

WEST LONDON NO WRONG DOOR PROGRAMME

THE SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT
SYSTEM FOR OVER 50S IN WEST LONDON

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Institute for Employment Studies (Institute for Employment Studies (IES) (employment-studies.co.uk)) was commissioned in January 2023 by West London Alliance (WLA) to conduct research into the labour market context, experiences and support needs of residents aged over 50 and out of work.

CONTEXT

This research forms part of the Mayor's **No Wrong Door Programme** which seeks to address the significant fragmentation of services in the skills and employment support system through the creation of 4 sub-regional Integration Hubs to support residents to better access appropriate employment support and upskilling opportunities, wherever they seek help across London.

The findings from this research will be used by the West London Integration Hub to support system improvements that meet the needs of residents aged over 50. Given the significant disadvantages in the labour market that older people often face, and the growth in worklessness amongst older people post-pandemic, supporting this cohort is a priority of the No Wrong Door programme.

The main focus of the research was in-depth interviews with residents themselves, which were supported by contextual analysis of Universal Credit and Census data, and by interviews with borough employment and skills leads.

Analysis of Universal Credit and Census data finds that there are generally higher rates of disadvantage among older people in West London Boroughs than in the country as a whole, with 15% of older people (those aged 50-64) claiming Universal Credit compared with 10% of those in England.

Rates of Universal Credit receipt among older people have grown in all boroughs, typically trebling since the eve of the pandemic.

Growth in UC receipt has been highest in Brent and Ealing (up by more than ten percentage points of the 50-64 population in each).



15%

of WL residents aged 50 – 64
claim Universal Credit
(compared with 10% nationally)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY cont'd...

Analysis of Census data on other demographic characteristics suggests that there is some correlation between areas with high rates of UC receipt and those with high shares of people with low qualifications, who cannot speak English well, are from ethnic minority groups, and/ or are disabled.

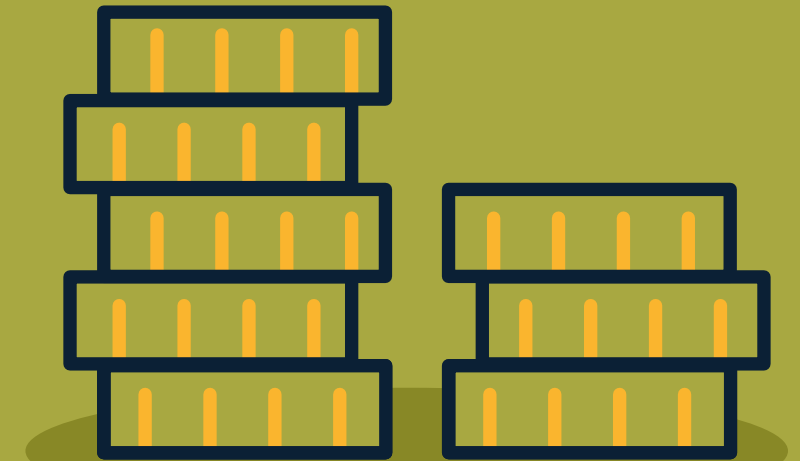
However, in each case these correlations are not particularly strong, so this data only gives us pointers as to some of the factors that are associated with – or could explain – higher levels of labour market disadvantage.

“I would like to access employment support and skills but I don’t know where to get that help. I would like to become more confident in my computer skills and get more technical training... I am self-motivated to get a job, but I want to know about where I can find work.”

Respondent

“There is a lot of evidence of digital exclusion. We have found that older groups do struggle with online applications. Some do find this very daunting, and for others there is the additional pressure of having to be tech savvy, and if they have not had much experience of filling out applications, then this could be a struggle.”

Borough employment and skills lead



9.2%

AVERAGE GROWTH OF
UNIVERSAL CREDIT CLAIMANTS

across all boroughs from
Feb 2020 to Dec 2022

UNDERSTANDING AND MEETING RESIDENTS' NEEDS

Interviews with residents and borough stakeholders identified 7 key themes.

ALMOST HALF OF ALL OLDER PEOPLE SURVEYED



suffered from a disability and/or a health condition

1. IDENTIFICATION, OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Many referrals into services were from Jobcentre Plus, with mixed experiences. Feedback was more positive where referrals were to services tailored to their needs; but less positive where referral was to larger scale, more generic provision.

Services were also often accessed via community routes – faith groups, libraries, or other Council services (including ‘no wrong door’ models), while boroughs talked about promoting services through websites, social media, newsletters and word-of mouth.

While referral pathways were felt to have improved post-pandemic, it was recognised that older people were often less likely to engage with services through more traditional routes – emphasising the need to work through wider services in more targeted ways.



Key themes from depth research with residents and borough partners

UNDERSTANDING AND MEETING RESIDENTS' NEEDS cont'd...

2. ORIENTATION TOWARDS WORK

Residents often wanted to move back into similar jobs to ones that they had previously worked in. However, there were strong preferences for more flexible work (more part-time, local and hybrid), job security and (where possible) less demanding work.

Nonetheless residents were not confident in finding these jobs, often as a result of direct experiences of discrimination. Many were demoralised or demotivated, and some internalised these biases – feeling 'obviously' less employable than others.

Stakeholders had similar views, and emphasised the importance of confidence building and support to maintain motivation. However, it was also felt that older people could have unrealistic expectations (on hours, security, flexibility and so on) and/ or may not understand what other jobs may suit their skills and experiences.

3. SPECIALIST SUPPORT TO PREPARE FOR WORK

Five key elements of more effective and specialised provision were identified:

- Longer-term, more consistent support – ideally with the same adviser
- Practical and tailored help – across job preparation, matching and brokerage
- A supportive and empathetic approach, to build and maintain confidence
- Strong employer relationships and connections, to help 'promote' older people;
- A focus on the whole person – including health, finances and caring needs

Borough level services were invariably seen as being better able to deliver most or all of these things, rather than Jobcentre Plus, as some of the larger-scale contracts such as Restart and JETS were felt to provide less personalised support and to focus on more rapid job entry. However, no services were providing targeted support for older people specifically, which was felt by residents and boroughs to be a gap.

4. SKILLS SUPPORT

Lack of access to appropriate digital skills support was identified as a key issue. In particular, residents wanted workplace-specific training rather than basic digital skills – so skills that would help them return to similar jobs that they had done in the past or to use digital technology day-to-day in new roles.

Related to this, older people were felt to be more likely to be at risk of digital exclusion, which could also affect their ability to apply for jobs online.

There also was often negative views on apprenticeships. This was partly this about perceptions (them being seen as something for younger people) but also in some instances reality – with one person reporting having left a highly pressured and very low paid 'apprenticeship' in a nursery. This combination of inflexibility, long hours and low pay clearly runs directly counter to what many older people wanted from work.



More than half of all respondents surveyed had been out of work for between 1 AND 3 YEARS

UNDERSTANDING AND MEETING RESIDENTS' NEEDS cont'd...

5. EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT, SUPPORT AND CHALLENGE

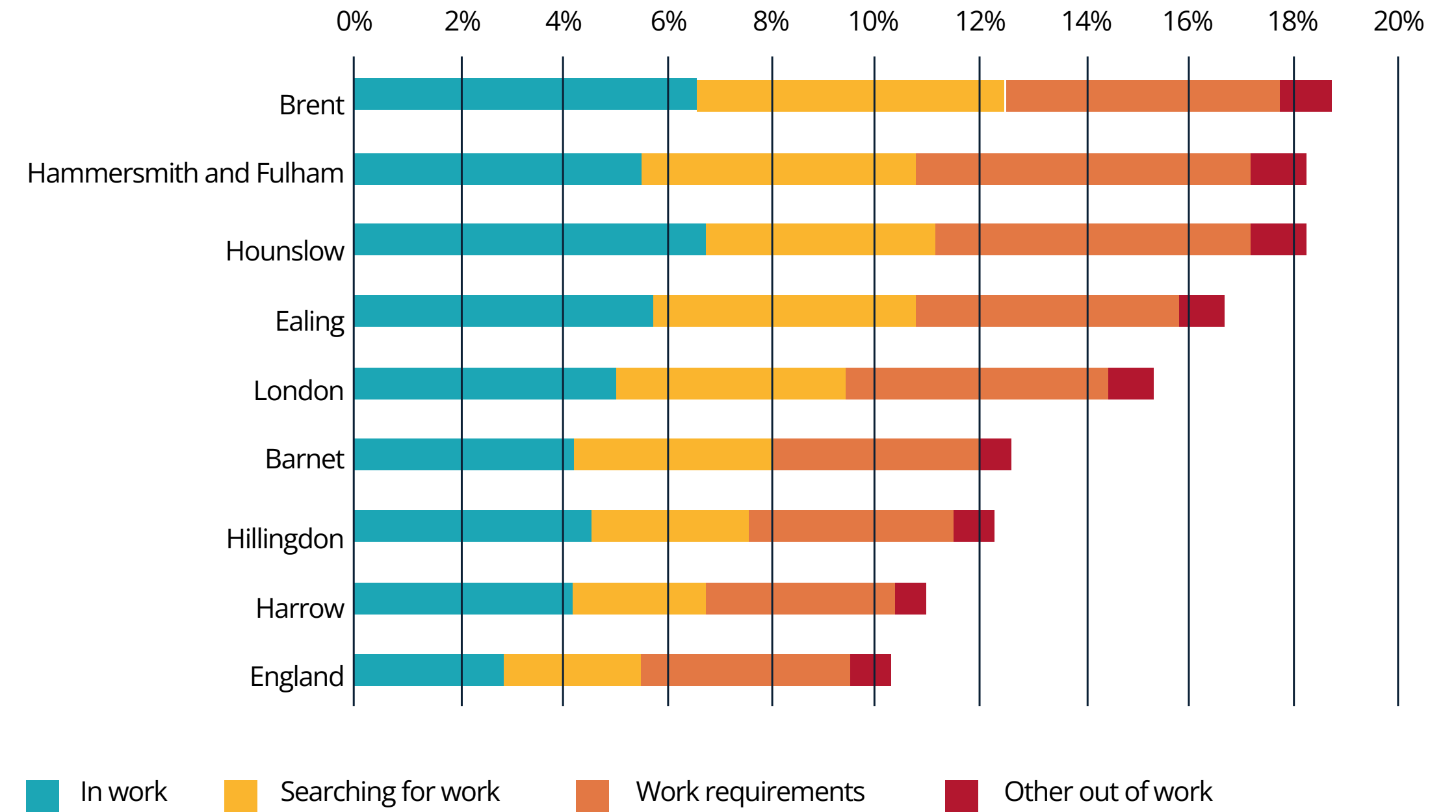
Experience and perceptions of employer discrimination was a consistent theme. Despite this, boroughs emphasised that current recruitment pressures meant some employers were starting to think differently about recruitment approaches and candidate pools.

Boroughs were often keen to take advantage of these opportunities, but recognised that more needed to be done; in particular in promoting the benefits of an age diverse workforce (and opening up opportunities specifically for older people).

6. ADDRESSING WIDER NEEDS

Three key wider needs were identified, around:

- **Long-term ill health.** This was often a key driver of leaving work, with evidence that both physical and mental health had deteriorated for many of those out of work. This then limited the sorts of jobs that people would consider applying for.
- **Costs of living.** It was reported that many more people needed help with managing household finances, and understanding how taking a job would affect their income (with it not always being clear that people would be significantly better off).
- **English language and literacy.** While less common, boroughs noted that many out of work residents needed help with the practical English language skills needed for a workplace – including around health and safety, understanding instructions and working in teams.



Proportion of population aged 50-64 claiming Universal Credit by conditionality group

UNDERSTANDING AND MEETING RESIDENTS' NEEDS cont'd...

7. CO-ORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

Taken together, these themes emphasise the importance of working effectively across services. There were a number of examples of this working well, notably in referral from employment support into skills or budgeting support; as well as a need and appetite to work more closely with health services in future.

One key area for improvement was around referral between employment support – with apparent duplication and perhaps over-provision of jobsearch support like CV writing and interview preparation; but gaps in more tailored support for things like reskilling, work trials or the more practical support referenced above.

There was often genuine hope among boroughs that the 'No Wrong Door' approach could help to address these issues and to work in more collaborative and complementary ways.

OLDER RESIDENTS PREFERRED:

Similar jobs to previous employment

Flexible work (more part-time, local and hybrid)

Job security

Less demanding work

“A big barrier is individual attitude...they fear they won't be hired. You see older workers getting pushed out for younger staff. This leads to a lack of confidence which becomes the biggest barrier.”

Borough Employment Lead Manager

“There are barriers from employers. They say it is cheaper to pay an under-25 year old...they don't look at the wealth of experience that someone over 50 has to offer...We do need more feedback from organisations about what more support can be given to them as well.”

Borough employment and skills programme manager



RECOMMENDATIONS

This research sets out a range of challenges in improving employment for older people, but also real opportunities. Especially with employers continuing to face recruitment difficulties, and with those commissioning and delivering services looking at how they can do more to raise participation among those outside of the labour market.



THREE QUARTERS

of all respondents were in receipt of universal credit, disability benefit or receiving a pension.

The report makes recommendations in five main areas as follows:

1. TAILORED, ONE-TO-ONE SUPPORT

- A focus on developing specialist 'streams' and lead advisers for working with older residents, within borough services
- Greater flexibility around delivery within these streams, to tailor support in line with the areas identified in this research
- A key focus on rapid skills assessment, mapping skills to jobs and building confidence

2. BUILDING ADVISER SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES

- Exploring scope for specialist training for advisers working most regularly with older people, perhaps using the Institute for Employability Professionals' accredited model
- Supporting development of a 'community of practice' for advisers working with older people
- Building in time for more outward-facing activity by specialist advisers – to engage and share learning with people delivering other employment services and with referral partners

3. MEETING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

Working to improve access to specialist support in the following areas:

- **Health** – with a particular focus on access to vocational rehabilitation support (e.g. support with self-management, understanding adjustments, action planning and counselling)
- **Digital skills** – tailored to workplace needs and with the scope for practical application through volunteering or placements
- **Job-specific skills** – and in particular, looking to fill the gap between short pre-employment training and full apprenticeships (this might include working to tailor Mayoral Academy provision to the needs of older people)
- **Apprenticeships** – designed to meet the needs of older people (for example on flexibility, pay and security)
- **English language and literacy** – again tailored to practical workplace application
- **Reducing costs of working** – for example by subsidising travel or paying wage top-ups via employer grants

RECOMMENDATIONS cont'd...

4. EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

- Developing resources for employer engagement, that can be used across services and that promote age-positive practices
- Co-ordinating employer engagement activity and conversations – for example by sharing contacts and vacancies; working to develop a joined-up employer offer; and if possible bringing together employers and older jobseekers (e.g. through specialist jobs fairs)
- Encouraging the public sector to lead by example – in job design, inclusive recruitment, flexible training and workplace support

5. CO-ORDINATION ACROSS SERVICES

Finally, we would recommend that the 'No Wrong Door' model could focus in particular on:

- Provision mapping – identifying available support and gaps in line with the themes in this research, and identifying which can offer tailored support to older people
- Referral partnerships – focusing on improving in-person outreach (via co-location with services that older people use) and building partnerships with JCP '50 Plus Champions'
- Effective case management – exploring the scope for a more integrated approach to case management across services, to help address risks around duplication and gaps in support

NEXT STEPS

The No Wrong Door Programme is funded to run until March 2025 and we are committed to implementing the recommendations of this research to improve the outcomes for our over 50s.

Work is underway on an Inclusive Recruitment Guide for employers, which will be followed up with bespoke support to help them embed inclusive recruitment and retention good practice. If you know of any local businesses who would benefit from this support, please refer them to wla@ealing.gov.uk. We are working with **Centre for Ageing Better** to upskill our front-line colleagues so they are better able to support the over 50s.

For further information, or to share any ideas and good practice, please contact wla@ealing.gov.uk.

“No Wrong Door could make more people aware of what is working and projects and programmes that are working. That is what we are interested in learning about, rather than trying to start everything from scratch ourselves.”

Borough lead for employment and skills



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