



Over 50s Employability Research Project

Project Profile

Project Aims & Structure

This project aimed to produce evidence of the positive impact on individual companies of employing the Over 50s and to explore the attitudes and experiences of individuals and employers in the Yorkshire and the Humber region.

The cornerstone of the project was a series of twenty case studies of small and medium sized businesses with positive approaches to age diversity. Additional research included a telephone survey of employers, a series of focus groups of employed and job-seeking individuals, an employer's focus group and a desk research review.

Key Findings

Forthcoming age discrimination legislation and the combined forces of economic growth and demographic change will prompt employers to revise their views and practices. However they will require support in developing age diversity policies and in addressing training and education needs. A strong emphasis on investment in lifelong learning, designed for older adults' needs, and programs focused on updating skills for the contemporary labour market will answer the needs of employers and individuals alike.

At the regional level, the research confirms that there is strong awareness of the contribution to economic activity made by the Over 50s, with 100% of the telephone survey employers recognising this contribution. Amongst the case study companies, 80% had employees who were working beyond the recognised age of retirement.

However there is still a significant gap between the attitudes expressed and the actions taken by most employers. Smaller businesses in particular appear to be benefiting from the resources offered by older employees, due to more open and flexible policies.

Case Studies

The key attributes of the group of **case study companies**, selected for their age diverse workforces, were an open recruitment policy, with skills the key factor, a flexible retirement policy and an open approach to flexible working. In the engineering sector, there was evidence of scarce critical skills being concentrated in older workers.

Telephone Survey

Employers were very positive about the benefits of employing the Over 50s, with their skills, experience, reliability and responsibility valued by over 90% of the sample. However half of the employers considered health problems to be significant and a third felt that older people have different training needs than other employees.

Focus Groups

Issues arising from the **focus groups of individuals** varied according to whether the individual had succeeded in finding work or not. Those who were employed were more confident and open-minded about the need for training and flexibility than those seeking work. There was very strong support for the idea of specialised help and guidance for the Over 50s in the contemporary job market and lifelong learning designed for older adults' needs.

The **employers' focus group** emphasised the relevance of experience, pointing out that employers seek skills rather than experience. The group questioned the assumption that there should be a direct link between greater age and greater pay. Health problems were cited by some as an issue, particularly in smaller businesses.