

D i g e s t

This report presents a general assessment of age and skills issues in two important economic sectors, namely Hospitality and Information & Communication Technology (ICT).

The rationale for this research is simple: as birth rates continue to fall and life expectancy rises the size and age structure of actual and potential availability of labour and demand for goods and services is changing. The Hospitality and ICT sectors provide useful windows on the impact of changes in the labour force and the subsequent skills required. How these two sectors evolve in relation to demographic changes and changes in the labour market is central in attempts to raise productivity and improve welfare concerns in London and across the country more generally.

The examples of the Hospitality and ICT sectors offer two contrasting sectors that are experiencing change. Of central relevance for this research are the skills issues they face.

Given a clear trend towards a more service-based economy in London and West London in particular, and the fact that most new jobs are expected to be created in the tertiary sector it is important to ensure that the labour supply matches the required size and quality.

People over the age of 40 account for 45 percent of the UK population and make up 22 percent of those currently in employment. People over the age of 50 are more likely to be unemployed for longer periods than other age groups.

A third of Londoners over 50 have no qualifications. And two thirds of these are in employment. The older the worker is the less likely they are to have IT skills. Many people over the age of 50 view IT skills as unnecessary for their jobs. Older people are half as likely to be involved in training than younger people. And more than half are not considering training.

From the qualitative data a number of important findings can be identified related to the age and skills debate. Firstly, there is a clear sense of the Hospitality and ICT sectors experiencing recruitment and retention problems. Secondly, there are strong perceptions associated with the image of the sectors and the age profile of staff. Thirdly, there is a tendency to either reduce the role of older peoples' involvement in the sectors and there is evidence of a gap between 'actual' and 'perceived' involvement. Fourthly, there is a mixed picture on the part of employers on the potential for recruiting older people in both sectors. Finally, there is a recognition that the employability of older people to enter and remain in the Hospitality and ICT sectors can be improved.

Whilst recognising some of the limitations of this research a number of interrelated recommendations can be made.

For **older people** these include:

- Recognising that they have a critical role to play in changing discriminatory practices in both employment and work generally.
- Ensuring that training and learning opportunities are developed and maximised.

For **employers** some of the recommendations cover the following:

- The need to review the skills base and identify their 'actual' skills needs and see how older people can meet them
- Brokering agreements between employers and local labour agencies is required.
- ◆ Work with local learning provision to ensure that current and future skills of older people are tailored to the demands of industry as needed.

For **statutory bodies**:

- There needs to be a recognition that the promotion of older people within key employment sectors is important for long-term economic development.