

OLDER WORKERS
&
EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES
IN
IRELAND

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investing in human resources

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From this in-depth examination of a small number of employment agencies from the State and private sectors and their perceptions of older jobseekers it is evident that for some older jobseekers getting employment is difficult because of a myriad of factors. The main findings from the study are as follows:

- Ageism is an issue common to agencies, jobseekers, employers and Irish society as whole;
- In some instances employers are using private employment agencies to screen out recruits on the grounds of age and gender, thus bypassing recent equality legislation in this area.
- The more well educated an older jobseeker is the more difficult it is for him/her to find employment however, in the current jobseeker market in Ireland, age is not an issue for employers seeking workers for lower level jobs;
- Less well educated male jobseekers are reluctant to be retrained in order to find employment;
- Older jobseekers want flexibility of hours and may prefer part-time to full-time work which is hard to find;
- Older jobseekers are not prepared to travel long distances to work;
- Redundancy can have a traumatic effect on workers particularly those who are older who may find it difficult to get a job with adequate rates of pay;
- Employers are generally reluctant to hire an executives over 45 years of age;
- Employers are generally unwilling to employ jobseekers with disabilities especially those with mental health problems.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

This research is part of a larger EU research project being conducted in Ireland, the Czech Republic, France, Holland and Sweden under the EQUAL Initiative. The Irish partners on the project are Age Action Ireland, Partas, FÁS, ICTU and South Dublin Chambers. The title of the Irish project is Senior, Select, Retain and Retrain (SSRR), which will investigate the experience of older people in regard to selection, retention and training in employment. The project will also design appropriate interventions to respond to the challenges faced by older jobseekers and older workers.

1.2 The EQUAL Initiative

This initiative is a laboratory for new ideas to the [European Employment Strategy](#) and the [Social inclusion](#) process. Its mission is to promote a more inclusive work life through fighting discrimination and exclusion based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. EQUAL is implemented in and between Member States and is funded through the [European Social Fund](#).

1.3 Age Action Ireland

This organisation is the national network on ageing and older people. Age Action promotes better policies and services for all older people and an ageing society. For the SSRR project, Age Action is taking the lead on the research, which is being conducted in three parts: (i) exploring the experiences of older people themselves, (ii) the experiences of employers and (iii) the experiences of employment agencies.

1.4 Older Jobseekers and Employment Agencies

The part of the research project described in this document is the current practice within public and private employment agencies for placing older people (aged 50+) in employment and the supports offered in helping older people reach their employment potential.

2. EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES IN IRELAND

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes employment agencies in Ireland and consists of six sections including this one as follows:

- **Section 2.2:** categorises the two sectors of employment agencies in Ireland, including their charges, if any, for services.
- **Section 2.3:** describes the State sector, including: a detailed description of the background and operation of the two State services.
- **Section 2.4:** gives a description of the private sector, including: regulation; enforcement of the 1971 Employment Agency Act; registration; and provides a detailed description of the three categories of private sector agencies.
- **Section 2.5:** examines equality legislation in Ireland as it relates to employment agencies.
- **Section 2.6:** contains the chapter summary;

2.2 A Description of Employment Agencies in Ireland

Sectors	
State	Private
FÁS	General Recruitment
Local Employment Services	Exclusively Headhunt/Executive Search
	On-Line Services ¹

Figure 1: Types of Employment Agencies in Ireland

¹ Personal communication, (K. Bradford, 26th July, 2006). However, because anecdotal evidence has suggested that many jobseekers rely heavily on these services, they are described in this chapter and have been included in this study.

Employment Agencies can be classified in relation to the sector in which they operate, viz. State or private. It should be noted that on-line services (e.g., Monster.ie and Irishjobs.ie, etc.) are an advertising medium for agencies and employers engaged in recruitment but are not regarded as employment agencies by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Figure 1 gives a breakdown of the types of employment agencies in Ireland.

Within the State sector a further classification can be made between *Foras Áiseanna Saothairthe* (FÁS, the Irish Training and Employment Authority) and Local Employment Services (LES). In the private sector also, a further breakdown can be made between those agencies which engage in the general recruitment of all categories of jobseekers, those which are exclusively headhunt/executive search and on-line services.

Charges for Services: In the State sector neither employers nor jobseekers are charged for the service.

In the private sector the Employment Agency Act 1971 stated:

A person carrying on the business of an employment agency shall not charge any fee solely for agreeing to seek employment for another person or solely for agreeing to seek persons who will give or accept employment (Section 7:2).

However, employers pay a fee to agencies which provide them with a suitable candidate who fills a vacant position.

On-line services are partly funded by fees from employment agencies and employers which use their services and from revenues derived from advertising on their sites.

2.3 The State Sector

This section describes the background, remit and operation of the two State sector's services, FÁS and LES.

FÁS

Background: This organisation was established in January 1988, under the Labour Services Act 1987 to provide a wide range of services to the labour market in Ireland. The organisation is funded by the Irish Government, the National Training Fund (NTF) and The European Union. The total non-capital, FÁS Budget for 2005 was €908.77m (FÁS, 2006). The organisation is administered by the Labour Force Development Division of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Remit: The functions of FÁS as laid down in the abovementioned Act are:

- Training and re-training;
- Designated apprenticeships;
- Recruitment service;
- Employment schemes;
- Placement and guidance services;
- Assistance to community groups ;
- Advice for people returning to Ireland and those seeking employment elsewhere in the EU (FÁS, 2006).

The statutory functions of the organisation also include the collection and publication of information relating to the labour market and the provision, to the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Employment, of information, reports etc. on matters within the FÁS remit (FÁS, 2006).

FÁS, in conjunction with the Department of Social and Family Affairs has the responsibility for the operation of the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) which was adopted by the Government as its response to the European Employment Guidelines. The plan includes “a commitment to more systematic engagement with

the unemployed” (FÁS, 2006, p. x). Its aim is to reintegrate unemployed people into the labour market by providing them with the skills they require, which from the macro perspective, helps to improve labour market supply. By 2004 50,000 unemployed people were referred directly to FÁS by the Department of Social and Family Affairs under this plan, of which 45,000 availed of training courses and 36,000 participated in employment programmes (e.g., Community Employment, Job Initiative, Workplace and Social Economy), (FÁS, 2006).

Operation: There are eight FÁS regions in the country comprising 20 Training Centres and 63 Employment Offices. There are seven Training Centres and 16 Employment Offices in the Dublin area.

Services for Jobseekers: All offices provide registration, information, guidance and advice, referral and placement services for jobseekers.

Jobseekers register with FÁS by completing a registration form and meeting an Employment Services Officer who compiles a profile of the jobseeker's educational qualifications, work experience, aptitudes and interests. Jobseekers have access to careers information, self help, career guidance, information on training and further education, information on working abroad, and job vacancies. Through the FÁS Employment Services Offices jobseekers may apply for FÁS Training Courses, Community Employment and Job Vacancies (FÁS, 2006).

Services to Business: FÁS also provides an extensive range of training and company development programmes for business in Ireland which are available to all sectors of industry and commerce and all sizes and types of firm, whether indigenous or foreign. One of the aims of this service is “to sustain and improve productivity, competitiveness and employability” (FAS, 2006, p. x).

Local Employment Service (LES)

This Service is one of the measures established by the State under the Local Development and Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) which aims to counter

disadvantage and promote equality and social and economic inclusion. The Programme is administered by *Pobal*² on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (Pobal, 2006b).

Background to the LDSIP: The Programme is delivered by 38 Partnerships, 33 Community Groups and four Employment Pacts. These not-for-profit companies were established in the areas of greatest need in the country, to provide an area-based response to long-term unemployment and to promote social inclusion. All Partnerships are companies limited by guarantee, without share capital. There are Partnerships in both urban and rural areas, 12 are in Dublin while seven operate in larger towns (more than 30,000 people). The other Partnerships operate across rural areas and small towns. During 2006-2007 a process of expansion continues to be under way to achieve full national coverage, though the Partnerships will continue to focus on the areas of greatest need (Pobal, 2006a).

The LDSIP services are grouped into three areas of activity:

- Services for the unemployed;
- Community development;
- Community-based youth initiatives.

The Partnerships and Community Groups throughout the country operate services in Local Employment Centres (LES) and Contact Points for disadvantaged persons who are unemployed³ (*Pobal*, 2006b).

LES Services: These services provide free, confidential and personal service to people who are or who are in danger of becoming long-term unemployed. ADM (2000) identified six core principles which underpin the provision of Services for

² Until January 2006 the Programme was administered by Area Development Management (ADM), which administered the programme on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in conjunction with FÁS (Pobal, 2006b).

³ Contact Points are community-based offices located in outreach locations. The aim of these offices is to provide a comprehensive service for unemployed people into one place within their area, which

unemployed persons within the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme.

These are that the services:

- Are available and accessible;
- Are provided free of charge;
- Are committed to active involvement of users/target groups in the process;
- Begin with the needs identified by unemployed people themselves;
- Are flexible and locally based;
- Promote equality of opportunity, access and outcome (Pobal, 2006b).

LES clients can access:

Information on education, training and courses to improve their prospects;

Daily job vacancies;

Career guidance counselling;

Employment mediation;

CV preparation;

CV typing, faxing and photocopying services (Southside LES, 2006).

According to ADM (2001):

A key measure of a successful local community development strategy will be its effectiveness in identifying and challenging ageist attitudes, policies and practices at a personal, organisational, institutional and community level (*p. 11*).

According to Pobal, 2006b, between 2000 and 2003, 93,542 people were supported under the Services for the Unemployed measure. The interventions provided by the LES were offered in conjunction with FÁS. It should be noted that the LES service is

eliminates the need to travel outside the community. The LES acts as an umbrella for all contact points within the Partnership area (Southside LES, 2006).

very different from any other recruitment service because it is client-centred and can provide prolonged interventions to persons who have been long-term unemployed. According to ADM (2000) citing *Meitheal Maigheo Teo*:

A core principle [of LES] is that progression is self-determined. Each individual is encouraged to identify their own personal needs, and their needs in a wider community context ... They will have identified barriers to their progression in their homes and in the community and will have sought solutions to deal with this in a positive way (p. 10).

2.4 The Private Sector

This section describes the regulation of employment agencies by the Employment Agency Act 1971, its enforcement as it pertains to the private sector, a description of the type and number of private agencies and on-line services in Ireland, the business sectors in which they specialise, their operation and their affiliations.

The Regulation of the Private Sector

According to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2006) under the Employment Agency Act 1971 an employment agency must hold a licence if it is to carry on its business. This Act regulates the issuing of an employment agency licence which is renewed on a yearly basis at an annual fee of €500. An applicant for a licence must, in the opinion of the Minister, be a person of good character and repute. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment verifies this by means of two independent references vouching for the good character of the applicant and by means of a report from the Gardaí that there is nothing in their records that would render the applicant unsuitable to hold an employment agency licence. In order to obtain a licence an applicant also has to have premises in the State, which conforms to standards of accommodation prescribed by Regulations under the 1971 Act. These prescribed standards are as follows. That:

1. The means of access to and egress of the premises has to be adequate in light of the anticipated volume of business;
2. The premises are kept in a clean and tidy condition, equipped with adequate heating, lighting and ventilation and that they should not constitute a danger to persons using them;
3. The premises must contain accommodation enabling persons to be interviewed in private;
4. The premises must be equipped with adequate seating for the number of persons likely to attend at the premises (Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, 2006). *Enforcement of the 1971 Act:*

It is an offence under the 1971 Act for an employment agency to carry out business without an employment agency licence. The law is enforced by the Employment Agency Licensing Section of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Under section 10 (1) of the Employment Agency Act, 1971, as amended by section 19 of the Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003, a person guilty of an offence under the Act shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding €2,000 and in the case of a continuing offence to a further fine not exceeding €1,000 a day (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2006).

Registration: In July 2006 there were 540 employment agencies in the private sector in Ireland (engaged in both general recruitment and headhunt/executive search) registered with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Sixty-two per cent (337/540) of all registered employment agencies are in the Dublin area.

General Recruitment⁴

In the general recruitment category employment agencies provide services to both jobseekers and employers.

⁴ It should be noted that some agencies that are in this category engage in both general recruitment and headhunt/executive search.

Services to Jobseekers: Agencies provide some or all of the following services to jobseekers:

- Flexible hours for consultations (i.e., evenings, lunch time);
- Advice on CV preparation and writing letter of application;
- Skills evaluation;
- Training in Microsoft Office;
- Training in interview skills;
- Follow-up phone calls after recruitment.

Services to Employers: Agencies offer some or all of the following services to employers:

- Maintain a database of jobseekers;
- Assist/advise on job advertisements;
- Psychometric testing of candidates;
- Payroll service for temporary staff;
- Assistance in staff retention.

Affiliation: The National Recruitment Federation (NRF) is a voluntary body founded to establish and maintain standards and codes of practice for the recruitment industry in Ireland (NRF, 2006)⁵. This organisation has 97 members of which 76 are based in the Dublin area. The NRF website categorises employment agencies into 33 business sectors as defined by them. The sector in which most agencies operate is accountancy and finance (53), followed by secretarial (47) and sales/marketing (41). Most agencies recruit in several sectors.

⁵ Membership of the NRF is granted only to organisations that meet criteria of excellence (including adherence to the provisions of the Employment Agency Act 1971 and all other relevant Government legislation & amendments) and who agree to abide by the NRF Code of Conduct (NRF, 2006).

Headhunt/Executive Search

Unfortunately it is not possible to identify all agencies which engage exclusively in headhunt/executive search from the list of registered agencies provided by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment. The six agencies identified as exclusively headhunt/executive search also engage in business other than recruitment (e.g., management, financial, HRM consulting, etc.).

Services to Employers: In the headhunt/executive recruitment segment of these organisations some or all of them provide the following services:

- Advertise executive positions on behalf of clients;
- Maintain a database of candidates;
- Assist with designing a job specification;
- Perform in-depth professional interviews for clients before submitting a shortlist of candidates to them;
- Provide or organise psychometric and medical testing of candidates;
- Follow-up on references;
- Provide support and follow-up, including remuneration negotiation;
- Advise on introduction of recruit to organisation.

Services to Jobseekers: Some organisations provide candidates with advice on the preparation of their CV and résumé and coach them to perform well in an interview situation.

Affiliation: The six agencies identified as engaging exclusively in headhunt/executive search are members of the Executive Selection Consultancies Association (ESCA) which is in turn affiliated to the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC). ESCA has a code of professional practice which “provides assurance that recruitment consulting assignments undertaken by its member companies operate to similar

standards of professionalism, objectivity and thoroughness which characterise other management consultancy activities” (ESCA, 2006).

On-Line Services

Again, it is not possible to document accurately the number on on-line services for jobseekers in Ireland as they are growing daily at an exponential rate.

Most on-line services offer jobseekers the following:

Services for jobseekers: These include:

- A database of vacancies;
- CV registration;
- Career advice;
- Links to other services (e.g., career guidance).

Services for Recruiters: Recruiters include employers and employment agencies, who must register with the site. The services provided include:

- Advertising of vacant positions;
- Use of CV database;
- News and analysis on recruitment trends;
- Customer support.

Services for Jobseekers over 50: Few, if any, on-line service has specific services for jobseekers over 50. One on-line service, www.plusskills.com, offers candidates a more flexible approach to working by offering them greater work life balance and the opportunity to work in their specialist area on a project, part-time or on an hourly basis. It invites professionals who have at least ten years plus experience in their respective fields and who wish to take a more flexible approach to work to register online by sending a resume to jobs@euoplanservices.com.

Europlan are putting together a register of experienced professionals and people with specialist skills to present to their clients, in the belief that situations arise where experience is called for on a short-term basis. They claim they know that there is a high level of expertise available and they believe that the retention of these skills could prove invaluable to business.

Job-sharing and Part-Time Working Arrangements: Another specialist service jobshare.ie is “for people seeking flexible working options and for businesses which understand the benefit of such arrangements” (jobshare.ie, 2006). The site has been designed to help a recruiter find the best possible staff, who are seeking to work either in a part time role, job share positions or other flexible hours a company might offer.

The organisation claims that “in today's world, so many people wish to find a work life balance. By offering part time or flexible hours a company is more likely to retain good staff, who in return are more productive in the hours that they are working so all round it is a win/win situation” (jobshare.ie, 2006).

2.5 Equality Legislation

Under the Employment Equality Acts 1998 and 2004, it is prohibited to publish, display or cause to be published or displayed an advertisement which relates to employment which indicates an intention to discriminate or might be reasonably understood to indicate such an intention (Equality Authority, 2006).

Under the Acts, employment agencies are precluded from discriminating against jobseekers on the following nine grounds:

- Gender;
- Marital Status;
- Family Status;
- Sexual Orientation;
- Religion;
- Age;
- Disability;
- Race;
- Member of the Traveller community.

Discrimination is defined as the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on any of the nine grounds which exists, existed, may exist in the future, or is imputed to the person concerned. The instruction to discriminate is also prohibited (Equality Authority, 2006).

Citing the Equality Authority ADM described the concept of ageism as follows:

Biological ageing is a continuous process. However, societal attitudes, assumptions and barriers create social ageing ... For instance, the link between chronological age and what is, and is not, expected of a person at that age is socially conditioned (p. 11).

According to the Equality Authority (2002) characteristics of institutional practices in relation to ageism are:

- The use of upper age limits to determine provision or participation;
- Segregation where older people are not afforded real choices to remain within their communities;
- A failure to take account of the situation, experience or aspirations of older people when making decisions, and a failure to seek to ensure benefit to them as a result of an over emphasis on youth and youth culture;
- Inadequate provision, casting older people as burdens or dependants.

There are different types of discrimination covered by the Acts including indirect discrimination, discrimination by imputation and discrimination by association.

- Indirect discrimination - happens where there is less favourable treatment in effect or by impact. It happens where people are, for example, refused employment or training not explicitly on account of a discriminatory reason but because of a provision, practice or requirement which they find hard to

satisfy. If the provision, practice or requirement puts people who belong to one of the grounds covered by the Acts at a particular disadvantage then the employer will have indirectly discriminated, unless the provision is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.

- Discrimination by Association - this happens where a person associated with another person (belonging to a specified group) is treated less favourably because of that association (Equality Authority, 2006).

2.6 Summary

This chapter described the two different sectors which provide employment services to jobseekers and employers. These are the State and private sector. The State sector provides free services to jobseekers and employers. In addition to offering recruitment services for jobseekers and employers, FÁS provides careers information, self-help, career guidance and information on education and training. Additionally, the organisation is responsible for providing training for jobseekers. The LES services are client-centred and offer services to persons who are disadvantaged and are or might become long-term unemployed. Additionally, they offer services similar to those offered by FÁS to their clients.

In the private sector three different types of agency/service were identified. These are general recruitment, headhunt/executive search and on-line services. Under the 1971 Employment Agency Act it is illegal for agencies to charge a fee to jobseekers; however, employers pay fees to private employment agencies when a job candidate has been successfully recruited. Additionally, employers and employment agencies pay fees to on-line services for advertising jobs on their websites. This sector (except for on-line services) is regulated by the Employment Agency Act 1971 and enforced by the Employment Agency Licensing Section of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Private employment agencies (general recruitment and headhunt/executive search) must register with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on an annual basis.

Both types of private employment agencies offer a range of services to employers and general recruitment agencies also offer a range of services to jobseekers. Many on-

line services provide information, links to services and advice for jobseekers on their websites. Many of both types of agency have affiliations to professional associations/federations.

Equality legislation prohibits discrimination against jobseekers on nine grounds including age, and employment agencies may not publish ageist job advertisements.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology employed in the pilot study of Jobseekers and Employment Agencies in Ireland. It comprises five sections including this one:

- **Section 3.1:** provides the rationale for the type of methodology used;
- **Section 3.2:** describes the interview methods used;
- **Section 3.3:** gives details of how the sample of respondents was obtained;
- **Section 3.4:** describes how the data were analysed;
- **Section 3.5:** contains the list of references to material cited in the chapter.

3.1 Rationale

Because qualitative data collection and analysis can be quite idiosyncratic, the methods used to collect and analyse the data from interviews with employment agency personnel are described in detail. Most research (especially quantitative research) is based on the idea that findings can be generalised to the population from which the random sample has been drawn. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined generalisations as ‘assertions of *enduring* value that are *context-free*’ (p. 110, emphasis in the original). These authors pointed out that this assumption is unattainable as ‘the trouble with generalisations is that they don’t apply to particulars’ (p. 110). In qualitative research, according to these authors, the only generalisation is that there is no generalisation. However, this does not mean that qualitative research is doomed to a description of the world as seen only by those who took part in the study. Researchers have to look at qualitative data in a different light to data derived by random sampling used in quantitative methods. We would remind our readers that the results of the qualitative study are not the type which can be generalised to known or unknown populations but will be invaluable in formulating questions of a quantitative nature for the next phase of the study.

3.2 Interview Methods

In this study, individual interviews were used to collect data.

Interview Preamble: The interview began with a short brief about the nature of the interview, including assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. This ‘interview preamble’ was written by the researcher, committed to memory and recited verbatim to each respondent. This strategy was used in order to reduce the possibility of different individuals being given slightly different information about what the research is about and what was required of them. A copy of this interview preamble is contained in Appendix A to this document.

The Interview Technique: The interviews were conducted using a modified version of the Emic⁶ technique. This technique is in the style developed by anthropologists and adopted by phenomenological sociologists and ethno-psychologists (Gregersen, 1977; Pike, 1954). Researchers using the Emic technique attempt to shed personal biases and those derived from their culture to view the world through the eyes of the group or individual being interviewed. The philosophy behind this technique is that the description of the form and meaning of a culture or subculture will necessarily differ from the description and interpretation of that culture by outside observers whose own culture or subculture has imparted a different set of values. Other forms of research (e.g., those using questionnaires and structured interviews), may depict a subculture quite differently from the way its members view it, possibly placing great importance on items that the members would normally ignore, while overlooking items that the members would never omit (Clifton, 1968). In other words, the Emic interview does not impose categories on the topic under investigation, but allows the cultural system to generate its own. The interviewer at all times tries to be a neutral vehicle for the expression of the system (for descriptions of Emic techniques, see Pike, 1967; Berlin, 1970; Goodenough, 1970; Hoebel & Frost, 1976).

This type of interview was used over more structured qualitative interview methods because: (a) the individuals from employment agencies on which a modified version of the Emic technique was used are ones about which little is known; (b) time constraints (i.e., given that there was only approximately six to eight weeks to carry out the

⁶‘Emic’ and its opposite ‘Etic’ both come from the field of linguistics. Emic is a foreshortened version of the grammatical term phonemic, signifying meaning, as opposed to Etic, from phonetic, denoting structure.

qualitative study, researching, piloting and implementing more structured interview or questionnaire formats would not have been possible).

In this type of interview, the researcher asks the respondent to tell him/her about her/his [the respondent's] particular agency. In this research the initial request was 'Tell me about the strategies employed in your agency *vis à vis* older jobseekers. Based on the reply and using only the respondent's words and concepts as keywords for further exploration, the interviewer continues: '*You mentioned [keyword]; can you tell me a little more about that*'? The interviewer persists with this technique until all keywords have been investigated. This strategy potentially offers a culturally unbiased worldview of an individual's frame of reference. In this instance several other prompts may be used to move the interview along. These are:

- Recruitment;
- Training;
- Retention;
- Promotion.

These prompts were used to mirror other research being conducted simultaneously with older workers and employers.

All qualitative interviews were conducted by Dr. Francesca Lundström who has training in clinical psychology and previous research experience using the Emic technique in individual interview situations (Lundström-Roche, 1982; Lundström-Roche, 1985, Lundström & McKeown, 1994; Lundström, 1996, Lundström, in press). When each interview is completed the respondent was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) giving details about the agency type, structure and client base.

Interview transcripts were returned to respondents for comment/editing/correction before they were subsumed into the data and subsequently analysed.

3.3 Sampling

The method which was used in the study, is what Patton (1980) described as 'Maximum Variation Sampling'. Using this method, the data collected includes as much information as possible on all aspects of employment agency's policies

concerning older candidates in all its various ramifications and constructions. The purpose of this type of sampling is to: (a) detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavour rather than, at this stage, develop generalisations; and (b) generate the information on which hypotheses can be formulated and tested (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Maximum variation was achieved by selecting each member of the target group only after the previous member had been interviewed and the data (especially the demographic data) thus derived partially analysed. Successive members were selected in accordance with the need to extend, test and fill information. Members within specific groups (e.g., head hunting; executive search; general recruitment, etc.) identified as suitable subjects for research, were obtained by nominations (e.g., reputational or personal). This method is often referred to as 'Snowball Sampling'.

The methodology which was employed in this study, in the interviews was that having completed an interview with employment agency personnel they were asked if they knew of any employment agencies which the researcher might approach for inclusion in the study.

3.4 Data Analysis

This section describes in detail the qualitative data analysis methodology used in this research and mentions briefly the methods used to analyse the quantitative data derived from the demographic questionnaire mentioned above.

Qualitative Data Analysis: The data from the interviews were transcribed onto computer text files, the qualitative data set was derived using three-step data classification procedure. This entails identifying: (a) segments and (b) themes and (c) variables. Figure 2 shows the structure of the analysis.

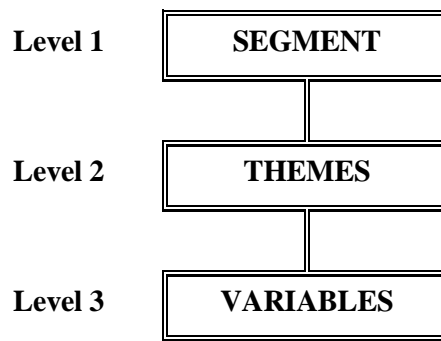


Figure 2: Structure of the qualitative data analysis

This framework was used heuristically to impose structure on the free-flowing, open-ended nature of the data within the different parts of the interview schedule. Analysis was conducted in three steps: the first defined ‘segments’—general headings in the data. These were agency, jobseeker and employer issues. The second step in the analysis identified ‘themes’—more specific headings in the emerging data (these were those derived from the pre-defined prompts)⁷; and the third and final step identified ‘variables’ within themes where the nuanced information emerged. In analysing the data using this method, it was possible to create a logical structure for the data and thereby identify elements common to all respondents and those specific to the different categories of respondent (e.g., State or private sector).

Because the qualitative interviews conducted in this study are exploratory, the data analysis is also exploratory. Tukey (1971) calls this type of work exploratory data analysis (EDA) and uses the analogy of the researcher being like a detective gathering evidence and questioning assumptions in an attempt to make a case that later may be formally tested in the court of statistical inference. He likens the initial analysis to using tools which are like jack knives rather than razors. A more sophisticated type of EDA conducted on Emic-type interview data appears in Lundström (1985).

Quantitative Data Analysis: Data derived from the demographic questionnaires were entered into an SYSTAT file and analysed using traditional data analysis methods.

⁷ Because of the complexity of the data in this study in some instances themes were broken down into sub-themes in order to make a more logical structure for the data.

4. THE RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the results of the fieldwork conducted with employment agencies in Ireland in the sectors described above. It consists of five sections, including this one, as follows:

- **Section 4.2:** gives a description of the agencies in this pilot study;
- **Section 4.3:** provides quantitative demographic details of the sample;
- **Section 4.4:** describes the results of the qualitative interviews;
- **Section 4.5:** contains the summary to this chapter.

4.2 The Agencies

Nine in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with employment agency personnel on the Southside of Dublin using the Emic technique (described in the methodology chapter). Table 1 gives a breakdown of the number of agencies by sector.

Sector	Type	Number
State	FÁS	2
	Local Employment Services	2
Private	General Recruitment	2
	Headhunt/Executive Search ⁸	2
	On-Line Service	1
Total		9

Table 1: Sectors, Types and Numbers of Employment Agencies and Services in which interviews were conducted

Overall four interviews were conducted in the State and five in the private sector.

⁸ It should be noted that headhunt/executive search agencies are not in the business of placing people in employment. The clients, employers, commission these agencies to find (headhunt) suitable job candidates for them. However, in this document for the sake of brevity and to avoid confusion all

4.3 Demographic Details

All agencies were asked to complete a short questionnaire to provide demographic information about: the employment sectors in which the agency specialised; the number of employees⁹; and the profile, in percentages, of the jobseekers on their databases in relation to age and gender; and the approximate percentage of jobseekers over 50 years of age placed in employment in the last 12 months. Additionally, agencies were asked if they engaged in training jobseekers and if they provided employers with a jobseeker psychometric testing service.

Sector Profiles: Only agencies in the private sector provided information on the sectors in which they recruited. These sector profiles are provided in Table 2.

Type of Private Sector Agency		
General	Headhunt/Executive Search	On-Line
Administration	Financial/Banking/	All categories (executive and non-executive)
Accounts	Insurance	
Sales & Marketing	Generic Services	
Industrial	Manufacturing	
Banking/Finance	Wholesale/Retail/ Distribution	
	Pharmaceutical/ Medical	

Table 2: Employment Sector in which Private Agencies Recruit by Type of Agency

individuals being placed in employment by whatever means are referred to as 'jobseekers', except when quoting verbatim.

⁹ Employment Service Officers (FÁS); Job Placement Mediator (LES); Consultants/ Recruitment staff (Private Sector).

This table demonstrates that the spread of sectors is quite heterogeneous. Only one general recruitment agency was engaged in placing temporary staff. All other agencies and the on-line service only recruited for permanent posts.

Agency Staff: Table 3 gives a breakdown of the average number of Employment Service Officers/Job Placement Mediators/Consultants/Recruitment Staff by type of agency.

Type of Agency	Average Number of Consultants
FÁS	8
Local Employment Services	6
General Recruitment	6
Headhunt/Executive Search	11
On-Line Service	150

Table 3: *The Average Number of Recruitment Staff Working within Agencies by Type*

Recruitment staff ranged from 150 in the on-line service to one in one general recruitment agency. One respondent described the role of recruiters thus:

A recruiter may be considered as a kind of ‘matchmaker’ whose role is to ensure that both candidate and client see each other in the most mutually attractive light (Respondent, Private Sector).

Jobseekers: Table 4 gives a breakdown by gender for jobseekers in the different types of agencies in percentages.

Type	Gender	
	%Male	%Female
FÁS	60	40
Local Employment Services	60	40
General Recruitment	55	45
Headhunt/Executive Search	53	47
On-Line Service	44	56

Table 4: Average Gender Breakdown of Jobseekers by Type of Agency in Percentages

This table reveals that except for the on-line service, the percentage of male jobseekers is higher than females.

Jobseekers Over 50: Table 5 gives a breakdown for the average percentage of 50+ jobseekers by gender and type of agency.

Type	+50 by Gender	
	%Male	%Female
FÁS	17	24
Local Employment Services	35	10
General Recruitment	3	2
Headhunt/Executive Search	55	7
On-Line Service	0	0

Table 5: Average Percentage of 50+ Jobseekers by Gender and Type of Agency

This table shows that in the State sector more women than men jobseekers 50+ years of age were catered for by FÁS where the reverse is the case for the Local Employment Services (LES). A very small percentage of workers over 50 were catered for by general recruitment agencies, whereas the headhunt/executive search agency jobseekers were mostly male. The on-line service had no jobseekers over 50 on their database.

Agencies were asked to provide information on the approximate percentage of jobseekers over 50 years of age who had been placed in employment in the last 12 months. Because of the way data are collected, FÁS was unable to supply this information. One LES reported that approximately 10 per cent of jobseekers over 50 were placed in employment. In the private sector Headhunt/Executive Search placed, on average, 15 per cent of jobseekers over 50, data from general recruitment agencies was not available and the on-line service had no jobseekers over 50.

Training: In the State sector both types of agency engaged in skills training jobseekers. In the private sector, training was provided in CV, résumé preparation and interview techniques in one general and both headhunt/executive search agencies. The one general recruitment agency that recruited temporary staff sometimes provides them with a minimum of training. The on-line service provided articles on CV preparation, dress codes, and other aspects of job seeking on their website.

Psychometric Testing: Psychometric testing was not provided in the State sector and one general recruitment agency conducted its own psychometric testing of jobseeker for employers. It seems that, in general, psychometric testing is carried out by companies specialising in this aspect of recruitment on behalf of potential employers.

Summary: From the demographic details supplied by agencies in both State and private sectors it is evident that there is a broad spectrum of types of private agency in relation to the employment sectors in which they recruit, except for on-line services more men than women use the services of employment agencies. For jobseekers over 50, there are gender differences in and between the two sectors and placing jobseekers over 50 had a success rate of between 10 and 15 per cent in the private sector. The State sector is mandated to provide training but the private sector only provides superficial, if any training to jobseekers. Psychometric testing of jobseekers is generally, but not exclusively, performed by companies specialising in this service rather than by agencies themselves.

4.4 The Qualitative Interviews

The method of data analysis is described in the methodology chapter. In this instance the segments into which the data are classified are: Agency issues, Jobseeker issues and Employer issues. The themes were somewhat pre-defined (see pre-interview preamble) in an attempt to reflect research being conducted simultaneously with older workers and employers. These themes are: Recruitment, Training, Retention and Promotion. Other themes arose serendipitously, some of these are: Redundancy, Disability, Ageism and the need for flexible jobs (i.e., part-time or reduced hours). Figure 1 gives an overview of the structure of the analysis as it relates to this study.

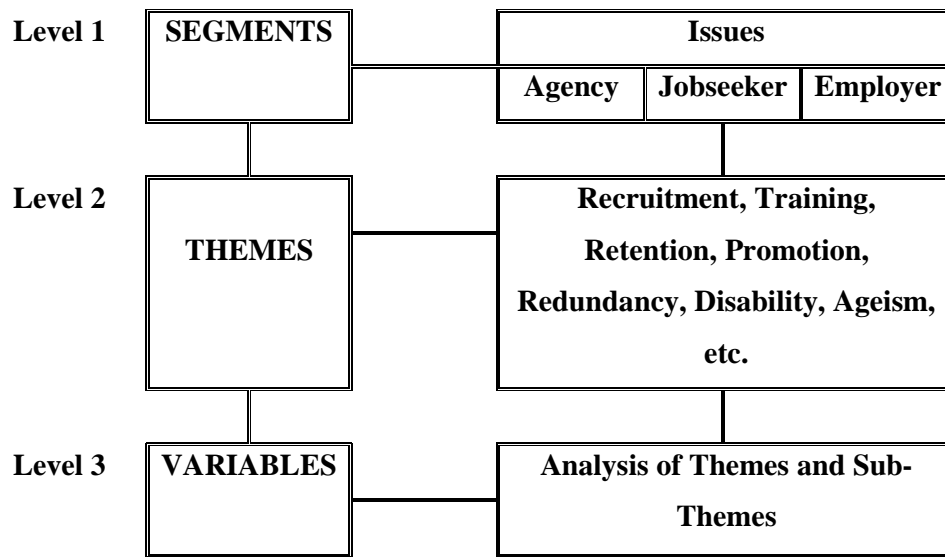


Figure 1: *Structure of Data Analysis*

Some themes are common across all segments while some are confined to one particular segment.

NB: It should be noted that the results reported in this document are the perceptions of the respondents who took part in the survey and may not reflect the perceptions or policies of their particular sector or agency.

4.4.1 Agency Issues

The themes that arose in relation to agencies are as follows: demographics, recruitment, training, promotion, ageism, location and disability.

Demographics: In the State sector, although the services for jobseekers over 50 currently represent only a small percentage of their clients, this percentage is expected to increase in the future because of the extension of the National Employment Action Plan¹⁰ to include those aged over 55.

Recruitment: In the State sector, respondents reported that in disadvantaged areas it is difficult to get jobs for older people because with manufacturing business moving to industrial estates on the outskirts of the city the traditional work (e.g., warehouse work, security, general operatives, etc.) is no longer available. If multi-national organisations replace manufacturing industries they require office staff which does not suit jobseekers who may be educationally disadvantaged.

In the private sector (in general recruitment) hiring older workers does not seem to be a problem because currently it is a jobseekers market. However, in the headhunt/executive search type agencies, placing an older jobseeker, no matter how well educated, can be difficult. A respondent in a headhunt/executive search agency said:

When a candidate gets to a certain age - around 50 - the chances of getting a job are very slim, unless s/he is in a senior executive role or has highly specialised and rare skills.

Training: In the State sector, services used to be tied in with the age bands covered by the Department of Social and Family Affairs on the basis that people retired at 65. Recent equality legislation has meant that there is now no age restriction on attending

¹⁰ Described in Chapter 2.

a FÁS or other State training courses. Once a person is training towards employment, it does not matter what age they are when they begin training.

When a jobseeker is referred to FÁS under the National Employment Action Plan, there is a small budget called the Customised Training Fund which means that if a jobseeker has training requirements that are not available through FÁS up to €635.00 is available to fund their training. Sometimes FÁS courses may not suit a jobseeker's circumstances, so the Customised Training Fund gives the flexibility of being able to go on a course which may suit their requirements better. This option is also available to LES jobseekers.

In the private sector, three of the four agencies engaged in grooming jobseekers for positions with companies that are their clients.

This may involve helping them to make their résumés more presentable or coaching jobseekers so that they present their strongest points to a client (Respondent, private sector).

Promotion: In the State sector, many jobseekers with an older profile are seen more often and they may come back some years later after having secured employment enquiring about applying for a higher level job or wanting to move from a contract to a more permanent job.

Ageism: Three of the four private sector agencies (excluding the on-line service) reported that anti-ageism policies in their recruitment practices were undermined by employers. One respondent in the private sector explained the situation as follows:

This agency is restricted in the candidates it can present because the clients it serves will only consider younger candidates ... If the agency puts a candidate of between 40 and 45 forward, the client will probably decide not to interview them. At a very senior level, a candidate up to 50 years of age could be put forward but clients prefer people in their 40s

who are active, enthusiastic, gullible, 'switched-on' company men to sell their souls until they burn themselves out.

It should be noted however that another respondent from the private sector claimed:

Neither the organisation, nor their clients can discriminate against a jobseeker on the grounds of age.... Placing jobseekers/candidates over 50 years of age does not come into the equation. The situation with this organisation is that they present a short list of five or six candidates to a client company which interviews these people and makes the appointment of their choice. If an older jobseeker comes to the organisation and has the relevant qualifications, they feature on a shortlist and then the client company will make a decision on the type of person they want to have.

The on-line service has a section on its website called Equality and Diversity and there are three sub-sections within it - Multiculturalism, Ageism and Disability. The organisation tries to work with these three groups of people to ensure equality among all jobseekers. To counteract ageism, the organisation has taken age off application forms because it can be seen as discriminatory to ask for a jobseeker's age.

Location: It is difficult to get jobs for older people in disadvantaged areas, some of which have changed over the years from having 200 to 300 companies recruiting directly from the service, to multi-national organisations which require office staff and which offer very few of the traditional jobs that were available in these areas heretofore.

Disability: A respondent from the private sector reported that it is a recruiter's responsibility to uncover something like a jobseeker's mental health difficulties before recommending them to a client. Not to have uncovered such material in advance discredits a recruiter in the eyes of a client.

Summary: The number of themes in the segment ‘agency issues’ that arose from prompts or serendipitously were considerably fewer than on the other two segments. Why this is the case is unclear.

It is clear that getting a job for older jobseekers who are educationally disadvantaged or who are executives is difficult, whereas because of the current jobseeker market it is relatively easy in the private sector to place an older jobseeker in a more mundane job. However, when manufacturing industries move out of an area, this can lead to older jobseekers with educational disadvantages being difficult, if not impossible, to place in employment.

Also, in the private sector, it would seem that ageism on the part of employers, especially those seeking to fill executive posts can override any anti-ageist policies or measures agencies may aspire to. There is an onus too on recruiters in the private sector to discover any negative facts about a jobseeker before referring them to a client. This strategy can lead to jobseekers with disabilities, especially mental health problems, being excluded from being put forward for a position.

Because of the shift from age bands by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, older jobseekers requiring training may now avail of training for employment, which heretofore was not available to them.

4.4.2 Jobseeker Issues

In this segment, because of the complexity of the data, there are themes (e.g., demographics, recruitment, training, retention, promotion and redundancy) and sub-themes, therefore this segment is structured using a slightly different format.

Demographics

A respondent from the State sector pointed out that people over 50 are not a homogeneous group, men and women are different, and there can be differences in educational backgrounds and work experience, she continued:

Older people who have had a career and who have been successful in their career, generally speaking, will find work. They will find a part-time

job, possibly through connections. The disadvantaged person is often doubly disadvantaged because of lack of education or training.

Recruitment

This theme has eight sub-themes as follows: getting a job; ageism; gender issues; wages; flexi-work; travel to work; career paths; contract work; and disabilities.

Getting a Job: In the State sector older jobseekers who are coming from senior positions in companies or who have been self-employed find it can take time to get another position at a senior level. They may be overqualified for many positions that they see advertised and they can feel they are up against younger people who can afford to work for less money.

Another issue reported in the State sector from a disadvantaged area is that finding work for older jobseekers is not easy as the rate for the job may not be much more than they are getting on the dole and the jobseeker cannot see the benefit of working 40 hours a week and getting the same amount as they would on welfare.

In the private sector, in headhunt/executive search agencies when a jobseeker gets to a certain age - around 50 - the chances of getting a job are very slim, unless s/he is in a senior executive role or has highly specialised and rare skills.

Ageism: In the State sector one respondent reported that concerns about ageism are more likely to come from jobseekers and rarely, if ever, come from employers. Jobseekers applying, especially for a physical type job, may be worried about an employer asking their age. In this instance the respondent's strategy is to advise jobseekers that employers are not entitled to ask their age.

Gender: The State sector agencies reported that older men usually have the most difficulty in getting employment, especially those who have previously worked in construction, production jobs, in general operative positions or who have worked all their lives in the trades, (e.g., as carpenters or electricians), but never formally

qualified. Older men who wish to move away from physical work can find it difficult to find alternative work.

In the State sector there seems to be more opportunities for women who are unskilled. The popular options are childcare and care work.

Wages: A respondent from the State sector reported that wages are staying quite low in certain sectors and often older jobseekers find it difficult to find wages commensurate with their experience and previous wages.

Men who have performed manual work often comment that they cannot find work which pays well enough. There are a large number of people looking for manual work and this inevitably keeps wages low. Older men who want to move away from physical work can find it difficult to source alternative work. The sort of work they might look for is something like caretaker or light maintenance or sometimes driving jobs. These jobs generally pay around €9 to €10 an hour and that is not enough for someone who has over 30 years experience in the workforce.

In the State sector, one agency reported that jobseekers over 50 who have been made redundant may sometimes be reluctant to take a cut in salary in a new job.

Women who opt for childcare or care work are paid quite low wages as are starting salaries in offices.

Flexi-Work Sometimes jobseekers have had negative experiences at work and it can take time for them to feel ready to go back to work. They may also prefer to opt for some sort of flexible working arrangement rather than full-time work. It can take longer for more mature job seekers to get work that suits them.

Some older workers want to reduce their workload and change jobs to something less stressful even if it pays less money, as their financial commitments may be less than those of younger persons.

Older women may look for part-time work if they are single parents, even if there is family backup. For example, a woman may be out working in the morning and her daughter would train in the afternoon or visa versa and they share the childminding.

In the private sector, agencies reported older jobseekers' priorities in life are slightly different from the younger worker. In a jobseeker-driven market jobseekers can now demand more flexible working arrangements, job share or part-time work. A company may often have to agree to jobseeker demands if they want the person badly enough.

Travel to Work: In the State sector one respondent from a disadvantaged area reported that jobseekers are reluctant to travel any distance to work. Additionally, if the job is badly paid and the employee has to pay a bus or train fare it is going to eat up another €10 to €20 out of their, already low, wages. With the move of industries to estates in the suburbs, getting a job locally, especially manual work, is often not an option for older jobseekers.

In the private sector also, jobseekers consider the location of their potential job important because of the stress of travel to work.

Career Paths: In the private sector a respondent claimed that:

An older middle-management employee who has kept up-to-date with technology and industry trends, ideally, should move every five years because a person can stay too long in a company. On the other hand, if they move too often they can be viewed as a 'job hopper'. A candidate should have a 'nice career pattern' which can make them marketable.

The ideal career path for an employee is:

... where s/he goes for the high-risk, fast-moving organisations in the early years in the hope that s/he will be lucky enough to find more stable, secure organisations to join later on (Respondent, private sector).

However, another respondent in the State sector commented that older jobseekers may not be looking for a career path because they are just moving on.

Contract Work: A respondent in the private sector remarked:

It often suits the older worker to work on contract and pay their own fringes because they can make more money, the job is more challenging and more varied and they can move around. Additionally they have more control of their destiny.

The respondent claimed that contract working is very extensive in technical roles with persons contracted to a company through large engineering contractors such as Project Management, Fluor, Jacobs or several other more specialised contracting companies in areas such as validation, training and IT.

Disabilities: A respondent in the State sector reported that people with disabilities can have difficulties in finding employment. However, they also reported that when a person with a disability is job ready then obstacles to employment can be overcome. In disadvantaged areas, people with disabilities may get an exemption from the Department of Social and Family Affairs to go on a Community Employment (CE) scheme. Permission is based on whether the work is therapeutic and not manual (for those with back problems). Jobseekers with mental health difficulties find it difficult to get placements. In the private sector one respondent said they would be loath to recommend a jobseeker with mental health difficulties for a job.

Training

This theme contains the following sub-themes: ageism and gender differences.

Ageism: A respondent in the private sector, in relation to an employer refusing an employee training on the grounds of their age, said:

The opportunity of leaving and moving to another company is not an option for an older worker because they might not get another job and if they do they might think they would have problems adjusting to a new work situation. So in a way an employer has a hidden stick, knowing the older worker is unlikely to leave because s/he might not get another job.

Gender Differences: Very often older male jobseekers who come from disadvantaged backgrounds believe they are too old to learn, whereas women who have raised their children and are 50ish believe they are just starting their careers. Additionally, some men are illiterate and pretend they have forgotten their glasses if asked to read something or fill in a form. Very often they have had a very negative experience in school that affects their confidence. Men may be more frightened at this stage of their life to do anything new and they are much more uncomfortable about entering an educational environment.

Older women jobseekers have more job options than their male counterparts. Many of them are keen to do a computer course, train up and go to work as a receptionist or in an office. Women are very nervous about training but are much more excited about it. One respondent in the State sector commented:

The women who come to the LES are often educationally disadvantaged. Many times they say they want to go back to work and suggest they take a job as a care assistant or a home help because that is what they have done all their lives. However, if the Mediator does a bit of exploration with them and starts to get them to look beyond caring because now it is time for them to look after themselves after being a carer all their life, they embrace education and it is wonderful to see their growth and development and the power that having some money that they can call their own gives them.

Many women from disadvantaged backgrounds try to get training for jobs in an office environment. However, although many of them become very skilled at computers,

they do not necessarily have good English. However there can be problems with their choice of career according to a State sector respondent:

To become a successful person working in an office one has to have good English. They have deficits in grammar and cop-on. For example, if they are writing about their Leaving Cert on their CV they will write down 'Leaving Cert' because they do not know to write down 'Leaving Certificate'. Sometimes they use local slang for the name of the school they attended. Little things like that show up if the client has not had broader experience which is also a disadvantage.

Retention

Very little was said about this theme. This is understandable because by its very nature it is not a relevant topic for employment agencies. Once a jobseeker is placed in employment the agency's role is complete.

According to a respondent in the State sector, people over 50 who get jobs do retain them because they have a stronger work ethic than younger people.

Promotion

People in their 50s with a good work ethic and are flexible can get promotion.

Some people who started off as car park attendants or porters, tidying up outside or general maintenance become supervisors. There are quite a few success stories (Respondent, State sector).

In the private sector a respondent remarked that older jobseekers who have experienced a redundancy are interested in promotion because they may still have considerable financial commitments. In the private sector another respondent reported:

Once an older worker gets into a company, if s/he is good s/he does have a chance of promotion. A bit of maturity is very important as it brings with it a more mature sense of values. To have a little bit of cop-on is no harm in a company. In some instances older people can be looked up to in a company and younger members of staff go to them for help, they become mentors. A company with an age and sex profile which mirrors the working age range of 16 to 65 in the local community. This benefits the company greatly because of stronger employee stability and contentment.

Redundancy

This theme contains three sub-themes as follows: the trauma of redundancy, gender differences and finances.

The Trauma of Redundancy: Many respondents commented on the trauma becoming redundant caused in an employee's life. In the private sector a respondent said she always counselled jobseekers in this situation who were experiencing self-esteem problems that it was the job not the person that was made redundant and not to take it personally. A State sector respondent commented:

If somebody has got the news of being made redundant suddenly it is often a great shock to them. Often they will decorate the house or do repairs and that will keep them busy for six weeks or so. Then they may decide that they do not want to be doing this type of thing every day.

Additionally, for men in disadvantaged areas redundancy comes as more of a shock because as a State sector respondent explained:

When you are working in a job for a considerable number of years and all your friends are there it is a shock to lose your job, especially those who only have their job and their home and no hobbies.

Another respondent in the State sector suggested that some workers who are made redundant are pleased to have been forced to make a career change, especially if they have a comfortable redundancy package. At this stage many people who are made redundant avail of FÁS training (e.g., computers).

Gender Differences: In this situation also, women find alternative work more easily than men, according to a respondent in the State sector. Men from disadvantaged areas who have been made redundant are reluctant to avail of counselling or training. However:

Those who are more skilled and have a different attitude get jobs quite quickly because of their long association with working and being amenable to change (Respondent, State sector).

Finances: Jobseekers who have lived off a redundancy package for a year or two can be under a lot more pressure and are more anxious about finding a job.

Summary

It must be borne in mind that older jobseekers are not a homogeneous group and demographic variables such as education, gender, location, work experience, etc. all play a part in whether they are easily placed or find difficulty being placed in the job market.

In both State and private sectors the educationally disadvantaged as well as better educated jobseeker seems to find it more difficult to find employment than those jobseekers in between these two ends of the jobs spectrum.

Ageism can be something internalised by jobseekers who may be fearful about revealing their age in case they would be discriminated against. This is especially true for men looking for manual work.

There are gender differences in the State sector, where older men, especially those with the minimum of qualifications, find it more difficult to find jobs than do their female counterparts.

Low wages can be a disincentive for jobseekers entering employment. If the income from a job is similar to or less than the dole many older jobseekers will not be willing to take on work. Older workers often prefer flexi-work, although it can be hard to find. Travelling distances to work is not generally welcomed by jobseekers, especially those from disadvantaged areas.

Career paths, especially for those who are or are aspiring to be executives have to be carefully managed, especially those who are older. However, some older workers are not interested in career paths, just a job. An alternative to staying on as an executive in a company is to work on contract which can suit both employee and employer.

Some people with disabilities, when they are job ready do overcome obstacles and find work. Those in disadvantaged areas can avail of Community Employment on the receipt of an exemption.

On-the-job training may not be an option offered to older workers. Additionally, because of their age they may not be willing to resign to try to get another job.

In the State sector, many older male jobseekers are reluctant to engage in training whereas older women embrace training and seem to do better than men on the job market having availed of training.

When older jobseekers do find employment they seem to retain them because they have a better work ethic than younger jobseekers. This category of jobseeker often will get promotion, especially if the employer values their maturity and cop-on and their co-workers look up to them as mentors.

Redundancy is a traumatic event in the life of any worker and may take from weeks to years before that person is again job ready. However, redundancy for some workers provides them with the opportunity to avail of training or make a career change. Women seem to find alternative work more easily than do men.

Some jobseeker case studies are contained in an appendix to this chapter.

4.4.3 Employer Issues

This section contains five themes including: recruitment, training, retention, promotion and contract work. As in the jobseekers segment the data are more complex than in the agency segment and therefore is structured in a similar way to the abovementioned segment. It is noteworthy that employer issues were more likely to arise and more numerous from respondents in the private sector than in the State sector.

Recruitment

This theme contains five sub-themes, including: general recruitment; ageism; attitudes towards older workers; disincentives to employing older workers and flexi-work.

General Recruitment: In general recruitment hiring older workers does not seem to be a problem. Employers are more interested in the jobseeker's abilities rather than his/her age. However, there may be issues concerning acquired injuries in older workers, especially those with back problems.

Ageism: According to a respondent from the State sector, the biggest problem with employers is that they do not have the openness to employ an older person.

We need to change the mindset in Ireland because we have become a very young culture. It is the ageist mindset of employers, not the government, which has to change in favour of seeing the value of the older worker (Respondent, State sector).

A respondent in the private sector claimed there may be a modicum of ageism related to recruitment in some employment sectors. For example, sales where an employer may want a young, possibly male, employee to project the company's image as a youthful and vibrant enterprise.

Another explanation was given for some employers' reluctance to hire older jobseekers:

Companies are not normally interested in older people whom they say 'carry too much baggage'. ... Clients prefer to recruit somebody who is green and enthusiastic and who can be pointed in the right direction (Respondent, private sector).

However, another respondent from the private sector pointed out:

With the new equality law, employers are realising they cannot discriminate on the grounds of age. This is supported by the Equality Authority and Age Action Ireland, so people are becoming more aware that it is not acceptable to discriminate against people who are over 50.

A respondent in the State sector, in relation to ageism of the part of employers, recommended:

Employers should be encouraged to take [older] people on. The legislation has changed over the last years and employers are not familiar with it and they are wary about 'what happens if ...?'

Attitudes towards Older Workers: Several respondents in both State and private sector reported that they knew of employers who preferred more mature applicants because they are more reliable, have a better work ethic (e.g., are not absent as frequently as younger workers, do not come to work hung over and have better customer relations skills). One respondent in the State sector commented:

Research in the US on production line employees, showed that the older worker, even though retired from other jobs, worked better, slower, but

they were more productive because they had fewer sick days, they were more committed to their job and the end product was better.

Disincentives to Employing Older Workers: A respondent in the private sector explained how an older worker can cost more money to hire and maintain than a younger worker:

The older a full-time employee is, the more the company has to contribute to his/her life assurance. As part of an employment package companies pay life assurance cover of up to four times salary for senior employees. The older the employee is, the greater the risk to an assurance company and therefore the higher the premiums they charge the employer. This is particularly the case where an employee has a medical history such as heart, blood pressure or diabetes.

This and other disincentives (e.g., cost of sickness/disability schemes, pension fund contributions and ‘Top Hat’¹¹ schemes) make hiring an older jobseeker less attractive than a younger, perhaps more healthy one.

Another disincentive to hiring older workers is according to a private sector respondent because of Government policy on pensions:

Sixty-five is when a person retires and that is a kind of deadline of when a person’s career is over. So, if a jobseeker is 60, they are only five years away from retirement and that can be a problem. Because we are all living longer, if the government were to change the retirement age to 80, 65 would not be seen as that old any more.

¹¹ Some companies operate these schemes for their senior executives which guarantee employees, two-thirds of their salary at retiring, irrespective of years of service.

Flexi Work: Most employers require full-time staff and therefore, except for people who work in accounts in small enterprises, they do not have flexible working arrangements. However, in manufacturing industries the situation is somewhat different with employers offering shift work which can fit into the need for parents to have flexible working hours.

Training

Little was mentioned about training relative to employers, however, a respondent in the private sector claimed that if older workers are nearing retirement the employer may consider that they are going to be retiring soon and they will not be willing to spend money training them.

Retention

According to one respondent in the State sector, employers can be very loyal to their older employees. Some have been treated very well and have been kept on and only let go as a last resort.

A private sector respondent claimed that:

Company philosophies vary considerably and there are many companies which are shareholder-driven and which do not have a sufficiently long-term view or approach. They cannot see and do not plan beyond the end of the next financial quarter or year.

The respondent claimed that US companies generally fell into this category whereas some European and most Japanese companies take a more long-term view. The respondent continued:

In a typical Japanese company a person stays with the same company for their full working life. Companies such as these are better focussed to coping with short-term trading difficulties and they don't need to 'flex'

their workforces as do the US companies. Terms such as 'profit preservation' and 'expendability of the workforce' are not part of their everyday vocabulary.

A private sector respondent comparing younger and older workers commented:

Young graduates who are recruited usually only stay on in their first job for a year, ditch it and move on to the next one. Because there are more job opportunities now they do not worry where the next pay cheque is going to come from In some situations employers prefer to hire older workers, especially in a customer service environment. ... In many instances in customer services employers get much more mileage out of an older worker if the role fits.

According to this private sector respondent:

Best practice in retaining older workers in employment is for them to reduce their workload and start enjoying life a bit more as they get older.

Promotion

A private sector respondent claimed:

A good employer, a people-oriented company with a long-term plan and a mature, philanthropic outlook will award older employees with promotion where due. Company philosophies vary considerably and there are many companies which are shareholder-driven and which do not have a sufficiently long-term view or approach, they do not plan beyond the end of the next financial quarter or year.

Redundancy

One respondent in the State sector said that when a company is making people redundant they are required to notify the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment which in turn notifies the local FÁS Office. FÁS contacts the employer and offers them their services (e.g., they can come to talk to the workers who are being made redundant).

In the private sector when multi-national companies relocate to other countries workers with a considerable number of year's experience may find themselves redundant. In this instance certain individuals (in other companies) will view that person as being a bit old.

Unfortunately, although the older jobseeker has knowledge; ambition, drive, coming up with new fresh ideas is mostly ascribed to younger jobseekers although this is not always true because smart ways around things are often born out of experience (Respondent, private sector).

Contract Work

As an alternative to hiring older workers two respondents in the private sector suggested that contract working was a better option for employers.

Companies are quite happy to employ good older workers on a contract basis. The worker operates on a self-employed tax status or that of a limited company. It suits the company because the contract is only for a specific time, for example, six months renewable and the employer does not have to worry about making contributions to the employee's pension or life assurance premiums (Respondent, private sector).

Summary

An employer, who is a client of a general recruitment agency is more concerned about any disabilities a jobseeker may have than his or her age. This is not the case for jobseekers in headhunt/executive search agencies.

Ageism is a mindset with many employers mirroring the general youth culture that has developed in Ireland. This may be more prevalent in areas like sales where the jobseeker will be expected to project a youthful image for the company. However, in some instances the value of employing older workers is beginning to be accepted by some employers.

Except in manufacturing industries, flexi-work is not an option employers currently offer older jobseekers.

There are cost disincentives to hiring older executives. This is exacerbated by Government policy in having a pensionable age of 65.

Some employers are adopting US short-term policies towards trading which in turn affects its workforce. A good employer will have a long-term policy and plan and value its whole workforce, including older workers who may be looked up to and seen as mentors.

Older workers who have been made redundant and who have considerable experience are not being re-employed because employers consider knowledge, ambition and drive to be attributes of younger workers.

Offering contract work to older jobseekers is an option often preferred by employers.

4.5 Summary

The results of the nine interviews with employment agency personnel, four in the State and five in the private sector yielded a rich vein of information both quantitative and qualitative. The qualitative information is based on the views of the respondents and may not reflect those of the sector or agency that employs them.

Quantitative Results

The spread of employment sectors in which the private agencies recruited is quite broad. The State sector did not respond to this question because they are mainly jobseeker driven and therefore do not specialise. Except for the on-line service, the numbers of recruitment staff were quite small in all agencies in both State and private sector. Only in the on-line service did the percentage of women jobseekers outweigh men.

In the private sector, only 15 per cent of jobseekers over 50 were placed in employment. Because of the way data are currently collected in the State sector, equivalent data were not available, except from one LES which placed 10 per cent of jobseekers over 50.

The State sector provided many and various types of training from CV preparation to long-term courses as required by their mandate but did not engage in psychometric testing. The private sector provided only superficial training to jobseekers and all but one did not engage in psychometric testing of jobseekers.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative interviews revealed that three issues were relevant to agencies in both sectors. These are those that relate to the agencies themselves, to jobseekers and to employers.

Agency Issues: The most striking agency issue is in the private sector where it was perceived that employers may use agencies in an attempt to evade equality legislation

by screening out older jobseekers from shortlists of jobseekers submitted by agencies. Other agency issues are, in the State sector, the difficulty of placing older workers from disadvantaged areas who have educational deficits; in the private sector in general recruitment there is currently a jobseekers market and as long as older workers are fit for the job (physically and/or psychologically) they will be employed. In the headhunt/executive search agencies it is very difficult to get companies to hire a jobseeker who is over 45 years.

Jobseeker Issues: The most striking finding in this segment is the traumatic impact redundancy can have on workers. Being made redundant can cause low self-esteem and depression. The State sector has a mandate to cater for workers who have been made redundant but there are few, if any, psychological provisions for those experiencing the trauma of redundancy.

Because of ageist attitudes in Irish society, some jobseekers worry about being turned down for jobs on the grounds of age. Ageism is also an issue which relates to training older jobseekers and workers in both State and private sectors. Some older workers and jobseekers can be denied training on the grounds of age. There are gender issues also related to training in the State sector: older men are reluctant to engage in training whereas women embrace the idea with enthusiasm.

The background (location, educational, type of previous employment, gender) from which an older jobseeker is coming from determines the ease with which they will get employment. Additionally, rates of pay offered older jobseekers may not be enough for them to meet their financial commitments. In the State sector in disadvantaged areas by the time travel to work and other expenses are factored in, wages may be the same or less than social welfare allowances, which leads to a reluctance on the part of jobseekers to accept a low paid job. Many older jobseekers, clients of both State and private sectors, prefer to have flexi-work arrangements which can be difficult to find. A growing trend in the private sector, especially for well-educated older jobseekers is for them to be hired on a contract basis. This suits both employer and jobseeker for different reasons.

Employer Issues: Ageism is an issue for employers and their attitudes to hiring older jobseekers, who might not fit in with their company's profile. On the other hand, some employers are discovering that older workers have a better work ethic and are better in the area of customer relations than their younger counterparts. Unfortunately, there are disincentives to hiring older jobseekers, particularly those seeking higher executive positions. The reason for this is the high cost to employers of life assurance, sickness/disability schemes, pension fund contributions and top hat schemes.

Appendix to Chapter 4

Case Studies

Two women in their 60s who had a broad experience of life were both doing a FÁS Return to Work course and both wanted part-time work. The LES Mediator suggested to both women that rather than doing a computer course for the kinds of jobs they did not want they should explore their interests further.

Woman #1: Jenny¹² had been in the beauty business and was very glamorous and sophisticated. The respondent suggested she might use her experience to train groups because there were a lot of CE schemes where women are returning to the workforce and might benefit from somebody talking to them about grooming, personal hygiene and presentation. She was interested but she did not have the confidence to do it - or maybe she just did not want to go to that much trouble. She ended up going for being a receptionist in a beauty salon, which was ideal for her.

Woman #2: Mary had been a hairdresser and ran her own business from home. Her interest was in art and for work experience she got a placement in an art gallery in town. They kept her on and finally she got the offer of a job and she is working there part-time guiding people around in an art gallery in the city.

Although both these women when first encountered by the Mediator were doing FÁS computer courses, neither would have benefited from taking a job in this line of work. The reason they were on the course is because FÁS are heavily into providing computer training for jobseekers as a potential source of a job but using a computer may only be needed as a tool for a job and careers guidance is essential in dealing with this type of client.

¹² All case study names used in this document are fictitious.

Man #1: Joe was 58 and had been unemployed for a few years. He had had his own business and had been very successful which he had sold. He wanted to go back to work for financial reasons. He was looking for a very high-flying job in a senior sales position and he was not getting anywhere. Eventually, he got a job with the Central Statistics Office as a supervisor.

Many people who work as census enumerators are more mature and often retired and sometimes they are offered other opportunities. For example some people do pricing for the consumer price index.

Man #2: Oliver who is in his 50s was put forward for a job as a bank teller by his employment agency. The bank was very reluctant to consider him for the post because of his age. In the long run, because of pressure from higher up in the bank, and with great reluctance of the manager, he was hired. He was a great success in terms of customer service and was preferred by many customers to the younger, perhaps less accommodating, tellers.

Man #3: Frank is 63 and redundant for three years. He was looking to return to training. He had a period of ill health after redundancy and was on Disability payment. He went to FÁS and the Placement Officer deemed that he had enough experience but needed to add some skills and put his name on the waiting list for a computer course. He then applied for an exemption from the Department of Social and Family affairs as he was required to do. He had all the documentation from his doctor who was recommending that he return to part-time employment. He was refused an exemption and thought that he could do no more and did not appeal the decision in the required 14 days.

One month later, Frank came to an LES office for advice. The Mediator considered that he had been refused training on the grounds of age. She requested all documents relating to his application under the Freedom of

Information Act and found that a medical assessor had written in hand writing that he did not believe that this course would lead to full-time employment in a 64 year old man. The Mediator has forwarded all of the paperwork to the Equality Authority.

5. DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the implications of the findings of the research and suggests hypotheses to be tested in the upcoming national survey.

The most striking finding in this study common to agencies, jobseekers and employers and, by inference, Irish society is that ageism is present in many aspects of the hiring of jobseekers. Why this should be in the light of equality legislation may point to the need for more vigilance on the part of agencies, jobseekers and employers. Additionally, the matter needs urgent attention from legislators and policymakers.

It was not anticipated that respondents would mention issues affecting agencies, jobseekers and employers. However by doing this they provided added structure to the study.

The more jobseeker-centred nature of the State sector is reflected in the large number of topics and sub-topics they mentioned concerning jobseekers and the relatively few they had concerning employers. On the other hand, private sector respondents were more likely to discuss employer issues than the State sector respondents. This finding makes sense because the private sector relies on their employer clients for their income, whereas the State sector, do not.

Although many of the findings are striking, they were generated by only nine respondents from State and private sector employment agencies. However, the information they provided will be crucial to inform the questions to be asked and subsequently the hypotheses to be tested in a quantitative national survey.

Some of the hypotheses to be tested in the national survey are as follows:

Agency Issues:

- Some employers use employment agencies to circumvent equality legislation on ageism;
- It is often difficult to place an older jobseeker in appropriate employment because of the ageist attitudes of society.

Jobseeker Issues:

- The more well educated an older jobseeker is the more difficult it is for him/her to find employment;
- Less well educated male jobseekers are reluctant to be retrained in order to find employment;
- Less well educated women jobseekers are willing to be retrained and have a tendency to do well in employment;
- Older jobseekers want flexibility of hours and may prefer part-time to full-time work;
- Older jobseekers who have been made redundant are often traumatised by this event;
- Many older jobseekers prefer to have a more flexible job than those usually on offer;
- Older jobseekers are not prepared to travel long distances to work.

Employer Issues:

- Employers seeking executives are generally reluctant to hire an employee over 45 years of age;
- Age is not an issue for employers seeking workers for lower level jobs;
- Employers are unwilling to employ jobseekers with disabilities especially those with mental health problems.

Demographic details on agencies, based on the findings in this study will include the following:

- Type of agency (e.g., executive search, general, on-line, state sponsored, etc.);
- The number of staff employed (including job titles and gender);
- The sectors in which it recruits;
- The gender and age of the jobseekers which they dealt with over the previous year;
- The number of jobseekers which they dealt with who had previously been made redundant;
- Reasons why older people are seeking employment (e.g., redundancy, Social Welfare requirements, acquired disability; change of lifestyle, health, etc.);
- The success rate for placing older jobseekers;
- The success rate for placing older jobseekers who had previously been made redundant;
- The percentage of jobseekers placed in permanent and temporary employment; the type of employment sought by gender (e.g., part-time, full-time, job sharing, etc.).

When this national survey of employment agencies is completed, the findings of this very small study will have been tested in the court of statistical inference and will enable measures to be taken to redress issues which militate against older jobseekers.

APPENDIX A

Pre-Interview Contact and/or Preamble

Hello, my name is Francesca Lundström and I am currently working for Age Action Ireland. Age Action Ireland is engaged in a research project about older workers called **Senior Select Retain and Retrain** (SSRR). My brief is about older workers and employment agencies in Ireland.

Age Action Ireland is the national network on ageing and older people. Age Action promotes better policies and services for all older people and an ageing society.

This research is EU funded under the EQUAL Initiative and is being conducted with partners in the Czech Republic, France, Holland, Ireland and Sweden.

The EQUAL Initiative is a laboratory for new ideas to the [European Employment Strategy](#) and the [Social inclusion](#) process. Its mission is to promote a more inclusive work life through fighting discrimination and exclusion based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. EQUAL is implemented in and between Member States and is funded through the [European Social Fund](#).

Your name was given to me byof S/he suggested your agency would be a good source of information on the subject of older workers and employment agencies.

If you agree to do an interview for me neither your name nor the name of the agency will ever be revealed to anybody and the information will be treated as strictly private and confidential. The data derived from the interviews with employment agencies will be used to inform the research about employment agencies and older workers.

The interview should take in the region of half to three-quarters of an hour and I would be willing to come to your premises at a time and date that would suit you.

APPENDIX B

STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

SSRR EMPLOYMENT AGENCY INTERVIEW FORMAT

Demographics

1. Type of employment agency:

- Exclusively Head hunt/Executive search _____
- General recruitment _____
- On-line service _____
- FÁS _____
- Local Employment Service _____

If 'other' please describe your agency below:

2. Number of Recruiters working in your agency _____

3. The age and gender profile of this agency's jobseekers is as follows:

Gender		Age		
	%	% 18 - 29	% 30 - 49	% 50+
Men				
Women				

4. Approximate percentage of candidates over 50 years of age placed in employment in the last 12 months.

5. The agency's employment sector profiles are as follows:

Sector	% Permanent	% Temporary

6. Does agency engage in training of recruits? _____

7. Does agency engage in psychometric testing of recruits?

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