



## ***Survey of Jobseekers Aged 50+***



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## Introduction

This survey was undertaken by TAEN – The Age and Employment Network, whose mission is to promote an effective job market that serves the needs of people in mid and later life.

While the employment rate of people over 50 has shown the fastest growth in recent years, it is still considerably lower than the rate for 25-49 year olds. And once out of work, people over 50 remain unemployed for longer than their younger counterparts.

While the introduction of legislation in 2006 outlawing age discrimination in employment and vocational training was welcome, it has certainly not eradicated discrimination in these areas and particularly in recruitment where it is difficult for an individual to prove discrimination and take action. That said, we realise age discrimination is not the only barrier older people face in trying to re-enter the labour market so we wanted to look at other barriers, such as lack of appropriate skills and qualifications; health conditions; and personal circumstances such as caring responsibilities.

TAEN provides an information service for individuals seeking work or looking to change direction, signposting them to organisations who may be able to help them. We decided to tap into the experiences of those contacting us to help inform our work. We added a survey for Jobseekers aged 50 and over (see Appendix) to our website in January of this year and by 22 September 370 jobseekers had responded. Not all respondents answered each question. The survey is ongoing but we decided to publish an interim report of the findings thus far, two years on from the introduction of the Age Regulations.

## Survey results

### 1 Age of respondents

Not surprisingly, two-thirds of those responding (67%) were aged 50-59 but interestingly one in ten were over 65, the default retirement age adopted by many employers since the introduction of the Age Regulations.

#### How old are you?

50-59	67%
60-64	23%
65 and over	10%
Total	100%
Number responding	369

## 2 Gender

More than half the respondents (54%) were male.

**Please indicate whether you are:**

Male	54%
Female	46%
Total	100%
Number responding	370

## 3 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. More than half the respondents (54%) had a degree or professional qualification.

**What qualifications do you have?**

No formal qualifications	17%
5 GCSEs or equivalent	18%
A levels or equivalent	10%
Degree or equivalent	32%
Professional qualification	23%
Total	100%
Number responding	366

## 4 Length of time looking for work

We wanted to know how long respondents had been seeking employment. Almost 40 per cent had been looking for work for up to three months but three in ten had been looking for a year or more. Labour market statistics show that once out of work, older people remain unemployed for longer than their younger counterparts (37 per cent of those aged 50 and over remain unemployed for more than 12 months against 29 per cent of those aged 25-49)<sup>1</sup>

### How long have you been looking for work?

Up to 3 months	39%
3 – 6 months	16%
6 – 12 months	15%
More than a year	15%
More than 2 years	15%
Total	100%
Number responding	361

## 5 Feelings about getting work

We also asked respondents how they felt about getting a job. Forty-four per cent said that they were worried about not working and 30 per cent that they were desperate to get a job. Only one in 20 said they were looking but not that bothered. And while there are many reasons why older people want to work, most respondents who commented cited financial worries as their principal motivation. Recent surveys have found that the debt problem for the over-50s is worsening. According to one research report<sup>2</sup>, the average mortgage debt for the over-55s is some £37,000 per person, and the findings of another<sup>3</sup> reveals that 40 per cent of those aged 50-65 believed they would only get by if they stopped working completely and 14 per cent said they would not be able to cope financially.

### How do you feel about getting a job?

Looking but not that bothered	5%
Keen but not worried	21%
Worried about not working	44%
Desperate to get a job	30%
Total	100%
Number responding	366

<sup>1</sup> Labour Market Statistics, Office for National Statistics, October 2008

<sup>2</sup> Research by equity release firm Key Retirement Solutions, 2008

<sup>3</sup> AEGON at Retirement Report, 2008

## **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 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)

## **6 Reasons for giving up work**

We wanted to know the reasons people had given up work. The commonest reason was redundancy, with 32 per cent of respondents citing it. The other largest single reason was personal circumstances such as caring responsibilities (16%) Thirty-one 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 8 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 who quit for health reasons might be unlikely to seek work, and this would tend to produce a smaller proportion answering our survey questionnaire. According to DWP research<sup>4</sup>, nearly three-quarters of people who retire early cite ill health as the main cause, and Labour Force Survey statistics show that nearly half of people aged 50 to state pension age who are economically inactive are inactive due to sickness, disability and injury<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 200, 2003

<sup>5</sup> Labour Force Survey, Quarter 4 2006, Office for National Statistics

### Why did you give up work?

Redundancy	32%
Reached employer's retirement age	6%
Accepted offer to retire early	7%
Personal circumstances	16%
Health	8%
Other	31%
Total	100%
Number responding	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 65+)

"Self-employed over the past 15 years. The last contact 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)

## 7 Factors contributing to difficulties in getting work

We asked respondents which factors they thought had contributed most to their difficulties in getting work. Significantly, employers' perceptions were highlighted by a majority. Well over half the respondents (63%) believed they were seen as 'too old' by employers and 42 per cent said they were seen as too experienced or over-qualified. Almost a third (27%) felt their skills did not match those required while a quarter said the experience required did not match their own. Just under a fifth (19%) said they did not have the qualifications required and the same percentage felt their need to work part-time or flexibly because of personal commitments presented a problem. Only 14 per cent said an aspect of their health was contributing to the difficulty. In their comments, respondents mentioned additional barriers, including modern recruitment practices and a history of self-employment.

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

An aspect of health	14%
Skills not matching those required	27%
Experience not matching that required	25%
Qualifications not matching those required	19%
Need to work part time or flexibly	19%
Seen as too experienced or over-qualified	42%
Seen as too old by employers	63%
Other	17%
Numbers responding	361

### Comments

"Convoluting 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)

## **8 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*, 60 per cent agreed while only a very small proportion (7%) disagreed. Older people tend to have fewer qualifications than younger people, and those they do have may no longer be understood or considered relevant.

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

Agree	60%
Neither agree nor disagree	33%
Disagree	7%
Total	100%
Number responding	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)

“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)

## **9 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 (67%) agreed. Only 9 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 put their unemployment and difficulty in finding work down not to a lack of the right skills but to age discrimination.

### **You have the right skills for today’s labour market**

Agree	67%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%
Disagree	9%
Total	100%
Number responding	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)

## 10 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 33 per cent who disagreed. Lack of access to publicly funded opportunities to upgrade skills or retrain remains a significant barrier for many older people who do not qualify for benefits or who already have achieved NVQ Level 2 (the equivalent of five GCSEs). TAEN receives a steady flow of requests for advice on this issue from individuals who find themselves in this position but cannot afford to pay to update their skills.

### **You have every opportunity to upgrade your skills to fit the needs of today’s employers**

Agree	42%
Neither agree nor disagree	25%
Disagree	33%
Total	100%
Number responding	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 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 Jobseekers Allowance.” (Woman aged 50-59)

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

## 11 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 38 per cent per cent of our respondents agreed that they knew where to go for advice and assistance in seeking work 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.

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

Agree	38%
Neither agree nor disagree	28%
Disagree	34%
Total	100%
Number responding	364

## 12 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 huge majority (85%) said they had sought help.

### Have you sought assistance in finding work?

Yes	85%
No	15%
Total	100%
Number responding	366

### If yes, which ones?

Jobcentre Plus	62%
Private employment agency	52%
Friends and personal contacts	46%
A professional body	14%
Other	21%

We also asked, in general terms, how they rated the quality of the assistance they were given. Unfortunately only 15 per cent rated it as good or excellent with nearly half (46%) rating it as not very good or poor and slightly fewer (39%) 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.

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

Good or excellent	15%
OK	39%
Not very good or poor	46%
Total	100%
Number responding	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 helping 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 Jobseekers 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)

### 13 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 vast majority (89%) 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**

Agree	89%
Not sure	9%
Disagree	2%
Total	100%
Number responding	367

More than half (63%) agreed with the statement *I understand roughly what the age legislation says and the rights it gives me* but a third (34%) were not sure.

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

Agree	63%
Not sure	34%
Disagree	3%
Total	100%
Number responding	364

Worryingly, however, only 13 per cent thought that age discrimination legislation had helped older people seeking work while 56 per cent were not sure whether it had and 31 per cent were of the view that it had not. The comments they made were universally sceptical.

#### **Age discrimination legislation has helped older people find work**

Agree	13%
Neither agree nor disagree	56%
Disagree	31%
Total	100%
Number responding	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)

## 14 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*, 38 per cent disagreed while 34 per cent were not sure. A minority (28%) agreed with the statement. Various surveys<sup>6</sup> have shown that age discrimination is the most common form of discrimination experienced and so these findings are not surprising.

### I have never experienced age discrimination in the workplace

Agree	28%
Not sure	34%
Disagree	38%
Total	100%
Number responding	362

<sup>6</sup> TAEN Briefing on Age Stereotypes and Evidence of Discrimination, December 2006

## 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)

## 15 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. Half (50%) disagreed with the statement *I have never experienced age discrimination in seeking employment* and 40 per cent were not sure. Just one in ten said they had never experienced ageism while looking for work.

### I have never experienced age discrimination in seeking employment

Agree	10%
Not sure	40%
Disagree	50%
Total	100%
Number responding	364

## **Comments**

“I believe that often age is used but other reasons are put forward.” (Man aged 65+)

“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 have never experienced the difficulties I am experiencing now.” (Woman 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)

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

“Because of my age I have find it extremely difficult to get an interview.” (Woman aged 50-59)

## Conclusions

There are few barriers to employment experienced by older job seekers so dispiriting as attitudes of age discrimination. Whilst not *everyone* in the 50+ plus age group, experiences difficulties in seeking suitable work, we believe such problems are very widespread. Indeed, the survey responses suggest that such difficulties are *routinely* the lot of those who seek to return to work in their 50s. Forty-two per cent of our sample said that they were seen as “too experienced” or “over-qualified” and 63 per cent said they were seen quite simply as “too old”. 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 two years, the evidence of our survey suggests discrimination is durable and endemic among British employers.

It may be argued that surely these 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 23 per cent had professional qualifications with only 17 per cent being without paper qualifications of any kind. With positive work orientations and generally good qualifications, it seems reasonable to assume that high proportions should have been easy 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 a third of this number having searched for work for more than two years. Skills qualifications may indeed have been one factor among others but 60 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 67 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”, 42 per cent believing this to be the case and 33 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 28 per cent 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.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, 85 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 (62 per cent) citing Job Centre Plus as a source of support, while 52 per cent said they had gone to private employment agency.<sup>8</sup> Only 15 per cent rated the quality of support received from their chosen sources as “good or excellent”; 39 per cent said it was “OK” while 46 per cent reported that they considered the advice sources rendered “not very good or poor” support.

A huge majority (89%) were aware of the existence of age discrimination legislation, with 63 per cent of the total being aware of roughly what it comprised and the rights it conferred. On the other hand, only 13 per cent said they thought the legislation had helped older people to get work. Just 10 per cent could say they had never experienced age discrimination while looking for work. And although half ( 50%) believed they had experienced it, a great many pointed out how difficult it would be to prove. And with 38 per cent affirming to have experienced age discrimination at work (and a further 34 per cent being “unsure” on the point), one is obliged to return to the issue and 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+ jobseekers, 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 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<sup>9</sup> and even those who work for only a few hours a week are included in the employment figures. Workers over 50 seeking to return to new jobs, as this survey confirms, find it very hard to realise their ambitions.

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<sup>7</sup> TAEN in fact provides such a sign posting 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.

<sup>8</sup> Some appear to have visited both.

<sup>9</sup> Focus on Gender, Office for National Statistics, September 2008

## **Going forward**

We began gathering responses to this survey from visitors to TAEN's web site in January 2008, before the labour market slowdown and the crisis in the financial markets started to bite. The data here therefore represents responses from older jobseekers in a context when personal financial worries were probably less grave. TAEN cannot but be concerned that the over-50s are going to face even greater barriers as the economy deteriorates, as most observers agree is now inevitable. The next series of data collected by our continuing survey, will monitor the impact of the current climate on older jobseekers' prospects and the difficulties they encounter.

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## **Appendix – Jobseekers 50+ Survey**

### **1 How old are you?**

50-59 / 60-64 / 65 and over

### **2 Please indicate whether you are male or female.**

### **3 What qualifications do you have?**

No formal qualifications  
5 GCSEs or equivalent  
A Levels or equivalent  
Degree or equivalent  
Professional qualification

### **4 How long have you been looking for work?**

Up to 3 months  
3 - 6 months  
6 – 12 months  
More than a year  
More than 2 years

### **5 How do you feel about getting a job?**

I am looking but I am not that bothered  
Keen but not worried about it  
Worried about not working  
Desperate to get a job

### **6 Why did you give up work?**

Made redundant  
Reached my employer's normal retirement age  
Accepted an offer to retire early  
Personal circumstances (eg caring responsibilities)  
Health reasons  
Other (please say what below)

### **7 What factors do you think have contributed most to your difficulties in getting work? Tick any you think are important.**

An aspect of your health  
Your skills do not match those required  
Experience required does not match your own  
You do not have the qualifications required  
Need to work part time or flexibly because of personal commitments  
Seen as too experienced or over-qualified  
Seen as 'too old' by employers  
Other (please say what below)

**8 Please say whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

*Employers place too much emphasis on qualifications rather than skills and experience*

*You have the right skills for today's labour market*

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

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

Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree

**9 Have you sought any assistance in finding work? If yes, which of these have you used/contacted?**

Yes/ No

**If yes, which ones?**

Jobcentre Plus / Private employment agency / Friends and personal contacts / A professional body / Other

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

Excellent / Good / OK / Not very good / Poor or worse

**11 Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:**

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

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

*Age discrimination legislation has helped older people seeking work*

*I have never experienced age discrimination in the workplace*

*I have never experienced age discrimination in seeking employment*

Agree / Not sure / Disagree

**12 Any other comments?**



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.

**TAEN – The Age and Employment Network**

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