

Skills and Training for an Ageing Workforce



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Learning and Work in Later Life

- Traditional model – older workers marginal groups, their employment rising and falling according to economic cycle.
- More dynamic approach - older workers as source of knowledge and experience.
- Changing demographics argues for the more dynamic approach

Selective exit in 50s

- Two groups leave; the high paid with good pensions who choose to retire for other interests and the very low paid in poor health for whom financial loss of moving from low pay to state benefits is marginal.
- Result – active workers concentrate more in intermediate roles.
- Most strongly represented in large organisations, public sector (health, education), self employed, routine/elementary occupations, skilled manual occupations in private sector manufacturing and construction, southern based.

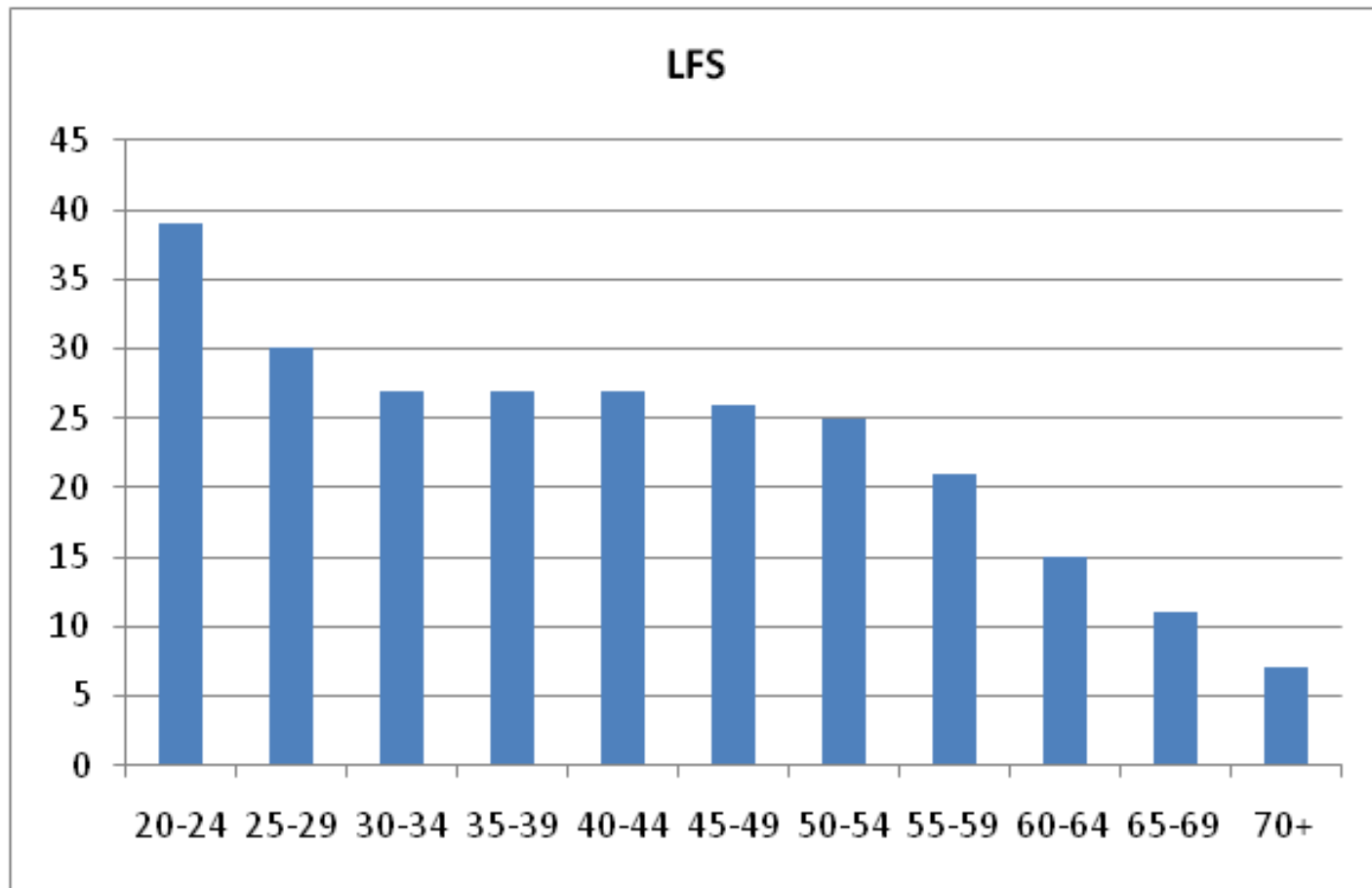
Selective exit after 60

- After 60 and especially after 65 (seen as “normal” retirement age) large scale exit. Distinctive minority left in work;
- Growing proportion work *part time* (28% of those employed in late 50s → 80% in early 70s).
- Growing concentration in five sectors: health and social work, education, other community services, wholesale/retail and business services. (Each of these accounts for about 15% of post SPA workforce.)

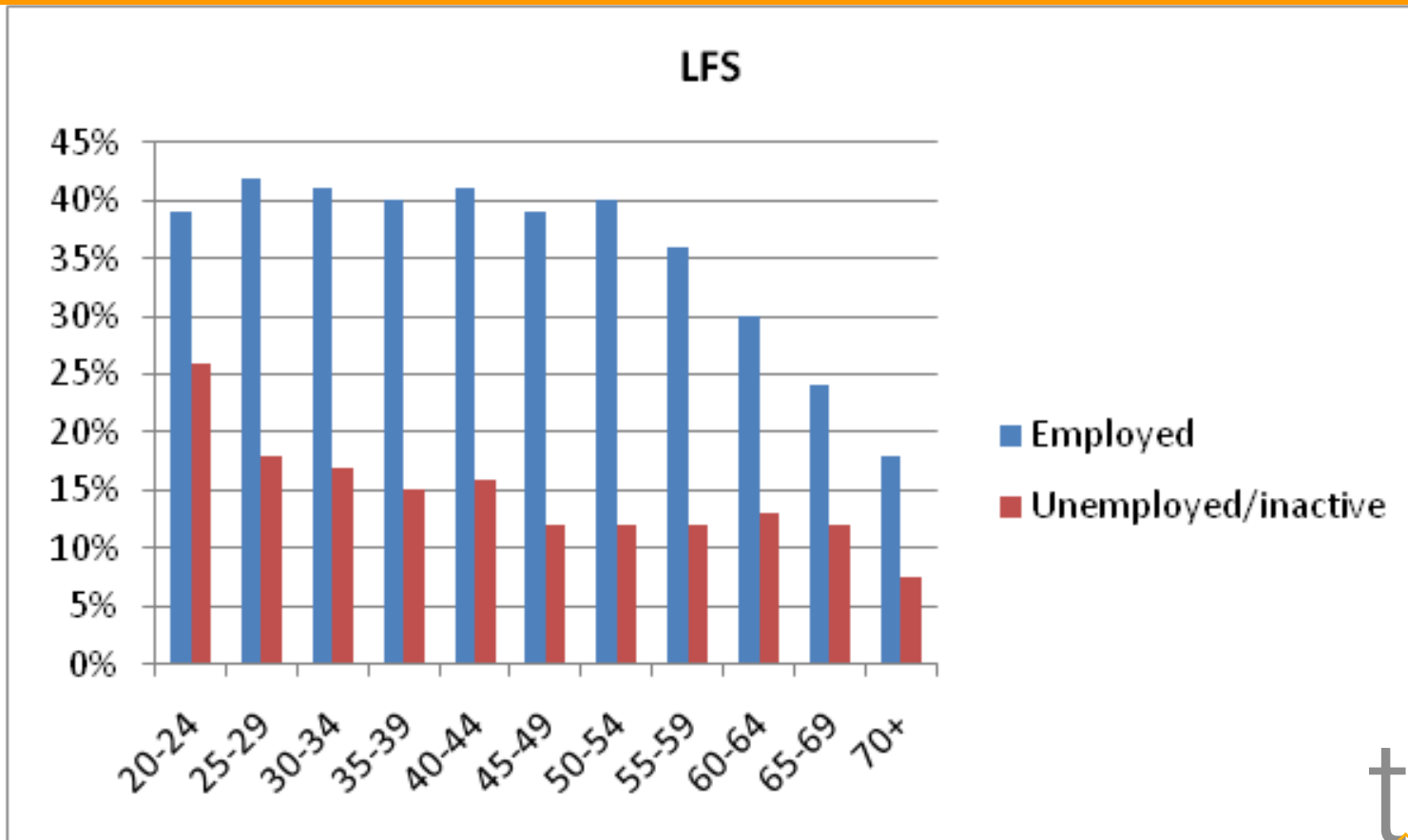
Employer and older employees' attitudes to training and skills

- Demographic change will lead to significant skills shortages – historical patterns will change.
- Employers and employees either not aware of, do not believe or do not understand these predictions – underestimate the risks involved.
- Most employers and most employees do not think there is a significant and urgent skills problem.
- Most employers well disposed to training older workers but do not give it priority against other commitments.
- Older employees do not give training priority either.

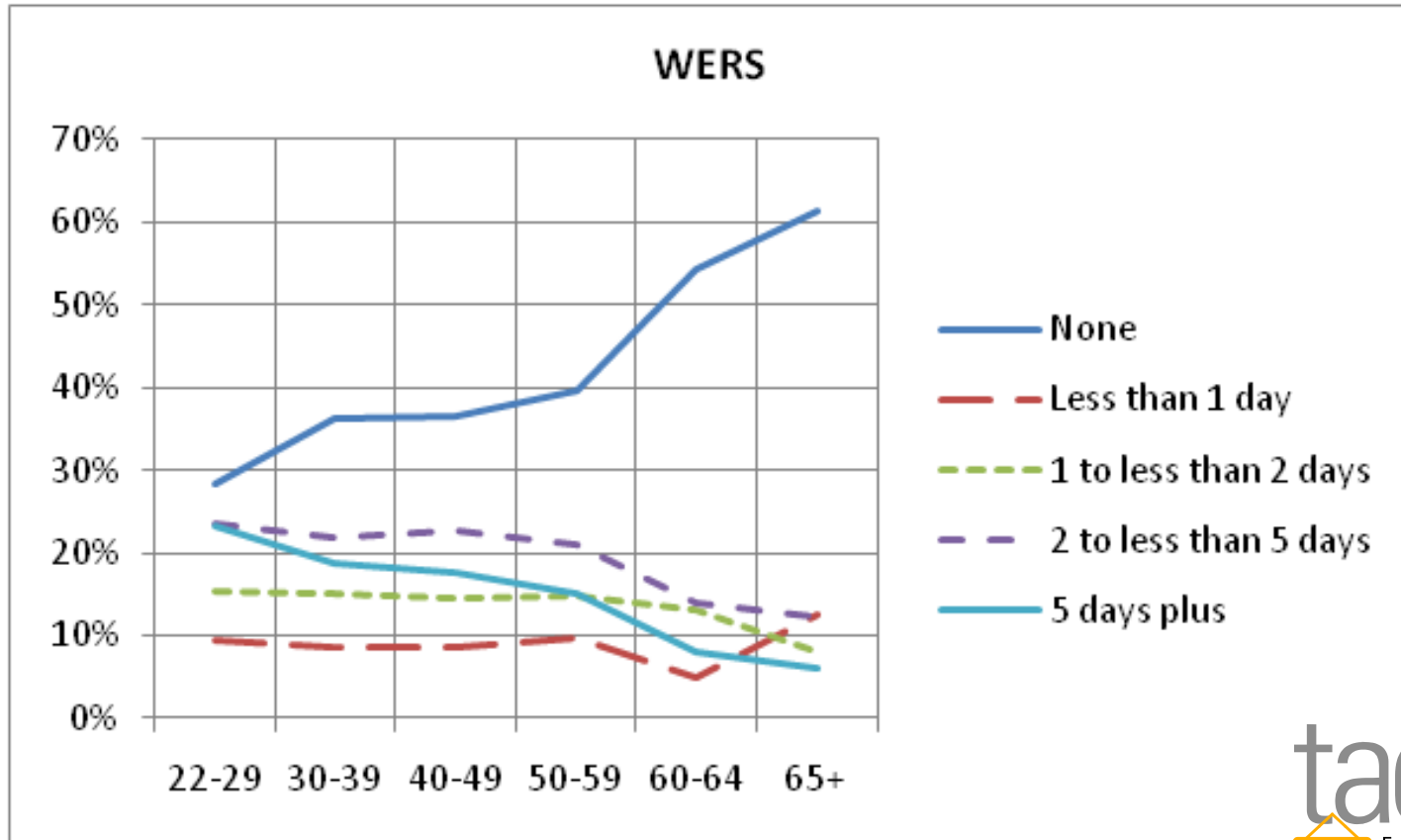
Training declines with age



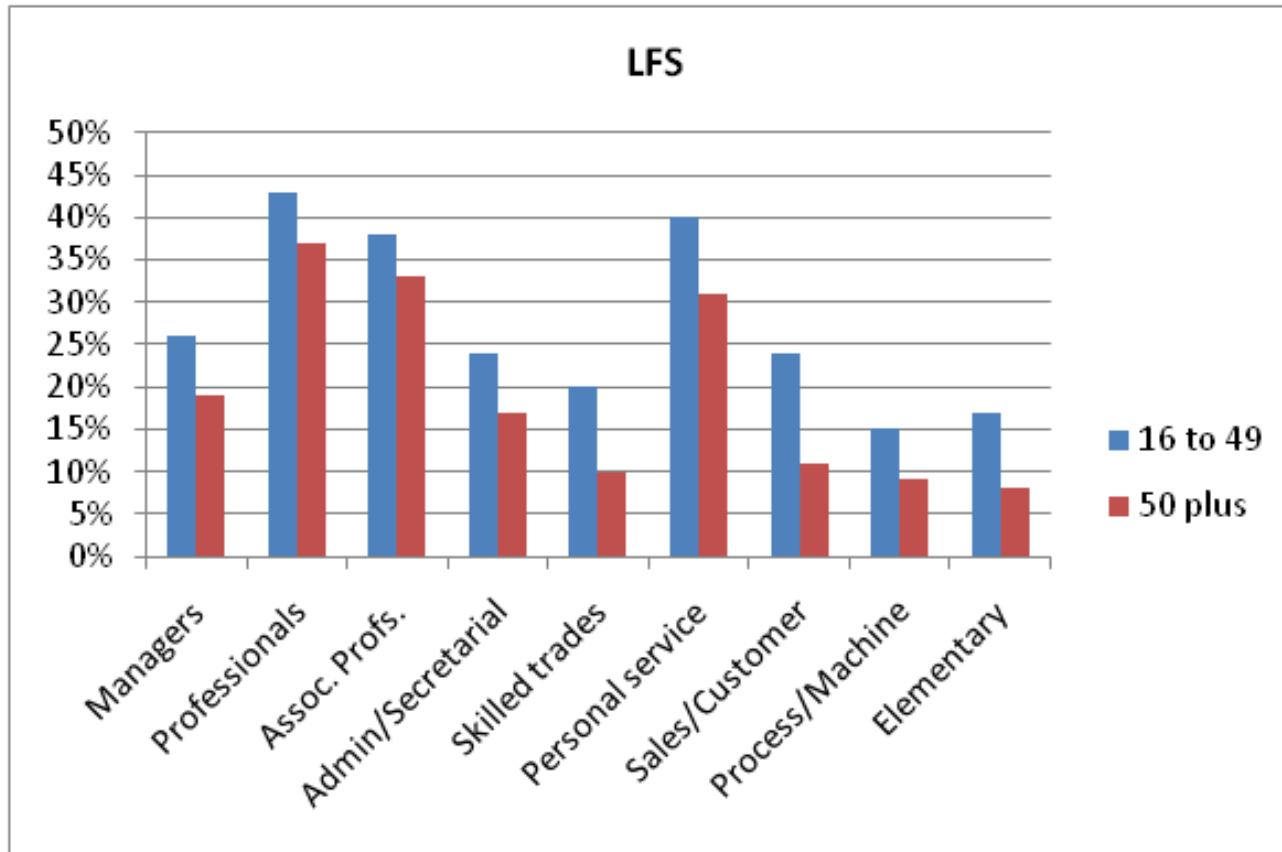
Participation in any activities to improve knowledge also falls off



Amount of training by age and form in past 12 months



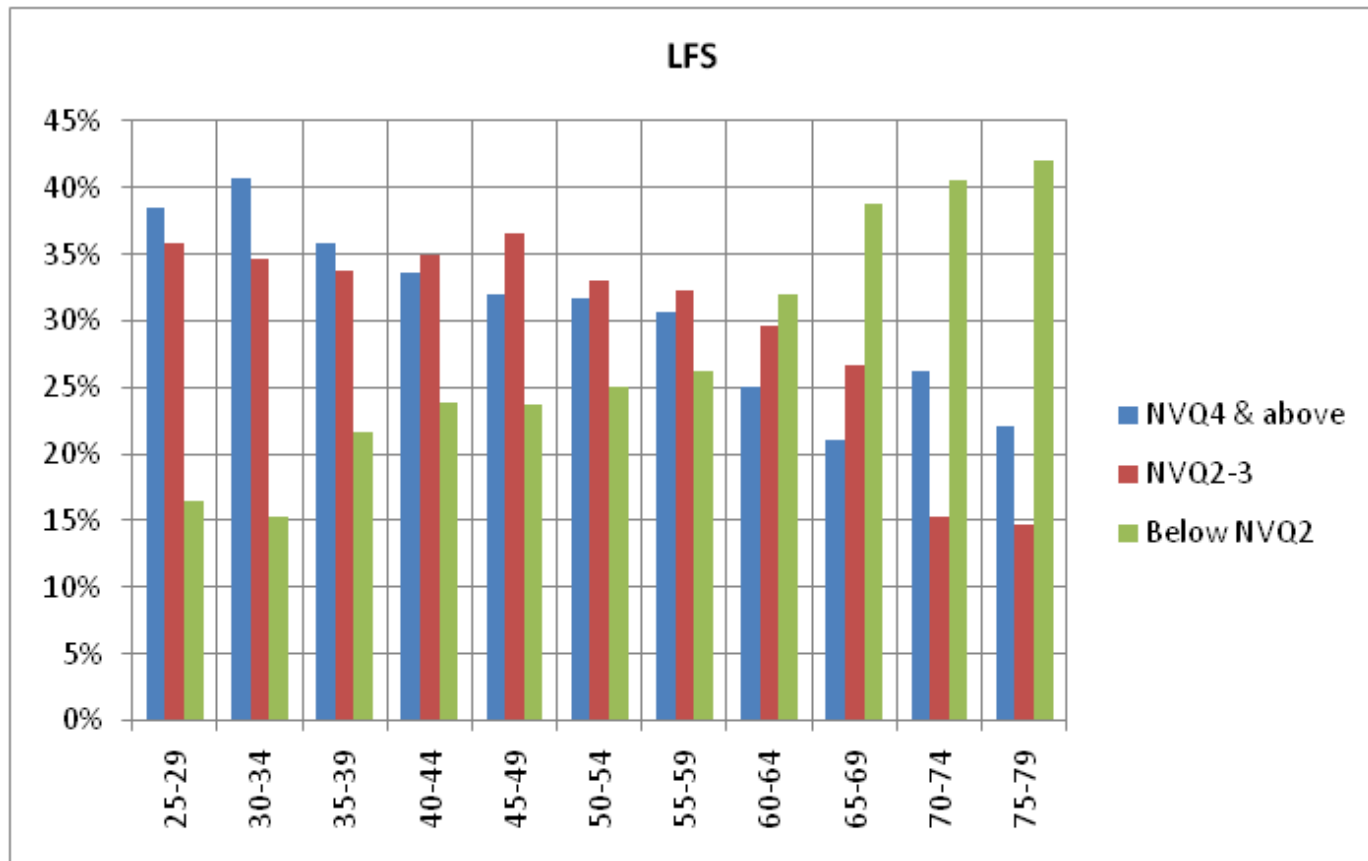
Training participation by occupation



Skills training and older workers

- Participation in training of all kinds declines with age – especially from 50+
- Most training is short and focussed on immediate job.
- Neither employers nor employees think further qualifications in later life is good use of time and energy.
- Older employees claim to have taken training when offered and most employers claim to have offered it.
- Older people more likely to train in sectors, occupations and organisations where training is part of the culture.
- (Training more widespread, falls off less in public than private sector.)

Per cent of workforce holding qualifications by age



Training - getting back to work

- Once unemployed, training is only likely to help older people return to work when linked to specific job opportunities (through work placements, apprenticeships, targeted entry schemes etc.)
- Unemployed older people who learn more generally, report benefits in terms of well being, even when don't actually secure new jobs.

What is the problem with skills and training?

- Employers and employees underestimate future needs;
- Impact of skills problems on older individual's decisions and motivation is low. (They may recognise problem but think “too near retirement for this to matter.”)
- Employees and managers may “conspire to underperform,” find it more convenient to tolerate sub-optimal performance than bear training costs,
- Employers often make poor use of employees' skills. (Employees may be right in assessments that they are “overqualified” for the work they do.)

Special policy attention needed..

- Low skilled workers who have worked a long time in same firm or same jobs. (They are at risk of unemployment if they lose current jobs.)
- High skilled, well qualified workers who are overqualified for their jobs. (They represent a resource that could be better used.)

Study recommends...

- Society, individuals, companies all gain if we make better use of older workers.
- Risks for employers – serious skills shortages; for workers – long term unemployment if made redundant in one's 50s.
- Government, sector bodies and adult career service should promote a positive sense of future for older workers and value of self development

Building on older workers' self motivation

- Most older workers say they would like to work longer.
- Employers should develop training (and other management strategies) to motivate them to work longer.
- Making work seem purposeful – contributing to one's own future and to the community
- Encouraging social engagement – keeping people active members of work team or community;
- Work should continue to pay;

Developing preventative strategies

- Government policy and employers should preempt risk to older workers by early intervention, including.....
- Encouraging training and job mobility among low skilled employees in their late 40s/early 50s to help cope with redundancy in later life,
- Make more use of those who think themselves over skilled by early identification and training to encourage career development.
- Promote evidence of benefits of training older workers to employers and individuals

Age management interventions involving learning

- Creating a thirst for learning and building learning culture in organisation;
- Encouraging employee job mobility and creating expectation of continued learning;
- Focusing on learning methodologies more suited to older learners;
- Consider working conditions throughout work life so that learning is supported. (Flexible working, career breaks etc);
- Career counselling and reviews can play an important part especially in mid to late 40s;

Age management interventions involving learning (2)

- Using employee opinion leaders to galvanise those who fear learning (TUC Unionlearn example.)
- Give better publicity to all learning opportunities.
- Improve management practice to make better use of underused skills of older workers;
- Use approaches such as job rotation, secondments, tacit knowledge programmes, mentoring, senior apprenticeships, training for unemployed older people;
- An obligation to help each worker remain employable



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