

**EQUAL EMPLOYMENT  
OPPORTUNITIES TRUST**

Helping workplaces achieve  
success through diversity

**MISSION STATEMENT**

*'The purpose of the  
Equal Employment  
Opportunities Trust is to  
promote to New Zealand  
employers the  
implementation of EEO  
principles in the  
workplace as a means  
of improving their  
effectiveness, efficiency  
and competitiveness  
through the successful  
management of diversity*

# Experienced, older and out of work

The plight of older unemployed people in New Zealand is better understood as a result of a number of recent research projects. In 2000 the EEO Trust Recruiting Talent survey of recruitment consultants showed that age was the most common form of discrimination against job seekers.

A new study by Judy McGregor and Lance Gray of Massey University gives the perspective of the mature job seekers themselves. The study, funded by the Public Good Science Fund, surveyed 954 mature job seekers who were using Mature Employment Support Agencies in Whangarei, Palmerston North, Christchurch and Invercargill.

Mature job seekers were defined as people over 40-years-old. McGregor says this age was chosen because many MESA clients are under 45 (the lower limit used in previous research) and many women return to the workforce between 40 and 45.

The study therefore captured two distinct samples; women returning to the workforce or entering it for the first time, and men who have been made redundant well before the traditional retirement age.

## **Mature workers will dominate**

McGregor explains why the study is important, "Long-term unemployment among mature people is growing more rapidly than total unemployment but, as published unemployment statistics focus on total unemployment, they draw attention to youth.

"Younger people do not necessarily stay unemployed for long and so the popular attention this receives masks the more difficult issue of long-term unemployment among mature job seekers.

"And although they are a relatively small number as a proportion of the total labour force, older people appear to be over-represented as long-term unemployed."

She also says New Zealand businesses will soon be forced by demographics to take the concerns of mature job seekers seriously. "In 10 years time, the entire baby boomer cohort will be termed older workers so there will be proportionately more older workers than younger workers in the labour market.

"This will bring challenges which have received little attention previously. Business will have to address the workforce they have: an older one."

The study explored a wide range of areas associated with unemployment including how long people had been out of work, why they wanted work and how they sought it, why they hadn't found a job and the psychological impact of being out of work.



Judy McGregor



Lance Gray

## First six months critical

It showed that the first four to six months of looking for work are critical to mature job seekers successfully entering or re-entering the labour market. McGregor says that in the first six months older workers look harder for work and maintain their psychological well being.

However, McGregor says the relationship between job search effort and getting a job is not very strong. "While a university graduate can be confidently told that their chances of gaining a job are related directly to their job seeking effort, the same cannot be said for mature workers, regardless of their skills and experience."

When asked how they felt about being unemployed, respondents expressed a mixture of hope and sadness. In particular, long-term unemployed men were likely to express feelings of guilt, worthlessness, poor self esteem. As McGregor says, "The voice of mature job seekers revealed in this study reveals anger, frustration and increasing isolation. For hundreds of older people who want to work, unemployment means social exclusion."

## Ethnic comparisons

The ethnicity of the mature job seekers surveyed was:

73.2% New Zealand European

12.3% Maori

14.5 % Pacific Island, Indian, Chinese, other European or other nationality

The study showed that all ethnic groups applied the same amount of effort in looking for a job, however Maori people tended to be out of work longer than other ethnic groups. McGregor says there needs to be more research into the needs, aspirations and experiences of mature Maori job seekers.

Four focus groups were held to obtain the views of mature Pacific Island job seekers. Their list of the barriers older Pacific Island job seekers face included:

- racial discrimination,
- limited English language ability,
- the job interview,
- lack of experience.

## Recruiters bar the gates

The study showed that many people viewed recruitment agencies as significant gatekeepers and a secondary study was

therefore undertaken of the experiences professional mature job seekers had with recruitment consultants. This study involved 41 people, of whom 56% had been out of work for two years or less.

Fifty-five percent of these people described their experiences of recruitment consultants as being negative or very negative

When asked what barriers they faced to gaining employment, the barrier of age permeated most responses. For example:

"...being told you're over qualified as an excuse not to even grant an interview. If mature job seekers could obtain an interview they would stand a good chance but often they can't get past the preliminary vetting process."

McGregor says it could presumably be assumed that recruitment consultants would be familiar with the mature worker labour market, particularly given the workplace restructuring that has occurred over the past decade, but this does not appear to be the case.

"The demand for older workers has not matched the increasing supply

as employers still prefer younger workers. As long as older workers are not in demand (regardless of skills) employment consultants will continue to ignore them."

## What next?

McGregor and Gray say a number of points for debate arose from their research. They suggest that:

- job search should be the primary active labour market policy for mature job seekers
- community employment agencies dealing with mature workers should receive better funding
- employment training should be shifted away from Government social welfare agencies to industry-based national qualifications
- the specific needs of women returning to the labour market need more research
- unskilled, long-term unemployed people need more assistance

*"The demand for older workers has not matched the increasing supply as employers still prefer younger workers. As long as older workers are not in demand (regardless of skills) employment consultants will continue to ignore them."*

To download the full research report go to [www.eeotrust.org.nz/information/maturejob.shtml](http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/information/maturejob.shtml). Judy McGregor is keen to receive suggestions from stakeholders on future research. Email her at [J.H.McGregor@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.H.McGregor@massey.ac.nz).

# Tools For Tapping Into Talent

A free training kit to help recruitment consultants work more effectively with discriminatory clients is now available on the EEO Trust website.

The kit, called Tools For Tapping Into Talent, was developed in response to the EEO Trust's Recruiting Talent study undertaken by Janice Burns of Top Drawer Consultants in 2000. This study showed that many recruitment professionals have been compromised and embarrassed by either managers who require them to behave illegally, unfairly or unethically, or by the discriminatory briefs of their clients.

The study showed that the groups most likely to be discriminated against were:

- older people,
- people with a non-New Zealand accent,
- people with a disability and
- people from a different culture.

Such discrimination is not only illegal, it also means employers are often not getting the best person to do a job thus preventing New Zealand businesses from effectively tapping a diverse labour pool.

Tools For Tapping Into Talent was developed by Top Drawer Consultants who liaised closely with recruitment consultants to ensure it would help them help their clients comply with the law and hire the best staff. The kit was also trialled in workplaces which found it a useful tool for involving management and staff in discussions around recruitment attitudes and practices.

Ola van Leeuwen of Adecco Personnel, who attended one of the trial training sessions, said everyone there came away with a new way of looking at diversity issues.

"I found the session on recognising biases and assumptions in interviews particularly interesting. Just because someone speaks softly doesn't mean they're shy, it may be a cultural attribute, and just because someone doesn't make eye contact doesn't mean



they've got something to hide."

Ola says her colleagues are using a wider range of strategies to tap the diverse talent pool as a result of attending the session.

Opal Manukau Business Unit Manager, Julie Cressey, who trialled the kit with all Opal's Auckland staff agrees that it is an excellent training tool. "It gave our staff the tools to encourage their clients to look beyond people's cultural background at their actual skills."

Julie says the module on managing clients who want to discriminate was particularly helpful as it gave Opal managers the opportunity to say they would back-up consultants who had to take a hard line with clients.

The kit comes in six modules covering topics like the labour market of the future, how to manage clients who want to discriminate and how to give candidates useful feedback. It includes a range of case studies and scenarios which can be selected from to reflect the industry sector in which consultants mainly work. Each module takes about 30 minutes to complete and could be led by a team member or external facilitator. The training could be undertaken as a half-day workshop, three separate one hour modules spread over a month or as part of regular staff meetings.

This project was funded by the EEO Contestable Fund, administered by the Department of Labour and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The Recruitment & Consulting Services Association assisted Top Drawer Consultants in developing the kit.

To find out more go to [www.eeotrust.org.nz/tools](http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/tools). The complete kit can be downloaded or individual modules can be viewed and printed. Hard copies of the training kit are available from the EEO Trust.

## Employers report on workers with mental illness

A new booklet summarising research into the workplace experiences of people with a mental illness will soon be available. The research was funded by the Government's EEO Contestable Fund and undertaken by members of Tapestry Clubhouse, a Dunedin-based centre for psychosocial rehabilitation.

The research asked employers:

- about their experiences in employing people with a mental illness and
- what information, resources and support they required to implement equal employment opportunities for people with mental illnesses.

The findings include:

- Safety of employees, employers, clients etc is the most common concern of employers
- Employers are looking for someone who can best perform their duties regardless of their health background

The booklet will be available free from the EEO Trust from June.



**T R U S T**  
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## Upcoming Events

### EEO Trust Work & Life Awards

Sponsored by  
**BLACKMORES**  
THE BEST OF HEALTH

Tickets are now on sale for this year's EEO Trust Work & Life Awards ceremony and dinner sponsored by Blackmores (NZ) Ltd. The Prime Minister Rt Hon Helen Clark has been asked to present the Work & Life Awards again this year and the entries look likely to be as competitive and varied as ever.

The ceremony and dinner is being held at the Crowne Plaza Auckland on the evening of Thursday 22 August. We provide free childcare so bring yourself, your children, your colleagues and your clients.

To order tickets, complete the enclosed invitation or contact the EEO Trust at [admin@eeotrust.org.nz](mailto:admin@eeotrust.org.nz) or 09 525 3023.

## Electronic delivery

In response to the last issue of EEO Trust News a number of readers asked if they could receive the newsletter electronically. Due to a fault in our database some of those responses may have been lost. If you received this issue in the post and would like to receive a PDF instead, please let us know and we'll ensure you receive future issues by email. Apologies for any inconvenience.

EEO Trust News is also available on our website at [www.eeotrust.org.nz/news/news.shtml](http://www.eeotrust.org.nz/news/news.shtml). We encourage you to download it and email it throughout your workplace or to other contacts interested in EEO issues.

## [www.eeotrust.org.nz](http://www.eeotrust.org.nz)

Go to our website to access a host of news and information on EEO, work/life initiatives and diversity issues, as well as links to related sites. New resources on the site are the Tools For Tapping Into Talent training kit for recruiters and Judy McGregor and Lance Gray's research report on the experiences on unemployed older workers.

## Can flexibility bring talent to work?

The Work and Age Trust, in another project funded by Government's EEO Contestable Fund, is developing material on the theme of flexible work options. The underlying principle is that flexibility in work arrangements makes more jobs more available to a wider range of people, including people:

- with disabilities,
- with demanding responsibilities outside work,
- from all disadvantaged groups,
- nearing retirement, and so on.

A wider range of people with abilities and experience is thus available to employers. The project team has completed the research and interviews with people in business and the information will be placed on the EEO Trust and Network websites in late July. (Network is another project of the Work and Age Trust.)

If you would like information about the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust services or resources, please contact:

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