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RESEARCH HELPS OVER 50S BECOME A TOP PRIORITY IN EDUCATION

The Learning and Skills Council in East London have made the over 50s one of their top priorities after major new research revealed that 'baby boomers' are one of the key groups in need of work-related training and support.

The revealing findings – undertaken by leading London-based older workers' agency Wiseowls – were based on an extensive survey which was completed in the Summer of 2004 and involved the participation of over 1000 east Londoners aged 50 and over. The survey aimed to gauge the kind of experience older people had in terms of vocational training and support, to provide a more accurate picture of older people's working and training situation.

The survey indicated that the support and training provision aimed at this increasing age group within the capital were often seen as inadequate. The research indicates that as a result of ageism older people are staying unemployed for longer, are applying unsuccessfully for proportionally more jobs, and are being increasingly forced to work part-time. In addition for every person over 50 registered as unemployed there are far more registered as on incapacity benefit, as taking early retirement or are unemployed but not registered.

The report's page-long conclusions had outlined the key findings from the nine-month research process and highlighted the key obstacles confronting older workers facing major employment-related discrimination.

- Ageism is still the main barrier to people obtaining employment over 50 years old
- Ethnicity and nationality are still barriers to peoples' employment prospects; Being older makes ethnicity / nationality a double barrier
- High levels of part-time work among older workers is partly a result of difficulties in obtaining full-time work
- Many older self employed people had previously been rejected for full time employment
- Recruitment agencies are part of the age discrimination problem

Wiseowls' report had listed the following conclusions and called for action to tackle the connected training issues:

- Ageism to be recognised as a major barrier to people aged over 50 obtaining employment and that consequently this age group is prioritised as a key target group, with resources targeted towards helping older people to overcome these ageist barriers
- That older (50+) members of Black and Ethnicity Minority communities are given even higher prioritisation and allocation of resources in order to help them overcome even greater barriers to employment
- That greater training and support is provided to older employees, particularly in updating marketable skills

- That part time workers are supported to move into full time employment when that person wishes to do so
- That self employment as an option for over 50s is given active support with additional training provided in business start up
- That a programme promoting older workers to employers be developed as part of an age diversity equal opportunities strategy plus changing recruitment and employment agencies current practice
- That employers - particularly small ones - are targeted with information, advice and guidance in relation to employment and equal opportunities legislation
- That more work based training is provided with support offered to employers to ensure that the training is of a high level
- That more e-learning programmes are made available to the over 50s
- That more free ICT centres are provided with technical support available where older people can practice and use their ICT skills

"The importance of this research is that it has been carried out amongst the older workforce who are likely to face social exclusion" explains Jo Norman, Head of research at not-for-profit company Wiseowls. "The research population is representative of East London and Inner City populations with high numbers of ethnic minorities and others who are more likely to face social exclusion through poverty, long term unemployment, being lone parents or carers, disability or lack of qualifications".

As a result of this and other research commissioned by the London East Learning Skills Council - which has overall responsibility for deciding how to allocate funds to educational and training organisations across east London - have acted to reflect their clients needs and are now making older learners a real priority. "This will be a real boost for older people seeking to reinforce their skills or simply to regain a foothold on the working ladder" says Chris Walsh, Director of Wiseowls,- the East London based older workers agency, who carried out the research. "Our experience - alongside the research we have undertaken into this area - indicates that older workers are keen to get back into employment and have much to offer employers so sidelining them is not only damaging socially but it is, of course, damaging the UK economy. The fact that much of our research has been taken into consideration by the major provider of training, support and education across East London is a really positive development and speaks a great deal about their ability to listen and respond to the needs of their clients- the people of East london".

For the full report: [www,wiseowls.co.uk](http://www.wiseowls.co.uk) and go to Research / projects or Contact us on 020 7923 7771/ fax 020 7923 9230