

## Grey matter

A survey out this month from Age Concern shows that 30 per cent of people believe that ageism is getting worse and that 75 per cent of people believe it won't get better over the next five years. This latest survey should act as a wakeup call to employers: those who think they will be able to continue to treat older staff (or potential staff) as second-class citizens are in for a rude awakening, as age discrimination legislation comes into place in the UK from 1 October 2006.

While many HR managers and employers may agree that age-neutral recruitment and employment retention is a worthwhile sentiment, its implementation in practical terms can be extremely difficult. Employers need to adapt to the spirit not just the letter of the law. By developing a culture of change, discrimination can be overcome. Many employers already recognise the benefits of employing both older and younger people, but we must help all employers to appreciate and achieve this.

The culture of change should extend beyond important issues such as recruitment policy to embrace the workplace itself. Just as recent years have seen workplaces adapt to accommodate the needs of specific demographic groups, notably the greater provision of crèche facilities and child-friendly work practices for working parents, the future will see us adapt to the needs of a larger number of 'third-age' workers. Current Disability legislation will go some way to meeting the varying needs of a more diverse range of workers, but the underlying driver of change will be our ability to open our minds and design for a greater variety of people. This is likely to have implications for all aspects of workplace design ranging from access through to signage, lighting and acoustics.

The agenda for change in this area is already being shaped by bodies such as the Helen Hamlyn Foundation at the Royal College of Art whose exceptional work on inclusive design under Jeremy Myerson is already influencing the way we look at such matters. I would expect that the future will see other associations champion this important issue. There is a role here for people like the British Institute of Facilities Management, RIBA and the British Council for Offices to offer clear guidance to their members on how to design and manage grey-friendly workplaces. We all stand to gain from designing for as large a part of our population as possible.

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