

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

**Submission No 40**

**Name of person making submission:** Marcus Wigan

**Submission made by**

X Older Australian who would like to work

X (honorary) Academic

**Submission regarding Older Australians**

***(a) Your experience***

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

X Yes

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

X 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.**

1. Unable to secure employment (in Australia) after many applications from age

55

2. Debarred from a board [redacted~~]~~ by their limit of 71 years at accession, so could not even stand for election

**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?)**

X Yes

**Please tell us more**

Finally I switched my attention to the EU, UK, US and secured a part time Professorship in Scotland, requiring me to commute up to 180,000 miles a year for many years in my 60’s…I secured 1m Euros of EU funds to pay for my expenses and research staff, and contracts with EU UNDP etc. After many years of this, eventually a few small contracts in Australia eventuated

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

X Yes

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

☐Not sure

**Please tell us more**

It would appear that one does not even get into the considerations set, let alone interviewed in most cases: this makes it problematical to say how age discrimination is being applied. The increasing practice of HR Departments to scan social media may have something to do with it now, but this was in general prior to the advent of social media…

**What are the incentives and disincentives for older Australians? Incentives:**

Still being of high capacity, still learning fresh subjects and disciplines, applying them in a workplace is well worth while and contributing scarce skills to ones own country would be nice.. instead of having to do it for other countries…we live here too!

**Disincentives:**

The huge number of applications one has to make, and the general response of over qualified/over experienced (code for old) has a very dispiriting impact.

When one works pro bono ‘as an honorary, one appears to be valued at the rate one is paid (namely zero): this is both insulting and demotivating.

***(b) Good practice***

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

I have not encountered any in the last 15 years. They might well exist.

**Please tell us of examples of good practice in employing and retaining older**

**Australians in work that you are aware of.**

I have not seen any: I am sure that they must exist

***(c) Solutions***

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

As such a large amount of work is done by older Australians without payment (volunteering, honorary service etc), they should be permitted to offset the costs that they incur against tax at the very least: this would require commuting from home to become generally allowable

A negative tax scheme (not uncommon in some other countries might be used to recompense for unpaid but vital work done, and this secure a positive valuation in their own eyes and those of others. This could be done as a contribution to superannuation rather than a direct and taxable payment, which would also address the issues of insurance etc for those over 70 and 75…this would also reduce costs from employers, while raising their organisations’ productivity

Age limits on Boards need to be struck down, as the lack of governance models in the elderly age group leads inevitably to further unthinking disrcimination

**What should be done to enhance workforce participation of older**

**Australians/Australians with disability?**

A very difficult question. Much rests on the mistaken conviction that the elderly cannot learn.. let alone their excellent and well developed networks…As high levels of experience, energy and qualification appear to be regarded as disqualification – perhaps even as a threat?, employer education is essential, as the motivations of older people often do not include goals that would threaten the employing managers own position, or lead to expectations of progression as many wish simply to contribute and not to progress. This is not true of all however, so such education requires some care,

Elderly internships and apprenticeships are mechanisms that can play a major role, as both have been successfully sued for the young, who suffer their own forms of discrimination by younger managers.

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

**Inquiry?**

1. Dismantling of age specific barriers to entry (Board positions as an example)

2. Some form of expense tax exemptions

3. Substantial numbers of internships and apprentice position support specifically for the elderly

4. Specific recognition of unpaid work in government statistics (that done by the elderly as significant fraction of GDP, and needs to be formally and widely

reported and indexed as such to change broader community attitudes)

5. Specific provision for governance positions on government boards etc for the elderly who wish and are capable of serving thus, and to require all

government bodies with elderly parties involved to have governance

representation as a matter of course.

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**Two pertinent resources of mine that might be helpful:**

Wigan, M. R. (2013). Constructing Age and Technology as Augmentation, not Degradation. IEEE ISTAS 2013. K. Michael. Toronto June 25-27, IEEE Xplore: 136-143.

**Abstract**

The widespread Western community construction of age as a dependent state has been reflected in many of the studies of technology and the aged. The present paper considers the situation that would obtain if this was reversed, and genuine utilization of the skills and knowledge of the aged applied to their own situations, as appropriate enhancements rather than as imposed assumptions. Examples are given, and the underlying causes of paternalistic ‘engagement’ models for the elderly, and questions are raised as to the social implications of these persistent myths, the benefits of revising them, and the forces that will make this necessary.

Wigan, M.R. (2014) Technology enhancement - a full role for the elderly (video recording of an

invited presentation to the Melbourne Graduate House) <http://works.bepress.com/mwigan/7/>

**Abstract**

The elderly are often the subject of technology assistance, but rarely are made active and peer parties to such Research and development, and are omitted from governance structures affecting them when fully capable or peer and leadership technical roles. Partly as the stereotype of the old old are rarely distinguished from the capacities of the young old (<75). Examples are given of mobility, assistive technologies and the cooperative design successes when these dependency stereotypes are overcome.