



too old to...?

July 3rd saw the launch of the report of the 3 year research project into Gender Discrimination & Ageist Perceptions, during the successful GDAP Conference 'Too Old To ...?', at the LACE Conference Centre in Liverpool.

The ESF and LJMU funded conference was free to attend and organisers were pleased to welcome delegates from national organisations in the voluntary, private and public sectors as well a number of higher education institutions, and individuals who had taken part in the study.

The findings of the study were presented by Helen Walker, Natasha Butler and Dr. Mark Meadows. Keynote speakers presented some stimulating ideas, prompting delegates to engage in debate about the experiences and perceptions of the over 50's.

Rosie Boycott (Radio 4 and Channel 4 presenter) gave the opening address and talked passionately about discrimination against women and particularly the over 50's. She stated, "Anti-age discrimination law is important ... the commercial world needs to wake up to it and society's attitude has to change".

Sylvia French and Audrey Gibson spoke, from their personal experience, about how it felt to be mature entrants to Higher Education and what it had led to in their personal and professional lives.

A unique initiative called 'Workwise' was introduced to the delegates by Jane Barmer from Age Concern England. 'Workwise' seeks and reaches excluded older people from different walks of life, and offers them opportunities to access, explore and enter the world of work.

Terry Owen proudly described how over 600 people, aged between 16 and 82, contribute over 2400 hours of service per week for the Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust Volunteer Scheme.

Keith Frost from The Age and Employment Network gave a timely introduction to the implications that the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 will have for employers from all sectors following their implementation in October.

Eileen Devaney as National Co-ordinator for the UK Coalition Against Poverty gave an insightful presentation on the gender gap in retirement income in the current UK Pension System, as being a precursor to female poverty in later life.



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Amanda Cox from ASDA highlighted the flexible schemes that ASDA operate to attract the over 50's into work, revealing that they already constitute 19% of their workforce.

LJMU's Senior Advisor for Equality and Policy Development, Naseem Anwar, discussed the measures that LJMU have put in place, to ensure compliance with the new legislation.

The conference was brought to a close by Dr Diane Grant who outlined the recommendations, to organisations and policy makers, on how the issues raised in the research could be addressed. A full list of these recommendations and copies of all of the above presentations, as well as copies of the full report and the executive summary can be found on the GDAP website:

www.ljmu.ac.uk/gdap

agender

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in this issue...

We give a brief summary of the major findings of the GDAP research project and a round-up of the Conference in July, which launched the final report. Following on from the research project is the new GDAP - Training Initiative. In this issue we explain what this will offer to those eligible for the FREE training. Finally, this October saw the implementation of the new age regulations and so, below, we offer a brief summary of what these regulations cover.



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age regulations in force

From the 1st October it became unlawful to discriminate, either directly or indirectly, on the grounds of age in the areas of employment and vocational training. The regulations cover such areas as: access to help and guidance, recruitment, training, promotion, development, termination, and 'perks' as well as pay.

The regulations extend to all workers (young and old), including the self employed and contract workers, as well as those who apply for work and those undertaking, or applying to undertake, employment related vocational training, which includes all Further Education and Higher Education courses.

Under the regulations, not only discrimination (direct or indirect) is outlawed but also age-related victimisation or harassment, and employers can be held responsible for the actions of their employees in these areas.

As a result of the regulations, compulsory retirement under the age of 65 will be unlawful (unless such a retirement age can be objectively justified) and a new national default retirement age of 65 will be introduced. This does not mean that employers must use the default retirement age - they could choose a higher age or have no set retirement age at all. Whatever retirement age is set, employees will have a right to request to work

beyond that age and employers will have a duty to consider such applications. The existing upper age limits for both unfair dismissal and redundancy were also removed by the regulations.

There are a number of exemptions allowed for. An employer could claim that discrimination is due to a Genuine Occupational Requirement or can be objectively justified. However it is widely accepted that either of these would be difficult to prove. An employer claiming 'objective justification' would need to provide evidence that they are pursuing a legitimate aim and also that their approach is a proportionate means of achieving the aim.

However the regulations do protect employers who are forced by other legislation to discriminate on the grounds of age (e.g., employees needing to be at least 18 to serve alcohol) and employers can legitimately follow the age bands and pay rates contained in the national minimum wage legislation.

The regulations also allow for positive action by employers or training organisations, which either prevents or compensates for disadvantages linked to age, suffered by persons of that age or age group.

Many commentators have noted, with disappointment, that the regulations do not cover unpaid volunteers and that goods, services and facilities are not included either. For Keith Frost of The Age and Employment Network, whilst it may not be a matter of 'popping champagne corks' he feels that the new regulations do 'put down a marker that this kind of behaviour is no longer legitimate'.

The above is a very brief guide and as such should not be relied upon as a statement of the legal position. Further information on the regulations is available from the Age Positive website (www.agepositive.gov.uk).

contact

The primary contact for the overall project is:

Dr Diane Grant, Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, IM Marsh Campus, Holmefield House, Barkhill Road Liverpool L17 6BD

t: +44(0)151 231 5301

For more information on GDAP-TI you can also contact:

Claire Hennessy - Project Delivery Coordinator

Ruth Hindley - Project Administrator

Mike Hogan - Project Development Coordinator

Telephone all the above on:

+44(0)151 231 5308/5260

Email all the above on:

gdap@livjm.ac.uk



GDAP findings

The 3 year Gender Discrimination and Ageist Perceptions research project has now published its findings, which may be obtained via the contact address on the back page or downloaded via www.ljmu.ac.uk/gdap

Data for the UK shows that a third of people of working age are over fifty; however, only a fifth of those are actually in work and only a tenth of those are on employer and government training programmes (TAEN, 2006). Yet despite these figures, only around 1% of the student population is over fifty.

Older people are now being encouraged to re-enter the workplace through schemes such as New Deal 50 Plus and Pathways to Work, to take up volunteering through the promotion of "Active Citizenship," or to re-enter education as part of a lifelong learning process.

The study set out to explore the perceptions of both men and women over fifty on how gender and age have influenced their treatment by others, and how they perceive the opportunities available to them now in their mid life. In addition, the views of employers, or their representatives, in the private, public, voluntary and higher education sectors were sought.

The findings below were derived from a survey of over a thousand (1035) men and women over fifty and 181 representatives of private, public and voluntary sector organisations, as well as higher education institutions.

Findings

Both men and women over fifty faced considerable difficulty in gaining re-entry into work. Many factors were cited including the belief that ageist assumptions were operating within the recruitment process.

Almost three-quarters of the men and women had experienced gaps out of the labour market. For men, detachment was mainly due to unemployment or redundancy, whilst for women it was largely due to maternity and child-rearing. Women often felt that the gaps were also due to a lack of currency in their skills: hence many felt 'left behind' and unable to compete for jobs.

Experiencing negative attitudes, persistent rejection and/or unequal

treatment resulted in lower levels of self-efficacy and life satisfaction for both men and women. Often those who exhibited lower scores had been affected by circumstances or events beyond their control, for example compulsory redundancy or ill health. The greater a person's self-efficacy was, the more likely it was that they would overcome personal challenges.

Women reported that gender disadvantage and ageist assumptions affected their chances of entering work or progressing within employment. There was evidence that the double jeopardy of age and gender combined to form a distinct form of prejudice for women. The stereotypical assumptions often associated with age were often played out in the work environment.

Whilst many organisations were aware of the voluntary codes of practice on age, around half were not. Yet amongst the sample of organisation representatives there was a widespread belief that ageist assumptions were commonplace in certain organisations, indicating that the gap between proposed policy objectives and everyday practice is somewhat wide. The populist views of older people as being techno-phobic, slower to learn or wanting a less stressful job were listed by employers, thus reinforcing the stereotypical profile often assigned to older people.

When the concept of the term 'older' was explored with organisations, women were perceived to be 'older' at younger ages than men. Public and



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private employers gave a mean age of fifty-five for women and fifty-six for men. However, the voluntary sector identified the higher ages of sixty for women and sixty-four for men, indicating a more age-positive approach, although the gender age gap was greater.

The study found that representatives had clear views about ideal ages for recruitment to management posts, with such appointments most likely to be offered to people between thirty and forty years of age. This has obvious implications for the progression of women in the workforce, begging the question of whether women who take time out of the labour market, because of maternity and childcare responsibilities are most affected. Is this an important contributor to the 'glass-ceiling' effect?

Positive correlations were found between those employers who valued their older workers (eg: through flexible working packages, negotiated retirement options etc) and the organisations that were least likely to

be suffering skills shortages or retention problems. However, some firms limited training opportunities for older workers, giving cost and the 'payback' period as reasons for this.

Whilst one in four of the individuals sampled expressed a desire to study at a higher level, both they and recruiters perceived costs of study, loans and top up fees as barriers. Both identified a lack of self-confidence and the perception of feeling 'too-old-to-study', as obstacles. In fact there was little evidence to suggest that universities actively try to attract 'hard to reach' groups. Whilst recruiters within the higher education sector used a variety of methods to contact potential students, very few used outreach methods or sustained community liaison. Once enrolled, there was evidence of limited support for older students within some institutions. Yet older students were perceived as bringing unique attributes to their studies, including maturity, wisdom and stability. They were also believed to reach higher levels of achievement despite encountering a myriad of barriers. **For a copy of the report please visit our website: www.ljmu.ac.uk/gdap.**



Launch of the GDAP Training Initiative

Following the news in the last issue of *Agender*, we are pleased to announce that preparations are being made to start delivery of the new GDAP Training Initiative. Read on for details of the FREE training on offer.

This training is aimed at women of all ages and will inform women of their rights under the age and gender legislation, thus educating and empowering women to address and tackle age and gender discrimination. The training will be of benefit to employers, employees and unemployed women who wish to understand the implications of discrimination on the grounds of age, in the workplace. It is envisaged that the training will also help to challenge assumptions and stereotypes about older women.

The launch of the training comes at a most appropriate time as recent research by the GDAP team indicates that many employers have very little knowledge of how forthcoming age legislation will affect recruitment and the obligations they will have to fulfil to ensure that their employees are aware of equal opportunities issues. Moreover, the Labour Force Study (2005) illustrates that some women, particularly those over 50, are less likely to be offered the opportunity for training which would improve their career development. This training will therefore make women aware of their rights, under legislation, for equal access to training and educational opportunities regardless of age or gender.

A varied training programme is being developed which will use group and individual activities to raise awareness of discrimination on the grounds of gender and age. A number of case studies will be examined which will look at the experiences of those over 50 re-entering the workplace or education, and will incorporate the positive experiences of women who have overcome barriers to progress within education or employment.

To complement the training programme the GDAP-TI team are also developing a DVD which will be given to all training initiative participants. The DVD will contain a selection of resources including video clips and interviews with key individuals who are working to overcome ageism in the UK. It will include information on the new age legislation as well as reports, and links to other organisations dedicated to overcoming ageist practices.

The courses will be delivered by a number of expert facilitators from the GDAP-TI team. The training will be offered at various locations throughout England during 2007.

The training is available as a day-long programme but can be adapted to suit the specific needs of an organisation or interested parties. **If your organisation would like to take part in the FREE training please contact the team on 0151 231 5308 or email us on gdap@ljmu.ac.uk.**

