

Response

Building a Society for All Ages

**Response to Government Consultation by
TAEN – The Age and Employment Network**

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Introduction

This response is from TAEN – The Age and Employment Network. Our concerns principally relate to the needs of those in later work-life, by which we mean roughly 50+. A number of your questions may not be relevant to us but we will try to provide responses that cover our main concerns on your questionnaire below.

Experiences of older people seeking work suggest that whilst many factors contribute to their overall problems in re-entering employment beyond the age of 50, *age discrimination* remains an important factor. Despite legislation, it remains hard for individuals to prove they have been discriminated against and hence to take action in response to it. This is a problem which the Government needs to address if it is seriously intent in encouraging people to work longer.

We are including a copy of our Survey of Jobseekers Aged 50 + as evidence to be read together with this response and we will make some additional points to supplement our comments to your questions below.

Questions

1. We are launching a new ‘one stop shop’ to bring together services for people planning ahead. In addition to the core services suggested, what else would you like to see included?

We do not believe that the ‘one stop shop’ concept will be appropriate to suit the need for information, advice and guidance about employment and career opportunities of those in mid and later life who wish to remain in work.

Quite simply, we believe that the branding and image of an information point for older people that covers the range of issues outlined in your document will not appeal either to the younger cohort in the 50+ age range.

However, we believe that there is a need to consider how it might be possible to support a wider cohort of people over state pension age who may wish to remain in work or to return to employment after retirement. The forms of advice and support for this group are likely to overlap those for the 50+ group even though there could also be some distinguishing features. On the other hand, a ‘one stop shop for seniors’ or whatever it is called seems unlikely to be the obvious place for older workers seeking work to go to.

Provision of suitable and relevant advice for jobseekers of 50+ is essential if we are to engage with more people in this cohort and activate their economic potential. Provision is in danger of falling between inappropriate stools – Jobcentre Plus on one hand, with whom few 50+ job seekers engage, and the one stop shop on the other. This would be a potentially very poor outcome for 50+ jobseekers.

We believe, however, that *some* advice and guidance on securing or re-entering employment or self employment would be helpful in the one stop shop for people

aged over 60 or state pension age. We believe it would be important for such advisers to make links with appropriate career advisory sources.

With regard to the latter, we believe there is an urgent need for improvements specifically to assist older jobseekers. Targeted advice given by people who have some understanding of the needs of older jobseekers is not often available.

We do not believe there is any value in the one stop shop attempting to cover all the areas in relation to employment and career guidance for those in later life, providing of course that provision is adequately made via other sources, principally the Adult Careers and Advancement Service and Jobcentre Plus.

2. At what stages in your life would it be/have been most useful to receive information about your opportunities and entitlements?

This question is framed within the context of the proposed *Active at 60* programme. In relation to staying economically active at 60+, we believe it would be useful for people to know their rights at an early stage.

We are strongly in favour of a layered approach to information giving so that people entering the workforce have some knowledge of issues that will confront them in mid and later life. This may be hard to achieve but it is important if we are to achieve a situation in which people realise that they have a personal stake in maintaining their own employability and that they cannot rely on the benevolent state to meet all their needs if they should become incapable of making an economic contribution.

In this way, we believe it may be possible to encourage individuals to begin to form career and development plans through which they may move at different life stages.

However, clearly there is a need to provide more detailed and specific advice to people as they approach 60. We believe that many people in their early 50s will be interested to receive information and will increasingly begin to formulate plans as they approach their 60s. We therefore think that most information about entitlements and opportunities should be disseminated towards people aged 50 and over but with the proviso that a layered introduction should be part of the overall plan.

3. How would you like to receive information about these opportunities and entitlements; and who would you like to receive this from?

Whilst we see the value in bringing all sources of information together, we think that this may be impracticable. In relation to information about employment and remaining in work, there are a variety of sources that may be considered appropriate. If a person is already in work it may be appropriate to receive information via their employer, supported by information in employee magazines and other communications, and also via their union or representative organisation. Clearly, if a person is seeking work one has to consider other sources: Jobcentre Plus and other providers of employment services, for example.

TAEN and its member organisations are always willing to consider passing on information to the older jobseekers and workers we are in touch with.

4. What additional issues should we be seeking views on beyond those we have already highlighted for the grandparents summit?

You should reflect on the fact that many grandparents are in work or seek to be in work. You make no reference at all to the huge problems that all carers have in remaining in work and combining work and care. Employers should be involved in this dialogue.

This raises the important issue of how you go about raising awareness on age and employment issues and actions that can be taken at different levels. We are talking here about action in relation to preserving the capacity of people to remain in work and helping older people to return to work. There are roles here for the all who are concerned with issues of health and well being, skills and who may influence and advise in job design, careers and working patterns, etc.

It seems to us that in planning for a grandparents summit you should identify the stream of grandparents who are at work or of working age as a key, discrete interest group. You could then consider how to provide separate ways of communicating on the issues and implications with all who are concerned with the world of work, including local authorities, health authorities and trusts, third sector organisations, employers and the unions.

5. What support have you found helpful when you have been in a caring role for family members?

The most helpful initiatives for those with caring responsibilities and who want to remain in work necessarily involve understanding of the employees' needs by the employer. A wide range of flexible working options have been devised by some employers for employees who need to combine providing care and work. Different models of flexibility can be more or less suitable and there is a need for employees to be able to make changes as the conditions of those for whom they care vary over time.

One problem with this, however, is that the larger employers are most likely to have the resources to devise packages of the kind that best facilitate the continued employment of employees with widely varying care roles. Small and medium sized enterprises may need support to encourage and help them make such provisions.

In some other countries we are aware of, the state is able to intervene and subsidise the provision of a "flex job" which offers an employee continued employment opportunities despite limiting factors, eg a disability.

Measures to provide support for "flex jobs" for older workers who have caring roles, could help keep them in the workforce rather allowing personal circumstances to cause them to exit prematurely. Often the caring role may change – perhaps with the death of an elderly relative who has needed care. In such cases, an individual who has been supported to remain in work could resume working normally.

6. What more can we do to enable business to understand the benefits of recruiting and retaining employees aged over 50, and to develop workable strategies for benefiting from an ageing workforce?

There is a pressing need to re-launch the Age Positive Campaign providing additional resources and engaging capable people to lead and champion the value proposition of the older worker.

TAEN has been organising seminars on age management and the value of employing older workers. Over the past 18 months we have held seminars with employers and other organisations in several parts of the UK. We believe we could achieve a great deal more if we had more resources and we are keen to work with Age Positive.

The other elements of a strategy need to include the following provisions:

There must be a strong focus on collecting case studies which not only exemplify the value of older workers, but also the full range of age management issues and techniques that managements need to become familiar with.

More resources must be put into making such examples available in convenient and convincing media formats

Business schools, the Open University and management short course providers need to become actively engaged in providing training so that managers at all levels in organisations are aware not simply of the business case for employing older workers, but the 'how' and 'why' of age management, including how to assess age related risks that are faced by the organisation and how to guard against them.

There is a need for a programme of activity that will engage the unions and their members around issues of age management. Clearly, there is work that could be done with TUC Unionlearn and individual unions. Union learning representatives provide a valuable model for the transformative impact that unions can have on learning. The lessons need to be applied to union roles in helping their members become equipped and better placed to extend their working lives.

Support could be given to action projects to test and exemplify different approaches to age management. One idea would be to offer support to partnership projects where employers, NHS trust, learning organisations, third sector bodies and unions could collaborate with initiatives to extend working lives. A range of initiatives could be supported, evaluated and publicised.

One outcome might be the establishment of an *Age Management Laboratory* to render advice, consultancy and training in this area.

Championing the cause of older workers, emphasising their value to organisations and the need to engage them in creative roles (mentoring and knowledge transfer are obvious examples) would, we believe, further address the issues raised in this question. The point is that a long term, continuing strategy is needed. It would have to engage a number of interest groups and, over time, transform the relatively shallow approach we take towards these issues into deeper, more analytical and holistic strategic responses. We need it to become normal for managers to think of population ageing and the ageing of their workforces and be capable of dealing with these issues at all levels of day to day management as well as in the

formulation of strategies, training, processes for engagement and development of their employees, terms and conditions of employment and so on.

Finally, we believe it is vital that a positive message is sent out to all employers and those involved in hiring workers, to the effect that age is not a barrier to working. An important element of this would be the abolition of the default retirement age. We believe it is important that the whole concept of mandatory retirement is abolished and that there is no attempt to fiddle with the details – for example raising it to some other age.

7. How can we encourage people to consider their options for working longer and ensure they have access to the information they need to make those decisions at the right time?

Much of our response to Question 6 applies to this point. A stronger offer to older workers is vital to make it clear that they have much to gain by prolonging their working lives. We need to see a wide series of measures among employers, directed at workers not simply in later life but throughout their life courses. Employers need to be aware that they will not succeed in persuading employees to work longer if work itself is seen negatively. This raises important issues regarding the organisation and management of work according to the ‘good work’ paradigm. The objective of preventing premature exit from the workforce must be seen as achievable by progressive increments in job quality, working with employees to change attitudes and make it manifest that they will gain by ‘buying in’ to the deal, both economically and in other respects.

The following sorts of changes can and should be encouraged as part of such a transformation programme:

- Career counselling to be available for people of all ages, not simply when they leave education.
- Personal development planning to be a normal provision and expectation of any employee with the employer playing an active part.
- Life long learning to become a reality, including the validation and recognition of skills and experience acquired on the job and the provision of clear pathways to change careers in later life.
- More active engagement by employers, NHS trusts, unions and non profit organisations in the provision of health and well being programmes with sensitive and appropriate advice driving home messages regarding smoking, alcohol, exercise and diet and encouraging people to choose work –lifestyle balances that minimise stress. A thorough incorporation of occupational health services into workplaces.
- Flexible working programmes to be much more widely adopted with many different approaches to retirement and working time. Flexible retirement to become widely available.
- Real efforts should be made to increase the interest and status of jobs of jobs so that they are rewarding and intrinsically satisfying to employees.

Regarding re-entering work when one becomes unemployed at 50+, the following points need to be borne in mind:

It is crucially important that older adults know where to go for help and that the advisors they are dealing with have access to up-to-date information on local

labour market conditions and opportunities, training and employment support services.

For a variety of reasons many older jobseekers may be unwilling to engage with Jobcentre Plus and are therefore ineligible to access help available under such programmes as New Deal 50+, Flexible New Deal, Employment Zones or Pathways to Work.

In most areas, however, there are employment support programmes run and partially funded by other funding streams, such as the European Social Fund or local regeneration funding. These seldom have much of a budget available for marketing and by the nature of the funding they receive may only be around for a relatively short period. However they can provide support and can make a significant difference to the employment prospects and outcomes of those they work with. It should be possible for all those seeking or needing work, who are not registered with Jobcentre Plus, to self-refer themselves to such local programmes, - which is often not the case at present.

This in turn means there is a clear need for continual mapping of all the sources of labour market support services available to older individuals in any particular area and for that information to be easily available to individuals themselves - and to intermediaries and local employers - in order that effective signposting can take place and that use of the available provision is maximised.

8. How can we ensure that the National Agreement will make a real difference to delivery partners working together to better deliver services for an ageing population?

The concept of a National Agreement would seem to imply a framework approach which ought to be agreed nationally, and permitting detailed application at local authority and NHS Trust level. Monitoring mechanisms in which stakeholders in the agreement have access to reports and statistics in relation to the agreement's performance indicators, would seem to be a logical way of applying the agreement.

There can be no guarantee that the National Agreement itself will help in the delivery of better services. The importance of the agreement may well be in providing a process in which the actions of delivery partners are called to account, questioned and subjected to criticism where appropriate.

9. When you stopped driving, what helped you stay mobile and active in your community? What options would have helped?

We have no comment on this question.

10. We want to improve attitudes towards ageing across society. What more could be done to challenge outdated stereotypes and tackle negative perceptions about being old? Can you share good examples of where this is already happening in your local community?

There is a pressing need to encourage the media to portray older people more positively.

TAEN Survey of Jobseekers Aged 50+ : commentary on evidence

There are few barriers to employment experienced by older jobseekers so dispiriting as attitudes of age discrimination. Whilst not *everyone* in the 50+ age group experiences difficulties in seeking suitable work, we believe such problems are very widespread. Indeed, responses to TAEN's survey suggest that such difficulties are *routinely* the lot of those who seek to return to work in their 50s. Forty-five 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.

Moreover, there has been a steady stream of anecdotal evidence supplied to TAEN over a period of time which is also supportive of this survey – indeed one of the prime motivating factors behind it. And though the UK has had legislation supposedly outlawing age discrimination for the past three years, the evidence of our survey suggests discrimination is durable and endemic among British employers.

The recession has made finding work difficult for all age groups, but it may be argued the particular difficulties faced by older workers in the labour market can be explained by their skills and knowledge deficiencies or other factors which might be expected to make them harder to place in jobs. Were our sample to have been composed of an evenly distributed cross section of older workers, one might find some justification for this view in the low qualifications of participants. However, this was not so. Our survey participants were in fact comprised of unemployed 50+ people seeking work and visiting our web site. Responses showed it was 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 job seekers. 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 private employment agency. 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 huge 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, only 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. And with 40 per cent affirming to have experienced age discrimination at work (and a further 33 per cent being “unsure” on the point), one is obliged to observe that for older job seekers at least, age discrimination seems one of the most significant of barriers that they face in returning to the workforce. As one respondent put it: “Age appears to be a new disability.”

One is drawn to conclude that, for unemployed 50+ job seekers, no programme to help them return to work would be complete without measures aimed at the demand side of the economic equation. On the other hand, the Government’s preponderantly supply side programme, set out in the Green Paper: *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility* from the Department for Work and Pensions, outlines the obligations of individuals to seek work and lays out a ‘work focused’ regime for people aged 60-65. Quite correctly it states: “People are no longer considered ‘over the hill’ at age 60,” though there is little reason to believe that the kinds of problems highlighted by our survey will be easily overcome.

In light of the foregoing, the reference in *No-one written off* to the Government’s Age Positive Initiative as “promoting the benefits to employers of recruiting, training and retaining older workers who will by 2020 comprise 30 per cent of the workforce” seems pitifully inadequate. The evidence points to widespread and systematic discrimination against older workers, making it difficult for them to re-enter the workforce.

Numbers of workers over state pension age in employment have been rising in recent years due very largely to the fact that women have been exercising their rights to remain in existing jobs beyond female state pension age (60 years). But it is worth noting that around half of women in the workforce work only part time and even those who only work a few hours a week are included in the employment figures. Unsurprisingly in the current climate, employment rates have stalled. But workers over 50 seeking to return to new jobs, as this survey confirms, find it very hard to realise their ambitions even when labour market conditions are relatively good.

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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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