
Survey of Jobseekers Aged 50+

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Introduction

This is the second TAEN survey of jobseekers aged 50+. In our first survey, published in October 2008, we explained the reasons for our special interest in this cohort of jobseekers. Putting it briefly, TAEN's field of interest focuses on people in mid and later life and the labour market. The special problems and issues faced by the 50+ jobseeker have been our concern for the 11 years of TAEN's existence.

Our initial reasons for embarking on this survey were simply to capture experience. We are aware of many of the problems and issues which are raised directly by callers to our information line or via messages from visitors to our website. The 50+ general public tell us every day of difficulties in trying to get work when you are 'of a certain age'. Since we cannot often capture isolated conversations, no matter how moving or poignant they may be, we hoped that the essence of some of these comments would come across in our survey report. This was, and remains, the fundamental purpose of our research: to obtain a statistical picture supported by individual comments and examples.

Reflecting on the essence of our research findings, however, it seems clear to us that attitudes towards working later in life have been changing. Much of this is down to the obvious factors of personal finance that influence people's decisions to work later. The harsh reality of the recession has caused many more people to need to work longer, though paradoxically it is harder for them actually to get work given the tighter labour market affecting jobseekers generally.

The statistics may say that people aged over 50 are not presently suffering disproportionately from increasing unemployment, but this does not tell the whole story. Beneath the figures one has to take account of the many more people who *would like to work* but are finding it harder to remain in the labour market.

With these changes in mind we decided to continue the survey during the recession. Revisiting this area now some nine months later, we begin to see how the daily experiences of older jobseekers have been changing as the economy has unwound. With the two samples of jobseekers aged 50+ (the first gathered in the period between January and September 2008, and the second in the period from October 2008 to May 2009), we have *before and during the recession* comparator groups.

Some of our comparisons show jobseekers over 50 reporting on consistent, durable experiences. Reports of the later cohort confirm many, indeed most of our earlier findings. We also find however that there are some differences. Whilst these are few in number, they are a helpful window on the real world of looking for work as an older person in the downturn.

Summary

Impact of the recession: key differences between reporting periods

There was little difference in the responses to some of the survey questions between the two reporting periods (January to September 2008 and October to May 2009). However in others there were changes which we believe reflect the impact of the recession.

As the economy deteriorated, we saw an increase in people in their 50s and a corresponding decrease in people in their 60s responding to the survey. We also saw a rise in the proportion of male respondents (63 per cent), up nine percentage points from the earlier period which we reported on in October 2008.

The number of respondents who said they were desperate to get a job rose sharply, up from 30 per cent to 39 per cent. And those who said they were looking for work but not worried dropped from 26 per cent to 19 per cent.

As expected, there was a sharp increase in the percentage who had given up work as a result of redundancy, up from 32 per cent in the earlier period to 47 per cent. There was a small decrease in those who had accepted an offer to retire early (4 per cent versus 7 per cent) and a fall of five percentage points in those giving up work due to personal circumstances (11 per cent, down from 16 per cent). Unsurprisingly, there was little difference between the periods in the numbers who said they had given up work because they had reached their employer's normal retirement age or for health reasons.

The percentage of respondents saying they were seen as too experienced, over-qualified or too old by employers, frequently interpreted as evidence of ageist attitudes, rose in the later period. Seventy-two per cent in the recent period felt they were seen as too old, up from 63 per cent in the earlier period; and 48 per cent said they were seen as too experienced or over qualified, up from 42 per cent. A smaller percentage believed their skills did not match those required (24 per cent, down from 27 per cent). Fewer felt the experience required did not match their own (21 per cent, down from 25 per cent).

More respondents in the later period agreed that employers put too much emphasis on qualifications rather than skills and experience (64 per cent, up from 60 per cent) and that they had the right skills for today's labour market (74 per cent, up from 67 per cent).

A greater proportion said they knew where to go for advice and assistance in finding work (44 per cent, up from 38 per cent) and fewer in the later period said there were not sure (22 per cent, down from 28 per cent). The number of respondents who sought assistance in finding work rose marginally from 85 per cent to 89 per cent. The most striking change lay in the numbers using private employment agencies (70 per cent, up from 52 per cent) but more were also seeking help and advice from a range of other sources, including Jobcentre Plus, professional bodies and personal contacts.

Overall, respondents in the later period reported they were less satisfied with the quality of assistance they received. Only 12 per cent rated it as "good or excellent", down from 15 per cent. More than half (53 per cent) felt it had been "not

very good or poor” (up from 46 per cent) while 34 per cent rated it as “OK”, down from 39 per cent.

And although there was little difference in the percentage of those who were aware of the legislation covering age discrimination in employment, fewer (57 per cent, down from 63 per cent) said they understood it or the rights it gave them; and more (37 per cent, up from 34 per cent) were not sure. A much larger proportion in the later period disagreed with the statement that *age discrimination legislation had helped older people seeking work*. Nearly half (45 per cent) disagreed with the statement compared with 31 per cent in the earlier period. Only one in ten believed that it had helped while 45 per cent were unsure (down from 55 per cent).

There was an increase in the numbers reporting they had experienced age discrimination in the workplace and in those who believed they had experienced age discrimination in seeking employment (55 per cent, up from 50 per cent earlier). Only 7 per cent could say they had not, down from 10 per cent.

Other comments

Quite apart from our ‘compare and contrast’ exercise of before and during the recession, there are a number of general points that have to be made about the survey taken as a whole. The survey responses suggest that difficulties are *routinely* experienced by those who seek to return to work in their 50s and 60s. Aggregating the responses from both cohorts, 45 per cent of our sample said that they were seen as “too experienced” or “over-qualified” and 68 per cent said they were seen quite simply as “too old” and this despite the fact that 70 per cent of survey respondents were in their 50s.

If the recession has made finding work difficult for all age groups, it seems clear that those with low skills are particularly badly placed. Our survey looked for evidence that the particular difficulties of older jobseekers could be attributed to low skills in this way but we found nothing to support this hypothesis. Had our sample been composed of an evenly distributed cross section of older workers, one might have found some justification for this view.

However, participants were in fact skewed in the direction of better than average qualification levels: 32 per cent were degree educated and a further 22 per cent had professional qualifications with only 17 per cent being without formal qualifications of any kind. With positive work orientations and generally good qualifications, it seems reasonable to assume that high proportions should have been easier to place in jobs; the evidence did not suggest that this was in fact the case.

The reality was that high proportions of our respondents were worried, even desperate, about getting jobs. Forty-five per cent had been looking for work for more than six months with over a quarter of this number having searched for work for more than two years. Skills qualifications may indeed have been one factor among others but 62 per cent of respondents felt that employers placed too much emphasis on *qualifications* rather than *experience* and many implied in their comments that they felt their experience was every bit as valid as a formal written qualification.

This impression is confirmed by the 71 per cent of respondents who felt they had “the right skills for today’s labour market”. Opinion was divided among respondents over whether they had “every opportunity to upgrade their skills to the

needs of today's employers", 41 per cent believing this to be the case and 34 per cent stating the contrary. It would seem then that while there is recognition here that improving skill sets could make a difference to the job prospects of a third of respondents, skills and qualifications for the job are not the whole picture.

Considering other factors leading to problems obtaining work, lack of knowledge of where to go for help was a problem affecting a surprising 34 per cent of respondents. (A further quarter were not certain in their responses on this question.) Stronger, clearer pointers to sources of advice and guidance would seem to be potentially helpful to older and mid life jobseekers.¹

On the other hand, 87 per cent of respondents said that they had indeed sought assistance in their job search activities from organisations and personal contacts with a clear majority of these (65 per cent) citing Jobcentre Plus as their source of support, while 61 per cent said they had gone to a private employment agency.² Only 14 per cent of respondents rated the quality of support received from their chosen source as "good or excellent"; 36 per cent said it was "OK" while half reported that they considered the advice source rendered "not very good or poor" support.

A large majority (89 per cent) were aware of the existence of age discrimination legislation, with 60 per cent of the total being aware of roughly what it comprised and the rights it conferred. On the other hand, just 12 per cent said they thought the legislation had helped older people to get work. Only 9 per cent could say they had never experienced age discrimination while looking for work. And although half (52 per cent) believed they had experienced discrimination, a great many pointed out how difficult it is to prove in the recruitment process.

With 40 per cent of our sample stating they had experienced age discrimination at work (and a further 33 per cent being "unsure" on the point), one is obliged to observe that for older jobseekers age discrimination seems one of the most significant of barriers that they face in returning to the workforce.

Overall, the recession has seen an increase in the proportions of our cohort seeking work for between three and 12 months. Nearly a third more 50+ jobseekers are "desperate" to get work than before the recession. Fifty per cent more became unemployed because of redundancy, though fewer accepted an offer to retire early. A third fewer decided (or were obliged) to leave because of personal circumstances. More felt that they were unable to find work because they were seen as "too experienced or overqualified" or simply because they were seen as "too old." (Both statements are, of course, examples of thinly veiled age discrimination.)

More 50 plus jobseekers since the downturn felt that employers put too much emphasis on qualifications rather than skills while more felt that at the same time they actually had *the right* skills for today's labour market. At the same time, more 50 plus jobseekers know where to go for advice and assistance in finding work (44 per cent, *up* from 38 per cent) and more were seeking assistance in finding work (89 per cent compared with 85 per cent). Many more (70 per cent compared with

¹ TAEN in fact provides such a signposting service and though we only provide details of organisations we believe to be relevant, we are conscious that our own database of support organisations is far from complete.

² Some appear to have visited both.

52 per cent) had sought advice from private employment agencies but all sources of advice and support were cited more frequently post the downturn.

At the same time, assessments of the quality of advice suggest service has possibly suffered under pressure. There was some decline in positive assessments and an increase in the “not very good or poor” rating (from 46 per cent to 53 per cent post the downturn). Responses indicating that individuals believed they had suffered discrimination in employment rose by eight per cent whilst those believing they had suffered discrimination in applying for work increased by 10 per cent.

This then is the picture we gain from our statistical snapshot. To understand more, one should read the comments of participants in the survey.

Survey results

Age of respondents

Not surprisingly, two-thirds of those responding (70%) were aged 50-59 but almost one in ten were over 65, the default retirement age adopted by many employers since the introduction of the Age Regulations.

In the more recent period (October 2008 to May 2009), there was an increase in people in their 50s and a corresponding decrease in people in their 60s responding to the survey.

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
50-59	70%	72%	67%
60-64	22%	21%	23%
65 and over	9%	7%	10%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	765	400	369

Gender

More than half the respondents (58 per cent) were male. Interestingly, we saw a rise in the number of male respondents in the later period (63 per cent), up nine percentage points from the earlier period.

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Male	58%	63%	54%
Female	42%	37%	46%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	764	398	370

Qualifications

Older workers tend to have fewer qualifications than their younger counterparts but those completing our questionnaire did not reflect this. An online survey naturally precludes those without IT skills. The survey sample appears skewed towards the more professionally qualified section of the workforce. More than half the respondents (54 per cent) had a degree or professional qualification. There was a small increase in respondents with A Levels or the equivalent in the second reporting period, up from 10 per cent to 14 per cent.

What qualifications do you have?

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
No formal qualifications	17%	17%	17%
5 GCSEs or equivalent	17%	16%	18%
A levels or equivalent	12%	14%	10%
Degree or equivalent	32%	31%	32%
Professional qualification	22%	23%	23%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	762	400	366

Length of time looking for work

We wanted to know how long respondents had been seeking employment. More than a third (36 per cent) had been looking for work for up to three months but 26 per cent had been looking for a year or more. In the second period of the survey, the number of respondents who had been looking for work for up to three months fell slightly but those who had been looking for between three months and a year rose. The number of respondents looking for more than a year declined, however this may reflect fewer long-term unemployed people searching for employment opportunities in the recession.

How long have you been looking for work?

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Up to 3 months	36%	32%	39%
3 – 6 months	19%	22%	16%
6 – 12 months	19%	23%	15%
More than a year	14%	13%	15%
More than 2 years	12%	10%	15%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	752	395	361

Feelings about getting work

We also asked respondents how they felt about getting a job. Forty-three per cent said that they were worried about not working and 35 per cent that they were desperate to get a job. Just over a fifth (22 per cent) said they were looking but not concerned. And while there are many reasons why older people want to work, most respondents who commented cited financial worries as their principal motivation.

In the later reporting period, the number of respondents who said they were desperate to get a job rose sharply, up from 30 per cent to 39 per cent. And those who said they were looking for work but not worried, dropped from 21 per cent to 16 per cent.

How do you feel about getting a job?

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Looking but not that bothered	4%	3%	5%
Keen but not worried	18%	16%	21%
Worried about not working	43%	42%	44%
Desperate to get a job	35%	39%	30%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	761	399	366

Comments

“We lost a good two-thirds final salary pension scheme in 2001-02. We are in our late 50s and currently have no spare income to save. I have no job. My husband earns half of what he used to. We are learning to live differently and worried how we will live in retirement.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“I don’t want to claim UK benefits as I have not fully contributed. I just want a job – any job to enable a survival standard of living.” (Woman aged over 65)

“I desperately need to find work but can’t.” (Man aged over 65)

“All I want is to find rewarding challenging employment to get me out of this downward spiral of debt and having to rely on state handouts.” (Man aged 50 -59)

“I am bored with being at home all the while. At my age I require employment now. It will be too late in one or two years’ time.” (Woman aged 60-64)

“I am very unhappy to be out of work and very nervous about my financial position.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“My plans have gone awry. I needed to work to pay the mortgage on a property in Spain until some rent was coming in but now I have a mortgage and no income.” (Man aged 60-64)

“I cannot claim benefits or help because my house is worth too much but in the current market I can’t sell it. I have supported my family for than a year without any income or support.” (Man aged 59)

“Self-employed chartered surveyor. Due to credit crunch turnover has dropped by 70 per cent putting family life under serious strain.” (Man aged 50-59)

“My husband and I are in a desperate financial situation where I HAVE to find some kind of employment.” (Woman aged 50-59)

*“I am the only wage earner within the household as my husband is disabled. I need to work otherwise we will be living in poverty and that is not right.”
(Woman aged 50-59)*

“Like a lot of other older unemployed people I am using my savings to supplement my living costs. These will not last for ever so at some point I shall have to throw myself on the mercy of the State.” (Man aged 60-64)

“I shared a business with another who, at 37, decided he was unable to continue. He was in charge of sales which left me high and dry. I am totally desperate to obtain relevant employment or I will lose everything which stresses me out and gives me sleepless nights. I worry about my wife and I desperately don’t want to lose our house.” (Man aged 60-64)

“I still have a fairly large mortgage.” (Woman aged 60-64)

*“I feel I would be extremely depressed if I had to be at home permanently.”
(Woman aged 61)*

Reasons for giving up work

We wanted to know why people had given up work. The commonest reason was redundancy, with 40 per cent of respondents citing it. The other largest single reason was personal circumstances (13 per cent). Twenty-eight per cent said they gave up work for ‘other’ reasons, mentioning the ending of temporary contracts and the failure of their businesses, in particular. Encouragingly for this age group, only 7 per cent said they had given up work because of a health condition. Our sample, by definition, is drawn from those who want to work and it is therefore inevitable that a higher than average proportion were made redundant. In contrast, those with who quit for health reasons might be unlikely to seek work, and this would tend to produce a smaller proportion answering our survey questionnaire.

In the October 2008 to May 2009 period, there was a sharp increase over the earlier period in the proportion of respondents who had given up work as a result of redundancy, up 15 percentage points to 47 per cent. There was a fall in those who had given up work due to personal circumstances (11 per cent, down from 16 per cent).

Why did you give up work?

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Redundancy	40%	47%	32%
Reached employer’s retirement age	6%	5%	6%
Accepted offer to retire early	6%	4%	7%
Personal circumstances	13%	11%	16%
Health	7%	7%	8%
Other	28%	27%	31%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	756	400	360

'Other' reasons for giving up work

"I have only been offered temporary assignments." (Woman aged 50-59)

"I ran my own shop/post office. The post office shut. Custom vanished."
(Man aged 50-59)

"My last job was outsourced to India." (Man aged 60-64)

"Bankruptcy." (Woman aged 50-59)

"One-man business in decline." (Man aged 60-64)

"My partner is the main earner, had to relocate with her." (Man aged 50-59)

"Loss of free-lance opportunities through location move with new marriage."
(Woman aged over 65)

"Self-employed over the past 15 years. The last contract ended in November 2007. Still nothing!" (Woman aged 60-64)

"I was sacked after asking for my statutory holiday." (Woman aged 50-59)

"Returned from abroad with my family." (Man aged 50-59)

"Wealthy wife meant a less stressful form of employment but I am now getting a divorce." (Man aged 50-59)

"Increasing stress working in a privately owned bank. I elected to resign before being asked to leave." (Man aged 50-59)

"I worked for myself but sold the firm. I had no idea that it would be so hard to get another job." (Man aged 50-59)

"I found my compulsory retirement was a means of cutting staff during restructuring." (Man aged over 65)

"Teaching and research contracts thinned out." (Man aged 50-59)

"I was made redundant because my employer outsourced my job to Bombay. Imagine my surprise to find out that this aspect of outsourcing is not covered by TUPE." (Man aged 50-59)

"I was sacked by the Royal Mail because I committed the crime of reaching 64 years and 366 days." (Man aged over 65)

Factors contributing to difficulties in getting work

We asked respondents which factors they thought had contributed most to their difficulties in getting work. Significantly, the majority highlighted employers' perceptions. More than two-thirds (68 per cent) believed they were seen as too old by employers and 45 per cent said they were seen as too experienced or over-qualified. A quarter (25 per cent) felt their skills did not match those required while just under a quarter said the experience required did not match their own. Just under a fifth (19 per cent) said they did not have the qualifications required and 14 per cent felt their need to work part-time or flexibly because of personal commitments presented a problem. Only 10 per cent said an aspect of their health was contributing to their difficulties. In their comments, respondents mentioned additional barriers, including modern recruitment practices and a history of self-employment.

In the later period, there was an increase in the number of respondents saying they were seen as too experienced, over-qualified or too old by employers, frequently interpreted as evidence of ageist attitudes. Seventy-two per cent in the recent period felt they were seen as too old (up from 63 per cent); and 48 per cent said they were seen as too experienced or over-qualified (up from 42 per cent). There was a drop in the number who believed their skills did not match those required (24 per cent, down from 27 per cent) and who felt the experience required did not match their own (21 per cent, down from 25 per cent). Those reporting that they thought an aspect of their health was contributing to their difficulties in finding work halved (7 per cent, down from 14 per cent)

What factors do you think contributed most to your difficulties getting work?

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
An aspect of health	10%	7%	14%
Skills not matching those required	25%	24%	27%
Experience not matching that required	23%	21%	25%
Qualifications not matching those required	19%	18%	19%
Need to work part time or flexibly	14%	10%	19%
Seen as too experienced or over-qualified	45%	48%	42%
Seen as too old by employers	68%	72%	63%
Other	17%	18%	17%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Numbers responding	752	395	361

Comments

“Convolut ed recruitment processes – box ticking, not looking at the whole process.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“After working for 18 years and reaching a management position in administration I feel I am too qualified/experienced for part time positions and I am not looking for full time work.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“When a vacancy occurs an employer will have picture of the sort of person they want to fill it. The over-40s will have difficulty here; the over-50s will find it almost impossible to fit the picture.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“I am reliable and methodical but I am not given the opportunity to show this as my CV is probably discarded due to my age and lack of qualifications. I left school at 15 which was then the norm. You never had to stay on.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“Agencies do not have time to slot in people who do not fit certain positions. Round pegs and square holes syndrome.” (Man aged 50-59)

“I am fed up with the jobs for which I apply going to ‘girlie’ clones of the interviewers.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“I believe working for one company for a long time can go against you. A lot of employers make the assumption you are set in your ways and that your experience of life and work does not count for anything.” (Man aged 60-64)

“I feel I have a set of skills for jobs I never see advertised. Specialist agencies seem to have limited vacancies that all fall into very few categories of relatively narrow skill ranges. My experience is wider and hence tends to miss the target of what is required.” (Man aged 50-59)

“I was told I was the second choice and an excellent candidate but that I was ‘too experienced for the team’.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“People are not interested because I worked for myself and have no references.” (Man aged 50-59)

“There are just not that many jobs in my area.” (Woman aged 50 -59)

“I have been self-employed and a company director of three companies. I feel this is a reason despite my considerable business experience.” (Man aged 50-59)

“My industry is shrinking and younger people seem to be preferred. I feel my career has given up on me. Yet I have so much to give.” (Man aged 60-64)

“I do think my education and experience have not helped me get employment and I many be seen as over-qualified and I would not stay that long. I am 52.” (Man)

“There is no work. I used to work in the construction industry as a site manager.” (Man aged 50-59)

“The job market over-emphasises the need for youth over experience. There are no courses for experience and it is greatly undervalued by employers.” (Man aged 50-59)

“I think my issue is that neither my employer nor myself invested time and effort to ensure my skills and experience were relevant to current IT technology and processes. Both of us focused too much on getting the immediate job done. So I was made redundant and now I can’t find work.” (Man aged 50-59)

“After caring for a long period now find that I do not exist!” (Woman aged 50-59)

Emphasis on qualifications rather than skills and experience

We asked participants whether they agreed or disagreed with various statements. In relation to the statement *Employers put too much emphasis on qualifications rather than skills and experience*, 62 per cent agreed while only a very small proportion (7 per cent) disagreed. Older people tend to have fewer qualifications than younger people, and those they do have may no longer be understood or considered relevant.

In the later period, more respondents agreed that employers put too much emphasis on qualifications rather than skills and experience (64 per cent, up from 60 per cent).

Employers put too much emphasis on qualifications rather than on skills and experience

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Agree	62%	64%	60%
Neither agree nor disagree	31%	28%	33%
Disagree	7%	8%	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	761	399	366

Comments

“Employers seem to be looking for today’s qualifications but I have risen through the ranks through experience and hard work and do not hold today’s qualifications.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“HR selectors look first at the specific qualification, which appears to be far narrower in scope than those we took 30-40 years ago, and ignore the relevance of experience to the job’s requirements.” (Man aged 60-64)

“Employers ask for GCSEs, not O Levels or experience. Staff in HR departments don’t seem to know the difference.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“It would be helpful if it were possible to verify skills and capabilities in line with newish NVQ qualification systems, a skills assessment centre?” (Man aged 60-64)

“More and more employers appear to use agents to screen out older applicants. There should be a way of updating qualifications or at least of quantifying experience and skills gained into NVQ ratings.” (Man aged 60-64)

The right skills for today's labour market

In relation to the statement *You have the right skills for today's labour market*, a large majority (71 per cent) agreed. Only 8 per cent disagreed. In other words, they believe they have the skills that are needed. This response may reflect in part the educational qualifications of more than 50 per cent of the survey participants (who have a degree or professional qualifications). However, most attributed their difficulty in finding work to age discrimination rather than a lack of the right skills. And in the later reporting period, more respondents said they believed they had the right skills for today's labour market (74 per cent, up from 67 per cent).

You have the right skills for today's labour market

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Agree	71%	74%	67%
Neither agree nor disagree	21%	19%	24%
Disagree	8%	7%	9%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	764	399	369

Comments

"Most older people have better literacy and numeracy skills, more experience of people and many transferable skills such as practical knowledge of the world around them. The trouble is that many jobs seem to focus on narrow measurements of 'skill' such as IT and customer service skills but much of this is very simplistic."
(Woman aged 50-59)

"I am frustrated that my skills, knowledge and successful experience are not being utilised." (Woman aged 50-59)

"I have a lot of skills and experience and want to offer them and earn a decent salary." (Woman aged 50-59)

"It does not make sense that all the skills and experience of my age group are being wasted." (Woman aged 50-59)

"Transferable core skills tend to be recognised in theory but rarely in practice."
(Man aged 50-59)

"It feels wrong not to be using the skills I have obtained over the last 25 years."
(Woman aged 50-59)

"When people with skills reach the age of 55 the opportunities diminish considerably. I have been told this on an 'off the record' discussion with recruiters. This is happening more and more." (Man aged 60-64)

Opportunity to upgrade skills

More than 40 per cent agreed with the statement *You have every opportunity to upgrade your skills to fit the needs of today's employers* against 34 per cent who disagreed. In the later period, there was a small rise in those who disagreed with the statement and a corresponding fall in those who agreed.

You have every opportunity to upgrade your skills to fit the needs of today's employers

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Agree	41%	40%	42%
Neither agree nor disagree	25%	26%	25%
Disagree	34%	35%	33%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	762	399	367

Comments

"I have been out of the workplace for a long time. I believe I need to retrain and start afresh but I have no money to do this and need to find alternative sources of funding." (Man aged 60-64)

"The company failed to provide the right training for me and they felt I did not have the right qualification within a care setting after working there successfully for five years." (Man aged 60-64)

"Companies are reluctant to train older workers and government schemes are available only to those in receipt of out-of-work benefits. Adult education has been cut dramatically in the last few years at the expense of basic skills courses and those that do exist are too expensive." (Woman aged 50-59)

"No help in finding a job or retraining as my small occupational pension outweighed any Jobseeker's Allowance so I got nothing in the way of benefits and thus no retraining." (Woman aged 50-59)

"Any serious training is difficult if you need to remain available for work to claim Jobseeker's Allowance." (Woman aged 50-59)

"Would like to improve my admin skills but cannot afford to pay the college fees." (Woman aged 50-59)

Knowing where to find assistance in seeking work

In relation to the statement *You know where to go for advice and assistance in seeking work*, only 41 per cent per cent of our respondents agreed that they know where to go while 34 per cent opted for the more emphatic 'disagree' response but a further 25 per cent were uncertain – to the extent they could neither agree nor disagree.

In the later period there was an increase in those who said they knew where to go for advice and assistance in finding work (44 per cent, up from 38 per cent) and a corresponding decrease in those who said they were not sure (22 per cent, down from 28 per cent).

You know where to go for advice and assistance in seeking work

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Agree	41%	44%	38%
Neither agree nor disagree	25%	22%	28%
Disagree	34%	34%	34%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	756	396	364

Seeking assistance in finding work

We asked survey participants whether they had sought assistance in finding work, and if so, which organisations or contacts they had used. A large majority (87 per cent) said they had sought help. There was a slight rise in the later period in those who sought assistance.

Have you sought assistance in finding work?

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Yes	87%	89%	85%
No	13%	11%	15%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	761	399	366

There was an increase between the two periods in all categories of organisations and contacts respondents were in touch with to seek help, possibly reflecting that in a downturn they have to make greater efforts. The most striking change in the later period was the rise in numbers contacting private employment agencies (70 per cent, up from 52 per cent), although the percentage contacting Jobcentre Plus also went up.

If yes, which ones?

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Jobcentre Plus	65%	67%	62%
Private employment agency	61%	70%	52%
Friends and personal contacts	52%	58%	46%
A professional body	16%	17%	14%
Other	21%	20%	21%

We also asked, in general terms, how they rated the quality of the assistance they were given. Unfortunately only 14 per cent rated it as good or excellent with half rating it as not very good or poor and fewer (36 per cent) as adequate. And although we did not ask them to rate particular organisations, a number commented specifically on their experience of using Jobcentre Plus and private employment agencies. We saw a decline in satisfaction in the later period.

In general terms, how would you rate the quality of assistance you were given?

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to May 2009
Good or excellent	14%	12%	15%
OK	36%	34%	39%
Not very good or poor	50%	53%	46%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	674	356	322

Comments

“Many mainstream employment agencies appear to favour younger workers – regardless of whether they can do the job or not.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“The Jobcentre virtually told me to go away when I was made redundant at 61 and came to them for help seeking employment.” (Man aged 60-64)

“The Jobcentre prefers to push towards disability allowance or pension credit. No real initiative to skill check senior level opportunities.” (Man aged 50–59)

“I find the Jobcentre attitude to help with finding work quite cold.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“I haven’t found the Jobcentre that helpful – they always seem surprised that I want to talk to them rather than just sign on the dotted line to claim Jobseeker’s Allowance.” (Man aged 60-64)

“Inability of inexperienced recruiters – agencies and employers – to relate CV information to their own business.” (Woman aged 60-64)

“Definite discrimination from employment agencies.” (Woman aged 50 -59)

“Looking for jobs (mainly via agencies) has been a bad experience. As soon as they find out your age their previously positive attitude quickly cools.” (Man aged 60-64)

“Jobcentre Plus, New Deal 50+ and the government provision for mature professionals are totally unfit for purpose. There are no practical measures in place whatsoever. Private sector employment agencies aren’t the answer either. They have no interest in helping older candidates.” (Man aged 60-64)

“Recruitment agencies are run by people in their 20s. It must be assumed that management has briefed these young people to disregard older candidates. If you can’t convince them, what chances does an older person stand in getting employment?” (Woman aged 50-59)

Age discrimination legislation

We wanted to check how many of the respondents were aware of the Age Regulations introduced in October 2006, the extent of their understanding of their rights, and how effective they thought the legislation was in helping older people seeking work. Encouragingly, a large majority (89 per cent) agreed with the statement *I am aware that there is now legislation covering age discrimination in employment*

I am aware that there is now legislation covering age discrimination in employment

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Agree	89%	89%	89%
Not sure	8%	7%	9%
Disagree	3%	4%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	760	397	367

More than half (60 per cent) agreed with the statement *I understand roughly what the age legislation says and the rights it gives me* but a third (35 per cent) were not sure. But a lower proportion in the later period than in the earlier one said they understood the legislation and more said they were not sure.

I understand roughly what the age discrimination legislation says and the rights it gives me

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Agree	60%	57%	63%
Not sure	35%	37%	34%
Disagree	5%	6%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	760	396	364

Worryingly, however, only 12 per cent thought that age discrimination legislation had helped older people seeking work while half were not sure whether it had and 39 per cent were of the view that it had not. The comments they made were universally sceptical. In the later period there seemed to be a decline in confidence that the legislation was effective with more people disagreeing with the statement *Age discrimination legislation has helped older people find work* (45 per cent compared with 31 per cent earlier).

Age discrimination legislation has helped older people find work

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Agree	12%	10%	13%
Neither agree nor disagree	50%	45%	56%
Disagree	39%	45%	31%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	756	396	364

Comments

“Age legislation does not work as employers simply get around it by rewording their job advertisements. So how can government enforce such legislation?”

(Man aged 50-59)

“Much of recruiting is done via websites or agencies. Therefore discrimination cannot be proved – so what good is the legislation? I have even reported an agency to the REC (Recruitment and Employment Confederation) – absolutely useless.”

(Woman aged 60-64)

“The new law is in favour of the employer to a large degree and concentrates too much on what the employer can’t do rather than on what the employer should be doing. It has been written in favour of business and is the most useless piece of legislation.” *(Woman aged 50-59)*

“Age discrimination definitely occurs when seeking work.” *(Woman aged 60-64)*

“Age discrimination legislation is ambiguous and therefore pointless.”

(Man aged 50-59)

“The new age law is toothless as long as the default retirement age is 65.”

(Man aged 50-59)

“Ageism may now be against the law but it still goes on and it is almost impossible to police.” *(Man aged 50-59)*

“I know my inability to find useful full time employment is because of my age but the law has given me no way of proving it.” *(Woman aged 50-59)*

“The law has made no difference. Employers are not going to be overtly ageist. Instead they will always find covert ways of excluding you if they think you are too old and just make another excuse, eg: ‘The position is too junior for you’ or ‘We don’t think you will fit into the team dynamics’, etc.” *(Man aged 50-59)*

“Experience, sickness record, excellent references – they all mean nothing. This is an ageist country and judgement is always made on age, no matter what new legislation is brought in.” *(Woman aged over 65)*

“The age discrimination law only works for people in jobs – not those seeking jobs.” *(Man aged 50-59)*

“The new legislation is an academic concept only. Employers run rings round it.” *(Man aged 50-59)*

Experience of age discrimination in the workplace

We asked respondents whether they had experienced age discrimination in the workplace. In relation to the statement *I have never experienced age discrimination in the workplace*, 40 per cent disagreed while 33 per cent were unsure. Only a minority (28 per cent) could say they had never experienced age discrimination in the workplace. In the later period, there was an increase in those who said they had experienced age discrimination in the workplace.

I have never experienced age discrimination in the workplace

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Agree	28%	28%	28%
Not sure	33%	31%	34%
Disagree	40%	41%	38%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	749	391	362

Comments

"I had a permanent job for two months but one of the young lads kept calling me an old bird." (Woman aged 50-59)

"I worked for a company for 17 years. It was taken over and I was made to feel as if I knew nothing by my new boss. He also made constant ageist remarks, he eventually made me redundant." (Man aged 50-59)

"I am currently involved in an age discrimination employment tribunal case against a previous employer." (Man aged 60-64)

"I am not given jobs where it is 'all happening'. I am given jobs where everyone has been put out to pasture." (Woman aged 50-59)

"I find myself in a job surrounded by young people. There are basic errors in procedures but I have learned to keep my mouth shut because I am seen as old and not being able to change my ways and quite possibly interfering. My advice is not seen as a good thing." (Woman aged 50-59)

"I was working in IT. I don't drink alcohol and thus an outsider in the boozy 'lads' culture of IT." (Man aged 50-59)

"The new CEO made it clear that he did not want me to continue in my job and that if I did not accept his offer to leave, my employment would be terminated." (Man aged 60-64)

Experience of age discrimination in seeking employment

We wanted to know what proportion had experienced age discrimination in seeking employment. Many pointed out that they suspected it but it was difficult to prove. Over half (52 per cent) disagreed with the statement *I have never experienced age discrimination in seeking employment* and 39 per cent were not sure. Under one in ten said they had never experienced age discrimination while looking for work. During the recession, the perception of age discrimination against older jobseekers

was more pronounced. Those who believed they had experienced discrimination rose by five percentage points in the later period (55 per cent, up from 50 per cent) while those who could say they never had fell slightly to 7 per cent from 10 per cent.

I have never experienced age discrimination in seeking employment

	Jan 2008 to May 2009	Oct 2008 to May 2009	Jan 2008 to Sept 2008
Agree	9%	7%	10%
Not sure	39%	38%	40%
Disagree	52%	55%	50%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number responding	756	396	364

Comments

“Discrimination is subtle. I went for a job where I had every stated qualification and experience. Was not even asked for interview.” (Man aged 60-64)

“Considering the amount of job applications I have made and the very small amounts of replies I have had, I am quite convinced age has a lot to do with it.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“To be honest I am not really sure. I keep knocking but no one seems interested. I have never experienced this before so I am beginning to wonder.” (Man aged 50-59)

“I have extensive experience and outstanding performance in automotive sector management but as yet I have not found the right job in the UK. Could it be because of my age?” (Man aged 50-59)

“I am sure an indication of my age does put potential employers off. While applying for several jobs I am easily qualified to do, I have yet to receive an acknowledgement let alone an interview.” (Woman aged 50-59)

“I can always get an interview but believe I am the ‘token’ older person.” (Woman aged 60-64)

“Agencies say there’s no problem with age. If so why am I finding it a problem? I have the necessary qualifications.” (Woman aged over 65)

“I have been invited to interviews but I have the strong feeling that my age, literacy and experience are intimidating to younger people as well as the in-built ageism I was probably guilty of myself as a young man!” (Man aged 50-59)

“I have an excellent CV, having worked all over Northern Europe as a consultant but now that I am 50+ I don’t even get interview.” (Man aged 50-59)

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TAEN's aim is to help create an effective labour market which works for people in mid and later life, for employers and for the economy.

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