



Industry restructuring and job loss: helping older workers get back into employment

Support document 1: literature review

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Introduction

Context

Out of a total workforce of 11.5 million, approximately 355 000 Australian workers were displaced in the year to February 2013 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013a). Displaced workers are those who are retrenched or cease employment, as their employer ceases to operate as a business or reduces its business operations and no longer needs anyone to do the job previously held by the worker. Across different countries, the displacement of workers is linked to either market based factors (e.g. changes in technology and consumer tastes) or policy changes (e.g. tariff reductions, deregulation). Overall, more market based factors are seen to be primarily responsible for the restructuring being witnessed around Australian industry and employment (Murtough, Pearson & Wreford 1998).

The displacement of workers in Australia is not a recent event with many past cases of industry restructuring that has resulted in the displacement of workers (e.g. Mitsubishi Motors, Pacific Brands, Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and Hills Industries). In these cases, many of the displaced workers have been older and less skilled employees in a blue collar occupation for whom the probability of being re-employed was much lower than for other retrenched workers (Murtough & Waite 2000).

A significant factor behind this project has been more recent announcements of industry restructuring (e.g. Qantas, BP, General Motors Holden [Holden], Toyota and SPC Ardmona) that have consequences around training, counselling and employment that are still being debated by governments, policy makers, the media and the broader community. These more recent announcements about future closures of Holden, Toyota and Ford for example, will result in the direct loss of up to 27 500 jobs nationally by 2017 (Department of Industry 2014). Looking at the longer term, the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) proposes that as a result of closures in the motor vehicle manufacturing industry, Australia may experience a fall in national employment of around 200 000 between now and 2017 (Barbaro, Spoehr & NIEIR 2014).

Clearly this 'involuntary career change group' (Dooley 2001) or the 'dislocated worker group' (International Labour Organisation 2009) is now a growing segment of the Australian labour force, and very likely to be a segment that continues to grow in response to more globalisation and increased competition. The warning is that further industry restructuring will very likely add to unemployment numbers for older Australians that have been dramatically increasing in the past four years, and to 200 000 Australians aged over 50 on unemployment benefits as at mid-2014. As Spoehr, Barnett and Parnis (2009) observe in their review of mature-age employment in Australia, 'many older workers who become unemployed do not intentionally retire but find that this happens by default when they fail to find employment' (p.5).

The research project

This NCVET research project is seeking to develop an evidence-based working model of effective skills transfer, re-skilling and training in order to help older workers (generally acknowledged as those 45 years and older) overcome job loss due to retrenchment. Typically, more skilled and highly qualified workers have skills that are transferable to other sectors, and gain new jobs more readily. However, there are much greater challenges for employees in those industries where larger proportions of the workforce are older, with lower skills, no formal qualifications and associated lower literacy and numeracy skills. This project is focused on these displaced older workers and the role played by public

and private providers in the vocational education and training sector (VET) in helping to assist them to find a new job.

According to Skills Australia (2011), the VET sector over the coming decade must play the major role in meeting the nation's demand for the types of skills required to address continued economic and demographic change. More than any other education sector, VET is pivotal as it connects learning with the labour market, the workplace and community development, as well as with individual learner and employer requirements. In addition, VET has special strengths, through its regional and community focus, in responding to and providing training and retraining to assist industries and individuals in the most economically vulnerable regions. Skills transfer, re-skilling and training have emerged as key proactive policy strategies in response to the continued rate of industry restructuring, and are in line with actions that will allow Australian governments to adopt a more proactive and strategic approach (Australian Government 2014).

As Circelli and Stanwick (2014) remark, in particular VET and its initiatives aim to ensure that people in vulnerable communities obtain the skills to gain employment, or to obtain skills that allow them to move to other regions where a business is in decline. Linked to VET and training is access to a wide variety of forms of assistance, including specific support payments and intensive employment services (e.g. career advice, job search training and assistance). Also as Evans-Klock et al. (1998) have detailed, active labour market programs for displaced workers provide a combination of training and retraining, career guidance, job search assistance, work experience, wage subsidies, public employment/public works programs and access to a range of support services. Recognising this reality, this review of the literature identifies the connection between these initiatives and with a focus on identifying good practice in skills transfer, re-skilling and training for displaced lower skilled older workers.

Aims of this literature review

The aims of this literature review are to:

- Promote a better understanding of the critical enablers and barriers to skills transfer, re-skilling and training of displaced older workers;
- Identify examples of good practice approaches around skills transfer and retraining of displaced older workers; and
- Offer a working model for effective design and delivery of skills transfer and re-skilling initiatives for displaced older workers.

The working model developed through this review is generic, based on a broad review of the key factors at work and good practices around skills transfer and retraining of displaced older workers, irrespective of industry type. The working model will be tested and further developed through four case studies where the focus will be upon displaced older, lesser skilled workers in Australia's manufacturing industry. The manufacturing industry has been chosen due to the disproportionate share of retrenchments that have occurred (Murtough & Waite 2000) and are to continue to occur (Manufacturing Skills Australia 2014a;b) within this industry. The manufacturing industry has high numbers of older and lesser skilled workers. Based on the insights gained from the cases, the working model will be refined and provided in the final report to NCVER.

Enablers and barriers

Introduction

There are several critical factors when designing skills transfer, re-skilling and training for displaced older workers. However, as many researchers highlight, older workers are not a homogenous group. Rather they have varied backgrounds, opportunities and work experiences, as do other chronological groups. While acknowledging this diversity, older workers of all backgrounds do face shared challenges typically around inaccurate and outdated stereotypes that serve to limit the range of responses that are available to them when faced by changes to workplaces and industries (e.g. Selby Smith, Smith & Smith 2007).

Age related stereotypes

Various myths have served as barriers to the training and employment of older people. Popular stereotypes include the beliefs that older workers do not want to learn, they cannot learn, they have great difficulty learning new technology, and any investment in their training provides a poor return (e.g. Gray & McGregor 2003; Van Rooij 2012). These beliefs are based on outdated views of older people.

Below, we provide two tables from the work of Bowman and Kearns (2007) that illustrate the realities compared to the common myths associated with older people, work and learning. Table 1 is drawn from a UK National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) study known as the Older and Bolder program (Withnall, McGivney & Soulsby 2004). Findings reveal that age is not necessarily a barrier to learning and older people have a wealth of experience they can bring to any new learning experience.

Table 2 is drawn from Australian research and a mature aged workforce special report by the Weekend Australian in 2007. It shows that older people can be effective workers from an employer perspective, and rather than yearning for retirement, many older people both in work and out of employment want to go on learning and earning, but at their own pace. Another Australian research study of the time, *Understanding the Over 50s* (APIA 2007) also concluded that the over 50s intend to remain active in the workforce, education and community engagement to benefit their mental and physical health. A more recent ABS survey identified over 600 000 Australians who never intend to retire from the labour force. Another significant group of over 45s (191 000) had 'un-retired'; that is, they had previously retired, then returned to the workforce, with 'financial need' (42%) as the most common reason given (ABS 2013c).

Table 1 Myths and realities relating to older people and learning, UK research

Myths	Realities
Older people are all the same	Every individual ages differently
Older people have nothing of value to say	Older people usually have a wealth of experience
It is not worthwhile to encourage older people to engage in learning	Older people can contribute much as volunteers, carers, advisors, active citizens and workers
Older people have less brain capability	While the brain undergoes structural and chemical changes with ageing, the brain has considerable plasticity for new learning
Older people's brain power has diminished	'Fluid intelligence' may decline with age but 'crystallised intelligence' grows throughout adult life
Older people are too slow to learn anything new	Health status influence this, but speed depends on a complex range of factors
Older people forget things	Short-term memory may be impaired but long-term memory is less impaired
Older people live in the past and don't like change	Older people differ in this respect, and many have a keen interest in current affairs
Older people are not interested in today's world	Individual differences are again relevant factors, while education and personal interests are important
Older people are not interested in learning	While older people participate less in organised learning; however, this reflects past experience, stereotypes and inadequate opportunities

Adapted from Withnall, McGivney & Soulsby 2004

Table 2 Myths and realities relating to older people working and learning, Australian research

Myths	Realities
Older workers are more expensive	There is a net human resource management cost benefit of \$1 956 per annum for each worker aged 45 years plus compared with the rest of the workforce (Study by Business, Work & Ageing)
Workers cognitive abilities deteriorate with age	There is no sign of any significant decline in either peoples' memory or intelligence until they are well into their 80s or 90s (Research by Queensland Government)
Older workers are not interested in career or self-development	86% of senior workers were keen to take up training opportunities offered to them (Research by Drake Management)
Older workers are less flexible and adaptable	People over 45 years are generally more flexible about their work hours and working conditions than younger people. However, employers retrench older workers in preference to younger workers (Research by Drake Management)
Older worker are not likely to stay with the firm	Employees 45 plus stay with an organisation 2.4 times longer on average than the under 45s
Older workers just want to retire	Far from yearning for retirement, older people both in work and out of employment want to go on learning and earning, but at their own pace (Survey by Diversity Council Australia)

From the *Mature Aged Workforce Special Report*, The Weekend Australian June 2-3 2007 p.6

As these and other studies have acknowledged, people are living longer and healthier lives. Many older people of 45 years or more want to continue to work longer, but they also recognise that continued learning will be required to remain relevant to the job market. The good news is that outdated ageism stereotypes are reducing, and employer attitudes towards older workers are changing in Australia (Keating 2011; Taylor 2011). Major drivers for these changes are the tight labour market and the retirement of skilled and knowledgeable baby boomer workers. In response, more employers realise the need to attract and retain older workers through offering more flexible work arrangements, including continued access to appropriate skills training. However, Australia's Age Discrimination Commissioner has warned recently that bias against workers over 50 remains prevalent and more needs to change for it to stop (Susan Ryan, 17 September 2014).

Discrimination

Older individuals face challenges around real or perceived job discrimination (Rutledge 2014; Van Rooij 2012). Furthermore, as Lundberg and Marshall (2007) found, even if Australian employers are no longer discriminating on the grounds of age in recruitment, retention and training practices, a perception of age discrimination persists among many older workers. Many older workers fear age discrimination more than they actually encounter it: a perception that needs to be combated, especially among displaced older workers in order to improve their levels of self-efficacy.

The overall finding from numerous studies is that those who have not yet reached retirement age rely on private pension benefits and continued employment, but at much lower earnings (Gray & Finnie 2009). Displaced older workers experience more limited job opportunities than younger workers (Gray & Finnie 2009) and are more likely to face a form of hastened retirement as forced early retirement, permanent disability or partial retirement.

There is also evidence that organisations that downsize are typically less supportive of older workers than organisations that have not downsized in the past. Older workers in downsized businesses report less supportive climates around training and development, including policies and practices that demonstrate the importance of training and development efforts, and the value of acquiring new knowledge and skills (Armstrong-Stassen & Cattaneo 2009). One outcome is a less favourable workplace climate, with less access to challenging and meaningful roles, leading to a greater likelihood of skill obsolescence and reduced employability during periods of industry restructuring.

Displaced older workers report a number of barriers to enrolling in training. These include the financial cost, psychological barriers, difficulties with fitting classes into an adult schedule, the lack of adequate career counselling, and limited information about what is available (Fletcher, Gillman & Fox Gorte 1988). In a recent three year study of mature United States workers seeking new jobs and careers, Heidkamp and Heldrich (2012) emphasise the value of focusing on career pathways, with an emphasis on programs that lead to credentials. Critical to achieving this goal is stronger career advice and counselling for job seekers by trained professionals who can access labour market data, information on the costs and benefits of different training programs, and information on the different credentials required by employers.

Having the right assumptions

Forming assumptions regarding the abilities and motivations of older workers can be problematic, as often these assumptions prove to be incorrect. In addition, the thinking about the most appropriate options for training and retraining the older worker is inhibited by false assumptions regarding older workers. For instance, like younger workers, older workers predominantly learn through their work. Employers who do not understand this often fail to provide older workers with opportunities to engage in new tasks, work practices and technologies as part of their everyday work. On-the-job learning gives them knowledge and skills that make them more resilient to the outcomes from redundancy through industry restructuring (Billett 2011). Indeed older workers report using a wide range of resources on the job (e.g. new task) and off-the-job (e.g. books, internet) to learn, and the vast majority report that the responsibility for continuous learning and maintaining their employability largely rests with them.

Standard wisdom is that training needs to be designed to fit learner characteristics. Drawing on past reports focused on older workers themselves, we identify the following six points that need to be taken into account when designing skills transfer, re-skilling and training for older workers.

1 Displaced older workers generally will be motivated. They are focused on finding a new job as soon as possible, but they can lack knowledge of the wider labour market and can slip into unemployment if not assisted with their job search.

All displaced workers face employment adjustment due to factors outside of their control. They have become unemployed due to factors in the wider economy, and not because of their personal performance at work. However, they may not have accurate ideas about labour demand, especially those workers displaced after many years of work with the same employer or in the same occupation. Job search assistance and targeted job matching may be required, and if so, this should be provided as early as possible. Ideally, this needs to occur before they are laid off to prevent them slipping into unemployment and losing their attachment to the world of work (Evans-Klock et al. 1998).

2 Displaced older workers are discriminating about what new learning they will undertake. They will not tolerate inappropriate or seemingly irrelevant content in retraining programs.

Research from China illustrates this point. One of the challenging problems emanating from China's era of reform and economic growth is the need to retrain or educate large numbers of displaced workers from state owned enterprises in a relatively short period of time. Laid-off workers overwhelmingly were not participating in the nationwide 'ten million reemployment retraining programs' (Wang, Ramon & Greenwood 2012). Displaced workers on the whole did not want to participate in retraining due to 'unmatched retraining' that did not meet either their expectations or the needs of the labour market. Similarly, in a review of the Mitsubishi closures in Australia, Beer and his colleagues (2006) found that most of the displaced workers were keen to undertake retraining, but they had mixed attitudes about the utility of the various courses and services provided by the company to assist them.

3 Displaced older workers want their existing knowledge and skills taken into account in determining what reskilling and training they will undertake. This situation is exacerbated where they do not have formal qualifications or have already left employment.

Mature aged workers will participate when training is modified to acknowledge their life and work experiences. Retraining programs have impact when they build on the existing knowledge and skills of older workers and provide them with new or updated skills that enable them to be more competitive in a changing workplace (Meyers, Billett & Kelly 2010; Rogers & O'Rourke 2004). In addition, older workers prefer training that fills gaps in their existing knowledge and skills and is designed around skill sets rather than full qualifications (see Schueler 1999). When studying in the formal VET system they demonstrate a preference for shorter, less formal vocational education and training such as 'subject only' or mixed field programs (Anlezark 2002).

Qualifications can be the common proxy used for identifying existing knowledge and skills. However, many older workers do not possess post school qualifications. Australia has a policy of recognition of prior learning (RPL) regardless of how the knowledge and skills have been attained to reduce the need for unnecessary new training and to encourage lifelong learning (AQFC 2011). However, RPL exercises require the collection of evidence about what a person knows and can do. This outcome is hard to achieve for displaced workers who have already left their former workplace and so have no context in which to collect the required supporting evidence. Furthermore, the idea of having their knowledge and skills formally assessed through an RPL process can be threatening for older workers (Hargreaves 2006).

4 Displaced older workers undertaking formal retraining can require additional support.

As previously mentioned, the past training experiences of many older workers are workplace based. This training is practical and not formal, and is their preferred mode of learning (Billet et al. 2014). On the other hand, these same researchers found that when workers' aspire to change occupations and careers, they perceive structured courses, assessment and certification through formal education and training as their preferred strategies. However, re-entering the world of formalised training is daunting to many older workers. They can often doubt their own capacity to engage with formalised training. Many are unaccustomed to thinking of themselves as learners and question their ability to learn new skills, often due to negative experiences in the past with formal education (e.g. Selby Smith, Smith & Smith 2007).

In addition, workers' basic literacy skills can be a further barrier. Some, if not most displaced unskilled workers, have sufficient reading, writing and mathematics skills to get by in their daily lives and in their old jobs, but not in a new job. For instance, the 2006 Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey (ALLS) indicated that between 46% and 70% of Australian adults had 'poor' or 'very poor' skills across one or more of the five skill domains of prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy, problem-solving and health literacy (ABS 2006). Further, the survey found that the literacy and numeracy skills of the population taper off for people aged over 45 years. That is, a substantial group of older Australians do not have the literacy and numeracy skills required by industry, and are vulnerable to changes in the job market. Data from the 2011-12 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) showed similar trends (ABS 2013b). Importantly, it showed that older Australians have lower levels of literacy and numeracy than younger Australians. It is to be noted however that the previously released data in ALLS are not directly comparable with PIAAC data.

The PIAAC measures three critical information processing skills: literacy; numeracy; and problem solving in technology-rich environments (PSTRE). The literacy and numeracy domains were characterised by an increase in assessed scores from the youngest age group, plateauing in the late 20s, and then declining from the late 40s. For PSTRE, just over 13% (2.2 million) of Australians were assessed as very poor (and below Level 1) and 31% (5.3 million) were assessed as poor, at Level 1. An estimated 25% (4.2 million) of Australians aged 15 to 74 years were not classified, many of whom lacked the basic mouse skills required to undertake the computer-based test. The proportion of respondents who were not classified increased from around one in ten for the youngest age groups to almost 60% for the oldest age group, 65 to 74 years (OECD 2013).

Alternatively, there can be instances where older displaced workers already have the underpinning foundation skills for employability. However, they require additional specialised skill sets in order to overcome job loss. There are also cases where displaced older workers need to avail themselves of more transferable skills through retraining. These are usually highly skilled workers, but with primarily specialist knowledge and skills derived from on the job learning, that are not readily transferable in the wider labour market.

5 Displaced older workers face personal factors that influence their decisions on what new job to focus on, and often settle for a lower status job compared to their previous job.

A UK study that tracked workers' experiences of redundancy after the closure of a large employer (Dobbins, Plows & Lloyd-Williams 2014) found a wide variety of worker responses to redundancy. For example, many workers stayed in their local area but travelled long distances to their new jobs. Others chose self-employment or early retirement, allowing them to stay in their region. Those who stayed in local jobs wanted to maintain local ties and family commitments, taking whatever jobs the local labour market provided. In many instances, displaced workers took up less skilled and less well

paid jobs to stay local. Studies in Australia have also found that many retrenched workers experience a change in the nature of their work and a reduction in work time and/or salaries (Beer et al. 2006).

Overall, these studies highlight the limits of supply-side skills policies if they are disconnected from demand-side levers related to the structure of the economy and job opportunities. These and other researchers (Bryson 2010; Finegold 1999) propose a more coordinated demand and supply or 'skills ecosystems approach' in preference to a 'silo' focus on skills policy as the better response to industry restructuring.

6 While the nature and approach to skills transfer and reskilling and retraining are critical, displaced workers face a wide range of other factors that influence their success in seeking employment after a job loss.

As numerous reviews (e.g. Cameron and Denniss 2013; Rogers & O'Rourke 2004) highlight, many background, personal, social and financial factors influence the job outcomes of displaced workers. For example:

- Involuntary time out of the workforce is predominantly a negative experience. Loss of confidence, depression and anxiety are the most commonly reported experiences as a result of time out of work.
- Where the work role is central to their lives and identity, these individuals are more motivated to find work. Individuals with higher self-esteem, more perceived control and higher levels of optimism generally have higher levels of mental health and cope more effectively with a variety of stressful life events like job loss. Unemployed individuals who are able to organise their time, keep routines and feel their time has a greater sense of purpose report better wellbeing despite job loss.
- Displaced workers embedded in sound social networks and communities are more likely to have positive self-esteem, which in turn enhances a propensity to maintain a positive outlook during unemployment.
- Those having adequate household income, savings or severance pay following displacement are better adjusted.

Summary

As Billett (2011) remarks, the older worker faces many issues that are not associated with their employability and which are not wholly age-related. These issues include being in occupations that are age intolerant around access to education and training; having lower levels of education, achievement and job status that makes them more vulnerable to industry restructuring; and facing circumstances regarding their personal lives and health that can constrain their ability to learn, upskill and take on new available job opportunities. In addition, older workers can face discrimination and incorrect assumptions about their ability to re-skill. These negative assumptions impede their access to training while both employed and unemployed (Van Rooij 2012). However, there are a growing number of examples of good practice approaches around skills transfer, re-skilling and training of older and often lower-skilled displaced worker that are identified in the next chapter.

Assisting displaced older workers: lessons from prior interventions

Introduction

The following sections identify in more detail the numerous factors linked to more effective support for the displaced older worker. We include good practice examples used in a number of countries. Across nations, the strategies to assist displaced workers usually include a combination of training and retraining, career guidance, job search assistance, work experience, wage subsidies, public employment/public works programs and access to a range of support services. This important point, in turn, influences the nature of the working model that is propounded in this report.

In an International Labour Organisation project, Hansen (2011) reflects that Anglo-Saxon nations tend to employ more comprehensive approaches in response to economic downturns. In contrast, many European countries have used more standalone classroom training or a combination of classroom and workplace training. For instance, Tatsiramos (2010) found differences between European countries in the interventions that were used for displaced older workers, and attributed these differences to the level of access to employment insurance across countries being better in some countries (e.g. Germany, Spain) rather than in others (e.g. Italy, United Kingdom).

Also to be recognised is that 'the impacts of downsizing and closures during economic downturns are quantitatively and qualitatively different to those that take place during periods of growth and relatively low unemployment ... The scale and focus of interventions to manage and minimise the negative impacts of significant change and shocks must be acutely tuned to the economic and labour market conditions that prevail at the time' (Spoehr 2014 p.2).

We begin with a brief review of the effectiveness of training programs. These evaluations highlight the features of more effective forms of training in response to industry restructuring for re-skilling displaced workers. While focused predominantly upon training and retraining initiatives for displaced workers, this review also gives guidance about the actual or potential impact of interventions for older displaced workers.

Lessons from evaluations of effective training programs

Fares and Puerto (2009) offer a useful four part typology of training programs: in-classroom training programs; workplace training; the interaction of the previous two types that provide training in classroom and in the workplace; and more inclusive programs that provide in-classroom and workplace training, as well as supplementary services such as counselling, coaching, job search and placement assistance, and social skills training. In their review, they conclude that a combination of classroom and workplace training increases positive outcomes by up to 30%, compared to classroom training alone. However, when other interventions are included, the probability of a positive impact from training increases by 53%. On the other hand, others are more cautious and note that due to program and cultural differences, it can be very difficult to tease out the direct impact of such training and re-skilling initiatives (see Hansen 2012).

Possibly unsurprisingly, many evaluations focused more specifically upon the effectiveness of training for displaced workers, report mixed findings. In one review, Jones (2011) found that both

experimental and non-experimental research reveals low returns from training for displaced workers, concluding that the body of evidence does not show that training pays off for most displaced workers. However, Cavaco, Fougère and Pouget (2013) argue that the intensity and timing of the training is important. Rather, more intensive retraining programs, and programs that work with retrenched workers soon after being laid off, have more positive effects, as evidenced by their higher future wages and rates of employment.

Hansen (2012), reviewing the lessons learned about the overall effectiveness of job training and retraining programs in response to economic and industry downturns, identified the following key factors in promoting training effectiveness in these more disrupted contexts:

- Short-time training is a viable strategy to facilitate the transition of laid-off workers into new jobs. In particular, short-time training acts as a form of compensation for loss of income during periods of unemployment and keeps individuals attached to the labour market;
- Temporary arrangements for reducing regular working time provide access to job training that enhances the skills of workers during the time they are not working;
- Well-targeted training delivered in the workplace has a more immediate and long-term impact for displaced older workers and the long-term unemployed;
- Training needs to be relevant to current or anticipated labour market requirements. This includes providing advice about career development based on an understanding of what skills are transferable into to which industry, and what skills gaps exist (see also the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2013a);
- The impact of training and retraining programs requires time, especially when training is put in place quickly and with less planning to respond to economic and industry crises; and
- Public and private sectors working in partnership during industry downturns maximise the mobilisation of resources and networks that help displaced workers.

Looking at specific good practice case studies that have been conducted on displaced workers, many emerge from the manufacturing sector. In the successful retraining project for displaced workers provided by Ford in the early to mid-1980s (Fletcher, Gillman & Fox Gorte 1988), Ford gave notice of the closing six months in advance. This action provided Ford with six months to counsel every worker on their best options; to prepare training courses; to identify jobs for those who were job-ready; and to establish funding for worker support from federal and state governments, Ford itself, the union, and Ford's national training centre. By the project's end, almost 2 000 workers completed vocational training courses, and only 8% dropped out.

The project's success was linked to the major use of pre-training assessment to determine whether the trainees were skilled enough to commence a training course immediately. Furthermore, associated with the training was a foundation skills program, for those who needed to improve their reading and math competencies before entering into further training courses. Finally, the training component was individualised and customised. Each trainee was matched to the most appropriate course, and a wide range of courses were offered, many of which did not require a high level of basic education (Fletcher, Gillman & Fox Gorte 1988).

A recent report by the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (2014) adds to these messages about how to best assist older workers, especially those with lower skills. The report emphasises that, as with younger workers, early intervention is critical. Programs need to be holistic, long-term, individually tailored to the characteristics and needs of the person, and recognise upfront peoples'

strengths and transferable skills. A key aspect of these programs is access to wraparound services to resolve both skill barriers and issues around self-confidence and motivation, as many older workers with lower skills drop out of the labour force, becoming invisible to services that might have otherwise assisted them.

The lessons learned from such cases emphasise the need for continued monitoring and evaluation processes to occur concurrently with the training. Bednarzik and Szalanski (2012) argue that a key indicator for any ongoing evaluation should be job placement rates, with a training program's continued funding dependent in large part upon the success of its graduates in finding jobs. In addition, it is important to monitor the number of training programs displaced workers have undertaken. Doing so allows corrective action for those who have completed multiple training courses, but still remain unemployed. Furthermore, participation in multiple programs can affect the responsiveness to an intervention. Hatala (2007) argues that actions must be taken to resolve any reasons for a lack of success and for the displaced worker remaining unemployed.

Quality screening and up front assessment

A pivotal factor in the success of displaced workers' retraining programs is the use of a screening or assessment process prior to commencement of any training (Leigh 1990; Bednarzik & Szalanski 2012). This ensures that the program is right for the individual and that the individual is capable of handling and grasping the content of the training (Bednarzik & Szalanski 2012).

One good practice retraining program used in Pittsburgh in the late 1980s was the One Stop Shop program (see Figure 1). Originally intended only to serve displaced steelworkers, after its proven success, its scope was expanded to include workers displaced from any type of business (Bednarzik & Szalanski 2012). Importantly, this program entailed a mandatory initial consultation and evaluation to aid in the displaced workers' assignment to one of three month-long training modules. The three training module options were either:

- Job Search, Job Placement, for those with the desire and capability to immediately re-enter the labour force;
- Learning to Learn, for those needing to upgrade their skills and wanting to complete vocational education and training; or
- Entrepreneurial Avenues, for those who were undecided about their next step (Bednarzik & Szalanski 2012).

In the US, various programs take dislocated workers through a structured career exploration experience, interest assessments, one-on-one career counselling sessions, and periodic academic advising throughout their academic experiences (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013). A key component of these programs is the upfront in-depth advising, which enables advisers and dislocated workers to work together to troubleshoot any barriers early on. These programs first require that a student completes an online interest profile or attends a career exploration workshop. After this component, students are asked to meet one-on-one with a career specialist. This mandatory meeting helps dislocated workers make appropriate choices, which in turn can help them save time and money.

As a first port of call, the use of online and self-service tools is an effective way to equip displaced older workers with relevant information to help guide their choices, including the use of a 'road map' to assist displaced workers in their decision making (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013). Each road map is a graphic representation available for each program of study, and outlines how the educational

program relates to the labour market, with links provided throughout the map leading to further information. When older job seekers click on the types of occupations each program leads to, they are connected to actual job postings on a website. In addition to the road map, one such program in the US offers online career planning resources via free access to MyPlan, an online software program providing information about careers and tools to help individuals assess their interests, personalities, skills and values to help them sort out potential career paths. In addition, it provides information concerning the salaries for different occupations, as well as what background and preparation are necessary.

In line with these developments is the recently developed and piloted National Apprenticeships Program (NAP) in Australia, which matches the situations facing many older workers who have few formal qualifications, but considerable industry experience. The program uses a highly rigorous recruitment and selection stage involving information sessions, followed by online completion of a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process using workplace testimonials, references and various forms of evidence provided by applicants. Following this, applicants attend assessment centres to complete a range of tests regarding literacy and numeracy, ability, safety awareness and psychometric personality tests. If successful, the individual then enters into a training contract to complete an apprenticeship following a training plan (Australian Government 2013).

Foundation skills assessment and training

Training needs to acknowledge that some older workers, especially those who are less skilled, may have sufficient foundation skills to get by in their daily lives, but not in a new job (IBSA 2011; International Labour Organisation 2009). Therefore, foundation skills programs which focus on a combination of core skills (learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy), employability skills and digital literacy skills need to be developed in order to help older second chance workers who are re-skilling after job loss.

Looking at overseas examples that help older displaced workers, numerous programs have recognised the need for basic skill remediation in mathematics, offering an Emporium Math (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013). This curriculum is modularised and customised, allowing the participant to improve areas of math they struggle in, while avoiding those they have already mastered. This customised remediation program saves dislocated workers time and money. In another example of an innovative approach to providing basic skills, the Bridge to Healthcare program is a one-term, non-credit course targeted to career changers that integrates basic reading, writing and math up-skilling with an overview of high-demand health professions (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013).

In Australia, we have an over-arching National Foundation Skills Strategy for adult Australians which was introduced in November 2011 and officially launched on 28 September 2012. This strategy particularly supports those with lower skill levels and those in greatest need of assistance to improve their employment opportunities. For the National Strategy, the OECD Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) has been used as the measuring tool to determine how many Australians have satisfactory foundation skills (COAG Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment 2012).

Designing age inclusive training

As numerous studies reveal (Billett 2010; Meyers, Billett & Kelly 2010; Van Rooij 2012), older workers' employability, and in turn training to support their continued employability, is dependent upon a

number of factors. In particular, trainers and training organisations need to design and deliver training for displaced older workers that reflects the differences in the types of jobs undertaken, the levels of education and skills, the levels of support available in and outside displaced workers' workplaces, and their occupational capacities, personal traits and interests. For instance, in the Beer et al. (2006) evaluation of the Mitsubishi plant closures, training options provided were more appropriate for less skilled workers. As a result, the higher skilled workers were less satisfied with the training initiatives made available to them.

Program design for displaced older workers needs to incorporate a number of lessons learned from previous interventions. Mature aged workers are more likely to participate in training when it is modified to acknowledge their life and work experiences. Also, retraining programs have more impact when they provide older workers with new or updated skills that enable them to be competitive in a changing workplace (Meyers, Billett & Kelly 2010; Rogers & O'Rourke 2004). In a study of retrenched textile workers in Victoria, Keating (2010) found that TAFE level courses with strong experiential components helped workers to regain confidence as a learner, especially as they realised that their previous qualifications, skills and experience were useful in entering and maintaining a job in the industry.

The most effective programs closely match the type and intensity of training to the needs and circumstances of the workers (Greenstone & Looney 2011). Given the ageing workforce, in order for training programs to be effective, it is important that they are well designed for the older worker and include elements such as allowing ample time to learn, and providing good levels of support and feedback. The more successful programs ensure there is mastery at each stage, build on familiar elements, and use strategies in the training that limit memory requirements (Rogers & O'Rourke 2004; Wolf et al. 1995). It is also beneficial for these training programs to be highly experiential in targeting practical skills around job search, resume writing, networking and interviewing.

The well-known good practice project by the American Association of Community College, called the Plus 50 Initiative sought to improve how community colleges served workers over the age of 50. Three critical enabling factors of community college programs were identified as helping older students succeed: learner-centred programming (i.e. accelerated courses); providing learner support services; and providing accessible and accommodating materials and environments to ensure the physical comfort and accessibility of older students (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013). Importantly, learner-centred programming means that vocational education institutions need to understand the interests and appreciate the life situations of their older students, and need to tailor instructional delivery to reflect those needs.

As older students may have age-related or other disabilities, another enabler was providing accessible and accommodating materials and environments to ensure older students' physical comfort and accessibility. Educational institutions can do this in a range of ways, such as via the use of smart rooms with dual monitors, microphones, and speakers; larger fonts for course materials; and event and course locations close to public transportation or with transportation services provided to increase access for older students (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013).

Accelerated delivery

Displaced older workers face academic, financial and time-based challenges. Academically, many no longer possess the basic skills they need in order to participate in vocational education courses as an adult learner. At the same time, they face financial pressure to complete their education and training

as rapidly as possible, due to the need to get back to work and earn an income. Vocational education institutions need to design courses with these facts in mind. As displaced older workers are often trying to upgrade their skills in order to return to the job market quickly, this means that educational institutions should be responsive to this need by offering accelerated courses for training or retraining (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013). Linked in with these efforts should be the use of career exploration and assessment tools, information about the local labour market, and identifying courses that will help them prepare for their careers.

A novel approach to accelerated course delivery occurring in the US by some training providers is the provision of 'stackable credentials', whereby dislocated workers complete a certain amount of coursework to obtain a credential, which enables them to enter a career right away, while continuing to pursue their education by obtaining additional credentials that can be 'stacked' together to form a higher level accreditation (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013). This type of model is often referred to as the Career Pathways model, and involves breaking down or 'chunking' out small parts of the curriculum of an already approved credit degree program. Most of these pathways are in technical areas, as well as health care and business, and are typically from 12 to 24 credits. These models rely on groups of participants learning together, as well as coordinated services provided by the training college, the local workforce board and other community partners. The programs have multiple exit and entry points, allowing students to acquire skills, work and return for more training and certificates to help them progress up the career ladder. These programs are available in the automotive and health care industries (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013).

Again, many of these features are present in Australia's National Apprenticeships Program (NAP) and the Advanced Entry Adult Apprenticeship Program to upskill talented Australians. These programs were originally developed to address a shortfall in skilled workers within the minerals and energy sectors, but have now expanded to other industries. NAP's entry requirements differ to a traditional apprenticeship in that applicants need to provide evidence to substantiate sufficient background experience or skills to be able to achieve a minimum of 40% of trade requirements in a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessment. A forthcoming NCVET study of the piloted National Apprenticeships Program (NAP) suggests, however, that while the practice of shortened pathways is not adversely affecting the quality and outcomes of the apprenticeship system, full implementation of competency based rather than a time based progression for adult apprentices is constrained. Key barriers are the inconsistent treatment of RPL, with evidence that 16% of apprenticeship graduates aged 25 years and over with relevant prior skills and experience did not have their training shortened as RPL assessment was not offered. Also, there is a lack of understanding about the role and purpose of skill sets and cultural barriers to alternative pathways for completion (Hargreaves & Blomberg forthcoming).

Skill sets are an emerging intermediate product of the formal VET system in Australia that co-exist with qualifications and units of competency. Skill sets prepare individuals to perform a specific job function, whereas qualifications prepare individuals for a broad range of job functions of an occupation. Skill sets are aimed at providing specific skills to enable a job function to be performed and in a way that could best be defined as 'just enough' and 'just-in-time'. Skill sets can lead to or form the basis of full qualifications and be used as 'skill top ups' for the already qualified, allowing individuals to transfer between job roles and even occupations. Skill set training has the potential to realise efficiencies in skills development and maximise productivity. However, fuelled by a lack of an evidence base, there remain different views regarding which skills sets, for what purposes, and for what individuals VET policy should cover. There are only three research studies on skill sets to date in Australia. All suggest that skill sets have a real role to play, including filling gaps in skills held by older workers seeking a new job. However, not all of the applications for skill sets are supported by current

Australian VET policy on skill sets. There is a need for more positive and innovative thinking about skill sets (see Bowman 2013).

Finally, Smith, Smith and Selby Smith (2010) remind us that in Australia and elsewhere (e.g. UK) more qualification-based training is now being delivered in workplaces as nationally recognised training, including traineeships. This development towards nationally recognised training that includes nationally agreed competencies, competency-based assessment and RPL should benefit older and less skilled workers. In particular, nationally recognised training has opened up new formal training opportunities for under-qualified mature-aged workers and provides an important vehicle for redressing the imbalance of training and education opportunities in the workforce.

Other key forms of assistance

Effective career planning and advice

According to Owen and Fitch's (2003) research, the first priority of a career counsellor should be to talk with displaced workers about their occupational concerns. Their aim is to bridge the gap between personal expectations and economic realities. It is not the counsellor's responsibility to provide displaced workers with a single, exact occupational choice. Rather, the counsellor should provide the displaced worker with a range of realistic career options given the economic conditions of the area in which the displaced worker lives, or is interested in living in. It is important to note that displaced workers experience employment difficulties not because they are unskilled, but because their skills may no longer be relevant for the available jobs in their area.

A primary purpose of retraining older displaced workers should be to retool their skills in order to facilitate their reemployment and to reduce the earnings loss they face when changing professions (Greenstone & Looney 2011). Access to appropriate career advice is a critical part of the mix in determining what skills and retraining is required. For instance, displaced older workers who use the opportunity during their unemployment to engage in meaningful and focused career exploration and planning, report being in more satisfying employment in the longer term than other older workers (Zikic & Klehe 2006).

As noted earlier, it is an error to assume that older workers are a single, homogenous group with the same needs and desires. Rather, at least three groups are identified among mature job seekers. Firstly, there are those who seek to work for primarily financial and family reasons (satisficers); secondly, there is the group who seek personal satisfaction and learning opportunities from employment (free agents); and thirdly, there are those who seek employment for a broad range of reasons (maximisers; Nakai et al. 2011). It is very likely that these differences exist among displaced older workers, although the assumption might be that satisficers dominate the cohort.

Indeed, the International Labour Organisation's (2013) review of Australia's response to displaced workers embarking on self-employment shows that there is a need for more information and advice, continued mentoring and financial counselling to this group of individuals. In addition, mechanisms should be developed to help them establish a good work-life balance, as self-employed people typically tend to work longer hours than employed workers in order to achieve a reasonable income (International Labour Organisation 2013).

Van Loo (2011) similarly argues that for older workers, the traditional focus around assistance with occupational and education and training choices needs to supplement a more holistic approach where career guidance is aimed at career success, facilitating job mobility and continuous skills updating,

whilst also still facilitating work-life balance. A feature of this approach is the move from an individualistic counselling approach to an employment services approach. In this model there is a more active linking of the individual to the changing characteristics of the work environment and industry they are in.

One example of an Australian approach that has successfully delivered training to older job seekers is the METEOR project (Matching Employees and Training to Employers for Ongoing Recruitment and Retention; Brooke et al. 2013). This project aims to address the workforce demographic challenges faced by older workers by reintegrating them into work in areas of skills shortages that match labour supply needs. Adopting the Finnish concept of workability, project promotes a balance between the individual's health, skills and experience on the one hand, with the demands of the business on the other. It is important that in these approaches, counselling and guidance for older workers seeking employment needs to better appreciate their needs around health, work-life balance, access to social support and roles in family support.

Effective partnering

Training needs to be provided where there is potential employment relating to that training. However, a Council on the Ageing project (COTA 2004) found that a connection between the two was not always established. The extent to which training in locations undergoing structural adjustment was keeping pace with the needs of the local workforce was not clear. It seemed that in a number of locations there was relatively poor synchronisation between the training available (if any) and the new job opportunities. This is an issue of considerable importance. It pinpoints the need for well-developed local partnerships, such as between TAFE institutes and campuses, and local industry groups so that joint planning activities are undertaken in regard to job opportunities.

Partnerships between local businesses, non-government organisations, social enterprises and specialist service providers are seen to achieve more effective outcomes for displaced older workers. Improved outcomes emerge around the areas of improved job to person matching, providing supported employment, and identifying volunteer and work placement opportunities as a bridge to employment (Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency 2013b). Unfortunately, the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency (2013b) also conclude that at the moment there are few programs that specifically target the needs of this vulnerable group.

It is clearly important that participants in training programs receive practical, marketable skills necessary for available jobs. Yet it is not always easy for prospective trainees or even traditional educators to identify which skills are important. One approach in order to overcome this problem is to draw on employers and industry partners who know best what skills their employees need, in order to help design and direct the training (Greenstone & Looney 2011). The most successful training programs are provided by vocational education institutions who partner with employers and industry to ensure their participants receive training in skills that are in demand, and undertake courses in fields of study that are relevant to the jobs available in the market (Greenstone & Looney 2011). Without this type of collaboration between training providers, employers and industry, newly trained or retrained workers may find themselves without the skills needed by industry or those skills required for long-lasting labour market success. In their review of the Mitsubishi closures in Australia, Beer and his colleagues (2006) concluded that much better liaison could have occurred between TAFE, the universities and other relevant education providers in order to develop appropriate skills and training packages for the workers.

Several successful American programs developed using partnering include the Sectoral Employment Impact Study, Career Academies, and Year Up. In these programs, it was employers who directed the focus of training. A common element of these programs was a focus on technical and vocational skills that were immediately translatable into higher wages and job opportunities in the marketplace. These partnerships have all paid off for workers in subsequent years of employment (Greenstone & Looney 2011).

Another innovative model of partnering is the US Lorain County Community College model, which involves the co-location of a satellite America's Job Centre on the college's campus, operated by college staff (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013). The college has frequent orientation sessions to introduce prospective students to the college and shows them the courses on offer. By having the Job Centre on campus, displaced workers looking for a job would go to the America's Job Centre for assistance, but then 'being in the right place at the right time' would stay to undertake an orientation of the college and see what courses were on offer. Indeed, during the height of the Global Financial Crisis, 40 to 50 people attended each orientation session, many of them displaced workers. Under this co-location model, college staff and the workforce system work hand-in-hand, striving to offer a consistent, integrated product in terms of career exploration, guidance, resume assistance, interviewing skills and job search techniques. They maintain one website where individuals register for a number of joint workshops and services. Not all displaced workers who visit the on-campus America's Job Centre are ultimately served there, but having the satellite America's Job Centre on campus provides visibility for the offerings of the community college (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013).

Another US model of a successful partnership between educational institutions and the public workforce system involves educational institutions reaching out directly to displaced workers. They do this by participating in the rapid response activities already being conducted by the public workforce system. Rapid response is designed to assist workers affected by a layoff or a plant closing in getting quickly connected to public workforce assistance benefits and services such as unemployment insurance, career counselling and job search (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013). Through these activities and services, staffs from educational institutions are able to connect with groups of displaced workers, in many cases even before their layoffs occur, and provide them with information regarding enrolment and different program options that might be especially appealing to these displaced workers.

In the US, partnering with community-based organisations such as churches, clubs, support groups and workers' unions is often used, and is considered critical to success. The research shows that often it is these groups that refer and encourage displaced older workers to enrol with vocational education institutions (Van Noy, Heidkamp & Manz 2013).

In summary, an International Labour Organisation publication (Hansen 2009) puts skills transfer and retraining options into a broader framework. It suggests five practical steps communities can take to prevent or minimise worker displacements:

- 1 Educate and encourage employers in the community to adopt innovative employment security strategies and use socially responsible restructuring to help them remain competitive in order to preserve and create jobs.
- 2 Develop an early warning network and implement a proactive business retention/layoff aversion strategy in the community to identify and assist troubled enterprises. This approach can avert layoffs and lessen the impacts of displacement on workers and the community.

- 3 Create a rapid response dislocated worker adjustment capacity at the community level to provide leadership and support if workers are displaced.
- 4 Use the rapid response capacity to help employers and worker representatives implement comprehensive worker assistance programs at the plant and community level to alleviate or minimise the negative consequences of displacement on workers and their families.
- 5 Initiate community economic assessment and planning efforts to help strengthen and expand the economic base and provide jobs for the dislocated workers.

Effective employment services

In Leigh's (1990) landmark study on displaced workers, where he synthesised findings from an examination of labour market policies in Sweden, Germany, Japan, Great Britain and Australia, he concluded that job search assistance was the most cost-effective program for displaced workers. Leigh's results demonstrated that job search assistance is relatively cheap and should be made freely available to those for whom their case managers have recommended it. In the successful Pittsburgh One Stop Shop Retraining Program, for example, displaced workers with the desire and capability to immediately re-enter the labour force were assigned to complete a Job Search, Job Placement training module, taught by former Personnel Directors with experience in the hiring process. This was complemented by Job Developers who had contacts and credibility in the private sector. For this service to work well, it must provide up-to-date information on both the pool of job seekers and the positions available (Bednarzik & Szalanski 2012).

To be effective, employment services must go beyond merely offering job seeking advice and placement. There is a need to shift the onus onto the displaced worker to be responsible and accountable for building their own professional network of contacts. As Hatala's (2007) study points out, participants who became re-employed demonstrated stronger networks than those who did not find employment. As such, traditional job search programs must go beyond simply introducing networking skills and techniques that assist participants in making contacts. Rather they need to introduce ways to monitor the number of contacts they make, the value of each contact, and whether new contacts are in a position to provide job-related information. By further determining the value of a social network, job search facilitators can work with displaced workers to effectively utilise their network of contacts to increase their probability of employment (Hatala 2007). Regardless of the type of training program, in order to succeed it is clear that the aid provided must be well targeted, offer services tailored to local circumstances, be linked to the local job market and be easily accessible to those in need (Bednarzik & Szalanski 2012).

Government policy and initiatives

Research has demonstrated that there is merit in government policy initiatives whereby the government pays for, or subsidises, a portion of the tuition costs of displaced workers' retraining at a community college (Bednarzik & Szalanski 2012). For instance, in the Pittsburgh One Stop Shop Retraining Program, the Department of Federal Programs contracted with a number of proprietary and vocational schools, paying the tuition and fees for each displaced worker referred to the school. In addition, there were government-funded programs designed in conjunction with local companies for specific jobs, such as those in robotics and fibre optics (Bednarzik & Szalanski 2012). Further, a US Brookings Institute Policy Brief suggests that in order to enhance retraining at community colleges for displaced workers, the government should enable more funding to be available to increase the use of

Pell Grants and other Federal aid. In addition, it should build more incentives into the system for colleges to retrain displaced workers (Brookings Institute 2010).

Turning to policy initiatives in Australia, the International Labour Organisation (2013) recommends that Australia should develop an education and skills forum or task force. Its focus needs to be specifically on the needs of displaced workers and should be linked to identified skills needs and shortages in the region. It further states that it is essential for adequate funds to be committed to training and re-skilling displaced workers. The Australian Productivity Commission has also suggested that governments should ensure appropriate resourcing of the delivery of generally available welfare, training and employment services for all clients in regions placed under pressure by retrenchments (Australian Productivity Commission 2014 p.2). In this case, the Productivity Commission was investigating automotive manufacturing retrenchments and added that providing adjustment assistance to retrenched automotive manufacturing employees at a level that exceeds the assistance generally available to other job seekers raises efficiency and equity issues.

Towards a working model

Knee-jerk and politically expedient responses are not strategic approaches to the restructure of any industry. Rather, governments and industry do best when they try to adopt a more proactive and strategic position. With increased competition, globalisation and change, effective planning and delivery around continuous skilling and reskilling must be provided to all workers. In addition to this, however, a special focus must be given to those who are most vulnerable and in the most vulnerable industries. As such, the task is to improve the employment opportunities of those older and less skilled workers, and this is where skills transfer and re-skilling and training emerge as key policy strategies. Australia is not alone in this task. The US, Canada and many European countries also face major challenges around responding to the displacement of older, less skilled workers due to major industry restructuring in their countries.

Based on an examination of the retraining strategies used to support displaced workers from plant closures at such organisations as Mitsubishi, Bridgestone and BlueScope, the Department of Industry (2014) has provided a two stage model for retraining. The first stage focuses on the need for preparation prior to retraining, including planning through career advice and placement support; the mapping of existing skills and identification of training needs; recognition of prior learning; advice about what jobs are in demand beyond vacancy lists; and high quality advice about employment and training opportunities. In stage two of the retraining, informal linkages are seen to be as important as formal institutional arrangements. At this stage there is the use of local coordinators, RPL to promote outcomes around the successful transition to a new job, and training in skills for jobs in demand in order to increase employability (see also Van Rooij 2012 for similar actions).

In Figure 1, based on the findings of our review of the literature we provide a three stage working model to assist older displaced workers. The model is comprised of Stage 1: Preparation for retraining; Stage 2: Retraining; and Stage 3: Post retraining. Underpinning the model are the six guidelines or underpinning principles relevant to the displaced older worker, as reported earlier in this review.

Figure1 Working model and underpinning principles to assist displaced older workers

Stage 1 – Preparation for retraining: Advice, screening, partnerships and analysis of labour markets

- Assess the skills of potentially displaced workers while they are still in work and deliver well-targeted training in the workplace.
 - Give access to career exploration and career assessment tools, information about the local labour market and begin to identify courses that help prepare displaced workers for new careers.
 - Provide advice on mapping of skills, recognition of prior learning and identify training needs and job prospects to help plan the transition to new jobs.
 - Screen and assess prior to training to ensure the training program is right for the displaced worker and he/she is capable of handling the content of the training.
 - Encourage educational and training institutions to provide a rapid response that assists displaced workers by connecting them to unemployment benefits, career counselling, job search and guidance about what jobs are in demand beyond vacancy lists.
 - Provide assistance to displaced workers according to need, in particular to older less skilled workers, those without formally recognised qualifications and those with low language, literacy and numeracy skills.
 - Create partnerships between local businesses, non-government organisations, social enterprises and specialist service providers to improve job-person matching.
 - Provide training in skills that are in demand, in courses relevant to available jobs and in skills/courses that promote long-lasting success in the labour market.
 - Consider short-time training that can compensate for the loss of income while aiming to keep individuals attached to the labour market.
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Stage 2 - Retraining: Design and delivery of age-inclusive training

- Modify training to acknowledge older displaced workers' life and work experiences.
- Involve them in the design and development of their own instruction.
- Allow them to learn among their own age group, at their own pace, and with flexible instruction.
- Motivate them through learning for empowerment and self-actualisation versus motivations around career advancement that apply more to younger workers.
- Instruction should be tailored to older workers' needs and motivation, and the specificity of the tasks to be learned.
- Design training to include (a) a targeted approach, (b) training to renew critical skills, (c) new knowledge opportunities/challenges and (d) integrate learning into recruitment strategies.
- Promote the learning of skills sets for those not seeking full qualifications.
- Design training to provide ample time to learn, good levels of support and feedback, and use training in groups to promote learning together and support.
- Use highly experiential approaches that target practical skills around job search, resume writing, networking and interviewing.
- Acknowledge that the full impact of retraining programs requires time, especially when training is put in place quickly and with less planning to respond to economic and industry crises.
- Deliver foundation skills training using modularised and customised approaches that save older displaced workers' time and money.
- Apply Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to promote accelerated courses that save older displaced workers' time and money.

Stage 3 – Post training support: Success stories, with continued monitoring and evaluation

- Promote organisational success stories that illustrate successful outcomes.
- Continue to provide career advice and training to older displaced workers in order to minimise the likelihood of long-term unemployment.
- Introduce ways to monitor the number of contacts they make, the value of each contact, and whether new contacts are in a position to provide job-related information.
- Support older displaced workers and their families to relocate to areas and industries where job opportunities exist.
- Measure success in terms of how many older displaced workers get a new job and what they regard as a 'good job'.

Six underpinning principles

- Displaced older workers generally will be motivated and focused on finding a new job as soon as possible. But they can lack knowledge of the wider labour market and can slip into unemployment if not assisted with their job search.
 - Displaced older workers are discriminating about what new learning they will undertake. They will not tolerate inappropriate or seemingly irrelevant content in retraining programs.
 - Displaced older workers want their existing knowledge and skills taken into account in determining what re-skilling and training they will undertake. This situation is exacerbated where they do not have formal qualifications or have already left employment.
 - Displaced older workers undertaking formal retraining can require additional support.
 - Displaced older workers face personal factors that influence their decisions on what new job to focus on and often settle for a lower status job compared to their previous job.
 - While the nature and approach to skills transfer and re-skilling and retraining are critical, displaced workers face a wide range of other factors that influence their success in seeking employment after a job loss.
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This working model will be tested in the next field work stage of the research project and through a series of case studies.

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