

# NZiRA NewZ

## From the Director

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### *Ideas and Priorities for Research*

- Over the course of its work, NZiRA has developed two streams of research. There is the late-life stream, which resulted in the publication *Life at 85 plus* and which has been the focus of contract research on housing, transport and health services. Then there is the mid-life stream, looking at people from the decade of the 40s onwards. This produced *Maximising the Potential of Older Workers* and our working carers study. We would like to make progress in both areas. "Ageing in Place" in late life is encouraged by government policies in New Zealand and is clearly the preference of most older people. But we need to know more about the factors—especially social and economic factors—which either promote or act as barriers to ageing in place, and how these interact with physical and psychological health. In the mid-life arena, we would like to extend our understanding of how people make decisions about workforce participation. In an era where there is no compulsory retirement, what are the "triggers" for leaving paid work? This is an important area for individuals but also for business and employers and for much wider economic and fiscal considerations. With predicted labour shortages, as smaller cohorts of young workers follow the baby boom generation, making the best use of the human capital represented by older workers should be a priority (but see page 2 for recent information on employers' attitudes).

Then there are inter-generational issues, which may link the mid-life and later life stages. Arvind Zodgekar talks about "two generation geriatric families" and there are plenty around—with the "children" in their sixties or even seventies and the "parents" in their eighties or nineties. The generations are linked by responsibilities or expectations of care, social support, possibly financial support and inheritance. It is also clear from the *Living Standards of Older New Zealanders* Survey that experiences in mid-life clearly have an impact on living standards in later life. Plenty of work, and challenges, for a research institute looking at ageing and its implications!

—Judith Davey



**NZiRA Director  
Judith Davey**

## Attitudes to Workforce Ageing and Older Workers



At the end of June, the Hudson Group, a multi-national professional recruitment, and human capital consultancy firm, published the results of a survey of 1800 companies across New Zealand. This found that less than half of the employers consider that the ageing workforce is a business issue and less than half have a formal process in place to transfer skills and knowledge internally when an employee chooses to retire. The Hudson New Zealand General Manager, Greg Thompson, is quoted as saying “Unfortunately negative stereotypes about older workers in the workplace still exist. Some common perceptions about older workers are that they lack innovation and creativity, are too expensive to employ, are technophobic, are more prone to absenteeism due to poor health and are not interested in retraining. These views are based on stereotypes, not the facts.”

NZiRA’s report on older workers came to the same conclusion. The undervaluing of experienced workers is poor business practice and employers may not yet realise that they will be increasingly reliant on mature workers in the future, given demographic changes.

Similar results are reported in the July edition of the British *Equal Opportunities Review* (EOR), based on findings from a survey of 122 organisations, employing over half a million people. Despite the fact that most of the respondents thought that age legislation is required, 74% did not believe that age discrimination occurs in their organisation, almost half do not have a policy on age discrimination, few monitor promotion, training or harassment on the basis of age, and two-thirds ask job applicants for their date of birth. This last has been shown to work against older applicants obtaining a job interview.

The Hudson report showed interesting differences by industry. Government-related industries are the most conscious of the impact of the ageing workforce. The Education sector was most aware (46%), followed by Transport (44%) and Healthcare (39%). The Information Technology sector (12%) was the least sensitive to the ageing workforce issue, followed by Wholesale/Distribution (24%), Financial Services (26%), Professional Services, Advertising/ Marketing/Media, Tourism and Hospitality and retail (all 29-30%). There is clearly a way to go in making employers aware of the implications of workforce ageing.

The EOR report includes a case study of ASDA, a UK retail business which employs 23,000 people over the age of 50 –20% of its workforce. ASDA has introduced special conditions to suit the commitments and lifestyle of older workers, including grandparents’ leave, seasonal work and up to three months unpaid leave in the winter (to allow older people to migrate to European resorts in the off-season). Senior management at ASDA have found significant benefits from their policies in terms of lower absenteeism and labour turnover, as well as good customer feedback. It makes you think!

But there may be other points to consider. The EOR suggests that banning all age-related employment differences could affect conditions such as long-service leave, which could be seen as indirect age discrimination. Workers’ representatives are clearly interested in this. The British Government’s draft regulations on age discrimination are keenly awaited.

Attitudes on the part of workers themselves also play a significant part, which is why we should examine the factors which influence decisions about workforce participation. Australian research (quoted by Hudson) found almost 70% of managers would like to remain in the workforce on a part-time or casual basis after retiring from full-time work. And a quarter of McGregor and Gray’s New Zealand sample (of male workers in the meat industry and female workers from a knitting mill) indicated that they would continue to work past age 65 provided their health allowed them to. Flexible retirement conditions are a key requirement for workforce changes which reflect the ageing trend.



## *Research News*

**Working Carers** – The report is completed and will be published on the Future of Work web-site (Department of Labour) in a few weeks. A joint paper on the research (Sally Keeling and Judith Davey) will be presented at the British Society of Gerontology's conference in London in September. At the conference the authors will be discussing other publication options with their British colleagues working on the same topic.

**Coping without a car** – The full report is completed and will appear on the Ministry of Social Development's web-site in a few weeks. A shortened version has been prepared and will be published in hard copy form. The Office for Senior Citizens will use information from the research to prepare a booklet of advice for older people, considering their transport options, and this will be widely distributed.

**Housing Options for Older People** – The report is ready for publication by the Centre for Housing Research on 20 August. There will be a press release at that time. The report suggested topics for further research which are being considered by CHRANZ for their ongoing work programme.

We hope to give you the web-site addresses for these reports in the October NZiRA NewZ.

## *Statistical Snippets*

### *Life expectancy is increasing*

Statistics New Zealand has recently put out new life expectancy figures, based on 2000-2002 data. The table below shows average age at death, given life expectancy at age 65, for men and women, Maori and non-Maori.

#### ***Average Age at Death (based on life expectancy at age 65) Statistics New Zealand 2000-2002 Figures***

	Male	Female
<b>1995-1997</b>		
Maori	77.2	79.5
Non-Maori	80.8	84.3
Total	80.5	84
<b>2000-2002</b>		
Maori	77.7	80.1
Non-Maori	81.9	85.2
Total	81.7	85

There have been some changes since the 1995-97 figures. Estimated life expectancy has increased for all groups. Over the five-year period, overall male life expectancy at age 65 has increased from 15.5 to 16.7 years and female life expectancy at age 65 has increased from 19 to 20 years. However, there has been no closing of the gaps in life expectancy between Maori and non-Maori. Non-Maori men still live, on average, 4 years longer than Maori men and non-Maori women live 5 years longer than Maori women.

Life expectancy at age 65 is much more relevant than life expectancy at birth when considering later life issues like retirement income, health and care needs.

## *Director's Diary*

- 30 June**      **Presentation to breakfast meeting of Port Nicholson Rotary Club**
- 1 July**        **Meeting with Wellington Kaumatua Council, Stokes Valley**
- 22 July**      **Presentation to FPIA Success Forum, Auckland**  
 This was a large gathering of 650 delegates from the financial planning and insurance industry. I discussed options available to older homeowners whereby they can use some of the equity in their mortgage-free homes to supplement income in later life. These range from trading down to a smaller dwelling, selling up and renting, intensifying use of the property, through to use of commercial equity release schemes. There are several forms of the latter and two new initiatives have begun in New Zealand recently.

## *Director's planned activities*

- 30 August**    **Association of Superannuation Funds of NZ Annual Conference.**  
 I have been invited to co-chair a session in which politicians from a range of parties set out their retirement income vision for New Zealand.
- 9-11 Sept**    **British Society of Gerontology Conference, London**  
 See the June NZiRA NewZ for the titles of the two papers to be presented.

## *Notices*

### *Radio New Zealand Recordings of interest*

- ◆ Veronika Meduna compiled two of her science programmes "Eureka" around Tom Kirkwood's work, on April 24 and May 8
- ◆ Sue Ingram presented an "Insight" documentary programme on ageing which was broadcast on 4 July. This included interviews from the NZAG/NZGS Conference in Christchurch in April.

Both programmes are available on CD from Radio NZ

### *2004 NZiRA/TOWER Seminar Series - The End of Retirement (as we know it)?*

Dates:            Tuesdays, 9, 16, 23, 30 November, 2004.  
 Time:             4.30 pm, tea and coffee at 4 pm (close at 6.30 pm)  
 Place:            National Library Conference room, Molesworth Street., Wellington

Speakers will include Diana Crossan, giving an overview; Gareth Morgan on financial issues, Judy McGregor on workers' aspirations and human rights, and a panel of people, prominent in their fields, who have passed "retirement age". They will reflect on what this has meant in their lives and what advice they would give to others.