

Recruiters are finding older is wiser

Mature-age workers are back in demand as the skills shortage returns to haunt many sectors, writes **Sam McKeith**.

Firms are hiring older staff and introducing strategies to keep them on the payroll as the labour market tightens and companies come to terms with the nation's ageing population.

Recruiters say firms are turning to mature-age workers as it becomes harder to source talent, especially in professional, manufacturing and administrative roles.

"Skill shortages never went away, we didn't all of a sudden grow more people, they're hitting with a vengeance and firms are now finding that mature workers can often fill that gap," says Quay Appointments chief executive Winsome Bernard.

"We've just recruited a mature person to our switchboard," she says. "The hours suit her and she can job-share with a student. It's working very well for us and for many of our clients."

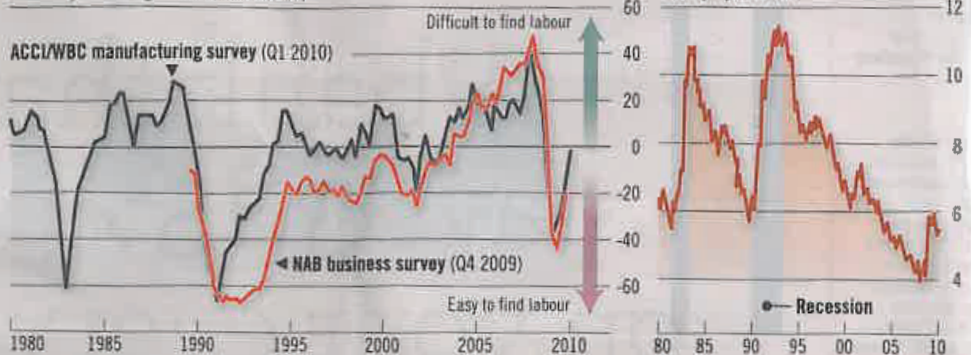
The economy's rebound in recent months has underpinned the jobs market, with 30,100 extra full-time jobs created last month. Part-time employment decreased by 10,600, leaving the unemployment rate steady at 5.3 per cent. There have been 215,000 jobs created since September, according to official data.

The Seek employment index that measures online job ads on the site - released on Friday - firmed last month, nudging 0.3 per cent higher. The number of job-seekers using the site reached a record 4.2 million.

An Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry survey of 771 companies found problems obtaining suitable staff was a top 10 constraint on investment for the first time since late 2008.

Getting Tighter

Difficulty in finding labour (net balance)



SOURCE: HNS

Australia's mature-aged participation rate of 58.9 per cent in 2008 is the 13th highest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, but lower than the United States, the

United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada.

By 2050, more than 8 million Australians will be aged 65 and over, up from 3 million now, according to the Rudd government's latest *Intergenerational Report*.

educate your clients that with an older worker, you're getting someone who's more reliable, who's not going to call in sick, and not going to turn up to work hungover on Monday after going out Sunday night."

Ross Julia Ross marketing manager Caroline Vickers-Willis says the stronger job market is forcing firms to "go lateral" when increasing head count.

"Employers underutilise older workers, people with disabilities, indigenous Australians and women," Vickers-Willis says.

"If an employer's default position is, 'We want a white male of a certain age', the workers are just not out there."

Quay Appointment's Bernard says job sharing and temporary work contracts are ensuring opportunities are created to keep mature employees on the payroll.