in four did not.

Table 19: Availability to the respondent of productivity-enhancing training

Respondent's	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	35	36.1
No	19	19.6
Don't know	43	44.3
Total	97	100.0
Non-response rate	145	59.9

Notes: The high non-response rate to this question was consistent with the question being conditional upon responses to question 18.

Conditional upon responses to question 18, Table 19 indicates that about two in five of respondents in the construction sample who indicated that they saw value in training to enhance the productivity and effectiveness of older workers who continue to work beyond retirement age reported that the kind of training they would require was available to them, and one in five reported that such training was not available to them.

Table 20: Would ‘Train the trainer’ courses assist older workers to train younger workers

Respondent’s	responses	%
Very unlikely	9	3.8
Unlikely	8	3.4
Don’t know	16	6.7
Likely	106	44.5
Very likely	99	41.6
Total	238	100.0
Non-response rate	4	1.7

Table 20 indicates that around four in five of the respondents in the construction sample saw value in ‘train the trainer’ courses that would assist older workers to train or mentor younger workers and pass on to them the benefits of their experience.

Table 20A: Q12 Own Attitude & Q20 Trainer Cross-tabulation

			Q20 Trainer					Total
			very unlikely	unlikely	neutral	likely	very likely	
Q12 Own Attitude	strongly disagree	<i>Count</i>	0	1	1	2	0	4
		<i>% of Total</i>	.0%	.4%	.4%	.8%	.0%	1.7%
	disagree	<i>Count</i>	1	0	0	7	4	12
		<i>% of Total</i>	.4%	.0%	.0%	3.0%	1.7%	5.1%
	neutral	<i>Count</i>	0	0	5	9	5	19
		<i>% of Total</i>	.0%	.0%	2.1%	3.8%	2.1%	8.0%
	agree	<i>Count</i>	5	7	8	62	48	130
		<i>% of Total</i>	2.1%	3.0%	3.4%	26.2%	20.3%	54.9%
	strongly agree	<i>Count</i>	3	0	2	26	41	72
		<i>% of Total</i>	1.3%	.0%	.8%	11.0%	17.3%	30.4%
	Total	<i>Count</i>	9	8	16	106	98	237
		<i>% of Total</i>	3.8%	3.4%	6.8%	44.7%	41.4%	100.0%

Notes: There were 5 non-responses, a rate of 2.1%. The Pearson Chi-Square has a value of 37.163, and is significant at 0.002. In the cross-tabulation, 17 cells (68.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.14.

Table 20A reports a significant cross-tabulation that indicates that in the SA construction industry sample the proportion of respondents who are personally positive or very positive about older workers continuing in work beyond the “normal” retirement age were inclined to agree that “train the trainer” training would assist older workers to train or mentor younger workers and pass on to them the benefits of their experience.

Table 21: Gender differences in access to training and employment opportunities for older workers

Respondent's perception	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
strongly disagree	5	2.1
disagree	21	8.9
neutral	82	34.9
agree	87	37.0
strongly agree	40	17.0
Total	235	100.0
Non-response rate	7	2.9

::

Table 21 indicates that around two in five of the respondents in the construction sample perceived gender differences in access to training and employment opportunities for older workers, and about one in ten did not.

Table 22: Need for training of supervisors and younger workers against age-biased stereotypes

Respondent's perception	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
strongly disagree	1	0.4
disagree	21	8.9
neutral	42	17.7
agree	119	50.2
strongly agree	54	22.8
Total	237	100.0
Non-response rate	5	2.1

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Table 22 indicates that around seven in ten of the respondents in the construction sample saw a need for training of supervisors and younger workers against age-biased stereotypes, and about one in ten did not. However, this is less persuasive than it would have been if the personal experience indicated by respondents in Tables 9, 10 and 11 were more clearly consistent with this view. The ambivalence or uncertainty evident in Tables 9, 10 and 11 somewhat diminishes the strength of the finding in Table 22, but it remains a notably strongly defined view on the specific issue.

SA construction industry qualitative responses to question 23 & 24

Table 23: Qualitative response rate on most effective training for work beyond retirement age

Effective training	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Qualitative response given	168	69.5
No qualitative response	74	30.5
Total	242	100.0

:

Table 23 provide rates of open-ended qualitative response to questions asking respondents about their suggestions about the most effective training required for work beyond retirement age. Their qualitative responses are reported in the next section.

Q. 23 Based on your experience, what types of training programs would be most effective to equip older workers to acquire skills and knowledge to remain effective in the workforce beyond retirement age in your present line of work? Please specify:

- Computer skills & new technology (33)
- Health and safety and Union rights (9)
- Train the trainer (8)
- Fitness training (9)
- I am a formwork carpenter. The thing I need is a new body.*
- Hands on training (6)
- Supervising skills (6)
- People skills (5)
- Training of new and inexperienced workers (5)
- Heavy machine training (4)
- Update on new machinery (2)
- Mature age apprenticeship (2)
- More TAFE College refresher courses (2)
- Manual handling
- Communication between boss and worker
- Paid training
- Working safely in any situation
- Keep up with technology

Table 24: Qualitative response rate on policy changes required for work beyond retirement age

Policy changes	<i>responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Qualitative response given	144	59.5
No qualitative response	98	40.5
Total	242	100.0

:

Table 24 provide rates of open-ended qualitative response to questions asking respondents about their suggestions on policy changes required for work beyond retirement age. Their qualitative responses are reported in the next section.

Q. 24 Are there policy changes that are needed to reinforce the effectiveness of training

- Tax benefits/incentives (6)
- Workcover and sickness benefits after age 65 (3)
- More money for government to set up training (2)
- Availability of paid course before retirement age (2)
- No overtime work for older workers

- Consult with older persons if they wish to retire
- More super benefits
- Flexibility of working hours
- Insurance issue over retirement age
- Older workers as mentors

Discussion of the issues

Q 23. *Training programs considered most effective*

A number of areas were stated as essential to equip older workers in the construction industry with skills and knowledge to remain effective in the workforce beyond retirement age. The most salient points are discussed here, incorporating some statements from the responses of the questionnaire and from focus group discussion with CFMEU members.

1. Computer skills and keeping abreast of new technology

A majority of the 242 responses stated this as of importance, particularly in keeping up-to-date with developments in technology. Computer skills in simple word-processing techniques were considered essential for report writing, filing reports, invoice preparations and day-to-day administration. Hence, the importance of training in computing skills.

Training that also keeps them informed on new machinery is linked with demand for information on new technology. Much of this training is best delivered in a practical hands-on approach particularly when dealing with heavy machine.

2. Health and safety training

Safety issue is of prime importance for workers in the construction industry as there is a need to ensure safety in all situations. This also includes training in fire safety regulations

3. Fitness training

Fitness training is important for workers in the construction industry, and relates to the need for training in the use of heavy machinery. However, one response stated that it is not so much training that is needed as “a new body”. In further focus group discussion with CFMEU members, it was pointed out that the most that the CFMEU members could hope for is to work up to the age of 55.

(However, in response to Q12, 85% were of the opinion that they can continue to participate effectively in the workforce beyond retirement age. In addition, in response to Q13, 59% stated that they would either work in a similar job or keep their present job if they continue working beyond retirement age).

Taken together, the qualitative response and the quantitative responses to questions 12 and 13 indicate the importance of fitness training

4. Further training

There were mixed responses in this regard, ranging from demands for more TAFE college refresher courses to mature age apprenticeships, with one response stating the need for paid training.

A “Train the trainer” course is also stated as an important means whereby older, more experienced skilled workers can be utilised to transfer their skills and knowledge to younger and more inexperienced workers. This was again noted in one of the responses

to Q 24 where older workers be considered as mentors to younger and less experienced workers.

5. Communication

A number (in various ways) consider this an important area for training, and possibly relates to calls for training in people skills, supervisory skills, and for better communication between “boss and worker”.

Q 24 Policy Changes to reinforce effectiveness of training.

In relation to this question, the responses indicate firstly, a concern with their situation upon retirement and secondly on effectiveness of training.

1. Tax, workcover and sickness benefits after age 65

Considering the nature of their occupations, it is not surprising that the dominant concern is in relation to these issues, as well as with insurance issues over retirement age. This concern relates to the responses to Q 6 on financial incentives or disincentives in their superannuation schemes that may influence whether people in their industry work beyond retirement age. A surprising 56.5% responded with a “don’t know”. An explanation for this response as discussed during the focus group meeting could be related to the fact that this industry was the first to have set up a superannuation scheme in 1984 which since then have grown to a 9% employer contribution. Since signing up for the superannuation scheme of that time, those in the age group 45-55 would not have noted their and their employers’ contribution to the scheme. It thus explains the calls for more superannuation benefits. For the union, this was a factor that needs to be brought to the attention of their members.

2. Working hours

Consistent with concerns for fitness training, responses in regard to working hours range from flexibility of working hours and that there be no overtime work for older workers.

3. Training

The few responses to this include: that there be “availability of paid course before retirement age” and that there be “more money for the government to set up training programs”.

There is general ambivalence on this issue, and in relation to over 56% “Don’t know” response rate to Q 11 regarding employers’ positive or negative attitude to support training of older workers. A total of 23% negative and 22% positive in response to this question again denote an ambivalence in attitude towards training.

However, in response to the Q 10, 40% were positive that their employers would have a positive attitude towards older workers working beyond retirement age compared to 18% of negative attitudes from the employers, with over 41% in the “don’t know” category.

On the whole, training does not appear to be a major concern for older workers in this category. What is of concern is continual fitness in order to be able to carry out their work. Hence, too, their overall positive attitudes on being able to continue to participate effectively in the workforce beyond retirement age.

Conclusions

The policy priority is to address the obstacles, constraints and disincentives that deter, constrain or prevent older workers from working beyond their “normal” retirement age. A substantial majority of older workers believe that older workers face discrimination in the workforce, but less of them report discriminatory attitudes from their colleagues and employers. Quantitative and qualitative findings strongly supported measures against age discrimination and age-biased stereotypes that limit opportunities for older workers. Rules and regulations relating to superannuation, work-cover policies need to be revised as current policies discriminate against older workers and act as disincentives for older workers to continue working. Since most older workers expect to continue working but a small minority do not, reviews of retirement ages need to enable individuals to have the options to continue working or to retire, depending on each individual’s health and circumstances. Older workers see themselves as needing fairer access to training programs to enable them to update their skills, and to keep up with developments in technology, especially in training in computing skills updating of existing skills, and professional development training programs that would enhance specific skills in their particular fields. The respondents strongly favour such programs, including “train the trainer” courses to equip older workers to train or mentor younger workers.

References

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Appendix A

SA CONSTRUCTION CFMEU

Older workers' perspectives on training and retention of older workers.

NATIONAL SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Your response matters. Why?

As you know, older people make up an increasing share of Australia's population. Some say this will mean older workers will need to continue working longer. The views of older workers have been missing from the public discussion of these issues. Four unions are cooperating with this project in an effort to inform public and policy debates by adding workers' viewpoints.

This is a survey of older workers in the **Aged Care, Construction and Finance** industries, who are members of four unions: the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU); Finance Sector Union; the Health Services Union; and the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union. These four unions urge their members to complete the survey.

The survey project is funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). The researchers are from the University of South Australia.

Your privacy and the confidentiality of your individual survey response are safe. The survey questionnaires are being posted to Union members by the Unions, to a sample of union members. Your **privacy** is protected because the researchers at the University of South Australia do not know your name or your address. All survey responses are to be returned to the researchers at the University of South Australia. The **confidentiality** of your individual survey response is protected because the Unions who have the names and addresses do not see any individual survey responses. The researchers at the University of South Australia will receive all of the survey responses and analyse them. The researchers will prepare summary reports for the Unions and NCVER.

Please take a few minutes to answer the questions in this questionnaire and post the form back to the researchers at the University of South Australia in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope.

Please tick one box for each question, unless another response is requested.

About you and your situation:

1. Are you male or female?

1. Female

2. Male

2. What age range includes your age?

1. 45-49

2. 50-54

3. 55-59

4. 60-64

5. 65 & over

3. Will you have dependants relying on you beyond your retirement age?

1. Will have several dependants

2. Will have one dependant

3. May have one or more dependants

4. Will have no dependants

5. Don't know

4. When you retire, where will you be living?

1. Own home paid off

2. Own home mortgaged

3. Renting home

4. Other

5. Don't know

5. Do you expect to have enough income and savings to live on when you retire, without needing to work?

1. Will need a retirement job

2. May need to work part-time

3. May work for better lifestyle

4. Will not need to work

5. Don't know

6. Are there financial incentives or disincentives in your superannuation scheme that may influence whether people in your industry work beyond retirement age?

1. Yes

2. No

3. Don't know

7. (If you answered 'No' to question 6, please go to question 8.) If you answered 'Yes' to question 6, please say what the financial incentives or disincentives are:

Your perspective on working after retirement age:

8. Do you have plans for what you will do in your retirement, not including paid work? (Tick as many boxes as apply in question 8).

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Caring for grandchildren | 2. Home improvements | 3. Travel | 4. Other | 5. No plans |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

9. Do most of your colleagues or work-mates have a positive or negative attitude towards older workers continuing at work beyond retirement age?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Very negative | 2. Negative | 3. Don't know | 4. Positive | 5. Strongly positive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10. Does your employer have a positive or negative attitude towards older workers continuing at work beyond retirement age?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Very negative | 2. Negative | 3. Don't know | 4. Positive | 5. Strongly positive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

11. Does your employer have a positive or negative attitude to supporting training for older workers if they continue at work beyond retirement age?

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Very negative | 2. Negative | 3. Don't know | 4. Positive | 5. Strongly positive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Your perspective on training for work after retirement:

12. Do you agree or disagree that older workers can continue to participate effectively in the workforce beyond retirement age?

1. Strongly disagree

2. Disagree

3. Neutral

4. Agree

5. Strongly agree

13. If you continue working beyond retirement age, would you like to keep your present job, or to do similar work or a different type of work?

1. I would like different work

Go to question 14

2. I would like similar work

Go to question 15

3. I would like to keep my job

4. I will not be working

Go to question 20

5. Don't know

14. If you will or might continue working beyond retirement age in a different type of job, what type of work would you prefer?

My job now is:

I would like to work as a:

--	--

15. If you would or might continue working beyond retirement age in the type of job you prefer, would you need training to do it?

1. Yes

Go to question 16

2. No

Go to question 20

3. Don't know

Go to question 20

16. If you answered yes to question 15, what kind of training would you need? Please specify:

--

17. Is the type of training you described at question 16 available to you?

1. Yes

2. No

3. Don't know

18. Whether you would prefer the work to be similar or different, are there training programs that would increase your productivity and effectiveness if you continue working beyond retirement age?

1. Yes

2. No

3. Don't know

19. Is the type of training referred to at question 18 available to you?

1. Yes

2. No

3. Don't know

Please answer questions 20-24 whether you wish to do continue in work or not.

20. Would a 'Train the trainer' course be likely to improve the capacity of older workers to train younger workers and give them the benefit of their experience?

1. Very Unlikely

2. Unlikely

3. Neutral

4. Likely

5. Very Likely

21. Do you agree or disagree that there are differences in access to training opportunities and employment participation for male and female older workers?

1. Strongly disagree

2. Disagree

3. Neutral

4. Agree

5. Strongly agree

22. Do you agree or disagree that there is a need for training of supervisors and younger workers against age-biased stereotypes of older workers?

1. Strongly disagree

2. Disagree

3. Neutral

4. Agree

5. Strongly agree

23. Based on your experience, what types of training programs would be most effective to equip older workers to acquire skills and knowledge to remain effective in the workforce beyond retirement age in your present line of work? Please specify:

24. Are there policy changes that are needed to reinforce the effectiveness of training in fostering retention of older workers as workforce participants? Please specify:

Thank you for your cooperation. Please return this form in the stamped addressed envelope provided.