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To whom it may concern,

Re: Submission to the Vocational Education and Training Workforce Study

In the latter half of 2009 I carried out a minor thesis titled 'Catering for an ageing workforce: The management of older teachers in TAFE institutions'. This being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Work and Learning) at Monash University. I have included in this letter details of my study, in the hope that my findings will assist in your inquiry.

The qualitative study investigated if and how Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions were catering to the requirements of older teachers within their business departments. The research was conducted with head teachers, younger teachers (under 55 years of age) and older teachers (55 years of age and over) in semi-structured in-depth interviews across three metropolitan TAFE institutions. The areas researched included; background and motivation to work of older teachers; issues and challenges faced by older teachers; perspective of older teachers on current management approaches and practices; issues and challenges faced by head teachers when dealing with older teachers; perspective of head teachers regarding the management of older teachers; possible deficiencies in older workers and the management of them; and policies and procedures put in place to address the issues pertinent to the management of older workers.

Specifically this study sought to address the following research questions:

1. What are the issues and challenges faced by older teachers compared to younger teachers?
2. What are the issues and challenges faced by head teachers in regard to managing older workers?
3. What is the perspective of older teachers on current approaches and practices?
4. What is the perspective of younger teachers on current approaches and practices?
5. What are the perspectives of head teachers regarding the management of older teachers?
6. Are there deficiencies in older teachers and the management of them?
7. What policies and practices can be put in place to retain older workers and address any deficiencies older workers may have?

The study has revealed a number of major findings in direct relation to the research questions. Firstly, all teachers faced challenges of auditing requirements that resulted in excessive administrivia and a need to demonstrate competency to teach. Such aspects were viewed as negative by teachers in both categories of older and younger, so clearly age was not a factor in respect to such issues. However, there were some differences noted between older and younger teachers. In comparison to their younger counterparts, older teachers are more likely to be motivated to work due to financial necessity, place higher importance on colleague interaction, be less critical of management due to an 'I don't care as I am retiring soon' type attitude, less likely to want to adapt to change and unwilling to be involved in training and mentoring to share knowledge and gain knowledge.

Secondly, head teachers face a variety of issues and challenges when dealing with older workers such as lack of flexibility in adapting to change and an inability to deliver their teaching to fit the needs and requirements of Generation Y students. This finding raises another issue of whether older teachers can successfully cater to Generation Y students. Such a dilemma would need to be addressed in a future research study. Long periods of absence was also raised by head teachers as a challenge when dealing with older workers. In terms of positive issues of dealing with older workers, head teachers did agree that wisdom and high level work and life experience were prominent factors.

Thirdly, there are no policies and practices put in place currently within TAFE institutions to directly address their ageing teaching workforce and their possible deficiencies. It appears that the policies and procedures suggested in the literature (with the exception of intergenerational workgrouping that could be viewed as social interaction that older teachers may favour) such as ergonomics, job sharing and flexible job options may not be seen as favourable by older teachers and could possibly be a waste of resources. This then raises the issue of further research being carried out into the area of how to motivate older teachers to improve workplace performance, as what is currently occurring is not likely to be successful.

Fourthly, head teachers' perspectives regarding the management of older teachers are mixed. Some head teachers believed all needs vary due to the heterogenous nature of workers yet some also viewed older teachers having different characteristics and needs to younger teachers. Research on this point has proved inconclusive at this stage.

Lastly, it appears strategies in place currently as a 'one size fits all' for all workers or lack of strategies specifically for older teachers, are resulting in teachers 'waiting out their time' and not willing to improve workplace performance.

In summary the results of this study indicate some major critical implications. It appears that older workers are motivated to work out of financial need so therefore organisations do not need to be concerned with retaining them with overt inducements. The findings of this study strongly imply that older workers need to be considered as different to younger workers when catering to

their workplace characteristics and needs. This research also implies that currently as older workers needs are not being specifically catered for or considered, that in fact transformational leadership is not occurring within TAFE institutions. It must be noted that transformational leadership has been identified as a method to assist ensure long term survival of TAFE institutions.

It is my wish that the above findings may assist in addressing the critical issue of the ageing workforce in the Vocational Education and Training sector.

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Bedson