

Action Guide: Managers

Challenging Age

Information, Advice and Guidance for Older Age Groups

Harnessing Third Age Skills and Experience

This Action Guide is designed to help LSC and IAG Partnership managers, and managers in member and stakeholder organisations, to meet the needs of greater numbers of older adults who wish to utilise and develop their skills and experience in learning and work. Local networks may be able to draw on a number of resources and funding streams to help implement effective practice, in addition to the IAG Programme Fund where this is applicable and in accordance with local discretion.

The Guide is based on feedback from older adults and from managers of frontline provider agencies who were consulted during the DfES-financed *Challenging Age* research project to identify the information, advice and guidance needs of the 45+. The need to enable many more 45+ to work and train has become a critical national issue, highlighted by:

- **Demographic trends** – the numbers of 50+ now exceed those aged under 16 but a third of men aged 50+, and two-thirds of those aged 60-64, are not in work.
- **The pensions crisis** – already 57% of the workless 50+ live in households without an occupational pension. Without a vast increase in savings for retirement many more people could face poverty in their old age.
- **Shortages of skilled and experienced workers** in many areas of the UK, prompting emphasis on workforce development in the workplace.
- **Employer reluctance to train older workers** – the 50+ are 50% less likely to be involved in training than workers aged 35-49.

There is now an urgent need to create many more employment and training opportunities for 45+ adults. The alternative could be a mounting waste of human ability and potential, increasing third age poverty, and consequent national and local economic decline.

Challenging Age shows that many older adults want to work, learn and continue to utilise their abilities – to the benefit of the community and themselves. However many are having difficulty doing so because of the barriers blocking their progress, and are giving up as a consequence. Feedback from the 45+ and from managers consulted during the research shows that local IAG networks are well situated to play an important role in:

- Helping many more older adults to utilise and develop their skills, qualities and experience by working on **supply** (ie through IAG delivery to individuals).
- Influencing the local **demand** for people aged 45+ by employers and learning providers.

THIRD AGE SKILLS, QUALITIES AND EXPERIENCE

Older adults were invited to identify the skills, qualities and experience they felt people aged 45+ were particularly able to contribute to the economy and community. These tend to fall into four main categories:

- **Skills developed during work and life** – these include both ‘harder’ craft and technical skills, and ‘softer’ skills learned through application of work skills and through coping with life.
- **Management and supervisory skills and experience.**
- **People skills and qualities** including nurturing and caring skills, ie communication and customer care, patience, a desire to give people time and to listen, mentoring skills, empathy, the ability to see the good qualities in others, and to motivate them and encourage their positive characteristics.
- **Moral values**, especially related to such areas as commitment to people and customers, a strong work ethic and sense of service determination, ‘stickability’, and discipline.

Many of those consulted emphasised that the individual skills, experience, qualities and values they identified are not unique to the 45+. They were concerned that older adults should **not be viewed as a homogenous group**, and stressed the importance of **avoiding stereotyping**.

However, they also considered that the exclusion of many older people from employment meant that there was likely to be an **increasing shortfall of these skills and experience in the workplace**, including key areas such as management, customer care and occupations demanding craft and technical skills and experience.

All those consulted favoured a **more balanced and age diverse workforce**, and were opposed to polarisation between age groups.

Managers may wish to:

- Undertake regular **local reviews and analyses of the skills, qualities and experience of people aged 45+** - both employed and unemployed.
- Compare these with **local skill shortage areas** as identified in local labour market information.
- **Identify approaches and initiatives** that appear particularly successful, or promising, in helping older people into suitable employment **and determine appropriate action.**

THE EVALUATION MODEL

A main objective of Challenging Age was to design a model which enables IAGPs and local networks to evaluate and develop their provision for older people. The model, piloted successfully by the participating IAGPs, is based on regular consultation with public and providers, and positive review of the feedback.

The model can be adapted to review IAG provision for other adult priority groups. The process is described in full in the main *Challenging Age* report.

The four stages of the model are as follows:

- 1 **Consult with representative samples of older people** to determine: their IAG, learning and work requirements; local barriers to progression; and how to overcome these.
- 2 **Collate and analyse the main points arising from the consultations.** Where appropriate these can be set out as a set of key criteria (see main *Challenging Age* report, Appendix 2).
- 3 **Map and research local provision** for older adults, using the analysed feedback and preferably including some employers as well as providers. Record examples of good and interesting practice.

- 4 Use the information to **review policy across the whole network, plan future strategies and draw up action plans**. Undertaking the strategic reviews collectively at network events:
- ensures that **gaps in local provision** can be more readily identified, and **action** to meet these deficiencies collectively determined.
 - helps to ensure **collective ownership** of action plans.
 - enables partner organisations to learn first-hand about **good and interesting practice**.
- **Use a segmented approach towards marketing** by designing publicity material and approaches aimed at specific groups in the local community, for example, the **hidden unemployed** who have withdrawn from the labour market after experiences of rejection but would like to work if opportunities occur.
 - **Review marketing material and promotional activity** to ensure that images and text: appeal to older adults; assure them that services are available and appropriate to them too; and inform them about relevant initiatives.
 - **Use success stories** of older people who have found suitable employment and/or succeeded in training and education, and incorporate these into marketing publicity.

ATTRACTING OLDER ADULTS

Challenging Age shows that **many older people don't know about the services offered by IAGPs and local networks or how to access them**. The research also shows that the 45+ who find out about IAG providers often feel uncomfortable visiting IAG premises, especially agencies serving wider age groups including young people. Reasons include: lack of self-confidence; belief that they are too old and that staff are more interested in younger age groups; and embarrassment because they are having to ask for help.

Positive efforts should be made to attract older adults and make them feel welcome. The following list uses feedback from older people and frontline workers to identify approaches and activities that can attract older adults and help them appreciate that the facilities are also designed for them.

- **Ensure that older adults know how to access the full range of services offered by their local IAG network**, for example through: simple leaflets describing the services offered by the partners and how to make contact; and comprehensive network Directories easily available in public places.
- **Distribute publicity leaflets and posters** in community and public venues which older people are likely to visit (eg libraries, doctors' surgeries, churches, community meeting places, supermarkets).
- **Arrange presentations** to third age groups in collaboration with relevant local agencies.
- **Organise special events for the 45+**, including job, skills training and learning fairs.
- **Employ a mix of ages on reception and other frontline positions**. Many 50+ are reassured by the presence of older workers and some feel more comfortable talking to staff nearer their own age. The visibility of older workers communicates to clients that management believes in the value of age diversity and actively sets a good example.
- **Consult older adults** on a regular basis and **systematically gather feedback** on their experiences, requirements, and barriers encountered and how these might

be overcome. Consider how the consultancy mechanisms available to young people in Connexions Partnerships might be adapted for adult usage. *Challenging Age* shows that older people value consultation and feel a greater sense of involvement as a result.

- **Track older clients** to assess the effectiveness of the IAG provided, record client satisfaction levels, and offer follow-up support if required.
- **Encourage older people to become involved** in progressing local network and individual partner objectives, for example, by: becoming 'learning champions'; acting as mentors to their peers (and other age groups); and researching and writing guides to local learning, employment and IAG opportunities for public dissemination. Older people can reach and influence others in their community in ways not open to 'external experts'.

THE ROLE OF IAG NETWORKS

IAG networks can play a key role in helping older adults to obtain suitable employment and creating opportunities for them to do so. This means:

- Acting simultaneously on both the **demand** for older people's skills and experience, and the **supply** of suitable workers.
- Working closely with **main partner organisations** – the research indicates that the complementary roles of the LSC, Jobcentre Plus, Regional Development Agencies, IAG Partnerships, providers and related agencies in implementing coherent local workforce development, learning, labour market and IAG strategies can be critical to third age employment.

Approaches identified during *Challenging Age* that appear especially successful or promising in helping older adults into suitable employment (paid, volunteering, work/life balance) include:

IAG FOR EMPLOYMENT

- Building up **motivation and hope** – ensuring that IAG workers and services provide positive encouragement and support, and help to restore self-confidence.
- **Analysis of skills, values and interests** – enabling the 45+ to identify their strengths and potential (including existing, transferable and under-developed skills), changing values and interests, and career development requirements.
- **In-depth and holistic guidance with follow-up and ongoing support** – identification of personal needs and objectives, and main barriers to access and progression (personal, labour market, learning needs) and how to overcome these.
- Drawing up and implementing **personal action plans**.
- **Jobsearch support** – including CV preparation, presentation skills, self-advocacy (including how to counter ageist attitudes), and networking.
- **Work experience and work trials** – can be particularly effective in helping older adults to obtain employment. They enable the 45+ to demonstrate their skills and abilities to employers, and (where appropriate) test their reactions to unfamiliar working environments and occupations.
- Skilled and experienced advice on **self-employment, portfolio working, freelancing** and finding a personally fulfilling **work/life balance**.
- Opportunities to develop **peer support groups** and expand **personal networks**.

INFLUENCING AND INFORMING EMPLOYERS

- Establishing close relations with **key intermediaries** including **Trade Union Learning Representatives, Investors in People** consultants, and **Learning Champions** – ensuring they have access to the information and support necessary to take forward the needs of older workers.
- Ensuring that **local employers understand and appreciate the range of services offered by IAGPs and local networks** and know that these are available to help them. This will normally be through intermediary organisations such as those mentioned above.
- **Offering services to industry** through intermediary organisations that may include: learning helplines; in-house career guidance for staff development; job diagnosis to evaluate work and identify training needs; redundancy counselling and guidance; and recruitment and employment agency services.
- Working with industry through intermediaries to ensure that **Workforce Development Strategies** include the 45+.
- **Identifying: local employment opportunities** for older workers, including potential opportunities; and the **business benefits** of recruiting and training older people for these positions.
- Identifying and encouraging **employer-led training schemes** that aim to recruit and train older workers – these may be specifically targeted or aimed at all adult age groups.
- Encouraging and assisting the establishment of in-company **Employee Development Centres**.
- Organising, or being involved in: **events for employers** to help them understand the business benefits of employing and training an age diverse workforce, and the implications for industry of current demographic trends and the imminence of age legislation; and **jobs and learning fairs** for older adults.
- Identifying local employers and recruitment agencies with successful age positive policies and practices who can act as **role models**.
- Introducing local **age diversity awards to industry**, appropriately sponsored and with maximum local publicity for the event and award ceremony.
- **Advocacy to employers** on behalf of **individual older adults** - enabling employers to appreciate each client's skills, qualities and experience, and suitability for the jobs available; and the **local 45+ population** more widely. The production and dissemination of **local and/or national guides outlining employer good practice** may assist guidance workers to communicate the business advantages of employing an age diverse workforce (eg the Department for Work and Pensions Age Positive campaign's *Age Diversity at Work: a Practical Guide for Business* and TAEN, BT and FiftyOn's *Age and Your Company: the Power of Experience*).

Employers are more likely to respond more positively to agencies already recognised as being active on behalf of local industry. **IAG networks that are providing a range of services to industry collectively and through individual members and stakeholders may be particularly effective in helping older adults.**

INFLUENCING AND INFORMING LOCAL POLICY

- **Regular consultations with older adults and frontline workers** on local barriers to work and learning, and ways of overcoming the barriers – analysis and feedback of the findings to inform local and national policy making.
- **Identifying gaps in local learning** which inhibit older adults from re-skilling and training for employment including gaps in employer-based provision - **feedback to relevant policy makers and providers.**

Challenging Age shows that **the difficulties facing many older people in finding and affording suitable opportunities to learn and retrain** is a key issue preventing many 45+ from utilising and/or optimising usage of their skills and experience in the workplace.

LOCAL LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION

- Skilled collation and presentation of **LLMI** for use by employers, older adults and policy makers – ensuring that LLMI is relevant to older age groups.
- Use of narrow age bands (ie 45-49; 50-54; 55-59; 60-64; 65+) so that a progressive picture of third age employment and learning trends can be established, including involvement of older adults in workforce development.

MAKING WORK PAY

- Availability of **financial information and advice**, including benefits and pensions – helping individuals to determine whether work pays and the financial viability of combining paid and unpaid work and quality time into a process of gradual retirement. Numbers of older adults are trying to manage a gradual transition from paid

to unpaid work and greater leisure time, including those employed by companies with downshifting policies that enable older workers to move gradually into 'retirement'.

- **Initiatives to make work pay**, eg New Deal 50 plus, successful in helping many 50+ into work but normally only available to those registered unemployed for 6 months and over.
- **Subsidies to employers** to employ older workers, eg local Jobcentre Plus Action Teams.

VOLUNTEERING

- Ready availability of detailed information and advice on **voluntary activities and local citizenship**. Many older adults consulted during *Challenging Age* consider that **the concept of retirement requires redefinition.**

HELPFUL IAG PROVIDERS

IAG providers identified by older people as being particularly helpful tend to be **highly personalised and 'people-focused' initiatives** that combine most or all of these activities into an **integrated service**. These providers may also offer **supported learning** (eg learndirect centres, community learning projects) from the same premises.

TRAINING GUIDANCE WORKERS IN WORK WITH OLDER ADULTS

Many frontline IAG workers require **training and awareness-raising sessions to help them work effectively with older adults**. Local needs may vary, but it is helpful if these events cover:

- Background issues, including:
 - a) factors that have worked against third age employment (eg changing

labour market, redundancy affecting the 50+, early retirement, age discrimination);

b) national issues (eg changing demographics, savings and pensions issues, the skills agenda and workforce development, waste of third age skills and potential).

- Main barriers encountered by the 50+ in accessing work and learning, and how to overcome these.
- The effect of exclusion from work on individuals (including minority groups, and differences in impact according to gender).
- The skills, qualities and experience of older adults.
- Older adults' expectations of IAG frontline workers.
- Preferred and effective IAG activities and services.
- Influencing the local infrastructure of opportunities (advocacy on behalf of individuals and groups, feeding back information on local issues affecting older adults to management).
- Preferred third age learning styles and teaching methods.
- Volunteering and citizenship.
- Individual, economic and social benefits of increased third age employment, activity rates and learning.

FEEDBACK

Feeding back qualitative as well as quantitative information on clients' requirements to management and policy makers is an essential guidance activity but is frequently neglected.

Frontline IAG workers are an important source of information on the employment, learning and related needs of individuals and groups in the communities they serve, because they are in immediate and continuing contact with people seeking

help in overcoming perceived and actual barriers blocking their progress.

Challenging Age has helped to demonstrate the importance of the feedback provided by frontline workers. However, too little use is often made of the experience they can offer. *Challenging Age* also shows that many older people welcome opportunities for direct consultation, and have much to contribute to the economic and social debate and to the potential solutions.

The need is for mechanisms to be put in place which **capture feedback from older adults and frontline workers on a more formal basis, and ensure that it can be made available in appropriate formats to policy-makers at all levels.** This means:

- **regular consultation with individuals, local groups and frontline workers** on aspects of provision;
- **listening carefully to their observations** on how barriers inhibiting involvement and progression might best be overcome, and **taking action** where appropriate.

RESEARCH

In addition to frontline feedback, there is a **pressing need for detailed information on a range of local and national issues affecting 45+ employment and learning.**

Examples of **key issues** arising during the Challenging Age research include:

- local workplace attitudes and employment practices and older workers;
- the effect of ageing on performance in specific occupations;
- adjustments in work practices that may enable older adults to maximise performance;
- retraining older adults;

- preferred learning styles;
- equipping 45+ workers in occupations with early retirement ages (eg the uniformed services) for second careers;
- third age volunteering.

These and other issues are additional to the **continuing need for regular information and research on local trends in third age employment, and 45+ skills and experience**, to inform local policy decisions on recruitment, training and workforce development requirements.

Subject to resource availability, **Local LSCs and IAG Partnerships and individual member and stakeholder organisations are potentially well situated to initiate research to increase understanding of these and other key issues**, and therefore substantially to **increase the ability of many older adults to work and learn**.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Challenging Age research was carried out by the Third Age Employment Network (TAEN) in partnership with the National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling and the Centre for Guidance Studies at the University of Derby.

Copies of the full report, *Challenging Age - Information, Advice and Guidance for Older Age Groups*, can be obtained from TAEN or downloaded from the website www.taen.org.uk

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The main *Challenging Age* report contains detailed case studies of interesting practice for IAG Partnerships and operational tools laid out to aid copying of material for training and review purposes.

These tools were developed by the research team: Geoff Ford, Barbara Watkins, Sara Bosley, Ruth Hawthorn, Barbara McGowan and Patrick Grattan.

Reports on the participating IAGPs, local networks, focus groups and third age specialist agencies are available from the Third Age Employment Network in separate Annexes:

1. Derbyshire IAG Network
2. Kent IAG Network
3. Lincolnshire and Rutland IAG Network
4. North London IAG Network
5. Guidance Advice and Information Network, City of Sunderland
6. York and North Yorkshire IAG Network
7. Third Age Specialist Organisations

The Learning and Skills Council is supporting dissemination of the findings of the research and of the diagnostic and planning tools. These tools include this Action Guide, an Action Guide for Frontline Workers (*Understanding Older Workers and Overcoming Barriers to Work and Learning*), and Presentation and other Resource Material to assist Information, Advice and Guidance Partnerships to deliver their services for older age groups. They may be copied and used free of charge so long as copyright is not infringed.



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