

Strengthening the older workforce: an evaluation of the ReGrow Project in the South East Region

By Stephen McNair

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2. Executive Summary

The ReGrow project piloted the delivery of Information Advice and Guidance (IAG¹), Mentoring and Training to people over 50 in employment in the South East Region. This is the report of the evaluation of the programme, considering both how far it achieved the targets set and what can be learned of value in developing such services in the future.

The project was carried out in the context of growing concern, at national and regional level, at the underemployment of older people, alongside growing skill and labour shortages in the region. It was hoped that providing older workers with career guidance, tailored training and mentoring would increase their retention in the workforce, and ensure that they were better deployed.

Employers were approached by Employer Engagement Officers employed by the lead contractor, A4e, and by the partner agencies. Participating employers nominated employees, who then received an IAG interview with an adviser employed by one of the partner agencies. In the light of this, training needs were identified, and A4e and its partners brokered appropriate training. Most employees also received ongoing mentoring from IAG staff, either face to face or by phone.

The project was funded by the South East Region of the LSC, with funds from the European Social Fund, between 2006 and 2008. It was conducted by A4e, working in partnership with four IAG providers and three training providers (two FE Colleges and one Chamber of Commerce)². All the guidance providers took on this work in addition to their normal guidance work. Some of the training was provided directly by A4e, while other training was contracted out to the training partners.

The Evaluation

This was one of the largest, (perhaps the largest), attempts to provide guidance to older workers ever conducted, and in addition to delivering IAG, training and mentoring to individuals, the project aimed to learn lessons for the future development of such services, including Train to Gain, the Adult Advancement and Careers Service, and the South East 40-70 Workforce programme.

This evaluation seeks to help in this process. It was conducted by the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce, which had been researching the older workforce in the South East for a number of years. The evaluation was carried out principally through two employee surveys (one immediately after the first IAG interview, and one after the training), and a survey of employers, together with qualitative interviews and quarterly seminars with project partners and the LSC.

Quantitative measures of performance

The project had a set of initial targets to achieve. However, as the project developed it became clear that demand for IAG and training had been underestimated, while the original aspirations for Skills for Life referrals were unrealistic. In response, the targets were renegotiated as shown in Table 1.

In addition, it was expected that at least 100 distinct training programmes would be identified to meet specific needs of older workers.

As the table demonstrates, the project finally delivered more (10%) distinct outcomes than originally planned. The project spent its agreed budget of £1.2 million, which represents an average cost of just under £1054 per participant, or 286 per recorded outcome.

¹ The term IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) was widely used during the project period for a range of advice services focused on employment, training and education. In practice it is often synonymous with “careers advice”.

² See annex.

Table 1: Outcomes of the ReGrow project

	Original Target	Revised Target	Achieved
IAG sessions delivered	850	1138	1138
Mentoring provided	700	880	789
Learning Programme starts	800	1079	1089
Learning Programme success	800	1052	1068
Skills for Life Assessments	250	100	100
Skills for Life Qualifications Achieved	200	60	7
Total individual outcomes	3600	4309	4191

Employer participation

The project engaged with 353 employers, 92% of which were SMEs, as planned in the Invitation to Tender. The largest single groups were small, and medium firms (10-49 employees and 50-249 employees) each of which accounted for a third of all participants. Ten percent were micro firms and a further 15% were large organisations, recruited because of exceptional circumstances. They were drawn from a wide range of employment sectors and from all parts of the region (Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Berkshire, Hampshire and Isle of Wight).

The largest groups of firms were in Health and Education and Professional Services, and there was a significant group of voluntary organisations. However, classification by sector proved problematic (for both employers and employees), because of the large number of firms in the service sector, where classification is difficult.

Employee participation

The project engaged with 1138 individual employees, all nominated by their employers, and all aged 50-85. Almost all (94%) went on to successfully complete a training programme of some sort, and two thirds received some mentoring support.

- All were within the target age range, with 43% in their late 50s (aged 56-60), and two thirds were women.
- People from non-white ethnic minority groups constituted less than 10% of the total (consistent with the original target).
- Four percent declared a disability (but 35% did not complete the question).
- Half were in managerial, professional, or administrative occupations (the areas identified by the employers as having particular skills problems, and also reflecting the workforce profile of many small service sector firms). Very small numbers were drawn from plant and machine operatives, craft occupations and sales.
- Two thirds held qualifications at or above Level 2, although the employers identified them as likely to benefit from some training. There was no qualification requirement or limitation on participation. It is impossible to know how long ago the qualification was acquired, which is a critical issue when considering the qualifications of older people, who may have qualified decades ago³.

The employees appear to have an unusually high level of commitment to learning and to ongoing career development. It is not clear why this is, but it seems probable that those employers who agreed

³ The question was asked, but frequently not completed, producing seriously incomplete data.

to participate were themselves unusually committed to training, and they may in turn have selected more committed employees to take part. Alternatively, it may be that older people the workplace in small firms are more committed to learning and work than previous research has suggested.

Achievements of ReGrow

Both employees and employers reported very positively on their experience of the ReGrow IAG and training⁴.

Employer views

Employers were very positive about the ReGrow experience, especially the training.

A quarter of all employers said that, if the service were to be offered again, they would “definitely” participate in both the IAG and the training, and would recommend both to colleagues.

Two thirds would take part in the IAG again, and three quarters would recommend the IAG process to a colleague.

Over 80% of respondents:

- identified benefits for the firm from the IAG;
- identified benefits for the firm from the training;
- would take part in the training again;
- would recommend it to a colleague.

Table 2 shows the proportions reporting specific benefits.

Table 2: Employer reported benefits from ReGrow

Percentage of employers reporting	Benefit from IAG %	Benefit from Training %
Increased employee motivation	43	67
Increased productivity/ performance	45	61
Increased commitment to the firm	30	48
Increased flexibility	25	45
Improved industrial relations	15	22
Helped people face retirement	15	18
Reduced sickness	0	8
Helped people face redundancy	4	4

Employee views

A very large majority of employees reported that they had found the IAG helpful, enjoyable and relevant, that it improved their skills, and that the adviser understood their needs and the options available (over 80% for each of these).

When asked whether they thought that ReGrow had made a difference to them:

- Two thirds thought that the **training had helped them to do their jobs better** and that it had **improved their self confidence**
- Half said that it had **increased the likelihood of their doing more learning** in the future
- A third said that ReGrow had **increased the likelihood that they would stay in work** longer

⁴ Numbers responding to questions on mentoring were too small for analysis.

- Much smaller numbers had found the process helpful in preparing to change job, get a better job or prepare for retirement.

By repeating some survey questions in the follow up survey, some objective evidence of change in employees can be gained. This shows that:

- The proportion who saw themselves as **overqualified for their present job** rose while the proportion adequately qualified fell. The proportion who feel underqualified for their current jobs remained constant;
- The proportion who said they had **no problem with work-life balance** rose from 65-83%;
- The proportion reporting that “I don’t feel that **my employer values my experience**” fell from 19-7% and the proportion disagreeing rose from 58-68%;

Value for money

The total cost per outcome averaged £396. Assuming that the average participant participated in three of these, the average cost per participant was £1190, £25 below the originally planned unit cost, but substantially higher than the rates which the LSC pays for mainstream IAG provision.

However, the survey evidence suggests strongly that little, if any, of the IAG would have taken place without the project, and that the same is true for most of the training (mainly because of cost). The most highly valued training was short (around 1 day) and focused on fairly specific immediately relevant job related skills. Employees did not feel that this was inappropriate.

Conclusions

1. The project shows clearly that older workers and their employers welcome advice and guidance about their work and careers. When a service is offered, demand rises rapidly. This needs to be recognised in the design of the new Adult Advancement and Careers service, which aspires to be a universal service for all adults.
2. Both employers and employees felt that the ReGrow processes of both advice and training improved performance, self confidence and attachment to work and the firm. This is important in the development of Train to Gain brokerage, which may otherwise fail to recognise the potential talent in older employees.
3. It would appear that the ReGrow process encouraged employees to think about their career options, and consolidate their views. There is clear evidence that the process increased communication between employer and employee, and in general increased attachment to the present employer and to work.
4. Employers and employees placed the highest value on training which was short, and focused on the relatively immediate needs of the job and the business, and there is evidence that without public support this training will not happen. Given the high cost, and relatively low take up, of full qualification courses by older people, it may be more economical to focus future policy in training for this age group on shorter, more focused training.
5. The reasons why people did not train were mainly passive. Very few had refused training when it was offered. Those who did not train generally had just never thought about it
6. The purpose of the IAG process was not clearly or consistently explained to participants, and this needs doing in any future work of this kind. There was some anxiety, especially at the beginning among the IAG providers, that conflicts of interest between employers and employees might lead to employees being pressured to take part in training which do not meet their real needs. There was almost no evidence of this, although this may reflect low, or limited, expectations on the part of employees and/or employers.
7. The project failed to identify significant numbers of people with basic skills needs. This may reflect employers’ perceptions and priorities, or the fact that older people, who have developed coping strategies over many years, may simply be unwilling to come forward. This

was true even in firms where individuals were facing redundancy (and might be expected to feel a need to improve their basic skills to find a new job). This needs further investigation.

8. The relationship between skills needs and training, and the age of formal qualifications needs further investigation. Poor data made it impossible to analyse this issue, but it seems likely that most of the participants with relatively high level qualifications had acquired these decades ago, and their relevance to current work may be slim.
9. Data collection systems for work of this kind need to ensure that the collection burden is not too onerous, but also that classification information is well collected.
10. The project involved an innovative partnership between a major private sector training provider and a group of mainly public sector IAG and training agencies. The partnership appeared to work well, and enable complementary skills and networks to be used effectively.
11. The project was specifically created to meet the needs of those in employment. However, some of the findings are applicable to older people more generally.

3. The project experience

Objectives

There were two areas where issues arose about project objectives: the balance between IAG and training, and between employer and employee interest.

The project aimed to provide both guidance and training. In the early stages, guidance workers reported that some employees clearly felt that the guidance was a formality and that really they were being sent to train, rather than to explore and plan for their own long term futures. There was some evidence of this in the surveys, but it seems to have been relatively rare. One guidance partner felt that employees in their 40s and early 50s were inclined to accept their employer's diagnosis of training needs uncritically, and several commented that older workers often have low aspirations and self confidence, which could only be effectively overcome through a full guidance process, for which sometimes neither individual nor employer was prepared or committed.

The project aimed to meet the needs of both employers and employees. A4e's primary responsibility was to the employer, but the IAG partners were accountable to the employees. Working through employers may make it easier to reach employees who would not approach a guidance service on their own initiative, but it runs the risk that the work will focus more strongly on employer needs, perhaps at the expense of the individual, which raises issues for IAG staff whose professional background and ethics are based on client centredness.

There was thus potential for conflict of values, but the survey evidence suggests that, in practice, this was not a major concern to either party, and only two employees commented that they felt they were being pressed to meet an employer need which they did not see as relevant to their needs or circumstances. However, some of the IAG professionals felt that individuals had low expectations of the service, and were therefore not expecting the level of engagement which the IAG services could (and sometimes did) provide, and this is borne out by some (though by no means a majority) of the comments on the survey forms.

Partnership and start up processes

The ReGrow project came into a world where a range of agencies were already active, in various ways, with complex networks and relationships already in place. The partnership model of the project sought to capitalise on these, but was somewhat new, with new partnerships, referral systems and subcontracting between A4e as the prime contractor and the guidance and training providers. There were some initial difficulties over contracts, target numbers, eligibility criteria and working practices (especially the relative roles of partner, A4e's employer engagement staff and training sourcing), but these were resolved, although some concern was expressed that monitoring (mainly to satisfy ESF/LSC data requirements) was unnecessarily burdensome.

A4e has formal contractual links with 6 partners (4 IAG providers, 2 Colleges, and one Chamber of Commerce) and "soft" partnerships with 10 others including Chambers of Commerce and Train to Gain brokers. At local level individual IAG partners had varying relationships with Business Links, Chambers of Commerce, Nextstep, and Redundancy support services (SEEDA, JcP and Local Authorities). None of the IAG contractors mentioned contacts with Local Authority economic regeneration services or with Learndirect, both of which might be useful links. Local Age Concern organisations were also active, both as employers and as channels for stimulating demand, reflecting their special interest in the needs of older people.

The IAG contractors have mainstream guidance functions, which enabled them to draw on resources (databases, materials, networks) to enhance the services to ReGrow clients, and to ensure that all individuals making contact receive some level of positive response. They also often had strong local networks, including employers, which can be, and were, used to recruit employers to participate.

Geographical spread

The project was expected to have a broad regional coverage, but not expected to do this at a detailed level. All major population centres in the region were represented, but in practice participants tended

to be clustered, reflecting the location of particular employers and guidance providers. The one voluntary IAG partner clearly had very good networks, and was able to generate important work in the neighbourhood they know well, but it would be unrealistic to expect them to cover a whole County. If a larger scale service was to be developed the balance between local and regional partners, and their relative roles would be worth further consideration.

Recruitment of employers

The planned project model assumed that employers would be contacted initially through A4e's employer engagement staff, who would promote the project, secure employer commitment, and refer employees to the IAG provider, who would then carry out the IAG session and any subsequent mentoring, and refer back to A4e to source appropriate training.

In practice this model only operated in its "pure" form in one case. IAG partners themselves contributed to the promotion and recruitment processes, when they had existing local employer networks, or in sourcing training, where they had existing education and training networks. In practice a mixture of approaches seemed to work well, and generate the numbers of employers and employees anticipated in the proposal. An example is the high numbers of employers participating on the Isle of Wight, which reflects the particular networks and enthusiasm of staff in the FE College there.

One partner had links into Regional redundancy programmes as a source of referrals, and these represented significant numbers in that area. Although it might be expected that individuals would be particularly open to receiving IAG and training when under threat of redundancy (and especially willing to engage in Skills for Life programmes), the surveys did not suggest that this was a major factor in employee perceptions. (Redundancy programmes also, of course, only deal with relatively large employers).

One partner would have liked to be able to recruit employees directly, through public advertising, to ensure that the service was perceived to be genuinely independent of employer preconceptions, and to provide a service to individual whose employers are unaware of, or hostile to, the project.

Recruitment of employers was relatively slow at first but then built up rapidly. There were several reasons for this, including:

- settling down of relationships between partners (with clearer understanding of each other's roles);
- increasing skill and knowledge of the employer engagement officers;
- more effective use of partner networks to generate referrals;
- availability of experience from satisfied customers to refer to.

The rapid expansion of demand for the IAG process created a potential problem of overload on the project budget, and at the same time it became clear that the numbers requiring Skills for Life training were much lower than expected. As a result, the targets for initial advice were raised and the targets for Skills for Life were lowered. Even so, A4e had, towards the end of the project, to actively intervene to stop partners taking on more IAG clients, when the budget was already fully committed.

This suggests that the demand for IAG and for training is very substantial, but that the ReGrow approach is not an effective way of contacting people with low basic skills. This is reflected in the occupational profile of participants, who were drawn mainly from managerial and administrative occupations.

Employer mix

Employers were drawn from a wide range of sectors, though with a strong concentration in health and education services. The high proportion of small and micro employers was consistent with the programme's original intentions. At an early stage there was also a relatively high proportion of referrals from voluntary sector agencies (especially Age Concern), reflecting their particular interest in the older workforce. It is not clear in all cases that the clients receiving IAG in voluntary organisations were employees, rather than volunteers (although it must be recognised that the boundary can be very blurred – with people moving through voluntary work into paid employment as

a legitimate route out of unemployment, and some people on, for example, Incapacity Benefit, doing work experience of working part time in voluntary agencies). There was also some demand for provision in Local Authorities, although there was some initial confusion about the eligibility of large and public sector employers.

As Figure 1 shows, the employers who participated were likely to have also been involved in other national programmes.

Employer engagement and attitudes

IAG contractors varied greatly in the extent and depth of their employer networks, and this appeared to be reflected in their activity. Some had used existing networks to generate referrals, while others depended entirely on A4e.

Guidance partners, and A4e's employer engagement staff, found it initially difficult to engage employers, especially in the commercial sectors and in smaller firms, although some appear to have found it easier than others. The most successful way of getting employers involved was through the offer of free training, but with the risk that employers and/or employees would see the project as primarily about free training, rather than the developmental needs of the firms or the long term employability of the individuals. This issue is discussed further below.

It is interesting to note that a number of firms which have been recognised at national level as examples of good age management practice by the DWP's Age Positive campaign, were unresponsive to local approaches.

It is also worth considering whether approaches through Union/Workplace Learning Representative networks might stimulate a "bottom up" demand for the service which would be more appropriate, and better informed.

The relationship between ReGrow and other employer skills brokerage services (especially Train to Gain – T2G) was uneven. In some areas T2G brokers were referring clients to ReGrow (partly because it has access to funded training not covered by the T2G rules). In any future development this link might usefully be developed, since making better use of older workers should be a part of an assessment of workforce development for any firm, and it is not clear that all employers who have engaged with ReGrow to date have been through any serious training needs analysis.

Employee profile

Altogether, 1138 employees participated in some element of the ReGrow programme. Of these:

- 64% were women and 36% men;
- 90% were White British, and a further 3% were other white. The balance were distributed across the range of minority ethnic groups;
- 4% declared a disability, and 61% said they had none. The remaining 35% did not respond;
- A third had qualifications below level 2 and a quarter had degree level qualifications, but the age of these qualifications is unknown⁵.

All IAG contractors would, in practice, offer some initial IAG to any individual approaching them, regardless of age. Where they fell outside the ReGrow remit this work was funded through their mainstream budgets, but the extent of any follow up varied greatly, according both to the organisation and workloads at the time. Inevitably some potential clients fell outside the ReGrow age range. In one case 10 potential clients were referred through small firms, but all were under 50.

Most IAG contractors assumed that if an employer was referred through A4e, their eligibility to participate had been assured, although there was some lack of clarity about the application of age limits and the use of the level 2 and Skills for Life tests.

⁵ The project was explicitly not required to restrict access on the basis of qualification levels. For older workers the relevance of a qualification acquired several decades ago may be doubtful, but information on age of qualification was not adequate for analysis.

Some IAG contractors felt that the nature of client need varied by age, with those at the lower end of the age range more likely to accept their employer's diagnosis of their needs, and that older clients might have more individual, and long term, objectives which they, or their employers, might feel inappropriate to be pursued under ReGrow. No evidence of this emerged in either the employer or employee surveys, but this may merely reflect the preconceptions with which participants approached the project.

No partner argued that older people need separate services, but most agreed that there are different emphases to guidance needs for older people, and that many older people are more resistant to IAG, training or change.

A distinctive feature of ReGrow was that it was not bound to focus training on the main LSC target areas of Skills for Life and Level 2 full qualifications. Three quarters of the employees participating already held a qualification at or above level 2, although a few had Skills for Life needs.

Unfortunately, data problems make it impossible to identify how old these qualifications might be (and a 30 year old level 2 qualification may not be very relevant to today's labour market). The IAG contractors agreed that the clients they were seeing were in need of the service, despite their previous qualification level.

IAG partners reported that, in addition to people seeking to upskill in order to remain employable in their current roles, they were also seeing people seeking to return to the labour market through part-time work, and people aspiring to change career altogether or to downscale. These are all legitimate needs, and ones which increase overall labour market retention, but may not be seen as priorities by their current employers.

IAG contractors agreed that a substantial number of clients had low expectations of their own skills and career opportunities. Such clients could often benefit from in depth guidance, but many were reluctant to engage, although the employee survey evidence suggests that those who did do so recognised these benefits. In some cases IAG contractors found resistance to continuing contact and mentoring.

There has been some resistance from clients to the notion of IAG, and a tendency sometimes to expect simple referral to training. The programme is posited on the notion that individuals will need more substantial life/career planning support than this, and the experience of IAG workers and adult educators is that this is often the case. In practice, the survey evidence suggests that employees were very satisfied with the level and nature of the guidance provided. Without further qualitative work it is impossible to know whether they would have benefited from more extensive engagement.

Guidance processes – what kind of IAG is required?

The agreed, and demanding, target numbers naturally put all the IAG contractors under some pressure, but the extent of this varied. As a result there was some variation in the extent of guidance provided. In some cases it was limited to a single session, and was only extended under a formal mentoring contract. In others it extended to several sessions, and included access to databases, CV services and other kinds of support. Some IAG contractors were concerned that a single session could not deal adequately with most needs, where individuals need to reflect on the advice, and return to clarify and explore further options, and sometimes, where they saw a need and had spare staff capacity they responded to this.

Since the guidance providers were already providing guidance to older people through their mainstream services, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish clearly between the ReGrow service and the wider services. This was a particular issue where they were providing mentoring for individuals after their initial IAG session. Although this was, for the purposes of the project, a separate and distinct service, the employees involved often did not recognise this, which made subsequent evaluation more difficult.

Some guidance providers reported particular success in using older guidance workers, who were felt to have greater rapport with older clients (and two survey respondents suggested this).

Although few respondents to the employee survey reported receiving advice on retirement options, one partner was offering some financial advice to clients considering retirement. It is clearly

important to be aware of the legal constraints on offering financial advice.

It was suggested that the timing of interventions in individuals' thinking about their futures is important, and one partner reported a very positive reaction to the speed of response, especially to redundancy counselling needs (with next working day responses and sessions offered in evenings and to night shifts).

It is clear that for some individuals, it was entirely appropriate to provide IAG which does not lead to a training recommendation, which could have raised issues for the project and its target numbers, but this was not reported to be a problem.

Mentoring and “Shared Compact” services

Mentoring was offered to IAG clients, involving a follow up face to face review meeting 6 weeks after the initial IAG session, followed by one or two contacts per month for up to 6 months.

Very few survey respondents commented on the mentoring, making it impossible to draw many conclusions about its effectiveness. This may be because employees had difficulty distinguishing the initial advice process from the mentoring, which will usually have been delivered by the same agency, and sometimes the same person. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it was particularly welcomed when the mentors were themselves older workers, and by employees who took part in several training events.

Issues identified in early discussions on the design of the mentoring process included a reluctance by clients to recognise a need, the difficulty of setting up face to face meetings (replaced in some cases by telephone contact), and difficulties in clients securing access to phones or internet at work.

At an early project seminar the notion of a “shared compact” approach was discussed. Under this, an IAG worker would act as a broker to facilitate better communication between employer and employee over training issues within the firm. This idea had some attractions, and would raise interesting issues for all parties, including the relationship between internal HR and training staff and the IAG worker, the ethical and legal implications for IAG workers acting as a “broker” in this way (rather than as a client advocate). It was decided that testing this would add an unmanageable layer of complexity to the project, and it was not pursued. The rationale for such an approach is that there is some tension between the aspirations of employer and employee which calls for mediation, and that both parties would welcome such mediation. In practice there was no evidence of such tensions, although this may reflect low expectations on the part of employer and/or employee, especially in cases where the IAG process was seen simply as a first stage of training.

Training demand and supply

All clients were offered training following their initial IAG session. On average this involved two training interventions (of varying length and level). IAG contractors then referred clients back to A4e who sourced the training. Although IAG contractors are aware of a guide price of £300 per intervention, there was no evidence that this had constrained options, and the ultimate average cost of training was £350 per head. Some individuals used much less, and in other cases the requirement was for something much more expensive. Some of the latter were funded by averaging out over the whole project cohort, in other cases joint funding was negotiated with other partners or employers. Although two employees in the survey reported that the training need had not been met, A4e has no record of any request being rejected outright⁶.

By the end of the programme the A4e course catalogue included 150 courses. Some were delivered by partners, and others (e.g. Health and Safety) by A4e themselves. To ensure speed of response individual tuition was negotiated in a number of cases, and this was particularly welcomed by employees and employers, although it is clearly expensive to deliver this on any scale.

One case was reported of an individual trained subsequently “cascading” the training to workmates, and some training was provided in leadership and management.

The highest demand was for IT training (much of it very specific skills). Other popular subjects have

⁶ Since Employers were guaranteed anonymity, it was not possible to follow up these issues.

been Health & Safety, First Aid, and Security. Other less directly work related subjects included pre-retirement (jointly funded with the employer) and scuba diving.

IAG contractors identified a need for training in generic, soft skills, but this was felt to be only acceptable when embedded in another “subject”, and no specific programme was offered or requested. There was demand for ESOL, especially in some redundancy situations, where the relatively high cost of provision is an issue.

Value for money: the deadweight issue

A key policy issue for the evaluation is the extent to which the ReGrow approach to IAG and training results in more training, and whether that training is more appropriate or cost effective than would otherwise be available.

The programme was able to fund a range of training which falls outside current Government priorities, and this flexibility was strongly welcomed by IAG contractors, employers and individuals, both in the qualitative interviews and the surveys. These responses suggest that, for this age group at least, it may be appropriate to support much shorter and more targeted training opportunities. The survey evidence suggests that levels of satisfaction (both employer and employee) were highest for relatively short training interventions. They also suggest that, despite the fact that the training was relatively short (and therefore cheap), the main reason why people had not taken the training previously was cost.

Although some IAG partners felt that some employers were using ReGrow to access training which they might otherwise have funded themselves (e.g. health and safety or food hygiene where training is a Statutory requirement), there was relatively little evidence of this in the surveys. Nor was there evidence of great tension between the employee and employer over training priorities.

The table below suggests that ReGrow unlocked existing latent training aspirations on the part of individuals, but that the employees perceived it as driven by their needs, rather than their employer.⁷

How important was the ReGrow interview in deciding to do the training?	%
Something I wanted to do before the ReGrow interview	53
Something I chose to do as a result of the interview	27
Something my employer wanted me to do before the interview	9
Something my employer wanted me to do as a result of the interview	1

Employee follow up survey

Quality assurance

The project had basic monitoring in place to meet A4e’s own management requirements and those of LSC. However, A4e was not directly responsible for the quality of the guidance provided. The expectation was that contracting with recognised IAG providers implies that normal IAG procedures will be applied. The tests include Matrix accreditation, with IAG provided by people holding Level 4 Guidance qualifications, and inspection of the services through ALI/OFSTED. No problems with quality were reported, and the survey evidence suggests very high levels of customer satisfaction.

Data gathering

Data was required by the project, for day to day administration and financial accountability, for formal reporting to LSC and ESF, and for the purposes of evaluation. Although efforts were made to minimise duplication in the collection of data, there were problems with this, and with the quality of the data gathered.

⁷ This question only appears in Survey 2, and the sample is therefore small.

Key issues included:

- Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes were not consistently recorded in employer and employee data. A significant number of employers were classified in Professional Services or Other Services which properly belonged in more specific categories. This problem was repeated in the employer survey where many employers clearly had difficulty classifying themselves. This means that the sectoral analysis of the survey data is more limited than one might have liked.
- Disability: two thirds of all clients provided no response to the question on disability, making it impossible to comment on this issue. This is unfortunate since disability is more likely to affect older workers, and may therefore be more of an issue in career planning. However, it may be that this issue is exaggerated, and several employers who commented on the possibility of older workers being more prone to health problems said that they had not personally experienced this.
- Qualifications: the qualification question on the LSC form asked about the date when a qualification was acquired, but many forms returned “unknown”. This is important in relation to older workers, who may hold qualifications acquired more than 30 years ago, and which may provide no indication of current levels of competence.

4. The employer survey

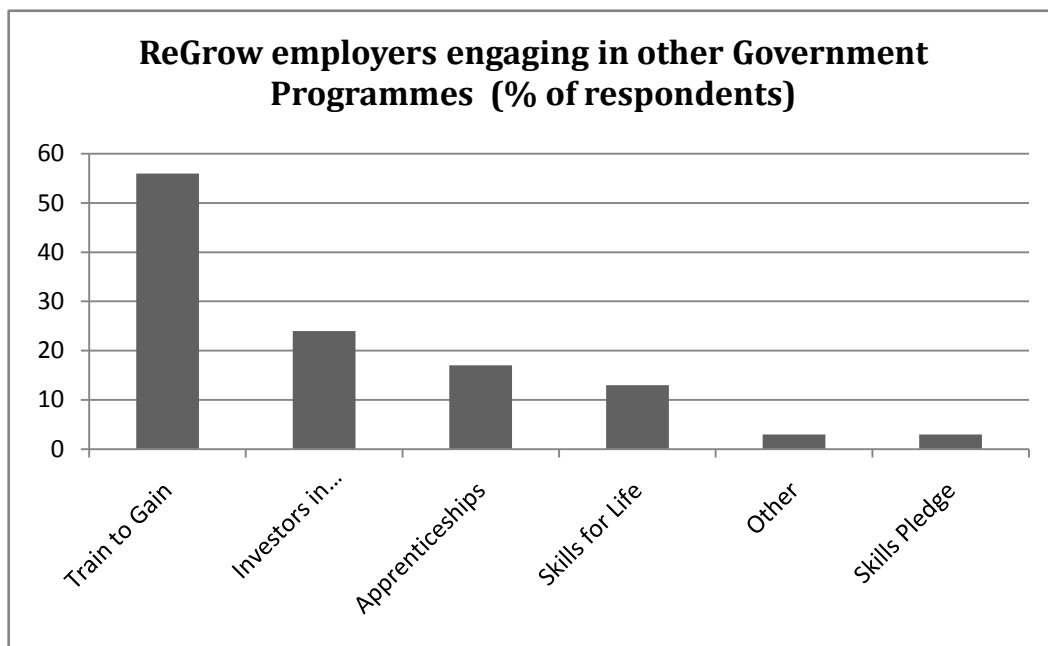
Survey methodology

A survey questionnaire was distributed to all participating employers in the last 6 months of the project (Spring 2008), and was returned by 67 employers (a response rate of 20%). The questionnaire is included as an Annex to this report.

Overall, 353 employers took part in the ReGrow project. The project was aimed at small and medium firms, and this was clearly achieved, with 92% of all participating firms employing fewer than 250 people. Two thirds employed fewer than 50 employees, with around a quarter employing fewer than 25. They were spread geographically across the Region, with a no major population areas untouched, but a particularly heavy concentration on the Isle of Wight. They were more likely than firms in general to have participated in Government programmes, notably Train to Gain and Apprenticeships, probably reflecting the networks through which they were originally recruited, but making their responses possibly untypical of employers generally.

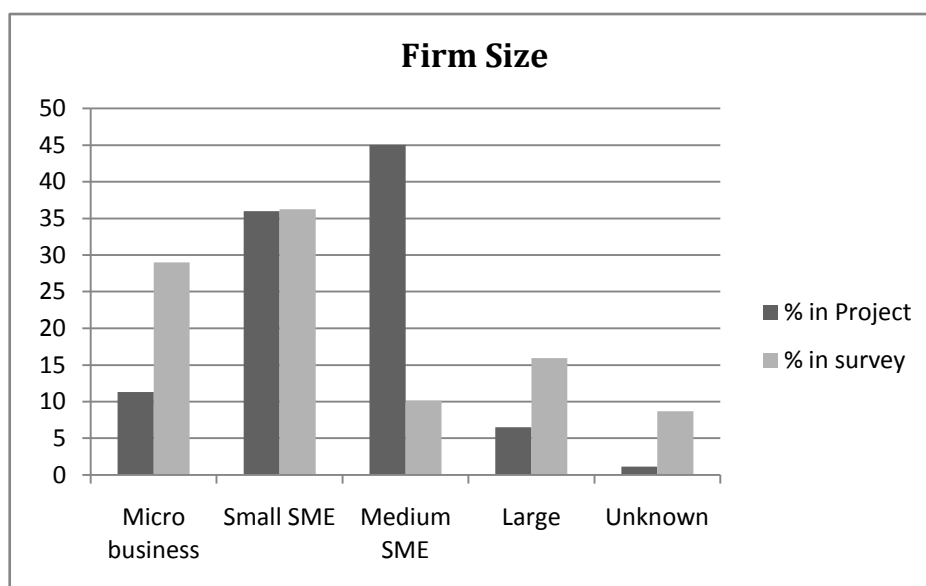
This bias in participation is not surprising, since the project was not asked to target particular sectors or “hard to reach” employers. The Employer Engagement officers at A4e, and the various partner agencies, adopted a range of strategies for finding employers. While A4e initially worked from the DWP’s Age Positive employer list, and published business directories, later they were more inclined to use existing A4e employer contacts, and some of the partners clearly drew on their own contacts. Furthermore, the employers who are sympathetic to approaches from other Government schemes are probably more likely to be sympathetic to approaches from ReGrow.

Figure 1



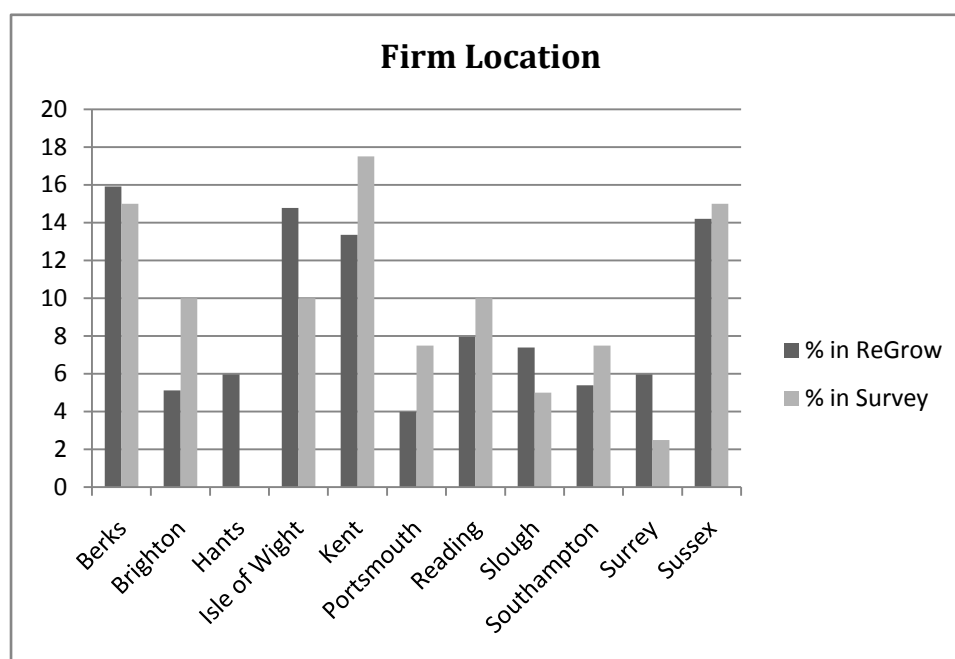
Employer survey

Firms were, as expected in the original Invitation to Tender, overwhelmingly small. Although all size categories were represented, and the proportion of small SMEs in the survey matched the profile of ReGrow participating employers, micro businesses and large firms were overrepresented. This has the effect of skewing the evidence on the age profile of the workforces, since the very small firms appear particularly likely to employ older people. Of the 16 firms where more than 50% of the workforce was over 50, 12 employed fewer than 10 people, and the remaining 4 employed fewer than 50.

Figure 2

Employer survey and A4e management data

The geographical spread of firms responding to the survey covered most of the major project locations, with the exception of Hampshire (where no employers from outside Portsmouth and Southampton responded).

Figure 3

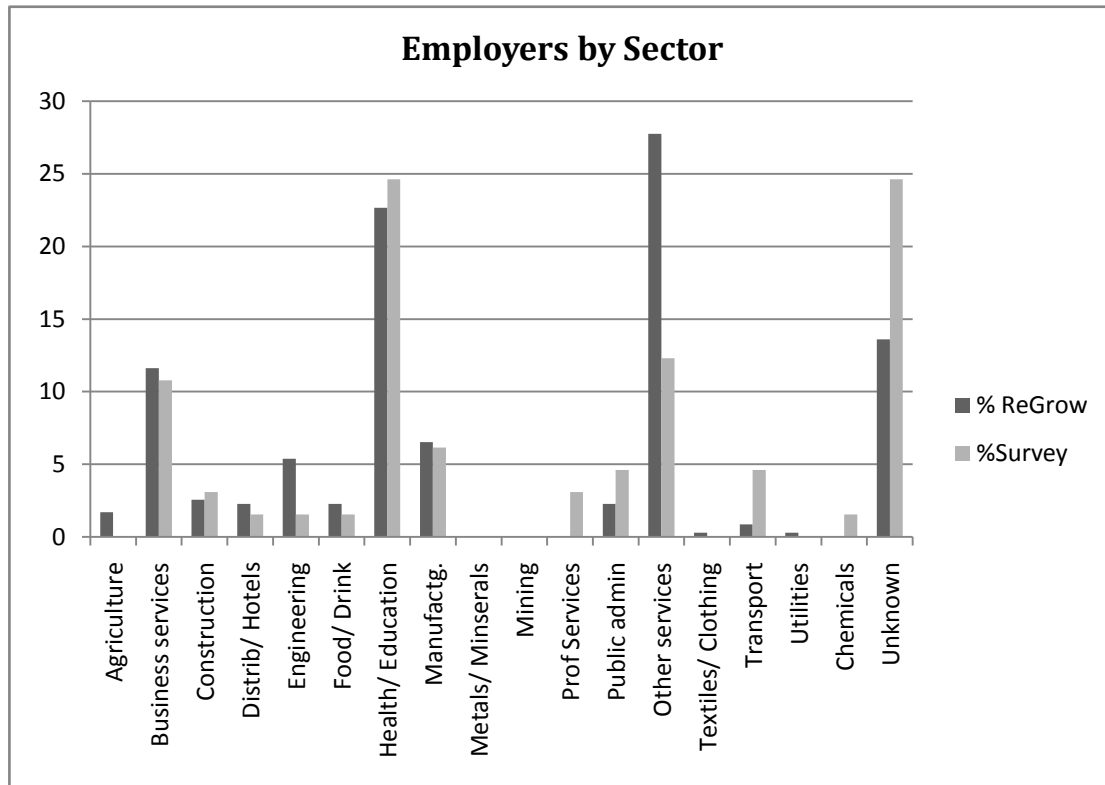
Employer survey and A4e management data

Data on the sectoral distribution of employers, both in the overall project and the survey is unreliable⁸. However, in both cases the largest single group were from Health and Education, and from the broad

⁸ There was evidence of miscoding in both datasets (especially by using “professional services” and “other services” for firms which should have been allocated to a specific sector). Where this was evident from the firm

service sector. The survey included four manufacturers, three transport firms, and two from Construction. Other sectors were represented by a single firm. No conclusions can be drawn, therefore, about the particular needs or attitudes of employers in individual sectors⁹.

Figure 4



Employer survey and A4e management data

Figure 5 shows the sectoral mix of all participating employers using LSC categories, which separate out voluntary sector employers, regardless of size.

Employment and the business climate

It is likely that employers' attitudes to older workers will be affected by their perception of the state of the labour market. At the time of responding (before the onset of the 2008 recession) most were optimistic about future employment prospects, with 58% anticipating growth in employment (as either "planned" or "likely"). Three quarters had recruited in the last year (40% of them in the 25-50 employee size band), and one third (mainly the larger firms) reported these as "hard to fill" vacancies. One might therefore expect that most of these employers would be broadly sympathetic to retaining older workers and recruiting new ones.

name, the data was corrected, but in many cases this was impossible within the resources available for the evaluation.

⁹⁹ Some information on sectoral variation in the management of the older workforce can be found in the series of booklets published by DWP "Managing Age in [sector]" See Age Positive Website.

<http://www.agepositive.gov.uk/resource/publications.asp>

Employer attitudes to older workers

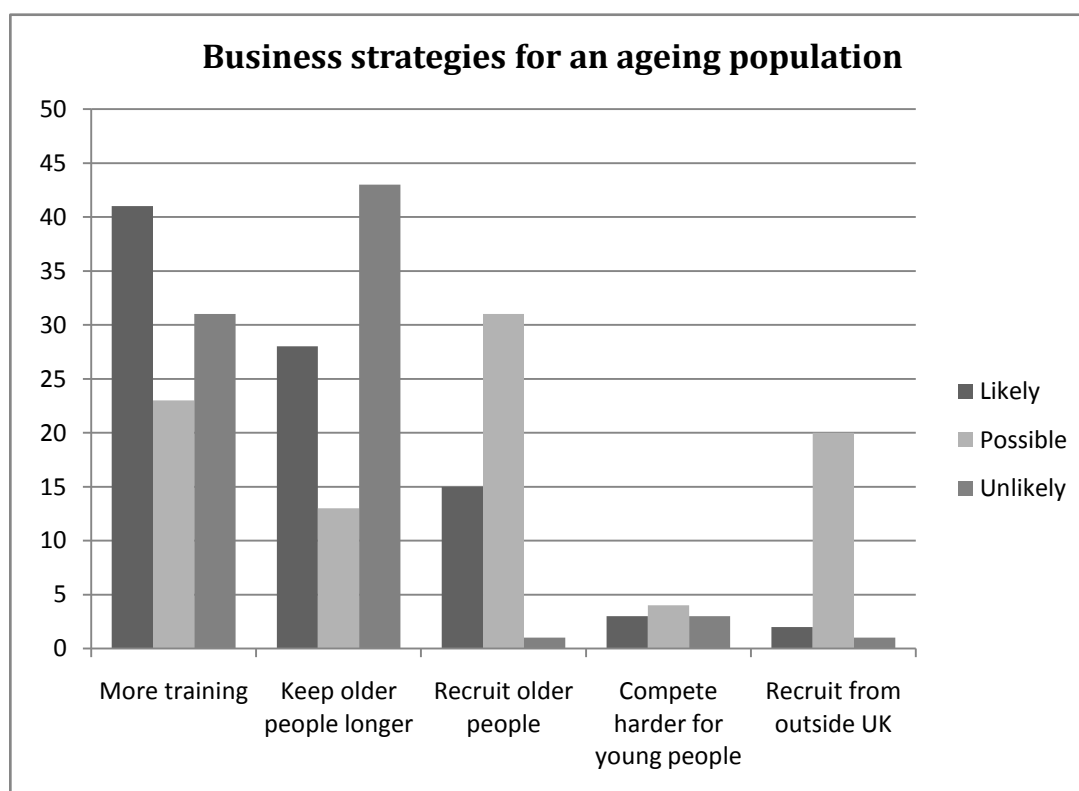
The age profile of firms varied greatly. Two thirds of firms had no employees under 20, and three quarters had none over 65. In five firms all the employees were over 50, and two thirds had some employees over 60.

Half the firms had a compulsory retirement age of 65, while three reported compulsory retirement ages of 60¹⁰. However, this appeared to make no difference to the firm's actual age profile. Two thirds of firms with a compulsory retirement age would allow people to stay on longer, and one third of these firms actually had employees over 65, compared with only one fifth of those without a compulsory age.

Reported attitudes to older workers were generally positive. Three quarters said that they actively encouraged older workers to stay on, and a similar proportion had recruited someone over 50 in the last two years. One third of all firms claimed to have recruited someone over 60 at some point in the past.

This positive picture is confirmed by the response to the question about the impact of an ageing population on business strategy. Offered a range of strategic options, the most popular was to retain older workers longer (two thirds of respondents), followed by recruiting older people (40%). While this compares with 90% who said they would train existing staff more, but only a quarter would try to recruit outside the UK, and less than one in five would try harder to recruit young people. Over a quarter of firms said that they were "likely" to seek to retain staff longer.

Figure 5



Employer survey

Asked to identify advantages or disadvantages of employing older people 55 firms identified the former and only 37 the latter. The frequency of these is shown in the table below:

¹⁰ Probably unlawful under the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006.

Advantage	No of respondents	Disadvantage	No of respondents
Experience	37	None	12
Reliability	12	Illness/ poor health ¹¹	11
Commitment	7	IT skills	5
Skills	7	Physical capacity	3
Loyalty	6	Slow/reluctant to learn	2
Knowledge	5	Inflexibility	2

Other positive words associated with older workers included: “thorough”, “consistent”, “patient”, “adaptable”, “desire to help”, “less time off”, “customer care”, and “no maternity leave”. One mentioned unrealistic salary expectations.

Did employers perceive skills problems?

When asked how many of their employees were fully capable of doing their current jobs, more than half of firms reported no problems with skilled, plant and machine operatives and people in elementary roles. However, one third identified competence problems with managerial staff, and a similar proportion did so for administrative staff (the two groups who dominate participants in ReGrow). The reasons for these problems were concentrated in three areas: “can’t keep up with change”; lack of experience; and failure to train. These were general observations about employees, and not explicitly related to their age.

Employer responses to ReGrow

Initial expectations

Employers were asked (in the single post-hoc survey) both about their expectations when joining the project, and their experience of it¹². When joining the project all had expected ReGrow to benefit the individual, and rather fewer expecting a benefit to the firm. One in three expected ReGrow to benefit the individual a lot, and the firm a little, while the reverse was true for benefit to the firms, with only a third expecting a lot of benefit to the firm, compared to two thirds expecting a little benefit.

Employers initial expectation was that the ReGrow process would mainly be aimed at Managers and Professionals and Administrative workers (40% of employers), and people approaching retirement (20%), with slightly higher expectations of the training than of the advice interview¹³. This was particularly true of smaller firms (where a higher proportion of staff are managers and professionals), and in the event these were indeed the groups reported as taking part.

Benefits of ReGrow

Overall, employer responses to the ReGrow project were remarkably positive. Only 11 firms (16%) identified no benefit to the firm from participation in the advice interviews, and 12 firms (18%) could not identify benefits from the training.

¹¹ Several of those commenting on potential health problems added comments like “possible health problems, but not experienced to date”.

¹² This data should be treated with caution since both questions were included in a retrospective survey, and completed at the same time, so responses are therefore likely to be related.

¹³ The numbers of clients who undertook mentoring was too small to produce useful data on attitudes to this from employers.

The main benefits to the firm from the IAG process were reported to be¹⁴:

- increased motivation, reported by one third of firms (more than half of them, “increased a lot”);
- increased productivity, one third of firms;
- increased commitment to the firm, one in five firms, especially larger ones

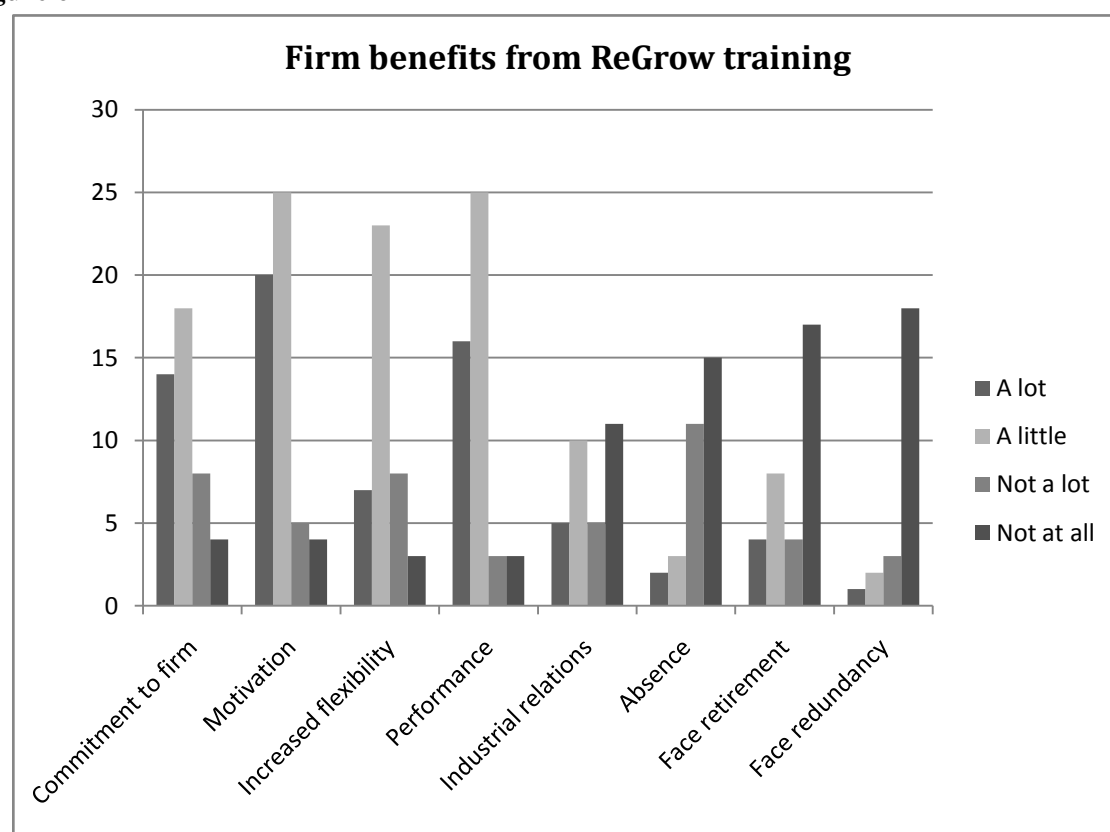
The benefits from the training were reported to be:

- increased motivation, over 40% of firms;
- increased productivity, 40% of firms;
- increased commitment to the firm, one third of firms;
- increased worker’s flexibility, one third of firms.

Smaller firms were particularly likely to think the training helped those facing redundancy, and those preparing for retirement or redundancy. Flexibility was also a particular feature of the benefits of training identified by smaller firms, and those with skills gaps.

Asked about who had, in fact, benefited from the advice interview, the initial expectations were confirmed. Employers reported that it had been most useful to Managers and Professionals (60% of firms), Administrators (40%) and people approaching retirement (30%)¹⁵.

Figure 6



Employer survey

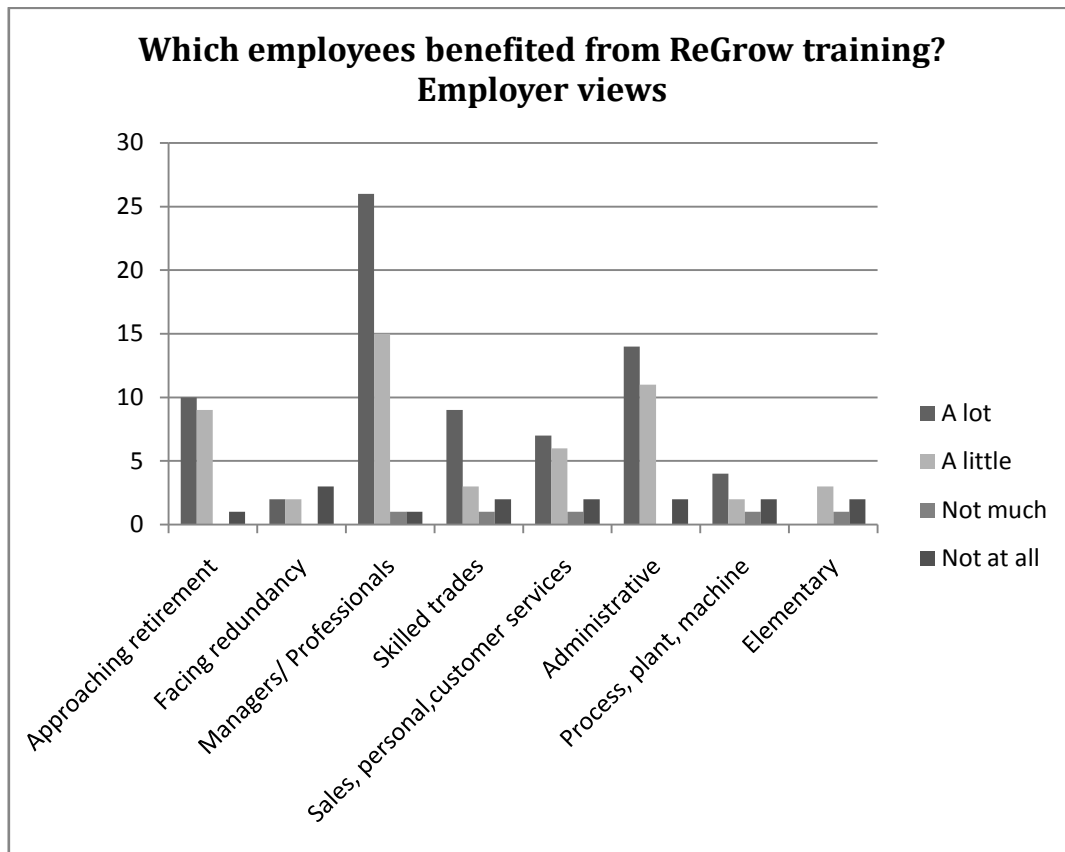
¹⁴ Includes “increased a lot” and “increased a little”, (and may have been high before the project).

¹⁵ Since the survey was conducted towards the end of the project, it is to be expected that answers to these two questions will overlap: individuals’ memory of their initial expectations are likely to be coloured by their more recent experience.

In the case of the training, rather fewer employers reported benefits to Administrators (35%), but the proportions of Managers and Professionals, and people approaching retirement, remained the same. This pattern was more likely in small firms, perhaps reflecting the closer personal relationships between employer and employee in such firms.

In relation to the training employers felt that it had been most useful to Managers and Administrative workers, and this was felt most strongly by those employers who identified skills problems within the firm.

Figure 7



Employer survey

It is likely to enhance our customer care programme and gain more business from existing contacts.

All the courses increased skills and knowledge from their chosen course, and the range of courses was very good.

By far the largest group of comments related to IT training, where there were clearly a wide range of needs, from introductory courses to advanced Excel and CAD. Several of the respondents commented on very specific skills, with immediate application in the workplace.

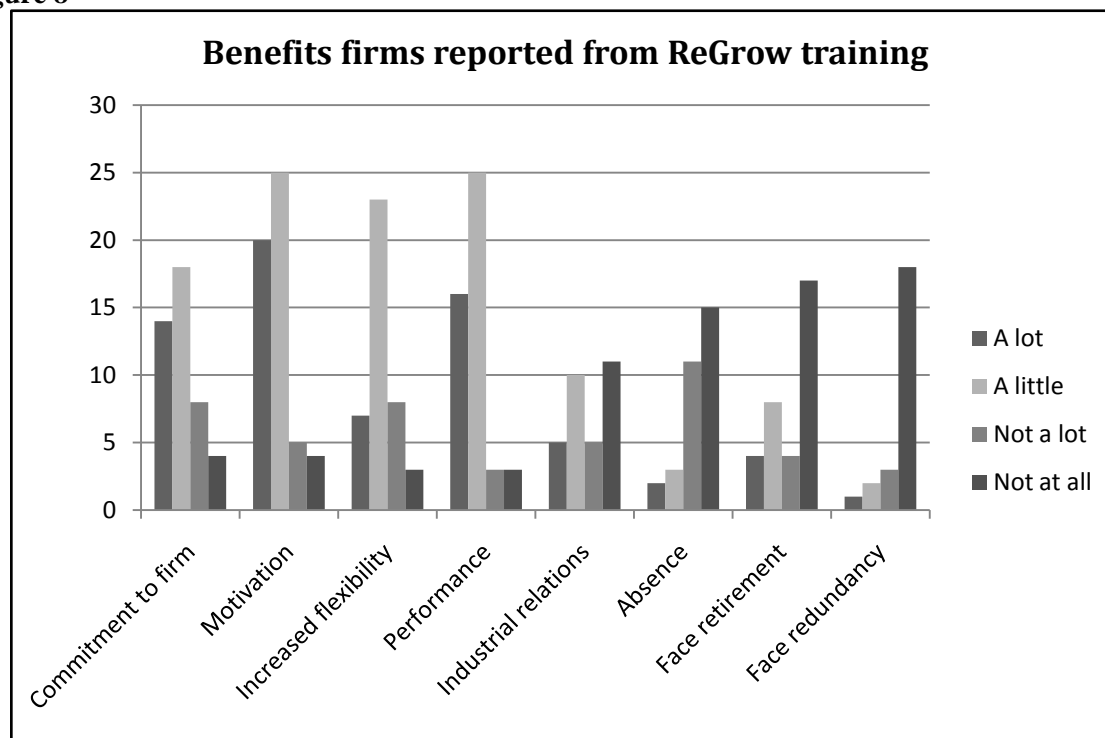
All our matrons and deputies received IT training and this was really beneficial as not all have had any previous training on computers. Being an older generation computers were not used like they are today and as most matrons are nurses, first the management side of things including IT skills has come second place. But with the change in the way nursing homes are run, they now need more management skills this includes the IT training.

IT courses were useful to underpin knowledge that had been gained by trial and error.

The employee could assist designing website

Excel trainer gave us a lot useful and time saving tips.

*AutoCAD (computer aided design) Helpful because our architect clients expect us to use it.
Of limited value because 3 half days of training is not enough to attain proficiency.
We implemented the skills immediately (sales)*

Figure 8

Employer survey

Several employers commented on the role of training in raising confidence and widening employee horizons:

*It motivated staff, and has given them better awareness of their environment
Fresh ideas and approaches, Increased confidence
Helped with motivation and morale*

However another felt that it was too short to be useful (a rare comment):

Too little to be really effective

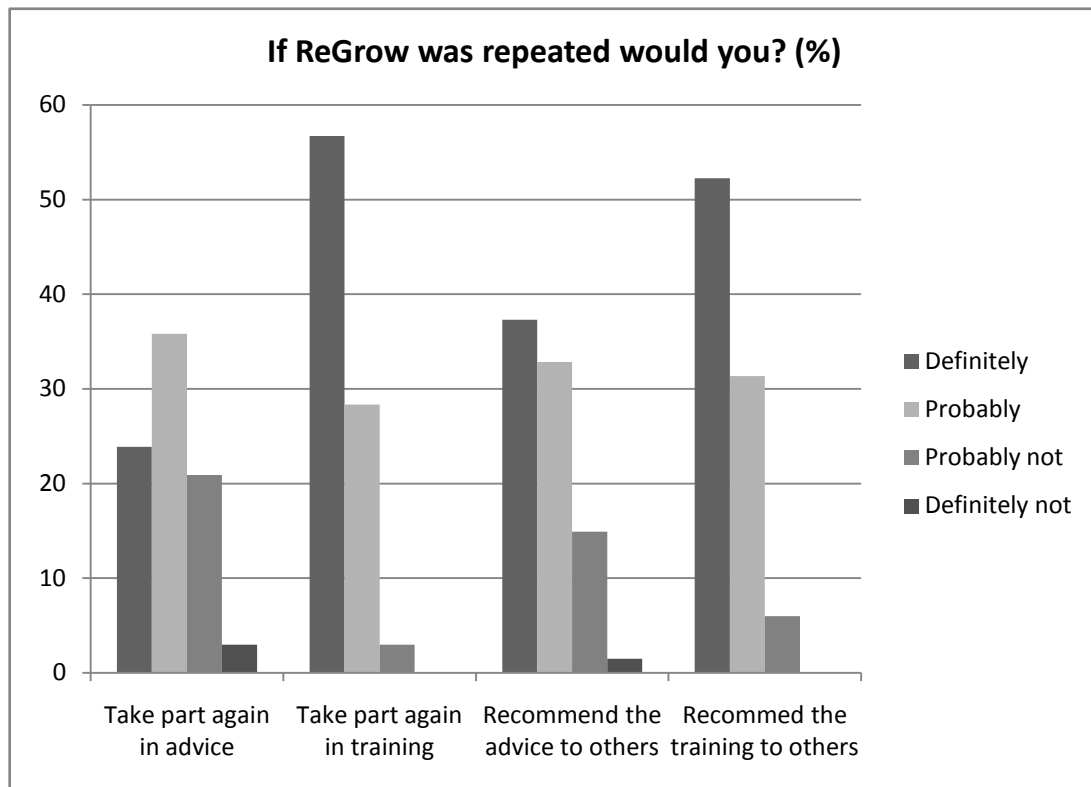
There were very few negative comments from employers on the training. Two reported that the course offered at interview was not then available (in one case the project paid for this to be provided by an alternative provider later). One course, in accounting software, was described as “a complete flop”. Customer care training was welcomed.

Would employers participate again?

When asked about future involvement in a process like ReGrow, the responses were very strongly positive. Two thirds would take part again in the advice interview, and three quarters would recommend it to other employers. Over 80% would participate in the training, and recommend it to others.

The most strongly positive responses were to the training, with over half of all respondents saying that they would “definitely” want to take part in training, and would “definitely” recommend it to others. A quarter of all participating firms would “definitely” want to participate in both, and would recommend both to other employers, while only 2 firms, both micro businesses, said “probably not” or “definitely not” to all four questions.

Figure 9



Employer survey

Would employers be willing to pay for the service?

Responses to the question of cost were, predictably, more muted. Employers were asked the simple question “If a service like this were to be available in the future there would probably be a charge. If this happened, would you consider paying for...”. While 70% would consider paying for the training, only 15% would consider doing so for the advice interview, perhaps reflecting a view that the principal beneficiary of this is the individual.

5. The employee surveys

The ReGrow project engaged 1138 older workers in advice and guidance, making it (as far as we know), the largest attempt ever made to test advice and guidance, training and mentoring for working people over 50, and the attempt to survey this population is unique. The two major previous contributions to knowledge of this field have reported on individuals' views of advice and guidance after 50, but have done so on the basis of qualitative interviews about what older people (employed and not employed) would like; on older peoples' experience of general, all age, advice services; and of small local projects¹⁶. These provide valuable background to the present study. The present evaluation considers the views of the older people receiving the service, their employers, and the providers of the advice and guidance and mentoring (but not the training).

Since this is a growing population, and Government is keen to encourage more people to stay longer in work, the evidence generated by the project is important, but it has some of the inevitable limitations of a first, pilot project, and the evaluation evidence reported here has similar limitations.

This chapter reports on the evidence from the two surveys of participants, carried out immediately after the first advice interview, and with the same people later in the project.

Survey methodology

There were two employee surveys. The first asked about attitudes to work, skills, retirement, discrimination and services for older workers, as well as about the experience of the IAG interview which respondents had just completed. The second asked in more detail about the experience of ReGrow, changes since the first ReGrow interview, and attitudes to work, skills and future career aspirations. The questions on attitudes to work were in both questionnaires, in order to try to identify any change during the individual's involvement in ReGrow.

The intention was that the first questionnaire would be completed immediately after the initial ReGrow interview, and the second 6 months later, when the training had taken place. However, the project took time to set up, and moved at different speeds in different areas. The issuing of the first round of questionnaires rested with the guidance providers, some of whom were more active than others in issuing the questionnaires, and ensuring that they were completed. In the event, some of the first round were issued, or completed, some time after the interview itself, and some of the second ones were completed more or less than 6 months afterwards. It follows that while they do offer some indication of how individuals changed during the project, it would be dangerous to draw very detailed conclusions. However, results are still important, since this is, as far as we know, the first time that such a longitudinal study has been done with older workers.

It is also important to note that the surveys, which examined attitudes to work and retirement as well as experience of the ReGrow process, tell us only about a limited population of older workers, who are almost certainly unrepresentative of older workers in general, especially in their commitment to education and training. Although some of the key questions were replicated from previous surveys of older workers, and the answers from the ReGrow respondents broadly match these previous results, it should not be assumed that these people necessarily represent the wider population.

Of the 1138 people who participated in the ReGrow Advice interview, 1089 (96%) undertook some training as part of the project. Of these, 389 completed the first questionnaire, and 106 the second. This represents an initial response rate of 34% and a response rate of 27% for the second survey. Almost all respondents also reported that they remembered the ReGrow interview and training clearly, so it is reasonable to assume an informed response¹⁷.

A higher response rate would have been helpful, especially to the second survey, but since both samples match the overall population closely on gender, and age mix, it is reasonable to assume that findings are broadly representative. There was a skew in the response rate to the second survey. Those

¹⁶ Ford, G. (2003) *Challenging Age: Information, Advice and Guidance for Older Age Groups*, London, DfES.

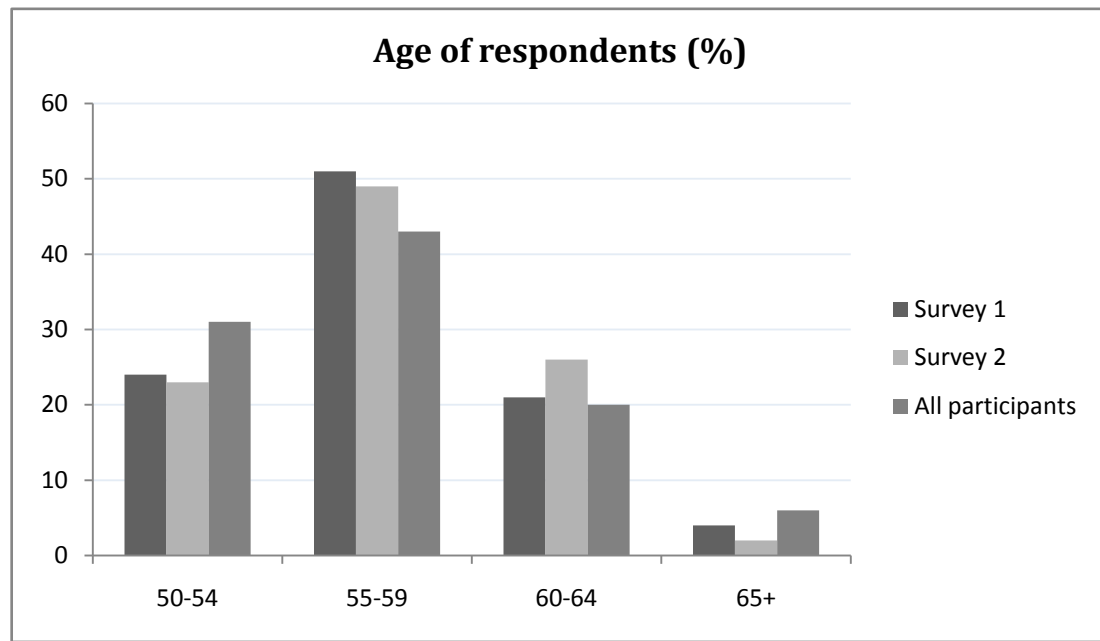
¹⁷ Over 80% remembered the elements of ReGrow "very well" or "quite well". Only 1 respondent did not remember at all.

who completed both surveys were generally more positive about work: they were more likely to feel that their work contributed to society, to say that they enjoyed their work and would miss it if they retired, and they were less likely to see money as the main reason for working, and to have problems with work-life balance. However, this skew does not appear to affect the evidence on changing attitudes between the two surveys.

Sector of employment is difficult to match. Over 10% described themselves as “other”, and the very high proportion classifying themselves as “managers and administrators” probably reflects problems with classification of roles, especially in small organisations and the voluntary sector. However, there is no obvious mismatch between the overall ReGrow client profile and the survey samples. While the numbers from ethnic minorities are consistent with the overall ReGrow client profile, their numbers are too small, and probably too specialised, for detailed analysis.

Overall, half the sample were aged 55-59, with a small group of 14 (4%) over 65. The remainder were divided evenly between 50-54 and 60-64. Two thirds were women, and around 5% from ethnic minorities.

Figure 10



Both employee surveys

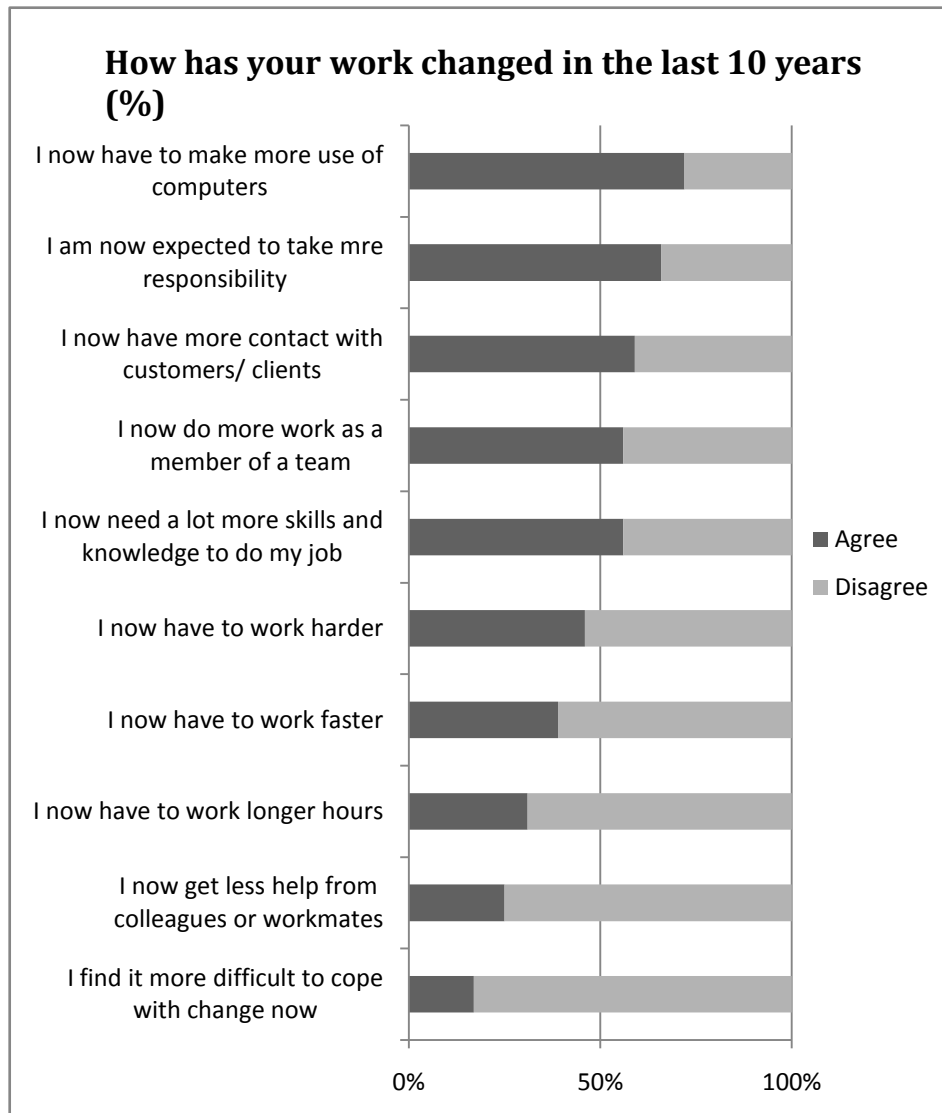
The changing work environment

The second survey asked about respondents' experience of change in work over the last 10 years. The most dramatic change was an increase in the use of computers (reported by 72% of respondents) and taking more responsibility (66%). More than half of respondents reported more teamwork, more contact with customers, and that their work required more skills and knowledge. All these findings are consistent with other studies of change in the workplace over recent years. On the other hand, a majority did not feel that they were now expected to work harder, faster or longer hours.

It is often suggested that older people have more difficulty coping with change at work. However, these older workers did not feel that the pace of change was making life more difficult, with 83% disagreeing with the statement “I now find it more difficult to cope with change”.

Where they had experienced change in the workplace they were relatively positive: 90% said they understood why changes were being made, and 80% agreed that the changes were necessary. Three quarters felt that they had been fairly treated, and two thirds that their experience had been valued. However, only half agreed that the change had been well managed.

Figure 11



Employee follow up survey

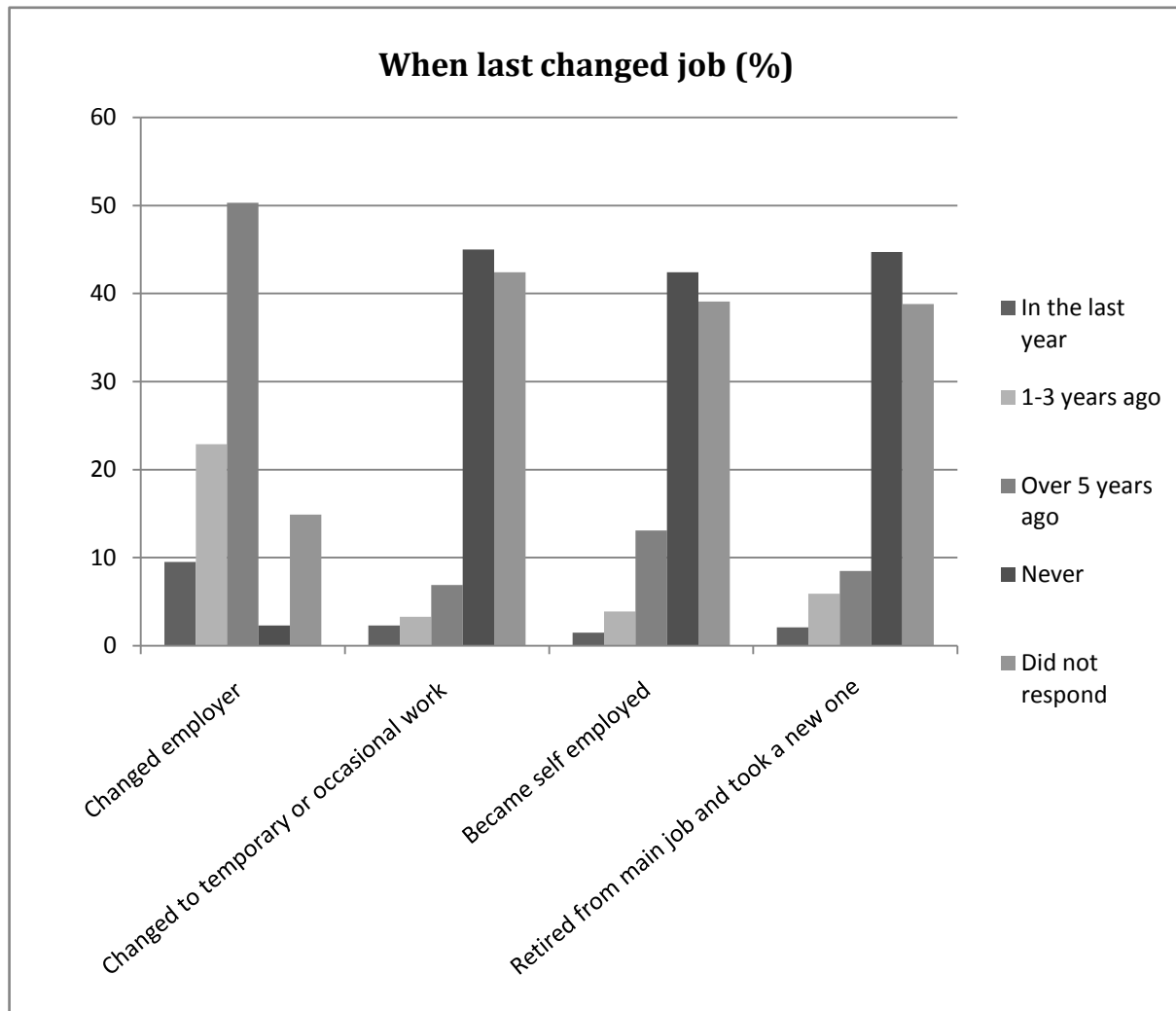
How stable are career patterns?

Most of the respondents had relatively stable careers. More than half had been working in their present firm for over 5 years.

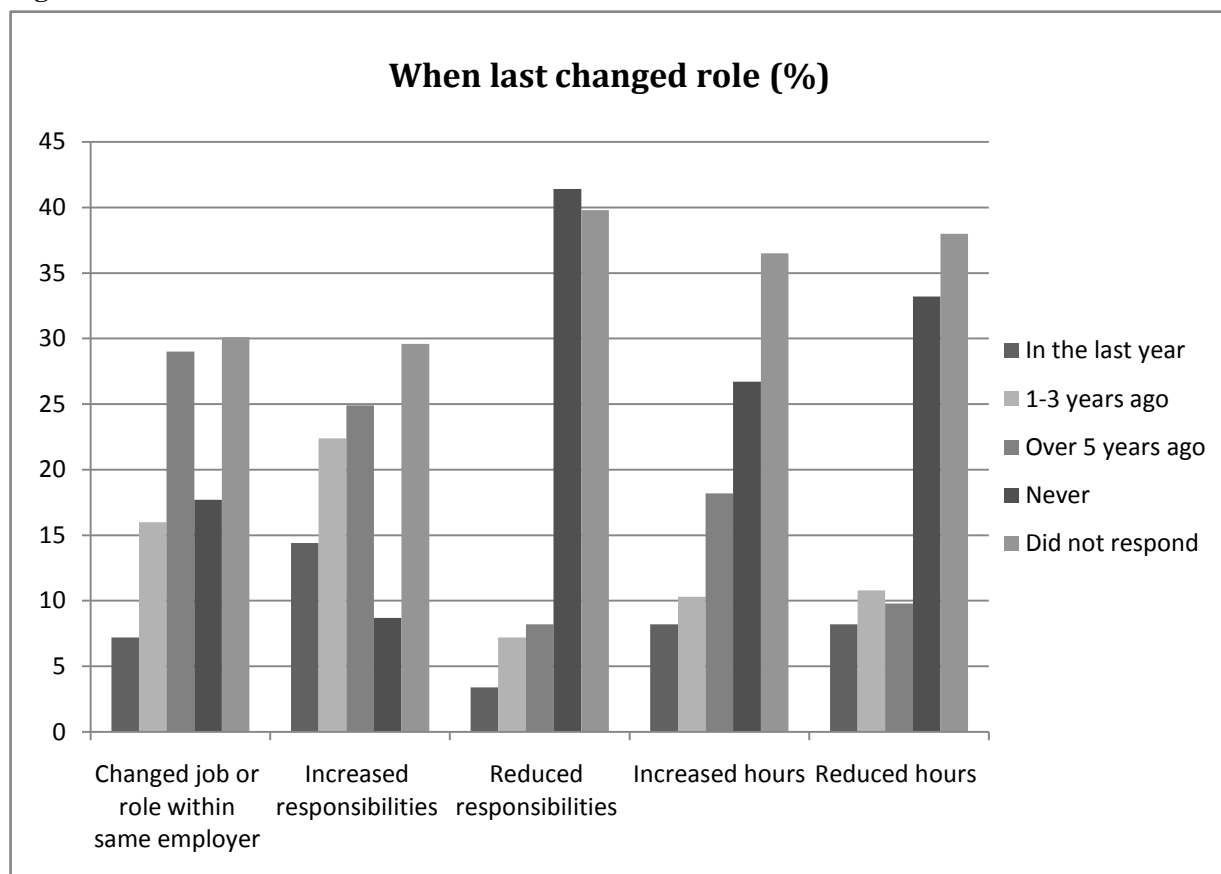
For those who had changed jobs, the most recent changes have been increased responsibility (one third in the last 3 years) and changed employer (also one third in the last 3 yrs). One in five had increased hours and the same proportion reduced hours in the last three years. A small group (about one in twelve) had returned to work after formal retirement.

Other job changes were very rare: over 40% had never worked on a temporary or occasional basis, been self-employed or taken up a new job after retirement, never reduced responsibilities, changed hours or done temporary/occasional work.

Figure 12



First employee survey

Figure 13*First employee survey*

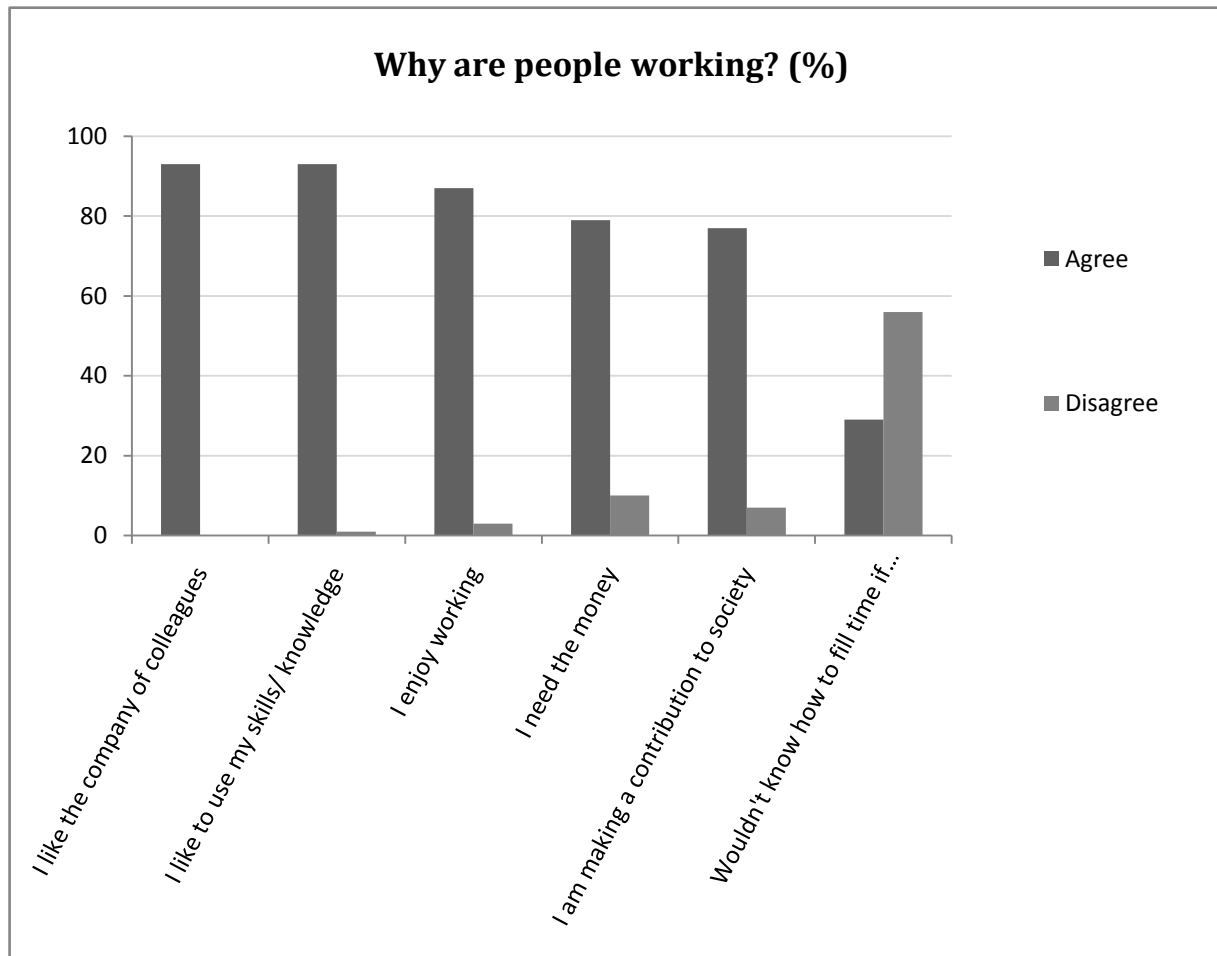
Experience of discrimination in the workplace

By comparison with most national surveys of discrimination, ReGrow respondents were very unlikely to have experienced discrimination at work. Only 13% reported age discrimination in applying for jobs and 2% reported it in the workplace. No significant numbers reported any other form of discrimination or age discrimination from workmates, in training or outside work

Attitudes to work

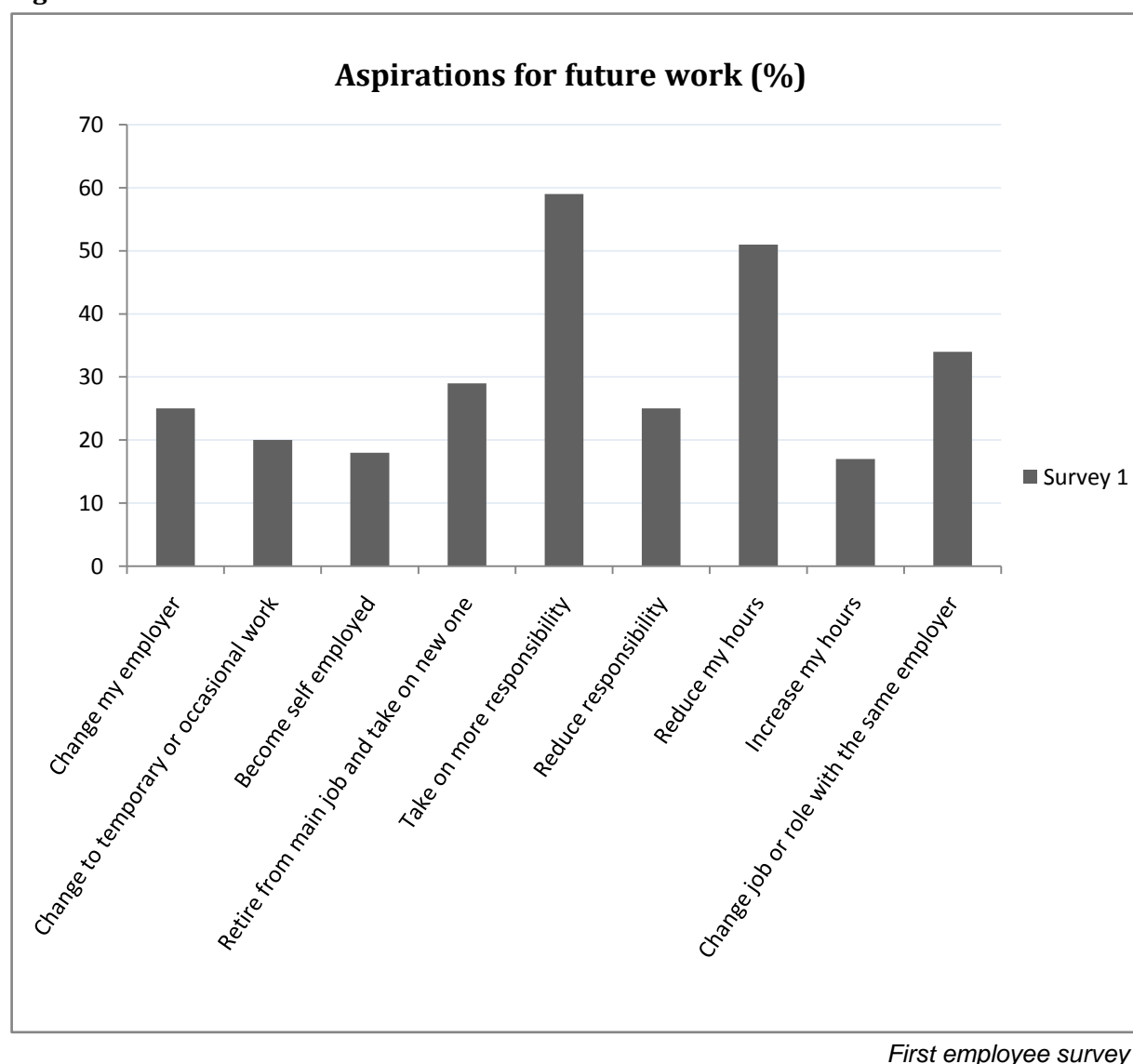
Why respondents were still at work

The second survey asked about motivation to work, and found very strong positive responses. The questionnaire offered five possible motivations to work, and a clear majority agreed with each. The most positive response (from around 90% of respondents) was to “I like the company of my colleagues”, “I like to use my skills and knowledge”, and “I enjoy working”. Three quarters of respondents agreed that “I need the money” or “I am making a contribution to society. Although half disagreed with “I don’t know how I would fill my time if I retired”, a significant minority (nearly a third) did say this.

Figure 14*First employee survey*

Do they have career aspirations?

The survey respondents had very positive views of work, and, contrary to popular belief, career aspirations remained strong. Half would like to take on more responsibility before retirement (and a third had done so in the last three years), and the proportion wanting this increased to nearly 60% in the second survey. A third would like to change job or role with their present employer, and a quarter would like to change their employer and a quarter would like to take up a new job after retirement from their present one. On the other hand, there was very little enthusiasm for self employment and temporary/occasional work, although attitudes to temporary employment and self employment became slightly more positive between the first and second surveys, perhaps reflecting a greater awareness of possibilities, a greater recognition of the hard realities of the labour market, or the approach of retirement.

Figure 15

The overall pattern is that most people want to stay where they are, with a new challenge, but not to take on major upheaval/uncertainty. About half would like to reduce their hours at some point before retirement, against only one in ten who would like to increase them¹⁸. Numbers selecting either of these options fell slightly, but not significantly, between surveys.

People's declared aspirations are likely to reflect their perception of what is possible. Increasing responsibility was felt to be the easiest change to achieve, with half of all respondents agreeing in the first survey and rather more doing so in the second survey. About 40% thought it would be easy to change hours (up and down) or reduce responsibility, and these proportions remained stable in the second survey. About a quarter thought it would be easy to change role with their present employer, change their employer, or change to temporary/occasional work, and these proportions did not change between surveys. The proportion seeing self employment as easy rose, from 14% to 19%, and the proportion seeing retiring and taking up a new job as easy fell from 24% to 16%. The proportion who would not consider changing employer, or changing role with the same employer, rose between surveys.

¹⁸ The number wishing to increase hours is necessarily constrained by the fact that a majority were already working full time.

Retirement plans

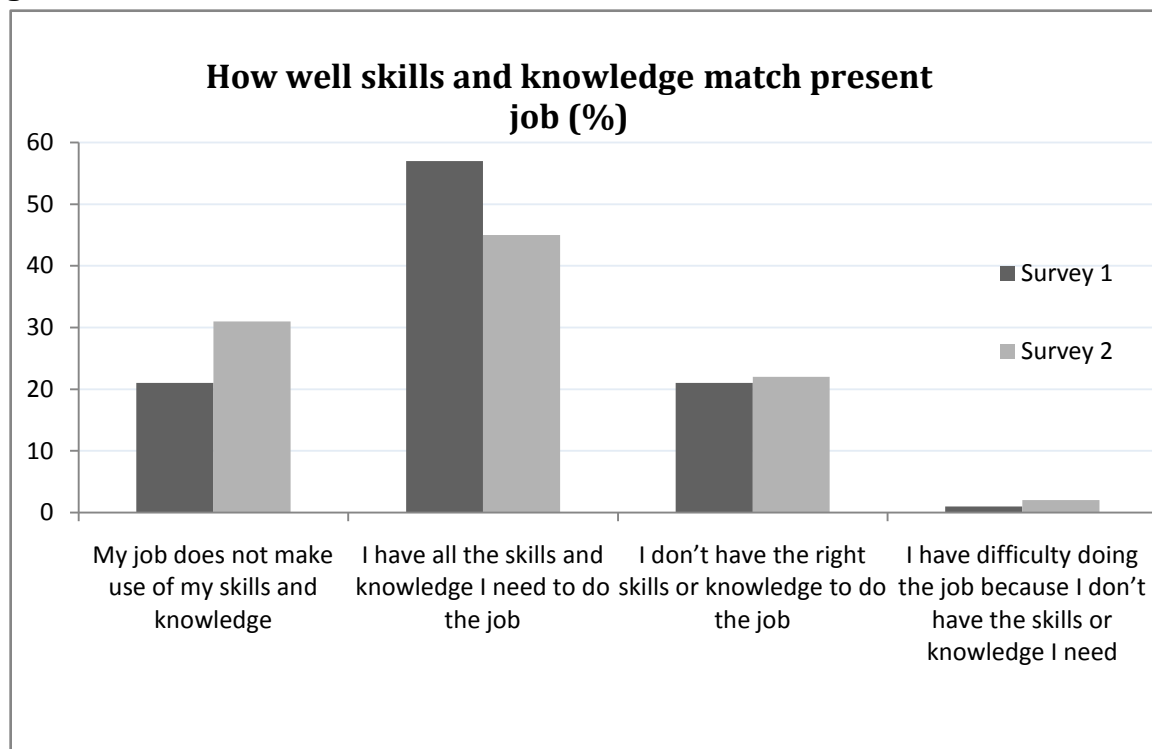
Although it is commonly assumed that people retire either at their employer's contractual retirement age or at State Pension Age (SPA), only about one third expected to retire at SPA, and less than one in five at their employer's retirement age, while 45% said that they expect to retire at "some other age", which was, for half the sample, between 60-64. This matches the national evidence on actual retirement ages. Financial factors also do not appear significant (less than 10% said "when my pension is paid up" or "when my mortgage is paid off", both of which have featured in previous research on retirement intentions). Significantly, over a quarter expected to retire after 65, and 4% said that they expected to do so after 70.

Skills and learning

Did respondents have the skills they need?

Half of those completing both surveys thought that they were adequately skilled, and one in five thought they were overqualified for their current jobs. Between surveys the proportion reporting that they were under qualified stayed constant at one in five, with a very small (about 2%) but stable group reporting more serious problems "I sometimes have difficulty in doing the job because of lack of skills or knowledge". However, the proportion seeing themselves as overqualified increased between the first and second surveys, while the proportion reporting that they were adequately qualified fell. This suggests that the process may have had more impact on those who were adequately qualified than those who feel some serious skills deficit. The findings suggest that the ReGrow process increased self confidence, and perhaps led to an increase in real skills levels.

Figure 16



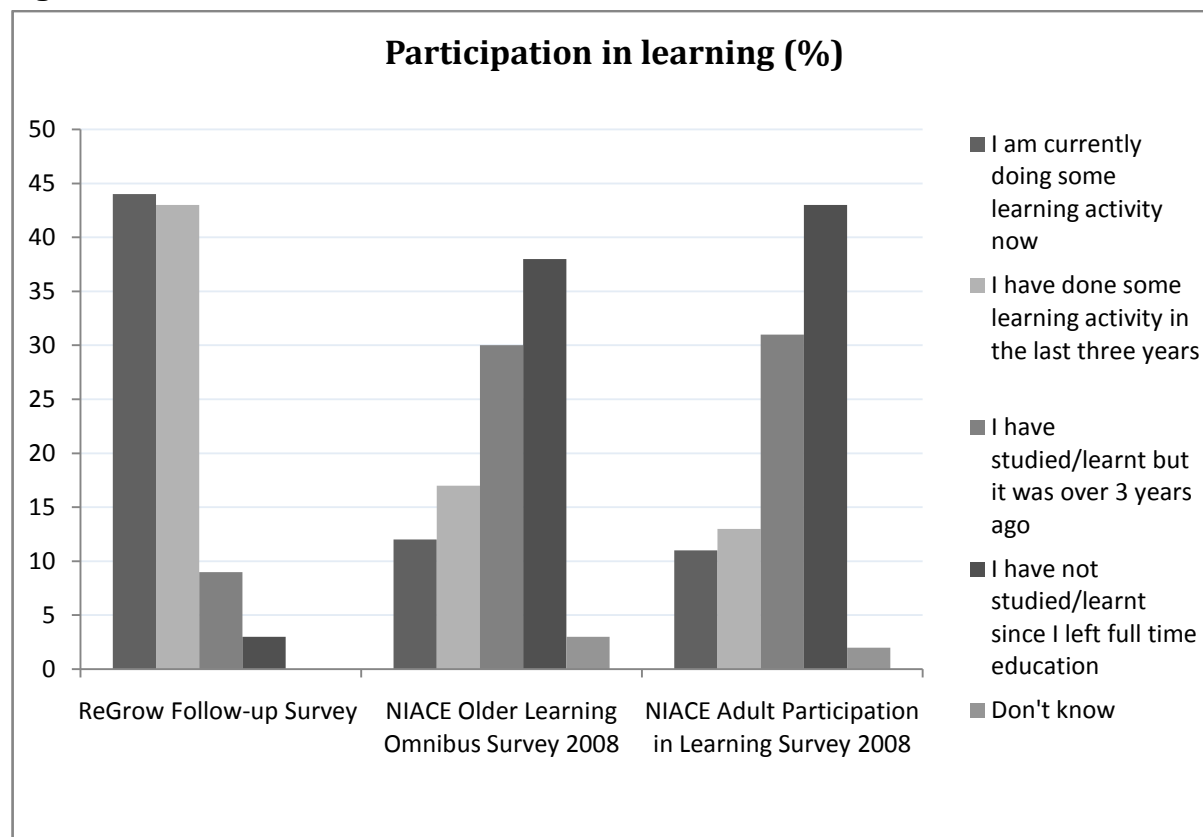
Employee survey and follow up survey

Are the respondents "learners"?

Perhaps the most remarkable finding of the surveys is the extent of commitment to learning among this group. While national surveys typically show 25-30% of adults of working age as "current

learners”¹⁹ the proportion among ReGrow participants is almost 90%. Although those under 55 are slightly more likely to be learners, the proportion is still over 80% among those aged 60-64. This suggests either that ReGrow attracted a group of employers or employees (or both) who were already predisposed to learning, or that the project itself increased attachment to learning.

Figure 17

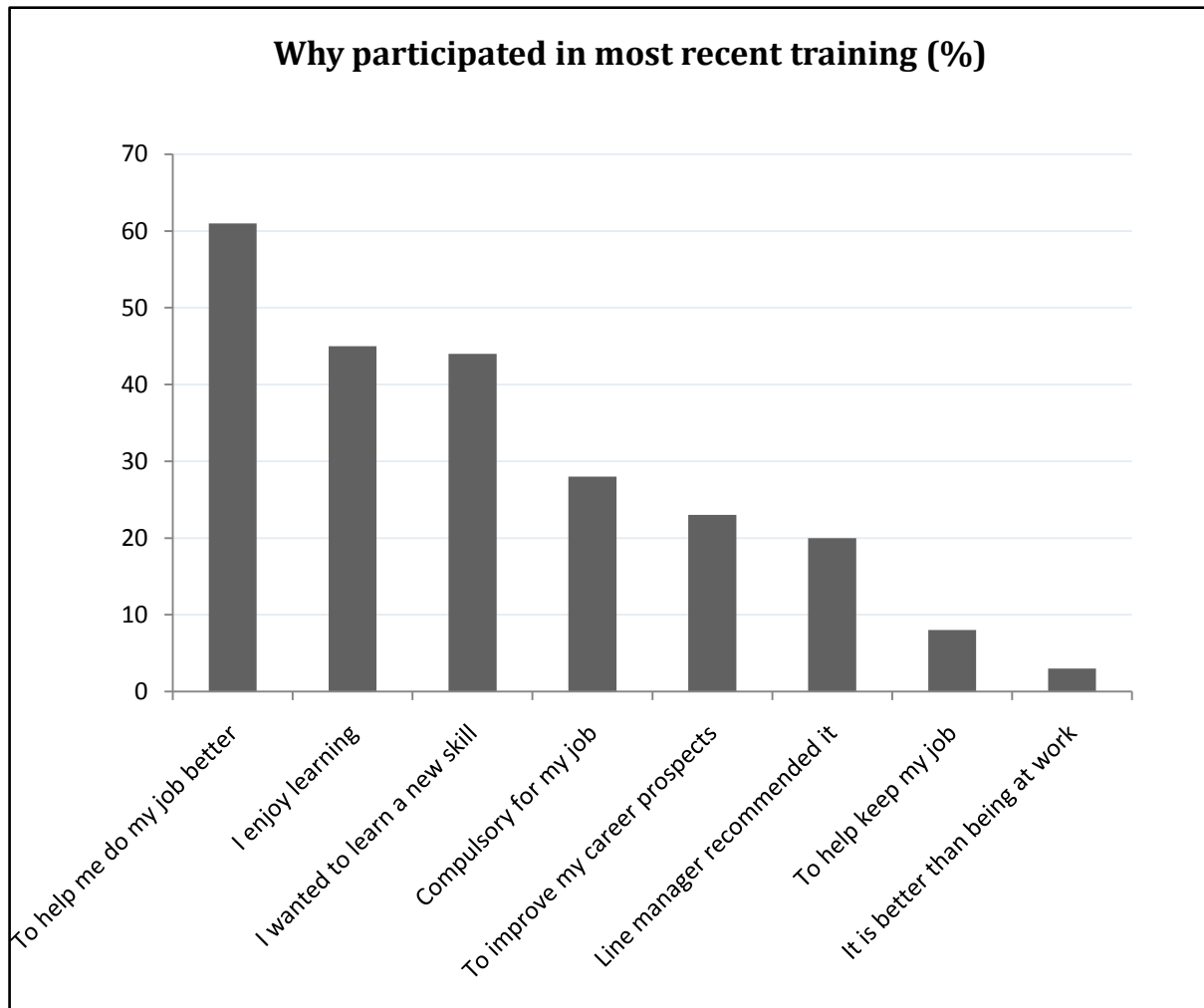


First employee survey

In the last year (i.e. before the ReGrow training) two thirds had undertaken training paid for by their employer and a similar number had undertaken informal learning of some kind. About a third had undertaken training at their own expense and a similar number paid for by Government in some form. However, a quarter had never paid for training themselves, and half had never participated in any Government funded training.

This was a self-motivating group, who were not training primarily to satisfy their employer's expectations. The most frequent reason given for training was that “it would help me to do my job better”, followed by “wanting to learn a new skill” and “enjoy learning”. Much smaller numbers reported “compulsory for my job” or “line manager recommended”.

¹⁹ Using the Adult Learning Survey definition, of participating in some form of learning (formal or informal) in the last three years.

Figure 18

Employee follow up survey

They also believed in training: 60% said that they thought that they could do their job better if they did some training. Where employers had offered training it was almost universally taken up (95%), with less than 5% having been offered and refused.

The reasons given for not participating in training are interesting. The very small number who had been offered training and refused it, cited “not relevant to my job”, “no time”, or “too close to retirement”. The larger group, who believed that training would help, but had not done any, generally cited passive reasons rather than active refusal or obstruction by the employer, with about one in five selecting each of “thought I could manage without”, “never thought to ask”, “not encouraged”, and less than one in ten reporting that “my line manager refused”.

Women were rather more likely than men to have been offered training, but they were also slightly more likely to have refused the offer. The group aged 55-59 were the most likely to have been offered training and taken it up (85%), while those aged 50-54 were the least likely. On this issue, there appeared to be very little difference between people in different kinds of employment, while those who had been working in the sector for between 1-5 years were a little more likely to have been offered and taken up training than others. There was little evidence of difference by age, gender or occupation among those who had refused the offer of training, or those who had never been offered it, but their numbers were very small.

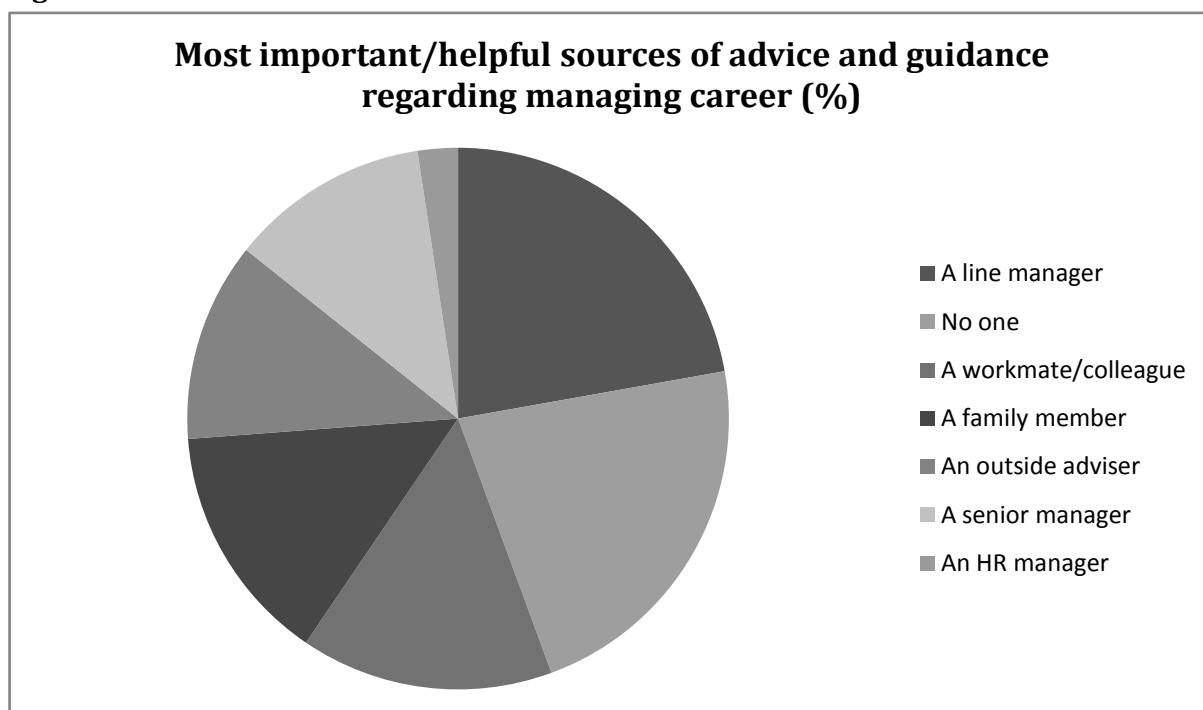
Where respondents get career advice

One key purpose of the ReGrow process was to provide career advice to older workers, and it is important to try to understand how participants viewed the process.

The concept of career advice is problematic, because many people have no strong sense of “career” or think that it has no application to people after learning initial education. Responses to questions about career advice must therefore be treated with caution. Previous research²⁰ has suggested that older people are less likely to receive formal advice and assistance to manage job change than their younger peers. However, when asked about advice on career in the last ten years, only one in five of ReGrow respondents had received no advice of any kind. Forty percent had received some advice from a line manager, followed by one third receiving it from a family member, and a similar proportion from a workmate. A quarter had received it from a senior manager or an outside adviser²¹.

Of all these sources, line managers advice were seen to have been most useful, reported by one in five, with about one in ten reporting that one of the other groups had been most useful.

Figure 19



Employee follow up survey

Employee responses to ReGrow

The ReGrow interview

Attitudes to the ReGrow interview were overwhelmingly positive. All found the timing convenient, and over 80% found the interview helpful, enjoyable and relevant, and carried out at a convenient time. The only significant negative responses were from the 15% who did not find it helpful, and 18% who found it not relevant to their needs. Four fifths of respondents thought that the adviser understood their needs and the available options. However, responses were less positive on how the

²⁰ Ford, G. (2003) *Challenging Age: Information, Advice and Guidance for Older Age Groups*, London DfES. Ford, G et al (2006) *The Impact of an Ageing Population on Career Guidance: a paper for the Government review of Information Advice and Guidance for Adults*. (NIACE)

²¹ The total exceeds 100% because multiple responses were allowed to this question.

interview had helped them to cope with change at work, with only one third agreeing (although this may mean that they were not experiencing change at work).

Almost all comments on the advice interview, and interviewers, were positive, some exceptionally so:

Found (interviewer) genuine, caring & helpful, felt at ease with her & able 2 ask relevant quests. find the prospect of future training we exciting & am lkg 4ward 2 it

I was pleased to talk in confidence to (interviewer) who helped my confidence. she listened & seemed to understand my work problems. My Line Manager talks down to me & treats me like an idiot although I did his job single handed for 4 months before he was put in place

(Interviewer) is a true gentleman and a joy to have been in his company

I am a professionally trained career consultant and whilst not now practising. I have already thought about my future. Talking to some else was useful.

Several were surprised by how useful they found the interview:

It was a surprise to me. I was asked to take part by my employer. It has made me reassess my future plans and the interview was very useful

I was surprised how helpful I found the interview.... and it has certainly spiked my interest in returning to learning

Very helpful interview, kind interviewer I wouldn't have reached the same conclusions

However, there was clearly confusion about the nature of the advice interview among some respondents:

I didn't know it was supposed to be careers advice

There was no careers advice in the interview I had. However, age discrimination is so endemic it probably would not make much real difference

For some it is clear that the interview was seen simply as a preliminary to training, which was not the original intention of ReGrow:

It would have been helpful if I had been made aware that the ReGrow interview was careers advice session – then I could have arrived better prepared. I was under the impression that the interview was to ask about my reasons for attending a specific course i.e. Introduction to Project Management.

This interview was a prerequisite to obtaining a grant towards CAD training.

The interview was not presented as an opportunity for careers advice but as a route to gain training of use to me in paid work and in my voluntary work

In the second survey, employees were asked to identify (via a write in question) what had been most and least useful about the advice interview. The following tables summarise the, very positive, results.

What was most helpful about the interview	No.
Information on options	26
Adviser	13
Access to training	9
Chance to reflect	8
Motivation	8
Other positive	6
Negative	3

What was least helpful about the interview	No.
No response	44
“Nothing”	41
Too short	5
No appropriate course	4
Timing	4
Adviser knowledge	3
Relevance	3
Focus on employer needs	2
Limited choices	2
No employer link , No follow up, No skills advice, Poor help, Pressure to select particular options, Superficial, Too long, Too much paperwork	1 each

Follow up survey

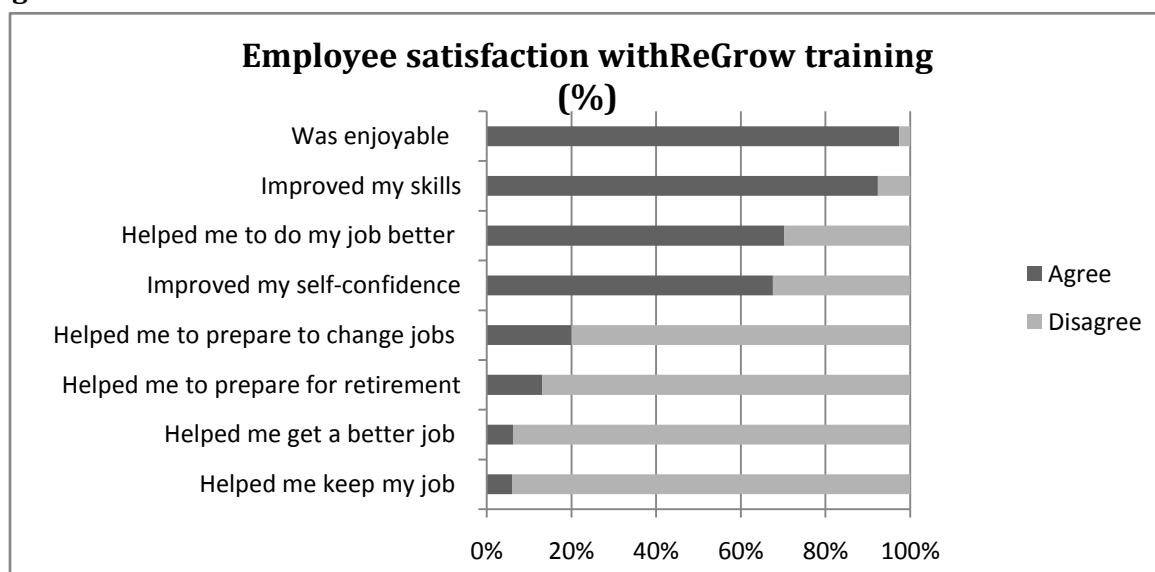
The ReGrow training

For the majority of respondents (60%), the training took a day (4-7 hours), with 20% taking between a day and a week (8-40 hours), 14% half a day or less, and a few over a week.

Reactions to the training focused strongly on the current job. Over 90% said that the training was enjoyable and had improved their skills, and two thirds reported increased self confidence, and better ability to do their job. Only one in five felt that it had helped them to prepare to change jobs, and much smaller numbers thought that it had helped them to keep their present job or find a better one, or prepare for retirement (the last of these was not an explicit objective of ReGrow).

These responses suggest that the respondents were overwhelmingly focused on their current jobs and employers, and that few were interested in changing jobs. The response to the final question on keeping the present job suggests that few felt that their present job was at risk in any way.

Figure 20



Employee follow up survey

Most comments on the training were positive, both on content and timing:

training for my new job, so the timing was excellent. The organisation of the ReGrow interview and follow-up together with the training organised, was very good.

However, not everyone was satisfied

I found the exercises difficult to follow. It's a long time since I had to do anything like that- plain English could have been useful.

The First Aid DVD was very very repetitive and could usefully have been much more succinct

Unfortunately I was put on the wrong course and only found out at the last minute. I found my own course eventually.

Despite the fact that ReGrow generally did not reveal major problems with basic skills, two respondents commented poignantly on this:

I did not do well at school as I was bullied. I know I could have done better for myself but have held back due to lack of education. I stayed in the same job for 20 years until my line manager gave me the confidence to move on to management- I only wish I could spell.

I need help to read and write

Respondents were asked "Would you have done the training if you had not had the ReGrow interview? If not why not?". One fifth of respondents thought that they would have done the training without ReGrow, but gave no details of this. Of those who would not have done the training one third gave no reason, a fifth cited cost and a tenth cited each of "lack of information" and "lack of time".

Without ReGrow I would not have done the training because of	No
No response	30
Cost	21
Inadequate information	10
Time	8
No motivation	2
Access, Availability, Needed tailored response, Not a priority, Relevance, Too embarrassed to ask	1 each

Respondents were asked to identify the most and least helpful features of the training provided through ReGrow. Again a sizable proportion did not respond, but of those who did, the clearest message is the importance of confidence and skills development.

What was most helpful about the training?	
No response	34
Improved confidence	12
Skills developed	10
Tutor	7
Content - information	5
Cost	5
Working with peer group	5
Relevance	4
Structured overview of the field	2
Time	2

All age, Improved job satisfaction, Learning, Link to interview, Not job related, Opportunity to change work, Pace, Tailored to individual need	1 each
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Two thirds either did not identify anything unhelpful about the training, or reported nothing unhelpful.

What was least helpful about the training?	
No response	49
“Nothing”	12
Too short	6
Travel	4
Time	3
Lack of tutor support	2
Paperwork/arrangements	2
Relevance	2
Superficial	2
Wanted a larger group	2
Accessibility, Can’t afford follow up, Inadequate information, Level too high, Level too low, No qualification attached, Sense of personal incompetence, Too little training, Training environment poor	1 each

Follow up survey

ReGrow Mentoring

Very few respondents (13) commented on the mentoring, although most who did so said they had enjoyed it and improved their skills. Three quarters of these had enjoyed it, half felt it had improved skills and self confidence, and a third felt that it had helped them to prepare for retirement. The low response probably reflects the fact that the mentoring was generally provided by the same person as had provided the initial IAG, and the distinction between the two was not clear to the employee.

Did ReGrow change anything?

Only 106 people completed both questionnaires (10% of all participants in the advice interviews), so it is important to be cautious about extrapolating conclusions to the whole population²². The changes can be divided into two kinds: specific measurable changes (which may or may not be related directly to ReGrow), and individuals’ reports of change in attitudes or behaviour (which are important, but less reliable, since they will be affected by external factors like attitude to the survey, mood at the time etc.)

In terms of objective change, half of respondents had done some training paid for by ReGrow, and a quarter had done training paid for by their employer²³. A fifth had increased their responsibilities. A few individuals had acquired a qualification, increased hours, retired or changed employer. There

²² Although the response was skewed towards people with more positive attitudes to work, there is no evidence to suggest that this distorts the findings reported here

²³ There may be some blurring of boundaries here, since not all were necessarily aware of who was paying, and some ReGrow training was jointly funded.

were two changes in responses to questions which were repeated in the second survey, which provides a degree of objective measure of change²⁴.

- the proportion feeling adequately qualified for their present jobs fell (from 57-45%), while the proportion feeling overqualified for their current jobs rose (from 21%-31%);
- the proportion reporting work-life balance problems fell, with the numbers agreeing with “I do not find it hard to balance home and work commitments”, rising from 65-86%, again suggesting that people became more attached to their jobs.

In terms of attitude change, most respondents thought that ReGrow had made some difference, and it does seem plausible that the process encouraged participants to think harder about their circumstances and opportunities, and perhaps make more realistic decisions.²⁵

- half agreed that ReGrow had increased the chance of them doing more learning;
- a third agreed that ReGrow had increased the chance of their staying longer in work.

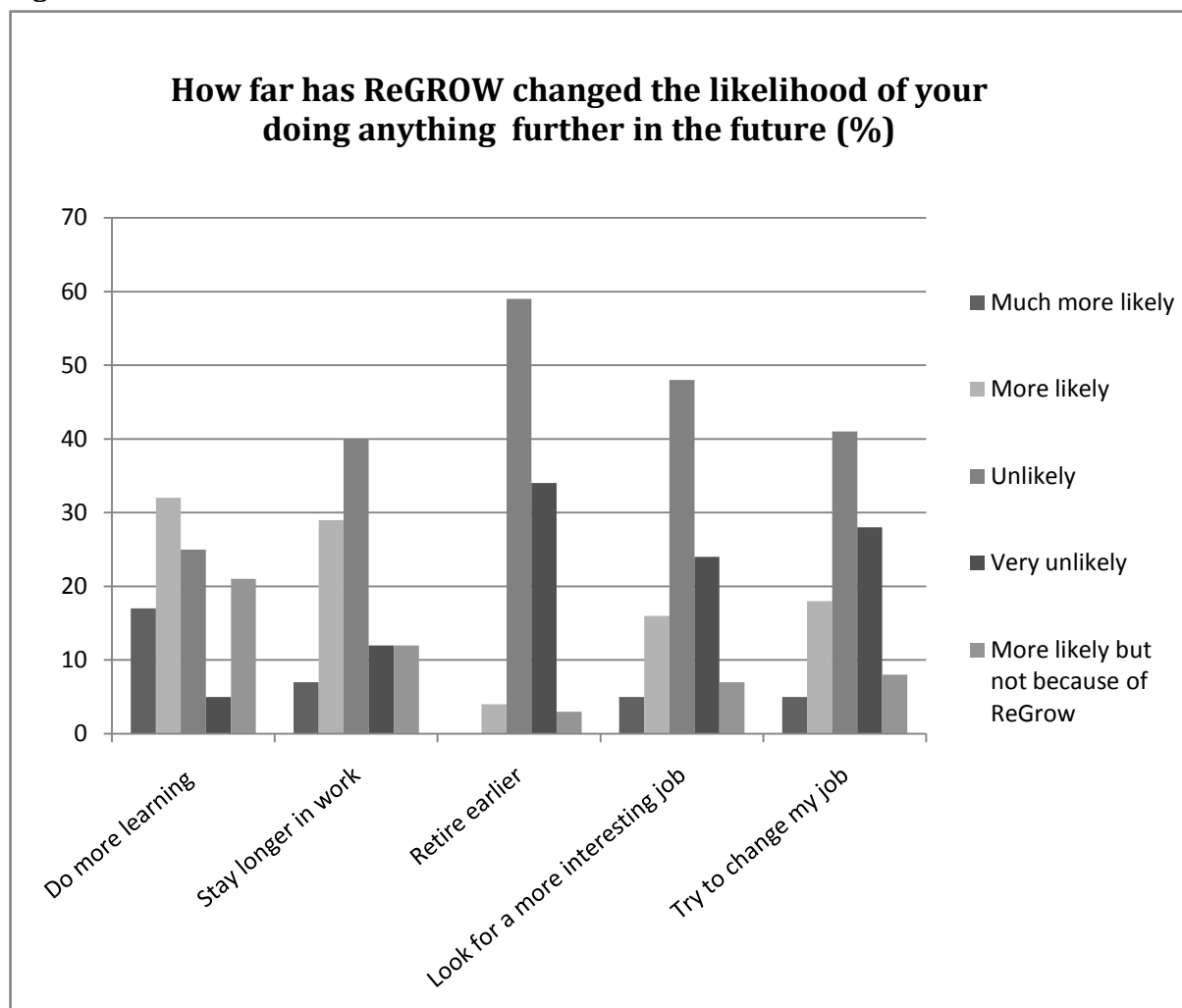
Almost all (over 90%) said that they were unlikely to consider retiring earlier than they had planned.

One notable change between surveys was the decline in the proportion of people responding “don’t know” to the attitude questions. This might suggest that during the ReGrow project people spent some time reflecting on their work and their employers, and their views became firmer (positively or negatively). This happened on four of the attitude questions:

- “I sometimes have difficulty at work because I don’t have the right skills and knowledge”: the “don’t knows” fell from 14-2%, while the proportion disagreeing rose from 45-75%. This was the largest single change, and suggests that ReGrow was successful in raising individuals’ skills and knowledge in areas which they perceived as critical to their jobs
- “I don’t feel that my employer values my experience”: the “don’t knows” fell from 19-7%, while the proportion disagreeing rose from 58-68%, indicating a greater awareness of the issue, and suggesting that the project increased communication between employer and employee.
- “My job is routine/mundane”: the “don’t knows” fell from 16-0% while the proportion disagreeing rose from 70-86% (a direct change of response);
- “my main reason for staying in work is that I need the money”: the “don’t knows” fell from 10-3%, while the proportion who did not see money as the main motivation for staying in work rose slightly, from 31-36%;

²⁴ Although it must be remembered that the numbers completing both surveys were small.

²⁵ The time between initial and follow-up survey varied, and for some it was quite short. It is also possible that changes merely reflect the fact that people are older and nearer to retirement.

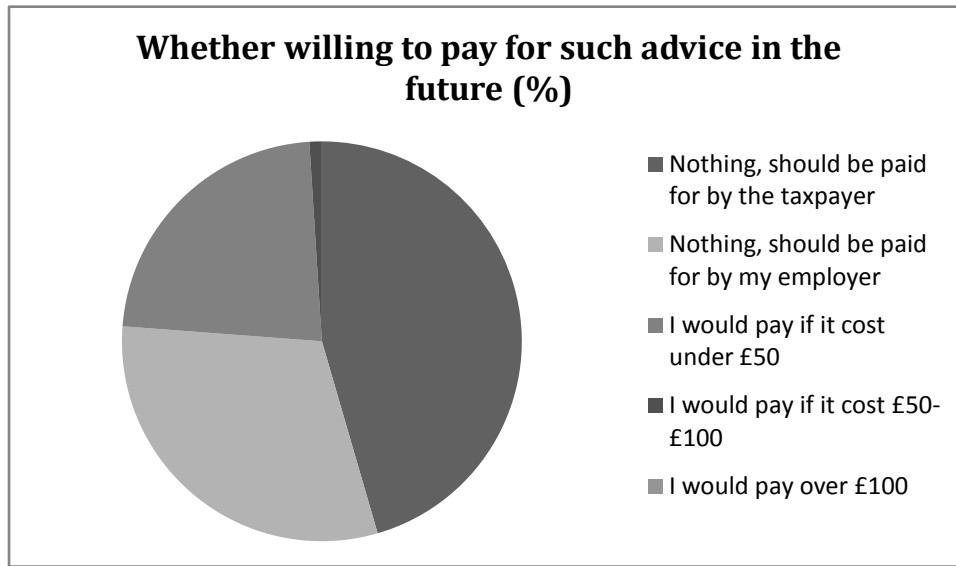
Figure 21*Employee follow up survey*

However, it was more likely to confirm their commitment to work and to their current job and organisation.

Would respondents pay for services?

Respondents were asked whether they would be willing to pay for the IAG review process in the future. The large majority felt that advice should be free to the user, with nearly half thinking it should be paid for by the taxpayer, and a third that it should be the employer). About a quarter would consider paying up to £50, but only one would consider more.

Figure 22



Employee follow up survey

General comments from employees

In the first survey respondents were invited to write in comments on ways in which services of this sort could be improved for older workers, and any other comments they wished.

Although comments were overwhelmingly positive, 152 respondents made suggestions about improvements. The major areas were:

- improvements in advertising or promotion of careers guidance and training for older people. (this was the largest single group - a quarter of respondents),
- improved services for people over 50, welcoming ReGrow and arguing for more such services,
- better recognition of older people's contribution,
- the need to improve careers services for older people,
- providing better information about the labour market.

186 respondents added "other comments", covering a wide range of issues.

Some were extremely grateful to the project:

I can not wait to extend my sincere thanks to the body who made it possible for me to carry on in life

It almost feels like an 'Honour'

However, not everyone found the ReGrow process relevant to their circumstance:

My qualifications and experience are such that I am very specialised and this is not very relevant

the work experience seems degrading for people below senior management - no accounts taken for people who own businesses.

Employer attitudes

Several commented that work was needed to change employer attitudes and behaviour:

Proof that employers have been re-educated to not ignore the over 50s

No- I think its the employers who need the advice

Proposals for improvement

There were proposals for better information on careers and training:

A communication/newsletter for 50+ which could be free or we could subscribe to. Giving details of free courses, distance learning courses, retirement information & pension advice

Firstly for it to be marketed more. For the interviewer to ensure the candidate has chosen the correct course, by using Q&A to check understanding

Alongside this were comments about improving the promotion of the service, and some were clearly unaware that it was a limited pilot:

I found out about ReGROW through Train2Gain and Business Link. If I were not a member of Business Links I would not have known about ReGrow at all. More accessible information needs to be advertised through public places etc

No information about the project/very fortunate to hear about it by a work colleague.

Glad there is some help and advice for over 50s as we seem to get forgotten

Good to know its there if or when needed

Knowing that if I were to become unemployed at my age (52) I would be able to call upon ReGROW for help and advice in retraining and guidance

Several commented on elements of the advice process and how they might be improved:

Possibly have a system you enter your history/pastimes likes/dislikes and this generates matching job-profiles - with links to local opportunities

Post retirement career advice- new opportunities for those leaving "normal" employment – voluntary or paid.

Older people giving the advice!

I think that careers advice should focus on your skills/competencies not on previous jobs/experience. What transferable skills do I have what do I really want to do, how could I use my skills in another career etc

I would have like a full list of training offered to me. I have since found out a couple of other courses would have been good.

More timely, more comprehensive, supply of online tools for adult career planning and retirement preparation

More visible/profile with easy access on the internet/dedicated section with clear/realistic guidance for all skill levels and help available. Some examples of success not just high flyers

Allow time before interview to assess CV and possibly use character testing analysis to match person with jobs

By improving the quality of advice which may be best achieved by some advisors specialising in this area

careers advice is generally geared to full-time employment so help to explore part-time and/or flexible working would be helpful

(ReGrow should offer) workshops with potential employers!

Some were concerned about how the process dealt with their personal context, and especially issues about retirement choices:

People like me educated from the other countries like India and Pakistan and we are fully trained teachers and any other degree holders. If any sort of advice and training that is relevant to their education is given is more useful

Before you make the plan with the client ask them if they would be prepared to talk about their current commitments family and or financial. Often at 50+ the difficulty with moving occupations is filling a competitive salary or a persons family commitments may be an influence to the guidance you need to give.

I need to look at health and financial issues before I can make concrete decisions

More information on how I am going to cope when I retire, regarding my pension, I only have a state pension to look forward to!

There is a misconception that older people who are in employment are financially sound, more help could be given on financial help i.e. benefits etc.

Funding

Funding was frequently commented on, with several saying that without ReGrow they or their employers would have been unable to undertake the training

I have been given much needed funding to do a course which will guarantee me getting part-time work. I could not have done any training without this financial help. There are still other courses I would find beneficial but due to financial hardship this is not possible. I'm sure there are many people like me, who would love to get training for work if they knew of this project

I was instantly surprised that training was available for over 50's free of charge. Also pleased to discover the variety of training options available.

In one case, the respondent had her taste for training whetted, but was unable to follow it up as she would have liked:

I was very grateful that ReGrow funded the first stage of a course. I thoroughly enjoyed it but unfortunately am financially unable to proceed any further at the moment.

Administration and management of ReGrow

No direct question was asked about the administrative processes of ReGrow, but respondents were invited to write in comments if they wished. Only two reported a failure to follow up requests for training, and the third was concerned with eligibility for subsidised training. Since respondents were promised confidentiality it is not possible to establish the nature of these problems, but they do constitute a very small proportion of those participating in the project.

The ReGROW interview was very informative. I have attended one course which was approx a year ago. I showed interest in several other courses on offer and to date have had no further contact. therefore I am totally disappointed.

Initial interview promised various free training options which then proved unavailable as I had obtained 'O' and 'A' Levels at school. I am eager and willing to learn new things but employers not able to or willing to afford to pay large sums for training (small family concern²⁶).

Finally, there were comments which illustrate the diversity of how older workers feel about their circumstances, and their responses to the needs which ReGrow sought to address:

There are a lot of people who are working below their skill level (because of personal circumstances) it is a shame!

Just a little mystified on the cost benefit for someone in my situation

I changed careers at age 57 after a lifetime in retail, I found I really needed help with interviews which I had not attended for 26 years. Also help with confidence which is difficult when you are making a change of direction.

With the exception of self-employment there seem to be few opportunities for change for a woman of 63 years. I do not know how to answer this question

Yes, I should have had this interview before 60 years

No, the end is in sight!

It should have started much earlier!

²⁶ This is a surprising comment, since the restrictions on access to training by qualification, which apply to mainstream LSC provision did not apply to ReGrow training.

6. Conclusions

The ReGrow project itself was clearly successful:

- in achieving an appropriate range of employers to participate
- in achieving the target numbers of participating employees;
- in improving the self confidence, skills and performance of employees,
- in increasing older employees flexibility, their attachment to work and to their employers, and to learning.

However, it recruited a group of employers, and employees who are unusually committed to training and development.

The employer experience

The ReGrow project was very warmly received by the employers who participated. They appreciated both the advice and training elements, would participate again if invited, and would recommend it to other employers.

However, although the project clearly achieved its objectives in terms of the mix of firm size, this is not a representative group of employers (either in the total participants or in the sample responding to the survey). The mix inevitably reflects the particular networks and contacts of A4e and their partners. They were optimistic about future growth, and concerned about skills gaps and shortages. There were a high proportion of micro businesses, and businesses with a high proportion of older employees, and positive attitudes to them. They were likely to have been involved in other Government programmes, and were also unusually committed to training, although it appears that much of the training undertaken would not have taken place without the impetus of ReGrow. The sectoral balance is skewed towards health and education, although the data does not allow for precise analysis of sectoral mix.

The benefits of ReGrow for employers were identified as:

- increased employee motivation;
- increased productivity/performance;
- increased commitment to the firm.

If ReGrow were to be repeated:

- over 80% would take part in training
- over 80% would recommend the training to a colleague.
- Two thirds would take part in the IAG process;
- Three quarters would recommend the IAG to a colleague;

The employee experience

Work has been changing over recent decades, and the employees taking part in ReGrow have experienced this. Over the last ten years they report increased responsibility, more use of computers and teamwork, more customer contact and higher skill requirements. However, they have not experienced a growth in pressure in terms of hours or pace of work. A third of them had changed jobs in the previous three years. Three quarters felt adequately or over-qualified for their present jobs, while a quarter felt underqualified in some way.

They are not typical of adults of their age in the population at large, especially in their commitment to learning, where they are much more likely than other people in their age group to have taken part in training in the recent past. They are strongly motivated to work, especially by the opportunity to use their skills and by the company of workmates. A majority would like to take on more responsibility in the future (as many have done in the past, and some did during the project), and this is the change which they are most likely to think possible. However, few are seeking to change jobs or employer,

and few say they want other kinds of change like flexible working, although two fifths have changed their hours in the last three years (half of these increasing and half decreasing them). Most were strongly resistant to the idea of self-employment, although this resistance reduced during the project.

By comparison with respondents to national surveys, they report relatively low levels of discrimination (of any kind), and where they feel they have been discriminated against, it has been age discrimination when applying for jobs, not in the workplace itself.

They were very positive about the experience of ReGrow, and reported that both the interview and the training had increased their self confidence and skills (this was also true for the small numbers who commented on the mentoring). On the other hand, they did not feel that the ReGrow process had contributed much to preparation for retirement, or increasing job security. In most cases, the training received was short (around 1 day) and satisfaction with this was higher than with longer or shorter programmes. They had very positive views of the advice interview, but the clear majority thought that paying for this should be the responsibility either of the state or their employer.

The effect of ReGrow (as reported by the employees) was:

- to increase confidence in their own skills, and perhaps the level of skill;
- to increase inclination to learn;
- to increase attachment to work;
- to increase attachment to the present job and organisation;
- to increase confidence that their employers valued them;
- to reduce anxiety about work-life balance;
- to reduce the sense that their jobs are routine or mundane.

ReGrow did not:

- increase inclination to change employer
- increase inclination to retire early
- improve the proportion feeling inadequately qualified for their present jobs

7. Recommendations and issues for further study

The ReGrow project was clearly a success. Demand for both the IAG and training was very strong; both were welcomed by employers and employees welcomed both; and both reported clear benefits to individuals and firms. There is therefore a case for replicating the work, and this has a direct bearing on at least three strands of current policy:

- the Adult Advancement and Careers Service, which is to provide a universal advice and guidance service to all adults from 2011;
- the Train to Gain Programme, recently reformed in the light of the first year's experience, and which aims to provide a brokerage service to help employers to identify and respond to workforce training needs;
- the South East Region's "40-70" older workforce programme, which aims to address the underuse of older people in the Regional economy.

This was an exploratory project in two senses:

- It was the first time that work based IAG had been offered on this scale to people over 50. Lessons were learned about the processes of set up, establishing appropriate relationships between the partners, defining priorities and strategies for delivery. In the event the problems were few, and none prevented the project from delivering its intended outcomes to employees and firms.
- The evaluation methodology was also experimental, in carrying out "before and after" questionnaire surveys of participants, and linking this to an employer survey. It gathered a substantial body of research data, which has been reported in this paper, but its ability to examine all relevant issues was inevitably limited, and there were some difficulties, notably in the administration of questionnaires, in return rates, and in some cases in incomplete data.

None of these difficulties call the broad conclusions into question. The project has demonstrated that providing IAG, with linked, short focused training for older workers and their employees has substantial benefits for both employer and employee.

The evidence collected is robust, and on the key variables appears to be representative of the ReGrow participating employers and employees. However, the relatively low response rates mean that many of the findings should be regarded as indicative, and most would benefit from more systematic study in the future.

The issues worth examining include the following (this is not an exhaustive list):

1. What do people understand IAG to be?

There was remarkable synergy between employer and employee views of the IAG process. Both responded very positively to the experience, but some IAG providers commented that employees had low expectations of the process, which may have skewed the response. It may also have been affected by the lack of clarity about the purpose of the IAG process. Where employer and/or employee saw the IAG as simply a preliminary to the training, it is possible that the broader potential of IAG may not have been expected, or missed.

If employers fear that independent, impartial careers advice would lead good employees to leave, ReGrow suggests the opposite – the IAG actually strengthened loyalty and motivation for the current job, and there was some evidence that providing employees with good advice about their options improved relationships between employer and employee.

However, the evidence on employers' willingness to participate in the future, and especially on willingness to pay for the IAG process suggests a limited commitment to this activity, and it would be worth investigating how far employees and employers understand the process and its purposes, and whether employees want, and employers would support, fully open ended careers guidance.

2. How far does the process change employee attitudes?

Comparison of the two employee surveys suggests that attitudes did change. These changes may, of course, be the product of other factors, but if it is true (as many respondents claimed) that ReGrow was the cause of these changes, the result would be very important in policy terms. However, the response rate to the follow up survey was low, and somewhat skewed, and the time gap between the two surveys varied greatly between individuals. Conclusions on this must therefore be tentative, and this issue would merit examination in any future work. Such a study might seek to examine how far the benefits related to the specific content of the interview and/or training, and how far to the more general sense of providing employees a chance to reflect, and to talk to their employer about their work and aspirations.

3. Is there a demand for basic skills tuition among older workers?

The initial project remit included a substantial commitment to Skills for Life training. In the event, hardly any of the people referred for IAG by their employers required Skills for Life assessment or teaching. However, it is known that older people generally are less likely to have formal qualifications in basic skills, and those who are forced out of the labour market in their 50s have difficulty returning because of poor basic skills. The reasons why the ReGrow model is ineffective in reaching such people would merit further investigation.

4. Is partnership the best way of delivering such services?

The project involved a new partnership between A4e and a small number of IAG and training providers, who had not worked together before. After some initial sorting out of relationships, this worked well within a relatively small group of agencies. This model of operation (a lead contractor with partner/subcontractors) is increasingly common in Government programme delivery, and is likely to be important in the evolution of Train to Gain, and the Adult Advancement and Careers Service. There is also potential to develop partnership with agencies managing outplacement and redundancy, and with Local Authorities and local regeneration agencies. It would be worth investigating how to make such partnerships effective on a wider basis

5. What kind of training of older workers represents best value for money?

The project was experimental, and it was intended from the beginning that it should operate outside the normal funding rules and guide prices which apply to mainstream LSC provision of training or IAG. One reported benefit of the higher rates of payment was the ability of IAG partners to provide extended support to clients, and to respond more rapidly to requests for support (e.g. when employers were planning redundancies). This may have a bearing on the enthusiastic response to the IAG from employees and employers. Further study is needed to establish how far this additional cost is necessary in order to achieve the benefits reported by ReGrow.

6. Whose skills are improved?

One striking finding is that the numbers of employees reporting underemployment rose, at the expense of those reporting that they were adequately qualified, but that the proportion reporting feeling underqualified remained constant. This might suggest that the process was more helpful to those who were already relatively confident in their skills than those who had more serious problems. Given the small sample, it is possible that this finding is simply a statistical aberration, but if it proved to be true it would be important in policy terms, and merits further investigation.

7. How relevant might these processes be to less committed employers?

Both employers and employees involved in ReGrow were unusually committed to training and likely to be already participating in Government programmes. The findings of this evaluation may therefore not apply to employers or employees more broadly. It would be appropriate in future work to explicitly target kinds of firm, try to broaden the base in terms of degree of commitment to training.

8. What role do line and senior managers play in encouraging or discouraging retention of older workers?

One theme of research into the older workforce is the disjunction between the attitudes of line and senior managers to older workers. In general the latter (probably the people who completed the ReGrow questionnaires) are much more positive. The current evaluation could not examine the specific roles of individual respondents, but follow up research might usefully seek to explore this question.

9. Is there a demand for mentoring?

The majority of employees who participated in ReGrow received some form of mentoring, but very few commented on this in the survey. It was outside the scope of the evaluation to probe this issue in more depth, but there are clearly questions about what form mentoring takes and who benefits in what circumstances, which merit investigation.

10. What kinds of training need do older workers perceive?

The evidence was clear that employers and employees were most positive about training that took around a day, and that positive responses were lower for both shorter and longer training activity. However, it was not possible to investigate the precise nature of training undertaken, and whether particular topics or kinds of training were more or less satisfactory.

11. How far are sectors different in needs or attitudes?

The range and numbers of employers involved in ReGrow were too small, and the extent of miscoding too great, for any analysis of whether different occupational sectors have different needs. However, it is known that the age profiles, and employer attitudes to age, vary between sectors. A future project might usefully examine whether there are differences in the kinds of IAG or training which are appropriate, working perhaps with Sector Skills Councils, and bearing in mind previous work which has been done on sectoral differences in the older workforce.

12. What role can the voluntary/third sector play?

There were particular constraints on the project in its engagement with the voluntary/third sector, although some voluntary organisations were involved. Given their role in providing entry routes to paid employment, and meaningful unpaid work for people in retirement, it would be worth investigating their potential further.

13. What will be the impact of a downturn in the economic cycle?

The project finished at the point where the UK economic cycle turned sharply downward. When it was conceived, employers were concerned about growing skills gaps and shortages, and Government was actively trying to bring more older people into work. The first decade of the 21st century has seen a substantial rise in the proportion of people over 50, and over 65, in the labour market. It remains to be seen whether these gains will be consolidated in the economic downturn, or whether older workers will, as in past recessions, be driven out.

14. How can such services be effectively promoted?

Participating employees felt that many more people could have benefited from the service and that more could have been done to advertise it. This would open it up to individuals to self refer, rather than wait for their employer to be contacted and agree to participate. It might also address the rather selective nature of participation in ReGrow. This is clearly a key issue for the Adult Advancement and Careers Service.

8. Annex 1 – the project partners

The project was led by A4e, who held the contract with LSC.

The IAG partners were:

- Surrey Careers Services Ltd
- CfBT Advice & Guidance Ltd
- Learning Links (Southern) Ltd
- Wheatsheaf Trust

The training providers were:

- City College Brighton & Hove
- The Isle of Wight College
- Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group

9. Annex 2 – the ReGrow invitation to tender

These are extracts from the original invitation to tender issued by LSC. It was in response to this that A4e submitted the proposal for the work evaluated in this report.

Specification Title

Lifelong Learning for Older Workers

Policy Field/Measure

3.2

Funding Available

£1,093,333 from 1st July 2006 to 31st July 2008

Number of Contracts and Delivery Districts

The LSC expects through a single contract to appoint an Older Workers Programme Agent to develop and co-ordinate 4-6 pilots through sub-contractual activity in appropriate locations throughout the region.

Description

The LSC wishes to support ONE regional project to investigate solutions to barriers faced by Older Workers in the SE. A single organisation will develop the project and bring together partners to deliver a number of pilots focused on different target groups.

Age is now a high profile issue. The UK is facing significant demographic change with people living longer and the birth rate declining. The Government's recent consultation document – 'Opportunity Age: meeting the challenges of the 21st century' set out three key priorities:

- **To achieve higher employment levels and more flexible arrangements to enable the over 50's to continue careers**
- **To enable older people to play a full and active role in society and**
- **To enable older people to retain independence and control as they grow older.**

The Age Discrimination regulations go a long way in providing a legal basis for the end of employment related age discrimination and are due to take effect in October 2006. This will provide a unique opportunity to raise the profile of the needs of older workers with employers as they may overlook the potential contribution of older workers to skill shortages. Recent findings from National and Regional research projects commissioned by the LSC highlight that there are currently many issues and obstacles that need to be addressed to support older workers to achieve their full potential in the future.

The project is intended to identify and develop a number of solutions to issues faced by Older Workers in maintaining employment, recently re-entering employment and changing career direction. It is envisaged that this will be achieved by clarifying the major issues faced by older workers in the SE and bringing together project teams involving a number of related agencies/organisations/ providers in each location that will:

- **Ensure joint development, planning and delivery of career development services and relevant learning opportunities for the target groups linked to business support providers.**
- **Develop a seamless IAG service that targets older-workers and offers an enhanced, short, high impact, coaching model which will identify a learner's current strengths & weaknesses and identify both the appropriate employment opportunities and training required.**

- **Develop a range of curricula and programmes that meet the requirements of the target group.**
- **Provide mentoring and ongoing support through and post training.**

Tracking learners through the entire process will be an essential requirement of the project. A final research report will reflect on the obstacles, issues, and successes of the project and make recommendations with universal application.

A Dissemination event will be held to promote the findings on conclusion of the project.

Priority Groups

Employed older workers aged 50 and over, especially those who are:

- **Employees with low/no/out-dated work related qualifications in vulnerable occupations and sectors and those delivering public services without a level 2 qualification**
- **Employees without a level 2 qualification and those who would benefit from progression to level 3**
- **Employees in part-time, temporary and insecure employment**
- **Employees without education and training opportunities**

Activities

Promotion of lifelong learning to support and develop the skills of older workers aged 50 and over in the workforce including those who are delivering public services. Particular emphasis to be focused on those in vulnerable jobs and industries including sectors experiencing skills shortages and people employed in the health & care sector and in local authorities, services to children, schools and colleges. Pilot groups may be selected from those re-entering employment and those facing redundancy or career change as well as those with requirements to upskill to maintain employment.

Phase 1: Research and Development

The regional Older Workers project agent will:

- **Review and assimilate research, regional priorities, and other project/initiatives such as the LSC Berkshire Equal project.**
- **Provide an analysis of the issues and needs around older workers in the SE and define the scope and nature of the pilot projects.**
- **Identify and initiate project systems for management and processes including resourcing requirements and develop organisational and working procedures to be used with each pilot project.**
- **Identify the membership of each pilot project team and agree a specific project plan for each pilot.**
- **Set up a steering Group to guide and oversee the project.**

Phase 2: Delivery of services and learning programmes to learners

The delivery of support and training will be a linear experience for the learners but will by necessity be contemporaneous and mutually informing for the project team.

Stage 1 Initial advice and guidance targeted at older workers

A joined up approach will be needed at this stage that draws upon the expertise of Next Step IAG services, is cognisant of / linked to Job Centre Plus initiatives such as New Deal 50+ for returnees to employment and work with Business Support providers. A short, high impact coaching model is envisaged that will add significant value to existing IAG processes and will assist learners to identify their current strengths and weaknesses, will inform on appropriate

career development or new vocational direction - paying particular attention to Labour Market Intelligence and Sector Skills information, and provide an individual learning plan identifying training requirements. Initial assessment of Skills for Life/ ICT needs will also be a part of this stage for relevant learners.

Throughout this stage the Older Worker project agent will gather research from individual learners into which employment areas are in demand, the nature of courses progressed onto and any shortfall/ gaps in available, suitable, relevant provision. It will also be essential to gather evidence from this source on the barriers that Older Workers face, or perceive, to learning. This ongoing information will be fed to those within the project partnership teams responsible for developing and delivering stage 2.

Stage 2 Development and delivery of learning programmes that match the identified needs

Although some existing programmes may be utilised initially, it is expected that significant development of course content and the processes / locations used in delivery will take place. Learning programmes will utilise short taster courses that will inform and develop the learners' individual learning plan, including confidence building and improving self esteem to enable them to progress to further more substantial training if relevant. Specific vocational courses offered will match skills gaps identified through regional and local Skills for Productivity Alliances. Content will cover competencies identified by the appropriate Sector Skills Councils. Those learners with needs highlighted by a Skills for Life assessment will complete an appropriate programme resulting in the achievement of the national test.

The methods and locations of delivery will be developed to match the specific requirements of this age group and will explore a range of flexible, blended, distance, work based learning. The location and nature of learning environment is particularly important to this group of learners and will form an integral part of the development rationale.

Stage 3 Support and Mentoring of learners from learning into work

Through support received from vocationally relevant mentors the learners will make the successful transition from learning into employment for returnees or career changers and into enhanced employment for those up-skilling. This may be through the support of a colleague at work where a learner is up-skilling as an employee or by an independent mentor drawn from the chosen vocation for a learner changing career or re-entering employment. The mentoring support will extend at least 6 months beyond the initial learning phase to ensure success in achieving the learners aims. It is possible that this stage would link directly with the initial advice and guidance and form part of the ongoing progression advice and tracking of the learner.

Phase 3: Evaluation

As a result of review and evaluation of phases 1 & 2, the final report will highlight the significant issues encountered throughout the project and make recommendations for wider application of successful best practice developed during phase 2. A synopsis of the project together with Key Issues and Recommendations will then be promoted through a dissemination event.

Planned Outputs

From Phase 1

- **A research synopsis that articulates and identifies the key issues faced by older workers**
- **drawn from existing research and practice concluding by scoping the priorities for the pilot projects.**
- **An overarching project plan identifying all aspects and contributors to the project with Service Level Agreements for each delivery partner**

- **4-6 specific Pilot project plans identifying the contribution each pilot project will make to the overall plan**
- **Steering Group formed and reporting at least quarterly**

From Phase 2

- **850 Learners participating in enhanced IAG of whom**
- **250 Learners undertaking a Skills for Life diagnostic assessment**
- **800 Learners participating and succeeding in learning programmes**
- **200 Learners successfully completing Skills for Life programmes**
- **700 Learners supported through on going mentoring**
- **At least 100 new short courses developed**

From Phase 3

- **Evaluation report on all aspects of the project**
- **Recommendations on best practice for future widespread application**
- **Dissemination event**

Planned Outcomes

Adoption of recommendations from project by relevant organisations resulting in improved opportunities for older workers and increased participation by 50+ learners.

10. Annex 3 – the Survey Questionnaires

1. First Employee Survey

Section A. About your working life

These questions are about your experience of work and your plans for the future.

How long have you worked in your present industry or sector?
(Please tick the relevant box)

Most of my working life	
More than 10 years	
5-10 years	
1-5 years	
Less than a year	

When did you last change your job in any of the following ways
(please tick the most relevant box on each line)

	In the last year	1-3 years ago	5-10 years ago	More than 10 years ago	Never
Changed my employer					
Changed my job or role with the same employer					
Took on more responsibility					
Reduced my responsibilities					
Reduced my hours					
Increased my hours					
Changed to temporary or occasional work					
Became self employed/freelance					
Retired from my main job and took on a new one					

About you and your job

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements by ticking the relevant box on each line

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My job makes good use of my skills and abilities					
My job is routine/ mundane					

My job is enjoyable					
My friendships with people at work are important to me					
My main reason for staying in work is because I need the money					
I spend a lot of time helping younger colleagues					
I would miss working if I retired today					
I find it hard to balance home and work commitments					
I enjoy working with my colleagues					
I feel my work contributes to society					
I sometimes have difficulty at work because I don't have the right skills or knowledge					
My employer is encouraging me to stay in work as long as I can					
My job is well suited to my personal circumstances					
I don't feel that my employer values my experience					
I could afford to retire now					
I need to work to keep benefits like private health insurance					

If it was possible, would you like to do any of the following between now and when you retire altogether?
(please tick one box in each row)

	Definitely	Possibly	Don't know	Probably not	Definitely not
Take on more responsibility					
Reduce my responsibilities					
Reduce my hours					
Increase my hours					
Change my employer					
Change job or role with the same employer					
Change to temporary or occasional work					
Become self employed/freelance					
Retire from my main job and take on a new one					

If you wanted to change your work how easy do you think it would be to:
(please tick one in each row)

	Very easy	Quite easy	Quite difficult	Very difficult	I would not consider this
Take on more responsibility					
Reduce my responsibilities					
Reduce my hours					
Increase my hours					
Change my employer					
Change job or role with the same employer					
Change to temporary or occasional work					
Become self employed/freelance					
Retire from my main job and take on a new one					

Section B. About Retirement

Does your employer have a fixed retirement age? If so what is it?

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Yes, and the age is	
No, there is no fixed retirement age	
I don't know	

When do you expect to retire altogether from paid work?
(tick one)

At my employer's retirement age	
At State Pension Age (60 for women and 65 for men)	
When my pension is paid up	
When my mortgage is paid off	
At another age (please write in)	

When would you like to retire altogether from paid work?
(tick one)

At my employer's retirement age (which is?)	
At State Pension Age (60 for women and 65 for men)	
When my pension is paid up	
When my mortgage is paid off	
At another age (please write in)	

If the answers to questions 6 and 7 are different, why is this?

--

Has the advice you received from ReGrow changed your view about when you might retire?

Yes, I am now thinking about retiring later	
Yes. I am now thinking about retiring sooner	
Yes. I am thinking about phasing out of work gradually with my present employer (for example, reducing my hours)	

Yes. I am thinking about moving to another employer, as a stepping stone to retirement	
No. I have not changed my plans	

Section C. About your skills and training

These questions are about your qualifications, how well they match your job, and your views on training for work.

How well do your skills and knowledge match your present job?

My job does not make use all my skills and knowledge	
I have all the skills and knowledge I need to do the job	
I don't have the right skills or knowledge for some parts of my job	
I have difficulty doing the job because I don't have the skills or knowledge I need	

When did you last take part in a training course, event or programme

	In the last three months	In the last year	In the last 5 years	5-10 years ago	Not since leaving school/college
Paid for by my employer					
Paid for myself					
Provided by a Government agency (e.g. Jobcentre)					
Informal learning (e.g. books, internet, workmates)					

Why did you do the most recent training? (tick all that apply)

Compulsory for my job	
My line manager recommended it	
I thought it would help me do my job better	
I thought it would help my career prospects	
I thought it would help me keep my job	
I wanted to learn a new skill	
I enjoy learning	
It is better than being at work	

Do you think you could do your job better if you did some form of training or education?

Yes	
-----	--

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No	

If you answered yes to question 14, and have not done any training to meet this need, why is this?

My line manager refused	
The firm's HR department/ personnel officer refused	
I was not encouraged to ask	
I was afraid to ask	
I wasn't sure I could complete training	
I thought I could manage without training	
I never thought to ask	
My reading or maths were not good enough	

**In the last three years, have you been offered training by your employer?
(tick one)**

Yes, and I did the training	
Yes, but I did not do the training	
No, I have not been offered training	

**If you were offered training and refused it, why was that?
(tick all that apply)**

I didn't think was relevant to my job	
The training didn't seem interesting	
I did not have time	
I don't enjoy training generally	
I would have been surrounded by people younger than me	
I'm too close to retirement	
I needed other skills which I didn't have	
I was worried what my manager would think	
I was worried what my workmates/ colleagues would think	
I am too old to start learning new things now	

Section D: Discrimination and work

Have you ever been discriminated against at work or when seeking work?
(Tick if yes)

	When applying for a job	At work, from my employer/ manager	At work from workmates/ colleagues	In applying for training	Outside work
Because of your					
Age					
Disability					
Ethnic group					
Gender					
Nationality					
Race					
Religion					
Sexual orientation					

Section E. Improving services for older workers

In your opinion, what would make it easier for people over 50 to find or stay in paid work? (tick)

	This would help a lot	This would help a little	This would not help at all
Better/more information about job opportunities			
Better help from the Job Centre			
Better services from employment agencies			
Help with caring for someone else (e.g. a family member)			
Better/ more training opportunities			
More opportunities to work close to home			
Employer offering more flexible ways of working			
Career/life planning advice at work			
Better/more advice on rights at work			
Help in setting up in self-employment/own company			
Something else (please write in)			

Section F: Your experience of ReGrow

These questions are about your experience of the ReGrow project

How helpful did you find the ReGrow interview?

	Very helpful	Quite helpful	Neither helpful or unhelpful	Not very helpful	Unhelpful
In helping me to understand my choices					
In helping me to find appropriate training					
In helping me to make retirement plans					
The interview generally					

Can you suggest any way in which careers advice could be made more useful to people like you?

Finally, is there anything else you would like to tell us about the experience of being involved in the ReGrow project?

Personal Details

(we need this information so that we can link your answers to this survey to the details which you have already provided to the ReGrow project. This saves you time in repeating questions. Remember, no personal information will be passed on to your employer or to the people who provided the service)

Name	
Address	
Postcode	

We would like to follow up this questionnaire in six months to see how your plans and career have developed. Would you be willing to complete another questionnaire like this in six months time?

Yes	
No	

Thank you for your help. The information will help us to design better advice services for older people in the future.

Stephen McNair
Director
CROW

2. The Employee follow up survey

ReGrow Survey Reference No.....

At some time during the last 18 months you took part in an interview as part of the ReGrow project, and after that interview you completed a questionnaire, and agreed that we could approach you to take part in a follow up survey later. I am now writing to ask for your help to complete this follow up questionnaire, which will help us to understand how helpful the ReGrow process is to people over 50. This is the last time you will be approached for this research.

The ReGrow project is trying to find out what kinds of advice about careers (including work, retirement and training issues), and what kinds of training, older people find useful. It is doing this by providing an experimental service to people, and then surveying them about their experiences.

The questionnaire should not take more than 15 minutes to complete, and will help us to understand what sorts of people are helped by the ReGrow interview or training, and how services for people over 50 might be improved.

This survey is being carried out by the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce. Your reply will be in strict confidence, no personal information will be passed to your employer or to anyone who has provided you with advice during the project.

I do hope you will be able to help us. Provided that we get a reasonable return, we would hope to put some information about the findings on the CROW website in the Autumn of 2008.

Stephen McNair

If you have any queries about this survey please contact:	If you have queries about the ReGrow project, please contact:
<p>Stephen McNair Director CROW/NIACE 21 DeMontfort St Leicester LE1 7GE</p> <p>Tel: 0116 204 2843 Website: www.olderworkforce.co.uk</p>	<p>Mark Shields Deputy Business Manager A4e Suite D, Bank Labs House 31-41 Cross Lances Rd Hounslow TW3 2AD</p> <p>Tel: 0784 303 6625 Website: www.a4e.co.uk</p>

Please return the completed form in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope to:

CROW
NIACE
21 DeMontfort Street
Leicester
LE1 7GE

Section A: Your experience of ReGrow

There were two parts to the ReGrow project:

Everyone had an interview with an Adviser to talk about their work, training needs and options for the future.

- Most people were then offered some sort of training, or mentoring (one to one support).

We are interested in your experience of both of these.

1. How well do you remember ReGrow?

(Tick one box on each line)

	Very well	Quite well	A little	Don't remember ReGrow*	Did not take part
a. I remember the ReGrow interview					
b. I remember the advice I received					
c. I remember the training					
d. I remember the mentoring					

*Even if you don't remember the ReGrow interview it would be helpful if you can answer as many questions as possible.

2. Has anything changed in your working life since your ReGrow interview?

We are interested in whether your work has changed in any way since the ReGrow interview (either as a result of interview or for some other reason):

(Tick all that apply)

I have changed my job but stayed with the same employer	
I have changed my employer	
I have retired	
I have been made redundant	
I have gained a qualification	
I have reduced my working hours	
I have increased my working hours	
I have increased my responsibilities	
I have done some training/learning – paid for by ReGrow	
I have done some training/learning – paid for by my employer	
I have done some training/learning – paid for myself	

Have there been any other changes affecting your work? (Please write in)

About the ReGrow interview

3. How long ago was your first ReGrow interview (roughly)? ----- Months

4 a. How satisfied were you with the ReGrow interview?

(Tick one box on each line)

The interview was:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Helpful				
Enjoyable				
Relevant to my circumstances				
In a convenient place				
At a convenient time				
Too short				

4 b. How helpful was the ReGrow adviser?

(Tick one box on each line)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The adviser had a good understanding of my needs				
The adviser had a good knowledge of the options available to me				
The interview helped me to cope better with change at work				

4 c. What was most helpful about the ReGrow interview?

4 d. What was least helpful about the ReGrow interview?

5. Would you be willing to pay for this sort of advice?

If a service like ReGrow was to be available to most people over 50, it might be necessary to charge for the interview. How much do think it would be reasonable to charge for an interview like the one you had?

(Tick one)

Nothing – it should be free, paid for by the taxpayer	
Nothing – it should be paid for by my employer	
I would pay if it cost under £50	
I would pay if it cost £50-£100	
I would pay over £100	

About the ReGrow Training

6 a. Did you do any training after the ReGrow interview? Yes / No

(If no, go straight to question 9)

6 b. What was the subject?

.....

6 c. If it led to a certificate or qualification what was the title of the qualification (and its level if you know that)?

6 d. How long did the training take? (Tick one)

Less than half a day (up to 4 hours)	
One day or less (4 - 7 hours)	
More than a day but less than a week (8-40 hours)	
Longer than a week (40 hours)	

6 e. How important was the ReGrow interview in deciding to do the training?

(Tick all that apply – if you did no training go straight to question 9)

The training was	
Something I wanted to do before the ReGrow interview	
Something I chose to do as a result of the interview	
Something my employer wanted me to do before the interview	
Something my employer wanted me to do as a result of the interview	

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7. How satisfied were you with the training provided through ReGrow?

(Tick one box on each line)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The training improved my skills				
The training improved my self-confidence				
The training helped me do my job better				
I enjoyed the training				
The training helped me keep my job				
The training helped me get a better job				
The training helped me prepare to change jobs				
The training helped me to prepare for retirement				

8 a. Would you have done this training if you had not had the ReGrow interview? If not, why not?

8 b. What was the most helpful thing about the ReGrow training?

8 c. What was least helpful about the ReGrow training?

About the ReGrow Mentoring

By mentoring we mean a series of meetings or phone conversations with a mentor to discuss your work and future plans.

9. Did you receive any mentoring as a result of the ReGrow interview? Yes / No

(If no, go straight to question 11)

10. How satisfied were you with the mentoring provided through ReGrow?

(Tick one box on each line)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The mentoring improved my skills				
The mentoring improved my self-confidence				
The mentoring helped me do my job better				
I enjoyed the mentoring				
The mentoring helped me keep my job				
The mentoring helped me get a better job				
The mentor helped me prepare to change jobs				
The mentor helped me to prepare for retirement				

11. Do you now think that as a result of the ReGrow interview, training or mentoring you are more or less likely to do any of the following?

(Tick one box on each line - if you think any of these is likely, but that ReGrow had no effect on the decision, please tick the right hand column)

I am now more likely to:	Much more likely	More likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	More likely, but not because of ReGrow
Do more learning					
Stay longer in work					

Retire earlier					
Look for a more interesting or challenging job					
Try to change my job					

Section B: You and work

After 50 some people have the chance to retire from paid work, and some don't have the choice. We are interested in the reasons why people do or don't stay at work.

12. Please indicate how strongly you agree with each of the following statements:

(Tick one box on each line)

I am working now because:	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I need the money					
I enjoy working					
I think I am making a contribution to society					
I like to use my skills and knowledge					
I like the company of my workmates/colleagues					
I don't know how I would fill my time if I retired					

We are also interested in how you feel about your current job.

13. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

(Tick one box on each line)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My job makes good use of my skills and abilities					
My job is routine/ mundane					
My job is enjoyable					
My main reason for staying in work is because I need the money					
I spend a lot of time helping younger colleagues					
I would miss working if I retired today					

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
I find it hard to balance home and work commitments					
I enjoy working with my colleagues					
I sometimes have difficulty at work because I don't have the right skills or knowledge					
My employer is encouraging me to stay in work as long as I can					
My job is well suited to my personal circumstances					
I don't feel that my employer values my experience					

People often say that the way people work is changing. We are interested in how far your own work has changed in the last five years.

14. How far do you agree with each of the following statements:

(Tick one box on each line)

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Compared to ten years ago:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I now have to work faster				
I now have to work harder				
I now have to work longer hours				
I now get less help from colleagues or workmates				
I now do more work as a member of a team				
I now have to make more use of computers				
I am now expected to take more responsibility				
I now have more contact with customers/clients				
I find it more difficult to cope with change now				
I now need a lot more skills and knowledge to do my job				

We are interested in your experience of change at work.

15. Please indicate how strongly you agree with each of the following statements:

(Tick one box on each line – if you have not experienced any change in the last five years please go straight to the next question)

When the most recent change was happening in my workplace:	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I understood why the changes were being made				
I agreed that the changes were necessary				
I think the change was well managed by my firm/organisation				
My knowledge and experience was valued/respected				
I felt that I was being treated fairly				

We are interested in who you might ask for advice or support about jobs

16 a. Has anyone provided you with advice or other support to help you to manage your career, in the last ten years?

(Tick all that apply)

A line manager	
An HR manager	
A senior manager	
An outside adviser	
A family member	
A workmate/colleague	
No one	

Someone else (please give their job role/title or relationship to you)

16 b. Which of these was most important/helpful to you in managing your career?

(Tick one only)

A line manager	
An HR manager	
A senior manager	
An outside adviser	
A family member	
A workmate/colleague	
No one	

16 c. How easy is it to discuss your plans for work in the future?

(Tick one box only)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I find it easy to talk honestly to my manager about my plans for work and					

training in the future?					
I prefer to discuss my plans for work with someone outside my firm/organisation					

Section C: Your skills and training

These questions are about your qualifications, how well they match your job, and your views on learning for work.

17. How well do your skills and knowledge match your present job?

(Tick one box only)

My current job does not use all my skills and knowledge	
I have all the skills and knowledge I need to do my current job	
I don't have the right skills or knowledge for some parts of my current job	
I have difficulty doing my current job because I don't have the skills or knowledge I need	

18. Are you involved in learning at the moment?

In this survey, learning can mean practising, studying, or reading about something. It can also mean being taught, instructed or coached. This is so you can develop skills, knowledge, abilities or understanding of something. Learning can also be called education or training. You can do it regularly (each day or month) or you can do it for a short period of time. It can be full-time or part-time, done at home, at work, or in another place like college. Learning does not have to lead to a qualification. We are interested in any learning you have done, whether or not it was finished.

Which of the following statements most applies to you?

(Tick one box only)

I am currently doing some learning activity now	
I have done some learning activity in the last 3 years	
I have studied/learnt but it was over 3 years ago	
I have not studied/learnt since I left full time education	

Section D: Your future career

19. If it was possible, would you like to do any of the following between now and when you retire altogether?

(Tick one box on each line)

	Definitely	Possibly	Don't know	Probably not	Definitely not
Take on more responsibility					
Reduce my responsibilities					
Reduce my hours					
Increase my hours					
Change my employer					
Change job or role with the same employer					
Change to temporary or occasional work					
Become self employed/freelance					
Retire from my main job and take on a new one					

20. If you wanted to change your work how easy do you think it would be to:

(Tick one box on each line)

	Very easy	Quite easy	Quite difficult	Very difficult	I would not consider this
Take on more responsibility					
Reduce my responsibilities					
Reduce my hours					
Increase my hours					
Change my employer					
Change job or role with the same employer					
Change to temporary or occasional work					

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Become self employed/freelance					
Retire from my main job and take on a new one					

About you

We want to understand how peoples' views and circumstances change over time. To do this we need to be able to link your answers to this questionnaire with your answers to the previous one (the one you did after your ReGrow interview). This saves us having to ask you the same questions twice.

Once again, your answers are entirely confidential, neither your employer nor the people who provided the advice interview or training will know that you replied, or what your answers were. We will keep the completed questionnaires securely, and only CROW staff involved in the survey will have access to them.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Postcode.....

Anything else?

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about the ReGrow experience? If so please write below or attach a separate sheet to this questionnaire

3. The Employer Survey

About this questionnaire

You have received this questionnaire because your firm has taken part in the ReGrow project managed by A4e Ltd. and funded by the European Social Fund..

ReGrow was created to investigate ways of providing support to employers and older workers (that is people over 50) to enable those workers to remain productive and stay longer in work.

So that we can develop better services in the future, we need to know whether this approach has worked. I would therefore be very grateful if you could spend a little time completing this questionnaire.

The results will be entirely confidential to the evaluation team: no individuals or firms will be named in reports or identified to other partners in the project.

I appreciate that you are busy, and that the form is quite long. However, it has been designed to be completed in around 10 minutes. A quick response is better than none. Please feel free to write in more information or comments if you wish, either in the space provided or by attaching a separate sheet.

This evaluation is being carried out by the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce at the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education. You can find more details of our work at www.oldeworkforce.org.uk

If you have any queries about this questionnaire, or would like to talk about the project, you can contact me by email at stephen.mcnair@niace.org.uk or by phone on 07724 067 748

Stephen McNair

Director
Centre for Research into the Older Workforce
National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
21 De Montfort Street
Leicester
LE1 7GE

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Section A: About your firm

To help us understand what sort of firm benefited from ReGrow we need to know a bit about your firm/organisation.

1. In which industry/sector is your firm's main business?

01 Agriculture		11 Professional Services	
02 Banking & Business Services		12 Public Administration & Defence	
03 Construction		13 Services (Other)	
04 Distribution, Hotels & Related		14 Textiles & Clothing	
05 Engineering		15 Transport & Communications	
06 Food, Drink & Tobacco		16 Utilities (Electricity, Gas & Water)	
07 Health & Education Services		17 Chemicals	
08 Manufacturing (Other)		97 Other	
09 Metals & Mineral Products		Voluntary/third sector organisation	
10 Mining & Related			

2. How large is your firm on this site

Under 10 employees	10-49 employees	50-99 employees	100-249 employees	250 employees or more

3. Do you expect that employment in your firm will change in the next year or two?

	Already planned	Likely	Unlikely	Definitely not
Employ more people in this location				
Employ fewer people in this location				
Move some or all work to another location - in this country or abroad				
Employ more highly skilled people				

4. In the last year have you had any vacant posts? (delete one) yes / no

5. Were any of those vacancies hard to fill? yes / no

6a. Do you have any current employees who are not fully proficient at the jobs they are doing?

	A lot	Some	None
Managers and Professionals			
Skilled tradesmen and women			
Sales, personal and customer services workers			
Administrative workers			
Process, plant and machine operatives			
Elementary occupations			

6b. What is the main reason why you have such workers?

	Failure to train	Recruitment problems	High turnover	People can't keep up with change	Not enough experience	Not motivated
Managers and Professionals						
Skilled tradesmen and women						
Sales, personal and customer services workers						
Administrative workers						

Process, plant and machine operatives						
Elementary occupations						

7. Can you estimate (roughly) what proportion of your workforce on this site is:

Under 20	
20-50	
50-60	
60-65	
Over 65	

If this age mix varies greatly between men and women, please explain briefly.

8. a Does your company have a normal retirement age?(delete as appropriate)

Yes / No

b. If so what is it?

.....

c. Do people ever stay after that age?

Yes / No

d. If so in what circumstances do you allow or encourage it?

9. Has your firm participated in any of the following programmes?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Train to Gain			
Investors in People			
Skills Pledge			
Skills for Life			
Apprenticeships			
Other Government Training programmes (if so please say which below)			

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Section B: About employing older workers

This section is designed to tell us about the attitudes to older workers of the employers who participated in ReGrow.

Because birth rates are falling, and people are living longer, the population, and the workforce, is ageing in all developed countries.

10. Do you think the ageing population is going to affect your firm in any of the following ways?

(tick all that apply)

	Likely	Possible	Unlikely
We will compete harder to recruit young people			
We will recruit more people from outside the UK			
We will keep our existing older people longer			
We will recruit more older people			
We will provide more training for existing workers			

Any other effects (write in)

11. How far do you agree with the following statements?

	Yes	No	Don't know
This firm actively encourages older workers to stay in the firm			
The firm has recruited people over 50 in the last two years			
The firm has recruited people over 60 in the past			

12. Do you think that there are particular advantages or disadvantages in employing older workers (over 50)²⁷?

Yes / No

If so what are the advantages?

And are there any disadvantages?

Do these apply to all older workers or particular groups (if so which)?

13. Do you have any other comments on the advantages or disadvantages of employing older workers?

²⁷ It is, of course, unlawful to discriminate on grounds of age. Here we are interested in your general views, not in your actual practice, which clearly must conform with the law.

Section C: About the ReGrow Project

This section is about what you expected from the ReGrow project when you agreed to take part, and how far your expectations were met.

The ReGrow project is managed by A4e Ltd. and financed by the European Social Fund. It provides two linked free services:

- an initial careers advice and guidance session to employees over 50, and
- some free training to implement the recommendations of that advice session.

We are interested in the effects of both these.

14. What kind of employees took part? (tick all that apply)

	Advice interview	Follow up training
People approaching retirement		
People facing redundancy		
Managers and Professionals		
Skilled tradesmen and women		
Sales, personal and customer services workers		
Administrative workers		
Process, plant and machine operatives		
Elementary occupations		

15. When you agreed to take part in the ReGrow project how far did you expect it to benefit:

	A lot	A little	Not much	Not at all	Not sure
The firm					
The individual workers who took part					

16. Did you expect it to be mainly useful for:

	A lot	A little	Not much	Not at all	Not sure
People approaching retirement					
People facing redundancy					
Managers and Professionals					
Skilled tradesmen and women					
Sales, personal and customer services workers					
Administrative workers					
Process, plant and machine operatives					
Elementary occupations					

17. What groups of staff do you think benefited as individuals from the advice interview

	A lot	A little	Not much	Not at all	Not sure
People approaching retirement					
People facing redundancy					
Managers and Professionals					
Skilled tradesmen and women					
Sales, personal and customer services workers					
Administrative workers					
Process, plant and machine operatives					

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Elementary occupations					
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18. Is there any group of staff who took part and did not benefit from the advice interview? If so who and why?

19. What group of staff do you think benefited most as individuals from the training?

	A lot	A little	Not much	Not at all	Not sure
People approaching retirement					
People facing redundancy					
Managers and Professionals					
Skilled tradesmen and women					
Sales, personal and customer services workers					
Administrative workers					
Process, plant and machine operatives					
Elementary occupations					

20. What sort of training was it and why was it helpful (or unhelpful)?

21. Do you think the firm benefited from the advice interview in any of the following ways

	A lot	A little	Not a lot	Not at all
Increased workers' commitment to the firm				
Increased workers' motivation				
Increased workers' flexibility				
Improved workers' productivity/performance				
Improved industrial relations				
Reduced sickness/absence				
Helped people face retirement				
Helped people face redundancy				

Were there any other benefits or disadvantages from the advice and guidance interview? (please write in)

22. Do you think the firm benefited from the training provided in any of the following ways

	A lot	A little	Not a lot	Not at all
Increased worker's commitment to the firm				
Increased worker's motivation				
Increased worker's flexibility				
Improved worker's productivity/performance				
Improved industrial relations				
Reduced sickness/absence				
Helped people face retirement				
Helped people face redundancy				

Were there any other benefits or disadvantages from the training (please write in)

What sort of training was it?

Why was it particularly helpful or unhelpful?

23. If the ReGrow programme were to be repeated, would you:

	Definitely	Probably	Probably not	Definitely not
Want to take part again in the advice interview process				
Want to take part again in the training				
Recommend the advice process to other employers like yourself				
Recommend the training to other employers like yourself				

The ReGrow project has provided services free, because it was subsidised as a pilot by the European Social Fund.

24. If a service like this were to be available in future there would probably be a charge. If this happened would you consider paying for:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------|
| a. the advice interview service? | Yes / No |
| b. the training | Yes / No |

Section D. Contact details

You are welcome to return this questionnaire anonymously, but it would be helpful if you could fill in the following details, so that we know which of the participating employers have responded, and so that we can check any unclear answers (this rarely happens).

Name

Job title

Firm name

Email

Telephone

Address

We may wish to carry out some short follow up interviews to this survey, to clarify answers, or to investigate the findings in more depth. Would you be willing to take part in such an interview either face to face or on the phone

Yes by phone / Yes face to face on my premises / No

Please return the completed questionnaire to

ReGrow Evaluation,
CROW/NIACE,
21 DeMontfort Street,
Leicester,
LE1 7GE

Or by email to stephen.mcnaur@niace.org.uk

If you have any queries about this questionnaire please contact Professor McNair by email at stephen.mcnaur@niace.org.uk or by phone on 0116 204 2843

Further comments

If you would like to include an additional comments on employing older workers or on the ReGrow project please add these on a separate sheet.