

# Our Ageing Workforce – When does unreasonable become reasonable?

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# UK Age-related Statistics

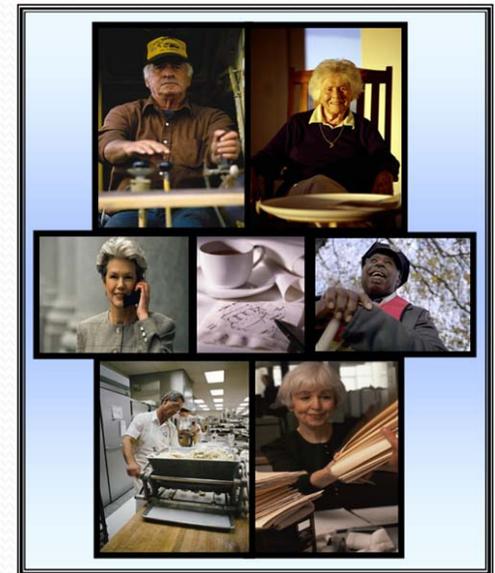
- The UK birth-rate is falling and we are living longer.
- Average life expectancy is now 80.17 years and this is increasing.
- The % of workers aged 65 and over, has doubled in the last decade.
- Within 20 years, nearly 25% of the UK population will be 65 or over.
- Already, those who are >50 years form 27% of the UK workforce. By 2020, this will rise to 33%.
- 1-4 babies born today will live to 100 – increasing the dependence on retirement funds by up to 25 years.
- 25% of 56-59 year olds and 9% of 70-75 year olds say they are still supporting their children!

# What do the numbers mean?

**Simply, we're running out of workers!**

It is estimated that the UK will need to fill 13.5 million jobs in the next decade. But –

- There are only 7 million young people leaving school and college during this period, and –
- Immigration will not fill the gap: currently around 200,000 (net) per year and the Government is committed to reducing this further.





# Pressures and constraints

- Working-age population is under pressure to support retirees and others, both financially and through care.
- Children are living at home longer and may be unemployed or in further/higher education for longer.
- Increasing participation in higher education (with associated debts), limits the number of years of pension contributions of the younger generation.
- Many home owners are in negative equity, with little spare cash. Unable to 'downsize' to release capital.
- Mortgage repayment loans up to 70 years of age.



# What older workers say

- The majority of workers over 50 (62 % of women and 59 % of men) say that they want or have to continue working beyond state pension age.
- More than twice as many (11 %) over 50s want promotion as want to downshift (4 %).
- 62 % say they are feeling ‘as fit as ever’.

**However, they say, ‘structural and attitudinal barriers’ are thwarting their ability to stay involved and at work.**



# The Benefits of Work

Jobs that are safe and allow workers a degree of control in their workplace are good for health.

We also know that long-term unemployment has a detrimental impact on both mental and physical wellbeing.

**Therefore, staying in work can –**

- Help maintain cognitive and physical activity.
- Provide a sense of identity and access to social support.
- Create intrinsic benefits of feeling productive and valued.



# Retaining older workers

- Some countries, including Finland and Germany, actively support the retention of older workers as a means of avoiding anticipated skills shortages\*.
- By contrast in the UK, little has been done to date.
- Line Manager relations and management skills have been identified as a target for improvement in supporting older workers and fostering an age-positive culture.

**\* Germany expects 25% of its working population to retire in the next 15 years – a shortfall of 35m workers by 2050.**



# Retirement – not yet!

Three factors strongly affect rates of (early) withdrawal from the labour market: **wealth, health and caring duties.**

- Over the last decade average retirement ages have steadily increased - currently 64.5 years for men and 62.0 years for women: high by European standards.
- The removal of the default retirement age in 2011 makes it illegal for employers to force workers to retire.
- However, legislative changes and financial incentives alone will not increase participation rates of older workers where there are barriers to good employment opportunities and access to support to stay in work.



# Retaining or retraining?

- In general, studies have shown that older workers exhibit lower turnover, more dedication to the workplace, and have more positive work values.
- Absenteeism is less frequent, although it is longer when it is due to injury or chronic illness.
- Older workers say they want to stay at work – but some would like to reduce their hours, have their job adjusted or be retrained to do something different.
- Increasing numbers of business start-ups are 50+.



# Older workers performing well.

**Studies have not shown any consistent relationship between ageing and poor work performance.**

**The main reasons for poor work performance are:**

- lack of recognition and feeling their work isn't valued;
- not getting along with supervisors;
- high job stress;
- lack of support;
- lack of or inappropriate training.

**Situations resulting in poor work performance can happen to anyone, at any age.**



# Negative Stereotypes.

**“Discrimination in the recruitment process is against the law, but it still happens in practice quite a lot”**

**Christopher Brooks, Age UK.**

**Age discrimination, based on incorrect perceptions about older workers, is still common place and age-based stereotyping is particularly significant for women.**

- Negative assumptions largely undermined by research evidence.
- Some studies have noted that older workers may work more slowly and cannot easily make quick decisions. However, they also tend to be more accurate in their work and make more correct decisions than their faster, younger, co-workers.
- **Negative attitudes can influence older workers’ self-perceptions, harming confidence in their capabilities and value.**



# Capability rather than Disability.

Employers should focus on what a worker **CAN** do rather than on what they **CANNOT** do.

- People reach full physical maturity at around 25 years of age. Then, after a period of relative stability, our bodies begin to show signs of ageing.
- Most of these changes are first noticed at age 40-50, but the process may start much earlier.

**A 40 year old who is overweight and inactive may be more unhealthy and less fit than a 70 year old who remains active and keeps in good shape.**



# Health and Well-being

## **Muscle strength and range of joint movement:**

*In general*, people lose 15 to 20% of their strength from the ages of 20 to 60. They also become less flexible.

## **Cardiovascular and Respiratory decline:**

- Between 30 and 65, functional breathing capacity can reduce by up to 40% and by 65, maximum O<sub>2</sub> intake declines by 30%.
- **Older workers are therefore more often working closer to capacity than younger workers.**



# Health and Well-being

## **Regulation of posture and balance:**

- In general, older people may find it harder to maintain good posture and balance.
- Statistics show that accidents due to loss of balance, do tend to happen more often with age.
- Fractures are more likely among older workers.

## **Sleeping less – sleeping lighter:**

- As we age, we are unable to regulate sleep so well.
- Sleep can further be disrupted by changing work hours or by light and noise. A concern for older shift/night workers.
- Older workers may need more recovery time between shifts.
- Use of shift rotations that are the least disruptive to sleep patterns are preferred.



# Health and Well-being

## **Thermoregulation:**

- As we age, our bodies are less able to maintain internal temperatures, adjust to changes in external temperature or to physical activity.
- Older workers may find heat or cold difficult to deal with.
- If doing hard manual labour, they may become overheated and become 'light-headed' or feel faint.

## **Diseases associated with older aged people:**

- Arthritis, Alzheimer's disease, Type-2 Diabetes, Cataracts, Osteoporosis, Hypertension and Cancer.



# Health and Well-being

## **Eyesight and ageing eyes:**

- Older workers may not be able to see or read as well as they used to, particularly if lighting/contrast is poor.
- Changes also occur in the peripheral visual field, depth perception, resistance to glare and bright light. Driving?

## **Auditory (Hearing) loss:**

- Hearing loss, due to noise and/or age, mainly affects the higher frequencies (high pitch sounds).
- Older people may have difficulty hearing verbal instructions/warning sounds. Increased risk of injury?



# Health and Well-being

## **Mental Agility –**

- Older people may not think as quickly and clearly and it may take longer to learn new skills.
- Reasoning, selective attention, 'dual/multi-task' activities and information processing may decline with age, while verbal tasks and vocabulary remain constant or improve.
- Tasks depending on short-term memory take longer.
- Older workers tend to use experience and expertise when working and may find it harder to work with complex or confusing stimuli.



# What employers can do

## **Employers can help –**

- by providing a healthy work environment (for all workers).
- by making the work more attractive and feasible for older workers - enabling them to work up to and even beyond the State Pension Age, if capable.
- by offering options/alternatives to encourage older workers to delay retirement and remain in the labour market for longer, if they are able/willing to do so.
- by providing training and support that is geared towards and more suitable for older workers.



# What employers can do

**A safe and healthy workplace reduces the chance of physical injury and/or occupational illness.**

**Examples include –**

- well maintained equipment, appropriate training, safe work procedures, low chemical and hazard exposure, supportive management styles, risk assessments that consider the ageing worker.

**Other interventions include –**

- health promotion initiatives e.g. active living, healthy eating, stress awareness, smoking cessation etc.



# Jobs adjusted for older workers

- Roles not bound to specific hours or locations.
- Flexibility of the task – slower, more self-paced work.
- More rest breaks and less repetitive tasks.
- Better illumination, less glare, provision of task lighting.
- Adjustable seating and working positions.
- Flexible schedule of work to accommodate medical care and periods of decreased work ability.
- Working at home or alternating between home/office.
- Remote working; annualised hours; flexitime; job sharing; phasing retirement; pension ‘draw-down’.



# Jobs adjusted for older workers

- Working height – avoiding excessive climbing, reaching and bending/stooping.
- Work tools – ergonomic design, longer handles, counter balance and hydraulic action reducing the need to exert strong pressure/manual effort.
- Mechanical aids – reducing manual handling tasks.
- Training - designed around the older employee.
- Access to Occupational Health and other support services.
- Younger Managers – made aware of generational attitudes and differences, effects and signs of ill health etc.



# What else?

Diseases and age-related conditions may become more debilitating as the workers ages. Mental and physical health are closely linked.

- **Is there regular communication and support when necessary?**

Positive aspects attributed to older workers include a strong work ethic, good time-keeping, reliability, loyalty, business experience, institutional memory and specialised skills.

- **Is your appreciation regularly transmitted to the worker?**

There is still a deeply held belief that older workers are less physically able and are not technically 'up-to-date'. Management may avoid addressing age-related issues and health problems in the hope that the older worker will soon retire.

- **Do you need to train your Managers and Supervisors?**



# Evidence of good practice?

**Some large companies have developed policies and practices that are 'age-friendly', but limited information.**

BMW, B&Q and McDonalds (20% higher performance in their outlets where 60+ age workers are employed).

- HR - Policies and Procedures should take account of the ageing workforce.
- Open culture - conversations regarding career planning throughout working life and where retirement is discussed as a matter of course.
- Managers trained to deal with age-related issues and to avoid discriminatory actions/attitudes and language.



# Unreasonable or reasonable?

**Adjustments that in the past, would have been considered unreasonable are becoming more necessary and will eventually be commonplace.**

- Adjustments that will be made, with older workers in mind, are also appropriate for other workers.
- The result will be a better place to work, a more engaged workforce and increased productivity.

**Surely this has to be REASONABLE**

## REFERENCE

### Employer case studies

Employing older workers for an effective multi-generational workforce



  
Department  
for Work &  
Pensions