

Older Workers – Older Learners

The perspectives of
employers in the East
Midlands

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Of interest to partners, providers and
employers, and all those interested in
learning and skills in the East Midlands

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Report submitted to the East Midlands Learning and Skills Council by

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Executive Summary

This report is the outcome of research carried out on behalf of the East Midlands Learning and Skills Council (LSC) that investigated the relationship between involvement in learning and participation in the labour market by older workers. The focus was on employers' use of learning and training opportunities and their perceptions of older workers, their engagement in learning and the benefits of such learning and training for the organisation.

There is general acceptance that populations are ageing and that this will require individuals to carry on working for longer than has been the case in the past. This requires a better understanding of the factors that influence the retirement process, the changing nature of these processes, and the mechanisms by which older workers can be better integrated into the workforce. It could be hypothesised that learning is a useful tool to integrate workers via improved career opportunities, flexibility for deployment, potentially increased pay, and better networking. However, this project's results on these aspects are limited.

The focus on (formal and informal) learning and training is in line with governmental policy that encourages up-skilling as a means to address economic and social exclusion and to extend working lives. Overall, there has been a decrease in the number of adult learners, especially in the 65+ age category, in publicly funded learning and in the areas of Further Education and Personal and Community Development Learning. The up-skilling on offer thus seems to be restricted to certain types of learning that is directly relevant and related to workplaces. Even here, however, some employers reported that they found it difficult to locate training courses that met their needs.

The East Midlands has seen considerable developments in its economy over the last years. The sectors under consideration for this project, namely construction, engineering, health, logistics and retail, are all crucial to the region's economy. This in itself is testimony to the improvements that have moved the East Midlands away from being trapped in a low skill, low pay equilibrium. Moreover, there has been considerable work by key organisations in the region to develop age awareness as well as the advice and support provision for older workers. This project is distinct in its approach in that the perceptions of employers were sought. To this end, 32 semi-structured interviews were conducted in the period from July to September 2008. Key findings per sector and overall are summarised in the following.

The construction sector employs some older workers but has no specific policies on and limited awareness of the ageing of its workforce. Recruitment is reasonably traditional in that apprenticeships are key. The most important role for older workers is to work with apprentices to pass on experience and knowledge. This indicates how important informal and on-the-job learning is.

The engineering sector is not yet prepared for the increase of its older workforce but already employs a considerable number of older workers and is dependent on their skills and experience. Many companies, especially small organisations, are dealing with the specific needs and requirements of older workers in informal and flexible ways.

The health sector is a large employer of older workers and has awareness of the ageing population, not only for workforce planning reasons but also due to the services that the sector provides. However, this does not necessarily equate to employers being prepared for change. Experienced and well-trained staff is crucial, though more development could be provided for auxiliary staff.

The logistics sector contains specific occupations, such as heavy goods vehicle drivers, in which workers tend to be older than the logistics workforce as a whole. The logistics sector is

growing and has a considerable demand for (replacement) labour. Part-time or flexible working is common and is used by many older workers, before and after state pension age. Partially as a result of the lack of formal training, experience on the part of workers is valued.

The retail sector workforce is comparatively young and this workforce has, in the main, low or no qualifications. The role of older workers in the sector varies considerably depending on the sub-sector and culture of individual retailers. Whilst experience can be an advantage, this tends only to be the case where the expected attitudes and behaviours are also present.

Despite the lack of policies specifically on age and learning, the research revealed the existence of practices and policies that could be adjusted to benefit older workers. These include:

- Flexible working, already being used in health, retail and logistics, allows older worker to gradually reduce their involvement in the labour market but also be in control of when and how much they work. It is also a useful mechanism to attract older workers into employment. Flexible working is especially useful for employers in health, retail and logistics because they require staff to cover different shifts, including early morning, late night and weekend hours.
- Apprenticeships provide two distinct possibilities for older workers. As assessors, older workers can draw on their experience to pass on knowledge to younger workers, though not all older workers may be inclined to work with youths. As adult apprentices, older workers could accredit their experience or move into different areas of work. Adult apprenticeships were mentioned in engineering and health.
- A related option is utilising older workers' experience and skills by recruiting them into mentor roles. In the health sector there was a particular variant, the patient tracker that would also rely on experienced staff to guide service users through the provisions offered by the health sector.
- Involvement in structured learning and training, via Train to Gain, Skills Pledges, Foundation Degrees, Skills Cards etc. provides experienced staff who do not hold qualifications with opportunities to accredit their skills. Such schemes are especially useful in retail and construction and possibly in logistics. Moreover, they can provide options for auxiliary staff in health.
- Benefits can also be an important factor in influencing an individual's decision to remain in employment or retire. It has been suggested that employers should consider their reward systems to accommodate the changes in the age of their workforce as older workers may have different needs and preferences (CIPD 2008).
- There is already some awareness (e.g. in retail and health) that considerable cultural changes are required to ensure that age is not merely an issue for workforce planning. Positive age awareness management is required to encourage older workers to continue working. The earlier in a life course such management systems start to take effect, the better work-life balance, employment conditions, and occupational health can be targeted to ensure a high degree of workability for the entire workforce.

Introduction

In the period from 1980 to 2008, the share of older workers in the global workforce has increased from 10.3 per cent to 11.9 per cent and it is expected to reach 14.3 per cent by 2020, with North America seeing the strongest increase (Ovseiko 2008). At a European level, there are distinct differences in the employment rates of those aged between 55 and 64. In particular, states with generally lower employment rates fare badly and the increase in employment in this age category is lowest amongst the less qualified (+5%) as compared to medium or highly qualified individuals (+6-7%) (EC 2008). The Lisbon European Council of 2000 and the Stockholm European Council of 2001 agreed principles to increase the average employment rate of those aged 44-64 years to 50 per cent by 2010 (Villosio 2008, von Nordheim 2004). The UK fares well in this respect with employment rates of those in the pre-retirement category, i.e. 50 to 59/64, ranging at 70 and 73 per cent for women and men respectively (ONS 2008). Nevertheless, recent and continuing demographic shifts have led to the expectation that older workers will need to form an increasing part of the labour force, highlighting the need to address issues relating to older people and their labour force participation (Warr et al. 2004). These issues are especially important in light of tendencies towards early retirement and discriminatory policies and practices of employers. It has been recognised that the cost to the UK of the falling rate of economic activity in those aged 50 and above when compared to younger workers is vast. In addition, the current recession will further increase the financial pressure on many older people to work due to inadequate pension income and savings. At a European level, key issues and problems have been identified that need addressing if working lives are to be extended. They include:

- Low-educated workers and self-employed people are mainly composed of older workers;
- Older workers receive less training than younger workers, and women have fewer opportunities in this respect compared with men;
- The introduction of new technology has been found to adversely affect low-skilled workers, and while it appears to have improved job opportunities in some fields, it has resulted in job losses for older workers;
- Only a slight tendency towards a decline in the number of working hours is detected as workers age;
- More generally, inflexible working time arrangement may discourage older workers from continuing to work for longer due to the difficulties in reconciling work and family life.

(Villosio 2008, p. 1-3)

Although the UK has seen an increase in the average age at which individuals exit the labour market there is considerable variation in this pattern; in Leicestershire, for example, economic activity is lowest amongst those aged over 50 years (LCC 2007). This means that whilst employment rates of those aged between 50 and state pension age have increased, they still remain lower (Parry, Taylor 2007). To some extent this drop in economic activity might be due to (early) retirement, though it is important to recognise the diversity in reasons for early retirement. The majority of workers in their fifties stop working not because they necessarily want to but due to other circumstances such as ill health, encouragement by their employer or being made redundant (Vickerstaff 2006b) and having care responsibilities. In fact, less than half of all workers who retire feel happy on doing so (DWP 2008a) and there are thus indications that some workers would like to continue their involvement in the labour

market, depending on circumstances within the workplace as well as within their social environment.

Given this situation, the conditions and context of the workplace are central to any considerations about extending working lives. The current project, *Older Workers – Older Learners* focussed on one aspect of this context: learning, in particular the relationship between involvement in learning and participation in the labour market. Does engagement with learning keep older workers in the workplace longer and reduce replacement demand? We know little about the effect of learning on organisations' attitudes to older workers and whether learning increases older workers' integration into the workforce? Do older workers use the knowledge they gain via accredited learning within the work context and pass on their knowledge to younger colleagues and vice versa? It could be hypothesised that if older learners are integrated into their occupational context better and can utilise their qualifications and experience, they will be more motivated to remain in employment longer.

These questions also highlight the importance of the context that older workers are employed in. In this project we are interested in the East Midlands and five sectors that are of particular importance to the region: retail, logistics, construction, engineering and health. It is not only the regional developments in the labour market and the specific skill demand changes within these industries that will influence older workers but also the specific arrangements within companies. It will be important to determine whether there is encouragement from the policy level and employers for older workers to learn. Are systems in place to involve older workers in sharing their skills and experience with younger colleagues? Could such sharing forums be conceived as Communities of Practice in which additional work-based learning can take place? Do skills bodies and employers see any problems with older workers' employability and if so, are – or could – these problems be addressed via involvement in learning?

The aim of this research project is to establish the basis for planning employer engagement and the promotion of learning opportunities for older workers – as well as to lay the foundations for a better understanding of the situation older workers face in the labour market.

In the following, the context to this research project is outlined by providing a review of the literature on older workers, extending working lives and learning and training in the workplace. This outline, though by no means comprehensive, sets the scene for the work that was undertaken. The methods and approach taken are then outlined in a separate section. Following this, the research results are presented. Initially, detailed findings on each of the sectors concerned are provided separately to allow a detailed understanding and analysis of each sectoral context. A comparative section then addresses policy relevant findings in more detail and proposes further considerations. Finally, conclusions are offered.

The context of extending working lives

The concept of extending working lives is often based on a human capital approach which might argue that the 'capital', i.e. skills, knowledge and ability, of individuals might decline with age and would therefore need additional training or development to ensure that older workers can continue to be useful to employers (Urwin 2006). Mitani (2008, p. 9) mentions a 'generational effect' that refers to the unique know-how, skills and expertise that reflect the economic conditions, technology, and skills development prevailing at and after the time each generation entered employment. This view is based on the understanding that older workers' productivity is not reduced by their age but by skill obsolescence (Mayhew, Elliott & Rijkers 2008). Thus, the lack of training provision for older workers could be considered as an indicator of employer discrimination. Attempting to tackle this via a business case argument in favour of the value and contribution of older workers means, however, that more covert ageism in employment and society more generally cannot be addressed (Duncan 2003). From a legal perspective, a policy approach stressing justice and universal rights to fair treatment might thus have more leverage (Weller 2007) but in the UK a business case tends to be more convincing to employers. Although the human capital approach can thus be criticised, it will be referred to throughout via the question whether learning and training will extend older workers participation in the labour market.

The reductions in employment rates outlined in the introduction are especially problematic in light of the need of the economy for qualified and motivated workers. If the skills and qualifications held by older workers do not correlate with those required by employers there is a problem of mismatch, especially as only a small proportion of the labour force will be part of generational 'turnover'. In the East Midlands 80 per cent of the workforce needed for 2012 is already in employment so that "simply waiting for older workers to retire and be replaced by more qualified younger workers is not an option" (Emda 2006, p. 178). It should therefore be in the economic interest of the region to work towards a labour force that is employable, developing via learning and training, and therefore motivated to remain in employment up to (and potentially past) state pension age. This is not to mention the social importance of increasing societal cohesion and solidarity between generations (cf. Hytti 2004, Bergmark, Thorslund & Lindberg 2000) that could be brought about via labour market inclusion.

Discriminatory practices and/or positive attitudes?

Whilst it is necessary for the number of mature age individuals in the labour force to increase, evidence suggests that they face discriminatory practices (Duncan, Loretto 2004). This includes discrimination within the employment interview itself (Morgeson et al. 2008) but also promotions, training opportunities, attitudes towards them and instances of redundancy (Duncan, Loretto 2004). There are indications that all age groups face discrimination, though it is especially the youngest and oldest age groups, as well as women within them, that face problems (Mayhew, Elliott & Rijkers 2008). In contrast, there are also indications of positive attitudes towards older workers and perceptions that they are very productive employees who are more reliable than younger workers (McNair, Flynn & Dutton 2007, Walker, Maltby 1997). It will therefore be important to differentiate carefully between sectors, skills requirements, skill provision and individual organisational contexts, to allow us a better understanding of what problems exist and how they might be addressed. The selection of sectors under investigation and the reasons for their inclusion are discussed in the methods section of this report.

In addition to facing discrimination in employment, older people find it difficult to re-enter the labour market if, for example, they have been made redundant (compare Beatty, Fothergill & Platts-Fowler 2008). One explanatory factor is a lack of attention that is being given to this group by information, advice and guidance institutions. This means that individuals who are

already vulnerable in terms of their labour market status have little support in terms of developing their employability for a potential re-entry into employment. It could be concluded that older people who are likely to have lower skills levels and who are less likely to be involved in learning activities are also less likely to be in employment (Mitton, Hull 2006). Moreover, current policy initiatives, such as the New Deal 50+, tend not to take into consideration more complex understandings of employability, including individual's involvement in learning opportunities to keep up to date with skill requirements and changing labour market demands (see Admasachew, Ogilvie & Maltby 2005). It is the current Government's ambition to reach a participation rate of 80 per cent of those aged 50+, which means that approximately a million people of this age need (re-)integrating into the labour market (TAEN 2006). This can only be achieved by a better understanding of their employability and involvement in learning activities, as well as general labour market dynamics. Given the recommendations by the Leitch Review of Skills (Leitch 2006) to emphasise up-skilling and the call for intense and individualised interventions via the welfare system (Freud 2007), learning has become a central policy and thus merits a detailed investigation in terms of its accessibility and effects for older workers in the region.

Many of those who have been unemployed, especially if such periods have been prolonged, have been moved onto incapacity benefits, thus making the group of those who are currently economically inactive or ill very heterogeneous. In Britain, the life expectancy of individuals has increased even within recent periods but there have also been developments towards a decrease in health-adjusted life expectancy, indicating that the prevalence of health problems has also increased (Groot, van den Brink, H. 2008). Of those individuals who are economically inactive, 27 per cent are people aged between 50 and State Pension Age (SPA) and of this group 14.2 per cent are in receipt of Incapacity Benefits (IB) (Mitton, Hull 2006). The likelihood of claiming IB thus increases with age (Beatty, Fothergill & Platts-Fowler 2008). Unemployment rates as such for the age group between fifty and SPA are low (2.3% by the ILO definition), especially when compared to those in their mid-twenties (see Mitton, Hull 2006). Yet there have been debates about the accuracy of unemployment rates and what they actually measure. When considering the 'real' levels of unemployment, that is including those claiming incapacity benefit in particular, but also in groups who do not look for work and do not claim benefits but are available for work, unemployment in parts of the East Midlands is as high as 15 per cent (Beatty et al. 2007). The high proportions of individuals on long-term ill health or disability benefits thus not only conceal unemployment as such but also a low demand for particular older workers, for example, those previously working in low-skilled occupations, whose dignity is to be protected by labelling them 'sick' rather than 'unemployed' (CROW 2004). A further problem was revealed by findings that socioeconomic disadvantages persist into old age. Thus, survey participants such as senior administrators fared significantly better than clerical or manual individuals who had four times the odds of poor physical health and were twice as likely to experience poor general and mental health as well as disability (Breeze et al. 2001).

Policies aimed at supporting these groups tend to focus on up-skilling. For unemployment benefit claimants whose skills are deemed insufficient to re-join the labour market, training has been made compulsory (DWP 2008b). From a quantitative perspective, Kajitani (2008) uses Japanese data to show that skill development shortens spells of unemployment for the older workforce. The above mentioned policies are thus based on the belief that employment is a crucial tool in integrating the economically and socially excluded. However, employment can bring positive and negative effects for well-being and health and is further dependent on issues such as income, housing conditions, domestic and caring responsibilities as well as age (Doyal, Payne 2006, Granville, Evandrou 2008). Generally speaking, employment tends to have a positive effect but the individual and social context as well as the working conditions need to be considered (Waddell, Burton 2006, Beck et al. 2008). Alternative forms of employment to full-time and permanent work have been considered to better respond to the needs of (some) older workers.

Factors influencing retirement decisions

Flexible employment, for example via part-time work or self-employment, has long been advocated to provide a bridging function to gradual retirement (Lissenburgh, Smeaton 2003). A whole range of measures have been suggested as means to extend the working life, including 'bridge jobs' such as those successfully utilised in Japan (Casey 2007) and North America (cf. Macnicol 2007), including part-time working, non-permanent working, self-employment, home working (Lissenburgh, Smeaton 2003, Loretto, Vickerstaff & White 2007). The thinking behind such approaches seems to include a number of factors. Bridge jobs allow older workers to gradually exit employment rather than face what has been termed a cliff edge (Vickerstaff 2006b, Vickerstaff 2006a) or an 'abrupt, non-negotiable guillotine of retirement' (Maltby 2007). In theory, this could also provide opportunities to pass on experience and knowledge that might otherwise be lost to a company on retirement of a worker. Moreover, older workers might retain a sense of control over working and retirement decisions when making use of flexible retirement.

However, it currently seems that only few people switch from full-time to part-time hours prior to retirement (Romans 2007) despite the centrality of flexible employment generally to the UK Government's policies on older workers. A key issue lies with financial factors. Previous research has shown that a significant proportion of those working past retirement age do so because they cannot afford to stop working (Parry, Taylor 2007, Vickerstaff 2006b). The current recession might make this a common phenomenon. A further reason might lie in the lack of clarity over what flexible retirement refers to. Platman (2004) provides a compelling critique of how the multiple meanings and interpretations of flexibility lead to questions over the sustainability of such an approach. It will be interesting to see how employers consider such options and whether there is any clarity on the different forms of flexibility available. Although the debate cannot be outlined here, it is also worth considering the European discussions on 'flexicurity' that weighs the usefulness of flexibility against job security for individuals (Muffels, Luijkx 2008, Bekker et al. 2008). Theoretically, this would be a means to combine economic and social interests, though there tend to be questions on the extent to which security is provided as flexibility is gained. Research in the UK has thus found that older portfolio workers were vulnerable to job insecurity and financial risk due to diminishing networks and skills (Platman 2003).

A further central aspect to consider is the overall orientation and motivation to work, which might be summarised as distinct 'work identities'. In their study of the reasons why people work after state pension age Parry and Taylor (2007, p. 595) distinguish between (self-defined) 'workers' and 'professionals and creatives' and conclude that "whilst the workers displayed a strong work ethic, they also saw retirement as the time when they could leave the employment treadmill, relax and enjoy life" (also compare Phillipson 2004) whereas "professionals and creatives were more committed to their work and saw less distinction between work and other aspects of their lives", thus being more likely to continue work after state pension age. The authors are aware that this is a somewhat crude distinction but show the importance of categories such as gender, class, location and socialisation in the normative perception of retirement. Further research has been conducted into reasons for withdrawal from the labour market and life course events at various stages of life were found to have an influence (Blekesaune, Bryan & Taylor 2008). Initial experience with education plays an obvious role, but late entry into the labour market, late partnership formation, long employment history and, for men, working in a skilled trade also tend to correlate with longer employment, whereas, for women, withdrawing from employment to care for a family member is common (Blekesaune, Bryan & Taylor 2008). Both early and later life-course events thus have mediating effects on the decision to withdraw from the labour market and on the timing of this decision.

When looking at older workers in employment and older people who are attempting to remain in or rejoin the labour force it is important to take into consideration the lack of control older people seem to have over the time and circumstances of their retirement, which influence the quality of life of mature aged individuals (McNair 2006). In this context, skill and qualification levels play a significant role because they seem to determine or at least influence how much control individuals have over their employment status. Overall, amongst the economically active in older age groups (50+), a study into attitudes to work (McNair 2006) found that 80 per cent were interested in employment or unpaid work, with 48 per cent indicating that they would like to continue in paid work after formal retirement, though this would usually not be full-time. Attachment to the labour market increased with age up to 60 but only for those who remain in employment. If individuals are made redundant or retire early attachment decreases with age, thus leading to the suggestion (McNair 2006, p. 491) that

there is a 'shaking out' of the labour market in the mid fifties, when many disaffected or de-motivated people leave, creating a distinct later life labour market of people who are much more highly motivated (either by the intrinsic attractions of the work, or the financial implications of retirement).

The 'shaking out' seems to differentiate in many cases between those with higher skills, qualifications and, subsequently, higher pay as, for example in professional and managerial jobs on the one hand and groups with lower, often manual skills or those in routine occupations and lower pay on the other hand. The latter are more likely to be squeezed out of the labour market in their fifties, thus emphasising the importance of a skills based approach and policy (Hodgson, Spurs & Steer 2008). Even within sectors, the different skill requirements and occupational levels will therefore have to be considered.

The role and benefits of learning and age management

The context in which this project must be located is the continual change within the learning and skills sector which has been described as moving away from a 'planned and unified to a more directive and market-oriented model of governance' (Hodgson, Spurs & Steer 2008). As part of this there has been an overall decrease of adult learners, especially in the 65+ age category, in publicly funded learning and in the areas of Further Education (FE) and Personal and Community Development Learning (Aldridge, Tuckett 2008, Anderson 2008). The main reasons why these developments have raised concerns are to be found in the benefits that learning generate, including social and personal development, especially enjoyment, improved mental health and access to social and community networks (Anderson 2008) thus empowering older learners and reducing social exclusion (Kump, Jelenc Krasovec 2007). However, it could also be argued that older learners are a valuable asset to the economy. Although the general definition of learning utilised here may be very broad, there is an important link to the learning and training that is undertaken in vocational and work-based contexts.

There is a considerable body of literature on workplace learning and learning related to employment (Eraut 2004, Eraut et al. 2002, Fuller et al. 2005, Stroud, Fairbrother 2006), though it has rarely been analysed specifically for older workers. It has been suggested (see Mayhew, Elliott & Rijkers 2008) that investment in human capital is more effective in younger individuals as they have longer periods in the labour market during which to provide a return on this investment. The relationship between cost of training and productivity gains for older workers may be industry specific (Ovseiko 2008) but overall, the argument assumes that there will be enough young people entering the labour market to fill skills gaps. Looking more generally at the ability of training to help older workers in the labour market Mayhew, Elliott and Rijkers (2008) consider three scenarios: keeping older workers employed; getting the unemployed back into work; and getting the inactive back into employment. Their conclusion on each of these scenarios is mixed at best, in particular due to the lack of evidence and the

difficulties to eliminate the effects of training from other circumstantial factors. This project will attempt to shed at least a little more light on the relationship between learning and labour market involvement.

Differences in learning activity involvement can be discerned as early as age 45 (Emda 2006) and there are changes in amount and content of learning in mid and later life and that this has implications for patterns of work and retirement (Aldridge, Tuckett 2007). The motivation for learning, for instance, changes considerably between the three age bands: 45-54, 55-64 and 65-74. Obtaining a recognised qualification and making work more satisfying are both cited less (from 20.7 to 4.6% and 16.8 to 5.5% respectively) where interest, enjoyment, improving self-confidence and meeting people are increasingly cited with age (ibid, p. 14). In outlining the older workers information, advice and guidance needs, it was found that this group of workers commonly developed their skills and knowledge experientially (Mitton, Hull 2006). Whilst such learning, as well as the resulting skills and knowledge, might not be accredited it could be essential to the individuals' work performance. In addition, a promotion of lifelong learning and career development is seen to be beneficial:

In-work learning and career development can both increase workers' capacity to meet new work demands and make them feel more positive about work itself.
(Hirsch 2007, p. 107)

The beneficial effect on the side of the learner or employee is matched by changes in employer attitudes to workplace training, learning and culture. The national evaluation of the Train to Gain initiative showed that 74 per cent of employers reported improvement in the skills of employees in relation to their specific job role; and 42 per cent confirmed that Train to Gain had had a positive impact on the bottom-line or profitability of their business (LSC 2008b).

Overall, there is evidence that older workers are less involved in work-related learning (Anderson 2008, Aldridge, Tuckett 2007) but government is increasingly heralding lifelong learning as a strategy for extending working lives. In this sense, it would be important to define and address older learners less via a prescriptive and categorical definition of their age, i.e. the chronological age, and pay more attention to the specific needs and purposes of their learning (Bunyan, Jordan 2005). Even when considering the employment options of older workers from a human capital perspective, it is the time for which an individual will remain working in a given company that is important rather than their age *per se* (Urwin 2006). Moreover, as stated above, in-work learning and career development can both increase workers' capacity to meet new work demands and make them feel more positive about work itself (Hirsch 2007). Changes in workplaces and economic activity associated with the move to a so-called knowledge economy have led to increased demand for workers to be able to learn continuously. This brings to the fore issues - including employers' attitudes, differential learning needs and abilities, and attitudinal differences - that older workers may face when learning or when being encouraged to learn.

The literature thus highlights a number of crucial issues that this research aims to address. There are general attitudes on older workers and their employment status, be this employed, unemployed or economically inactive, that should be reviewed alongside the various factors that influence retirement decisions. These include what alternatives to full-time employment might be available, financial considerations, work motivation and locus of control over these decisions. Moreover, the overall role and benefits of learning and age management need to be considered.

Methodology

This project is focussed on the relationship between involvement in learning and participation in the labour market. Does engagement with learning keep older workers in the workplace longer and reduce replacement demand? We know little about the effect of learning on the workplace and whether learning increases older workers' integration into the workforce? Do older workers use the knowledge they gain via accredited learning within the work context and pass on their knowledge to younger colleagues and vice versa? In particular, it has been shown that a mix of ages amongst colleagues is useful and that older workers bring experience, reliability and understanding to the workplace (DWP 2007). It could be hypothesised that if older learners are integrated into their occupational context better and can utilise their qualifications and experience, they will be more motivated to remain in employment longer.

It has been shown that a broad range of issues influence (early) retirement patterns and their variation, including the welfare state, production system, and state-labour-employer relationships with actors such as governments, unions, employers' associations, firms and workers having an influence (Hult, Edlund 2008). We therefore consider in more detail the specific settings within the East Midlands and within certain sectors of relevance within this region. And whilst there has been valuable research into employers' attitudes towards older workers (Walker, Maltby 1997, Loretto, White 2006a, Loretto, White 2006b), little is known about the role of learning within this relationships, employers' rewards of such potential investment and employees' work satisfaction as a result of involvement with learning. A comparison between different sectors is particularly pertinent because there is a perception that age is more of an issue in manual jobs where performance is seen to decline more than for non-manual workers (Loretto, White 2006c). The following table shows participation in learning of employees in all age groups. The information is provided for a selected number of sectors of relevance to this project. Interesting differences emerge when comparing current vs. past learning but also when looking at sectoral variations. The health sector stands out as providing and/or attracting most (current) learning. It should also be considered that sectors have different age structures, e.g. retail employs a high proportion of young people or school leavers for whom not having learnt since leaving education would not be a long period.

Table 1: Participation in learning 2008, by sector

	Total %	Construction %	Wholesale/Retail %	Transport/Storage/Communication %	Health/Social Work %
Current learning	20	14	15	15	33
Recent learning (in last 3 yrs)	19	17	19	29	34
All current or recent learning	38	32	34	45	66
Past learning (more than 3 yrs ago)	26	32	26	24	16
None since leaving FT education/don't know	36	37	40	31	18

Source: Aldridge, Tuckett 2008, p. 20

The sectors under investigation in this project are construction, engineering, health, logistics and retail. These were determined in co-ordination with the LSC to reflect some of the priority sectors in the East Midlands in terms of their contribution to regional development. Moreover, and as will be demonstrated in the sectoral outlines in the following sections, the sectors provided considerable variation, e.g. in terms of the proportion of older workers that are employed but also in terms of the skills and training dilemmas that they face. As an example, the following table juxtaposes aspects of three of the sectors under consideration and highlights specific skill and training issues. The importance of the context that older workers face is thus highlighted.

Table 2: Key characteristics of sectors

Health and Social Care	Construction and Engineering
Relatively few hard-to-fill vacancies	Larger volumes of hard-to-fill and skill shortage vacancies
Unlikely to recruit 16 year old school leavers	More likely to recruit young people at age 16 and in constructions' case, at 'College leaver' age
High training sector, strong user of national qualifications, including NVQs	Less likely to offer training to staff but in construction more likely to offer national qualifications when they do so
Relatively heavy user of FE Colleges, relatively high awareness and use of Train to Gain	Somewhat more likely to use FE Colleges than is average for all sectors, strong use of apprenticeships, but less awareness and use of Train to Gain

Adapted from: Roe, Godrey 2008

The first stage of the project consisted of a literature review to cover the national and regional-specific state of knowledge regarding older workers. To this end, academic and policy literature was targeted. On the academic side, the search was conducted via social science search engines such as SwetsWise, Business Source Premier and Social Science Citation Index. The search strategy for each search engine differed but always included the terms: older worker, older learners and workplace learning in combination with employment, work and learning. In addition, policy related websites and documents were located via the Internet mainly with sector specific searches involving the same key words. Originally, the aim had been to conduct a statistical analysis via the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and provide detailed regional breakdowns of the sectoral situations for older workers. However, the LFS does not support such disaggregation as the sample sizes become too small and therefore unreliable. Given that the Sector Skills Councils and other bodies in each sector provided some data on age, a reasonable overview of the East Midlands was possible, though more work would need to be done to allow for sub-regional analysis.

The research consisted of 32 semi-structured interviews (see table 3 for a full breakdown). In each sector, a conversation was held with the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) responsible for the majority of workers in the sector, namely: Construction Skills, SEMTA (The Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies), Skills for Health, Skills for Logistics, and SkillsSmart Retail. Established since 2002, the SSCs have been given an ever larger remit, though according to Payne (2008, p. 98) they have four core strategic goals: "to reduce skills gaps and shortages; improve productivity, business and public service performance; increase the opportunities to develop the productivity and skills of everyone in their sector; and improve learning supply through the development of apprenticeships, higher education and national occupational standards". The SSCs were intended to be employer-led

and the voice of employers (Lloyd 2008) but in practice many of the 25 bodies have reduced their employer engagement strategies to be more 'strategic and targeted' (Payne 2008). None of the SSCs had specific policies on older workers or the changing labour force, and some were more able to provide contacts to employers than others.

It was generally easier to win over larger employers to participate in the research and the findings are therefore to some extent comparable to previous research on large companies (see Taylor, Walker 1998). However, a number of small and medium sized organisations were also interviewed, the smallest employing three individuals, one of whom was 63 years of age. Although interviewees made some references to the size of their companies, this was not a key factor in this study. As indicated by some of the quotes in the results chapter, the link between the size of a company, their training and learning provisions and age management practices would be an important future research area.

Employers were contacted via a number of routes: the LSC provided a host of links to employers associations, regional bodies and direct contacts, some of the Sector Skills Councils held similar information and some cold calling and personal contacts were pursued. Although this approach to contacting employers made the research process easier, there is the downside that, in the main, research participants are 'the usual suspects', meaning that they tended to be employers who participate on a regular basis in regional and sectoral activities and tend to be part of the strategic and targeted work of the SSCs. The sample is thus not necessarily representative and it may be assumed that there is some bias in the sample that provides us with an insight into the more pro-active and socially aware section of employers. In addition, there is always the fear that there is a dichotomy between the public face and the private reality, meaning that research results can be artificial. As questions on this issue were not part of the research design, no findings or indications can be made about this problem. Depending on the size of the organisation, the CEO, training or diversity manager or an HR expert was interviewed. All interviewees were given the option to remain anonymous but were also offered the opportunity to be named to showcase good practice. Where quotes from interviews are utilized throughout this report, some thus have a name attached whereas others are provided anonymously.

A number of general conversations were also conducted to provide the context to this study. A considerable range of activities have previously been undertaken with regards to the older workforce in the East Midlands (see Farmer, Soulsby 2009) and it was considered important not to replicate this work. To this end, conversations of various lengths (between 10 minutes and 90 minutes) were held with representatives from the following organisations: NIACE (The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education); TAEN (The Age and Employment Network); GOEM (Government Office for the East Midlands); emda (The East Midlands Development Agency); and the LSC (Learning and Skills Council). Interviewees had all previously been involved in the activities and development in the East Midlands.

The interviews were conducted from July to September 2008. Interviews were semi-structured and, broadly speaking covered the area of activity of the organization or company as well as some background questions on the workforce, general questions about policies and practices on older workers and policies and practices on training and learning. In the process of most interviews, it quickly became clear that respondents did not have specific measures to address older workers and that learning was not a particular means utilised to integrate and retain them in employment. It is therefore difficult to present findings that respond directly to the research questions set for this project. The interviews thus explored the individual situation with companies and more general issues regarding learning and work practices. As will be reported in the results section, a considerable amount of existing practices are extremely useful tools that could be adjusted to be part of an age management programme – even though they were not devised for such a purpose.

The majority of interviews was conducted on the phone, took approximately 30 minutes and were one-to-one conversations. They were taped and transcribed for analysis.

Table 3: Overview of Interviews conducted

Sector	SSC	Employers	Other	Total
Construction	1	3	1	5
Engineering	1	5	0	6
Health	1	6	1	8
Logistics	1	2	1	4
Retail	1	3	0	4
General	0	0	5	5
				32

In the following, results will be reported in detail for each sector before some policy relevant comparisons are drawn.

Construction

Key sectoral characteristics

Construction is a key industry in the UK and research has shown that traditional contracting activities have not been influenced much by the forces driving globalisation. Firms involved in higher value-added construction activities are the exception (Whitla, Walters & Davies 2006). In the current economic climate, however, there has been a direct effect of changes in the housing sector on the industry in the East Midlands. Organisations involved in the housing industry in particular but also those who work on repairs and maintenance have experienced a slump. Redundancies and financial pressure were mentioned by most of the interviewees. In this sense, construction is directly affected by economic growth and/or recession. In terms of the information and especially the statistics provided here, it is therefore worth considering that the situation is likely to have changed and still be changing considerably. The downturn in the sector and laying-off of the workforce is, in the main, not yet reflected in the literature or the statistics. Interviewees also stated that the economic situation would make it difficult to meet Leitch targets in the sector, including fulfilling training and apprenticeship quotas. At the same time, the levy and grant system in the industry (see below) should ensure that training is still carried out.

One of the key characteristics of the sector is the predominance of subcontracting and the importance of self-employment or, in places, bogus self-employment. A recent study (Clayton 2008) calculated that there are between 375,000 and 425,000 workers falsely self-employed in the UK construction industry. In particular, the discussion is around labour only subcontracting which has been described as an indirect form of employment of labour (Watson, Sharp 2007). Winch (1998, p. 531) suggests that this development started in the 1970s and was mainly due to "the strategic choice of construction companies to emphasise flexibility over productivity as sources of competitive advantage". However, Winch also suggests that the strategy backfired in that productivity and quality are compromised by the fact that training and innovation are hindered in labour only sub-contracting and self-employment strategies (compare also Agapiou, Price & McCaffery 1995, Forde, MacKenzie & Robinson 2008). In a study looking at responses to skills shortages (MacKenzie, Kilpatrick & Akintoye 2000) there were indications that a return to direct employment was favoured by employers, however, the economic situation has changed since that period of recovery, so implementation of such ideas may be problematic. The sample of respondents to this research is atypical in that none utilised subcontracting. Some consciously decided against using sub-contracting because this led to problems with workers' attendance. Directly employed staff may earn less but they can be kept busy if they are multi-skilled and flexible, which, in the long-term, benefits both employer and employee. Others had previously used sub contracting but, due to recent redundancies, were no longer in a position to employ on this basis. Findings of this research therefore need to be considered in terms of how representative they might be for the sector as a whole.

A recent development in the construction industry is the introduction of the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS), which was promoted by both employers and trade unions. The scheme was launched in 1995, is administered by the CITB and controlled by a management board including employers' bodies and trade unions (MacKenzie, Kilpatrick & Akintoye 2000). The CSCS was set up to help the construction industry to improve quality and reduce accidents. CSCS cards have not become a requirement and act merely as a proof of occupational competence by contractors, public and private clients. They cover hundreds of occupations with different colour coding for different types of occupations or workers (CSCS 2008). According to UCATT "[t]he Major Contractors Group is still committing itself to 100% registration on all MCG sites even though they missed the original target of achieving this by

the end of 2003. There are currently over 600,000 workers registered with CSCS or an affiliated skillcard" (UCATT 2008).

The East Midlands construction industry was worth approximately £ 5.8 bn in 2006 but that year also saw a decline in the industry (ConstructionSkills 2008b). Interviewees confirmed this trend in that a number mentioned having to make workers redundant. According to ConstructionSkills (2008b) the total construction workforce in the East Midlands numbered 158,100 in 2006 and this was forecast to increase to 188,610 in 2008 and 198,130 in 2012. When considering those entering and leaving the industry, it is calculated that 4,530 workers would be needed to join the industry every year to cover replacement demand, with a particular need for wood trades and interior fit-out, electrical trades and installation and construction professionals and technical staff (ConstructionSkills 2008b). These figures may now be revised depending on the developments in the housing market and related industries.

Table 4: Total employment by occupation in the East Midlands

	Actual 2006	Forecast 2008	Forecast 2012
Senior and executive managers	570	670	700
Business process managers	3510	3970	4260
Construction managers	12540	14390	15270
Office-based staff (excl. managers)	12050	13860	14480
Other professionals/technical staff & IT	2130	2450	3000
Wood trades & interior fit-out	18510	21590	23900
Bricklayers	8430	10850	11530
Building envelope specialists	7780	10020	10640
Painters & decorators	5590	6570	7420
Plasterers & dry liners	2990	3470	3600
Roofers	1190	1420	1650
Floorers	2580	2970	3220
Glaziers	2730	2980	3040
Specialist building operatives	3870	4510	4830
Scaffolders	680	830	940
Plant operatives	1940	2190	2440
Plant mechanics/fitters	2780	3060	3170
Steel erectors/structural	1330	1540	1630
Labourers	6660	7830	8400
Electrical trades & installation	12420	14560	15600
Plumbing & HVAC trades	9580	11530	12430
Logistics	2150	2630	2770
Civil engineering operatives	2810	3360	3610
Non-construction operatives	19180	25170	22500
Construction professionals & technical staff	14100	16190	17100
Total (SIC 45)	144000	172420	181030
Total (SIC 45 & 74.2)	158100	188610	198130

Source: ConstructionSkills 2008b

Another noteworthy fact about the construction sector is that the Sector Skills Council, ConstructionSkills, is a private sector SSC that has a levy scheme in operation (Payne 2008). It is also one of the largest employers amongst the SSCs which, together with its history and experience, may result in increased opportunities for taking action. The CITB, now ConstructionSkills is one of only two industries that retain a levy system, introduced with the 1964 Industrial Training Act. Companies whose turnover is above a certain level pay the levy which is used to hand out grants for training and apprenticeships (Watson, Sharp 2007). The construction industry is characterised by particular working conditions, often influenced by the weather and seasons, particular constraints and contexts of the location of the job, and the requirement to work to deadlines (Beck, Clark & Michielsens 2003). Part-time work and all flexible working are therefore, in the main, difficult to realise and the majority of employers do not offer such possibilities.

Older workers in the construction sector

Nationally, the construction sector has a reasonably high proportion of older workers (McNair, Flynn 2006a). ConstructionSkills published a press release in June 2008 entitled 'Construction industry warnings on 'workforce time bomb' which indicated that the number of older workers (aged 60 and over) in the industry had doubled since the early 1990s. Further statistics offered in this press release include:

- In 1990, over 55s represented 11% of the workforce, compared with 17% in 2007.
- In 1990, over a third (36%) of workers in the construction industry were aged under 30 in comparison with only a quarter of the sector's workforce today.
- In 1990, only 4% were aged 60 years or over, while by 2007 it had reached 8%.

(ConstructionSkills 2008a)

Despite these indicators of an ageing workforce, the main response seems to be to offer more apprenticeships and training places. Given the finding that adult recruits are not favoured (MacKenzie, Kilpatrick & Akintoye 2000), it is assumed that these are sought amongst young people. From the interviews conducted for the purpose of this research, the majority of respondents stated that older workers are not a discussion point in the industry nor is age a way in which workers would be classified. In one interview the interviewer was questioned over her use of the term "older worker" and the majority of respondents could or would not offer a definition of this term. As such, there are also no specific policies on older workers.

Research into older workers in the construction industry shows that there are particular issues with skills and experience vs. physical fitness of workers, especially as injury and ill-health seem to be part of working in the sector (Leaviss, Gibb & Bust 2008). More differentiated findings from the construction sector in Hong Kong show that accident rates are not necessarily related to age as injuries first increased with age and then decreased, possible due to older workers exhibiting more positive attitudes to safety (Siu, Phillips & Leung 2003). One of the problems that is widely discussed is the physical nature of the work undertaken in construction in which the body becomes highly important (see Thiel 2007). The implication is that older workers lose their physicality and struggle to keep up with the strains of the job. Unlike in other sectors, experience may not always be able to make up for the lack of youth and strength. One employer discussed the implications of a working life in the construction sector, mentioning the wear and tear on knees, elbows, hands and backs. This meant that workers were most likely to want to retire as soon as they could, although there were always exceptions. As the following quote shows, there are also clear differences between organisations in the sector especially when considering different sized companies.

By the time workers get to sort of 50, 60ish, they might be looking to still stay within the industry, but change the type of job that they're doing, or else if they're in a larger company, perhaps move to a more managerial type position. But of course then it depends on the size of the company and I would suggest those opportunities are only really available in the larger companies. The smaller companies, which is you know, typically what the industry is comprised of, employing fewer than ten, in the main less than five, those opportunities aren't available, so the workers will just keep going.

Amanda Sergeant, Regional Strategy Advisor (Midlands), ConstructionSkills

There were other voices amongst the interviewees who felt that the physical aspect of the job had become much less important, though it clearly has not disappeared altogether. This was mainly due to technological developments but also based on individuals' understanding of their own capabilities. Moreover, the following quote also expresses a clear stance against a possible move into an office job and/or management.

It depends very much on what their job is, because a lot of the actual lifting and manoeuvring of the equipment and materials has been taken out of the equation by using plant. You don't have hod carriers anymore because it is all moved around the site mechanically. People do tend to still lift things but they're quite sensible really. They'll go on until they think I don't want to do this anymore, I'm struggling to do this, and obviously if people are recognised to be struggling, then we'd see if there's anything that they could do or they would leave of their own accord, sort of ready because they couldn't cope with the physicality of it anymore. [...] Nobody wants an office job. If they've been working out on site, not many workers want to come in the offices, and I can't ever remember anybody asking to come in the offices. We had recently somebody who moved from being a bricklayer to more of a supervisory role because he was having problems with his knees and we accommodated him in that way.

Anne de Vere Hunt, HR manager Jelson

Whilst there seem to be issues with the age of the workforce and the particular jobs that have to be undertaken, this is not necessarily seen as a problem. The health of the workforce is a concern but, as long as this is addressed, there was no sense of urgency to tackle issues raised by demographic changes in the workforce. There are early indications that there are different possibilities to address changes in physical capabilities including an increasing dependence on technical or mechanical support, or a move to more managerial and/or office based work. Although there are thus not necessarily problems with older workers, recruitment practices tend to favour traditional routes.

The CITB-ConstructionSkills Employers' Skill Needs Survey 2004 questioned employers regarding their recruitment preferences. Almost half of the respondents (47%) indicated that they would prefer to recruit workers in the 20 to 40 category. The main reasons provided were experience, attitude, ability, stability and reliability. Younger workers would in effect be trainees due to their lack of skills and experience. There is no specific reason why workers older than 40 are less attractive, though it should also be mentioned that 30 per cent of respondents indicated that they had no preference as to the age of recruits (see CITB ConstructionSkills 2004). A further practice that was discussed with some interviewees, in particular in small and medium-sized companies, was employing older relatives. Some were semi-retired but would help out when there was a need. This type of flexibility can help both the employer and the individual who still wants some involvement in the labour market.

Skill requirements and learning in construction

The situation of learning in the British construction sector has been described as adversarial and based on a context in which the use of collaborative working has been difficult (Bishop et al. 2008). Both the Latham Report (Latham 1994) and the Egan report (Egan 1998) outlined considerable problems within the industry, including poor health and safety records, high accident rates, under-investment in research and development and a crisis in training. However, research has also found that from an individual perspective, work patterns in building work were characterised by task autonomy and freedom from managerial control (Thiel 2007). This could, potentially, leave a lot of opportunity for team based or one-to-one, on-the-job learning and training – but there is also evidence of skill shortages.

According to the CITB-ConstructionSkills Employers' Skill Needs Survey 2004, approximately three quarters of employers were experiencing recruitment difficulties, with the biggest problems being positions for craft trades and managers (CITB ConstructionSkills 2004). Research published in 2005 found that in the East Midlands, the construction workforce is on par with the rest of the UK in terms of their qualifications, though a smaller proportion of workers in the region held a skill card or a formal qualification (IFF Research Ltd 2005). Interviewees stated that there had been lay-offs in the industry and that this meant there were no particular skill shortages or hard-to-fill vacancies. This is a significant change to only a few years ago when there was more business. It has been argued that one of the main causes of previous skills shortages was the "demographic decline in the number of young people available to enter the labour market, which has increased competition for new entrants to the labour pool" (MacKenzie, Kilpatrick & Akintoye 2000, p. 853). And although the CITB found adult recruits more enthusiastic and committed than young people, construction employers were found not to favour alternative sources of labour, including adult recruits. One interviewee mentioned that skill shortages could become more intense due to the fact that eastern European, in particular Polish, workers were returning home as their economies picked up. Overall, the situation with regard to labour supply and demand, and the implications this may have for the demand for older workers, is thus difficult to gauge in light of the upheaval that the recent economic developments have caused in the sector.

The Sector Skills Council, ConstructionSkills, offer a whole range of courses to workers and/or employers of any size of company, for example via the National Construction College (NCC). The NCC is the largest construction training provider in the UK and Europe and covers courses on: Health and safety; Scaffolding and Access; Sustainability; Surveying and setting out; Plant operation and maintenance; Management and Supervisory; General construction; and Graduate Appreciation Courses (ConstructionSkills 2008c). For experienced workers, ConstructionSkills also provides support with On-Site Assessment and Training (OSAT) to continue working whilst being assessed and SkillsDirect, helping to get qualified and carded (CSCS). In terms of provision, there should thus be plenty of training and support available. This also means that the training and development requirements of older workers should be picked up as part of the bigger picture of understanding a company's training and development needs. To what extent this actually occurs, however, is difficult to determine.

There was evidence of development in that employers were positive about the CSCS card. One respondent talked about the cards becoming mandatory, thus making certain levels of achievement as well of health and safety tests a requirement. Previously, workers were not particularly interested in undertaking further training once they had done their apprenticeship or had undertaken years of work. But with CSCS cards there is a lot of up-skilling even of those people who previously had no qualifications. This means that the cards have brought considerable change to the industry and deliver at least part of what they were designed to do. Once looking at qualifications over and above NVQ 2 level, however, there is less interest and activity, indicating that it is difficult to encourage up-skilling unless it is compulsory or leads to advantages in accessing or maintaining employment. A number of interviewees

stated that, given the current situation in which companies have to make workers redundant, a key way to retain skills is to ensure that the workforce is multi-skilled. Employers thus mentioned not laying off as many workers as may be economically sensible, and absorbing the excess costs to ensure that they have the labour availability and experience of long-serving workers when new work comes along. This also creates loyalty amongst employees who, in addition, benefit from having multiple skills on their CVs.

Given the nature of the construction industry, on-the-job and experiential learning is more important than in some of the other sectors and this is reflected in the finding that 60 per cent of reporting firms provide work related training for all staff, compared to 70 per cent in all sectors (McNair, Flynn 2006a). In addition, in terms of formal assessment for promotion, this is required by only 18 per cent of firms in construction compared to 37 per cent in all sectors (ibid). Small companies in particular struggle to provide additional training and often depend on the skills workers acquired prior to being employed by them. However, Manual Handling and Health & Safety sessions are provided to ensure compliance with regulations, again indicating that training will be offered and undertaken if it is compulsory or regulated. In the construction industry health and safety plays a major part, and refresher courses on health and safety, training on items of plant like forklift, dumpers, road rollers, JCBs, have to go ahead irrespective of the economic situation. Overall, however, the evidence does not suggest that training is a key policy for companies, especially in the current economic climate and especially not for older workers.

When considering the benefits of employing older workers, respondents listed a number of ways in which such workers are valuable to them. One interviewee described employing a mixed age workforce as advantageous because many clients are older and sending only young workers to jobs caused problems. Moreover, nearly all of the interviewees described how older workers' experience was important when it came to training apprentices. One interviewee described how older workers' attitudes towards work, in particular their reliability, would 'rub off' on the young workers. This particular interviewee talked about the older workers teaching the new ones the tricks of the trade that they would not learn at college. He also stated that they would make sure health and safety rules would be adhered to. Most small and medium-sized companies do not have a written policy on these practices, but will ensure that there is some informal mentoring or buddy system in place. In this sense, and as the following quote outlines, older workers provide an important contribution to the training systems of companies.

But you know, age has never been a downer if you like and we've always had older workers, but those are the experienced workers and they're the people who help bring the apprentices on and pass on their knowledge and, without them, I think we'd have a big gap in our business. [...] The only thing perhaps for the future that... and it has been talked about before, is having people who are primarily in charge of the apprentices, the older experienced skilled workers looking after a whole gang of apprentices if you like and training them that way. But I can't think of many other ways that we could do any better than the way things are at the moment.

Anne de Vere Hunt, HR manager Jelson

Thus, as one interviewee pointed out, it is the experience of older workers and their ability to pass it on to apprentices or other younger workers that cannot be bought. This idea could be formalised to ensure the retention of knowledge. As the following quote suggests this can be done via the role of assessor or mentor.

I don't have a hard and fast case study, but older workers could undertake assessor training, so that they can assess, building on their experience, become a

qualified assessor or workplace mentor to support the younger workers. So the experience isn't lost, but they might not necessarily be doing the managerial aspect, but they're still keeping their skills within the company.

Amanda Sergeant, Regional Strategy Advisor (Midlands), ConstructionSkills

Given the previously mentioned reluctance in the sector to partake in structured and/or classroom based training, a more informal approach to such assessor and mentor training could be taken. The on-the-job assessment used by CSCS might be a useful guideline. Again due to the current economic situation, respondents suggested that there were very few skills gaps or requirements. In the main, there were currently more than enough workers in the industry. Given this situation, it was difficult for respondents to identify ways in which older workers could be integrated better. One example mentioned nevertheless seems to encourage workers to stay with the company, Jelson, at least until they had achieved 25 years of service.

We've got something called the Quarter Century Club, which is for people who've worked for the company for 25 years or over, once they've completed 25 years service they are invited to attend the club's annual dinner where they are presented with an engraved watch. Once they retire they're still part of the club and still attend the dinner, they also receive a hamper at Christmas. There are currently about 250 members. Employees will ask to continue working until they qualify to get into the club, it is quite a big thing.

Anne de Vere Hunt, HR manager Jelson

Overall, the construction sector employs some older workers but has no specific policies or awareness about the ageing of its workforce. Recruitment practices are reasonably traditional in that the majority of employers would rely on young apprentices to fill their vacancies. Qualified adults in the age range between 20 and 40 are also sought but older workers are less likely to be trained or taken on, for example, as adult apprentices. However, experienced workers are very important to the training processes within companies in that they tend to support and accompany young recruits. This indicates how important informal and on-the-job learning is. Formal qualifications and training is most effective when regulated.

Engineering

Key sectoral characteristics

Engineering is a heterogeneous sector in that engineers work in a variety of contexts. The total number of those employed in the metals, mechanical equipments and electrical equipment sector in the East Midlands is 95,870, which accounts for 4.1 per cent of all employment in the East Midlands (SEMTA 2008b). According to a national survey of the British engineering sectors (see Wiseman, Harrington 2007) around half of all engineering organisations (51%) employ more than 5 employees, with 49 per cent employing fewer than 50 employees. The same report breaks down the sector into occupations as: other (18%), operators (16%), craftsperson (13%), administration and clerical employees (11%), engineering managers (8%), other managers (8%), professional engineers, scientists and technologists (8%), technician engineers and engineering technicians (6%), other professionals (5%), assemblers (4%), engineering supervisors (2%) and other supervisors (2%). The engineering sector has been through almost two decades of restructuring which has been accompanied by a decline in employment. Considerable changes have occurred in technological development and there is increased global pressure (compare Patil, Codner 2007). One interviewee stated:

[It is] difficult to get skills, difficult to get people, and when you see the Chinese that are pushing on and developing and inventing, and then we've just, you know, it's going to be reversed. We're going backwards in this country.

Moreover, there is increased awareness of the importance of soft skills in engineering, summarised as a reversal of priorities from knowledge, skills and attitude to attitudes, skills and knowledge (Heinrich, Bhattacharya & Rayudu 2007). Part of what has been describe as 'the British Engineering Problem' (Jones et al. 2000) is under-education via insufficient degrees, under-professionalisation due to anti-engineering or anti-industrial culture in Britain, and under-utilisation of existing engineering capabilities. The situation is exacerbated by weak professional organisation and professional codes (Jones et al. 2000). In the East Midlands, the period 1984 to 2004 saw a net loss of jobs of about -41,000 (or -32%) It is expected that this decline will continue, especially given the recent economic downturn. It has also been suggested that the increase in engineering and technology graduates has been at the expense of craft and intermediate skill grades (Jones et al. 2000).

There is very little part-time or flexible work in the sector as it is difficult to implement given the requirements of the sector and the, mainly small, size of organisations. One company reported keeping on individuals past state pension age full-time, though with a view to winding down. In another company flexibility and flexi-working had been discussed but put on the back burner because it was not considered to be realistic. Although it would have been a great benefit the company was too small to be able to implement such systems.

Older workers in engineering

Engineering is considered to have an 'ageing workforce' with 46 per cent of the workforce in the East Midlands aged 45+, compared to 40 per cent in all sectors in the East Midlands and the UK. The following two tables provide an overview of the age of the engineering workforce when compared to the economy as a whole and the breakdown of ages in different sections of engineering in the East Midlands.

Table 5: Age profile of the engineering workforce

Sector	Age band						Total
	16-18	19-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	
Total Engineering	1.6	7.2	20.3	28.2	25.9	16.8	100.0
Total Economy	3.9	9.2	21.1	26.8	22.8	16.1	100.0

Source: LFS 2004, produced and provided by SEMTA

Table 6: Workforce age of the East Midlands MME sectors (by age band)

Age band	Metals East Midlands	Mechanical Equipment East Midlands	Electrical Equipment East Midlands	MME East Midlands
16-19	6%	3%	0%	4%
20-24	9%	2%	12%	7%
25-34	18%	18%	15%	18%
35-44	21%	25%	35%	25%
45-54	26%	29%	15%	25%
55+	19%	23%	23%	21%

Source: SEMTA 2008b, p. 29

In manufacturing, which also employs considerable numbers of engineers, there have been attempts to ensure employers are prepared for the ageing of the workforce (see EEF 2008). In the present context, however, there were few indicators of such preparedness. The majority of organisations interviewed were not clear about what age an older worker might be, though one suggested definition was 60+. The majority of companies had some and in most cases a substantial proportion of older workers in the 50+ age category. In the main, recruitment is sought from a younger age pool and the demographic changes occurring in the population at large is not an issue that is being considered in depth. Nevertheless, there are signs that the demographics of the pool of available labour are changing as the following quote indicates:

This reflects the general age demographic profile for manufacturing engineering in the UK. So, even though we have recruited significantly into those areas in the last two to three years, we've found we've recruited in the same demographic profile.

Whilst this in itself is not necessarily a problem, there was concern about how this would affect replacement rates and succession planning. In one company the projected increase in older workers would increase replacement demand due to natural attrition (e.g. retirement) by up to 400 per cent. Despite such potential for age to become an issue for workforce planning and development the companies interviewed did not have specific policies on older workers. In part, this may be due to the fact that attitudes towards older or more experienced workers are very positive, so that age is not seen as a problem. Experience tends to be very important in producing quality, ensuring safety and delivering on time and this was reflected in the recruitment practices of the interviewees. As one respondent stated: "I wouldn't think twice about employing somebody over 50 years old." However, age and experience are considered depending on the job and expectations. This was summarised as follows:

If we're looking for an apprentice we're not looking for somebody 50 years old. And when we're looking for someone to lead one of our businesses, we're not

looking for somebody 18 years old. So in that respect yes, but in general I don't think it matters. Like I say, I think it depends what role they're trying to fill. When we bring somebody in of an older age, we want them to add something to the business, somebody of a younger age, we're looking to support and train them.

The above quote clearly articulates the expectation and hope for older workers who are necessary to bring added value to the organisation. The experience of individuals can thus be linked to status and position within a company. In a similar vein, career succession in many companies is based on having an understudy in place prior a retiree leaving the organisation, thus suggesting that workforce planning needs are being addressed and that this might provide potential for younger and older workers to learn from each other.

We're trying to train people at the moment and that's why we're grateful that the people of that age are not only fit and healthy, but they're willing to continue. And they know we put or are putting, depending on the area, an individual in place, an understudy.

Similar processes are in place where companies are utilising the internal labour market and train up individuals to fill senior positions. However, as the following quote shows, this will depend on the ability to find new recruits as replacements before a promotion or transfer can be affected.

We've got somebody who's extremely skilled at what he does in the factory and I think he would actually like to move into the offices into a desk job, and that wouldn't be a problem. We're all for it, but there's resistance from his manager in the factory to let him go because he's his number one guy. We're basically saying we shouldn't hinder anybody, but what we need to do is try and find somebody, a replacement for that guy but that's where we've struggled with skills. So if we had the skills it wouldn't be a problem at all, but until we find someone to put in his place, he knows that we need to do that.

In extensions of such a scenario, it can also become problematic when very experienced individuals have no formal qualifications, especially if they are released or their employer closes down as it can then be difficult for them to find new employment. There were indications that companies rely on this type of experience but find it difficult to accredit. There may be various reasons for this, including companies' inability to pay for training or lose the individual for the training period as well as the reluctance of very experience workers to have to participate in such training. The current findings back up previous research results on British engineering employers. Age is not necessarily a factor when it comes to recruitment as 34 per cent of all British engineering organisations have recruited workers aged 45+ and the propensity to do so tends to increase with the size of the organisation, except for the largest organisations (Wiseman, Harrington 2007). This age group (45+) makes up 18 per cent of recruits in British engineering, though their proportion sinks to 7 per cent in Marine and 11 per cent in Motor Vehicles engineering and increases to 28 per cent in the area of other transport equipment (Wiseman, Harrington 2007).

Skill requirements and learning

Despite the economic downturn, Wiseman and Harrington (2007) report that 11 per cent of all British engineering organisations have had vacancies that were hard to fill, in particular with regard to skilled trades occupations (in 48% of organisations) and plant and machine operative posts (20%). The main reason for skills shortages was reported as a lack of applicants with the required qualifications and skills. The main skills that were required are: experience (24%), appropriate qualification (6%), job specific skills (6%), welding (4%), CNC

machine operation (4%) and CNC machines (3%), basic skills (3%), sheet metal work (3%) and motivation (4%) (Wiseman, Harrington 2007). The importance of experience is significant as this could be a favourable factor for older workers.

A study including older workers in an engineering company in Australia indicated that work and learning at work are perceived in quantitative terms and as very separate entities (Pillay et al. 2003). This finding is not supported by the current research, especially as recruitment, learning and training were often conducted in house. Recruitment to engineering companies is considered to work best when based on internal recruitment. Jones et al. (2000) suggest that this indicates the importance of socialisation into a firm's practices and cultures over and above engineering competencies acquired via a degree. There are thus complex forces including educational, industrial-sectoral, workplace and life-style/life-cycle effects influencing engineering careers (Jones et al. 2000). Employers have reported concerns about the lack of suitably qualified applicants (Markes 2006) and this was confirmed by some of the interviewees. In addition, they reported having had trouble locating courses or training that suited their needs. Technical skills, training on specialist equipment and technician type roles were mentioned in particular. Employers do not necessarily have the systems or capacity to undertake training needs analyses that would allow them to pick the right people to develop and move on. A further problem that was mentioned was the lack of funding for training at level 3 and above as well as for adult apprentices.

Adult apprenticeships can play an important role as is the case with Toyota. Adult apprenticeships are available for individuals working in production who would normally not have technical qualifications but have got very good practical production knowledge and an ability to learn. Individuals are given the opportunity to apply for a three-year conversion course going from production to maintenance. During their training, they work and learn alongside Toyota's 16-year old apprentices. At the end of the programme, they will gain the same qualification and have, in addition, the added advantage of years of practical production experience. The adult apprenticeship scheme is tied in with company policy to promote and develop from within and only recruit externally as a secondary measure. For example, all Team leader positions are filled by internal promotion rather than external hire. This system provides clear career progression opportunities. There is a total development framework that maps out, from the team member through to manager, what the different stepping-stones are, and what kind of training you would receive at each level.

The majority of companies interviewed have extensive internal training schemes, are Investors in People, and take on apprentices, though not necessarily adult apprentices. There is thus a positive attitude towards training and learning in general. Interviewees report that they have experienced employees' reluctance regarding training but that there is support for those who want opportunities to learn. To some extent opportunities for training and learning depend on the size of the company as well as their financial performance. One company reported holding back on a training programme for an individual they were hoping to promote because of the current economic climate. Other companies reported problems with the apprenticeship scheme, despite the fact that in many organisations, management has come through apprenticeships and moved up the career ladder. There is thus support for apprenticeships but problems with the scheme include finding apprentices for the trades and individuals who are interested in the occupation.

... the apprenticeship scheme these days has fallen into disarray, and when we do get one, we can find that they're not interested and they don't last and I don't know what they really want. But yes we do have apprentices in the factory and we do have an apprentice in the engineering department, but we have struggled. It's something that we would like to encourage more of if we could.

In Britain, 34 per cent of engineering organisations have been found to fund or arrange training (formal, informal, off- or on-the-job) for employees, with organisations with less than five employees faring poorly (18% trained) (Wiseman, Harrington 2007). Size also determines which type of training tends to be provided: companies with more than five employees provide more on-the-job training though more than 27 per cent of organisations provide both on- and off-the job training (Wiseman, Harrington 2007). These indications were reflected in the current research. In smaller companies it was reported to be more difficult to keep individuals up to date with developments but there are means to do this whilst keeping the individuals on at work. For one small to medium sized company, this is part of the overall strategy to have a multi-skilled workforce that allows flexible deployment. Ultimately, this has meant staff do not have to be made redundant when any particular aspect of the company is doing poorly as staff can be used in other areas:

At Smith of Derby we try to deploy a multi-skilling strategy giving us the flexibility to deploy staff in multiple areas. We recognise we have a flat organisation and that's not going to change. This means that progression for our people could be seen as limited. Keeping our staff busy is also key. Quiet departments can become issues. Multi-skilling staff also enhances their own CV's and moving around departments proves that change is as good as a rest! So we will hopefully end up with a multi-skilled workforce. If anybody's sick somebody can jump in. Anybody can work any machine. We're not there yet, but that's the production director's strategy to make sure we can cope with flexibility in the workforce through sickness or through attrition, and at the same time get a more highly skilled workforce across the board. This system also benefits new apprentices. We are able to say that working here you are going to learn everything, and if you suddenly come across something you absolutely love, then sure you could work up to be the leader of that cell, leader of that particular discipline in the business. So plenty of ways to skin a cat, but small and medium businesses I think have to be a little bit cleverer than your average bear.

Bob Betts, MD Smith of Derby

As suggested above, a considerable proportion of the engineering industry is made up of small and medium sized companies and could thus face similar issues. Both on-the-job and off-the-job training can be difficult to organise due to the financial implications of releasing the trainee. In contrast, larger companies can provide more opportunity for team-based learning and for linking learning to promotions. Most respondents indicated that training was specifically provided to enable promotion and/or progress. The majority (48%) of British companies use company in-house training providers to deliver training and this figure rises to 89 per cent for companies with more than 500 employees. Of all engineering organisations in Britain, 12 per cent employ apprentices or recognised trainees and this propensity increases with the size of the organisation (Wiseman, Harrington 2007). The opportunity for workers to learn from each other was mentioned, for example, with apprentices and those learning the trades.

You've got an experienced tradesman and a younger guy there in the engineering department. You know, you'll have a young lad who will come in who will work for somebody who's been a section leader or a project engineer who's been with the company for a number of years and then he in turn will work for the engineering manager who's been there longer. So it's sort of filtered down.

Given the above-mentioned skills shortages in the sector, one might consider what steps have been taken to address the shortages and, in the context of this project, what role older workers might play in the process. Wiseman and Harrington (2007) report that of British engineering organisations, 34 per cent took no action to address skills shortages and 33 per

cent increased their recruitment efforts, with only 5 per cent retraining existing staff to fill skills gaps. SEMTA's (2008a) assessment of the current provisions in the sector, which highlights the VET qualifications available via FEs and HEs, seems to support the impression that recruitment is sought mainly among younger graduates. But despite this focus of recruitment, there is a relatively high proportion within the East Midlands engineering workforce who have no qualification (13% compared to 10% for all sectors in the East Midlands and the UK). SEMTA (2008b) emphasise the need for continued up-skilling within the sector in the East Midlands. In this context it is interesting to note that in the West Midlands, SEMTA is reported (see (Payne 2008, p. 106) to be working with other SSCs and the LSC to "develop 'specialist' Train to Gain brokers with a more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the specific sectors that they are dealing with." Such attempts to increase participation in Train to Gain might be important given some of the low qualifications of parts of the engineering workforce in the East Midlands.

Good practice examples in engineering

In most companies questions about a better integration of older workers were rejected as not applicable because there was a strong reliance on their expertise. The following examples are thus structures that are in place for a variety of reasons, not for the benefit of older workers. However, given the remit of the current project, they were considered as having potential to benefit older workers. In many companies a team-based approach is apparent which could encourage on-the-job and informal learning. Toyota's approach of designing smooth work processes is an interesting example of how careful consideration of working conditions could improve the health of the workforce and enable and/or motivate individuals to work longer.

Effectively, every process is designed to ensure ease of operation. If you have a job that it is physically hard to do, rather than accept that some people cannot do it, Toyota would rather improve the job to make it smoother. Although the older worker issue does not apply to engineers as their work is not necessarily that physical, smooth work is important for shop floor line members who do repetitive standardised work. What Toyota does is to systematically assess the job based upon what kind of body movements and forces are necessary, resulting in a detailed ergonomic assessment. The result is a rating of the physical demand of any given job. Toyota's approach is to gradually reduce the rating so that there is a wider range of people that could be doing that job. The key objective is smooth work and elimination of ergonomic, MSS [Musculo Skeletal Syndrome] type issues. A knock-on from that is that a wider range of people, with a wider range of physical capabilities are able to do the job, and, by definition, that addresses the challenges that would normally come from an older worker's natural body strength or ailments. Each individual is assessed at regular intervals. By having a systematic way of assessing each job according to physical requirements and assessing each employee based on the same criteria, Toyota is able to decide the most appropriate placement for each individual and understand any implication of changes to either the job or individuals medical condition.

Clive Bridge, Corporate Affairs Director Toyota

In addition to addressing working conditions and practices, companies displayed various formats in which to keep on older workers who are highly experienced and valued. At Smith of Derby, for example, a high degree of flexibility can be used to draw on individuals past retirement age.

The issue we get is the immediate loss of huge experience in particular areas of in-depth knowledge. Fortunately, many of our staff are local and retire locally. If past employees are only down the road and relationships are strong then it's not

unusual for us to pick up the phone and ask one of the guys to pop in for a couple of days. I think as long as your relationships are strong and you treat people well this flexibility is important.

When asked whether this system could be formalised, there was a positive response:

Yes. The last long-term employee that retired went down to four days, then three days, and so on. We have another employee retiring in October after 50 years and he is actually going out on a big bang. He was quite happy to work full-time right up to his last day and he's that sort of a character that will adjust and be fine. But again, the small and medium business can cope with this flexibility. This business is open and inclusive. You don't even have to knock on my door to speak to me. I don't have an office. I'm the MD but I'm sat out here with the team, and if anybody wants to say look you know my retirements coming up Bob, can I do it this way?, the answer is most likely going to be yes.

Bob Betts, MD Smith of Derby

Overall, the engineering sector is thus not necessarily prepared for the imminent increase of its older workforce. However, the sector already employs a considerable number of older workers and is dependent on their skills and experience, so it could be suggested that many companies, especially small organisations, are dealing with the specific needs and requirements of older workers in informal and flexible ways. Having said this, large companies like Toyota also have practices in place that, albeit not directed at older workers, would benefit this group of workers. The approach implemented at Toyota is close to the idea of workability which would consider work, life and home issues in a holistic manner (see Maltby 2007) and thus aim to ensure work is balanced and manageable. This would also result in a rebalancing of education, work and life-styles and would thus require us to better understand career deceleration. These practices are worth considering in more detail with regards to their applicability to different types of jobs or occupations, in particular those where skills gaps have been reported.

Health

Key sectoral characteristics

The health sector is one of the largest employers in the country and the National Health Service (NHS) alone is the third largest public sector employer in the world (Morgan, Cullinane & Pye 2008). The sector is also characterised by a high proportion of female (79%), white (89%) staff who are, in the main, highly qualified (24% hold a degree or equivalent qualification) (NGRF 2008). In 2007, the East Midlands Health sector employed a total of 149,033 individuals (Skills for Health 2008), for whom the following characteristics are provided:

Table 7: Characteristics of the Health Workforce in the East Midlands

Descriptive	East Midlands
Employment as proportion of UK	7% of all people in the healthcare sector are employed in the East Midlands
Size of firms	59% 1-10 employees 33% 11-49 employees 7% 50-199 employees 2% 200+ employees
Gender	79% female, 21% male
Ethnicity	89% White; 11% non-White
Age	49% aged 24-44 yrs 45% aged 45 yrs plus
Qualifications	63% S/NVQ 3 and above 24% S/NVQ 2 13% S/NVQ 1 and below
Training	86% establishments funded or arranged training in preceding 12 months
Vacancies	1400 during 2005 23% of establishments reporting vacancies 1% vacancies as proportion of employment
Hard to Fill Vacancies	400 during 2005 7% of establishments reporting HTF vacancies
Skill Shortage Vacancies	200 during 2005 5% of establishments reporting skill shortage vacancies
Skill Gaps	14% of establishments reporting internal skill gaps

Source: Skills for Health 2008, p. 19

The Health Sector is heavily dominated by the NHS and the importance of NHS staff in the East Midlands is visible in the numbers employed as outlined in Table 8. Given the size of the Health sector, and it's importance not only as an employer but also as a service provider, it is not surprising that considerations on the workforce have to be well structured and planned. For the NHS, this is done via Workforce Development Managers based in localities around the country and the Workforce Review Team (see www.healthcareworkforce.nhs.uk/workforcereviewteam.html). The majority of interviewees for this project were either Workforce Development Managers or Training Managers. However, in addition to the NHS, the voluntary sector is an important service provider. There are 1,961 registered charities in the East Midlands with activities in health and well-being (Skills for Health 2008). One interview was conducted in the voluntary sector to get some insight into the significant differences between the NHS and other services.

Table 8: The NHS Workforce in the East Midlands

	Headcount	Full Time Equivalent (FTE)
Total Directly Employed NHS Staff	91,730	75,704
All Hospital Medical & Dental Staff (including consultants, doctors in training and other medics)	6,495	5,993
All Non-Medical Staff	85,235	69,711
Professionally qualified clinical staff total	39,675	33,413
Support to clinical staff total	27,263	21,336
NHS infrastructure support total	18,255	14,926
Other staff or those with unknown classification	42	36

Source: Skills for Health 2008, p. 25

The Health sector has a high proportion of part-time workers. To give just one example, within the Nottinghamshire Health workforce, of 25,617 individual members of staff, 42.5 per cent work part time, thus amounting to 21,645.1 full time equivalents (information provided by Nottinghamshire Health and Social Care Community Workforce Team hosted by Nottinghamshire County Teaching PCT). According to Skills for Health (2008) the East Midlands has one of the lowest proportions of part-time students of all regions and therefore a net inflow of young, full-time first degree students. Part-time and flexible working is nevertheless used more widely than in other sectors. The possibilities for part-time or flexible working are important given previous research findings that, for example, older nurses assign greater importance to flexibility (Proenca, Shewchuk 1998).

A further characteristic of the Health Sector is reasonably high turnover both in terms of individuals leaving the sector and between different organisations within the sector (Andrews 2003). Barron, West and Reeves (2007) looked at the retention of nurses and found that their career intentions are complex and influenced by their individual socio-demographic characteristics, the quality of care they see being provided for patients, the extent to which they feel overworked and their satisfaction with pay. However, interviewees for this project also reflected that substantial numbers amongst their staff have a long service record and like working with the people and in the positions they are used to.

Older workers in the sector

Previous research shows that the health care sector has a high rate of older workers (more than 15% in the 55 to 64 age range and 25% between 45 and 54) (McNair, Flynn 2006b). For the East Midlands, the NHS Medical and Non-Medical Census 2007 shows that of the Medical and Dental Workforce, there are 8 individuals who are 70 years of age and older (3.01 FTE) and 62 who are aged between 65 and 69 years of age (32.3 FTE). In Non-Medical occupations, there are 564 individuals who are 65 years and over (330.59 FTE). This Census also shows that a significant number of NHS staff in the East Midlands is over 45 years of age.

Table 9: NHS Staff in the East Midlands by Age

	Staff over 45		All Staff	
	Heads	FTE	Heads	FTE
Medical & Dental Staff	1888	1604.790049	5346	6075.26
Nursing & Midwifery Staff	10464	8804.66	27904	23009.08
Scientific, Therapeutic & Technical Staff	3545	2930.25	10000	8457.67
Ambulance Staff	733	713.72	1662	1637.22
Support Staff	21467	17294.11	44424	35167.67

Source: NHS Medical and Non-Medical Census 2007

Interviewees' most common response to the question how an older worker might be defined in the organisation was: "We don't really." None of the respondents reported specific policies for older workers. There was mention that age was not considered when recruiting or promoting and there were indications of familiarity with age legislation, although there were no specific questions on this aspect. The findings here thus confirm previous results showing employers displaying positive attitudes towards older workers (McNair, Flynn 2006b). This may, in part, be due to increased awareness about the ageing population as this development affects the sector both in terms of the future service demand and with regards to their workforce (Skills for Health n/a, Darzi 2008). However, as one respondent outlined, awareness about demographic changes is more due to workforce planning requirements than attempts to retain workers:

... most organisations are very aware of their aging workforce profile and for workforce planning purposes will track their current and potential retirements. This influences the commissioning i.e. the need to train more, adapt current roles and factor in the idea of flexible retirements. The NHS workforce has a growing number of staff aged 55 and over, and the challenge is to incorporate that into more part time or flexible working arrangements.

Richard Ansell, Head of the Local Health Community Workforce Team for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

Irrespective of the reasons, there is awareness that the health sector has an ageing workforce and that this could, potentially, create problems. Health has experienced employment growth and is expected to have a high replacement demand ratio. For the East Midlands, it is estimated that the NHS will need to replace approximately 59 per cent of the professionally qualified clinical staff, such as nurses, and physiotherapists; 63 per cent of clinical support staff; and 60 per cent of NHS infrastructure staff (including Admin, clerical and managers) (Skills for Health 2008). These calculations are based on the assumption that retirement profiles will not dramatically change over the period 2006 to 2016 and on a conservative 5 per cent estimate for all other turnover.

A further indicator of awareness regarding demographic changes in the workforce is the pre-retirement course run by Northamptonshire Teaching PCT. The PCT's training department targets those who could retire in the next 10 years. The topics covered during the session include credit history, equity release, state pensions, savings and investing, taxation and wills and inheritance tax. The advertisement for this course emphasises the financial nature and the course objectives are to have an understanding of managing your money, claiming your pension, reducing your insurance costs and saving and investing with confidence. Information on the course is sent out to all PCT staff though sessions are oversubscribed. Despite the financial nature of the course, there could be additional information, or sessions on the

possibilities for flexible retirement and/or working past state pension age. Flexible retirement, for example, is mentioned on the course and people are directed to their individual trusts' retirement policy.

The overall impression gained from the interviews conducted is thus that there are a substantial number of older workers in the health sector who are key to the service the sector provides.

Skill requirements and learning in the health sector

Medical and caring professions have a stringent system in place to ensure that staff are adequately trained and skills updated on a regular basis. For many professions such training is required to keep their registration alive and thus be allowed to practice. It is therefore not surprising that research undertaken by Morgan, Cullinane and Pye (2008) shows that learning and development are perceived to be the responsibility of the individual rather than the organisation. However, the health sector has a considerable range of staff, including unqualified catering staff as well as medical professionals. It should also be considered that the Health sector includes a considerable range of agency workers; in 2001 their number was 43,000 in the entire NHS (including internal 'bank' nurses) (Hoque et al. 2008). In many cases, this use of agency staff covers vacant posts and keeps services running (Tailby 2005). The broad range of staff might go some way to explain why previous research found that slightly fewer organisations (68%) in the health and social care sector provide work related training to all staff when compared to all sectors (70%) (McNair, Flynn 2006b) though the inclusion of social care distorts this figure. A further factor to consider is the length of training and the experience that is required to access certain specialist positions. It could therefore be that older workers, with more experience, are essential to fill specialist positions. One example in case is a district nurse who would need to have worked for quite a few years before taking that qualification. These long training periods also necessitate forward planning by Workforce Planning Managers of at least 5 years.

In contrast to the regular training required of professional staff, other staff groups within the sector have, in the past, hardly received any training. To address this, some healthcare organisations have signed a Skills Pledge that includes basic literacy, numeracy and IT skills. With regard to other skills, it was reported that there is a shortage of specialist practitioners such as occupational, speech and language therapists and nurses. A further specialist area is work in the community, which, according to Government plans and the Next Stage Review (Darzi 2008), is to be expanded. At present, nurses coming out of university have not got the necessary skills because it is very different to nursing in an acute hospital. This skills gap is being addressed in collaboration with Universities. A further example of training schemes is the Joint Investment Framework set up jointly in July 2007 by Strategic Health Authorities, the LSC and Skills for Health to inject up to £ 100m extra to tackle skills gaps and shortages over a period of three years (Skills for Health 2008a). This initiative was seen to be part of developing the demand-led skills system recommended by the Leitch review (see Leitch 2006). The Joint Investment Framework is also seen as an opportunity to provide flexible training for NHS staff in partnership with the LSC. Discussions are under way whether the funding for the Joint Investment Framework and investments such as assessment time and infrastructure costs will be matched.

A further means by which the provision of training and learning opportunities is addressed is the careers framework. As most of the SSCs, Skills for Health is working on a skills / career matrix, entitled the career framework for Health, which gives an overview of the various areas (e.g. non-clinical, mental health nursing, occupational therapy, audiology, elective care, radiology, A&E, etc) in which there are nine hierarchical levels (from initial entry level jobs to senior staff) (for further details see the Skills for Health web pages at: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk/page/career-frameworks for further details). The aim is to enable

both sideways and upward moves from any given situation within the matrix. Each job description is based on a certain number of competencies, thus allowing for clear forward planning for skills escalation when a promotion is targeted. The matrix is clearly intended to link training and learning to career progression. The model also aims to address the 'silo mentality' that has been found in the Health sector. However, at present, this complex system is still in the planning phase. Although likely to take a long time to plan carefully and implement correctly, the career framework should provide a clear and transparent system of training and progression to all staff. It should also address specific problems such as those found by Morgan, Cullinane and Pye (2008) that those who move into management do not necessarily have managerial training available to them. The same research shows that the majority of staff in management positions progressed to these positions at least partially because of the experience they had. Experience is thus vital to the work that is done in the sector. Interviewees confirmed that older workers could have it easier to demonstrate that they have appropriate knowledge, competencies and experience and therefore have possibilities for promotion.

Respondents also confirmed that they did not restrict access to training or learning opportunities for older workers, though, as the following quotes suggest, there may be some variation in the perceptions on this matter.

It feels like most people can access some learning and development, but a lot of it is very biased towards the graduate level and above, in NHS speak, this is band 5 and above, especially postgraduate. [...] Individuals that did not do well academically therefore access disproportionately less training and development. However it is this group that may need the most assistance but may not want to go back to school. We need to look at things like adult apprenticeships for example.

Richard Ansell, Head of the Local Health Community Workforce Team for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

Formally we don't put any age restrictions on accessing education at all. I think there will be mixed views in the workforce in general about individuals who have been with us a particular length of time, who are good workers, therefore we'll support them to carry on as opposed to the idea that you can't teach an old dog new tricks. I also know that we've had mention of preferring more mature people because sometimes the youngsters don't necessarily have a good solid work ethic.

Cate Hollinshead, Derbyshire Workforce Development Team

Such critical attitudes to younger labour market entrants or staff in general reflects the findings in the Employer Skills Survey (Roe, Godfrey 2008). Respondents also suggested that if training were provided for long-term members of staff, there might be an assumption that this will bind the individual to the organisation. At the same time, there is a clear acknowledgement that previous experience is valuable, as is also evident in Derby's Graduate Entry Medical School. Candidates on this scheme will have a previous degree (not necessarily medical), therefore bringing with them some life experience, and will also have gone through an intense selection process. There are early indications that this could result in better all-round doctors because they have more experience. The scheme is being extended to graduate entry nurses.

As previously mentioned, for large sections of the registered workforce (e.g. nurses and doctors) CPD is compulsory to keep their registration alive (Morgan, Cullinane & Pye 2008) whereas there are few such requirements for occupations such as porters or catering staff.

Here emphasis on qualification levels 2 and 3 (e.g. via Train to Gain and the Skills Pledge) is important. One responded clearly summarised further differences between occupations within the sector:

A couple of years ago we were pushing the national vocational qualifications and the learning accounts in a particular staff group, especially amongst our domestic staff, who are very well trained to do their job and had been with us for maybe 30 years but possibly didn't have any qualification at all. And so we offered it to them. As individuals they maybe saw less need to take up this national qualification but several of them did and it was the first qualification they would have had. [...] And that was fantastic for them as individuals, but also had quite a knock-on effect when they were talking to some of their younger colleagues.

When asked whether this meant that there were possibilities to accredit practical on-the-job experience and more general experience for such groups of staff, the respondent stated:

I think it is possible. I think sometimes there are restrictions put on it that may not be formal but in terms of what people think they are capable of themselves. But also in that there may be prejudice within the NHS, which is about professional staff good, unqualified staff poor. And sometimes those are barriers.

Cate Hollinshead, Derbyshire Workforce Development Team

Apart from formal training available to professional staff and schemes that could be utilised for auxiliary staff, the silo mentality mentioned above indicates that it can be difficult to implement workplace or informal learning. Nevertheless, there is scope for teams working together to learn from each other, in particular where more experienced and possibly older staff is involved. Due to the long training periods, a significant proportion of staff in the health sector are part of the 'older worker' category. The skills gaps, in particular for specialist positions such as district nurses, could also provide opportunities for more experienced and long-serving staff.

Good practice examples in the health sector

When questioned about means to better integrate older workers into the workforce and make better use of their experience, the interviews revealed good practice examples where longer-serving and, in many cases, older workers have been encouraged into learning. One of these is outlined in the following example of a Certificate in Higher Education (Palliative and Supportive Care) developed collaboratively by LOROS (Hospice Care for Leicestershire and Rutland) and the University of Northampton.

Example: Certificate in Higher Education

We highlighted that there was a serious gap for employers, but also in terms of end of life care, and how this is managed strategically. Excellence and quality in end of life care is a high priority and to a large extent is dependent on the appropriate skills and knowledge of the workforce. Support workers, as front line carers, provide much of end of life care. However such staff are often not offered the opportunity to develop their skills. We therefore developed the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care (Palliative and Supportive Care). The course is aimed at support workers such as nursing auxiliaries, healthcare assistants and community support workers. Many of these individuals have been in post for many years and are older workers. Often, they have not had access to any form of education.

Course outline

Year 1: Graduate Skills; Work based learning for effective practice in Health and Social Care; Inter-professional working in Health and Social Care; Principles and Practice of Palliative and Supportive Care

Year 2: Promoting health and Well-being, Symptom Management; Ethical & spiritual perspectives in end of life care; Evidence Based Practice, Responding to loss - knowledge and skills for practice, Advanced Work Based Learning

This is a flexible programme including work-based learning and taught sessions at The Leicestershire and Rutland Hospice (LOROS) and the University of Northampton. Students can choose to undertake a one-year course resulting in a Certificate in Higher Education Health & Social Care (Palliative and Supportive Care) or continue with the 2nd year of study to achieve the Foundation degree in Health & Social Care (Palliative and Supportive Care). Specialist modules can also be accessed as stand alone units of learning to a maximum of 40 credits. Entry criteria include that students should have been working in the public, private or voluntary sector, for a minimum of 6 months and achieved NVQ level 3 or equivalent or have significant work experience to APEL. The University of Northampton validates this 2-year foundation degree.

Most of the students who have completed the first year have been older or middle age. Most are new to formal adult education and are also faced with the need to juggle work and families in addition to the demands of the course. This has proved to be a particular challenge. The numbers signing up to the first cohort have been disappointing (4 doing the full foundation degree and 10 people accessing specialist modules) though there have been many expressions of interest. Funding has proved to be a major barrier to people accessing the course. Until recently funding was not available for level 1-4 training. The second cohort of students commenced in September 2008 and attracted 13 students onto the Foundation Degree Programme.

Source: www.loros.co.uk and Sharon de Caestecker, Head of Education LOROS

Other examples of learning that make use of experience address the silo mentality that is frequently mentioned in the health sector. The most progressive example is the inter-professional learning manager post set up by the Nottinghamshire Health and Social Care Community Workforce Team to promote and implement inter-professional working and learning. For example, a nurse, physio, occupational therapist, a doctor, pharmacist would be brought together to learn and work together. Given the extensive changes and developments in the Health sector, it is important for staff to understand each other's roles in health and social care. This is especially the case when considering that there are considerable differences between what might be learnt in an academic setting and how knowledge is actually implemented in real working life. Such inter-disciplinarity is also starting to occur in pre-registration and training.

Finally, more specific roles were mentioned that would be useful for the sector and that could draw on the experience of older workers. Involvement in mentoring has previously been suggested as a means by which older workers can help resolve HR issues (McNair, Flynn & Dutton 2007). This idea was also mentioned, for example in the following quote:

Across the health sector it is likely that retaining staff beyond the current retirement age will become increasingly important. To make this attractive to a wide range of staff careful planning will be required. Due to the physical and emotional nature of working in health care it might be that managers and supervisors can explore alternative roles for staff to undertake to make the best

use of their experience. One frequent suggestion is to use older workers in mentoring and assessment roles. Any change in role will require individuals to gain additional skills which will require the necessary investment.

Pippa Hodgson, Regional Director East Midlands, Skills for Health

A specific variation of this role where experience would be valued was also suggested:

New roles like patient trackers or patient navigators are designed to enhance the patient experience and require someone with an in-depth knowledge of a patients' journey. It wouldn't necessarily be a high grade perhaps, but it could be a rewarding role, and at the moment is performed by volunteers. Greater recognition of the value of this role could lead to an ideal role for an older, experienced employee.

Richard Ansell, Head of the Local Health Community Workforce Team for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

Motivation to carry on working?

A key question raised by interviewees was whether individuals in the Health sector would want to work past state pension age. Respondents felt it was important to support those who might be interested in carrying on but that they could not actively encourage those who wanted to retire. In this respect, press coverage and public discussions that older workers 'should' carry on working (BBC 2008) has not been particularly helpful. One issue raised was that many of the occupations in the health sector involve heavy lifting and/or psychological pressure. A study into the workability, that is the holistic approach to work, life and home balance (see Maltby 2007), of health care workers found that the proportion with excellent workability decreased from 29.8 per cent in the 45-49 age group to 13.6% in the 60-67 age group and that there was a higher incident of excellent workability among nurses and nursing health care assistant than among domestic assistants and doctors (Nachiappan, Harrison 2005). As previously indicated, it is thus also important to look at specific occupations and their different possibilities for extending working lives.

The Health sector faces particular problems as there is a lack of incentives to carry on working. As found by previous research (see Loretto, White 2006c) this might be due to a lack of career advancement and promotion opportunities. In the Health sector there is a variation of this problem as the good pension entitlements do not improve with longer service (once past a minimum level of service years). Interviewees also mentioned anecdotal information of staff who had to work at a lower grade once they had past state pension age and this again confirms previous research findings (especially in the care industries, see Loretto, White 2006c). At the same time, there were also voices highlighting the considerable loyalty of NHS staff who generally care about the job and their patients. This in itself can be enough motivation for some people to carry on working part-time after retirement. Interviewees stated that they see people of 70 years still working for the NHS, because the work has become an important part of their life and because they have a strong sense of loyalty. The reasons for such decisions to carry on working were described as emotive and particular to public service industries.

The health sector is a large employer of older workers and has awareness of the ageing population, not only for workforce planning reasons but also due to the services that the sector provides. However, this does not necessarily equate to employers being prepared for changes. Experienced and well-trained staff are crucial though more development could be provided for auxiliary staff, for example via NVQs, adult apprenticeships, Train to Gain or specialist Foundation Degrees. Alternative roles were also suggested, including mentors,

assessors and patient trackers. However, the issue of providing incentives or at least some benefit to extending working lives needs to be addressed.

Logistics

Key sectoral characteristics

Logistics is one of the most global industries (compare Pyne, Dinwoodie & Roe 2007), despite its concentration in the East Midlands. It is in particular the large companies that act on the global level. It has been noted that whereas, in the past, logistics referred to freight transportation and warehousing, it is now concerned with supply chain management, which includes:

...the planning and control of the entire supply chain, from production to transportation, to storage and distribution, through to sales, and back again to production. This entire cycle is now viewed as an integrated circuit in constant motion. The efficiency of the whole cycle, in terms of accuracy, speed, and cost, is seen as more important than the efficiency of the individual parts of the system.

(Bonacich, Wilson 2005, p. 68)

The logistics industry is therefore closely related to aspects of different sectors, for example, the construction sector (Barker, Naim 2008) and printing and packaging industries (Found, Rich 2007). The most important overlap, however, is with the retail sector as most of the innovation in the sector was carried out by the high volume operators including food retailers and mixed retail businesses (Ferne 1997).

Logistics is usually considered in combination with transport, and it was the aim to separate out logistics as such for the purpose of this project. However, this was hampered by the lack of statistics and evidence-based policy development in the sector (Skills for Logistics 2005a). This is confounded by the poor image projected by the industry (Skills for Logistics 2006). Yet despite these problems, logistics is key to the UK economy, accounting for 8 per cent of the national GDP, and government spending of around £20 million a year on training in the sector (LSC 2008a). Small and medium-sized firms, mainly in freight and distribution, dominate the structure of the industry. Those employing 1-10 people make up 85 per cent of logistics workplaces in the East Midlands (Skills for Logistics n/a). In addition, there are a small amount of large firms often involved in air, rail and inland shipping (Skills for Logistics 2005a). For the logistics sector, the East Midlands is well situated within the UK, especially given the importance of transport hubs and gateways that are well situated, reliable and well connected (European Foundation 2008). Table 10 provides an overview of workplaces in the region. The importance of the location of the region becomes evident via the high proportion (22%) of workplaces dealing with freight transport by road.

The workforce involved in logistics and related activities is spread across a number of different occupations and sectors. There are also indications that agency labour is very important in the sector. Skills for Logistics claimed in 2005 that the total workforce is 1.75 million people, or about 6 per cent of all UK employment (Skills for Logistics 2005a). There are 15,700 logistics sector workplaces in the East Midlands accounting for nearly 10 per cent of all workplaces in the region (Skills for Logistics n/a). Of the workforce, 39 per cent are process plant and machine operatives and elementary staff, and 18 per cent are 55 years and over. The latter group dominate road freight (NGRF 2006). This suggests that the East Midlands has a large proportion of older workers in its 'freight transport by road' workplaces.

Table 10: Workplaces by type and size in the East Midlands logistics sector

UK SIC 2003	1-10	11-49	50-199	200+	Total
511 : Wholesale on a fee or contract basis	1200	100	0	0	1200
512 : Wholesale of agricultural raw materials and live animals	300	0	0	0	300
513 : Wholesale of food, beverages and tobacco	800	100	100	0	1000
514 : Wholesale of household goods	1800	300	100	0	2200
515 : Wholesale of non-agricultural intermediate products, waste & scrap	1300	400	0	0	1700
518 : Wholesale of machinery, equipment & supplies	1400	300	0	0	1800
519 : Other wholesale	1400	100	0	0	1500
6024 : Freight transport by road	3000	400	100	0	3500
6411 : National post activities	300	100	100	0	400
6412 : Courier activities other than national post activities	900	0	0	0	1000
6210 : Scheduled air transport	0	0	0	0	0
6220 : Non-scheduled air transport	0	0	0	0	0
6311 : Cargo handling	0	0	0	0	0
6312 : Storage and warehousing	300	100	0	0	500
6323 : Other supporting air transport activities	0	0	0	0	0
6340 : Activities of other transport agencies	200	0	0	0	300
All Sectors	13000	2000	500	100	15600

Source: ABI 2006, provided by the LSC (due to the small sample size in the ABI, the results are rounded by the LSC to protect confidentiality)

There are some striking characteristics of the workforce in the East Midlands. Over half, 52 per cent, are employed in process, plant and machine operations and in elementary occupations. The self-employed make up 8 per cent, and 14 per cent work part-time. The proportion of part-time workers is highest in National Post activities and lowest in storage and warehousing. This picture is typical for the UK logistics sector but, when compared to the region as a whole (26% work part-time), is relatively low (Skills for Logistics n/a). Older workers often take advantage of flexible working, for example as drivers or warehouse workers. In part, this is driven by necessity on the part of employers. Given the need for drivers in general it can be especially difficult to get experienced and good drivers.

Older workers in the logistics sector

The logistics workforce is composed mainly of male, white workers (Skills for Logistics 2005a) and there are indications that the sector has an old and relatively unskilled workforce, though there has been an increase in skill requirements. At 17 per cent, the sector has a higher proportion of workers over 55 than the UK workforce as a whole (McNair, Flynn 2006d). Amongst heavy goods vehicle drivers it was estimated in 2004 that 23 per cent were aged 55 and over. At this point in time 80,000 of these drivers were forecast to retire over the next five years. In contrast, a disproportionately low number of young people were entering the sector (Skills for Logistics 2006). Unlike other types of work such as construction, there are only few indications that work performance decreases with age and, at 70 per cent of firms reporting, access to work related training for all staff in the sector is on par with other sectors (ibid 2006, 19).

Employment in the East Midlands logistics sector is predicted to increase. Taking into consideration retirements, the demand in the East Midlands logistics sector has therefore been placed at 24,000 people (Skills for Logistics n/a). The occupation with the highest

replacement demand is the ageing driver population, which makes for almost 1/3 of all replacement demand needs. The logistics sector regional profile considers employment by age as follows:

In the East Midlands the logistics sector broadly mirrors the regional economy when looking at age groupings within its workforce. It is notable that within freight transport by road and wholesale, two key sub-sectors, the majority of employment comes from the older age groups, with nearly half over the age of 45. This highlights the growing concerns of future workforce supply for the sector, particularly freight transport by road where one in 10 of the workforce is under 25.

Skills for Logistics n/a, p. 18

Similar to the health sector, the main concerns seem to be workforce planning requirements. When considering the demographic factors of labour force issues Skills for Logistics have also considered the implications of an ageing workforce in terms of how work could or should be changed for older workers.

One of the problems arising from the relatively high proportion of older drivers in the industry is that with ageing comes a gradual loss of driving skills and capabilities. Maturity and experience can compensate to some extent, and advances in vehicle design and technology help older drivers to continue working. Examples are reduced vibration and noise, and better temperature control. However goods vehicle drivers do not themselves have the option of adapting by changing when and where they drive, in the way that private motorists do. As a response to shortages of drivers it may be possible to adapt working practices to suit the needs of older drivers, for example by allocating them shorter and easier journeys, and re-allocating manual handling tasks from drivers to other staff.

Skills for Logistics 2005b, p. 27

A further issue of concern are legislative changes to come into effect next year. Generally speaking, there is pressure regarding the time and cost of training, especially if there is no solid business case for training. This issue becomes more prominent for older workers as the following example for larger goods vehicles (LGV) shows. Legislation for LGV drivers is to change from next year onwards when an EU Directive makes 35 hours of training mandatory for professional drivers. The content of the training is flexible, can be classroom or cab based, and cover anything from vehicle maintenance to health and safety. Individuals, employers or colleges can provide the training. There is fear that drivers will be put off by this development and retire early rather than undergo the training, thus highlighting the lack of young drivers even more.

There are thus clearly concerns within the sector regarding the high proportion of older workers and there is awareness amongst employers regarding those workers. The proportion of such older workers varied considerably and depended on the particular occupations and jobs offered by different companies. As in other sectors there are no specific organisational policies on older workers. However, the experience of the workforce is important. Interviewees confirmed that, when recruiting, experience was one of the main competencies they looked for, with qualifications being of secondary importance. Experience would be assessed by looking at jobs or positions previously held, tasks completed and whether any of these were within the logistics sector. The majority of the skills required are thus transferable skills rather than firm specific skills. However, as the following quote shows, there was also a perception that experience is not always important.

I think life would go on if I'm honest. I mean we all like to think we'd be missed if we weren't here, but I think the reality of the situation is it just goes on.

As will be shown in the next section, the fact that experience is valued highly is related to the lack of formal training. Part of the problem is also that the sector is dominated by smaller firms who do not normally have the systems in place to fund training, monitor how well the training is delivered or how well it may be done.

Skill requirements and learning in the logistics sector

"A large part of the school training carried out for the benefit of operatives in the transport and logistics industry is currently driven by miscellaneous statutory requirements" (Skills for Logistics 2005b). This refers in particular to driver licensing, the certificate of professional competence, training for dangerous goods safety advisers, and dangerous goods driver training. Legislation is thus an important leveraged for employer involvement in training and learning opportunities for staff. Skills for Logistics have attempted to address this issue and work with awarding bodies to structure and develop NVQs. Two key current developments are the Professional Development Stairway (see also stairway.org) and the Regional Logistics Academy.

According to Skills for Logistics many firms are driven by short-term considerations and are ambivalent about training and skill development, especially when it concerns anything beyond statutory requirements (Skills for Logistics 2006). The main strategy seems to be to buy in staff or poach staff from other firms. It is generally known that there are key skill shortages in the area of heavy goods vehicle drivers and, in part, this is related to working conditions such as pay, long and generally inflexible working hours, shift patterns, stress factors, working environment, supervision and career prospects (Skills for Logistics 2005a, Skills for Logistics 2006). Two key reasons for skills shortages lie in the lack of skills amongst applicants and a general lack of applicants but there also seems to be a failure to train staff at all levels; a need for new skills following the introduction of new products or technology, and a need for new skills following the introduction of new working practices (NGRF 2006). Of the East Midlands logistics workforce 45 per cent are qualified below NVQ level 2 or have no qualification, compared with 30 per cent in all other sectors. There are also fewer people in logistics (17%) qualified at level 4 and above when compared to all other sectors (30%) (Skills for Logistics n/a). This is, potentially, a problem because many jobs in logistics require a higher level of skill and involve more responsibilities than might be expected. Interviewees indicated that the skills and image problem in the industry mean they have very few applicants with higher skills.

Statistics indicate that logistics employers in the East Midlands do not fund or provide staff training as a matter of course (NGRF 2006) and that the majority of the workforce have low or no qualifications. But the logistics industry does not suffer a big recruitment problem. 14 per cent of employers in the East Midlands have at least one vacancy, 4 per cent of which are hard to fill and 3 per cent of which are skills shortage vacancies (Skills for Logistics n/a). Of the employers in the East Midlands logistics sector only 54 per cent formally assessed staff training needs, and 29 per cent do not have a business plan, training plan or a budget for expenditure. This could indicate a lack of knowledge regarding training needs and skills gaps. The main preference when providing training is to train in-house. Further education colleges are only used by 16 per cent of employers providing off the job training, with a significant proportion of employers citing that further education courses do not provide relevant training (Skills for Logistics n/a). This leaves both employers and education providers in a difficult position. It is not yet clear how recent developments allowing further education colleges to bid for LSC funds to provide certain types of courses will address this problem.

The results from the current research are, to some extent, not representative of the sector as a whole because interviewees confirmed an involvement in training. In one company, NVQs were available to all members of staff and they could be undertaken at the local college. In addition to formal training offered via, for example, further education colleges, employers also undertook in-house training and relied on informal, on-the-job learning. This informal learning is often delivered via informal and internal networks though these do not act as a means to undertake skills needs assessment. One example mentioned referred to the manager or foreman having a chat round the back of a truck. Other companies took a more strategic approach to training up new members of staff.

As we are an Investor in People, training is very important to us. We always, when we take a new person on, offer full training. They all have an induction period where they will spend a certain amount of time with other people who will be mentoring them and teaching them the new position. We never bring anybody in and just tell them to get on with it. That doesn't happen.

Helen Gibson, The Spatial Group

In addition to the value of training for the company there is reward for individuals participating in training. Employers confirmed that there is a relationship between learning opportunities and career progression. In one company, workers would start off on the shop floor and work their way up into the offices whilst completing NVQs along the way. Despite the use of NVQs, the uptake of apprenticeships in the logistics sector has been traditionally poor and this could be an area where further development is possible.

The skills gaps mentioned by employers interviewed for this project reflect national shortages. Drivers, especially at heavy goods vehicle level, were mentioned. Other than that, employers were aware that filling positions was closely linked to working conditions such as pay. When asked how skills gaps could be addressed and older workers integrated better, various forms of flexible employment were mentioned. The Spatial Group provides a good example of how older workers past state pension age have been integrated into the workforce.

Most of the people who are over retirement age didn't work here before they retired. They came here after retirement age and through temporary agencies. They worked here with temporary agencies first and we took them on a part-time basis, permanently. [...] So most of the people who are over 65 are only part-time, most of them have previously done other more involved jobs. They now come in and pick and pack or work in the post room, processing mail for us. I don't think you can consider people aged 50 to be older workers. I mean, there's a lot of people who work in the offices, managers, directors, there's definitely no issues at that age. [...] The over retirement age people have a review meeting with the managing director once a year, where they discuss any issues they have and whether they want to carry on working.

Helen Gibson, The Spatial Group

When queried about reasons why individuals carried on working after state pension age, the respondent indicated two distinct factors: first, some cannot afford to retire because they still have a mortgage or other financial responsibilities, and second, some feel that they would get bored if they were at home all day.

The logistics sector contains specific occupations, such as heavy goods vehicle drivers, that are particularly effected by the ageing of the workforce. In part this issue is confounded by the poor image of the sector but also by its growth and demand for (replacement) labour.

Part-time or flexible working is common and is used by many older workers, before and after state pension age. The majority of the training that is provided by the sector is due to regulations such as those for drivers or health and safety legislation. Although NVQs are utilised, this is not necessarily a consistent approach by all employers as can be seen in the lack of apprentices in the sector. Partially as a result of the lack of formal training, experience on the part of workers is highly valued.

Retail

Key sectoral characteristics

Retail is a key sector within the UK economy, employing over 3 million people (Foster, Whysall & Harris 2008). It comprises the largest sector of the private economy in the UK and includes a small amount of large retailers and a large amount of small businesses (Hart et al. 2007). The growth of the retail sector as a whole has ensured a continual rise in retail employment over the last 30 years, a trend that has been predicted to continue (Hart et al. 2007). There have been considerable changes in the sector with significant concentration amongst the top ten British retailers and increased reliance on logistical support to stores around the country (Ferne 1997). This highlights the important relationship between head offices and outlets or individual stores around the country. Despite the overall shift to a more centralised approach, the importance of local, tacit knowledge and experiential learning, e.g. via long periods of service for the company, are still important (Fuller et al. 2008). The dominance of large companies has not produced a strong sectoral sense of development. This is evident in the role of the Sector Skills Council, Skillsmart Retail, vis-à-vis employers which has been summarised as follows.

Skillsmart Retail had originally been given seed corn funding of £2 million and was expected to produce a business plan and become self-financing by the industry. A spokesperson conceded that they failed to receive the level of employer contributions which they had originally hoped for. As a result they had been forced to 'restructure the business in order to ensure its effective operations'. Any hope of sustainability through employer contributions has since been shelved.

(Payne 2008, p. 100)

And whereas Skillsmart Retail has strong engagement with major employers, awareness of the SSC remains low (at 6% of retail establishments) and, prior to the Skills Pledge, uptake of NVQs was limited and declining (Payne 2008). More generally, retail has been described as having recruitment problems, high staff turnover, particularly amongst front-line staff, and skills shortages (Foster, Whysall & Harris 2008). Turnover, for example, has been reported at rates of around 43 per cent (Hart et al. 2007). A considerable range of factors, including environmental factors, organisational factors such as company culture and values, as well as management behaviour and individual employee variables are important in influencing turnover in the retail sector (Booth, Hamer 2007). This has led to the development of a poor public image, in particular with regards to career opportunities for the well-qualified (Hart et al. 2007). Together with the low and, in part non-existent, qualifications of employees, this has led to the description of the sector as being trapped in a low skills, low pay equilibrium.

Yet there are also considerable opportunities within the retail sector, which continues to offer a considerable proportion of jobs on a part time basis. This has attracted in particular women returners, but also students (Hart et al. 2007). Interviewees confirmed that covering all opening hours can be a struggle. In particular, early morning or late night vacancies, and weekend work can be difficult to fill.

I think over time your attitude will no doubt change. You become less hungry and less quick to get out of your seat and talk to people and less willing to go and do a 7 o'clock demonstration at someone's house or something like that, because you want to go home and see the kids. You can't blame them for that.

Barnaby Sturgess, MD and Volvo Dealer Principle, Sturgess Motor Group

It requires a diverse pattern of shifts as well as employees flexibility to provide retail services. In most cases, but not all, this meant that part-time and flexible working was the norm, with the rate of part-time workers in one particular store standing at 83 per cent. Part-time work is not universally attractive, though, and research has identified that it can lead to an inability to recruit suitable applicants with appropriate qualifications (Hart et al. 2007).

Older workers in the retail sector

The retail sector traditionally has a young workforce with high turnover rates. Nearly a third of the workforce is under 25 (Skillsmart Retail 2007) and less than 15 per cent are over 55 (McNair, Flynn 2006c). Other sources suggest that currently 31 per cent of the workforce is aged over 45 (Skillsmart Retail 2008). For the East Midlands, Skillsmart Retail provide the following breakdown of retail workers by age.

Table 11: Retail workers by age in the East Midlands

Age group	Number of retail workers in East Midlands
16-24	60,000
25-49	103,800
50+	44,200

Source: Skillsmart Retail 2008, p. 11

Interviewees indicated that further differentiation between different sub-sectors and their pre-dominant age is necessary. It was suggested that supermarket retailing tends to be older and fashion retailing younger. Even within companies there are significant differences depending on, for example, whether a store is out-of-town or in a town centre. Having said this, respondents did not have a clear definition of what a younger or older workers would be. Some interviewees also stated that a date of birth is not provided on application forms, thus making it impossible to know the age of individuals who are invited for interview. Nevertheless, demographics and market forces are starting to challenge the sector's recruitment and retention practices (Skillsmart Retail 2007) as is also indicated by Hart et al. (2007, p.273):

[F]or the retail industry, replacement demand, i.e. the labour required to replace those leaving the industry, is five times higher than the labour required to meet expansion. Forecasts show that between 2002-2012 in the UK nearly half a million people would be needed in sales and customer service occupations alone to replace those leaving the industry.

Again, workforce planning seems to be the issue rather than older workers *per se*. Overall, in terms of older workers, there is the need for a sector wide change of mindset if lifelong learning is to be a reality for the sector. As is pointed out by Wheeler (2006) retailers must take a lead if they wish to have influence over their future recruitment and employment options. Potential results of an age imbalance in the workforce are skills shortages, especially at higher skilled levels. This might be enhanced further by the lack of training provision as only 57 per cent of firms provided training of any kind. In one study, of the organisations reporting in the retail sector, 66 per cent indicated that they provided work-related training to all staff (70% in all sectors) and off-the-job training in the sector is not common (McNair, Flynn 2006c). There is recognition that it is expensive to replace even junior retail workers and that younger workers had higher turnover rates than older workers (Urwin 2004). This could indicate that work-related training could be a useful means by which to reduce turnover and address the skills shortages within the sector. Yet, like most industries, retail seems to

concentrate its efforts on recruiting younger people. This is in contradiction to indications that a change of approach will be necessary, especially as there will be more competition for (well-qualified) youths, a traditional pool of labour for retail. There may thus be even more need to train young workers in future. The increase in older consumers also needs to be considered (Hart et al. 2007). The Sector Skills Council, Skillsmart Retail, suggests that it is likely that employing older workers is going to be a key strategy for the future as this age group increases at the same time as younger age groups are in decline (Skillsmart Retail 2007). This is especially important because it has been pointed out that the retail sector has failed to train its older workers:

The sector prefers to qualify and train its younger workforce members, particularly those under the age of 25. Participation in training activities is significantly less for those over 50. In addition these older workers are less likely to hold higher-level qualifications. This is a particular concern as in future, younger workers will become an increasingly scarce resource for the retail sector to draw upon. The development of older workers will therefore grow in importance.

(Wheeler 2006, p. 2)

The following table provides more detailed information about the levels of qualifications held by retail employees in specific age groups and confirms that there are proportionally less individuals in the 50+ age category with (higher) qualifications.

Table 12: Highest level of qualification held by retail employees by age band

	16-24 (%)	25-49 (%)	50+ (%)
NVQ level 4 and above	10	17	10
NVQ level 3	30	12	7
Trade apprenticeships	1	4	8
NVQ level 2	34	20	12
Below NVQ level 2	15	25	15
Other qualifications	2	9	14
No qualifications	6	12	33

Source: Wheeler 2006, p. 6

More recently, it has thus been suggested that older workers could improve the skills base in the sector (Taylor 2008). Thus, older workers are perceived by employers to have better interpersonal skills and be more knowledgeable in product areas (Hart et al. 2007). Respondents mentioned soft skills and interpersonal skills, dealing with customers, as being highly valued and as increasing with age and experience. General life experience as well as know-how gained by working in the sector were mentioned as relevant and not something that can be trained. In the retail sector, employers thus tended to focus on individuals with the right attitude and the right behaviour. But employers also feel that older workers display a lack of awareness about their own as well as others' training needs (Hart et al. 2007). Interviewees who felt that older workers resented some of the training that was being offered to them confirmed that a lack of understanding about continual training and learning exists:

I've sat in on a number of meetings with people who are stony faced when they're in these training sessions, because they resent the prospect of having to spend a day out of the showroom not talking to customers and, you know, it seems that they resent the prospect of having to learn anything. But younger people are much more responsive, they know that they've not been in the

industry very long. They know they've got a lot to learn and they know they can benefit from it. So it's almost, age and experience is starting to become a disadvantage to sales people.

Barnaby Sturgess, MD and Volvo Dealer Principle, Sturgess Motor Group

There are particular skills gaps with regards to older workers' knowledge of technologies necessary for the job, and/or their willingness to learn new skills. Interviewees also reported difficulties in getting older workers to understand their recruitment practices and requirements. To some extent, there was a realisation that this is due to issues with the communication of what a company might be looking for.

In some of the companies interviewed, employee loyalty plays a significant role in retaining staff who have accumulated a significant amount of experience. It has been shown, however, that commitment or loyalty must be differentiated between loyalty to the retail industry, to the retailer or employer, and/or to the store or workplace (Foster, Whysall & Harris 2008). Depending on what aspect of retail an organisation is involved in, employers had very different attitudes towards experience. Previous research has reported that some retailers consider behaviour and attitude to be as important as skills in young people (Hart et al. 2007). This was reflected by the majority of interviewees for this research who pointed out that experience could be acquired and skills taught but that attitude and behaviour were much more difficult to change. This emphasis is not related to age and could benefit or disadvantage older workers as much as young recruits.

Skill requirements and learning in the retail sector

Previous research (Payne 2008) has reported that in retail skill needs can be quite modest and, in many cases, what is lacking are logistics and supply chain management skills. Interviewees confirmed that it is possible to move up the career ladder in retail without necessarily obtaining qualifications, especially if on-the-job and in-house training is provided. The lack of skill requirement for some of the key roles such as shelf-stackers or checkout operatives also creates a problem with the delivery of basic key skills as there is little incentive for employers to provide such learning opportunities. However, according to Payne (2008) Skillsmart Retail is developing sector specific numeracy and literacy qualifications at level 1 to address this problem. The improvement of a company's image may be an important incentive for organisations to participate in learning and training provision (Payne 2008).

There are further indications that training and learning are not key concerns in the sector. Of East Midlands retailers 40 per cent have devised a training plan, with on-the-job or internal training the preferred method – but a further 41 per cent of retailers have funded no training over the past year (Skillsmart Retail 2008). The interviews conducted as part of this research suggested that, increasingly, the sector is welcoming qualifications and standards. The new qualifications and credit framework (QCF) is going to be especially important in this respect (QCA 2008). It is a new way of recognising skills and qualifications and does this by awarding credit for small steps of learning, which enables people to gain qualifications at their own pace and along flexible routes. Overall, however, in-house and on-the-job training products are still more popular than other formal routes.

Previous research has identified fundamental barriers to the successful implementation and completion of modern apprenticeships in the retail sector, in particular because of the mobility of young workers who frequently change jobs (Spielhofer, Sims 2004). However, a different study identified apprenticeships as being popular with employers, in particular because they felt that existing retail qualifications were not appropriate to the needs of the

current retail trainee (Hart et al. 2007). There was one example of a company instituting its own training plan that was described as being similar to an apprenticeship:

... we have got our own guy who we are putting through a series of training sessions, we're sort of nurturing him in the order of an apprenticeship, although he is not formally on a programme. And that's the first time we've done that. Typically in a sales environment it's a very high turnover business. [...] If you're a very good salesman, you follow the path of least resistance. So you'll go where the cars are easy to sell, which is not generally Volvo. So as a result we've had so many disappointing experiences with sales people we've taken on and subsequently let go. We thought we'd have a go at finding the right person with the right attitude and training them to be sales people. [...] My experience has shown me that recruiting people with experience is not a recipe for success with the Volvo brand. You need to find someone who's got energy and commitment and enthusiasm.

Barnaby Sturgess, MD and Volvo Dealer Principle, Sturgess Motor Group

The difficulties to recruit the right person reflects the fact that, within the retail sector, 26 per cent of UK companies report skills gaps amongst their employees, a especially amongst sales and customer service occupations (Hart et al. 2007). Despite the importance of attitudes and behaviour, there is also a place for experience as is demonstrated in the next quote:

Older workers do have an opportunity to progress and sometimes their experience does mean they demonstrate the knowledge and skills that make them successful when applying for our coach and section coordinator roles. Equally we would not stand in the way of someone who was younger with 6 months or 12 months experience if they too demonstrated that skill and knowledge.

Katheryn Vernon, Head of Region HR Business Partner for Central/East Region, Marks & Spencer

Previous research has indicated a direct relationship between successful skills and competence building in organisations on the one hand and greater effectiveness and increased work place satisfaction for employees on the other hand, thus indicating that business performance can be influenced (Hart et al. 2007).

When queried about ways in which older workers could be retained or integrated better, some of the big companies interviewed for this research outlined extensive benefits systems for employees who have been working with the company for a long time. These include shares in the company, discount schemes, leisure facilities, holiday centres available at reduced rates and, for individuals who have been with one particular company a long time, 6 months paid leave. In addition to such benefit systems, there are indications that realisation of the overall change of outlook required in the industry is beginning to take hold. The following quote shows the extent to which changes are necessary, although Marks and Spencer have a particular problem to tackle due to their previous retirement policy.

Having had a culture of early retirement being available at 50 and now facing a future of retirement being available from 55 we are having to adapt. People are thinking of having extra assignments because they are having longer working careers. This is quite a culture change for our organisation particularly in management categories.

Katheryn Vernon, Head of Region HR Business Partner for Central/East Region,
Marks & Spencer

The findings outlined here reflect the recommendations put forward by a previous study into the retail sector in the East Midlands (Hart et al. 2007, p. 284) that a) it is important that retail is made more attractive career choice for workers of all ages; b) essential skills for retail need to be taught to potential employees to prioritise retail needs; c) the management skills gap needs to be closed; and d) students provide an increasing if transient workforce for retail, but could provide an opportunity for retention. The low qualifications of workers in the sector are a concern and need addressing whether this be via Train to Gain, Skills Accounts or NVQs. The role of older workers in the sector varies considerably depending on the sub-sector and culture of individual retailers. Whilst experience can thus be an advantage, this tends only to be the case where the expected attitudes and behaviours are also present. The high degree of part-time work that is necessary in the sector could nevertheless provide opportunities for older workers.

Policy-relevant considerations and further recommendations

The five sectors researched in this project provide very different scenarios in which to consider employers perspectives on older workers and the potential of training to extend working lives and reduce replacement demand. What has become clear in each sectoral analysis and the varying emphases that are placed on aspects of recruitment, training and development and work processes in general is that it is, inevitably, extremely difficult to find a one-size fits all approach. Depending on the varying needs and contexts, very different challenges and opportunities emerge. Bearing in mind that this research is based on a limited number of interviews, the range of different contexts presented here is only indicative. To ensure that any actions do not go against the requirements of employers and businesses in the East Midlands, sector- or even company-specific approaches and policies should therefore be considered. Moreover, previous findings on issues raised by the role of government in facilitating employment for older workers should also be reflected, in particular three key problems: expenditure restrictions, the negative impact of targets and the contradictions between rhetoric and reality (Pendleton 2006). Thus, "the concept of employer leadership remains deeply problematic in the English context" (Payne 2008, p. 93).

Generally speaking, employers have a reasonably high level of awareness of demographic trends, above all due to the increase of the pension entitlement age. Less have thought about the implications that this may have for their sector and company, though especially larger companies were clearly aware of age legislation. However, there were indications that the legislation has resulted in a 'scare tactic' in that employers feel unable to address older workers specifically, due to fear that they will contravene the legislation. The economic downturn has also affected some of the sectors, especially construction and engineering and has led to redundancies. Smaller organisations find it difficult to carry out all training and/or any activities beyond the necessary, though most large companies will carry on their usual training, apprenticeship and development programmes.

One of the key ways in which the continued participation of older workers in the labour force is discussed is via flexible working, in particular part-time hours. Health, retail and, to some extent, logistics provide considerable opportunities in this respect, due to the existent dependence on part-time work that meets the needs of the sectors. So far, this is, in the main, not targeted specifically at older workers, though there are some companies in the retail sector and in logistics who specialise on recruiting individuals who are eligible to retire. In the health sector it was questioned, however, whether awareness of older workers is more due to workforce planning issues rather than the intrinsic desire or attempts to extend workers' participation in the labour market. Moreover, there is some confusion about the different possibilities available to employers and the sustainability of these options for employers, especially in financial terms (compare Platman 2004). The issue of flexibility as raised in the literature review has been confirmed to be a difficult one by the current research findings.

The interviews conducted did not ask employers whether they thought their employees would want to continue working for longer but the topic tended to emerge in the conversations. Where it was discussed, employers tended to think that most employees would want to retire at state pension age, though there would always be exceptions. The employees' perspective was not included in the research aims of this project – though a follow-up project in this respect would be useful – but any findings in this respect need to be differentiated as is evident from the research conducted by McNair (2006, p. 489f):

Among the economically active, 80 per cent said that they would consider some form of paid or unpaid work, with 48 per cent choosing paid work after formal retirement but, for most, only on a part-time basis. Attachment to work of some

kind increased progressively with age up to 60. However, for the economically inactive (of all ages) the reverse was true: not only were they unlikely to want to work after retirement, the older they were, the less likely they were to want to work either on a paid or voluntary basis.

This means that once an individual has retired or is out of work, it is more difficult to get them back into labour market. Previous evidence has also shown that the timing of retirement is not necessarily voluntary and that choices are restricted (Barnes, Parry & and Lakey 2002, Cappellari, Dorsett & Haile 2005) but that there is a relationship between sustained good health and working past state pension age (Loretto, Vickerstaff & White 2006). The results presented for the health sector indicate how important it is to ensure that there are sufficient reasons for individuals to work for longer, rather than relying on their intrinsic motivation.

Considering that the majority of interviewees reported that no specific policies on older workers existed, interview questions investigated the value attached to the experience that workers may acquire as a proxy for the skills and knowledge that older workers could potentially offer an organisation. Whilst this can provide no definitive results, responses were indicative of the potential roles and opportunities available for older workers. Whereas all sectors attach some value to experience, this was reported significantly fewer times in the retail and logistics sector and was contextualised by references to the physicality of work in construction. In contrast, employers in engineering and health positively endorse experience and rely on the knowledge and skills acquired by their staff over time. These attitudes on experience seem, at least to some extent, related to the policies on learning and training within the different sectors.

The retail sector has low numbers of qualified workers and there are attempts to address this via provision of basic key skills. The sector tends to rely on in-house and on-the-job-learning. Logistics and construction have in common that there are some regulations regarding training such as health and safety and licensing requirements. In both sectors there are also developments to accredit existing knowledge, via a mandatory 35 hours of training for large goods vehicle drivers in logistics and the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS). However, there are also indications that, in both sectors, there is some resistance to go beyond what is required, thus highlighting the power of regulation and legislation in bringing about changes in a given sector or workplace. The health sector is an interesting mix of the aforementioned situations. Its professional staff are regulated by their respective professional bodies that tend to require regular training and up-dates to keep the registration to practice alive. In contrast, auxiliary and related staff, including those working in catering or as porters, have often been neglected and received little or no training. Overall, however, the health sector has a highly educated and well-trained workforce. The same can be said for engineering though this is a sector that has been experiencing skills gaps despite a decrease in the overall workforce. The existence of some mandatory training and effects this can have on a sector is noteworthy. Recent developments in Construction that accredit prior knowledge and may become a requirement indicate the extent to which regulation can make a difference.

Specific programmes such as Train to Gain can only be fitted into these patterns to a limited extent, due to their specific focus. Train to Gain focuses on employees' first NVQ level 2 or equivalent. In retail, the SSC and one of the Unions are attempting to increase demand via the development of NVQ Level 2 Programmes to provide long-standing staff with qualifications but in other sectors this level of qualification may be less appropriate. A further approach that has been heralded as a useful means to improve labour market attachment of older workers is individual learning accounts (Hanley, McKeown & O'Connell 2007) such as Skills Accounts. These are personal accounts for individuals that, broadly speaking, contain virtual vouchers of state funding towards learning, an information portal, and a record of a

learner's achievements and goals (see LSC 2008c) and may thus be able to respond to the mixed needs of workers in sectors that have needs for both basic skill development and more specialised training.

A key means via which learning and training has traditionally been conveyed is through apprenticeships. They have especially strong traditions in construction and engineering and, to some extent, in health. Their uptake in the logistics sector has been very poor and the retail sector has also experienced difficulties due to the lack of interest in and completion of apprenticeships. Interviewees from the engineering sector indicated that they were finding it difficult to find young apprentices that were appropriate either in terms of their attitude, ability or work ethics. With regards to older workers, adult apprenticeships could potentially be a route for those with experience to gain a qualification or for individuals to change their career paths. Adult apprenticeships were specifically mentioned in the engineering and health sectors, where experience is also highly valued.

A related issue is the previously discussed possibility of utilising older workers' experience and skills by recruiting them into mentor or assessor roles. This seems to be a common sense solution, though would obviously not be a route that could be available to all older workers – nor could it be expected that teaching and working with young people would be everybody's personal preference. Jobs thus need to be matched not only to the skills and experience older workers have but also to the lifetime experience of work and the individual inclinations that older workers have (Admasachew, Ogilvie & Maltby 2005). In this sense there is a need for a better understanding of the differentiations between older workers, especially in terms of their occupational status and qualifications, gender (see Collis, Green & Mallier 2000), ethnicity, location, and so forth.

More generally speaking, learning is a key component, independent of any age differences, as considerable change will need to be adjusted to if age-awareness is to be implemented. This is in line with the suggestion that not only the pre-retirement phase (and it could be questioned when this may start) but also retirement as such is a learning process (Hodkinson et al. 2008). Learning is thus central to the necessary developments in British culture, including how we perceive age and retirement, and the economic, cultural and social values attached to them (Riach 2006). It has previously been questioned whether education campaigns to challenge and change employers' attitudes towards older workers can be effective (Taylor, Walker 1998). The evidence presented in this report suggests that there are a number of practices in place that are not considered to be specific to or targeted at older workers. However, these could be adjusted without too much financial and time investment to develop significant age management programmes. To achieve this, the training provided needs to be purposeful to employers as well as to the individual rather than a 'one size fits all' approach (Admasachew, Ogilvie & Maltby 2005).

Regional differences did not seem to play a significant role in the information provided by the employers interviewed for this project. However, a large proportion of these were large organisations and may therefore reflect not only on the regional situation. Moreover, some interviewees indicated that there were differences, such as in retail where town centre stores differed significantly in their recruitment and retention patterns when compared to out-of-town stores. The health sector also indicated that towns had different workforces, e.g. with regard to their ethnic background, when compared to the more rural Shires. Benefits can also be an important factor in influencing an individual's decision to remain in employment or retire. It has been suggested that employers should consider their reward systems to accommodate the changes in the age of their workforce as older workers may have different needs and preferences (CIPD 2008).

Overall, organisations should be encouraged to move towards age awareness and active age management systems. It seems that there are five key reasons why organisations would

institute such systems: maintaining the skills base; making a virtue of necessity; reducing age-related labour costs; reacting to changes in external labour market conditions; and resolving labour market bottle necks (Naegele, Walker 2006). However, there are pre-requisites for addressing such causes via age management and these have been shown to include the existence of age awareness; careful planning and implementation; improvement of working conditions; cooperation of all parties concerned; continuous communication; internal and external monitoring; and evaluation and assessment (Naegele, Walker 2006). The specific list of good practices in relation to learning and training that are recommended consists of:

- The absence of age limits in determining access to in-house learning and training opportunities;
- Special efforts to motivate learners, establish methodologies and provide support;
- Systematic evaluation;
- Specific provisions in providing leave;
- Analysing the skills needs of the organisation, matching these with the available skills and individual educational status of older employees and utilising them in the methodology and contents of the training;
- Continual monitoring of an employee's educational status;
- Defining training opportunities as being an integral part of career planning and not solely as job specific;
- Linking training schemes to an individual's life course;
- Organising work so that it is conducive to learning and development – for instance, within the framework of mixed-age teams and groups;
- Using older employees and their particular qualifications both as facilitators of further education for older and younger employees, and as an organisational 'knowledge pool'.

(Naegele, Walker 2006, p. 10)

The majority of these recommendations and pre-requisites address workplace relations that do not only benefit older workers. This means that workplace relations more generally should be analysed vis-à-vis age because, unlike other equality and diversity issues, it affects everybody. Systems addressing age could and should thus apply not only to older workers but also younger and middle-aged workers. Previous research has already highlighted the importance of work-life balance and health issues for older workers (Admasachew, Ogilvie & Maltby 2005). This also links in with the previously mentioned findings that both early and later life-course events play a role in when and how the retirement decision is made (Blekesaune, Bryan & Taylor 2008). The conclusion from this should then be to address issues of work-life balance, employment conditions, and occupational health as early as possible to ensure the workers can and want to carry on working longer. Brooke and Taylor (2005, p. 415) thus summarise that

...policies directed at older workers alone will ignore the age and age-group dynamics that pervade workplaces. To promote the better deployment of younger and older individuals in rapidly transforming organisations, there is a need for

policy makers, employers and employees to be attentive to the age-group relationships that currently inform workplace practices. Organisations cannot ignore these age dynamics but should adopt 'age aware' rather than 'age free' practices.

An age aware approach that spans different age categories as well as issues including work-life balance and other issues raised by this report quickly begins to sound like the Finnish idea of workability, a holistic view of individuals working and social life as well as health and other responsibilities and needs.

Conclusions

The *Older Workers – Older Learners* project focussed on employers' perspectives on the relationship between involvement in learning and the continuation of working life, in particular to ascertain whether replacement demand could be reduced. Despite the reasonably high level of awareness regarding the ageing of the workforce on the part of employers, results on the immediate research aims are sparse. The research reflects previous findings that employer attitudes to older workers are, in the main, positive but passive (McNair, Flynn & Dutton 2007). There are also indications that little has changed in terms of the stereotypical attitudes that some employers hold about older workers (compare Taylor, Walker 1998). This means that hardly any of the interviewees had considered the role that older workers could play in lowering their replacement demand. This is despite the fact that a number of employers were concerned not only about replacement but about recruitment and the quality of recruits in particular.

More generally speaking, the aim of the project was to establish the basis for planning employer engagement and the promotion of learning opportunities for older workers – as well as to lay the foundations for a better understanding of the situation older workers face in the labour market. As the previous section on policy relevant considerations outlined, the research revealed a wealth of practices and policies that are not targeted specifically at older workers but which have considerable potential to be developed into active age management systems. Rather than generalising these to be universally applicable, however, it is important to differentiate carefully as there are considerable sectoral and occupational variations that need to be taken into consideration to ensure that employers and employees support and welcome developments towards age awareness. Such caution is especially important because the sample of employers who took part in this project was not necessarily representative for their sectors but tended to be the 'usual suspects', meaning that they are likely to represent a more active and socially engaged section of employers.

The specific characteristics of the company and sector are crucial to the perception that employers have of older workers. The smallest and the largest companies stand out as having more positive approaches: SMEs due to the ability to have personal relationships between management and the workforce, and large companies because there are more possibilities for promotions, sideways development and a structured approach to training and development. The health sector in particular has a positive attitude towards personal development and equity. However, in all sectors developments are underfoot in that there is increasing awareness of the aging workforce. In retail, it is acknowledged, that there will have to be a sector-wide change of culture to reduce reliance on young recruits. Despite awareness in all sectors, recruitment tactics still tend to be focused on traditional routes and younger entrants into the sector.

There was a concern in some sectors regarding the employability of older workers. In construction the 'wear and tear' of the body caused by the physical nature of work was highlighted and, to some extent, this also applies to the physical aspects of health work. A further aspect in the logistics sector was concern about declining abilities of older drivers. In the retail sector there was more concern about the attitudes and behaviour of older workers, rather than their potential skill gaps. Overall, however, the employability of older workers was not considered a problem – mainly due to the fact that employers tend to focus their labour demands on younger cohorts. One exception mentioned was in engineering where the pool of available labour was described as middle aged or older.

There was no evidence of specific policies on older workers but it was clear that their experience and knowledge is valued, more so in engineering and health. This correlates with longer training periods and higher qualifications of the workforce in these two sectors. In this

sense, there is an effect of learning on organisations' attitude to older workers, though, in practice, the learning often refers to original training and qualifications obtained rather than continued or life-long learning. When considering specific occupations, however, regulations requiring continual updates or keeping up-to-date with developments in the respective fields show that this can make workers highly valuable to the employer. This is especially the case for doctors and nurses in the health sector. There is thus what has previously been called a distinctive 'older labour market' (McNair, Flynn & Dutton 2007) in that some jobs seem to be better suited to older workers. The same can be said about certain work practices. Employers in retail, health and logistics generally welcome flexible working and are often dependent on it to fill the hours necessary to deliver a good service. Flexible work is not seen as a specific policy for older workers but, as some companies are already demonstrating, this could be utilised as a successful strategy (McNair, Flynn & Dutton 2007). Considering the sector and occupation specific contexts, it would be useful to engage in further research on sub-sector and occupation-specific differences in opportunities for learning as well as possibilities and motivation by older workers to extend their working lives.

There was considerable evidence that older workers utilise their experience, knowledge and skills within the work context and pass on knowledge to younger colleagues. In particular, older workers' involvement in the apprenticeship system was highlighted as crucial, though apprenticeships are especially weak in retail and logistics. In contrast, in engineering and construction, older workers are crucial when taking on apprentices and there were suggestions to extend such arrangements via two routes. On the one hand, it was thought that those older workers who enjoyed working with young apprentices could take on whole groups and be responsible for their training. On the other hand, adult apprenticeships were also considered to be a useful alternative in engineering, health and, to some extent, construction. Experience gained in other workplaces, or in life more generally, could thus also become valued by employers. Despite such examples, there was no mention of inter-generational learning in that younger and older colleagues could learn from each other, though this could be seen as implicit within the schemes outlined.

Whilst this project has thus been limited in finding direct answers to the question how much involvement in learning can extend working lives and reduce replacement demand, it has been highly successful at revealing the potential for successful age management systems in the East Midlands.

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