

## UWV approaches to employers focussed on hiring older people

### Summary<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, labour participation of older people rose from 34% in 2000 to 49% in 2010, but it is still lower than the average for the total working population (67%). Once older people end up outside the labour market a combination of factors make it difficult for them to get back to work and they have a big chance of being unemployed for a long period of time. For those over 55, the percentage of work resumption within twelve months of influx into the WW (Unemployment Insurance Act) is 30%; for those under 55 this is around 45%<sup>2</sup>. Research by the Public Employment Agency (UWV Werkbedrijf) shows that one in five job seekers are aged 55 or older, but of all job finders only 6% are in this age category<sup>3</sup>.

Employers are relatively negative about hiring older job seekers. Older job seekers have less chance of being invited to an interview than younger job seekers do, also because employers have unfavourable perceptions about older people. The issue is how we can find employers who are prepared to hire more older people and what approaches to employers by UWV offer good opportunities to do so.

The research agency SEOR, commissioned by the Department of SBK (Strategy, Policy and Knowledge Centre) and in consultation with Werkbedrijf employees, identified the approaches taken to employers by UWV for older people in the first half of 2011<sup>4</sup>. To this end a large number of employer services advisers and work coaches were surveyed. The following questions were the basis for this study:

1. *how do employer services advisers and UWV Werkbedrijf approach employers*
2. *how do they recognise opportunities at employers for older people*
3. *how can they influence employers' selection behaviour*
4. *what are successful approaches to employers for older people*

### Main conclusions of the study by SEOR

#### ***It is possible to influence the employer's hiring policy according to employer services advisers***

The majority (59%) of the employer services advisers and work coaches are of the opinion that the recruitment and hiring policy of employers can be influenced to a certain extent. One fifth believes that hiring policy can even be strongly influenced. This is important because where hiring policy can be influenced this means there may be opportunities for older people.

#### ***Good relationship management increases opportunities for older people***

According to employer services advisers and work coaches good relationship management is essential to exercise influence on the recruitment conduct of employers. Personal contact with the employer is required, preferably with short lines to those deciding on staff policy at the employer. Employers with whom good contact has been built up and where there is a bond of trust can be

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<sup>1</sup> Summary of the report: Zandvliet, K., Gelderblom, A., Gravesteijn J., (2011). Werkgeversbenaderingen van UWV gericht op het aannemen van ouderen. Rotterdam: SEOR.

<sup>2</sup> UWV Kennisverslag (UKV) 2011-II. July 2011.

<sup>3</sup> UWV Werkbedrijf (2011). Niet-werkende werkzoekenden aan het werk in 2010: Wie zijn ze en waar vinden ze en baan?

<sup>4</sup> Summary of the report: Zandvliet, K., Gelderblom, A., Gravesteijn J., (2011). Werkgeversbenaderingen van UWV gericht op het aannemen van ouderen. Rotterdam: SEOR.

more easily influenced. To this end the employer services adviser must get to know the company (and the company culture), have set up good agreements with the employer in the past and have kept them. If there is a bond of trust and the employer has already satisfactorily hired older job seekers via the employer services advisor, then the employer will be more prepared to do so again. Good experiences of the employer with the selection of candidates by UWV are therefore important. In addition, the age of the contact person at the employer might be a sign that there are opportunities for older people. If they are also a bit older they will often have more affinity with older job seekers according to the employer services advisers, which increases their opportunities.

### ***Opportunities for older people depend on characteristics of the employer***

*Company size:* The recruitment conduct of employers in small and medium-sized enterprises can be more strongly influenced than that of large companies. At smaller companies, the lines to the director, owner or HR officer - the people who decide - are often short and direct. This means there are more opportunities for personal contact with the employer and for introduction of an older candidate. Older people often experience **preconceptions** at the employer where their age is concerned. Therefore they will need direct personal contact with the employer more often than younger job seekers in order to make things click. This is easier in the SME than in large companies. This kind of "bridge matching" is considered very successful by employer services advisers and work coaches.

*Age distribution:* Companies with an aging personnel base are grappling with replacement issues and are often open to advice and proposals from UWV. If the average staff age is high then that may be an advantage for older job seekers because the employer is able to assess the quality of the older employee. Vice versa, in a company with many young employees, an older employee can sometimes effectuate a better balance and stability through his experience. Therefore it very much comes down to the advisory skills of the employer services advisor or the work coach, their contacts with the employer and knowledge of the company culture in order to recognise opportunities for older people.

*Sector and type of function:* At companies in technical sectors relevant professional knowledge is particularly important for the employer. Age is less important and employers look at experience, education and professional knowledge. The possibility of placing older people sometimes depends on the specific content of the function. Companies that focus on older clients for example may prefer older employees because they can relate better to their client base. Vacancies where the employer prefers experience or stability are also often more suitable for older people and offer them opportunities according to employer services advisers and work coaches.

*Corporate social responsibility:* Employers valuing corporate social responsibility can be influenced more than others where it concerns hiring older people. These are often large companies with which UWV has entered into covenants. According to the employer services advisers and work coaches, large companies often think about the long-term with regard to their staff policy. The ability to identify employers who have a social angle and who are open to a good balance in staffing, is seen as an important quality that employer services advisers should possess in order to successfully approach employers to hire older people.

### ***Bottlenecks or shortages in staffing***

According to employer services advisers, a tight labour market is an important driver for influencing the hiring conduct of employers. An employer with staffing problems is often sensitive to advice and mediation by employer services advisers. Employer services advisers therefore use expected staff shortages to present older job seekers. In addition, employer services advisers see a high staff turnover as an indicator for recognising opportunities for older people. Due to their greater loyalty and lesser mobility older people have a more favourable position in that situation compared to younger employees.

### ***Five routes for approaches to employers, differing in labour-intensive nature***

Employer services advisers and work coaches provided many examples of successful employer approaches (best practices)<sup>5</sup>. These can be reduced to a number of routes or strategies that are employed. There is broad consensus amongst employer services advisers that direct contact between the employer and job seeker increases the opportunities for older people. These routes differ in the extent as to how labour-intensive they are.

*Route 1: Demand restructuring. Individual matching by adapting demand of the employer*

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<sup>5</sup>In total 95 examples of successful approaches to employers are given.

The starting point is the employer with a vacancy. He is encouraged by the employer services advisor to invite an older job seeker for a personal interview. And, then to determine whether he or she is suitable for the vacancy and possibly amend the vacancy requirements. This requires a good preliminary selection of job-seeking candidates. It is a labour-intensive and therefore relatively "expensive" route.

*Route 2: Job hunting. Individual matching based on the qualities of the older job seeker*

The starting point is the job seeker who is matched to a vacancy based on his CV. This approach is also labour-intensive and therefore relatively "expensive".

*Route 3: Projects and arrangements*

The starting point is the sector. Bottlenecks in staffing in a sector may provide opportunities for a project-based approach. The advantage is that this is a relatively "cheap" route as job seekers can be approached as a group.

*Route 4: Speed dating for employers and older job seekers*

This route is extremely suitable for older people because of the personal contact between the employer and job seekers and preconceptions are overcome. The advantage is that this is a less labour-intensive and therefore relatively "cheap" route.

*Route 5: Identifying employers willing to implement socially responsible business practices*

The social angle of the employer is the departure point here. The costs of this route depend on how the strategy is applied and how easy it is to find these employers.

***Employer services advisers are sometimes 'client focussed' and sometimes 'outcome focussed'***

When employer services advisers and work coaches come up against preconceptions at employers, they sometimes apply a compliant (client-focussed), and sometimes a more confrontational tactic (sales or results-oriented). In a compliant approach, they endeavour by using instruments and gentle persuasion to persuade the employer to hire an older candidate. The possibilities of cost or risk reduction of the various instruments are discussed in particular (such as a trial placement, premium discount). For a confrontational tactic, the emphasis is on convincing the employer of the older candidate's qualities: older people are loyal, have a strong work ethic and a lot of experience, skill and judgement of character. To ward off prejudices at employers, older employer services advisers and work coaches also "flaunt" their own age.

***Employer services advisers set priorities and point out important competences***

Employer services advisers and work coaches prioritise approaches to employers for older people in the following order

- Bringing older job seekers and employers into direct contact with each other;
- Setting up a project-based approach for groups of older job seekers;
- Good relationship management by maintaining personal contact with employers;
- Close cooperation between employer services advisers and work coaches;
- Using commercial skills for promoting older people at employers;
- Help older job seekers to improve their 'soft characteristics' (attitude, motivation) and presentation.

They mention a number of important competencies that are needed for a successful approach to employers: communicative skills, relationship management, client-oriented action, dosed assertiveness, empathic ability, commercial skills and creativity. Together with good knowledge of the regional employment market these competencies define the professionalism of the employer services adviser.

**The full report is available in Dutch at:**

[http://www.uwv.nl/OverUWV/publicaties/Kennis\\_onderzoeken/Onderzoeksrapporten/Werkgeversbenaderingen\\_van\\_UWV\\_gericht\\_op\\_het\\_aannemen\\_van\\_ouderen.aspx](http://www.uwv.nl/OverUWV/publicaties/Kennis_onderzoeken/Onderzoeksrapporten/Werkgeversbenaderingen_van_UWV_gericht_op_het_aannemen_van_ouderen.aspx)