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Policy contexts for a changing world: Regulatory context in Australia and innovations at the workplace level

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Policy Dialogue on Mature Workers in Organisations: Emerging Policy Issues for a Productive Future

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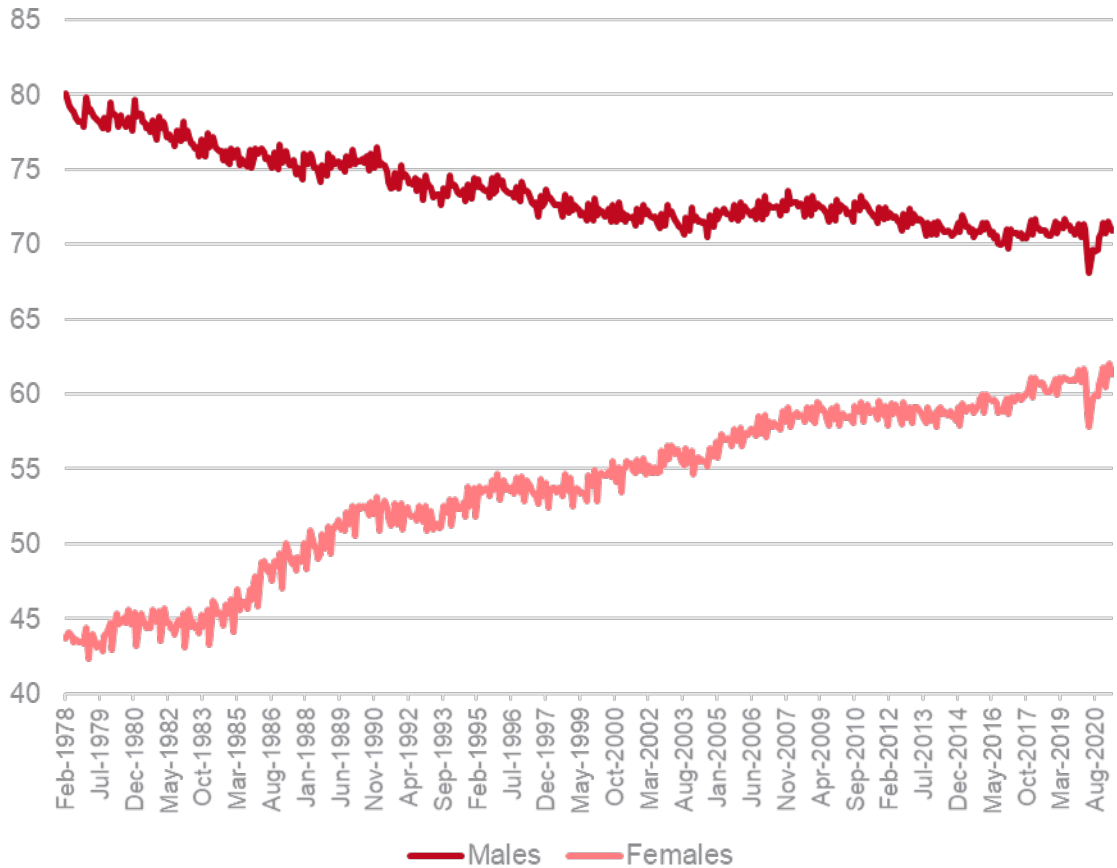
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The Policy Framework for Australian Employers

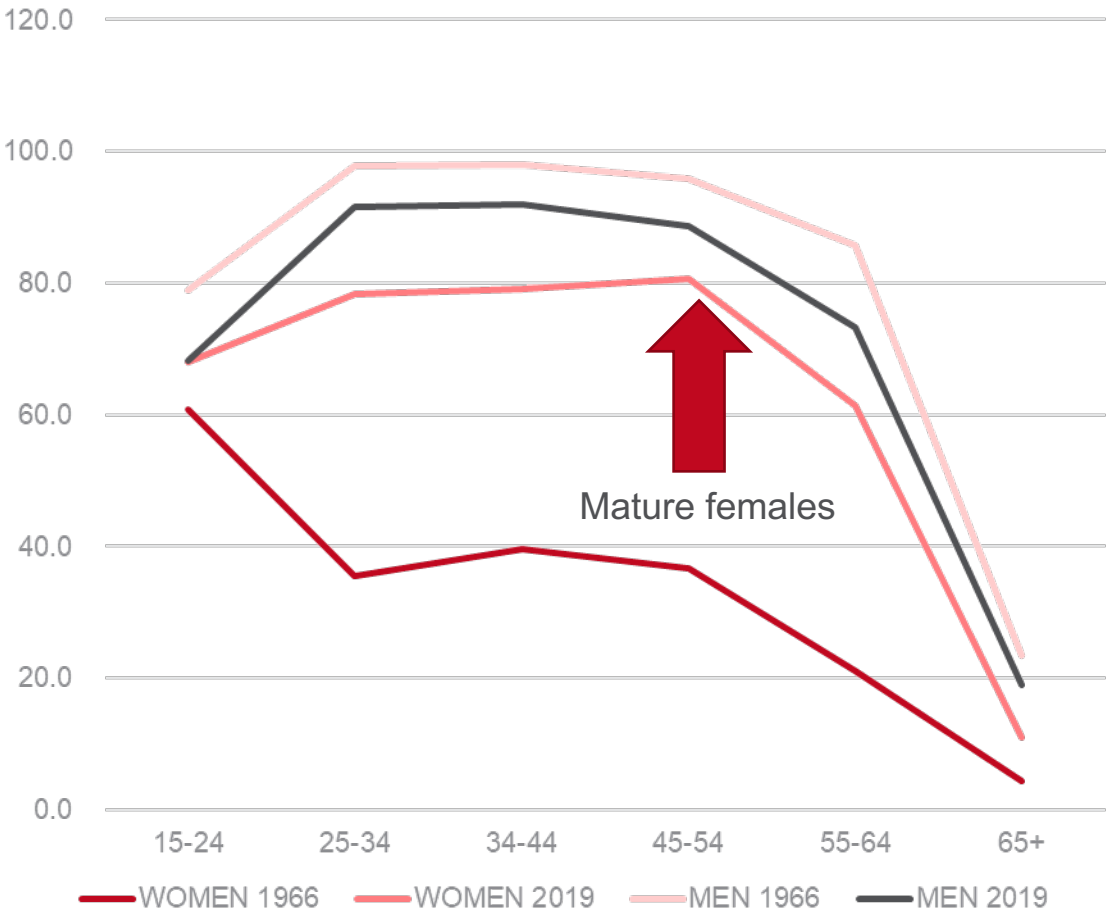


Context: Australian labour force changes

Male and Female Labour Force Participation Rates
(Feb-1978 to Apr-2021)



Labour Force Participation (by cohort, by sex)



Public policies

Australian public policies focusing on increasing or prolonging the workforce participation of mature workers:

Examples

- Raising the pension age
- Increasing opportunities for drawing retirement incomes while still working
- Right to request flexible working arrangements for workers aged 55 and over
- Incentives for employers to employ older workers

Our Research

Have employers responded to these wider public policy changes by adjusting and/or introducing their own policies aimed at their mature workforce?

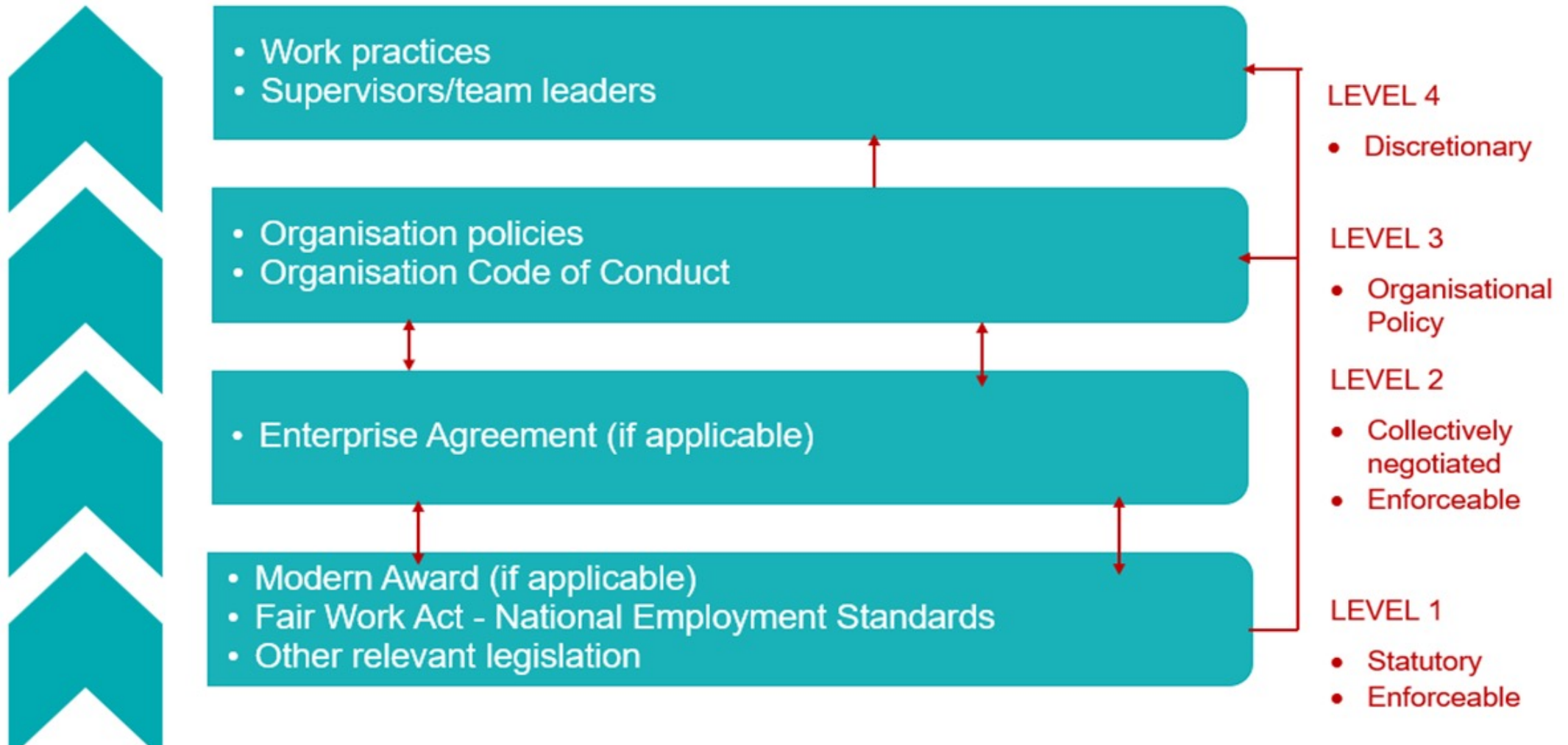


Key legislation providing protections & entitlements to mature workers

- Anti-Discrimination legislation
- Fair Work Act:
 - Workplace Bullying
 - Termination
 - Requests for Flexible Working Arrangements
 - Individual Flexibility Arrangements (IFAs)
 - Taking leave from work
- Work Health and Safety
- Return to Work



How do employers create their policies for mature workers?



Policy areas relevant to Australian mature workers-

7 categories that influence the working lives of mature workers (Eppler-Hattab et al 2020)

Theme	POLICY AREA
1. Flexibility—flexible working and work–life balance practices	Flexibility
	Leave
	Hours of Work
2. Training and Learning —development and regeneration opportunities	Educational Assistance
	Knowledge & skills exchange across age groups (eg mentoring)
	Staff Training and Development
3. Job Design and Redesign – workplace adjustments and jobs for older workers	Incentive and Bonus
	Job Design
	Performance Management & Appraisal
	Attendance and Absenteeism
4. Recognition and inclusion—a positive environment of respecting older workers	Mature Workers
	Code of Conduct
	Diversity
5. Equality and Fairness— equal opportunities in recruitment and internal mobility	Internal Mobility (including Relocation)
	Medical Examination
	Anti-Discrimination and EEO
	Recruitment
6. Health and wellbeing—promotion and protection of health and wellbeing in the workplace	Occupational Health & Safety
	Grievance Resolution
	Rehabilitation
	Workplace Harassment & Bullying
	Wellness
7. Retirement and Redeployment—pre- and post-retirement flexible arrangements	Termination
	Retirement

CASE STUDY Group 1: Policy framework in local government organisations

- Indoor/outdoor workers
- Waged/salaried workers
- Blue/white collar workers

Council 1 – Medium, rural

Council 2 – Large, metropolitan

Council 3 – Large, metropolitan

Council 4 – Large, metropolitan

Council 5 – Medium-large,
metropolitan

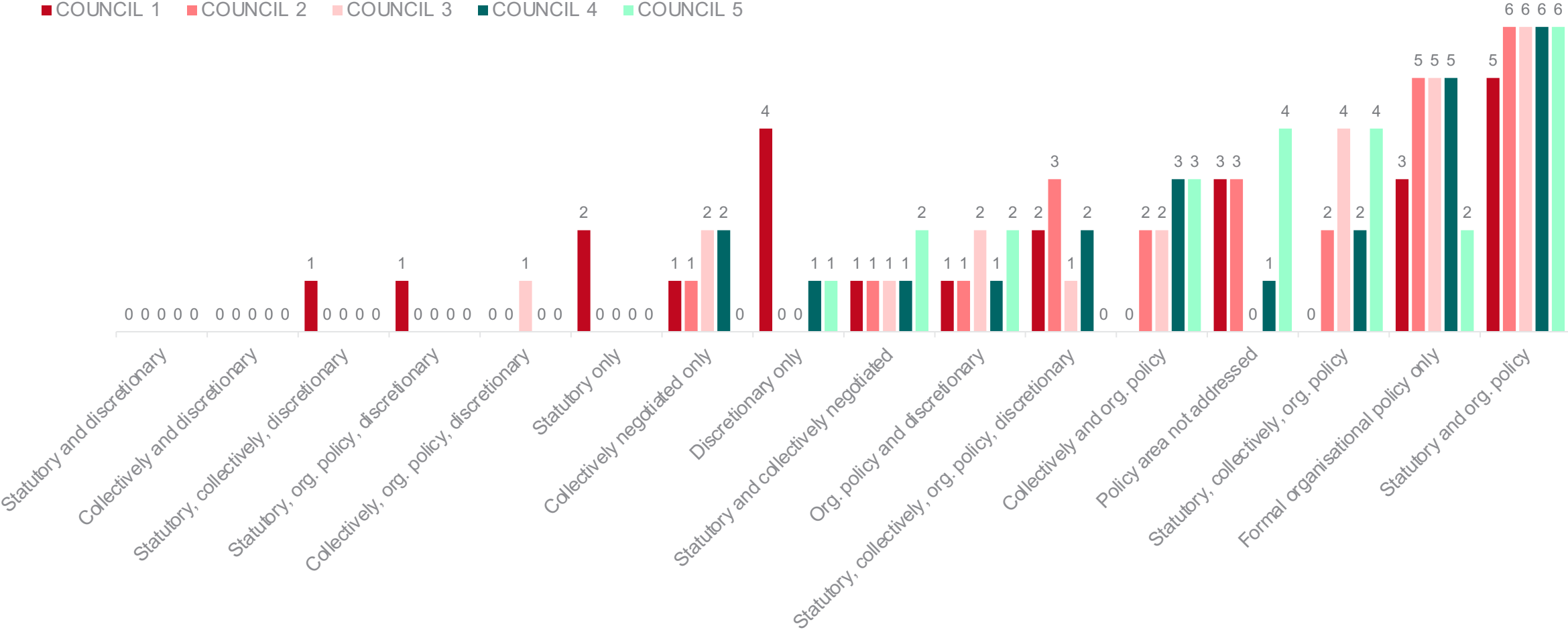


Photo by [James Day](#) on [Unsplash](#)

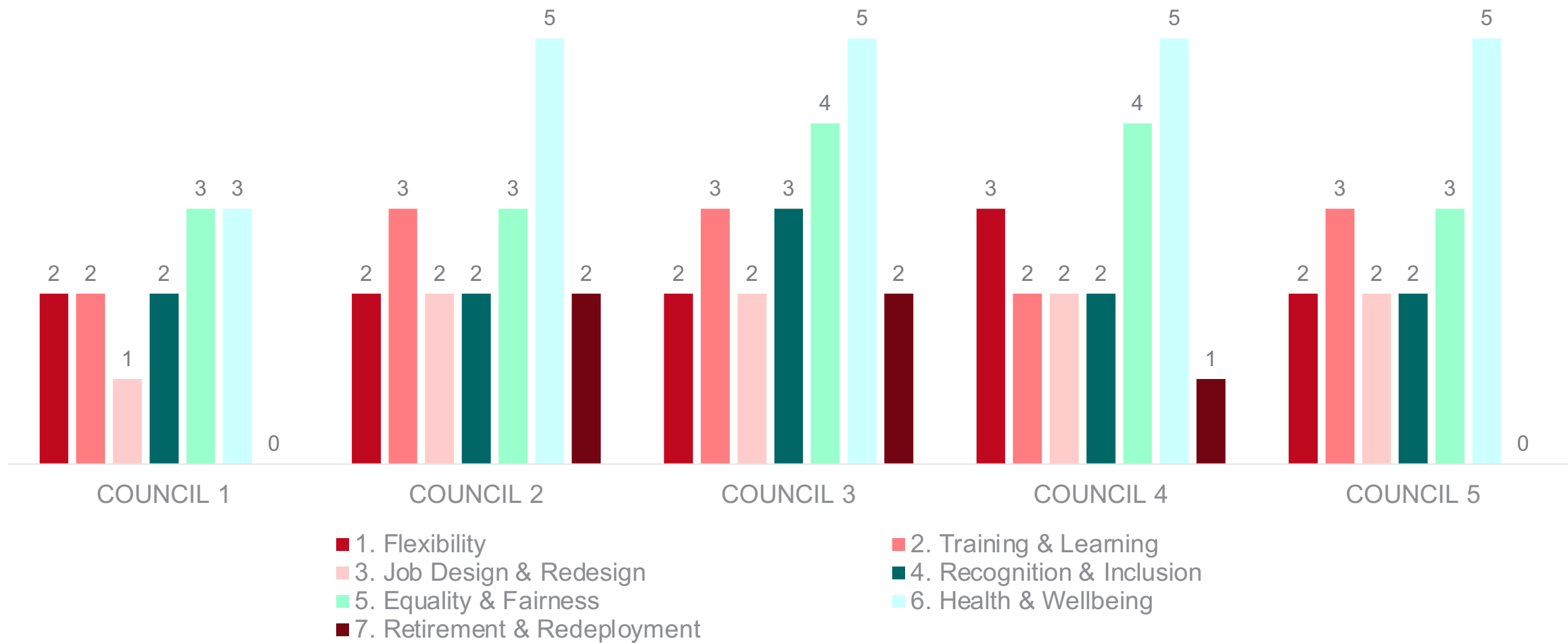
Policy Framework



Most common type of policy provision

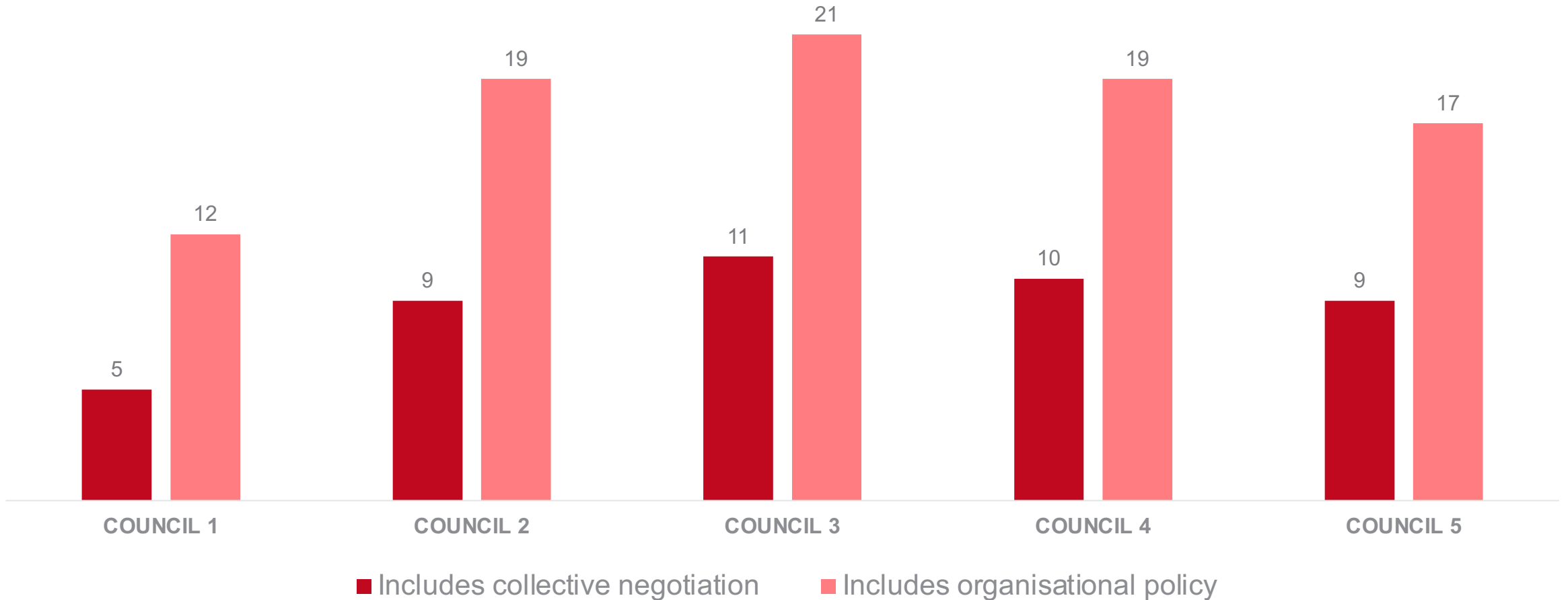


Policy areas that include a formal organisational policy



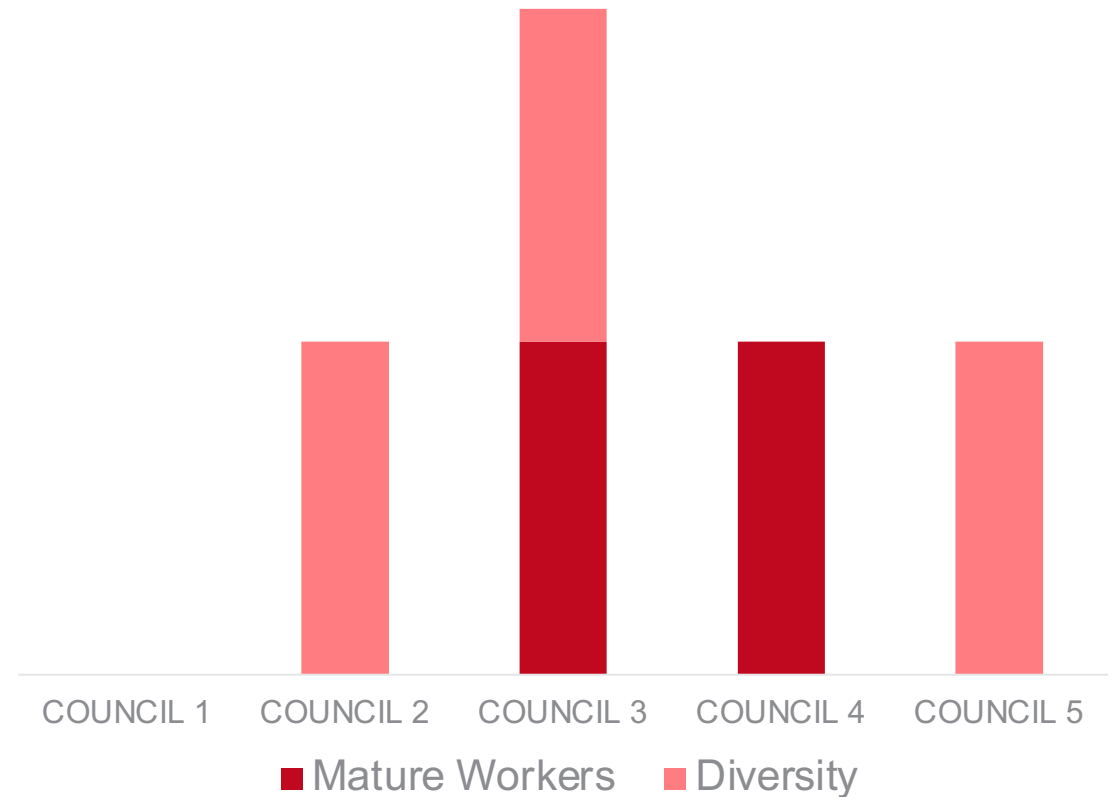
Organisational policy vs collective negotiation

Collective bargaining is not producing results aimed at mature workers.



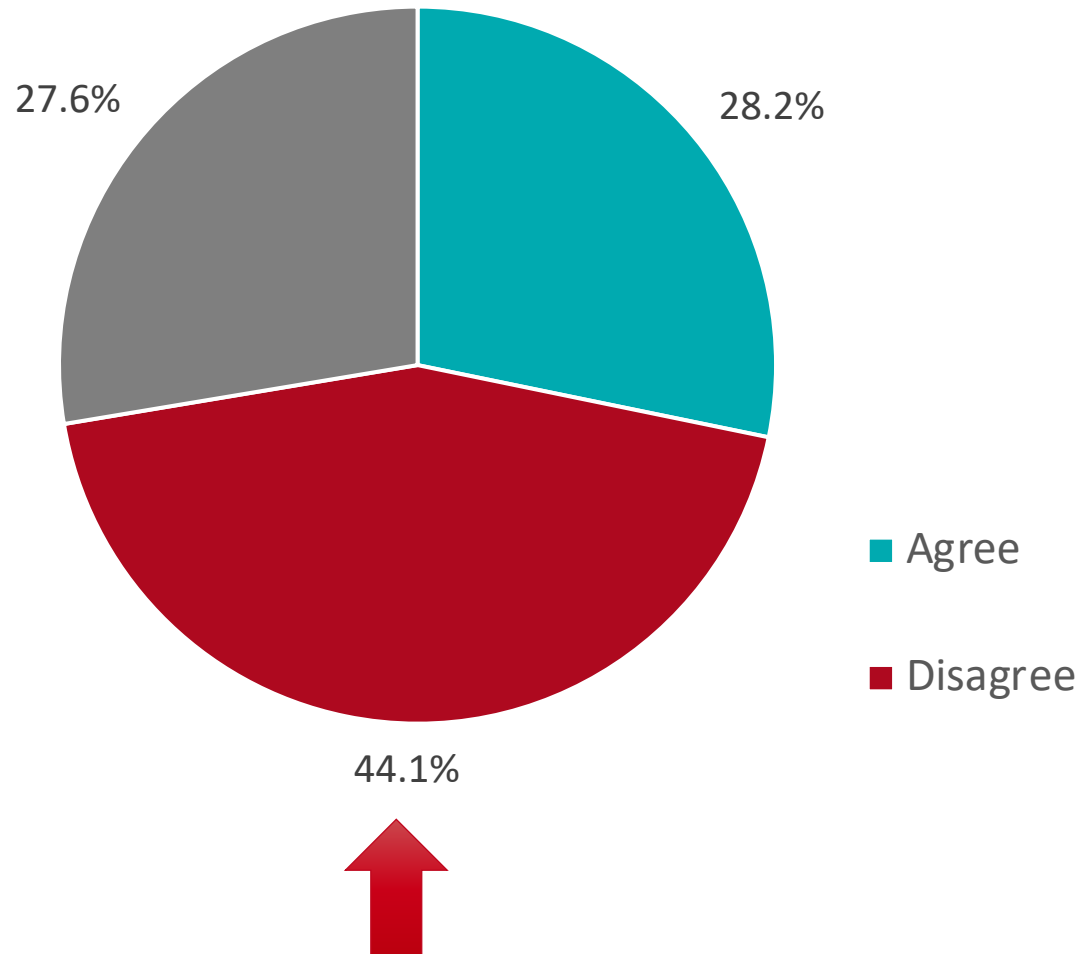
Diversity & Mature Worker policies

- Only two councils have a specific mature workers policy
- But is this a bad thing?
- Mature workers have told us that they don't want to stand out – they just want to be treated equally



In the future, I would prefer to work from home more often than I do now (45 years plus)

Source: CEPAR Mature Workers in Organisations (2020)



- 44% of older workers do not want to work from home more in the future
- Less than a third want to WFH more in the future

CASE STUDY Group 2: State government departments

- Part of larger research project: policy review; stakeholder/**mature worker interviews**; large survey.
- Qualitative research: interviews with 24 employees
- 2 large state government departments
- Employing approx. 30,000 employees in total



Findings: desires, aspirations and plans

- The majority of mature worker interviewees expressed a **strong aspiration for training and career development opportunities**.
- All interviewees expressed a **strong desire and need for flexible work arrangements and adequate leave**.
- Many expressed a **desire for part-time work options** as they transition towards retirement.
- Almost all interviewees stated they were **unaware of any support that their employer provides to assist mature workers with retirement planning**.

“Even probably, bringing a woman of 50 plus in, to start the training. People initially questioned, ‘Why would they bring you in?’”

“I want to be sure that I am still making a contribution. I don't want to be one of those people that everyone's saying, “Why doesn't she just retire?””

Findings: Gender and care

- **Almost all interviewees reported that they had unpaid caring responsibilities** for children, ageing parents, or other family members.
- Most **felt supported** in their caring role, through access to leave, flexibility and understanding from employers, which enabled them to stay in work while caring.
- But, several interviewees commented that the **support for unpaid care responsibilities is not consistent** and depends on local managers.
- Several interviewees stated that **older women** (especially with caring responsibilities) **were more likely to be overlooked for career progression opportunities** than older men.

“I had to take a lot of leave this year because of Mum being so ill and often do because she has lots of appointments. And so, all the stuff around carer’s leave. I mean, I’ve used all that up. So I’m now just using sick leave. That’s been really good. Flex leave is great. I couldn’t manage without flex leave.”

“I did have caring responsibilities, my mother died about four years ago. So she, for about a year or so needed quite a lot of care and attention. And I actually didn’t apply for a promotion that I would have applied for because my job was restructured. It used to be more senior, but because of the fact that I knew that I had that obligation ...”

Findings: workplace cultures and practices

- Almost all interviewees reported that **mature workers make important positive contributions to the workplace.**
- Most mature worker interviewees felt positively about the **value of working in age-diverse teams.**
- Interviewees consistently reported that they were **unaware of any specific policies or practices designed for mature workers.**
- Most mature worker interviewees felt that, while inclusion and diversity were strongly held values in the organisation, but this didn't necessarily mean that they felt **fully included and accepted regardless of their age.**

“Well, they could start by doing it [support for mature workers]. I'm not aware of anything that they do.”

“my biggest fear is that there will be some kind of organisational restructure and I'll lose my job before I want to retire.”

Some policies for organisations



- Consider a mature workers policy (60% of employees in one organisation >40 – but no policy)
- Focus on the strengths of mature workers & how to leverage
- Actively encourage job sharing – e.g. older worker/ younger worker
- Refresher training on recruitment best practices & equity principles
- Consider age when aiming for diversity in the composition of recruitment panels
- Elder Care and Grandparent Leave policy
- Transition to Retirement Policy Formal mentoring programs: older employees mentor junior colleagues
- Job design to accommodate the needs of mature workers

In Summary



- Expansive legislative platform with potential impact on mature worker employment – but not well known, e.g. right to request for over 55s; opportunity for government to target information delivery.
- Scope for more attention by employers on their mature workers' needs, and recognition of gender differences and care responsibilities.
- Opportunity for unions to give voice to mature worker needs.
- Mature workers are interested in flexibility, training and support for their care responsibilities
- Interface between employment policies and welfare policies, and impact on potential mature workforce under-explored.

Looking ahead

COVID-19: forced employers to implement workplace flexibility and work-life balance policies differently and more broadly.

For example:

- Tailoring existing policies (e.g. leave and workplace flexibility) to the needs of employees
- Developing new workplace practices and cultures to enable the take up of work-life balance policies
- Developing new policies to meet changing needs for flexibility and support associated with health and care responsibilities.



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