

# IRT Foundation

## Mature Workforce Roundtable



IRT Foundation  
Mature Workforce  
Roundtable

# Summary

In July 2015 IRT Foundation and the Australian Human Rights Commission signed Australia's first **Mature Workforce Initiative Statement of Intent** to work together to change perceptions about mature age workers and improve choice and quality of life for over 50s.

To commence implementation of this Statement of Intent, IRT Foundation hosted a Mature Workforce Participation Roundtable ('the Roundtable') at the University of Wollongong's SMART Infrastructure Facility on Friday 20 November 2015.

Facilitated by distinguished journalist, Ellen Fanning, with interactive panel discussions featuring The Hon. Susan Ryan AO, Age & Disability Discrimination Commissioner, **the Roundtable brought together key representatives from the business and community sectors**, with mature-age workers to discuss opportunities for changing community perceptions of working beyond the traditional retirement age.

## Key discussion points

- The challenge of our ageing population in relation to workforce participation
- Illawarra examples of leadership in mature workforce participation
- Shifting community perceptions so people start to look at 60+ as active working years
- Changing organisational culture/perceptions to harness the benefits of employing older workers

**“Older people offer a competitive advantage.”**

**“We need to have active intervention.”**

## IRT Foundation

### Mature Workforce Roundtable

The Roundtable involved two panel sessions featuring both workers and employers – these sessions were followed by interactive workshops enabling all participants to contribute to debate and discussion.

## Primary messages

- Workplaces should be encouraged to value older workers. They have skills and capabilities suitable across a range of industries, and can play a powerful role in supporting and mentoring younger leaders.
- Part-time and flexible work arrangements offer benefits to both workplaces and employees. Inter-generational job sharing is one example of this.
- The Illawarra region aspires to be a leader in a national debate about identifying the legislative, taxation and attitudinal barriers to employment of older workers and demonstrating innovative practice as an economy in transition.

Roundtable participants agreed there is a need to support employers and employees to better understand innovative employment strategies for successful mature workforce participation. It was also agreed that we should aspire to build a stronger economy to provide jobs for people of all ages.

## Panellists

**The Hon Susan Ryan AO**

Age & Disability Discrimination  
Commissioner  
Australian Human Rights  
Commission

**Vivien Twyford**

Founder and Director  
Twyfords

**Ken Owens**

Customer Service Staff  
Bunnings Wollongong

**Peter Brady**

Community Programs Coordinator  
IRT Foundation

# Panel Session 1

The first panel session discussed why mature age workers may choose to continue working and how to enable them to identify opportunities and barriers to employment.

**Key points from panel session 1 included:**

- Job satisfaction was seen as the main reason to continue working.
- Age discrimination in the workplace is a common experience for many mature age workers.
- Working in mature age can be a different phase of work - it can be about doing different work for different reasons.
- Superannuation may not be adequate to support the financial needs of the current generation of older workers, as more Australians are living longer.
- Positive discrimination to specifically attract older workers can be done with appropriate aim and wording.
- Empowering workers to communicate their needs for flexibility is important.

# Workshop 1

Shifting community perceptions  
to start looking at 60+ as active  
working years

## **Workshop participants examined four questions:**

- 1.** Stereotypes and perceptions identified by employers.
- 2.** Positive examples of engagement of mature workers.
- 3.** Promoting and encouraging 60+ as active working years
- 4.** Key industries, roles and job types suitable for people of 60+.

## Key discussion points

- Customer centric occupations such as retail, tourism, and hospitality were identified as roles older workers naturally excel at.
- Industries with flexible work hours, such as transport and retail were also identified as suitable for older people.
- The professional sector values skills and experience, while minimising physical impact on the ageing body.
- Bank and insurance companies are increasing their engagement of mature age workers.
- Occupations offering opportunities for mentoring and leadership, especially where specialised or technical skills are required, were also mentioned.

**“The media can be used to dispel myths and stereotypes through appropriate language and positive stories.”**

**“Employers need management and communication skills specific to older workers.”**

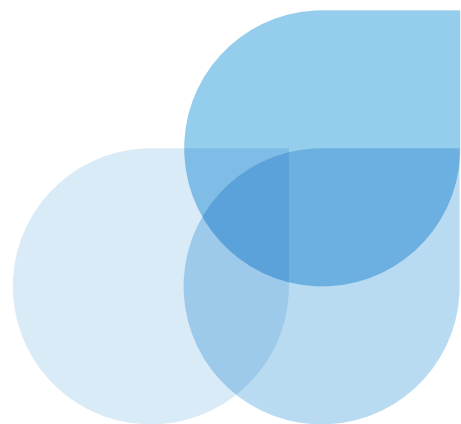
# Panel Session 2 comments

**Adam Barlow**  
Partner, Support-Staff  
RMB Lawyers

**John Karayianni**  
Complex Manager  
Bunnings Wollongong

- We employ older workers because fundamentally it's our bottom line.
- Older workers offer different skills and strengths e.g. a mature age worker can mentor and tutor.
- Customers look for the older worker to serve them.
- Older people offer a competitive advantage.
- For taxation reasons and a better quality of life, older people prefer to work part-time, which suits many retail operations.

- 30% of people we hire are over 50.
- Older people enjoy flexible arrangements/work.
- Older partners can work in partnership/mentoring roles.
- There is a culture shift by having older people as a colleague, not as a supervisor.





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### Les Dion

Owner/Operator  
Dion's Bus Company

- My dad drove a bus until age 85.
- We employ older workers because they stick around – we don't have to keep training people that are starting from scratch.
- Our customers know their drivers.
- For public health and safety, age based medical review is required at 75.
- Older workers bring a lot of flexibility to the workplace.

**Terry Wetherall**  
Deputy President  
of ACCI

- Our major focus is on youth employment and women.
- Older workers bring a wealth of experience.
- There is a perception that older people do not contribute to the economy, don't work, use up resources and are a burden.
- In reality, the aged-related industry is the fastest sector of employment.
- There appear to be issues for people who have stopped working at say age 60, paused, and then want to start again.
- We need to have active intervention.

**Prof. Pascal Perez**  
SMART UOW

- 3.5% of the jobs in the Illawarra region are occupied by older workers.
- Older workers are experienced and flexible.
- Demographically, older worker employment is already happening. However, older people need assistance to enter/re-enter the workforce.
- Pro-bono work needs to be monetised.

# Workshop 2

changing organisational culture  
to be more welcoming to  
mature age employment

## Workshop participants examined four questions:

1. Challenges in shifting organisational culture.
2. Creating a more supportive legislative/regulatory framework.
3. What are mature workers seeking?
4. Innovative programs to increase mature workforce employment.

**“Employers also need tools and training to attract and retain older workers.”**

## Conclusions

- Workplaces should be encouraged to value older workers – they possess skills/capabilities that are suitable across a range of industries.
- Older workers can play a powerful role in supporting/mentoring younger leaders.
- There are significant business/organisational benefits of part-time, flexible work arrangements and we need to acknowledge the benefits to both workplaces and employees.
- Inter-generational job sharing is an excellent example of innovative, flexible working arrangements.
- The Illawarra has the potential to be a leader in a national debate about identifying the legislative, taxation and attitudinal barriers to employment of older workers.

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## Workshop potential actions

Connect downsizing industries to growing/emerging ones, e.g. disability, ageing, tourism and hospitality.

A 'gateway' program to bring older workers back to the workplace.

Gather information and evidence – ask why older people were rejected from job applications – and speak with bosses.

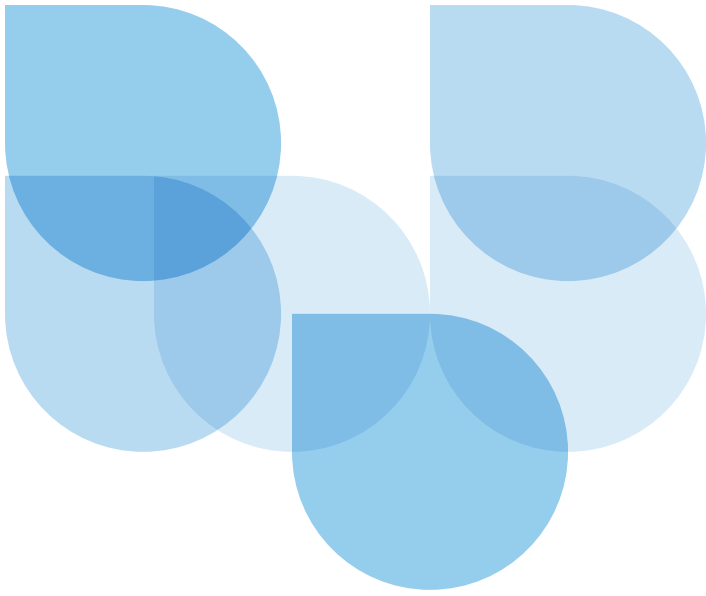
Create a point in life to stop and check - seniors skills checkpoint, similar to federal government FOBT – auto-post @50yo “what will you do for the next 20 years?”

Fill the current understanding gaps about the transferral of skills/ capabilities.

Assessments need to take place via a capability framework – mobility provisions.

Identify, clarify and create a clear pathway for people to re-train into a new career.

Support industry to lead/develop skill-specific frameworks.



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