

Drake C, Haslam R and Haslam C, 2016, Management strategies to help engage, protect and promote the Health and Safety of older workers. In: *Proceedings the National Food and Drink Manufacturing Health and Safety Conference, 4-5 October 2016, Nottingham.*

Background

The world population is ageing rapidly and life expectancy will carry on increasing compared to previous generations. The challenge faced by European and national policies is how to adapt to an ageing population. Governments are looking at the pressure on state pensions and have announced increases in the state pension age and mandatory retirement age has been removed. With an increase in the overall age of the workforce employers will face both opportunities and challenges. It is therefore vital that employers examine the consequences of an ageing work force and respond appropriately, otherwise they may face increased injuries and reduced productivity.

The older worker has much to offer, however they could also be vulnerable to certain working conditions that could further exacerbate ageing decline in capabilities. It is critical that job demands, work environments and capability requirements are assessed, so that employers have an understanding of what tasks have no age issues and those that could become a burden.

Please note for the purposes of this research an older worker is over 50 years of age

Aims & Objectives

To identify the facilitators and barriers to the implementation of health and safety age management strategies.

In order to combine research findings and literature to compile a list of management approaches and initiatives that could help employers identify and use good practice when seeking to engage, protect and promote the health and safety of older workers.

Research undertaken

Over the last two years the following studies have been completed :-

1. Discussions with 41 employers (senior stakeholders ie MD, HR Director, H&S Director across 13 sectors) to understand their perceptions of the older worker within their organisations and any health and safety initiatives they may have implemented specifically for their older workers. Any barriers to implementing strategies to help protect and promote the health and safety of their older workers was also discussed.
2. Ten focus groups were conducted with manufacturing employees to discuss the barriers highlighted in the previous study. The focus groups were also asked for any suggestions to help them remain in the workforce for longer and help keep them safe and healthy.
3. Fifty individual interviews (a quarter being from the food & drink sector) were conducted with manufacturing employees to understand their perceptions of the barriers highlighted by the senior stakeholders and focus groups. They also discussed their personal capability changes and whether they had reported them to their employer and their reasons why they may not have reported any capability issues. They were shown the list of suggestions compiled during the focus groups and chose the five most useful to them.

Investors in older workers - The results of the three studies and literature has been combined and a list of good practice management initiatives has been identified.