

... PRESS RELEASE ... PRESS RELEASE ... PRESS RELEASE ... PRESS RELEASE
... PRESS RELEASE ...

(September 20 2004)

NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE EMPLOYMENT AGEISM STUDY CONFIRMS VALIDITY OF WISEOWLS PROJECT

Recent research by the National Audit Office (NAO) into work-related ageism echoes many of the findings from studies undertaken by Wiseowls, one of the UK's leading older workers' representative organisations. The NAO study, released on 15 September, confirms what many older workers and job-seekers have experienced first hand: Ageism is damaging to self esteem, it is undermining the potential for economic recovery in the UK during a severe labour shortage and that active campaigns to tackle ageism are the key route to re-employment for older people seeking work.

The NAO's report looks at the hurdles faced by older people in relation to the labour market and states: "These barriers include relatively low levels of skills (and) age discrimination by some employers". Wiseowls research from mid-2004 which looked into the recruitment experience of older job-seekers in east London alongside a study into the priority that the over 50s occupied in terms of education and training provision reached similar conclusions: Ageism is the key reason proportionally more older people are unemployed in the capital's East End; Unemployed older people are having to make proportionally many more applications before they find employment; Education providers have often neglected the vocational training needs of older job-seekers.

The NAO study also states: "Against the background of an ageing population, a high overall employment rate and skills shortages in the labour market, around 2.7 million people between 50 and state pension age do not work. Currently, almost half are receiving incapacity benefits, many on a long-term basis. Between 700,000 and one million of those currently inactive say they would like to work, with some 200,000 seeking employment". This telling statistic also reinforces Wiseowls' east London ageism research – involving 1,000-plus of the most economically-challenged older workers within this impoverished part of the capital and entitled 'The Older Person's Experience of Training & Employment Support in East London' – which reports: "the number of older people not in employment (should be) recognised as being far greater than those registered as job seekers and should include those seeking work who classify themselves as unemployed without receiving Job Seekers Allowance, people given early retirement, those on incapacity

benefit, and those caring for dependants (children, grand children, parents and relatives)". The study also highlights that many older workers want to get into full-time work but they are often having to accept part-time work as the only option available to them.

Wiseowls also welcomes the findings of the NAO research which indicates a greater acceptance by employment experts that further and more profound action is needed to tackle the age employment crisis which has been at the centre of Wiseowls' anti-ageism strategy since it was launched in 1999. The NAO report explains that: "The Government is increasing employment opportunities in a number of ways including working with employers to raise awareness of the benefits of employing an age diverse workforce, increasing the opportunities and incentives for people to work longer if they wish to, and helping older people back into work by improving self-confidence, providing work experience, financial incentives, supporting self-employment and improving skills". As a key provider of Information, Advice and Guidance alongside offering a dynamic employment service for 45-65 year-olds while spearheading anti-ageism campaigns Wiseowls is pleased to see official confirmation that pro-active training and associated services are the key route for older job-seekers to become economically active again.

Through our work – and the work of others such as Third Age Employment Network, Age Positive and dedicated teams of localised employment centres – we have been able to promote the merits of employing older people through initiatives such as the Diversity Plus and Age Positive employers' network. Campaigns to highlight best practice among employers are on-going; 'Outing' ageism among the worst culprits has yielded results; Working with employers to raise awareness about older workers and to challenge ageist falsehoods (such as the idea that older workers are too expensive or that their health is a problem) has seen employers taking on increasing numbers of older workers through our employment networks; Targetting education providers to provide the skills-booster that older job-seekers often need has seen higher take-up rates on IT skills courses for example.

"Accepting the problems confronting older workers is the first step – adopting the strategies to tackle ageism is the next and most crucial move forward" says Wiseowls Director Chris Walsh.