



**Age Equality – Untapped Potential: Enhancing Age Friendly Service  
Provision in the Irish Hospitality Sector**

**Funded by the Equality Authority**



**Report by**

**Tourism Research Centre  
Dublin Institute of Technology  
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## **Background and Context**

'Say No to Ageism Week' is an initiative of the Equality Authority, the Health Service Executive and the National Council on Ageing and Older People. The aim of the week is to promote new awareness and understanding of ageism and of how ageism excludes older people from participating in and contributing to society. Public awareness activities to raise awareness of ageism and to stimulate practical action to promote age friendly practices within organisations are being developed as part of the week. Practical action to promote age friendly practices for older people as customers and employees is a key part of the initiative.

### **Ageism**

Ageism is embedded in Irish society, in our assumptions, relationships and institutional practices. Ageist attitudes towards older people are rooted firmly in negative stereotypes and include false assumptions which lead to discrimination. In addition to raising awareness and changing the way of thinking in relation to age, there is a need to inform new practice and link attitude with action. Such initiatives represent good practice, yield a business benefit and enhance the experience of both customers and employees.

### **Barriers in Accessing Goods and Services**

Many older people encounter barriers in accessing goods and services. Many of these barriers can be resolved by simple, practical and reasonable measures. Some common barriers include:

- Attitudinal barriers due to a lack of understanding regarding ageing and older people;
- Communication barriers due to a lack of accessible and user friendly information material;
- Physical barriers where older people have a disability;
- Service barriers where the specific needs of older people are not taken into account in the design and delivery of services.

### **Rationale for Action: Why Address Ageism?**

Action by providers of services to develop age friendly services is good for older people and good for business. The benefits include:

- Tapping into the growing share of the market place occupied by older people
- Opportunities for goods/service development, enhancing business competitiveness and attracting an ever wider customer base
- Compliance with the Equal Status Acts which prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education on nine grounds including the ground of age

## **Age Friendly Service Provision**

Age friendly provision of goods and services is provision that:

- Does not discriminate against older people and others on the grounds of age;
- Takes account of the specific needs, experience and situation of older people and other age groups in the design and delivery of goods and services;
- Makes reasonable accommodation for older people with disabilities;
- Contributes to promoting equality for older people and other age groups including through positive action measures allowed under equality legislation;
- Communicates a commitment to age equality out into the wider community that is served by the organisation.

*(Source: Towards Age Friendly Provision of Goods and Services, Equality Authority)*

## **Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2008**

The Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2008 promote equality and prohibit discrimination, sexual harassment, harassment and victimisation in the provision of goods and services, accommodation and education. The Acts cover nine grounds including an age ground.

Under the Equal Status Acts, organisations are required to provide 'reasonable accommodation' for people with disabilities subject to a nominal cost exemption. Such reasonable accommodation may involve for example, providing special treatment or facilities in circumstances where without these, it would be impossible or unduly difficult to avail of the goods, services, accommodation etc. Positive action measures are permitted under the legislation to ensure full equality in practice across the nine grounds.

## **Framework for Action: Principles and Guidelines towards Age Friendly Service Provision**

Nine different initiatives provide starting points for age friendly provision of goods and services. These initiatives are intended to support age friendly service provision and are designed to be adapted and tailored to the particular circumstances of different organisations.

### **1. Develop staff awareness about ageism and equality for older people**

This involves supporting staff to explore their attitudes to older people and their understanding of the needs, situation and experience of older people, through formal equality training.

### **2. Take steps to ensure older customers are treated with dignity and respect**

This measure essentially involves treating older people with courtesy and in a manner that acknowledges their intelligence, needs and aspirations and respects their independence. Put simply, it involves valuing older people.

Steps include

- Treating older customers as individuals;
- Including older customers in decision making;
- Communicating with older customers as equals;
- Using non-ageist language;
- Preventing harassment of customers on the basis of their age.

### **3. Consult with older customers and organisations of older people**

This involves a dialogue that gives older people a space to express their needs and what they want from the service provided, to evaluate the extent to which current service provision is meeting their needs and preferences and to shape the design of new services and delivery methods. This consultation is a two way process and benefits from the inclusion of older people's organisations, who can provide a wealth of information, expertise and experience, in addition to being valuable forum to engage older people and also play important advocacy roles.

### **4. Age proof or audit provision of goods and services for their relevance and availability to older people**

An audit of the provision of goods and services involves checking for and eliminating barriers that preclude or diminish the availability of the goods and services to older people.

An audit should consider the following:

- Policies and practices;
- Service delivery structures;
- Information material used;
- Decision making processes.

### **5. Take steps to ensure goods and services provided are accessible to older people**

This involves considering the physical infrastructure, transport services and financial constraints which can limit or block access for older people. Some of

these issues are outside the direct control of providers but steps can be taken to limit their impact.

**6. Provide user friendly information to older customers**

Accurate, relevant and accessible information on the goods and services available and how to obtain these will support their uptake by older people, particularly if available in places where older people live or meet. There are a number of simple yet highly effective ways in which providers of goods and services can develop user friendly and appropriate information, to meet the needs of older customers.

These include:

- Consultation with and involvement of older people, identifying what is needed and preparing and checking it;
- Training staff to ensure that the full range of information is available and to support face to face dissemination;
- Using images and language that reflect the diversity of age groups at which the service is aimed;
- Disseminating information in places where older people live.

**7. Target older people through the development of specific goods and services to meet their particular needs**

Targeting is a form of positive action which is allowed under the equality legislation to promote equality of opportunity.

**8. Employ older people**

The employment of older people is important in its own right. Moreover, the presence and participation of older staff can enhance the relevance, attractiveness and accessibility of goods and services to older customers.

*(Source: Towards Age Friendly Provision of Goods and Services, Equality Authority)*

## **Enhancing Age Friendly Service Provision in the Irish Hospitality Sector**

The Irish Hospitality Institute, in partnership with the Equality Authority, has undertaken an initiative to enhance age friendly service provision in the Irish hospitality sector. Launched in May 2008, this practical action has focused on developing and implementing an action programme on age friendly service provision. The initiative aims to enhance the quality of customer service to older people in the hospitality sector in an environment of respect and dignity that is responsive to the particular needs of older people.

This initiative on age friendly service provision is part of a wider programme of activities launched in 2007 by the Irish Hospitality Institute, in conjunction with the Equality Authority, aimed at supporting the integration of equality and diversity into employment and customer service in the hospitality sector and ultimately, setting a road map for a sectoral approach to equality and diversity.

### **IHI Initiative on Age Friendly Service Provision**

Among the activities organised during 2008 by the IHI as part of this initiative were the following:

- The initiative was highlighted at a number of IHI events during 2008, including the IHI AGM and conference, 22<sup>nd</sup> May and the IHI Founders Banquet, 27<sup>th</sup> November;
- A free learning network event was held for IHI members on 1<sup>st</sup> July in the Conrad Hotel, Dublin – ‘*Age Equality – Untapped Potential*’ - to support age awareness and skills for age friendly service provision among IHI members;
- ‘Say No to Ageism’ posters were distributed for use by IHI members in their establishments;
- ‘Towards Age Friendly Service Provision’, a publication offering guidance on developing age-friendly services, was distributed to IHI members;
- Training to stimulate and promote good practice in age-friendly approaches in relation to employment and customer service was provided to IHI members;
- Development of an age-friendly guideline for the hospitality sector;
- Activities by IHI members to further develop age friendly service provision;
- Action programme was also highlighted in a number of IHI press releases, IHI website and industry publications including Hotel and Catering Review and Hotel and Restaurant Times.

The document seeks to detail and review activities developed by IHI members during the year and to promote and support good practice in age friendly service provision by IHI members.

## **What IHI members can do**

In the course of 2008, the IHI initiative on Age Friendly Service Provision profiled a series of actions to be undertaken in the following core areas:

### **Communication**

- Organise meetings with local organisations of older people to explore age friendly service provision and to identify needs specific to older people and how best to meet those needs;
- Review marketing strategies to further enhance the profile of older customers and to ensure effective communication with older people;
- Develop initiatives to target older people in the dissemination of marketing materials that are accessible and user friendly.

### **Training**

- Include a training module on age equality in staff training;
- Organise events for management and staff to support age awareness and skills to promote equality for older people;
- Develop materials on age friendly service provision to support staff in their work.

### **Service Design**

- Ensure that employees have the necessary training to respond to the age diversity of your customer base;
- Audit existing provision to identify and remove barriers, physical and otherwise, to quality service provision for older people throughout your organisation;
- Develop and provide specially designed services which are appropriate to and meet the needs of older people ;
- Make adjustments to your premises – develop clearer signage etc.;
- Provide for special dietary requirements e.g. medical (e.g. diabetic, coeliac/gluten free diets)
- Communicate with employees and customers the availability of special services of older people

## **Employment**

- Use an age diverse workforce to cater for an age diverse customer base e.g. have older employees liaise with older customers. An older, long term employee profile infuses the character of hotels and is a valued asset, while also bringing its own challenges;
- Raise awareness about accessibility issues with subcontractors and maintenance teams

### **Steps in Addressing Age Discrimination in Hotels**

In order to reduce age discrimination in hotel workplaces, managers should:

- Ensure age neutrality in recruitment and selection;
- Develop and implement a recruitment strategy which uses a broad range of methods;
- Develop and implement special initiatives to attract older workers into the workforce;
- Collect and make use of statistics on the age of employees in the workforce and the age of applicants who were short listed, rejected or appointed;
- Offer age awareness training to all employees and managers;
- Train line managers on equality issues and how they should interpret and implement the workplaces' equal opportunities and/or managing diversity policy;
- Offer specific IT training for older workers;
- Develop and implement a promotions policy which is age neutral and encourage older workers to apply for promotion;
- Offer a greater range of flexible work patterns to all workers and offer greater flexibility in terms of retirement;
- Ensure age neutrality where redundancies is concerned;
- Include a specific mention of age in the organisation's EO or managing diversity policy;
- Establish and support an age diversity work group to advise on age related matters;
- Develop and implement policy and practice on developing an age diverse workforce;
- Ensure that all managers are aware of age discrimination legislation and other major initiatives to address age discrimination on the workplace and that these are translated into improved policy and practice;
- Measure the effects of the organisation's EO and /or managing diversity policies.

Employment conditions and opportunities for older workers have undoubtedly improved over the last twenty years. However, there is still much to achieve, especially in the hospitality industry which is particularly ageist (Clark, 2000). Many businesses have realised the benefits of employing older workers. It is time that hospitality businesses followed suit.

*Source: Jenkins (2007) Age Discrimination in Hotel Workplaces: HRM Practices and their Effects on the Employment of Older Workers*

## **Age Equality – Untapped Potential: Establishing the Agenda**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008, the IHI hosted an interactive and participative learning network event in Dublin, focusing on enhancing age friendly service provision within the hospitality sector. Participants at the event were composed largely of HR professionals drawn from hotel, catering and hospitality recruitment and services organisations in the main. Also in attendance were a number of consultants actively involved in the National Framework for Equal Opportunities at the Level of the Enterprise SME scheme, which seeks to assist SMEs to implement a planned and systematic approach to equality in their workplaces.

The purpose to this event was threefold:

- **To highlight the benefits for IHI members of developing age-friendly service provision for older customers**

Research<sup>1</sup> indicates that a comprehensive approach to equality and diversity (including age friendly service provision), which goes beyond legal compliance, is good for business performance and good for the customer.

- From the business perspective, the presence of equality and diversity leads to a quantifiable increase in labour productivity, innovation (product and service development) and reduced employee turnover;
- From a customer perspective, it enables the business meet the needs of diverse customers, expand the customer base and positively affect staff morale, which subsequently has a positive impact on labour productivity.

However, the presence of equality and diversity in itself is insufficient to realise these benefits – there is a need for comprehensive planned and systematic proactive strategies, which consider the practical implications of equality and diversity in the workplace.

- **To create awareness of ageism and how ageism presents barriers to quality customer service and employment for older people**

An interactive age awareness workshop, led by Age and Opportunity<sup>2</sup>, sought to raise awareness of ageism and challenge discrimination and the factors causing discrimination. Participants were encouraged to explore themes regarding aging, perceptions of aging and the role of language in communicating and reinforcing these perceptions.

- **To provide an opportunity for diverse range of participants to network with each other**

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<sup>1</sup> Monks, K. (2007) *The Business Impact of Equality and Diversity: The International Evidence*, Equality Authority and National Centre for Partnership and Performance

Flood, P. (2008) *New Models of High Performance Work Systems: The Business Case for Strategic HRM, Partnership and Diversity and Equality Systems*, Equality Authority and National Centre for Partnership and Performance

<sup>2</sup> Age and Opportunity are the national agency working to challenge negative attitudes to ageing and older people and to promote greater participation by older people in society

## What one organisation involved has already done to promote age-friendly services

### **Dunboyne Castle Hotel and Spa**

- Sales Team circulated special details for Seoid Spa to Active Retirement Groups
- Over 55 offers on website [www.dunboynecastlehotel.com/offers](http://www.dunboynecastlehotel.com/offers)
- Planning to include a section of ageism training into existing diversity training

### **Case Example - Organisation outside Tourism & Hospitality**

#### **B&Q: Equality for Employees and Customers**

B&Q is the number one DIY retailer in Europe and the third largest in the world, with more than 60 stores opened internationally. With a turnover of £3.9billion, B&Q employs over 39,000 employees worldwide, over a quarter of who are over 50 years of age.

B&Q has achieved a major breakthrough in recognising the value of employing older in their stores as business results demonstrate they are more attuned to the needs of their customers, resulting in improved customer service.

An independent survey by Warwick University published two years after B&Q trialed an over 50s only recruitment policy in one store showed that in practically every respect – customer service, short term absenteeism, staff turnover and sales – the store's staff outperformed other stores and the new recruitment policy was directly linked with a profit increase of 18%. Improved customer service was identified as a clear business benefit to employing people who reflect the customer profile and older workers have a great rapport with customers.

Among the age related initiatives at B&Q's include the development of an age neutral working policy, removing the retirement age and any age criteria in relation to recruitment or benefits. B&Q also use age diverse case studies wherever possible and training and development programmes and promotional opportunities are available to everyone. These initiatives are supported by flexible working arrangements.

## **Organisations**

Equality Authority, 2 Clonmel Street, Dublin 2

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1890 245 545 (Lo-Call)  
01 417 3385 (Text Phone)  
f 01 417 3366  
e [info@equality.ie](mailto:info@equality.ie)  
w [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie)

A full list of Equality Authority publications, including on age-friendly services, is available on the [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie) website.

Irish Hospitality Institute, 8 Herbert Lane, Dublin 2

t 01 662 4790  
f 01 662 4789  
e [info@ihi.ie](mailto:info@ihi.ie)  
w [www.ihi.ie](http://www.ihi.ie)

## **Training and Consultancy**

### *SME (Small and Medium Enterprises) Framework*

The European Social Fund provides funding, through the Equality Authority's Equality Mainstreaming Unit for an equality support scheme for SMEs. The scheme offers up to five days free consultancy support on employment equality and/or customer service.

### *Work-Life Balance Scheme*

The National Framework Committee for Work-Life Balance Policies offers a free consultancy support scheme to SMEs to enable them to develop and implement work-life balance arrangements that are suitable for the needs of their businesses and employees and that improve productivity, retain skilled personnel and create a positive working environment.

Details of both schemes are available from the Equality Authority at [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie) or at [info@equality.ie](mailto:info@equality.ie).

### *Age and Opportunity Training Scheme*

Age and Opportunity offers free ageism sensitivity training to organisations through its Agewise training module. The training highlights the negative impact of ageism on organisations and individuals and debunks myths about older people.

Details of the training can be obtained from Fiona Holohan, Age and Opportunity (tel. 01 8057709).