

**Summary Findings of
Research into
Labour Market and Training
Experiences of Older Workers**

**2 June 2009
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Aims



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- To collect a robust evidence base from which the LSC can inform policies that impact older workers and learners
- To bring together existing research and data sources to profile older workers in the Region, including demographics, economic activity, sectors and occupations, qualifications, training and learning activity and sizebands of employers
- To investigate the experience of older workers in the labour market – those both employed and unemployed/ economically inactive who wish to continue working
- To explore the experiences and opinions of employers of older workers

Methods



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1. **Desk research to review policy context for training and employment of older workers**
2. **Secondary data reviewed about demographics of the over-50 population in the West Midlands**
3. **10 Older Workforce Focus Groups across the region**
 - 2 with people from ethnic minority backgrounds
 - 2 with workless people
4. **Consultation with 50 Employers**
 - Semi-structured interviews with small, medium and large employers from a variety of sectors in the six LSC sub-regions

Overview of Findings



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Incentives and Barriers to Employment

Self-Employment

Employer Attitudes

Employment Policy and Practice

Training and Learning

IAG

Incentives to Employment



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1. Older workers expressed a variety of incentives and motivations to employment and an even *wider* variety of barriers
2. Attitudes to employment from those in work were more positive than those of the unemployed. However, this positivity was tempered by comments about stress, paperwork and targets
3. Several employed participants perceived larger employers to offer more advantages to older workers
4. The main motivation was the need for money or financial security. Other motivations included: boredom; socialising; a sense of purpose; progression; and suitable hours

Future Employment Aspirations



1. Older workers had a wide variety of aspirations, including: changing to a new career; returning to a previous expertise; retraining; progression; winding down to retirement
2. Employed participants expressed more career aspirations than those without work
3. Younger participants expressed more ambition to progress than older respondents
4. Women also seemed to be more open to retraining as a means of developing their career (mirroring secondary data findings).

Barriers to Employment



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*“You’re on the scrapheap once you’re 50,
no doubt about it.”*

Male Older Worker, unemployed

Barriers to Employment



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- 1. Older workers' negative attitudes formed one barrier to employment**
 - Training and qualifications and IT
 - Modern stressful work environments, and nostalgic attitudes to declining sectors, such as Manufacturing
- 2. Other barriers perceived by older workers were: employer attitudes; health and caring issues; transport; and discrimination - gender, ethnicity, age and postcode**
- 3. While employer respondents stated that they were not discriminatory, older worker respondents were sceptical**

Self-employment



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1. **Self-employment can be a means of staying in work for older workers. Nationally, growing numbers of over 50s are self-employed**
2. **The advantages of self-employment were seen as: freedom to do what you want; earning capacity; and reaping the rewards of hard work**
3. **The disadvantages of self-employment included: competition; not having a marketable skill; legislation, tax and paperwork; costs/outlay versus returns on investment; insecurity; lack of company benefits; benefits trap; long hours**

Employer Attitudes



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1. Employers were generally positive about the contribution of the older workforce
2. Advantages of older workers included: personal qualities; existing skills; and practical advantages such as retention, less training, fewer family and childcare commitments
3. Employers tended to say that there were no disadvantages of older workers
4. Disadvantages of older workers listed included: health issues; fitness, especially for physically demanding jobs; reluctance to change or train
5. Experience vs Qualifications – varied requirements

Employment Policy and Practice

“It makes no difference really though because they won’t give the job to someone who is too old they’ll just make another excuse for why you weren’t right for the company.”

Male Older Worker, Computer Engineer

“The company encourages applicants of any age... Age is not a critical factor, but skills for the job are. The company does not put age limits on its applications.”

Employer

Employment Policy and Practice

1. Implementation of policies and practice relating to age was not consistent
2. Older workers were doubtful about the efficacy of anti-age discrimination policies and the law relating to recruitment
3. The larger the company, the more likely it will have policies and data analysis relating to age
4. Practice may not be directly affected by the existence of formal policies
5. Specifically targeting older workers was not generally seen as a solution to HR issues by employers

Employment Policy and Practice



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1. Awareness of anti-age discrimination law varied amongst older workers and employers
2. Just over a quarter of employers said that the legislation had not made an impact 'on the ground'
3. There is evidence of variation in employer practice, especially by size, relating to the management of retirement .
4. Employers saw retirement age as an individual's choice and cited examples of staff staying beyond SPA

Training and Learning

Learning learning and skills

1. Most who recently undertook training, had received funding from their employer.
2. Older workers put forward various motivations for training, including learning new skills and as routes into work.
3. Barriers included employer attitudes, cost, time and transport (in rural areas). Barriers mentioned by employers were similar: older workers' attitudes, time and cost.
4. LSC ILR statistics for 2007/8 show that the proportions of learners over 40 reduce with age.

Training and Learning

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1. There was low awareness amongst older workers of routes into training, especially from the unemployed
2. Employers stated that their decisions to train staff generally related to the job role (not age)
3. There was some variation between employers as to whether they were offering training programmes to staff
4. The findings imply that awareness of Train to Gain still does not have high enough recognition amongst employers

Information, Advice and Guidance



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*“They need a – what was it called? –
The Careers Office, but for grey-haired people.”*
Female Older Worker, Employed

Information, Advice and Guidance



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1. There was low awareness, and little or no experience, of IAG for adults across all groups of older workers
2. Older workers had difficulty identifying support agencies that offer IAG and practical help which meets their specific needs
3. Older workers expressed a need for IAG services, including advice and support with interview techniques, help with CVs and wider careers guidance
4. Sources of IAG identified were: learndirect; and Jobcentre Plus (nextstep was not mentioned). Perceptions of Jobcentre Plus were generally negative, especially by those who were unemployed.
5. Delivery of IAG through Jobcentres is likely to be effective in reaching this demographic (especially the unemployed) given the higher awareness by older workers of Jobcentres' potential roles as a source of IAG.

Full report available at:

[http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/WestMidlands/
Labour_market_research_wm.pdf](http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/WestMidlands/Labour_market_research_wm.pdf)

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