Gender Discrimination and Ageist Perceptions

Liverpool John Moores University
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Research Report

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from an ESF Objective 3 Project "Gender Discrimination and Ageist Perceptions". The project is based at Liverpool John Moores University, in the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure.

Context

Older age groups have consistently been undervalued and often discarded by employers, for being too old. They are now being encouraged to re-enter the workplace through schemes such as New Deal 50 plus and Pathways to Work, or to take up volunteering through the promotion of "Active Citizenship". In addition, the concept of lifelong learning has been advocated by New Labour as an attempt to move away from the traditional notions of education, towards a vision in which education forms a lifelong process, which can be accessed at any time during the life course. Yet, despite the lower labour market attachment of the over fifties, people of this age group in higher education account for only around 1% of the student population. There is a variety of ways in which people approaching their mid life would, on the face of it, be able to access work, education or volunteering experiences. However, past research and current data suggest that there appear to be barriers to the take up of such opportunities.

The Aim

This study set out to investigate the experiences and perceptions of women and men aged over fifty and the organisations which impact upon their lives, in an effort to understand more fully the potential barriers this age group may face when accessing opportunities, employment, training or education.

Background

Gender disadvantages in the world of work have been well documented. Increasingly, age perceptions are thought to be a factor in older peoples' access to employment and training opportunities. Data shows that the

over fifties comprise a third of people of working age; however, only a fifth of those are actually in work and only a tenth of those are on employer and government training programmes (TAEN, 2006).

The demographic change, with more people living longer, coupled with low birth rates, is creating an expanding older population and fuelling concerns over labour shortages. There is, therefore, an economic imperative to draw workers back into work via a variety of avenues.

Despite over 70% of women now participating in the workforce, the employment patterns of men and women show that only 21% of women over 40 are in full-time employment, compared with 46% of men. Women have not had the same opportunities as men to build a career or to earn the equivalent of males due to their child-rearing and caring responsibilities, with many continuing to be concentrated in traditionally low paid sectors. The pay gap between some men and women is widening, despite the long history of legislation on equal pay. To compound the situation, older women are now said to be facing a double jeopardy of age and gender discrimination.

Tackling discrimination has been at the heart of equal opportunities legislation designed to prevent unequal treatment regardless of gender, race and disability. The Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) and Equal Pay Act (EPA) both came into force in 1975. Each Act attempted to redress the inequalities suffered by (mainly) women in terms of employment and education. The Bill to establish the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) received Royal Assent on 16th February 2006 and will provide an integrated approach to all forms of discrimination including that on the grounds of age.

Sample

A national sample of 1035 men and women over fifty was surveyed, as were 181 employer representatives across the private and public, voluntary and higher education sectors. Interviews were conducted with 51 people over the age of fifty and 21 with organisation representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Findings

- Both men and women over fifty faced considerable difficulty in gaining re-entry into work following labour market detachment. Factors which they perceived to hinder their access included a belief that ageist assumptions were operating within the recruitment process.
- Almost three-quarters of the men and women had experienced gaps out of the labour market. For women these were largely due to maternity and child-rearing, whilst for men, detachment was mainly due to unemployment or redundancy. Women often felt as though these gaps resulted in their skills lacking currency and hence many felt 'left behind'.
- Clear relationships were found between the cumulative experiences of discrimination past and present and those in the sample who exhibited lower levels of life satisfaction and self-efficacy. This was affected by circumstances or events which were beyond the control of the individual, for example compulsory redundancy or ill health.
- Women were likely to indicate, during the interviews, that gender disadvantage and ageist assumptions were factors in their experiences of entering work or progression within employment. There was evidence that the double jeopardy of age and gender combined to create a distinct form of prejudice against women. The stereotypical assumptions associated with age, mental acuity and physical appearance were played out in the work environment.
- Around half of all organisations were aware of the voluntary codes of practice on age. Yet there was widespread belief that ageist assumptions were commonplace in certain organisations. However, most organisations favoured a legislative approach to age discrimination.
- Very few organisations placed importance on the skills, proficiencies and competencies required in running a home.
- When exploring the concept of 'older', the organisations perceived women to be older at an earlier age than men. Public and private employers gave a mean age of fifty-five for women and fifty-six for men. However, the voluntary sector identified the higher ages of

sixty for women and sixty-four for men, indicating a more age positive approach, yet the difference between the mean ages for men and women was greater.

- Management appointments were more likely to be offered to people between thirty and forty years of age. This perhaps discriminates against women who have taken time out of the labour market in their earlier life due to maternity and childcare responsibilities and thus may contribute to the glass-ceiling effect.
- Organisations that operated flexible working arrangements and/or negotiated retirement options, were those least likely to be suffering from skills shortages or retention problems.
- Training opportunities were sometimes limited for older workers, due to a perception that the cost and the payback period, in terms of years an older person was expected to continue working, were economically unviable.
- Recruiters within the higher education sector used a variety of methods to contact potential students. However, very few used outreach methods or sustained community liaison. There was evidence of limited support for older students within some institutions.
- Older students were perceived as bringing unique attributes to their studies including maturity, wisdom and stability. They were also believed to reach high levels of achievement despite experiencing a myriad of barriers.
- Whilst one in four of the sample expressed a desire to study at a higher level, both recruiters and individuals over fifty perceived barriers to be mainly attributed to costs of study, loans and top up fees. Also, both identified a lack of self-confidence and the perception of feeling too old to study, as barriers.

Summary of Recommendations

It is recommended that age be incorporated into an Equal Opportunities (EO) statement or policy. Age should be considered on an equal footing with discrimination on such grounds as race and sex.

All decisions regarding suitability of applicants for work, volunteering or education should be based upon an age neutral set of criteria, which values experience and competency whether acquired through paid employment, volunteering or the undertaking of caring responsibilities.

The double jeopardy of age and gender discrimination is often expressed in the form of ageist and sexist stereotypes, therefore, a proactive approach in the form of monitoring organisational performance through regular gender and age audits, will ensure that career progression is age neutral.

Age restrictions on specific roles or tasks need to be removed (unless absolutely necessary[1]) to promote age equality.

Equal opportunity for training, career development and progression must be transparent and achievable regardless of age.

Negotiation of needs for training between employer and employee should be part of the performance criteria.

Flexibility in working patterns has been identified as a benefit most appreciated by workforces. Organisations should appoint an age diversity champion to ensure age equality is in place for all personnel, thus raising awareness of how gender and ageist assumptions can conspire to limit opportunities.

Training opportunities to raise awareness of gender and age discrimination issues should be developed to facilitate an understanding of the

[1] Organisations would need to refer to the 2006 Age Discrimination legislation to understand under what circumstances such age restrictions would be lawful. Exemptions will be allowed on Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR) and if there is an objective justification.

dynamics at work, and thus create opportunities to challenge possible discriminatory experience.

Feedback to identify what stage of a recruitment process people reach when applying for a position is recommended, and should be actively pursued and piloted. Standardising this feedback would help to allay the perceptions of the application ending up ‘in the bin’.

Flexibility of work opportunities should be encouraged for all age groups and should be equally available to all who need them.

Flexible and negotiated retirement is a precursor to a more inclusive and stable work environment and is valued by both employers and employees. Development of flexible retirement options should be explored with employees.

Under the terms of the forthcoming Age Discrimination legislation, employees should be given the relevant information on retirement policy.

Partnerships should be created between both small businesses and local community organisations, whose knowledge and contacts may be able to assist employees with their job-finding skills.

Mixed age and gender workforces have been shown to create inclusive environments and therefore open up opportunities to both men and women of all ages. Forming partnerships with the voluntary sector could create an avenue of support for those contemplating a phased retirement, who may wish to make the transition into volunteering.

Higher education institutes should endeavour to review their support mechanisms for older students including financial advice, support for family obligations (including childcare), study skills groups and a specified advisor for older students.

Higher education institutions should seek to forge links with community projects and interventions or local learning groups, prior to involvement with further education (FE) level, and not wholly rely upon Access routes.

Barriers need to be broken down; therefore encouragement should be given to universities to engage with local community groups. There will be many individuals with the competencies required to enter higher education, based upon their previous work or voluntary experience and due weight should be given to competencies acquired through undertaking caring responsibilities.

CHAPTER ONE
BACKGROUND

This study set out to investigate the experiences and perceptions of women and men aged over fifty and the organisations which impact upon their lives, in an effort to understand more fully the potential barriers this age group may face when accessing opportunities, employment, training or education.

Tackling discrimination in all forms has been at the heart of equal opportunities legislation designed to prevent unequal treatment due to gender, race and disability. The Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) came into force in 1975. The Equal Pay Act (EPA) took effect in 1975. Each Act attempted to redress the inequalities suffered by (mainly) women in terms of employment and education or in the provision of goods, services and facilities. The Acts cover discrimination occurring because someone is married, in employment or in recruitment. The EPA declared that women must be paid the same as men when they are undertaking work of equal value and vice-versa for men. Little in terms of legislation has been done since to tackle other forms of discrimination until now.

The Bill to establish the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) received Royal Assent on 16th February 2006 and will provide an integrated approach to all forms of discrimination. This new Commission will be the first organisation in the UK to promote equality across the board, and the first to promote and protect human rights.

The CEHR will be responsible for promoting and enforcing equality law, across all forms of discrimination and inequality. It will bring together the work of the existing Equal Opportunities Commission and Disability Rights Commission from October 2007, and will be responsible for the new grounds of sexual orientation, age and religion or belief from the same date. The Commission for Racial Equality will join in two years time (2009).

Over thirty years have now lapsed since the SDA and the EPA, and many advances have been made in terms of employment prospects and educational attainment, but evidence continues to emerge to suggest that older women are facing particular difficulties in accessing decent quality employment.

With over 70% of women now participating in the workforce, research by the Women's Unit declared that women were paying a heavy economic price for just being female. With many women in the workforce without qualifications and continuing to be concentrated in the traditionally low paid sectors (Jay, 2000), the Commission for Women (2006) highlights how the pay gap between some men and women is now widening despite the long history of legislation on equal pay.

Further to this, comparisons of employment patterns between men and women show that only 21% of women over 40 are in full time employment compared with 46% of men. Only 5% of men work part time compared to 21% of women, with 19% of women being classed as economically inactive compared to 10% of men (Hakim, 2002). However as the proportion of the population aged fifty and over continues to expand alongside a reduced pool of younger workers, it is inevitable that workers will have to be drawn from other sources. The older age groups have consistently been undervalued and often discarded in the past by employers as being too old, and are now being encouraged to take on new challenges whether in work (New Deal 50 plus, Pathways to Work), volunteering or in taking up lifelong learning opportunities.

Arguably then, women have not had the same opportunities as men to build a career or to earn the equivalent of males due to their child-rearing and caring responsibilities. Equally age discrimination has been found to play a part in accessing employment and training opportunities (Taylor & Irwin, 2001). Data shows that the over fifties comprise a third of people of working age, however only 20% of those are actually in work and only 10% of those are on employer and government training programmes (TAEN, 2006). Often when applying for work, men and women have felt that they have been overlooked because of their age.

To compound the situation the gender differences and age differences introduced here may need further exploration when one considers that 69% of women in their fifties are economically inactive compared to 54% of men. This leads us to question whether older women are facing a double jeopardy of age and gender discrimination and how perceptions held by society, individuals and organisations impact on the opportunities for women and men over fifty in employment, training and education.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this report is to:

- Examine the interactions between gender discrimination and ageist perceptions

The Objectives:

- To identify whether the perceptions held by those involved in recruitment, and or progression within organisations may impact upon the opportunities for the over fifties, in paid or unpaid employment and education
- To determine whether past or present experiences of gender discrimination and/or ageist perceptions affect access to employment, training, progression, promotion and learning opportunities for people over fifty.
- To research the history, experiences and perceptions through the eyes of women and men aged fifty and over, in relation to work; education and learning; intermittent or early exit from work; discrimination and ageism.
- To investigate barriers that may exist either externally or internally, which may prevent participation in work (paid or voluntary) and educational/training opportunities.
- To gain knowledge about how labour market detachment (enforced, voluntary or intermittent) affects a person's readiness to access work, training and education opportunities.

Overview

There has been a surge in interest and debate about the employment of older people (usually defined as those aged 50 and over). This has taken place against a background of wider concerns over population ageing and its projected impact on welfare expenditure and the pensions industry. It is estimated that by the year 2026, the number of people aged 55-65 will have increased by 54% (ONS, 1996) - a trend that has become marked in recent years, as the baby boom generation (born between 1945-1965) have approached late middle age. A consequence of which will be fewer younger people to replace older workers (Magd, 2003).

Government policies have been gearing up to retrain and return many of the over fifties, who have been previously become disengaged from the workforce, back into a more economically active life. For some, such measures may present welcome opportunities to take up flexible working or volunteering or indeed return to learning as a way of improving earning potential or purely for self interest. This research evaluates the attitudes and perceptions of key personnel in organisations which may enable such transitions to be made. It explores the experiences and perceptions of people over fifty in relation to education, labour market detachment, home, work, discrimination past or present. It will explore whether internal and external barriers exist which may affect change and limit opportunities for the over fifties. The research will also explore, based upon the evidence presented, how individuals may be encouraged to embark upon what may prove to be life changing experiences in work, in education and in volunteering.

From an organisational perspective, employers and educators may wish to examine how they have viewed this age group and furthermore how they may improve their procedures to ensure that policies designed to retrain, educate and return people to work will also engender the improvement of social aspirations, learning deficits and opportunities for the advancement of older women and men.

Women and the World of Work

Women's participation in work in the non-traditional settings during the second world war sparked off major changes in the way women viewed their contribution to society, with many seemingly rejecting the life of previous domesticity. With economic growth and low unemployment in the 1950's and 1960's women began to work alongside men in many industries, but faced years of discrimination in the workplace in terms of access to employment and parity of pay and conditions. Yet, during this period from the 1960's onwards and well into the 1970's, the rise of the Women's Movement and the campaigns that ensued for the equal rights of women to receive fair and equitable treatment, gave women the hope that equality would soon be theirs. Women in their fifties and over are today those young women in the 1960's and 1970's, who believed that change would enable them to achieve pay and conditions equal to those of men.

Legislation aimed at trying to create a level playing field for women culminated in two major Acts: the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act, both coming into effect in 1975. The Acts enabled women to challenge and confront unequal treatment in the workplace in terms of pay and gender inequalities. These Acts attempted to keep pace with the changing demography of the workforce, whereby the economic activity rates of women had been increasing.

For example, women in the 1950's had very low rates of economic activity of around 35% up to age fifty-five, reflecting the nature of the working class women's role in society as home-maker, supporting the male breadwinner and caring for offspring in the home. However this model was challenged not simply due to raising of female consciousness but also due to economic forces.

The inflationary period in the 1970's, the oil crisis, the beginnings of the recession with the subsequent demise of manufacturing, was a period in which many women entered the labour market as they watched the full time male employment rate spiral downwards and part time work in-

crease. Employers could take on women on part time contract work, with lesser conditions of service at a fraction of the rate of men. Trade Union restrictions imposed by the successive Conservative administrations in the 1980's and early 1990's allowed employers to fully exploit the vulnerability of women with impunity. During this period women had been promised equality, yet ironically they were faced with limited choices in opportunities in employment. Although employment increased (70% of women aged 20 in 1971 were economically active), the peak age for employment was between the ages of forty and fifty-five (Collis et al 2000).

The economic activity rates of those in their forties were much higher in 1971 than for similar aged women two decades earlier, indicating the inroads women had made in accessing employment. Both in 1951 and 1971 higher percentages of women who had reached their sixties could work right up until sixty five years of age. By 1996 around 70% of women between the ages of twenty-five and fifty were engaged in paid employment; the economic activity rate for women aged between forty and fifty was particularly high at 80%. After the age of fifty the economic activity rates decline more sharply, and at an earlier age, than had been witnessed in the 1950's and 1970's (Collis et al 2000).

The withdrawal of older women from the workforce was thus increasing and coincides with early exit strategies (mainly for men), in which voluntary redundancy packages were used to downsize companies and reduce wage bills by offering enticements for people to leave employment before official retirement ages.

For women the widening or reduction of employment choices has often been determined by the economic requirements of the market. In this way women have been used as the reserve army of workers to be brought in and out of the workforce as and when required. Choices for women in the past have similarly been diminished due to assumptions made by employers on age, reproductive functions, and familial obligations. Much of the literature surrounding the problems faced by older workers in gaining access to employment is based upon men's detachment from the labour

market. Once detached from the labour market evidence has emerged of difficulty in re-entering due to age discrimination in employers' attitudes and practices towards older workers (eg: Platman & Tinker, 1998). Until recently though, little attention was paid to the problems faced by older workers. In fact, in the recessions of the 1970's and early 1980's, public policy was explicitly aimed at creating jobs for the young unemployed, through measures that encouraged the withdrawal or 'early exit' of older men (Redundancy Payment Act, 1965; Job Release Scheme, 1977). It is argued that women now face a further hurdle to overcome, the combination of gender and age discrimination (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995).

The impact of ageism on the present-day careers and experiences of older women is an emergent area of interest. There is evidence, for example, that stereotypical beliefs about age and gender combine to form a 'double jeopardy' for women in organisations. Most of the existing studies in this area represent initial attempts to define and conceptualise this 'gendered-ageism' (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995). Although producing important arguments they have tended to be limited in scope. Some have targeted men and women from only one organisation (i.e. Duncan and Loretto, 2004) whilst others have focused on women from one employment sector (i.e. Itzin and Phillipson, 1995; Bronstein, 2001). However one must recognise that ageism can also be gender neutral in that recent analysis of the age profiles of the labour market indicate increasing numbers of men over the age of fifty have now also become economically inactive.

It is not just in employment where such trends are found. Research into training opportunities has found that older workers were less likely to be offered or take up offers of training in comparison with younger workers (Taylor and Unwin 2001). Recent statistics from the Labour Force Survey in 2005 support this finding in that when asked whether they had undergone any kind of training in the last four weeks, on average around 40% of women aged 35 to 49 said they had, compared to approximately 16% of the 50+ age group (LFS, 2005). Similar rates were found for men, thus suggesting that ageism may operate in the workforce on a variety of

levels for example, direct discriminatory practices or internal belief systems and of course these may be mutually supportive.

The consequence of such practice is that people who may be fit and healthy enough and with vast experience of both work and life in general are denied progression opportunities when they may have potentially 20 years of active working life if they desire it.

It is not surprising therefore that the Government has made action against age discrimination a policy priority. Historically, the preferred approach to tackling such discrimination has been voluntary, with policy aimed at persuading employers to abandon age related thinking and behaviour (Code of Practice on Age Diversity, 1999). But in the absence of legal enforcement, this approach has had limited impact. More recently, the final draft consultation on age discrimination in the workplace (see DTI, 2005 for details) has been published. As part of its commitment to a European Directive (Council Directive, 2000/78/EC) the UK Government is to introduce anti-age discrimination legislation by October 2006. It is hoped that the legislation will place age on an equal footing with discrimination on such grounds as race and sex and ultimately that it will change the way we view getting older.

The Voluntary Sector

Today the voluntary sector is more central in public policy discussions than ever before, as national and international governments are recognising its invaluable contribution to modern society (Kendall, 2003). In terms of its value to the UK economy, the voluntary sector is worth some £26 billion per year (Vol Resource, 2003) with an estimated paid workforce of over half a million (2% of the UK's total working population). This, in part, is due to the changing nature of welfare provision, which has meant that the voluntary sector is increasingly called upon to deliver public services (Kendall and Knapp, 1996). However, the remit of the voluntary sector is much wider than this, in that opportunities for volunteering exist in many different forms. Voluntary and community organisations are heavily reliant upon the 22 million people who volunteer each year giving their time

and efforts freely to help sustain the sector's services (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2005).

The motivations for volunteering are varied, for example some may see it as a place where they can make a difference while some may look to secure an environment for social contact and an opportunity whereby new skills may also be developed. Of course this does not just apply to volunteers, the dynamics can also apply to people who work within the sector whereby a rich and rewarding career can be pursued.

As already stated, life expectancy is increasing and birth rates falling, an ageing population, coupled with the recent trend for people to retire from the workforce earlier, will result in employers, including those in the voluntary sector, having to increase their recruitment of and reliance on older staff (Shen and Kleiner, 2001). Given that people will be required to work for longer, there are now mounting concerns over the number of older people who are available to volunteer. A smaller pool of older people to draw from may mean that the voluntary sector will have to work harder to recruit older volunteers.

The UK Government are promoting 'active citizenship' in an attempt to overcome the population's depleting interest in their local environments and revive social responsibility. The 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey found that the lowest levels of involvement in formal volunteering were amongst the 50-64 age group (37%) and the 65+ age group (27%) (Green et al, 2004). As a result, the government are keen to increase the numbers of older adults involved in voluntary work. This they hope will, as Tony Blair said previously at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations Conference in 1999, "ignite a new spirit of involvement in the community" (Blair, 1999). Indeed, the 2002 UN World Assembly identified older adults as an untapped and unappreciated resource, and that despite them having the time and experience that is ideal for voluntary work, the majority are not taking part in this activity (United Nations Volunteers, 2002).

One way this is hoped to be overcome, is by emphasising active ageing strategies, where older adults' talents and experience can be used to benefit voluntary and community organisations, whilst also benefiting themselves. The Institute of Volunteering Research (IVR) identify that older adults benefit the voluntary sector by bringing maturity and experience, skills, availability, loyalty and commitment to community organisations (IVR, 2004). The United Nations Volunteer Programme (UNV) outlines how voluntary work in later life also helps older people, by enabling them to retain self-respect and a sense of purpose, whilst maintaining healthy lifestyles and independence (UNV, 2005). For paid employees over fifty, if it is their choice to continue working, they too benefit, by being in an enjoyable and satisfying role (Hirsch, 2005). Health benefits can also be a result of paid employment. For example, the National Academy on an Ageing Society (NAAS) found that people who work past sixty are more likely to report a higher standard of health than those who do not (NAAS, 2000). In the voluntary sector specifically, it has been shown that volunteering and undertaking paid work in later life can prevent social exclusion of this group, whilst challenging the stereotype of older people as service users, not givers (Leigh, 2002).

Although the voluntary sector is often perceived as more age friendly than the public and private sectors, it has been found that ageism does exist, "one finds a surprising amount of age discrimination in the voluntary sector" (Midwinter, 1992, p. 18). Various practical and perceptual barriers exist that may limit the participation of older paid and unpaid workers in voluntary and community organisations. For example, many organisations do not offer satisfactory expenses and transport allowances, which can prevent older people from accessing voluntary work. In addition to this, some organisations say that they cannot get insurance for their older workers and have mandatory retirement ages for their staff and volunteers (Davis, Smith and Gay, 2005). For older volunteers, one of the main obstacles is the lack of organisations actually pursuing older people for volunteering in the first place (Graham, 2003)

Perceptually, organisations can also discriminate against older people by having a narrow view of what activities are suitable for older staff and

volunteers. It has been found that they can subject older people to less favourable treatment due to their age, identifying them as lacking the motivation and capacity to perform a job or task adequately (Magd, 2003). It is not only organisations that may have this view, but older people in voluntary employment can also harbour negative attitudes about their own capabilities, “ageism is a phenomenon shared and indulged by older people themselves” (Midwinter, 1990, p. 105). A perception that seems as relevant today as when first penned by Midwinter.

In terms of the existence of gender discrimination, although women have historically dominated the voluntary sector, perhaps reflecting gendered assumptions about women’s care and support roles; paid work and volunteering opportunities are now seen to be more accessible for men and are indeed accessed by greater numbers of men than before.

Education

It is fair to say that people in their fifties and above have been both the catalysts and contributors to technological change and advancement, as well as the casualties of the new ways of working. Many have seen their once respected skills superseded by more computerised systems, as manufacturing industry declined and firms relocated overseas, taking advantage of qualified yet cheaper workforces. Skills they once may have had, have become outmoded in the new economy, where so often the only work that is ‘do-able’ is in the unskilled sectors. The scale of the ageing population poses further problems for government in terms of the cost of pensions. For those still in the workforce the recent assertions that older people will have to work for longer to ensure a relatively comfortable retirement may be a bitter pill to swallow. Government policies designed to facilitate re-entry into the labour market for the over-fifties address both labour market shortages and delays the onset of pension payments.

The issue of life long learning has therefore taken a back seat to continuing concerns about the financial support of a larger and older population. Yet encouraging participation in education is one way of enhancing the employability of this group. Educational attainment is a key determi-

nant of entry to and progression within an increasingly competitive labour market (Collis et al, 2000). According to the Labour Force Survey given below, 33% of women and 27% of men over the age of fifty illustrate that there are quite marked differences in the numbers of working age people without any form of qualifications.

Table 1 - Proportion of age group who have no qualifications (000's)

	All aged 16-59/64	16-24 years	25-34 years	35-49 years	50-59/64 years
All people of working age	5944	890	815	1925	2314
	16%	14%	10%	15%	27%
Women	3159	415	428	1117	1199
	18%	13%	10%	18%	33%
Men	2785	475	387	808	1115
	15%	15%	9%	13%	22%

(Base: All people of working age (men 16-64, women 16-59)
Source: Labour Force Survey (Spring 2001 – United Kingdom)

The importance of acquiring qualifications and pursuing some form of lifelong learning cannot be underestimated. Employment rates are consistently found to be higher for people with longer periods in education (Disney and Hawkes, 2003). There is evidence also that the income disparity amongst those with different levels of educational attainment will result in greater inequality with increased age (Hotopp, 2005; Ehrenberg and Smith, 1994). In addition, the collapse of traditional manufacturing has caused a shift in demand for more technical ways of working and therefore many older people will now need to re-train, update and expand their skills if they are to access gainful employment.

Even for those who do not have aspirations to re-enter work or participate in vocational training, the argument for continued education is compelling. Education (whether formal or informal) has been found to have a positive impact on health, well-being and personal satisfaction in later life

(Carlton and Soulsby, 1999). Other positive outcomes of continued education include, increased autonomy and independence, improved self-esteem, mental stimulation, greater social contact and enjoyment of life. The contribution to wider society by providing examples of good role models for the younger generation is also acknowledged (Age Concern, 1998). The reasons why older people choose to participate in education are diverse and varied. They include, the desire to increase knowledge, to enhance employability, the challenge of learning, keeping the brain active, a sense of achievement, or to train for voluntary or leisure activities.

Much of the research is underpinned by the moral emphasis on older people's entitlement to education, derived from the fact that they have contributed to the public purse and have earned their citizenship rights through their many years of hard work (both paid and unpaid). Schullar and Bostyn (1992) also make the point that older people are deserved of education as compensation for a lack of educational opportunities earlier in life. Other researchers expand on this point by emphasising the fulfilment of human potential and the notion of equality for all (Withnall and Percy, 1994).

However, there are a number of barriers that would need to be tackled in order to ensure that older people have equality of access to education. Firstly, there is an implicit assumption that age should determine when we access school, college and university. According to Ince (2005),

> *"The British education system is designed on the measles theory. You are meant to catch it early and get it over with." (Ince, 2005, p. 23).*

But does the demand for formal education ever stop? Many older people are more active and healthy than ever before and have a radically different attitude to age (Blaikie, 1999). In addition, economic and structural change, the growth of technology, women's entry into the labour market and life becoming more materialistic and uncertain have all had an impact on the demand for education. Yet older people have so far been absent from serious educational debate (Walker, 2000).

The second barrier is related to the cost associated with formal education. The Government's target to create fairer access to education for all, is evidenced through the Higher Education Funding Council for England widening participation strategic plan:

> *"we aim to ensure that all those with potential to benefit from higher education have the opportunity to do so, whatever their background and whenever they need it." (HEFCE Strategic Plan 2003-8).*

However, the age limit on student loans which is set to rise to a cut-off point of sixty, combined with increased top up fees being introduced in 2006 may in effect reduce the participation of mature students over sixty, thus sending out a clear message to employers that this group may have little to offer. Those who can afford to pay are still those most likely to benefit and those who cannot are likely to remain in their current socio-economic position. In addition, Government funding for some non-vocational and informal or community-based education has been withdrawn. One argument could be that greater emphasis is placed on work based education rather than education for its own sake, which is self-defeating, as research has shown the importance of non-vocational courses can be the first step back to formal education (Meadows and Grant, 2005).

Although there is a lot of information about the benefits of education for older people, and the potential barriers that they face, little is known of older people's choices about and experiences of learning, particularly at higher education level. An important question still to be asked is, "What is it earlier in life that determines whether people return to education, and just what does education mean to older people?" (Ince, 2005, p. 23). The Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) found a change in attitude towards education in planned retirement, when older people tended to join a class because of a variety of reasons, becoming lonely after the loss of a partner, boredom, or introduced to a class or heard about it through word of mouth.

But what about people in their fifties and sixties who want or need to return to formal education because of an unexpected transition (early retirement, redundancy, ill health) or because they want a change of

career or to prove something to an education system which let them down earlier in life, or perhaps education was not an available option for them personally due to a variety of circumstances? Most people engaged in formal education are more likely to have returned to education at some point and have the financial capability to undertake education at that level. So there may be barriers to participation for certain groups of older people, about which more needs to be known. Another question to be asked is whether or not there is a gender dimension to participation (and non participation) in formal education? Researchers have only begun to scratch the surface. The key group on which attention has been focused is the typically younger women returning to work after a break for childbirth. Yet over half of older women are believed to have lower level qualifications only, compared with only a third of younger women. The importance of improving educational provision for this group is further highlighted by the observation that a higher percentage of women as compared to men (especially in the 35+ category) have lesser participation rates in terms of education and training.

Reay (2003) looked at the process of learning from the perspective of mature women undertaking an access course and revealed how the complexities of juggling unpaid care (i.e. care of children) and study, often resulted in time poverty for the women. She suggests that universities need to change how they accommodate the non-traditional entrant. Some of the genuine apprehension men and women face when attempting to change direction and combine previous roles with new identities (i.e. student) may also prevent the engagement of the potential older learner. It is also the case that many older people (particularly working-class) may view higher education as an alien concept, or feel that it is perhaps, out of reach to people living in communities where no one has previously undertaken study at that level. Less than 1% of full-time undergraduate students in UK higher education institutions are over the age of fifty.

Following the election of New Labour in 1997, a strong commitment to ‘promoting education for all’ was made and heralded as the Government’s vision to effect a transition away from the traditional notion

of education, towards education that could be accessed throughout the life course (DfEE, 1998, DfEE, 1999). But when viewed from the actual experience of the older learner it is much less obvious how they are to be included in this vision of a learning society. Whereas once the pressure was off to undertake education that would be of value in the labour market, the ageing of the workforce and the debate about pensions may focus attention on this position, thus creating new challenges and opportunities for the education system.

The move to legislate against ageism in the workplace poses some questions for the education sector. Do equal opportunities policies within higher education protect against ageism and how prevalent are ageist perceptions both within the academy and amongst those who seek to enter it?

CHAPTER TWO
RESEARCH METHODS

Private and Public Employment Strand

Sample and Access

The participants for this strand of the research were men and women aged fifty and over, and public and private sector employers. The aim was to collect 500 questionnaires from people aged fifty and over, and 100 questionnaires from employers. Overall, 731 questionnaires were collected – 650 from people over fifty, and 81 from employers. Forty-two interviews were also carried out, 30 with men and women aged fifty and over, and 12 with employers.

The study was initially only to recruit from Liverpool and Coventry. These locations were selected on the basis that they are large cities with diverse populations and employer groups. The Liverpool and Coventry economies have traditionally been dominated by manufacturing industries, many of which have collapsed in recent years causing job losses for local workers. However, mid way through the project it was agreed by the research group and funding body that the sample should be extended to the rest of the UK.

The national sample of men and women was broadly representative of the general population of people aged fifty years plus who are economically active (67%) and those who are economically inactive (33%) (Labour Force Survey, 2003/4). However, in order to understand the potential barriers to work facing people in this age group, those who had experience of job loss at age fifty or over were targeted by the research team and accounted for 46% (300 people) of the sample. The aim here was to investigate the experiences of people leaving work in their fifties in order to determine how successful they have been in accessing employment and whether there have been differences in outcomes between men and women.

The sample of people aged fifty and over was recruited through various avenues, including newsletters, advertisements in public libraries with assistance from community groups and information and advice centres. Trade Unions, unemployment centres and employers were also used as gatekeepers to people who had experienced redundancy or other job loss at age fifty or over. The gatekeepers were asked to contact this group on behalf of the project, informing them of the research and providing a copy of the questionnaire. The target participants were invited to complete the questionnaire anonymously, as well as given the opportunity to provide their name and contact details if they wished to take part in an interview.

The employers were contacted mainly though a national database of public and private organisations held within the University as well as internet searches, phone book research and advertisements in local and national newspapers. The employers were initially contacted by phone to inform them of the research project and those who agreed to take part were sent a questionnaire and covering letter.

Data Collection

Pilot Study

The first phase of the data collection was a pilot study undertaken with 12 women aged 50-65 in Liverpool. It involved an interview with each of the women, examining their views concerning age and employment. The interviewees were accessed through advertisements placed in local community centres, asking for volunteers to take part in the research and were, therefore, those most likely to have an interest in the subject matter. The interviews, each of which lasted for approximately one hour, were recorded and transcribed in full. The interviewees were asked a series of loosely framed and open-ended questions about age related matters in employment. The interview data highlighted emergent themes and issues, which were later used to develop the main survey questions and interview topics.

The second phase of the research consisted of two questionnaires – one for men and women aged fifty years plus to complete, the other for employers in the private and public sectors to complete. The question-

naire for individuals was designed to collect detailed information about the sample, including their education and employment background, present situation and plans for the future. In common with other research it included pre-tested questions and scales.

The employers questionnaire included original questions developed for the research as well as pre-tested questions, and attitudinal statements used in existing research (e.g.,Taylor and Walker, 1993), thus allowing us to draw comparisons with previous studies. The questionnaire was designed to explore employers' attitudes and identify practices adopted towards older employees and job applicants. Both questionnaires were distributed nationally, in both paper and e-mail format. The results were then analysed using the computer software package, SPSS.

The final phase of the data collection for the private and public employment strand of the research was to undertake semi-structured interviews. These were conducted with both participant groups (men and women over fifty and employers) to provide qualitative data for the study. The semi-structured format allowed the researchers to cover relevant issues, whilst at the same time providing flexibility to explore new areas of interest. The interviewees were randomly selected from a list of people who had agreed to be interviewed. However, in the case of men and women aged fifty and over, a study group was chosen to represent variation in demographic profile (i.e. gender). The interviews took place either at the participant's place of work, the university, a neutral location (for example, café or public library) or the participant's home if preferred. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full and each participant signed a written consent form. Anonymity was guaranteed. The interviews were conducted carefully and sensitively constructed in line with ethical considerations. The qualitative data were analysed by identifying emergent themes.

Voluntary Sector Strand

Sample and Access

The participants for this strand of the study came essentially from three separate backgrounds. The first group were representatives in a position to answer questions on behalf of their particular voluntary sector organisation (VSO). The second group were paid staff employed in the voluntary sector who were aged over fifty and the third group comprised of volunteers in this sector, also over fifty years old. The aim was to collect a total of 400 questionnaires nationally in both paper and on-line formats. However, the final number of questionnaires for this strand was 459, comprising of 74 from VSOs, 187 from paid staff (over fifty) and 198 from volunteers (over fifty). A total of 30 interviews were also conducted, 10 of which were with VSO representatives, and 10 with each of the paid staff and the volunteers over fifty.

The organisations that took part in the research were identified through a variety of methods, including newsletter publications, internet searches, telephone book research, referrals and local Council for Voluntary Service information. They were then contacted by telephone, email or letter to introduce them to the study and request their participation. They were also requested at this time to pass out the relevant questionnaires to any paid staff or volunteers which they had at their organisation who were over fifty years of age. The older paid staff and volunteers that were not directly referred by their organisations, were alerted to the research through a variety of methods including general word or mouth, leaflet distribution, web-site[1] links and the project's Agender newsletters. The participants who completed an on-line questionnaire were generally self-referred, via the Agender newsletter or project web-site.

Data Collection

Pilot Stage

Focus groups were conducted at the initial stage of the investigation. The focus group was chosen to enable a participative approach to the re-

[1] www.ljmu.ac.uk/gdap

search; those that the study was investigating could offer their input and ideas on what the research should cover and how this could be found out. Two focus groups were conducted at a large voluntary organisation in Liverpool, one with paid staff and the other with volunteers, all of whom were over fifty years of age. The participants for both focus groups were contacted via a gatekeeper at the organisation. Three males and three females participated in the paid staff focus group and five females in the volunteers' focus group. Both of the groups were tape recorded and transcribed, again with the consent of all those taking part, on the premise that their anonymity would be ensured. Focus groups were used for this initial stage of the research to provide a better understanding of the issues and topics deemed important to the participant group.

The findings of the focus group meetings were then utilised to develop the survey questions and interview schedules (Crandall, B, 1999). As the data collection for the private and public employment strand of the study had already began at this stage, the questionnaires used for these sectors also formed part of the voluntary sector strand questionnaire development process. This ensured an element of consistency so that comparisons could be made between the two strands during the data analysis. A pilot questionnaire was then administered to 20 representatives from all three participant groups from voluntary sector organisations.

Quantitative Data Collection Stage

Three questionnaires were developed and administered to:

1. Organisation representatives
2. Paid staff fifty plus
3. Volunteers fifty plus

The questionnaires were sent out nationally, in both paper and email format. All posted questionnaires were sent with pre-paid envelopes for ease of return. An online survey was also developed which could be completed though the GDAP project website, furthering the national reach of the research. A total of 71 of the 459 questionnaires completed for this strand were obtained through the online survey. Returned and

completed questionnaires were then input into SPSS for the quantitative analysis.

Qualitative Data Collection Stage

The final stage of the data collection for the voluntary sector strand of the research was semi-structured interviews, these being conducted with all three participant groups (organisations, paid staff and volunteers). Semi structured interviews were used to facilitate initial discussion, whilst also allowing the flexibility for other emergent topics and areas of interest to be discussed. The participants were randomly selected from those who had indicated a willingness to be contacted for the purpose of an interview. Participants were then contacted either by telephone or email to arrange an interview. The interviews took place at either the participant's organisation premises or another agreed site, including University offices and local cafes. All interviews were tape recorded with the participants consent and transcribed. These transcripts were then analysed to identify the emergent themes.

Higher Education

Sample and Access

The data collection of the views of the over fifties were drawn from cross cutting questions taken from the individuals over fifty, who completed questionnaires for the study. Views were sought on issues regarding education, qualifications and educational experiences.

Following telephone requests to the universities named recruiters with experience of recruiting to HE courses were sent a questionnaire (n=25). Effort was made to identify a wide range of courses spanning vocational and non-vocational degree routes. Various people who had undertaken recruitment within their job role responded. Overall, 25 questionnaires were completed and returned from HE recruiters.

Data Collection

The questionnaire sent to men and women aged over fifty included questions on their educational qualifications, past and current experience

in education, including whether the participants had previously, or were currently undertaking study at HE level (n=650). It also identified the possible demand for higher education amongst the sample, and the factors that encouraged or discouraged them from accessing HE courses. Additionally, in the interviews carried out with this group, general feelings regarding higher education and lifelong learning were discussed.

The questionnaire sent to HE recruiters included similar questions to those asked of participating organisations regarding age and gender related issues. However the main focus was also to investigate access to higher education for men and women aged fifty and over, including perceptions of the mature student over fifty, the extent of support structures and the general views of academic staff in the context of the recruitment of mature students. The questionnaires were administered in a paper format and sent with pre-paid envelopes to increase the response rate. Returned and completed questionnaires were analysed using SPSS.

CHAPTER THREE ORGANISATIONS

Profiles of Participating Organisations

This section outlines the profiles of the three different organisational groups that took part in the research. These were private and public sector employers (PPE); voluntary sector organisations (VSO) and higher education institutions (HE). For the PPE and VSO we have specifically concentrated on the age and gender profiles of their work-force, enabling us to outline the differences within and between these sectors and explore the possible reasons for these.

Public and Private Sector Organisations

Eighty-one representatives of employers in the private and public sector responded to the survey. These participants are referred to as 'employers'; however the majority were, in fact, the representatives of major employers and included general managers (23%), personnel man-agers (22%), HR co-ordinators (18%), other non-personnel or lower level staff (27%) and a small proportion of owners or senior executives (7%). Within the nationally represented sample both public and private organi-sations were included with a full range of sectors[1] responding to the survey. The organisations were classified as, small for those with up to 50 employees (40%), medium with 51 to 500 employees (50%) and large with over 500 employees (26%) (Taylor and Walker 1994).

Voluntary Sector Organisations

Seventy four organisations within the voluntary sector took part in the survey. Two thirds comprised of local community organisations and a third were categorised as regional or national agencies.

Amongst all of the organisations 75% had a combination of both paid and voluntary staff, whilst 14% relied upon a workforce of volunteers only and

[1] The sample of employers spanned the whole range of industrial sectors, which were 'collapsed' down into three main groups: construction and production, business and service.

11% relied only on paid staff. Over half of the agencies which had paid staff, operated with a workforce of less than ten workers, whilst 40% had between 10 and 100 workers and 7% had over a hundred workers. Of those organisations which had volunteers, only 1 in three had less than 10 working with them, compared to over half (52%) which had between 10 and 99 volunteers; only 15% had 100 or more volunteers at their organisation.

Age and Gender: Choice or Chance?

Public and Private Sector Organisations

When asked what percentage of their workforce were aged fifty or over, 44% of employers reported that this group accounted for less than one-quarter of their workforce. One in five employers (21%) had workforces in which between one quarter and one half of their staff were aged fifty and over; a similar proportion (19%) reported having no employees over fifty at all. The most common reason for the under-representation of older employees was the lack of older applicants applying for employment:

> *"I've never thought about it too much, but we don't have a huge number of people above fifty applying." (Male 40-49, General Manager, Hospitality).*

> *"The problem really is finding people of that age group, because most of them are a settled group." (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).*

However, one interviewee attributed the apparent age imbalance in his workforce to a preference for a younger team:

> *"I've never really worked with an older designer…. I quite like the idea - we've got a young group so everyone likes the same thing. You get a group of people round a table, we all like football, music, we all go out for a drink,… in this industry you tend not to stop working…it might be a case you're sitting round the table and then it might be you all start talking about work, which sometimes you do and then you're all bouncing ideas off one another." (Male 30-39, Partner, Marketing).*

There was a significant difference between the size of the organisation and the proportion of employees over fifty years of age. In general, the

larger the organisation, the greater the proportion of staff aged fifty or over. One participant based this trend on the relationship between age and seniority and the fact that managerial roles are more widely available in large organisations.

In the United Kingdom much has been made about the ageing of the population and the predicted impact on the age structure of the work-force. In order to determine if employers were experiencing the effects of demographic change, they were asked whether the average age of their employees was increasing.

Almost 6 out of 10 employers felt that their workforce 'age' was exhibiting no real change whilst 26% felt that the average age of their workforce was increasing over time. There was also evidence of an age difference in the types of jobs undertaken within a particular organisation.

> *"Probably within the food and beverage (sector) the average age you'll be looking at …is about 18, whereas up in housekeeping, you'll be looking at, probably, at about 45-50 as an average age." (Female 30-39, Human Resource Co-ordinator, Service Sector).*

The perception by employers, that particular types of jobs seem to either attract or be associated with a person's age was an interesting point. Employers in the business and service sectors were more likely to say that the average age of their workforce was remaining constant (46% and 40% respectively); this compared with only 21% of employers in manu-facturing and construction. Some sectors appear to be experiencing the demographic changes more so than others, for instance in manufacturing and construction they were almost twice as likely to say that the average age of their workforce was 'increasing' (47%) than those in the service sector (27%) with the business sector being the least likely to be experi-encing this trend(14%). This is perhaps to be expected given the progres-sive decline in the number of young people entering trade professions.

Differences were also found when the size of the organisation was taken into account. Overall, small and medium-sized organisations were not experiencing age increases to the same extent as large organisations. It

is difficult to predict why this may be occurring - there is perhaps a greater likelihood that employers in larger organisations have the advantage of a robust range of policies and employment conditions, which may offer more security to the older worker as they approach their retirement age.
In terms of the gender profile, there was a significant difference in relation to the size of the organisation and the percentage of older men and women employed. Small organisations had more than double the percentage of older men in the workforce as compared to older women, yet similar proportions of older men and women were employed in medium-sized and large organisations.

As might be expected, older women tended to be concentrated within work sectors that have traditionally been acknowledged as women's employment areas (i.e. the service sector). There was however awareness amongst some employers of an increase in the number of young women entering formerly male dominated professions, suggesting that real progress towards equality is being made. Yet the traditional notion of 'women's work' continues to characterise the employment of many women in their fifties.

> *"I think a lot of the jobs in the city - there are more men in those jobs. We have one female worker in IT even though we try to encourage them. But I think again it's an area that traditionally in the past women have not gone into, but they are starting to now." (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business Sector).*

The data obtained from employers did suggest that men tended to be employed in a wider variety of roles and sectors than did women, who tended to be concentrated within specific areas. However, what is interesting is that this seems to be the case only amongst large organisations and not necessarily within small or medium-sized organisations.

Voluntary Sector Organisations

For the voluntary sector the gender and age profiles of workers differed between the paid staff and volunteers. Paid staff within the sector were predominantly female, with 45% of the organisations questioned stating that three quarters of their paid workforce were women. There was a consensus of opinion expressed by representatives of the sector who

viewed the high concentration of female staff to be indicative of the historical beginnings of the voluntary sector movement.

> *"I think it's a reflection of the voluntary sector as a whole, we are a voluntary organisation which does tend to be much more focused on women than men. I think it is a historical thing…it has always been the case that the voluntary sector has been that way." (Male 30-39, Director, Local organisation/charity)*

However, it was also explained that this female domination was changing, with more men accessing work in this sector.

> *"Traditionally I think it has just been seen a bit more as women's rather than a men's role. It is becoming less and less true. There are a lot more men in the business now than when I was first starting out 25 years ago." (Female 40-49, Manager, Local organisation /charity)*

> *"I think it is historical and it always has been that way… but the numbers of male staff are increasing, both because of the changing nature of the voluntary sector, but also redundancies in manufacturing and things like that, with more men." (Female 60+, Manager, Regional organisation/charity).*

It was widely acknowledged by those interviewed that females were more likely to be attracted to work within this sector due to the flexibility it offered, but of course the downside was that more often than not this was associated with part time work and lower rates of pay.

> *"Well as a charity the staff tends to be women, because it is a low paid job, it fits in with the school hours. The actual amount of money you take home is not a lot and you wouldn't be able to live on it." (Male 18-29, Development Officer, Local organisation/charity)*

The percentage of workers over the age of fifty varied between the voluntary organisations with a quarter of them reporting over half of their paid staff being of this age group. Around a third employed less than 10% of staff over fifty.

Age profiles of staff varied within the sector with no clear indication of why this was the case. One interviewee who worked for an organisation that did not have any paid staff over fifty, felt that this was due to the organisation having in the past had a younger team of workers.

> *"I think subconsciously when you are interviewing, one of the key things you always think after an interview with the panel, is, is the person going to fit into the team?… because you have got a younger organisation you tend to appoint younger people, because you think they are going to fit in and it can just get worse and worse an worse. We have had older people, a couple of people here in their fifties but they have not lasted very long before leaving." (Male 30-39, Director, Local organisation/charity).*

An alternative view was offered from another participant who explained why older paid staff were preferred at their organisation.

> *"We actually don't have any staff under thirty-five really…in my opinion, because of the hours and nature of job, they have to work quite a lot and they have to work unsupervised on a daily basis really and that can take a lot. Also certainly there is a group of our (service users)….. who feel much more comfortable with older people or at least people around their own age group, which is forties, than younger people." (Female 40-49, Manager, Local organisation /charity).*

Unless there are lawful exemptions to recruit suitably qualified people to cater for the special needs of particular groups then the rationale given in the two examples for their preferred applicant would on the face of it seem to be discriminatory. The subjective assessment of whether a person is going to 'fit in' undermines the application and interview process. What may be a perfectly good set of qualifications or experience, which the applicant has been able to demonstrate during interview, may be rejected based on the supposition that they may not fit in (because of their age?). Whilst the paid staff in the voluntary sector will be covered under the new age legislation, volunteers on the other hand will not be. Age as a deciding factor, based upon the perceived acceptance by others in the workforce, should be challenged. If we were to replace age with race and apply the same argument then clearly such practices are discriminatory.

In terms of the gender and age profiles of the volunteers with such high percentages of female volunteers (up to 75% in some cases) indicates that unpaid roles in the voluntary sector are also highly dependant upon female workers. One participant explains this by suggesting that historically volunteering has been perceived as a female role.

> *"Well I still think men don't like to (volunteer). I think they still feel it's typically a female thing to do, although having said that…two of my main volunteers, they're both men and that's because they are the main carers for their children." (Female 50-59, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

Similar to the discussion around gender and paid staff, the quote above also indicates that although two men volunteer at her organisation, this is related to them being the main carers for their children, which is typically perceived as a females' role. This may suggest that volunteering is a more flexible alternative for those who are full time carers for their family, rather than undertaking paid work and as such may attract women more so than men to the sector.

Another participant felt that women were better at volunteering and believed this explained the high concentration of women volunteers at her particular organisation.

> *"I think because its been led by women for a while…it has been fronted by women for a while and…in a general way I think that women might be more able, if you like, to think about the greater good for the group." (Female 30-39, Coordinator, Local organisation /charity).*

Possible explanations for the high concentrations of fifty plus volunteers in their organisations were centred around the need to *do something,* following retirement, having more time to spare, as well as wanting to give something back to their communities after paid employment.

> *"Volunteers have to put a certain amount of work into the organisation, so you tend to struggle to get people who have still got day jobs and are still working. So a lot are retired…they have all got the time to give to the organisation." (Male 30-39, Director, Local organisation /charity).*

> *"We have got 7 volunteers who are over 50…they are retired and don't want paid work, but they want to give something back to the community." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation /charity).*

These profiles provide a snapshot of the voluntary sector, how it is predominantly female, yet supporting of all age groups through the work that they do and the paid staff and volunteers they recruit to undertake

this work. However as may be expected there are higher proportions of volunteers over fifty than there are paid workers within the sector.

The male to female ratios were reported by the respondents to be broadly the same as in the past, with around two-thirds of the organisations stating this. However around one third of employers felt that the numbers of female paid staff were increasing. Only three organisations felt that male staff were on the increase. There was also an indication that some employers (13%) felt that the number of male paid staff within was decreasing. For those organisations with voluntary workers just under a third felt that female volunteers were on the increase, compared to only 15% of organisations feeling the same increase was applicable to men with 10% stating that male volunteers within the sector was on the decrease. This illustrates that the sector will continue to be female dominated partly due to the observations that male volunteering was in decline. Interestingly however, this finding does actually contradict some of the opinions outlined above in the interview discussions, where participants indicate that they felt there had been increase of male paid staff and volunteers in the sector.

Policies and Practices

Employer representatives within the public private and voluntary sector discussed their work practices, particularly in relation to flexible working arrangements, not only to identify what differences there were within the sector, but also to explore the variety of flexible working opportunities that are available. Policy related issues were also examined, to ascertain whether organisations protected their older staff from ageism, as well as to identify current attitudes towards recent age-related government initiatives.

Flexible Working Arrangements

Public and Private Sector Organisations

There is a growing body of research that highlights the benefits for employers and older workers of providing flexible employment

(Department of Work and Pensions, 2002). More flexible working has the potential to reconcile common work-life tensions including the need to care for an elderly relative or spouse, or the desire to spend more time with grandchildren or to combine elements of work and retirement. Good practice in this area has been shown to help older people to remain in the workplace for longer, whilst allowing employers to retain their most experienced staff. Flexibility can take many forms including part time working, job sharing, career breaks, home based working and special leave for people with sick dependents. As one participant explains:

> *"So you know we've got a wide range of people. Some people work in term time. Some people work a shorter working week. Some work mornings. Some work evenings. Some work shorter hours coming in five days but just doing 10-2 or whatever. So really it'd be broad ranging. We don't define it. If people make a proposal or a suggestion or a request we will consider what they are saying and see if we can fit it in." (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business Sector).*

Almost three-quarters of PPE's offered some form of flexible working, which might be expected to benefit their older members of staff. The majority of these organisations (91%) offered part time hours while seven out of ten offered short-term contacts and 60% of employers provided special leave provision for people with sick dependents. People undertaking part time work and short term contracts generally have lesser rights than those on permanent contract and full time work, However part time work has often been the preferred option for people to use, partly to fit in with their other responsibilities outside of work. Fewer employers provided career breaks (30%), job sharing (48%) and the option to work from home (43%). Arguably these latter two options may be offered by more progressive organisations than those only offering part-time working contracts.

It was generally the case that the larger the organisation, the more likely they were to provide all kinds of flexible work options. For example, it was more than twice as likely for large organisations to provide job sharing as it was for small or medium-sized organisations (81% compared to 39% and 31% respectively). However, the interview data suggested otherwise. In spite of the fact that many smaller firms had no formal policy for flexible

work, they were often more personal in their approach to their staff and were able to provide flexible and creative ways of accommodating individual need.

> *"I think bigger firms tend to be sort of hard and fast and they don't tend to have the sort of personal approach with the staff." (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).*

Employers in the business sector were more likely to provide job sharing opportunities (68%) than those in the construction and manufacturing sector (50%). They were also more likely to operate short-term contracts (86% compared to 55%) whilst also offering career breaks (50% compared to 25%), which may in part be due to the increased flexibility that is normally offered within say for example, a clerical working environment. It is perhaps less likely for employers in manufacturing and construction to offer the same range of options this is largely due to a predominantly male workforce requiring full time labour market attachment. Yet the service sector, being a sector which tends to be female-dominated was the least likely amongst the sectors to provide job sharing opportunities (27%) and career breaks (9%).

There was a strong feeling amongst some employers that men, more so than women, have difficultly in requesting flexible work or partial retirement because of the gender differences in typical patterns of employment.

> *"I think that because the culture has been that women come back to work and if they come back to work they come back to work part time because they've got family commitments…that ethos, it's easier for it to be accepted now." (Female 50-59, Human Resource Director, Care Profession).*

> *"I think some guys do want to carry on working because that's their role. They've still got the role of the breadwinner. Whereas I don't think it's as hard for women to retire earlier, especially if they've got a partner who's still working, because they can do it." (Female 53, Human Resource Manager, Business Sector).*

Voluntary Sector Organisations

Most voluntary organisations did offer some form of flexible work arrangements to their paid staff, however 16% did not offer any at all. The most

predominant arrangement provided was flexible working hours and part time hours, with 4 in 5 organisations offering these. Around half of organisations with paid staff also offered job-sharing opportunities, some operated short-term contracts, whilst others offered opportunities to work from home and allowed special leave for people with sick dependents. However only a minority offered career breaks to their paid staff.

In terms of volunteering, positive working arrangements were also offered to people who volunteered, but due to the nature of the work they differed from those available to the paid staff. Most organisations offered the payment of volunteers' expenses and made available various training opportunities for volunteers, with more than 1 in 5 organisations offering these incentives. Several organisations identified the types of expenses that they offered to their volunteers and what these would cover.

> *"They get travel expenses, out-of-pocket expenses, so for example if they needed to buy postage stamps or stationery to send out they would get reimbursed on that. Any travel expenses, whether it is to do with volunteering…or whether attending training events or anything like that." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation /charity).*

Over half of the organisations with volunteers offered some form of recognition for their volunteer work and enabled volunteers to take responsibility for their workload and other important decisions. Less than a third offered mobility allowances/transport provisions and the opportunity to work from home. Those organisations which had fewer flexible arrangements were also found to be those most likely to be suffering from difficulty in recruiting volunteers or retaining their workers.

Age Related Policies

Awareness of the forthcoming age discrimination legislation was explored within the public, private and voluntary sectors. Age related policies and practices were also discussed with the employers regarding how they protected their staff against ageism and what measures they undertook to accomplish this. The researchers also wanted to determine the levels of knowledge about the current anti-ageism voluntary code of practice

and gain an insight into their perceptions about the forthcoming age discrimination legislation.

Public and Private Sector Organisations

The anti-ageism voluntary code of practice introduced by Government in 1998 was initially designed to raise awareness of age discriminatory practice, yet over half of employers questioned (56%) had no knowledge of its existence. Despite this, 4 out of 5 of all organisations (79%) had some form of age related policy incorporated into their equal opportunities policies.

> *"We don't discriminate in terms of race, colour, age - anything. We treat people as individuals here." (Female 30-39, Training Co-ordinator, Retail).*

> *"We've got an equal opportunities policy. We don't discriminate on the grounds of age, sex, race or nationality." (Female 30-39, Human Resource Co-ordinator, Hospitality).*

There was no significant difference in terms of the size of the organisation and whether or not age was incorporated into their employment policy, although large-sized organisations were slightly more likely to do so.

When asked if they were in favour of a legislative rather than a voluntary or educative approach to age discrimination, 53% said they were in favour, as opposed to only 9% against and 37% who were 'unsure'. We found that the older age of the actual employer representative we surveyed, the more likely it was that were inclined to favour the legislative approach. It was also the case that male employers were slightly more likely to express support for legislation than female employers.

Those in favour of legislation felt that it was logical to place age on an equal footing with discrimination on such grounds as race and sex and that it would improve the employment prospects of older people. There was a widespread belief that ageism in employment was commonplace in certain companies.

> *"Well I think that if they've got it there for race and everything else, then it should be there for age." (Female 19-29, Systems Officer).*

> *"I think with us we've got the thing in place (equal opportunities policy) so we're fine. But I know, probably certain other companies haven't…I think it is useful to bring something like that in, because I still think it [ageism] probably does happen in certain places." (Female 30-39, Human Resource Co-ordinator, Hospitality).*

There was a strong feeling that a legislative approach might force employers to take age discrimination more seriously.

> *"A Statute of Parliament makes such a big difference…if I was to ask them [managers] the question specifically on ethnicity, they would say they bend over backwards to ensure that that's right. If I asked them on gender, they probably would say the same, but I think that's probably customary practice. If you say it on ageism, I don't think it would have entered their minds…[but] the majority of them would be horrified at the thought that they were discriminating." (Female 50-59, HR Director, Care Profession).*

Most of those who were *not* in favour of introducing legislation argued that it would add too much bureaucracy to an organisation and that it would interfere with market forces. They also questioned the effectiveness of a legislative approach, arguing that it would increase the number of older people in areas were it would be easy to do so, rather than the difficult areas that require investment and training. One participant thought that it might also work against the older person by preventing the positive discrimination of a particular age group.

> *"People are frightened to put in advertisements: 'may suit an older person' because its discriminatory and the next thing you know 'well why wouldn't it suit a younger person, that's discriminatory' so the legislation is hampering the other, its one against the other, so if you put in that in an advert: 'might suit…' you get some bright, young spark turn round and say, 'they're discriminating' and then we're in a situation." (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).*

Voluntary Sector Organisations

Within the voluntary sector it was found that around 4 out of 5 organisations had age incorporated into their equal opportunities policies to protect their paid staff from ageism. In comparison, only half of the organisations had the same in place for their volunteers and a small number of organisations with volunteers had no formal policies in place, but felt that their older volunteers were protected from ageism by other methods. This suggests unpaid workers in the voluntary sector are not

being formally protected against ageism to the same extent as paid staff are. This situation is also reflected in the forthcoming age discrimination legislation, as voluntary workers will not be covered, only paid employees.

It was found that approximately half of the organisations that had paid staff, were aware of the 1998 voluntary age discrimination code of practice. There was a much greater awareness regarding the forthcoming age discrimination legislation amongst the employers in this sector, with 8 out of 10 organisations claiming to have policies and practices in place to comply with it. During the interviews, participants were asked whether they were making any changes in light of the legislation.

> *"No, I mean maybe I am wrong, but I don't know how it would affect us in some ways, because I don't feel that we are particularly discriminatory against age. We do have quite a few people who are older than 70, who come and work as volunteers and quite a few are involved in management committees." (Male 18-29, Development Officer, Local organisation/charity).*

> *"I don't think it will make a difference to our organisation at all because we don't, we are quite sort of positive about it anyway…We have equal opportunities, you name it we have it." (Female 60+, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

The vast majority of organisations expressed a positive attitude towards this legislation, saying that it was something that they favoured. It was also identified, as has been illustrated in the private and public sectors, that the older the employer surveyed the more empathy they had with the issues of ageism.

> *"Perhaps because I am reaching that kind of age and I think now if I - I mean I have been here 10 years now and if the funding ever folded people might look at me, like I have just said to you, thinks I am 'too old', and I'm not too old you know. As long as you are mentally alright and as long as you have got enough other bodies to do the lifting and the carrying you can still do the organising can't you?" (Female 50-59, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

One aspect of the forthcoming legislation refers to the notice given or required before a person retires. One persons view illustrates how she believed the new law was a positive measure, especially for herself in view of her own age.

> *"I like the fact that you have to give everybody six months notice of their retirement, I just think it gives…again I think it is age related, I can see benefits for people my age I suppose." (Female 60+, Manager, Regional organisation/charity).*

Another viewpoint identified how the legislation will enable people from both ends of the age spectrum, young and old, to have more opportunities and not be discriminated against because of their age.

> *"It will just level out the field a bit, you know for people in older age groups. There are some groups who positively discriminate aren't there, but younger people have the same needs as well and there are some companies that won't take younger people on, because they want two or three years experience. So it will help the balances, they need to try and redress them and I'm sure legislation will change as it goes on and it can see what is working and what isn't." (Male 40-49, Development Officer, Local organisation/charity).*

> *"Again possibly a reflection on the sector, we are in the voluntary sector and we are supposed to be inclusive, that's what its all about and our organisation is all about…So if we are preaching that to others then we ought to be practicing it ourselves basically." (Male 30-39, Director, Local organisation/charity).*

Sector Comparisons

Both voluntary and employer organisations offered similar numbers of flexible work options to their paid staff. The exception being that part-time hours which are often sought to fit in with other commitments by potential workers were provided less often amongst the voluntary sector employers we surveyed.

Whilst all organisations were likely to have age incorporated into their equal opportunities policies, there was a perception however, that the voluntary sector is somewhat ahead of other organisations in terms of equality and anti-discriminatory practice.

> *"I think (the voluntary sector) is miles ahead. I mean discrimination might be there, but in terms of businesses and stuff I think we are miles ahead in that we are better on the equality issues." (Male 40-49, Development Officer, Local organisation/charity).*

Only around half of the organisations knew about the 1998 voluntary code of practice however voluntary organisations were more likely to

favour the forthcoming 2006 age discrimination legislation than employer organisations.

Recruitment

This section explores the issues of recruitment, including the criteria and selection procedure used to recruit a new member of staff (paid and unpaid) It is concerned with how the recruitment process might impact on the older applicant and the potential barriers they might face in gaining access to employment. It will consider the use of age as a factor in recruitment, what groups are targeted and the age at which a person may be considered to be 'too old' for selection. Finally, the issue of retention will be explored to identify those organisations that have retention difficulties.

Public and Private Sector Organisations

The majority of employers (86%) stated that job specific skills were an important requirement in the recruitment of staff, illustrating the demand for certain skills when short-listing for a particular post. The majority of employers (82%) also rated previous work experience as important and 63% felt that vocational qualifications were an important requirement in recruitment. Slightly fewer (54%) thought that formal qualifications were important, suggesting that more employers are focusing on job-appropriate skills as well as, or as an alternative to traditional 'paper' qualifications.

Table 2 - Skills & Qualifications Valued (PPE)

	%
Job specific skill	86
Previous work experience	82
Vocational qualifications	63
Formal qualifications	54
Experiential skills	52
Skills learned in the home	26

When asked what they looked for in a job applicant, good personality, transferable skills and good references were thought to be important.

Gauging a person's personality can only partly be assessed during interview with references providing a more objective measure of suitability for the post, whilst transferable skills may be demonstrated to a potential employer through a well-focused application or during the interview process.

It is of interest to note that whilst the majority of employers believed that work experience was important, they did not, to the same extent, believe that experiential learning was as important in the recruitment process. It was also the case that only around one quarter of employers agreed that skills acquired in the running of the home were important in the recruitment of staff. This is a disappointing finding, especially for women, many of whom have put their career on hold to have and raise their children. Hence, for those women in their fifties who have come to regard mid-life as a special opportunity to pursue a career, or have decided to return to work after their children have grown up and left home, being involved in the running of the home and caring for children or relatives, those important skills developed would seem to count for very little in the eyes of employers.

However, there were some significant differences in terms of males and female employer representative responses. Female employers were more likely to agree that skills acquired in the running of the home were important in the recruitment of new staff (33%) than male employers (13%). They were also more likely to rate vocational qualifications as an important consideration (73%) than male employers (47%). Amongst the sectors, employers in the business sector were more likely to agree that skills acquired in the home were important (43%) than those in the service sector (23%) and in manufacturing and construction (10%).

Voluntary Sector Organisations

There seemed to be a marked difference in the level of qualifications, types of skills and previous experience and history required for employers when recruiting for paid work within the voluntary sector. The following table highlights how different personal skills and attributes are viewed in the context of recruitment for paid staff and volunteers.

Table 3 - Employer perceptions of requirements for recruitment of personnel to paid and voluntary positions within the sector

	Paid Staff	Volunteers
Formal qualifications	29	6
Transferable skills	57	45
Role/job specific skills	59	38
Good references	57	37
Employment History	47	7
Good personality	51	49

N= 87 Voluntary sector employers

Overall, having a good personality was deemed important for both job roles. However when recruiting for new paid staff, the organisations were more likely to state that qualifications, transferable and job specific skills, as well as good references and past employment history were more important, than in the recruitment of volunteers.

Age as a Factor in Employment

Public and Private Sector Organisations

Almost half of all employers (48%) stated that a person's age was not important in the recruitment of staff as compared to only 10% who said that age was important, indicating a more age positive approach than had been found in previous studies (for example, Taylor and Walker, 1998). A notable proportion (42%) however said they had no definite opinion on the matter and gave a neutral response. This might suggest that employers are sensitive to age-related issues in the run up to anti-age discrimination legislation (October, 2006) and are careful not to respond or to respond in positive terms only, or that there has been some sort of change in attitude amongst employers, which could herald new opportunities for workers of all ages.

> *"We do not put a limit on age. We do not put an age limit on anybody, you know as far as we are concerned it's the individual that suits the role, has the skills and qualifications we're looking for and we'll interview them." (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business).*

However other interviewees were quite clear and more direct in stating their reasons for preferring a particular age group:

> *"We generally tend to employ people up to 35. That's because of the industry, it's dead creative, all the computers we use are all totally up-to-date, very modern so yes its generally because of the industry." (Male 30-39, Partner, Marketing).*

> *"It is a very competitive industry and a lot of people tend to sort of have younger people working for them because obviously in the past younger people have worked for less money. But we'd rather employ the older person in the same job role…these people have got a wealth of experience behind them." (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).*

Both of the above give an insight into how perceptions of age may in fact formulate into assumptions regarding suitability for the posts in question. They both cite how specific age groups are preferred by their companies, but for very different reasons. The first attributes their need for younger employees as being geared towards people with high grade knowledge of computer based technology and presumes that the creativity required in this field is more easily found amongst the younger end of the labour market. The second values the older workers experience due to their wealth of experience, but acknowledges that younger workers in a competitive market are cheaper to employ.

The term 'older worker' was explored amongst employers, the quote below illustrates the potential confusion the question posed.

> *"To be honest I don't have any perceived version of what an older person is. You know we have got a few people above retirement age working for us. They are not perceived in a way, you know, as being classified as old." (Male 40-49, General Manager, Hospitality).*

Of those that did specify an age, there was a range from thirty years to eighty years for men and women. A minority of employers (8%) said that women become older at age forty or under, and 7% of employers held the same view for men. Whilst in the minority two employers did state that people over thirty would be classed as older. Around one third of employers considered women to be older between the ages of forty-one and fifty, with slightly fewer employers applying the same age range to men. These

results indicate that women are perceived as older at a slightly earlier age than men. The average (mean) age for women was fifty-five compared to fifty-six for men

On the issue of age equality it was felt that this may be affected by the ethos of the company in which people work. If a company generally recruits from a younger cohort, this may foster an attitude amongst fellow workers whereby people over the age of thirty are perceived be 'older' earlier.

> *"I think there is a perception amongst the young because they tend to think anyone over twenty-five is old, probably [laughing] and amongst certain companies – some companies have an absolute cut off and will not take people on of a certain age. But I think there is a perception that once you go past thirty, thirty-five, you're an older worker." (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business).*

A sizeable number of employers (39%) considered men to be too old if they were sixty years of age or under. Rather more (46%) considered women to be too old at age sixty or under. Although only one employer did state that, women were too old at forty and men too old at fifty. Given the evidence of the difficulties people in their fifties face when trying to access employment, it does highlight that these views do exist amongst employers and may be covertly operating in recruitment processes. The extent to which the age of being too old is related to or informed by the current gender difference in the state pension age (SPA) is unclear.

The average (mean) age at which large organisations considered people to be too old to recruit was fifty-eight, compared with medium-sized organisations who on average gave an age of fifty-nine and small organisations an average age of sixty-five. There were some important sector differences as well. The average age at which employers in manufacturing and construction considered people to be too old to recruit was fifty-eight for men and fifty-five for women, some 5 plus years lower than the average age stated by employers in the service sector (sixty-four for both men and women) and business sector (sixty-five for both men and women). A possible explanation for this difference may be related to the physical nature of construction and manufacturing and the possible

decline in physical fitness amongst older men and women. The consideration of older workers and the possible difficulties they may face in a particular industry were discussed, and whilst some workers may be physically disadvantaged it may not be solely because of their age, many older people are much fitter than some of their younger counterparts, but age was the focus of the rationale given here,

> *"Because the production could be considered to be, you know, reasonably, not heavy work, but you're talking about a 12-hour shift, you're on your feet probably for quite a lot of that time and you're also moving around…. some of the working environment around the machines particularly, will be hot and humid and dusty so it's not an industry that is well matched to older people, just because of the amount of physical work. But it doesn't mean that, you know, we don't take them on and obviously if they come with experience from a ship yard or something like that then they'll bring a lot of new things to the place too." (Female 41, Human Resource Manager, Manufacturing).*

When recruiting for a managerial post 17% of employers stated that age was no barrier. However, over half of the rest of the employers were more likely to feel that women, were too old at age sixty and under (52%) but only 42% had the same view for men. The age at which managerial appointments were made varied, one employer expressed a preference for a younger age group, suggesting that people aged 20-40 were easier to mould. He added that the older the manager, the more set in their ways they are.

> *"I mean…I think there is a perception, I think I hinted at it before, that when it comes to management, you know if I've got 10 candidates I would probably look at some - not very young. I think there is a discrimination against very young people as well – those people in the sort of 25-40 age would probably be at the top of my list before I looked at the other extremes. I think there is a presumption that young people in management are easier to manipulate in terms of getting your company message across…25-30 is a good age group and you can mould them into the company ways sort of thing." (Male 40-49, General Manager, Hospitality).*

In the survey, 52 employers gave a maximum age they would consider someone for a management post, ranging from twenty to fifty-five years. However, the majority of appointments followed the 'golden decade' model (Itzin and Phillipson, 1993) of 30-40 years (63%). This opens up the debate once again for women who take time out of their career to to

have and raise children. The relative inequality of access to higher echelon management positions, which women have continually failed to reach, may be partly due to their lack of participation during the 'golden decade' and the employers perceptions of a particular age band from which they prefer to recruit to management.

The pressure that (some) senior women felt on returning to work soon after maternity leave - perhaps fearing that a break in employment might adversely affect their career was well understood by this employer,

> *"I think women naturally maybe want to have children and what have you, and I think that can affect their career because we've had one woman here who has been on maternity leave and she went back within a month because she wanted to keep the relationship with the client, and that can…it shouldn't… but it can be damaged, if there is a break you know. If somebody takes over your client base when you are not there…. the client may say: 'well I prefer to stay with them' so it's a bit cut throat then." (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business).*

Double Jeopardy: Age and Gender

There was overwhelming support for the notion that women faced a double jeopardy of gender and age discrimination, particularly in respect to management and the under-representation of women in senior positions:

> *"There is still a glass ceiling. It's still interesting to see who [is] on the boards, especially in public services." (Female 50-59, HR Director).*

This gender effect was particularly strong amongst women in their fifties who were often held back or judged in relation to people's perceptions of and expectations about their generation. The employer above used her own experience to illustrate the point,

> *"I mean I've been in the [caring profession] a long time, but it's amazing, you bump into people who you knew from a previous existence, you know, from before you got to the elevated position of Director in your title and they say 'you've done well for yourself' and you say you know, 'yes' and then afterwards you think, I wonder if they would have said that to a man of my age, and whether they would have said that to a women who was 15 years younger,*

> *because I think there is …… people's perception of where you should be and what a surprise that is." (Female 50-59, Human Resource Director).*

Whilst a notable proportion of employers (17%) applied age restrictions to certain job roles or tasks, most were statutory or for health and safety reasons and applied to younger and older workers (i.e. 18 years of age for bar work). The most common age restriction was 65 years of age for driving[1]. However one employer said that despite the DVLA setting an upper age requirement for driving if the applicant passed his or her medical test at that age, he would employ them. He also said that he had employed 'retired' people in the past and would continue to do so. Another employer discussed the issue of apprenticeship, highlighting its cultural association with youth and how this might alter in the future:

> *"We do have an age limit [for apprentices] but it's because of the funding that we get from X, again whether that will change when the age discrimination legislation stuff comes in? We take on anybody, from sort of 16 to sort of starting A' level kind of levels, er, if somebody has taken a year out or done a gap year all those certain types of things that's all fine, but at the moment the funding doesn't allow us to take sort of 20, 30, 40, 50 year olds." (Female 41, Human Resource Manager, Manufacturing).*

It was found to be significant that those employers who applied age restrictions to certain job roles or tasks were also those most likely to be experiencing labour shortages (57%) when compared to those who did not apply age restrictions (16%).

We asked employers what might discourage them from employing an older person. A third of employers gave reasons why a persons age may discourage them from offering an appointment. The reasons given below indicate that whilst some factors are outside the control of the organisation others are not:

- employment policy (i.e. insurance coverage)
- pay back period on time spent in employment before retirement
- low return on investment in training.

> *"I think if you are 55, [am I] going to get good value out of you... I would support managers if they were to say that to me….if you're trying to get someone to move into a career at that age, that's hugely*

[1] at age 70 a person must apply to renew their licence

difficult, because you do have to look at the years of service that people can give, and you know their capacity to be able to go through the education system that [the post] requires." (Female 50-59, Human Resource Director).

Generally those employers currently experiencing recruitment problems and labour shortages were the most likely to give reasons for not employing older workers.

When asked what job role might be unavailable to a person aged fifty or over, one in five could not think of any job role to which such a person may have difficulty in adapting to. The reasons for perhaps not giving a position to a person over fifty was due to the physical nature of the work, or that the person may not be up to date with computer based work.

Just under half did not answer the question, maybe indicating that it was difficult to answer or that realistically there was no preclusion for a fifty plus applicant. Given the evidence of Platman and Tinker (1998) and the current labour force participation rates of the over fifties, must lead us to question whether perhaps preconceptions about age, which may operate within the workplace - perhaps leading to discriminatory practices - could not be conveyed with confidence to the researchers at this stage in the debate around age legislation.

There was evidence of job typing or of older people preferring to work in certain areas. Some felt that their older staff were slowing down or getting tired. Others identified bridging jobs, when nearing the end of career employment – jobs in which people 'kept their hand in' and enjoyed the more social aspect of work:

"We have advertised in the past for a mechanic and age didn't matter, but we couldn't find anyone of that age who still wants to do it, because it's such a physically demanding job, it's a young man's job if you like. Really you know…if you get somebody who's older like the yard man or delivery driver or whatever they will take on that role." (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).

"It's probably wrong for me to say this in a way, but I don't think that there are any older people [in the organisation] who have any great ambitions, but that may be down to the job role they're doing, they're getting on in years and quite honestly [they have] different priorities and you know they've decided what they wanted to do and they are

quite happy to come along and get the social environment of work…. get the money….and then go off and do what they want to do." (Male 40-49, General Manager, Hospitality).

There was a perception however amongst some employers that older people were perhaps more suited to, or expected to be recruited into more highly paid or managerial roles:

"I wouldn't expect an older person to come for a junior designers job, for one, the wages, they wouldn't want the wages, so?… and probably we are a younger industry because of it being designer lead. If I was employing someone older it would be on a management level or an accounts handler level and I wouldn't have a problem, whether it was a man or a women and it would be down to personality, personality and experience." (Male 30-39, Partner, Marketing).

"I think in certain roles here – in our back operations it's the salary, the rate of pay and the job that puts them off, because if they are older workers or more experienced workers they're not going to want to come in at that level." (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business Sector).

Voluntary Sector Organisations

Recruitment strategies highlighted some clear differences between the recruitment of paid staff and volunteers. According to 49% of the organisations, the best avenue to recruit paid staff was through advertising. The most effective types of advertising was through the use of newspapers (local and national), which seemed to be the most popular.

"They generally advertise in (service type) magazine…But they advertise…on the website and I think they advertise in the Guardian or Guardian group of papers." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).

The practice of word of mouth was often used as a method for recruiting paid staff within the voluntary sector.

" I think also quite a lot of the people who apply tend to be friends or relatives of people who have worked for us before…it is the kind of people who are aware of us already and we try and recruit local people in the area, its part of the social enterprise stuff, you know try to give back to the community." (Female 40-49, Manager, Local organisation/charity).

Despite newspaper adverts being very popular, one organisation representative found this method unsuccessful and had to resort to other methods that he felt might be less compliant with equal opportunities.

> *"The last time we advertised in the (local paper) we actually got a rubbish response, I don't know if we got anybody coming through and it was quite expensive…I think we also put up posters and stuff and in the end I actually used a connection, possibly not in line with equal opportunities, but from that we actually got more answers." (Male 18-29, Development Officer, Local organisation/charity).*

For the recruitment of volunteers, organisations deemed external agencies and word of mouth as the most successful way of attracting volunteers. Often volunteers had prior experience of being involved in their communities.

> *"The vast majority of people will come to use because they are actively involved in one or more voluntary or community groups locally and they will know something about us or they will know something about our (service) already before they come to us." (Male 30-39, Director, Local organisation/charity).*

Some organisations also identified how service users were often likely to volunteer for the organisations that have helped them. Knowledge of or experience of being helped by a voluntary service also drew people into the sector who had experienced the benefits of their help.

> *"About 25% of people who come to volunteer have been service users. So they have used the service, benefited from the service and thought I'd like to do that, with no intention of getting a job out of it, but just thought I'd like to do that." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

Recruitment also took place at related events where literature about the organisations was given out. Advertising at related events was the other main method of recruitment used for volunteers.

The sector promoted their voluntary roles as either a leisure activity or as a work like role. Although the majority of respondents did not target any particular age groups when recruiting, a number of organisations did say they were more likely to target the over fifties for volunteers compared to only 2% targeting this group for paid staff, indicating that older workers

may be perceived as more acceptable as volunteers than they are as paid staff in this sector. Similarly, out of those organisations with staff, 78% said nothing would discourage them from employing someone over fifty, compared to 92% who said nothing would deter them from taking on volunteers over fifty. Thus indicating a slight difference in attitude towards people in paid and volunteering roles, and recruitment of people over fifty. Despite the overall positive attitude towards older workers, there was some evidence whereby a representative reported she was targeting a particular paid role towards a younger person, as she did not perceive an older person to be as suitable.

> *"I thought actually I might try for a local young person who had maybe some typing skills and computer skills just to kind of start them off on the road, because it is only short term. I'm hoping I can get two years funding for it, but say a lot of mature people want fixed jobs long term. That's what I had in my head anyway, perhaps somebody local who might not stand a chance somewhere else." (Female 50-59, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

A slightly more positive attitude towards the recruitment of older people as volunteers is also reflected in the maximum recruitment ages specified for this group, which tended to be higher than the ages given for paid staff.

Over half of the organisations would not regard any applicant as being too old to recruit to paid employment in the sector. The knowledge of the sector and how people often move from paid staff to undertaking a volunteer role in later life prompted this response.

> *"I just haven't got any prejudices about older people I think they can bring a lot of experience…personally, I think older people can bring a lot to the organisation and probably won't be quite as [ambitious], obviously we have people who are quite brutally career focused in the organisation which can cause problems and conflicts and obviously we don't want people wrestling with each other to get to the top. I generally perceive that not to be the case with older members of staff, who maybe have had their career or are looking to make some sort of career set, but gradually." (Male 30-39, Director, Local organisation/charity).*

In terms of those that did specify an age at which they would possibly consider someone as being too old to recruit, some organisations were

slightly more inclined to give an age of between sixty and sixty-four for females (18%) and males (14%). The age band limit mostly favoured by approximately 20% of employers in this sector was sixty-five to sixty-nine for males and females. Only 11% of organisations would consider applications from people of seventy and over.

The factors, which affected the 70+ age cut off cited for potential staff was further explored,

> *"I don't know, I sort of plucked it out of the air really." (Female 30-39, Coordinator, Local organisation/charity).*

> *"Well, are there really many 70 year olds wanting to start work? You see the reason I am hesitating is…normally the retirement age is 65 and increasingly we are getting applications to extend that beyond 65. So far the applications to do so have been agreed, but it is on a yearly basis, post-65. But we have (one member of staff) who has just reached 65 and was actually ill at the thought of having to retire, he hasn't had to retire, we have happily kept him on because he is a really good member of staff, but I saw the effect the possibility of retirement had on him, it was quite devastating, but then seventy I'm not sure, it is all relative to your own age you know." (Female 60+, Manager, Regional organisation/charity).*

Again the notion of physical difficulties was given as a reason for not taking on an older worker:

> *"They might be required to do quite a bit of travelling, quite a bit of work in the evening. So I just feel it might be asking too much of them, a lot of the physical side to it." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

However, another interviewee outlines the issue of insurance costs from having paid staff of that age group.

> *"I think we would recruit up to seventy, so anyone who applied, you know if they met the person specification would get an automatic interview and I think generally, we would take them on if under seventy, but over seventy we would have to refer to head office because you need special insurance." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

In terms of the volunteers, organisations seemed to be more 'age-friendly' in their maximum recruitment ages than for paid staff, with almost three

quarters of the organisations saying that there was no specific age at which a man or women would be seen as too old to recruit as a volunteer.

> *"I think for a volunteer, because they can, there is not as much expectation of them (like for paid staff). So, for example (volunteers name) who's 80, he can be a volunteer for as long as he likes as far as I'm concerned…when you are a volunteer you can really pick and choose what you do and there is no pressure on any of the volunteers to undertake any of the activities." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

> *"It is different to staff to be honest. The bottom line is ….the difference I see is that at 70 for example I would be very happy to do a voluntary job but I don't know if I would want to take the responsibility of a paid job…I am not saying I am right, but I think that, my thought processes tell me that." (Female 60+, Manager, Regional organisation/charity).*

As with the paid staff in the sector, the issue of insurance and the additional cost this may incur was cited as a factor which may affect the recruitment of an older volunteer.

> *"We just have to be careful that for anyone over 70, we take out additional insurance for them…I mean we've not got anyone over 70 on (one particular job role) It's not because of paying the insurance as I don't think it is an astronomical amount and I don't think it's a problem. I think it is more someone getting to 70 and thinking, I still want to come in, but I would like to do something less demanding." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

With reference to those that did specify an age, 11% of organisations said that an applicant may be too old if aged between sixty and seventy for men and women and 16% of organisations specified an age of seventy-one and older as too old. One interviewee that said seventy was too old to recruit, gave the nature of their volunteer roles as a reason.

> *"I was thinking well physically I mean like (one service area) it is quite a physical [role], but I mean X is 75 and she works here as a volunteer about 3 or 4 days a week, but that is unusual I would have thought and she tells us 'I'm too old!' But no one forces her to come." (Male 18-29, Development Officer, Local organisation /charity).*

Perceptions and assumptions regarding a person's age and the decisions on their suitability for employment to paid or unpaid work can be based upon a whole range of messages from society, through media interpreta-

tions, previous experience, knowledge of a persons capability and ones own subjective opinion. Given that this study highlights the double jeopardy of gender and age, it would seem timely to also begin to explore how cross cutting areas of for example disability and age, or race and age may impact upon a person life chances. In the face of new legislation many pre-conceived ideas about ageing and how we view the differences in age will be challenged. In addition the proposed changes to increase the pension age to sixty-eight by 2046 will happen in three stages: the first increase, from sixty-five to sixty-six, will be phased in over two years starting in 2024, with sixty-eight being reached in the third stage by 2046. In light of the findings from this study there would appear to be an imperative for employers to review their current recruitment and advancement policies, instigate all staff into taking up training on the issues of ageism and how this operates within the workplace.

Recruitment and Retention Issues

Public and Private Sector Organisations

Over a third of organisations were experiencing recruitment problems. Employers in manufacturing and construction were having the hardest problem recruiting new staff (45%) whilst the least likely to be experiencing such problems were those in the business sector (29%). The need to recruit new staff was expressed by over 40% of employers in large and medium-sized companies and by around 25% of those in small-sized companies. Hence, recruitment was a significant concern for employers across a wide variety of organisations and industrial sectors.

In addition to recruiting the appropriate staff for their organisation, many employers raised concerns over retention levels. Employers from various sectors were experiencing problems retaining their staff (35% in manufacturing and construction, 32% in the business sector and 27% in the service sector). It was also the case that the larger the organisation, the greater the problem in retaining staff (42% of large organisations, 30% of medium-sized organisations and 15% of small organisations).

Over half of the organisations who were finding it difficult to retain staff had also operated a mandatory retirement scheme with an average retirement age of sixty-five. Only 45% offered the option of later retirement and even fewer (23%) gave their staff the option of partial or gradual retirement, a factor which may influence the current tensions in recruitment and retention. There was evidence, however, of some employers moving towards a more flexible approach to the retirement process.

> *"But we've certainly been looking at difficulties in recruitment and retention, about what we do about the recruitment profile there and seeing if we want to encourage more people to stay." (Female 50-59, Human Resource Director).*

It was also the case that organisations providing flexible work options were slightly less likely to be experiencing retention problems, perhaps confirming the possible role of job flexibility in prolonging labour market attachment.

Voluntary Sector Organisations

Over half of those surveyed from the voluntary sector agreed that they were experiencing difficulties in recruiting people to the sector as well as retaining them. These difficulties in retention may be linked to a variety of reasons. The majority of employers in the voluntary sector (61%) felt that a paid staff position was more stressful than a volunteer role with just under a third of employers believing the volunteer role was stressful. When asked whether they felt paid work in the sector was demanding all organisations agreed, but only 15% felt that the work of volunteers could be called the same. It was significant that those who had agreed that the paid staff roles were stressful, were also those organisations most likely to have recruitment and retention difficulties.

The commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities within the workforce whilst actively being pursued, also presented some difficulties in getting people from minority groups into a post:

> *"We don't measure the age, we do ask about disabilities, we do ask about black, racial minorities, ethnic groupings. We don't struggle to get the applicants, particularly from those communities; we struggle*

> *to get them onto shortlist and those that we do shortlist, for whatever reason, we tend to find that they just don't come to the interviews at all. ….we've not got black or racial minorities, no disabled people, so we are looking at a strategy for trying to attract candidates from those communities." (Male 30-39, Director, Local organisation/ charity).*

However, recruitment difficulties were related to the nature and requirements of the job roles, also included were issues regarding transport and the difficulties in negotiating the benefits system, were cited as potential problems the agencies had to face when trying to recruit to the sector

> *"The people that we are looking for in the staff team have to be qualified (profession)…[they are] like gold dust at the moment and they can just pick and choose their jobs, so I think it is difficult, particularly when I think they are looking for part time staff, because of people not wanting to go from a lucrative full time job… into a part time post." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

> *"It is sometimes difficult to recruit staff and a lot of that I think has to do with transport difficulties and you have to be able to move around the area really, with ease." (Female 60+, Manager, Regional organisation/charity).*

With employment being less of an issue than in the past and the issues surrounding volunteering when unemployed, the vicissitudes of the benefit system appear to hamper the recruitment of volunteers.

> *"There is not enough unemployment and where there is unemployment the job centre doesn't always see volunteering as a plan for work …we have a number of volunteers who are in receipt of incapacity benefit who obviously couldn't do paid work because of their incapacity…. if they did voluntary work then they could lose their benefit with the changing legislation. So they become a bit [less] confident about doing that now." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

The general lack of interest in the voluntary sector was highlighted as a major reason for under recruitment to volunteering.

> *"There just doesn't seem to be that many people interested in volunteering at the moment." (Male 40-49, Development Officer, Local organisation/charity).*

Sector Comparisons

Just under half of the voluntary agencies did not consider that there was a specific age at which paid staff would be to old to recruit, this figure dropped to 15% for private and public organisations. However it must be acknowledged that these views may contradict organisational policy. It would be possibly naïve to suggest that they do not have influence in the recruiting process. Additionally, more employers (33%) in those sectors were likely to be able to cite reasons that may discourage them from employing older workers than those in the voluntary sector (8%) and were also more likely to apply age restrictions to certain roles or tasks (17%) than voluntary organisations (3%).

No differences were found between the various sectors, in terms of criteria deemed important when recruiting staff, they included qualifications, personality, references, employment history and transferable skills.[1]

It was found that whilst labour shortages were similar amongst all sectors, employers in the private and public sectors were also experiencing a combination of skill shortages, recruitment and retention difficulties, with fewer voluntary sector agencies experiencing them to the same extent. However the reasons for such difficulties seem to vary between the two main sectors with the voluntary sector relating their problems of recruitment to high levels of employment and the difficulties of attracting potential volunteers without tem losing benefit entitlement, as well as a general lack of interest in the sector.

Whilst measures were deemed to be in place to ensure equality of opportunity, it was reported that there were difficulties in getting minority applicants from the short-listing process and into post.

Finally, the demographic changes seem to be beginning to bite, certainly within the private and public sector agencies, which may be more to do

[1] The voluntary sector (VSO) questionnaire did not request information regarding skills learned in the home, but did use the term transferable skills. Given the low order of importance found amongst the private and public sector employers (PPE) on the value of home skills and the higher level of importance attached to transferable skills as used in both the PPE and VSO questionnaire a direct comparison between the sectors could not be made.

with a lack of younger workers in general. It may be the case that employers would need to re-appraise their policies on flexible working, as the survey shows, the less flexibility within an organisation the more likely it is that they will experience problems with retention as well as labour and skills shortages.

Training and Promotion

Public and Private Sector Organisations

Lack of training amongst the older workforce is an area of research which has found that fewer people over the age of 40 are either not willing to take up offers of training or are not being put forward for training (Taylor and Urwin 2001, Labour force survey 2005).

Overall 64% of employers disagreed with the assertion that it is a better investment to train younger rather than older workers. When asked at what age might they consider a person to perhaps be 'too old' to train, less than half of employers said that age did not present a barrier. One in three did not answer the question. A small number of employers in this study (7 in total) said that they did not provide training for people past the age of fifty. Of those that did respond, a small percentage (7%) set a maximum age of fifty-five for men and 11% of employers said the same for women. Rather more however set an upper limit of sixty or over for men (28%) and women (24%) this was especially the case for those in manufacturing and construction (41% for men and 29% for women) than for those in the service sector (30% for men and women) and the business sector (20% for men and women).

The most common reason given for imposing an age limit on training or considering a person to perhaps be too old to train was in relation to the return on the investment in training. Despite one company having no formal age limit on training, employer attitudes could be seen to restrict older workers' access especially in areas where training is costly.

> *"If you had an applicant who was 55 who'd been in X [profession] the same time as somebody who was 35, I don't think you'd find discrimination actually there. But in terms of recruiting in to train,*

> *basic training, managers would not recruit in at that upper end of the age group to basic training…they might question even people returning at that age who had been out of the service for a long time… part of that would be the amount of time you would need to give, the capacity to catch up… So I think you might find there'd be reluctance on that front. It wouldn't overtly be that, it would always be at the back of the managers' mind." (Female 50-59, Human Resource Director).*

Another employer identified the importance of training for all age groups:

> *"We provide a lot of training within [name of organisation] regardless of age or if they're on a contract or full time - they still get, especially the statutory training because they have to have that, but they still get all the basic skills training…everyone goes through that, it's not just your full time people. It's everybody. It's people from all different departments regardless of what job they do, there will still be a set criteria for that job." (Female 30-39, Human Resource Co-ordinator, Service Sector).*

There was evidence that older and younger workers might find it difficult in adapting to training, but for different reasons related to their age:

> *"You get some youngsters who are very difficult to get motivated and trained and equally sometimes older people can get stuck in their ways but you know there is an equal proportion of both I think." (Male 40-49, General Manager, Hospitality).*

When asked at what age might a person be considered to be 'too old' for promotion, 50% said that age was not a criterion for deciding who would be put forward. Again a considerable number (one in three) did not answer the question. Of those that did respond, 4% said that men were too old if they were aged fifty-five. However, 7% said that women were too old if they were aged fifty-five. Although these are relatively small numbers they indicate a perception amongst some employers that women, more so than men, are considered older at age fifty-five (a trend discussed earlier). However, the majority of employers who responded (16%) set an upper limit of sixty for men and women. Although there is some indication of a perception amongst some employers of ageing being viewed differently for men and women, it remains somewhat unclear as to why so many employers did not respond to some of the questions regarding age in relation to recruitment, training and promotion.

Voluntary Sector Organisations

Some voluntary sector organisations offered several training opportunities to their paid staff, which were readily available and easily accessible to them.

> *"Yes we have a training section…we offer a range…we provide external training, you know can't do it for everybody every year… but there are a lot of opportunities." (Female 60+, Manager, Regional organisation/charity).*

Some indicated how the annual appraisal process identified key areas where training could be used to develop staff.

> *"Everyone has an individual training plan. So they have an appraisal once a year and at the end of the appraisal there is a section on training and they say what they would like to do over the next 12 months and they have an individual training plan which links into the (organisations) overall training plan." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

> *"Well all staff have personal development reviews…and that's about identifying training needs for the individual and the organisation." (Male 40-49, Development Officer, Local organisation/charity).*

There was however some indication that not all agencies are able or willing to provide staff training.

> *" …some of them do have training built into their contracts and that is kind of part of my contract as well. Here in the (X) there is not a great of deal of training. Most of it is on the job, people get shown how to do things. Some people do a health and hygiene course, or some go on health and safety and first aid." (Male 18-29, Development Officer, Local organisation/charity).*

For the volunteers there seemed to be less training available than that for paid staff. Although most offered induction training, after that it tended to be only sporadic opportunities that were available.

> *"Initially there is an induction with the board …[but] because I basically do everything here I haven't got like a training programme for volunteers because it would take up more time than it would be worth in terms of what would come back in volunteering. But at some point I know there could be something like that, if the organisation grew sufficiently to support that." (Female 30-39, Coordinator, Local organisation/charity).*

> *"Well basically anything that I can get hold of that doesn't cost me anything…we don't have a training budget so to speak." (Female 50-59, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

There was an assumption that older volunteers may not be receptive to training and that if provided it may place further expectations on the volunteer to perhaps undertake more work.

> *"Well, they don't mind volunteering but I think they think, " if I do that training they might expect a bit more of me and I might be tied down then"…. and they've worked all their lives, so they don't mind doing a little bit of voluntary work to suit them and that's fine by me." (Female 50-59, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

Although many voluntary organisations did run training for all their employees and volunteers, or accessed it from other sources, some organisations in this sector did apply age restrictions to such training opportunities.

Just under 70% of organisations stated that age was not a factor in whether they offered training to their staff. Of those who specified an age cut off around 10% of organisations cited 60-65 as the cut off age point for women for training, compared to 9% stating the same age for males. Similarly 9% and 8% of organisations cited the older age of 65-69 for males and females respectively. However 13% of organisations said that they felt age seventy and over would be too old to consider a person for training.

For volunteers within this sector 79% of organisations said that there was no specific age at which they would consider a person too old to train. From the remaining organisations 8% specified 55-69 and around 13% stated seventy and over as being the age at which volunteers would be too old undertake training.

These results show that voluntary organisations were more likely to apply age cut-off points to their training opportunities for their paid staff than for their volunteers. However, there tended to be more opportunities for paid staff than there were for volunteers in the first place. Of those that did place age limits on training, gender differences were marginal.

The training age limits provided a variety of responses from employers, which varied from full support for training of all ages to restricting training opportunities, and a perceived lack of interest by volunteers towards training.

> *"I don't think they are ever too old. I mean we have got a volunteer who is 81…she goes on training days." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

One interviewee that has a training age limit at their organisation highlights a perceived lack of return on the cost of training older people.

> *"I think really it is down to cost. We are a very small organisation; we've got increasing need for accountability…and there is lots of training that people have to do … I think it is just people who are over 65 maybe, well some people at that age, they don't want to do any more training, other people do want to do it, but we are not economically going to get a return on that really in time." (Female 40-49, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

Sometimes the staff/volunteers may hold negative views about opportunities for training, which might inhibit them from taking part, rather than it being an organisational decision.

> *"Our oldest member of staff is a woman certainly in her late 50's…she lacks confidence in her competency skills, but she's an extremely good member of staff and you wouldn't look at her and think she is that age… Although she would like to learn more things and have that piece of paper for herself, I think she thinks it's not worth the effort really…She lacks the confidence to do [training]…I think that is related to age and I think that its related to sort of traditional attitudes really and a mentality of her age group not to do that." (Female 40-49, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

It was evident that some organisations in the voluntary sector did limit the training opportunities for their older paid staff and volunteers an that some organisations felt that even if training was readily available and on offer to their older workers, they may not actually want to take part anyway.

Sector Comparisons

Voluntary organisations were more likely to agree that it is was not a better investment to train younger rather than older workers, than em-

ployers in the private and public sectors. They were also more age positive in their attitudes towards training opportunities, with the majority of voluntary agencies not applying age restrictions on their workers. Amongst the two main sectors it was more likely that employers in the private public sectors would apply age restrictions and were more likely to set this at sixty years and under, compared to the voluntary sector who tended to set them at sixty years and over.

Given the age profile differences between the sectors with the voluntary sector having almost half of their paid staff over the age of fifty, and the private and public sectors having less than one quarter of their workers over fifty, this may then account for the slight differences in age cut offs. Whilst training policies are partly informed by the profile of the workers and the needs of the organisation, there is now a need to re-appraise such policies to ensure the new age legislation is complied with. Age restrictions for some areas of employment can be justified but when evidence as found by Platman and Tinker (1998) and labour market data suggests that age restrictions are not solely based upon rational decision making, then the findings from this study would indicate that age restrictions based upon a variety of reasons, impact upon the older worker and discriminates against them taking up opportunities to engage with training and advancement. If they are not too old to work then they should not be too old to train.

Retirement and Pensions

Policies and attitudes towards retirement varied between the different types of organisations involved in the study. In identifying whether organisations had mandatory retirement ages or offered flexible retirement options it was possible to gain insights into the attitudes and viewpoints held by employers towards employment exit and age. Narratives around gender and retirement offered some valuable insights.

Public and Private Sector Organisations

Just under half (47 in total) of employers had a mandatory retirement scheme in place. Of these, 76% set a retirement age of sixty-five for men,

while 63% had the same for women. A notable proportion of employers (13%) did not know the average age at which their staff usually retired. Those that did specify an age said that male employees usually retired between sixty and sixty-five years of age while female employees retired earlier, usually at age sixty or under. However, there was some evidence of flexibility in both the nature of retirement and the retirement process with 38% of employers offering the option of later retirement and 27% offering partial or gradual retirement (for example, a reduction in working hours). Rather more (41%) however offered voluntary early retirement, which ranged from fifty to sixty-five years of age. In terms of later retirement, a third of employers operating such a scheme did not set a maximum retirement age (preferring instead to consider it on a case by case basis) 47% set an upper age limit of between sixty-five and seventy, and 1 in 5 employers allowed their staff to continue working after seventy years of age. Although there was some indication that this might alter in response to the proposed rise in the state pension age,

> *"The way the company describes it [retirement age] …is, that's the mandatory age [65], but we've had a lot of people asking about continuing to work until they're seventy and I'm sure the figure will change. But it's just at the minute that's the way the company is kind of geared up for the pension and those things, but with increasing pressure and I'm sure possibly with the help of some legislation it will change." (Female 41, Human Resource Manager, Manufacturing).*

Some employers said that staff wanted to retire early because of burn out or the pressure of a senior role, or that they wanted to spend more time with the family or travelling. But there were just as many employers who said that staff wanted the option to work beyond the normal retirement age or scale down into a less stressful and strenuous job role.

> *"We've got two managers of that age group who have been here for a long time. One since she practically left school, one for a good few years and both of them have asked to be relieved of their duties as managers and want to wind down. So they're coming towards retirement and don't want the responsibility… I think that's what a lot of people think as well. I think some men and women may seize the opportunity for the last five years to push their pension up, give themselves a bit of a challenge, but some are winding down and thinking 'I don't want to be bothered anymore'." (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business Sector).*

> *"We don't have a fixed [retirement] age…the approach was very much, to some extent, me going up to them you know when they got to the [state] retirement age [and asking] 'are you continuing?' and they all positively said 'yes, we would like to continue' and that was the end of that." (Male 40-49, General Manager, Care Sector).*

One organisation's retirement policy allowed its staff to work beyond the normal retirement age, but applied certain conditions to the extension:

> *"We do allow people to stay on past sixty-five. They don't have to finish then, but we look at what their shifts will be, what days they're looking at and they have to have like a doctor's check every year, just to make sure, you know, that it not affecting them." (Female 30-39, Human Resource Co-ordinator, Service Sector).*

Another gave the option to stay on, for some employees but not others:

> *"We have a retirement age of sixty so most people on pension scheme retire…but our oldest member of staff, we've just had someone retire. He was actually the Chief Executive and so he was a little bit older. He was sixty-five. You tend to get that when people are in executive positions, they tend to stay on that little bit longer, it's usually agreed that they can." (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business Sector).*

Many employers had a positive approach to retirement, offering succession planning, exit interviews and pre-retirement rundowns, where six to seven months before retirement staff drop a shift and then five months before drop two shifts and so on to help them prepare for retirement. There was also evidence of people moving into transitional jobs within the same company, allowing them to combine elements of work and retirement, or to revise their work pattern and move to part time work. The desire to retain experienced staff was often a determining factor in whether flexible retirement was provided. As one employer put it,

> *"if you've got somebody who is here five days and you can keep them for three, you might as well keep them." (Female 30-39, Human Resource Co-ordinator, Hospitality).*

Large and medium-sized organisations were more likely to have a mandatory retirement age in place (65% and 62% respectively) than small organisations (19%) but there were no significant differences in relation to the size of the organisation and whether they offered later or partial retirement. Large organisations were however more likely to offer volun-

tary early retirement (57%) than medium and small organisations (27% and 38% respectively) despite the fact that they were also more likely to be finding it hard to retain staff.

Employers in manufacturing and construction and the business sector were more likely to have a mandatory retirement age in place (55% and 59% respectively) than those in the service sector (27%). There was no difference in relation to whether they offered later or partial retirement, although employers in the business sector were slightly more likely to offer later retirement (44%) than those in manufacturing and construction (30%) and the service sector (30%) demonstrating a more flexible approach to retirement. It is of interest to note that employers in the business sector were also the least likely to be experiencing labour and skill shortages.

Employers in construction and manufacturing identified some practical issues and problems in organising later retirement:

> *"I think in an industry like mine or this manufacturing site it's not as easy as some places because the work is hard on an older frame. We're the first place I've ever worked in where we have limited amounts of things that you can offer just because…we've had some people move into more office based work in say quality or in the planning area. But if you think about the fact we've only got 40 people or heads that work in that [area] anyway and you've got 360 people working in [the factory] it's limited chances… for some people it really isn't what they want to do. They've worked all their life perhaps in the [factory] and an office based [job] just isn't [for them] - it's very different." (Female 41, Human Resource Manager, Manufacturing).*

In the past, manual employees retired either before or at the state pension age, when they could no longer physically do the job, or at least were not expected to be able to do so. Those who needed or wanted to continue working found it difficult to find a new career on account of their age and lack of relevant experience. More recently however, the 'bridge' job following the end of career employment has become an important resource for the displaced older worker. But the bridge job is largely a phenomenon of the service sector where maturity is seen as an advantage and hence retired manual workers tend to be confined to the option

of work in the retail or service sector or non-employment. Yet one employer argued that given imagination and foresight, the concept of the bridge job could be applied to manufacturing, preventing older people leaving jobs they loved.

> *"Rather than have to go out or feel as if they wanted to go out and have a little job in X [well-known supermarket] or something like that, why not have a [pause] little job or less hours in the business you've worked in for so long, and you know just come in for so many hours in a week? So that could work." (Female 41, Human Resource Manager, Manufacturing).*

In order to find out employers' own attitudes towards retirement, we asked them at what age did they think the state pension age should be set. 49% of employers felt that the state pension age for men should be around sixty while 57% felt that it should be around sixty years of age for women. Hence there is some support amongst employers for an equalising of the pension age to sixty for men and women. The government's favoured option of extending the pension age to over sixty-five years of age was supported by only 7% of employers. Female employers were more likely to feel that the state pension age for men and women should be sixty whilst male employers were more likely to say that it should be over sixty years of age.

The majority of those interviewed supported the idea of a 'flexible decade of retirement' (Schuller and Walker, 1990) and more choice in the retirement process.

> *"I just think that you're forcing people into something… everybody is saying you should raise the retirement age to 70 and allow people to work till then. Well I don't think that you should be forcing people to do that. I think it should be a choice that you can retire - I don't know how they're going to work the pensions out and everything else but retire between a given [age] …that is my personal opinion." (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business).*

Voluntary Sector Organisations

In the voluntary sectors it was found that a quarter of the organisations had mandatory retirement ages for their paid staff. The majority of which set them at sixty-five for both men and women, with only one organisation indicating the age of seventy for all. A few who had paid staff applied

mandatory ages at their organisations said that these were just contract standards, but that they could be flexible with these.

> *"All our employment stuff was done by an agency, contracts and stuff…they slotted sixty-five in as a kind of standard, I don't remember it ever being discussed as an issue. I think it was only when completing your questionnaire I looked at that standard and realised that we did say sixty-five. .. I don't know, it wouldn't be a hard and fast rule - you know if somebody was getting to sixty-five, could certainly do a couple of years more, it wouldn't be an issue to us." (Male 30-39, Director, Local organisation/charity).*

Reasons for not having mandatory ages were offered.

> *"I just think it is something that is being kept open, it has always been policy really that people should work as long as they want to or need to, if they are healthy and able to carry on the role." (Female 40-49, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

> *"I don't know, it is just not there. People tend to just you know, the last manager retired when she was 60 but that was her choice. I will probably retire…when I can, and I'm looking forward to it. It is up to the individual really. I think if people want to stay on beyond the retirement age then it will be discussed because we do pay pensions and things but as I say I don't think the issue has arisen." (Female 60+, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

Of those that had mandatory ages for paid staff, only 4 out of the 11 offered the opportunity for later retirement and two of those had maximum ages of seventy or seventy-five.

> *"Normally the retirement age is sixty-five and increasingly we are getting applications to extend that beyond sixty-five and so far the applications to do so have been agreed, but it is on a yearly basis, post sixty-five... Opinions have definitely changed because I had a member of staff who had stayed for one or two more years and he was sixty-seven and an extremely valued member of staff. He was actually forced to retire…it actually changed the way round of thinking because his loss was suffered and we have not done that since." (Female 60+, Manager, Regional organisation/charity).*

The same number of organisations also offered partial and early opportunities to retire, with one having a minimum age of fifty. In terms of the actual ages paid staff tended to retire from this sector, they were more likely to give sixty as the average age for female paid staff to retire (67%) than they were for male paid staff (10%), who they felt were more likely to retire from their organisation at sixty-five (72%).

Only one organisation had a mandatory retirement age for volunteers, which was the same for both men and women. This was due to insurance being too expensive for older workers and not wanting to have to ask people to leave when they were no longer capable. A third of organisations did not feel that there were specific ages that their volunteers tended to retire, for both males and females. Of those that did specify an age, these were the same for males and females, with 43% stating under the age of sixty-five and 26% over the age of sixty-five. Some reasons for volunteers retiring tended to be due to ill health, family commitments or just feeling as though they were too old to continue working.

Organisations tended to feel that retirement should be set at sixty or under for females and between sixty-one and sixty-five for males. This is in stark contrast with the current white paper, which is expected to back calls for a staged increase in the state retirement age to sixty-eight by 2046 (Turner Report 2006).

Sector Comparisons

Although PPEs were twice as likely to have a mandatory retirement age for paid staff than VSOs, there was no difference in the mandatory ages that were set.

There was no significant difference between employers and voluntary organisations in whether they offered later retirement, partial retirement and voluntary early retirement. Both types of organisation tended to find that male staff retired later than female staff, although the average retirement age given was slightly higher in voluntary organisations.

Attitudes Towards Older Adults

This section explores the perceptions and attitudes held about older and younger workers and volunteers. Finally we will consider what organisations perceptions are of the motivations and benefits of working with older people.

Public and Private Sector Organisations

Generally employers in the PPE held very clear views about their older workers: the majority (88%) thought older workers had as much to offer as younger workers, 82% did not feel older workers should step aside for younger workers, and 3 in 4 employers did not think that older workers should be the first to be made redundant. A notable proportion (36%) did however suggest that it is perhaps a better investment to train younger rather than older workers.

The interview data confirmed the traditional stereotypes of older people as being trustworthy and reliable Older workers were viewed positively in respect to their life experience and mature perspective. They were also thought to play an important role in nurturing and supporting younger or inexperienced staff. Another area in which older people were viewed positively was in terms of dealing with the public – that older workers have greater interpersonal skills and credibility with customers. Typical opinions included:

> *"Older workers are more confident. They will come to you, whereas the younger ones will tend to either group together and discuss it or not say anything to you if you go and ask them. Whereas an older person won't have any issue with coming and telling you…it will be done in a nice way. It's just confidence with life really." (Female 30-39, Human Resource Co-ordinator, Service Sector).*

> *"I'd say the strengths of an older person is they've got a better understanding of life in a way, it sounds a bit crazy, but they can deal with the younger fella's … better…sort of understanding, because like [pause] they accept it sometimes better than the younger fellas - the younger fellas get a lot of ribbing [hassle], whereas an older fella will take people under their wing a little bit, and give them some good solid advice because he's been there and done it basically." (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).*

> *"I think it's a good thing in a lot of ways to have older people working here in as much as that when the public come in, their perception of them is 'well this guy's an older guy he's not a fool'." (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).*

On the other hand, there was some limited evidence that older workers were viewed as more resistant to and less willing to adapt to change and new technology than their younger counterparts. One employer argued

that older workers were not aware of new computer technology and hence priority was given to the recruitment of younger workers:

> *"I wouldn't expect someone 40 plus, definitely 50 plus to come and sit in here tomorrow and have a clue about any of the software. I'd expect a lot of older people now to be able to use computers but PCs not X so a lot of them will never of heard of the software we use…and so, yes, it would be a case of…if I wanted a junior designer I'd go for a person late teens, early twenties." (Male 30-39, Partner, Marketing).*

Other negative stereotypes were discredited. Overall employers believed older workers to be no less flexible or committed than younger workers. There was however ambiguity with regards to absenteeism. Some employers felt that older workers were more likely to be absent from work due to an age-related decline in health. However, others felt that older workers were less likely to be absent from work on account of their strong work ethic.

> *"If you look at our sickness and attendance you'll see that the younger workers let us down far more than the older ones. I think it's generational." (Female 30-39, Personnel Manager, Business).*

Generally speaking most employers had a positive view of older workers with 63% of employers stating that they would not be discouraged from employing older workers, however around a third of employers did agree that they could be discouraged from employing older people for a variety of reasons which have already been identified/discussed.

Voluntary Sector Organisations

Voluntary sector representatives were asked their opinions on the differences between younger and older workers (paid and unpaid) in relation to their experiences at their organisations. Around 7 in 10 of organisations said that they did not prefer to work with younger rather than older paid staff or volunteers. The majority preferred to employ older workers. However, they were more likely to say this in relation to the employment of volunteers (75%) than paid staff (60%). Just over half (51%) of organisations felt that older paid staff tended to stay in their jobs longer than younger ones, however only 37% felt that older volunteers did. An

increased sense of commitment was cited as a reason why older people tended to stay with their organisations.

> *"The older ones tend to be more committed, perhaps because they have got the time. They would be involved in other activities in their community and they volunteered to join… because they want to and they are committed to their community. Whereas the younger ones will be the ones who have got day jobs who have been pushed into it because their bosses said you need to (volunteer)." (Male 30-39, Director, Local organisation/charity).*

Although the majority of organisations thought that older workers had more to offer than younger paid staff, there was unanimous agreement in response to paid staff, compared to 84% of organisations who thought this in relation to their volunteers. Three quarters of the voluntary organisations did not think that it was a better investment to train younger than older paid staff and volunteers. Similarly around three quarters did not think that older paid staff or volunteers were less likely to take up training opportunities than their younger counterparts. Extracts from interviews outlined how any differences within their staff and volunteers were dependent on personality, not age.

> *"There are people that you consider responsible people…it is just how you know people and it is not necessarily about age…But that's just about knowing people, that's personality more than age I think." (Female 30-39, Coordinator, Local organisation/charity).*

Confidence levels of younger and older people were also discussed, however opinions differed depending on the organisation

> *"[Older volunteers] are confident on delivering the service, but also confident on asking for support and not feeling embarrassed if they don't know something…I think probably the younger volunteers who have not been in a working environment for a long time, sometimes think "oh I am asking too many questions" and they will all think I'm stupid, or I'm asking too many questions and they've already told me. Whereas the older volunteers will just say I know you've told me this before but I forgot, because they have learnt that it is the best way from their experiences in the workplace." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

However, another viewpoint identified the lack of confidence of older volunteers when discussing the generational differences.

> *"A lot of it just depends on the people themselves, I mean you can make very vague generalisations. Obviously there are some cultural differences,…X for example who I mentioned before, she doesn't feel very confident with users, but then some of the other staff don't either." (Male 18-29, Development Officer, Local organisation /charity).*

Voluntary sector employers were more likely to give older workers the following role types: roles with responsibility (89%), customer service roles (88%), problems solving roles (83%) and simple, but important tasks (80%). However, only just under half of the organisations said that they would be likely to give older workers physical roles (48%).

Whilst voluntary organisations tended to have a positive attitudes towards their older workers, it was evident that the strength of these attitudes differed in relation to the paid staff and volunteers. Although organisations demonstrated more positive attitudes towards age in the recruitment of volunteers than they did for paid staff, it was also shown that organisations felt that older paid staff, rather than volunteers, were more likely to have more to offer and to stay in their roles for longer, than their younger counterparts.

Perceptions of Work Capabilities of Older Adults

Public and Private Sector Organisations

The beliefs held by private and public sector employers about older workers were, on balance more positive than negative - yet some traditional stereotypes held firm. Perceived strengths and weaknesses of older employees were expressed, for example, employers were concerned about the ability or the willingness of older workers to adapt to change and to accept new technology, but felt that older workers were more reliable and slightly easier to get on with than younger workers. Interestingly, however, one in three employers felt that there was no difference between older and younger workers. This age neutral approach was a strong feature of the interview data.

> *"I would always try and look at the individual because you can get really hard working, very conscientious young people, but you can get a lazy young person as well, "I want to come in at 9 and go at 5 and take my money, and I don't want to do much for it". But equally*

I think that older people can be the same. I genuinely believe that." (Female 53, Human Resource Manager, Business Sector).

Related to the above is employers' support for a mixed age workforce. Employing older people was a way of achieving the right balance between youth and maturity:

"I've had reports that the environment is nicer, and the mixture of ages as well. Where they [younger staff] were initially quite sceptical of older people joining the workforce, you know [now] they actually have quite a laugh with them and they've got lots of tales and they've added something…the mixture means that you haven't got … lots of the same age say competing - it balances it all." (Female 41, Human Resource Manager, Manufacturing).

The age of the employer representative who responded to our questionnaire was found to be positively related to the beliefs held, in that the older the employer the more likely they were to rate older workers more favourably than younger ones. For example, 70% of employers aged fifty and over felt that older women were more effective at their job; this compared with 56% of employers aged 40-49 and 20% of those aged under forty who generally felt there was no difference based on age. A similar trend also emerged in relation to older men.

One employer suggested that older workers were no more difficult to train than younger ones, but may lack confidence in their ability to embrace new technology. This was based on or related to her own experience of being of an older age group.

"The only thing I think that we're [50 plus] slightly disadvantaged with and it's our own fault, is that we don't sort of embrace new technology very quickly [laughing]. I go to X [younger colleague] 'Help!' I think younger people pick things up like that much more quickly…but that's my fault because I know I could master it…I think we do that to ourselves because I can remember - it was only when I changed jobs and this sounds awful, it was only probably ten years ago and I went to another company and they put a computer in front of me and I thought, 'oh my…' I didn't even know how to switch it on, but now I'm fine with them and I've realised that if you're frightened of something, tackle it." (Female 53, Human Resource Manager, Business Sector).

Perceived differences between the sexes was evident in that women aged fifty and over were viewed rather more positively than men of the

same age group (this in spite of the fact that, as mentioned earlier, employers felt that women were perhaps too old to recruit at a younger ages than men). Employers were more likely to feel that older women were more flexible in their approach to work, more reliable, more willing to take direction and less difficult to get on with than men of the same age. How much this may be attributed to perceived feminine attributes - caring, empathy - or the perception of 'women's work', which is traditionally more 'qualitative' or 'softer' in nature was unclear. Yet women were also thought to be less resistant to change and better able to accept new technology than men. On the other hand employers were more likely to feel that men aged fifty and over learned more quickly than women of the same age group. However, there were no perceived differences found amongst the employers in terms of productivity rates between men and women.

Small organisations tended to hold more favourable beliefs about older workers as compared to medium-sized and large organisations. For example, 59% felt that older men were more effective at their job than younger workers. This compared with 39% of medium-sized organisations and 14% of large organisations that tended generally to feel that there was no difference based on age. A similar trend emerged in relation to older women. One possible explanation is that employers in small organisations tended to have more personal contact with staff (at all levels) and that those in direct contact with a known older employee are perhaps more likely to hold more favourable (and non-stereotypical) beliefs about people in the fifty plus age group.

> *"The last guy we had, he had a little part-time job as a caretaker and he left us to go full-time because obviously he liked the caretaker job. But he was exceptional, as you do find older people, because prior to that we had another older person doing the job and we had no complaints whatsoever." (Male 50-59, General Manager, Transport).*

Voluntary Sector Organisations

The qualities the older worker brought to the voluntary sector tended to be interpreted as experience, knowledge, patience and dedication to their work.

> *"I think that older people do have a lot to offer and I think they can be more patient and dedicated, probably because they have the knowledge and the experience of life." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

> *"Life experience definitely, and I think they are quite calm, they are more laid back…they are settled and have a caring attitude really…it is natural and I think by the time you get to over 50 then …you have got quite a lot of experience in that and you can relate to others." (Female 60+, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

Peoples' experience was also particularly related to their careers. It was felt that many older people might have moved on from their 'career' and into the voluntary sector, where they were able to pass on this specific experience.

> *"Some of them have relevant experience. They have previously in their professional careers been involved in things which often were much bigger than this." (Male 18-29, Development Officer, Local organisation/charity).*

> *"I think they are just quite nice to have, they play that role that they have obviously got life skills, they've got knowledge of life and they are quite willing to impart and share that knowledge with other people." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

With particular reference to older volunteers, availability was defined as a quality unique to this age group, which was an asset to their organisation.

> *"Well one of the big benefits and the most obvious one is availability. Availability is a massive thing for volunteers because you have got to be available and obviously a lot of older people have got pensions and are not actually having to go out to work to bring in an income so they do have the time and if they are reasonably healthy and have an interest in the work that we are doing they have more opportunities than many younger people." (Male 18-29, Development Officer, Local organisation/charity).*

> *"Because a lot of them, you know, are retired or semi retired, they've got the time. Probably one of our best volunteers is retired and he takes on an enormous amount of work, you know, he really does." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity)*

It was also suggested that older volunteers tended to be more committed, which was again associated with them having more time on their hands in the first place.

> *"I suppose commitment, they would be the ones that turn up for meetings perhaps more than the ones that have got day jobs or at school or whatever… They will have a much broader knowledge of their community because the majority of them will have lived in it all their life and that's why they are interested in doing something for it." (Male 30-39, Director, Local organisation/charity).*

In relation to the paid staff only, one interviewee identified stability and reliability as qualities unique to their older staff.

> *"I think they add stability to the workforce, I think certainly people who have stayed sometime with us it adds stability…They have good sick records, they don't go off sick at the drop of a hat." (Female 40-49, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

All did not mirror this perception, some felt that older paid people brought no particular qualities, that it was down to the individual to bring the skills required for their particular role.

> *"I think they would just bring the skills they were employed for I don't know that people would necessarily think 'oh look that's an older person'." (Female 30-39, Coordinator, Local organisation/charity).*

Those surveyed were more likely to consider women over fifty as being as capable of all types of work, adaptable and able to show initiative. In addition they were also considered to be knowledgeable and experienced and very reliable, instead of complaining they tended to get on with the job and repaid their employers with loyalty. Men however whilst having similar traits, but to a lesser extent, were considered by more of the employers to be extremely reliable.

Older Adults' Motivations and Benefits of Work

The motivations and benefits of working in the voluntary sector were explored for paid staff and volunteers aged fifty plus. It was found that generally employers were more likely to feel that older volunteers needed to have a higher number of personal motivations for them to work in the voluntary sector than older paid staff. However, the actual motivations stated by the organisations were similar for both the older paid staff and volunteers. The majority of organisations felt that both were motivated to work in the sector by the need for something to commit to, to meet people

and make new friends, to give something back to the community, to help others and as a result of a personal interest in the particular group or organisation. Just under half of agencies with paid staff stated that motivations to work in the sector may be due to training and educational advancement and career development as well as the take home pay. Motivations for volunteers was felt by around a third of the representatives to be for career or education opportunities.

Perceptions of what actually motivates a person to offer their time freely as a volunteer was explored amongst those in the sector. Some employers felt that older staff came to work in the voluntary sector for a 'nice' job with little stress or pressure and because they no longer needed a decent wage, as they may have done previously. The desire to undertake work in the communities in which they lived was a strong motivator for some coupled with the social interaction gained from working with others.

> *"But also you are giving something back to society by working for a charity." (Male 30-39, Director, Local organisation/charity).*

In addition to monetary incentives, the challenge of being busy, having a structure to the day, was also given as a motivation for older staff.

> *"Obviously they get the cash at the end of the month, they get out and about rather than being at home all day, they like the challenge of it, you know, yeah I'll take that on." (Female 40-49, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

In terms of the older volunteers, the motivation to 'give something back to the community' after one's main career, was cited by many within the survey.

> *"I think it is giving back really, giving back stuff to the community that you have, the fact that we offer a service to the community…a lot of the people that volunteer and work here have been through difficult times in their own lives and so it is sharing that experience and wanting to empowers others." (Female 60+, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

The other most cited motivation for older volunteers was the social aspect of voluntary work.

> *"There's the social interaction, the you know, the action and debate and discussion with people, sharing their ideas, a lot of motivations." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

Another employer outlines the importance of social interaction and highlighted how people also needed to have interaction with others, to gain some space for themselves thus avoiding the isolation of being alone or just with a partner.

> *"For some of them it is something to do to get out of the house, you know to stop them being lonely… wanting to keep busy and keep their brain ticking over instead of stagnating at home... there is also wanting to get out from the other retired person, partner, get away from them (laughs) which sounds silly but is actually quite true…its socialising…it is a social event for them as well." (Female 60+, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

Two other motivations attributed to the older volunteer were the need for structure in the day after employment and the ability to build up confidence from voluntary work.

> *"When you work for a number of years in whatever job it is a big leap to go to retirement which sometimes doesn't appear to offer any structure and I think what it offers for older people to come here... is that structure to the day after retirement." (Female 40-49, Manager, National organisation/charity).*

> *"I suppose (one volunteer) has gained a lot of confidence over the years, she is just an ordinary mum and I think she has gained a lot of skills…that has boosted her confidence to do a job and other things. For the others I think it is just more strings to their bow." (Female 40-49, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

Some employers felt that motivators to do voluntary work were nothing to do with age but stemmed from perhaps an inherent desire to undertake such work for a variety of reasons, not associated with age.

> *"There are different things that motivate people and I don't think it makes much difference how old people are… I don't think its particularly related to age." (Female 30-39, Coordinator, Local organisation/charity).*

> *"I think its the same as anything, what has age got to do with it, the same as anybody else." (Female 60+, Manager, Regional organisation/charity).*

The employers in the voluntary sector felt that both the paid staff and volunteers over fifty benefited from their work in the voluntary sector in a variety of ways, they built confidence; kept their brain active; achieved mental well being; established a sense of purpose; provided opportunities to gain new skills; enjoyed their work; and gained personal satisfaction from their role. Additionally, the majority of organisations felt that volunteers also benefited from being able to socialise with others and feeling good physically. The benefits of volunteering are given in the following extracts:

> *"I guess it's a sense of involvement…I think it keeps you, being active actually keeps you younger and fitter…and I think being involved as a volunteer keeps you positive." (Male 18-29, Development Officer, Local organisation/charity).*

> *"Certainly the women that I was talking about before she is just a very active person for her age, you know and she only works part time, 16 hours a week. But you know she will take on a lot in that. She is just very motivated she has got lots of energy and lots of experience and she has a very calming kind of influence." (Female 40-49, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

The 'feel good factor' of working in the voluntary sector was also mentioned as a benefit.

> *"There is a buzz, sometimes you can feel very pressured as an individual working here, but then (a service user) will leave with a smile and that is good to see. So you get pay back in that, it is not why you do it, but there is that outcome from it that you end up feeling good." (Female 60+, Manager, Local organisation/charity).*

Mutual benefits were apparent for both the organisation and the volunteer.

> *"All our volunteers say they benefit, they would say you know it is very much a two way process and they get as much out of it as they give to it." (Female 60+, Manager, Regional organisation/charity).*

The voluntary sector representatives recognised that older workers had distinctive reasons for joining the voluntary sector, as well as personally benefiting in ways that are exclusive to this age group. The motivations and benefits for older workers in the voluntary sector were unique to this

sector, due to the personal and worthwhile nature of the role, which would not exist in the public or private sectors.

Sector Comparisons

Issues regarding recruitment criteria, perceptions of age and assumptions attached to age, figure quite prominently in the study. There also appears to be a different ethos operating between sectors which perhaps is illustrated by examination of the profile of workers as well as the attitudes employers have on issues of age, gender, training opportunities and flexibility of work patterns, all of which will be further examined in the discussion.

Higher Education Sector

To investigate the views of key decision makers within the recruitment sectors of higher education, personnel within twenty-three universities and two colleges of higher education completed questionnaires. Views and experiences on the admissions process and in particular about how admissions for mature students over 50 were handled, how they felt their students were supported and what specific barriers potential students may face in accessing higher education were explored. Unlike the employers in the private public and voluntary sectors the recruiters were not interviewed. The recruiters held a variety of job titles within the university, but all had responsibility for recruiting to their courses, through activities which included taking part in the reading of the UCAS forms, talking to potential students on open days and conducting interviews. The recruiters' views and perceptions are their own and are not to be viewed as that of the institutions in which they work.

The recruiters were representatives of a wide range of courses spanning vocational and non-vocational degree routes. Many of the courses that the recruiters had responsibility for offered full and part time opportunities to study for diplomas or degrees, while less than half offered foundation degrees or diplomas. Four out of ten offered modular degrees or diplomas, however only twenty percent offered the flexibility of open or distance learning.

The marketing of the courses generally adopted the more conventional methods of Open or Experience days. Almost three-quarters of the respondents took part in recruitment fairs and most used university literature to feature their courses. Direct contact with schools and colleges was used by just over half of the recruiters. Only 20% of the recruiters were involved in outreach work within their local communities, and a similar number placed their advertising literature within community and public service establishments, e.g. medical centres and libraries. Other methods identified were through partnerships with industry and the use of the Internet.

Some differences were found in the activities regarding recruitment between male and female personnel. Women recruiters were more likely to form partnerships with local schools, undertake outreach work or advertise within the community. Men in general, were less involved in these activities. Interestingly those recruiters who had not been involved in wider recruiting methods were also those most likely to report that they did not have any applicants aged fifty or over in their last admissions intake. However, this may be as much to do with the popularity of the course with younger applicants as it may be influenced by the ratio of applications to available places, thus the need to promote to a wider audience is not undertaken.

The marketing strategies are shown to be different amongst the universities with some engaging with local communities, and most using the traditional methods to market their courses. However the advantage of community engagement provides the potential older student with opportunities to engage with academics and institutional literature on a more informal basis earlier on along the pathway to higher qualifications. Such communications are vital, in that they break down barriers and present an opportunity to become more informed, or less deterred from making the decision to enter higher education. This kind of approach is felt to benefit those who may either have had poor experiences of the education system, been deemed as failures, or ‘turned off’ education earlier in their life.

Recruitment

Obtaining a place on a higher education course was very much dependent upon qualifications, with over ninety percent of recruiters stating that formal qualifications were important. However, only a third of recruiters felt that the decision to offer a place to an older applicant would be based upon normal entry qualifications. Sixty per cent stated that they would arrange interviews and a small number would request a sample of written work to be submitted. When the recruiters were asked about the importance of vocational qualifications, there was somewhat less agreement with only six out of ten believing that such qualifications were important, and nine believing they were of no importance. Given that many courses openly state that they welcome the mature student and that many students prefer to study for vocational qualifications[1], the recruitment criteria used for some courses may imply that despite achieving such a qualification, some older applicants may not have the opportunity to gain a place in higher education, on a course or in a locality of their choosing.

Apart from formal qualifications other factors are also deemed to be important in the recruitment process albeit to a lesser extent. Recent experience of study may give an indication of a person's ability to understand the level of commitment needed to enter higher education. Transferable skills or work experience, may give an advantage to an applicant who may not have the required formal qualifications but who may, during interview, elucidate their capabilities to strengthen their application. Evidence often gleaned from the UCAS form can disclose some useful and relevant information from which a recruiter can gauge whether the applicant may be a suitable candidate for a place on their courses.

We asked the recruiters which of the following occurrences, disclosed on an application form, was felt to be important in the recruitment process.

[1] The points scoring system allows the same equivalence to be reached as for A level qualifications

Table 4 - Importance of Skills/Knowledge for Recruitment

	Numbers (n = 25)
Evidence of recent study	19
Personal statement	16
Transferable skills	15
Experiential learning	14
Work history	13
Skills acquired in the home	0

Given the general agreement that experiential, transferable and work experience were all viewed as important, by the recruiters, they to, along with the employers from the private and public sectors did not recognise the skills used within home to be of any value in the recruitment process. The reason for this needs to be understood within the context of what has been traditionally described as women's work, undervalued by society, and is manifested in lower rates of pay within the sectors where women tend to find employment. Notwithstanding this, in order to accomplish a smooth running home demands competency in a variety of skills ranging from managerial decision making, as well as coping with the physical and emotional needs of others. The lack of recognition of some of the valuable skills obtained in other areas other than qualifications, or work experience is disappointing, yet understandable, given the lack of formalisation or measurement of such skills.

Personal Attitudes

Recruiters were unanimous in their agreement that age was not a factor when offering places in higher education although one did point out that teacher education did have an age bar. Therefore, whilst age was not a factor, whether a person was, in their opinion, 'too old to study', revealed a slightly different picture. Eleven of the recruiters said they would never consider anybody to be too old in their evaluation of an applicant. Some said it would depend on the applicant and several did not respond to the question. Of those that did offer a possible age, the highest age was ninety, the lowest age was fifty-five, whether this age was aligned to the previous student loan cut off point or teacher training age limitations was

unclear, however it does indicate that some recruiters would consider a persons age as a factor in recruitment. Reasons given for possibly rejecting an older applicant ranged from 'the student having unreal expectations', to them being 'overqualified for the course', which are reasons unrelated to age specifically, but arguably could be applied to any applicant.

Around a third of recruiters felt that applicants having clear plans for the future was important with some also feeling that employability after study was important in the admissions decision. Certainly some courses clearly recruit for specific employment areas such as social work or teaching, but employability may not be an older applicants criterion for study at the higher level, perhaps preferring to study for the sheer enjoyment of learning.

Personal qualities of the applicant had an important bearing on the recruiters decision making. However only nine of the recruiters felt that personality was important, which contrasts with the views found amongst employers. Recruiters stated that mature students over fifty brought to higher education a unique blend of special qualities, including knowledge and experience as well as wisdom and maturity. Interestingly, almost all the recruiters felt that mature students over fifty were reliable and committed and displayed good interpersonal skills, which are not necessarily descriptors of a particular age group but can be viewed as qualitative evidence of the way in which mature students over fifty have conducted themselves at university. Interaction in lectures and good communications skills in tutorials were mentioned as very positive features of having older learners within the lecture group.

Whilst acknowledging that the recruiters may not have prior knowledge of the exact routes mature students may tend to take in higher education, the recruiters were asked what type of courses they felt mature students may opt for. Most recruiters thought that many older women would be drawn to the humanities[1]. Science based subjects were thought to be more popular choices for men than women, as were vocational degrees.

[1] Academic subjects united by a commitment to studying aspects of the human condition

Recruiters believed the least popular courses for the women would be the physical science or maths based courses and the least popular for men would be biological or chemical sciences.

The traditional polarisation of women into work aligned with the humanities, e.g., the caring, service sector, shows that at the lower end of the spectrum this work is characterised by poor pay and part time work, but offers a flexible enough choice for women to juggle work and caring responsibilities. It is interesting to note then, that when mature women applicants make a career choice it seems to be into avenues that are similarly aligned to the humanities.

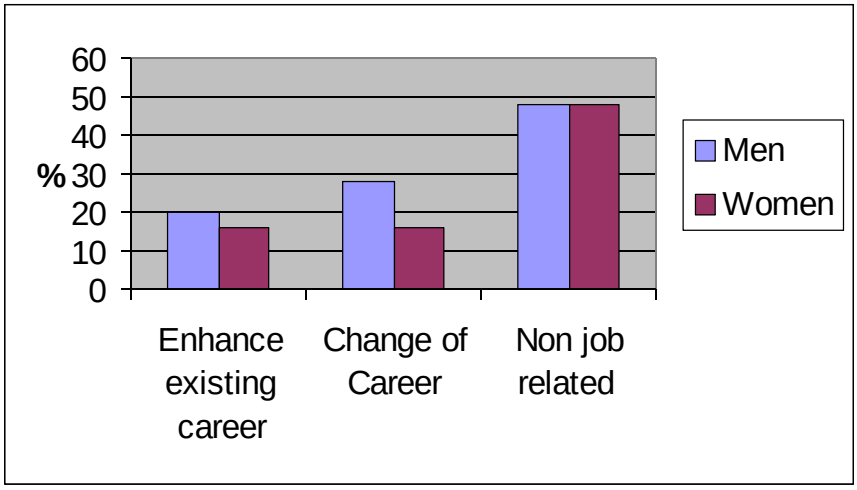
Perceptions of and Attitudes towards Mature Students over Fifty

The main motivators ascribed to older applicants accessing higher education, was perceived by the recruiters to be mainly non-job related. This may indicate that many of the over-fifties applicants were in transitions, for example they may not be in a specific job role or wishing to improve on their current positions, or that they may desire to study for the enjoyment of learning.

The recruiters felt there was a wide range of reasons older applicants may have for wanting to study at higher education level. Over half of the recruiters felt that students over fifty had a desire to access higher education was not job related. All felt that the main motivators for mature students was a particular interest in the subject and an enjoyment of the learning process. Applicants viewed higher education as a new challenge with over three quarters of recruiters endorsing this. For some applicants, entering higher education was perceived to fulfil a need for social contact, especially for older women. Having work related experience in a related subject area was given by a third of the recruiters as a key motivator to study, (for example an applicant working on a Sure Start programme, may wish to further their understanding by studying for a community studies or social policy based degree). Recruiters felt that it was twice as likely for men to want to study at higher level for job-related reasons and

that that this was driven by a desire for career change, whereas for women the motivations were thought to be from the need to enhance an existing career.

Figure One - Recruiters' Perceptions of Older Adults' Motivators for Undertaking Higher Education



Support for the Mature Student

Once the older applicant enters higher education the complexities of managing study with home life requires compromise and planning (Reay 2003). The support strategies undertaken by universities are designed to enable the student to have a smooth transition into H.E. regardless of age. There are however examples of how the needs of mature students have been identified and translated into university policy and practice in an effort to integrate all students from a variety of backgrounds.

Just over half of recruiters deemed that the awareness of the needs of mature students at their university was good, with three quarters stating they provided good academic support to mature student over fifty. However the knowledge of or the provision of literature or study skills materials aimed at supporting the students was somewhat less than good. Ten of the twenty-five respondents stated that their department did not provide introductory or study skills classes for their mature students. Less than half stated that their school or department provided special literature, for example, 'notes of guidance' for their mature students, several were unsure and only five stated they did provide such literature.

Very few knew whether there was a mature students union or society or whether their institution had a mature student's advisor. In terms of childcare the majority of the recruiters stated that childcare facilities were available, but again there was uncertainty as to whether this childcare could be extended to grandparents with caring responsibilities.

The recruiters knowledge of the services that did exist in their universities was patchy, with male recruiters far less likely for instance to know about the existence of mature students advisors.

Prior to the implementation of the 2006 legislation on age, the recruiters were asked about whether they felt there was a need for a particular focus to the legislation to protect mature students. Out of a sample of twenty-five, eleven felt there was no need and ten thought that the legislation should cover all students regardless of age.

Perceptions of the barriers to higher education

The recruiters were asked, what, in their opinion, would constitute a barrier for older men and women wishing to access higher education. The recruiters taking part in this study were very clear in what they believed to be particular hurdles for older people, in accessing higher education. Over three-quarters of the recruiters believed the financial considerations were the most likely to be viewed as a potential difficulty for all older applicants.

Eighteen recruiters believed that self confidence was an issue for both men and women. Three quarters of the recruiters felt that the weight of family responsibilities, were heavily skewed towards women with none of the recruiters citing this as a barrier for men to deal with. The adjustments people would need to make to their lives in order to enter higher education and the resultant study time required were considered as adjustments, which may for some, be prohibitive. Just under half of the recruiters (45%) felt that some students over fifty might feel too old to undertake study at this level. A fifth of the recruiters felt that competing with younger students was more of an issue with men than it would be for women.

Recruiters were asked to comment on what they felt the perception was amongst older men and women about higher education in general and whether they felt that age may go against them. A quarter of the recruiters believed that women would feel as though they may perceive their age to be a discriminatory factor in accessing higher education, whereas a third of recruiters said men felt the same barriers existed.

Whilst many recruiters felt their institutions capability of supporting the mature student was good, at the school or department level their support for the older learner seemed to be less robust. This may indeed be reflected in the comments made during interview from some who felt *'overwhelmed'* and *'like a fish out of water'* when entering higher education. This would suggest that in some cases extra effort needs to be made to welcome, support and allay the fears of the older learner. Clearly some schools and departments had produced support materials designed specifically for the older learner but generally this was not the case for all those universities who responded.

New Labour's policies were intended to address neo-liberal concerns about the welfare state; although neo-liberal solutions had been rejected in favour of a "third way" they were strongly influenced by amongst others, Mead and Field. The government's welfare reform package was premised on a conception of citizenship that emphasises equally the importance of "entitlements" and "obligations", especially the obligation to work. This is reflective in much of the rhetoric of New Labour whereby the demands of modern society can only be met by partnership between both the state and its citizens. But do they propose different partnerships for different citizens in a period in which there appear to be serious implications for the economy caused by labour shortages? If we look at policy directed at lone parents as an example the provision is clearly aimed at getting people into work, for example New Deal for lone parents (NDLP),

> *"The responsibilities of individuals who can provide for themselves and their families to do so must always be matched by a responsibility on the part of government to provide opportunities for self advancement." (cited in Lavalette & Mooney, 1999).*

The same case for self advancement should be made for potential older learners, now faced with similar policies to return them into ‘work’ or the voluntary sector. Negative experiences of the men and women during their school years coupled with for women their familial obligations to support the family, had in this survey made women feel less able. Ageist perceptions had clearly been internalised by some in the sample. and not only amongst women, but a notable proportion of the whole sample cited ‘feeling too old’ (see following section) as a barrier to re-entering education. It seems that combinations of past experiences of schooling, feed into lacking of confidence or self efficacy. The perceptions of cost associated with fees and the prospect of loans also serves to turn the potential older learner off. Those who have the confidence, time and financial capacity to support themselves will do so, leaving the rest to ponder what might have been achieved with very few questioning a system which in the past allowed so many of its young people to fail (Reay 2003).

A universities commitment to widening participation can be measured in how well they are perceived to be inclusive in their local communities. Perceptions of university places being aimed at young people, serves to create a divide between the generations and perpetuates stereotypical assumptions. What is required are clear lines of progression from which older men and women who take those small tentative steps back into learning for pleasure or for advancement can feel empowered to believe in their own ability to achieve to the limits of their potential.

CHAPTER FOUR
INDIVIDUALS

Profile of respondents

In this section we have outlined the profiles of the individuals who took part in the research. These were men and women who were previously involved in, or were working within the public and private sector, or working as either a paid worker or volunteer within the voluntary sector.

In total, 1035 people over the age of fifty completed a questionnaire, with 57% being between fifty and fifty-nine years and 41% sixty years and over. Over one third were currently working, 20% were voluntary workers and 29% were economically inactive. There was a general balance between the number of males and females in the sample, women (57%) and men (43%). Most of the sample described themselves as white European (96%) with 4% from ethnic origins.

The geographical spread of the sample was varied having more participants from the north of England (54%), 17% from the Midlands, 20% from the South and 10% categorised as UK (not England). The types of school attended by the sample illustrated that 43% had been to a secondary modern school, 31% a grammar school and 18% a comprehensive school. Less than 5% had attended a private school.

The education level at which people ceased their initial education varied: 40% had only reached lower school level (14/15 years) and 27% high school, followed by 12% reaching both further or higher education and only 8% sixth form or college level. 54% of the total sample had since returned to education at some stage in their lives.

Education - Experiences, Opportunities and Barriers

Further information from a smaller sample was obtained from 650 respondents, and 13 interviewees. These are outlined in the following sections.

Returning to Education

Just over half of the sample (51%) had returned to education on at least one occasion including a notable proportion of those with few or no qualifications (39%). This figure rose to 54% for those educated to GCSE level or equivalent, 64% of those initially educated to degree level and up to 81% of those with professional qualifications. These figures were comparatively static between men and women.

Educational Attainment and Employment

Educational attainment did appear to have a relationship with the types of employment the respondents were involved in. Generally, those with low educational attainment were likely to have previously worked in elementary or unskilled jobs, whilst those with higher qualifications were to be found concentrated in managerial and professional occupations. Further to this, the majority of respondents who were economically inactive at the time, reported holding few or no qualifications.

Demand for Higher Education?

One in four people (28% of the total sample) said that they would like to study at HE level. Whilst this does not necessarily mean they have the intention to do so, it does nevertheless illustrate the potential interest and possible demand for higher education that may exist.

Men were more likely to want to study at HE level (32%), than women (23%). The younger end of the cohort were also more likely to want to study at HE (33% of those aged 50-59, compared to 17% of those aged 60 and over). The difference is more pronounced when the age groups are broken down; with 34% of 50-54 year olds and 33% of 55-59 year olds; this compared with 25% of 60-64 years olds and 11% of those aged sixty-five and over. There was also a gender difference between the age groups, with relatively equal proportions of men and women aged sixty and over wanting to study at HE level (18% and 17% respectively). However, more men than women aged 50-59 said that they would like to study at HE (38% compared to 28% of women).

Barriers

The barriers that respondents considered would hinder their access to further educational opportunities were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, 57% indicated that multiple barriers were barring access to education, with notable differences between males and females' pattern of response.

Table 5 - Barriers to Education

Barrier	% indicating influence
Finance	52
Lack of formal qualifications	25
Lack of self confidence	22
Adjustment to study	17
Too old	32
Age discrimination	10

Women were more likely to report a lack of self-confidence (28%) than men (17%) and were also more likely to cite finance as a barrier (61%) than men (46%). However, men were more likely to feel that they might be discriminated against because of their age (13%) than women (7%).

Current Educational Status

Almost 10% of the sample were currently undertaking study at some level with 91% of these being part-time. Indeed, available time appeared to be an influencing factor here, with study most prevalent amongst retired people (30%) followed by the economically inactive (16%) and those in work (9%).

Women were more likely to take up study (20%) than men (13%). Those who were single or divorced were also more likely to take up study (50%) than those who were married or living with a partner (14%) and it was most popular amongst younger rather than older age groups (10% of those aged 50-59, compared to 26% of those aged sixty and over).

Those who had returned to education in adulthood were significantly more likely to be involved in education at age fifty and over (59%) than those who had not (11%). There was no significant difference in relation to the initial educational attainment of those who were studying, although the pattern to emerge was that those educated to further and higher levels, were the most likely to be doing so now.

The type of study undertaken included vocational and non-vocational courses spanning a wide variety of subjects and disciplines. Nearly one quarter (23%) were undertaking IT related courses, especially the European Computer Driving Licence (challenging the negative stereotype that older people are unwilling or unable to adapt to new technology). Seventeen percent were studying vocational qualifications (for example, NVQs), with modern languages and arts and social sciences also proving to be popular.

The majority of the sample (51%) were studying both accredited and non-accredited courses at community level, whilst relatively equal proportions were studying at Further Education (FE) level (25%) and HE level (23%). Those who were at the older end of the cohort (those in their sixties) were more likely to study at community level (64%), than those at the younger end (those in their fifties) who were most likely to study at FE level (31%).

When asked what prompted them to return to study, 21% said that family (usually a partner or children) persuaded them, however it did also appear that a life event had been the original trigger to return. For example, 41% indicated retirement had been this trigger, with 18% suggesting ill health was the initial prompt. Other triggers included bereavement (5%), unemployment (12%) and redundancy (15%). This indicates that labour market detachment through redundancy, unemployment or retirement provided the impetus for some to return to education. Of those made redundant, 41% had considered study straight away, 12% had considered study less than six months after redundancy with almost half (47%) returning to education between six month and two years after being made redundant. This perhaps suggests that for some, time on

ones hands could be filled by undertaking some form of educational course, or the realisation that re-skilling or upgrading their qualifications was something which had to be undertaken fairly swiftly as 41% of the sample considered study immediately after being made redundant. The same proportion however who had not considered returning to education until at the earliest six months to two years later may signify a failure to secure employment or employment of at the same rate of pay or quality as previously enjoyed.

Those who had experienced compulsory redundancy were more likely to consider study straight away (47%), than those who had experienced voluntary redundancy (31%) who were most likely to have taken up study after more than 2 years (39%). It was notable that those who had experienced compulsory redundancy were more likely to study to increase their employability or for career development (43%) than those who had experienced voluntary redundancy (35%) who were most likely to study in a non-job related area (65%). This would confirm the finding (from the employment sector of the research) that those who had experienced compulsory redundancy were more likely to want - (or need) - to return to work, than those for whom redundancy was voluntary.

Overall 61% of the sample were studying in a non-job related area, 22% wanted to acquire qualifications for progression or re-establishment in an existing career and 17% wanted to acquire qualifications for a change of career. Those who were working at the time were the less likely to study in a non-job related area (23%), than those who were economically inactive (50%) and retired (93%).

In terms of the respondents' age, the younger end of the cohort (those in their fifties) were equally as likely to want to acquire qualifications for a change of career (34%) and to study in a non-job related area (34%), whereas those aged 60 and over were much more likely to want to study in a non-job related area (86%). Other motives included having a special interest in the subject area, and the enjoyment of learning (both of which were rated important by 90% of the sample). Eighty percent felt the desire for new challenges was important, 63% were interested in the social

aspect and meeting new people and 52% said that they wanted time to do something that was just for themselves. The desire to contribute to society and the community was rated important by 52% of the sample, while 42% rated the status acquired from qualification as being important.

Those who were economically inactive were more likely to rate social contact as important (69%), than those who were economically active (48%). However, those who were economically active were more likely to rate status from qualification as important (73%), than those who were economically inactive (29%). Again the picture for the retired community is one of 'learning for learning's sake', for interest and recreation rather than working for educational attainment. Those aged sixty and over were more likely to say that social contact was an important motivation (67%), than those currently in their fifties (57%) who were more likely to rate status from qualification as being important (57%), than those aged sixty and over (26%). The following interviewee recalls how social support and bonds were formed between fellow students:

> *"We used to have study groups in each other's houses and the phone would ring all the time, you know 'what are you doing for this?', 'How can we do this?'. And I'd phone them up, but everyone was absolutely loving it … and it takes up your whole life, it's not like…it's unlike anything else really." (Male 60 +, retired).*

Constraints

The most frequently indicated constraint was trying to combine studying with other commitments (39%), followed by the financial cost of study (28%), lack of confidence (23%) and the demands of study (24%). Availability of choice in study areas was mentioned but by less then 1 in 10. In terms of age, 12% said that age as a feeling of being too old to study was an issue, while only 6% mentioned, age discrimination as a constraint. Younger age groups however viewed finance as a constraint to study (39%) more so than older age groups (19%), this possibly reflecting the fact that those in their 60s tended to study at community level where courses can sometimes be provided free of charge. Lack of confidence and a feeling of trying to catch up created a feeling of despondency in this interviewee:

> *"I've been on a computer course, but it's only the Learn Direct one so I feel that the barriers are obviously my skills aren't up to date, you get a lack of confidence as well because you realise that everybody else is up to speed on computers and things, and when you've been out of the full-time workforce for any length of time, you do loose your confidence and, you know, it's hard." (Female 50, job seeker/volunteer).*

Those in their fifties were generally less confident about studying than the over-sixties. Younger age groups also had greater concerns about the demands of study and, interestingly, also were more likely to suggest they were too old to study. Indeed, this younger group also appeared to have less confidence in their ability to learn. These interviewees recalled how failure to achieve at school was in a way expected, and this resulted in limiting the choices that were open to them:

> *"But you know, about …school when you left, no one expected you to…you never got any qualifications, and there were no O' levels on offer… after you failed the eleven plus, it was just - you left with…the most you could hope for was a reference and in my case it was two sentences." (Male, 65).*

> *"I was in the C stream so my expectations or the school's expectations of me was not [good] …I wouldn't be suitable for going onto further education or anything like that. My only choices were to work in a factory or shop work you know that kind of work." (Female 55, early retired).*

> *"I always felt that I had failed really because when I took the 11 plus I had an interview to go to the grammar school and I didn't pass. You can imagine the first couple of years of my schooling, I probably felt quite a sort of failure really." (Female 54, returned to work in her forties).*

For some the prospect of returning to education was viewed with some trepidation:

> *"I haven't studied since I was fifteen, and the thought of going through all that is quite daunting. I mean I will be OK once I do it, but the prospect is quite daunting." (Male 55, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

As might be expected, those who had returned to study after the initial school period found the adjustment to study easier to cope with and were also more confident in their ability to learn.

> *"I always knew I wasn't thick like, but I just hated maths and that so when I was 36 I did three O' levels on a correspondence course and I just got one you know of the three at a very low level. I was a bit like Rodney from 'Only Fools and Horses' you know one 'O' level [laughing]. But I think if I'd have failed that I may not have gone on, but I took the other two again and then the following year and I got them." (Male 60+, retired).*

When asked about the advantages or disadvantages of study after middle age the responses included: keeping the mind active – that taking up study helps you remain physically and intellectually active; the pleasure and enjoyment of learning; the need to keep up with new technology; to broaden the mind; to enrich their life; for emotional and social development; and to increase self-confidence. A number of people wanted to prove that they were still capable or to prove something to themselves. Some felt that being older allowed them to bring a mature approach to study and that it actually might be easier this time around. Others wanted to increase their employability or to further their career.

When asked about disadvantages of study, answers ranged from adjustment to study; ill health; financial cost incurred, that it perhaps takes longer to assimilate information *'brain not what it was'*; time constraints and family commitments. Seven percent had taken up study to increase their employability but were veering towards the idea that study after middle age is not as profitable because of the age discrimination they expected to face when looking for work or the lack of jobs available. Finally, 4% said that negative cultural perceptions about age and learning were at the back of their mind or had impacted on their study in some respect.

Examination of qualitative data highlighted a myriad of influences that impacted upon learning and educational choices and decisions. For example, a key issue here was that education and/or study were just too expensive. This ranged from not being able to afford to access H.E. due to student loans not being available to the over fifty-fives, to not being able to afford locally based courses, offering, for instance basic foreign language skills. The marketing of Higher Education was also of some concern with some institutions thought of as being exclusively aimed at

younger people and not valuing the life experience gained by prospective older students. Whilst this in some ways suggests institutional failings in widening participation amongst older learners, the barriers were sometimes much more blunt. As one interviewee noted.

> *"….then a course came up in X [another college] so I thought I'll try there so I rang up and by then I think I was 49 or 50 and he (tutor) said. 'How old…can I ask you how old you are?' I said, 'I'm 50' He said, 'Won't you feel stupid in a class of 16-19 year olds?'." (Female 50+, unemployed).*

Whilst of course such discriminatory remarks may be contrary to institutional policy, they do demonstrate how individual prejudice and/or attitude may undermine any good work that may be have been done in making educational opportunities more accessible.

In this case the interviewee also highlighted how her confidence had been extremely dented by such an attitude and this was a constant theme running through the interviews. It was not necessarily the ability to deal with the intellectual demands of higher or further education or a locally based course that was causing reluctance to access such courses, although this was mentioned, but it was also the ability to deal with other, maybe hidden, pressures. For example, as pointed out by one interviewee who had witnessed the difficulties other women had encountered whilst undertaking a degree herself, that working, home life and studying present hidden pressures, interacting within home life creating tension and pressure upon some women.

> *"I think what happens is, especially if their family is still at home, and especially if they've got a man, the old fashioned ideas come back in again…I should be there to put the tea on, I should make sure the washing is done, and then if I've got any time I will go and do that, she doesn't think about the man going to the pub in the night and the kids going out." (Female 54, unemployed).*

One must recognise however that it does not necessarily mean that family members are deliberately standing in the way of opportunities, but that social influences run deep. Family members, whilst on one hand lauded as being supportive and encouraging, may be, in some ways, complicit in failing to break down barriers.

Conversations also tried to determine what the initial motivations for study may have been with the reasons centred on three themes. Firstly, the need to re-train after redundancy, secondly, for reasons of increased social contact, and thirdly, for reasons of personal development.

> *"Because I was the oldest person doing my final …this diploma I have done…my tutor said to me 'why are you doing it', because I was already qualified but I just wanted to get in there, renew it all and find out what else is going on, she used to say to me 'you are so brave', and I used to think, 'is it because I am older', you know, what the bloody hell is she doing this for?" (Female 57, volunteer).*

Of course these motivations are not necessarily mutually exclusive and one may facilitate the other. However, what was clear, and somewhat supported by quantitative data, was that accessing education and/or training more often than not, was a reaction to a life event. For some it was to gain skills after redundancy, for others it was just to keep some social contact after stopping work, whilst for others it was to maintain companionship after bereavement.

Regardless of the initial motive to access education, what emerged from the data was how an initial introduction to education was able to foster a desire to undertake more, and that small, manageable steps, within the context of extended support networks, helps to mitigate some of the effects that lack of confidence may bring. The comment below gives an example of these dynamics at work.

> *"Then, all very slow steps…I did a couple of A' levels…and then I did a further education teacher's certificate... then I applied to the open university and did a humanities degree… I suppose I was into my fifties then." (Male 60+, retired).*

Indeed, as stated by another interviewee.

> *"It was just that once I got the bit between my teeth about education, I went mad and I just I mean I got loads of stuff." (Male 60+, retired).*

Emerging picture

The picture to emerge thus far from the data is that in many ways the world of education replicates the world of work in that men and women are guided into educational avenues reflective of gendered presumptions. Further to this, both internal and external barriers co-exist that to seek to dissuade many from taking the important initial step back to education/training. These initial steps cannot be underestimated and both sets of data clearly highlight how confidence, ambition and efficacy may be enhanced through the achievement of clearly reachable educational goals. Service providers do need to take this into account and ensure they market themselves accordingly.

Learner typology

If we were to categorise those who are studying, five groups could be said to have emerged from the data.

- Highly educated and motivated people who have become serial learners, dipping in and out of education throughout their life.
- Those who have returned to education to get back to work or to become job ready after a period out of employment, and have enjoyed or achieved something from their studying.
- Those who enjoyed learning at school but did not get the opportunity to pursue it earlier on and left school unqualified.
- A smaller group who have found themselves out of work at 50 and need to retrain or re-skill in a new area.
- Those who have opted for community based training for reasons of personal growth and/or social contact.

There will of course be some blurring of the edges here, but what is apparent from the data is that, with the exception of the first group, education was seen and acted upon as a reaction to some kind of life event. That rather than being proactive in terms of updating skills and knowledge, a majority of the cohort waited for, in the main, a negative life event, and used education as an antidote to that.

We do have to think about this however in the context of modern employment practices, whereby employees are in some ways expected to regularly update skills and knowledge so as to keep pace with technological progress and the changing world of work. This in itself may be a concern, in that if education is seen as an antidote to a problem, rather than something done in tandem with employment, many who have been reluctant to update their knowledge may find the skills they have relied upon thus far, are now redundant and outdated at a time when they are needed most. This may not be so much of an issue for people close to their retirement, for as the data demonstrates, as this time approaches, ones motivation for education tends to change. However, it is worth considering two points; firstly, those who have some experience of post compulsory education are more likely to access education in later life and secondly, the well-being fostered through continuing social contact undoubtedly aides health into retirement, the challenge must be to ensure education is continually accessible and relevant and that stereotypes, along with discriminatory institutional and personal practices are continually monitored and challenged.

The following sections are based upon data collected from 1035 men and women over fifty.

Past Employment

This section explored the experiences of people in their past employment. It delved into whether past employment had any impact on how they viewed their position today[1].

When the samples were asked about their previous employment, 9% had come from a professional background, 35% had been involved in managerial or lower professional work, 32% in non-manual skilled work (such as office work), and 25% in lower skilled roles.

Differences between the participants' current employment situation and socio-economic group can be seen in the table below.

[1] Two datasets were used to inform this section, as such some of the results presented are not for comparison between sectors but to provide information only

Table 6 - Current Employment Situation

Socio-economic Group	Voluntary Sector Paid Staff	Working in Public or Private Sector	Volunteers	Not Working
Professional Level	10%	7%	16%	6%
Management/Lower Professional Level	48%	31%	43%	24%
Non-Manual Skilled	27%	35%	26%	34%
Lower Skilled	15%	27%	15%	36%

Across all the participants the volunteers were the most likely group to have been of involved in previous work at a professional level.

Generally men (43%) had previously been more involved in lower skilled work, compared to only 16% of women surveyed. Whilst 43% of all women had previously worked in non-manual skilled work, the figure for all men was just 16%. However similar numbers of men and women in this study had previous experience of working in both professional and managerial/lower professional levels. These results suggest that gendered job roles do still exist in society especially within the lower socio-economic levels such as non-manual and lower skilled, however with regards to the higher levels such as management and professional gender differences are less evident.

The voluntary sector participants were asked which sector they had spent most of their employed life in. The results for both the volunteers and paid staff can be seen in the table below.

Table 7 - Past Employment: Voluntary Sector

Sector Type	Paid Staff (%)	Volunteers (%)
Public Sector	28	46
Private Sector	34	49
Voluntary Sector	37	5

It can be seen that for the paid staff in the voluntary sector, their history of employment was fairly evenly spread across the three sectors. However, for the volunteers, very few (5%) had previously worked within the voluntary sector and had mostly been involved with the private and public sector (n= 398).

For women it was found that a quarter of the paid staff had previously been employed in the public sector. With regards to the male participants, just under half of the paid staff had formerly been employed in the private sector, whilst one fifth had previously had some voluntary sector history (19%).

The majority of those who had worked in the private and public sectors participants (83%) had worked in more full-time than part-time roles (17%). In terms of gender, 28% of women surveyed had previously most regularly worked part-time, compared to only 2% of men surveyed. There were also differences between women who took part in the survey. Women at the older end of the cohort (those in their sixties and over) were more likely than those at the younger end (those in their fifties) to have worked mostly part time, although the difference here was not statistically significant (n=650)

Over half of the females working or volunteering in the voluntary sector had in the past tended to have worked in environments which had more women than men as employees. Men currently working or volunteering within the voluntary sector had in the past tended to work in environment where there were more men than women. The survey showed that just under a quarter (22%) of voluntary sector paid staff that had said there when in the past they had been employed in workforces they had experienced ageist attitudes, however those that had worked in environments which had more older than younger workers or in a gender balanced environment had not experienced such attitudes.

Just under half of the paid staff (47%) agreed that the promotion opportunities in their past main employer did become less accessible to them after age of fifty, compared to just over a third (37%) who felt the same for training opportunities. This indicates that older staff had been viewed as less eligible for promotion and training as they passed fifty, or perhaps even younger.

It was found that those who had experienced ageist attitudes and age discrimination in their past employment and agreed with the statement

"as you get older you have less choice in your career and employment", was only slightly influenced by whether in the past they has worked in predominantly younger environment (70%), even for those who had worked alongside more older people in the past (62%) felt the statement to be true.

Whether people have less choice in their careers as they get older was explored in the survey. Male paid staff in the voluntary sector were more likely to agree (90%), than the female paid staff were (78%). Interestingly, those who felt that their employers had more younger than older workers, or an even gender balance, were most likely to agree that you have less choice in your career with age.

Employment History

From the interview data it is clear that the world of work was a very different place then to what it is today. Men and women in their fifties and sixties are a unique group in that they have grown up and grown older in a period marked by social and economic change. In the economic boom of the late 1950's and 1960's Great Britain was the 'workshop of the world' (McDowell, 2001) dominated by its industrial and manufacturing employment. Young people at that time entered a new era of economic growth and expansion. Unemployment was generally low and people grew up with the notion that work was secure and accessible – it was there for those who wanted it.

> *"When I left school it wasn't a matter of whether you'd get a job, it was a matter of what job you'd get. I hadn't got a clue and then I went on holiday for a week and I thought I'll get a job when I come back and I walked around to the trading estate… I saw this factory there for tailoring and so I went into tailoring. I did that for two years and thought, I think I'll go and do something different…and went out in my lunch hour and got a job as hand sander in a factory and that led to an apprenticeship." (Male 66, retired).*

Volunteering History

The majority of volunteers in the sample had volunteered before in some capacity. Just under a third of the paid staff were also currently involved in voluntary work. Those with private sector backgrounds were the least likely to have had any history of volunteering. However, people who had

worked mainly in the public sector were more likely to have volunteered than those from the private sector.

For some their first period of volunteering began with their involvement in giving their time to particular groups, often this was through some form of involvement the group had with their children. From this they had progressed

> *"….mainly with children, play schemes when my children were there. I got involved with this committee, I was there, I got involved...then I moved…If people know that you have done that they ask you to do the same and then I got pulled into (organisation name)." (Female 62, Volunteer).*

> *"I had been involved in volunteering at an earlier stage in the life cycle when you have kids, I did things with the scout movement that sort of aspect, but other than that I don't think I would describe it as volunteering." (Male 61, Volunteer).*

Women and Work Patterns

As Maguire (1995) observed, where women once left work upon marriage, the present situation is one where the majority of women leave work upon the birth of a child and return to work after basic maternity leave. Hence there are some older women who left work as soon as they got married or had children and there are some women typically in their fifties who left work upon the birth of a child, returned to work and worked (mostly part time) between the births of subsequent children. While the pattern is undoubtedly different for single and divorced women, the point made is the same, namely, 'the younger the woman, the more paid work she is likely to have done and the better qualified in formal terms she is likely to be' (Groves, 1993: 43). Thus, prevailing attitudes and expectations especially about women's role in employment have influenced the female cohort at different points throughout their working lives.

> *"think what happened when I was younger you left your job and your children were your life you brought them up sort of thing it was a different attitude more traditional." (Female 60, full-time carer of grandchildren).*

> *"I think it's probably the norm for the woman to go back to work whereas when I had my first child it wasn't, it was more normal to do what I did [break in employment]." (Female 56, working full-time).*

These next two examples are of females who spent time out of employment to look after their family and home, after which they changed their career paths to be different from what they had done before.

> *"I had my children…I got married…to be honest because of my work experience I had hated all the jobs that I had had, so I was quite happy to be at home and be the housekeeper and the mum…It is a sessional thing I do now…it can be any number of days a month." (Female 62, volunteer).*

Intermittent work patterns in the past served to reduce the opportunities for women once they re-entered the workforce. As the employers have shown in this study

Experiences of discrimination because of gender race or disability were not unusual. Indeed the period was characterised by the sex-stereotyping of jobs, whereby the majority of women were channelled into female dominated occupations like teaching and shop work – '*women could do office work, nursing, teaching, but definitely not engineering or working on the roads'* - or were located at the lowest grades of the sectors in which they worked. As one woman put it.

> *"There was a lower expectation of women actually progressing up the ladder. Women generally had to work twice as hard as men to achieve particularly the higher positions within the system and there was a cultural expectation that really it was the man who worked and provided and really women would work for a number of years until they got married and settled down." (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

Some women had to be proactive and fight to enter jobs that were previously closed off to them. One such woman applied for a job in her chosen career, only to be rejected and told that it was a "male-only" position.

> *"To do the actual job I do now, I had to wait for the Equal Opportunities Bill and then re-apply, because they [employer] didn't take notice of me the first time. I applied for my first X, and I was told that it was a male only job, and then I applied again and they said 'no'*

> *they only employed men. I'm going back a long time ago - anyway they only employed men and then I reapplied when the Equal Opportunities Bill came in which must have been in the [pause] 70s. I wrote out a written application and attached a copy of the Bill." (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

During some of the interviews various employment related transitions were discussed. One interviewee identified how it was a total career change for her to go and work in the voluntary sector, having always worked for private sector employers.

> *"When I was young…I went into (private sector employer) and I stayed there for 10 years …I got a little bit fed up of that and then I had a total career change and I went work for (voluntary organisation). I had done some work in the community, you know, voluntary work myself, so I had a little bit of background and that's where it came from there…It was one of those government programmes that finished. The organisation said they didn't want to lose me so they bought me in. and because of my administration background they started to train me as a (current role) and it all stemmed from there." (Female 58, paid staff voluntary sector).*

Another interviewee indicated how he had worked in the public sector until he moved into voluntary sector work, his motivation for this being his altruistic religious beliefs.

> *"I started…in local government for 14 years…and left that as that I felt that was what god wanted for me and I found myself involved in founding (voluntary organisation) in Liverpool and I was with them for 10 years…although I am not directly involved with them now I still act as a consultant for them." (Male 58, paid staff voluntary sector).*

Following redundancy some found work in their later years within the voluntary sector.

> *"I had a few different sort of jobs… I got a job with (private employer) and that was, I was in (that) for 20 years…I stayed with (private employer) because I couldn't afford to do anything else you know…[they] were offering voluntary redundancy to people when they reached the age of 50 and I thought it was quite a good deal, so I thought, yeah, now is my chance to move, I had been wanting too for ages so… its something to remember that once you get married and you have got a mortgage and a car, you can't afford to mess around, you are stuck….then I came into this work and that's it, fine you know, Child is grown up, wife is fine, she's not working she's retired now and basically mortgage is paid and I'm waiting until I retire now." (Male 61, paid staff voluntary sector).*

With a history of private sector employment, a move into the voluntary sector provided a safety net at a time when work was hard to find. However the short-termism contract culture of the sector, in that jobs are often created following funding brings about a certain degree of insecurity which the older worker can sometimes find difficult to accept, following the era when there were "jobs for life".

> *"Right up to the early 80's I worked for a (private company)…The factory closed down due to the redundancies… all the factories were closing down at the particular time and I was out of work more or less for about 2 years. I just happened to see a job…I took it on the basis that it would do until I found a proper job, which would be again in industry because that was my background …then an opportunity came up in (within previous employer)…and I kept doing that basically until the opportunity to come and work here…I think it is generally people who are at the bottom end when it comes to seeking employment can very often find work here [in the voluntary sector] because it is not the highest paid work…There is that instability about it…I think nowadays there is not that climate that people are thinking I have a job for life, you know what I mean. If you get a job for a couple of years I think you are doing well. So I think people have come to accept, you know that there isn't permanent employment. I think it is more a case of people at our age having to catch up and accept that, I think young people already see that." (Male 50, paid staff in voluntary sector).*

Women's progression in the workforce has been slow to filter through, with many still banging their heads against the glass ceiling, some are now facing the silver ceiling of ageism. However enlightened the following two interviewees may be, the evidence from research continues to highlight the gender and age disadvantage experienced by older people in society,

> *"When I was a child and was growing up mothers and women were housewives - and then they were managers! - and it only takes a few generations for this integration to take place. I think we're in that [transition]. I don't think it's happened yet to its full potential, but I think it's on its way." (Male 55-60, working full-time).*

Supporting the belief that women are moving into managerial positions in the middle years this interviewee explains how although quite daunting especially when taking on a new managerial position, she was fully supported by her boss.

> *"I just decided to change direction a year ago because I'd been with [previous organisation] for 18 years...I saw this job advertised and I*

> *just read it, read it in the window and I thought I could do that. It was just a spur of the moment thing seeing that advert. I had thought about moving on, well I can't at my age - I'll be here till I retire [I thought]. When I say that, I thought, its worth a try and I did…I wouldn't say I have said I'm ambitious, in the past I think that I just got to the stage in [previous organisation] where you could do the job with your eyes closed. You go on automatic pilot. The chief executive said 'I thought you'd be here till you retired' and so did I, 'but if I don't do it now maybe it won't wait till I'm over 60, its going to be even harder', … he was very pleased for me and very supportive." (Female 58, change of career at age 50).*

The experience of this interviewee contradicts the stereotypical age assumptions held by some of the employers interviewed in this study and the more generally held beliefs about women's lack of managerial capabilities.

Past Experiences of Discrimination and Impact

Within the context of past employment this study explored the extent of perceived discrimination in different employment sectors and examined the impact and experiences of discrimination through the eyes of the over fifties. Of the 1035 people surveyed, a significant proportion (22%) said that they had experienced age discrimination previously in their career. While slightly fewer, but nevertheless a notable proportion (13%), said that they had experienced gender discrimination. Significant relationships were found between these experiences and other variables or criteria identified from the survey research.

Age Discrimination

We wanted to determine if and how people's experiences of discrimination varied across age and gender. In general men were more likely to have reported they had experienced age discrimination in employment (28%) than women (17%). Within the experiences of those now working as volunteers, it was found that women were twice as likely as men to have reported discrimination based on their age. There was also variation across age groups in that those currently aged 50-59 were more likely to have experienced age discrimination previously in the work history (25%) than those aged sixty and over (18%). The difference was more marked for those who were currently economically inactive, with 33% of people in their fifties reporting experiences of age discrimination, compared to

20% of people in their sixties. For those people currently employed we found not statistical significance between the respondents' age and whether they had experienced age discrimination.

When people have had gaps out of the labour force they were more likely to have reported experiences of age discrimination (24%), compared to people who had full and continuous patterns of employment (16%). This may suggest that the cumulative effect of, gaps out of work, missed opportunities, as a result of breaks, coupled with unfair treatment regarding their age (which for many women meant re-starting work at lesser positions than they may have previously been able to command) had a long term profound effect, extending far beyond the actual events, thus impacting upon a person's future career or work status. How far such recollections had been influenced by, perhaps, possible dissatisfaction in their current employment or being out of work, is obviously uncertain yet the evidence offered during interviews outlines clear occurrences of age discrimination in past work histories.

Age discrimination was found to operate when people were younger, sometimes straight after leaving school and again later in their lives, for some, as early as thirty years of age. For age discrimination at a younger age, this was dismissed by some of the sample as being negative treatment, especially amongst those who entered into manual labour occupations after the initial schooling period, where it was said they got a 'bit of a hard time' from older employees. Although, this was accepted by most as being part and parcel of a male-orientated work environment, it was a period in which they could look back on and perhaps identify it as a learning process and a kind of initiation into adulthood; for age discrimination in later years the sample, in hindsight, viewed this more seriously due to the placing of limitations on opportunities and the subsequent impact this had on their life chances. Some interviewees felt that they had experienced discrimination in terms of the pay they received, whereby organisations based the pay scales on age rather than experience. Hence we can trace back to some ageist practices that have largely been played out in the labour market. Our understanding of age and adulthood may be defined, to a large extent by how labour market

practices were able to determine both the age of adult status and the pay and rewards that went with it.

> *"One time there weren't opportunities to train for promotion, no. When I worked in [public sector organisation] you were twenty-eight before you came on full money. So if you were looking to get married or anything before twenty-eight, forget it, you know. It was crazy." (Male 60, retired after redundancy).*

More common was age discrimination, that was levied at some people from thirty years onwards, through the use maximum age limits in job adverts, which usually meant that a person was too old to find work as early as age thirty. There were also examples of ageist attitudes operating within the workplace. As one interviewee understood it, age discrimination has always been a part of the workplace culture, and as such it was accepted as an inevitable part of growing older in employment.

> *"I remember when we went for a night out, the younger people that we had trained were coming up, I was now part time, they were now full time. We were in a restaurant and I sort of came in slightly later, and I remember (colleagues name), who I had know for some time [say] ' oh, you are over there with the oldies' and then she was like, 'oh I am sorry, I am sorry' and I was [saying] ' yeah you are right'…I remember being her age and doing it [myself]. That was interesting…you see there was no age discrimination then... it was just the way it was, there wasn't a label or a word for it, that's the difference." (Female 55, Volunteer).*

Situations arose in which access to training opportunities was based upon age. Assumptions were made about perceived learning capabilities and mental acuity. The reinforcement of negative messages can bring about self doubt as outlined in an earlier section, this interviewee reiterates a similar sentiment,

> *"I think for somebody of my age, you sometimes get a lot of ageism. I used to work at one time for (public sector employer) in the enquiries department and I had to go for… training… for that…All I kept getting told was that 'we wont expect you to be able to do this because you are an older person' and although they had this policy of non-ageism, no prejudice, it kept on getting dropped in the conversation… I enjoyed the job and I enjoyed the people I was with, but I always felt I was the oldest. I might have only been the oldest by five years, but I didn't feel as valued there…I was about fifty-two, but I did feel old. I mean I didn't feel old before I went to work there…The training put years on me… I even put a complaint in about [it] - I mean she was a lovely girl, but she kept bringing up*

this thing, about, well because you are older and fair enough I maybe wasn't as fast, I had never been great at geography but I mean I had only been there three months and I got the employee of the month, so I wasn't that bad." (Female 58, paid staff voluntary sector).

Subjective decisions based upon a person's age are often couched in terms of the economic benefit or payback period the trainee may have within the company, and as such are misjudged, as the literature has shown workers who have considerable length of service are more likely to repay their firm with loyalty, unlike younger workers who move on with the training certificates acquired elsewhere in their back pockets. This interviewee illustrated how, when in his forties he was sidelined for training and those younger men who had been more successful in accessing training invariably moved on.

"The equipment was actually getting very hi-tech… and they felt that it was not cost effective for me to be trained …they had a retirement age of sixty… they probably thought…it would have cost them, probably years of training and for only ten years possible return and they probably … [thought] it was not worthwhile you know…In the end…you could see the younger people, people in their thirties and that , sort of moving on [leaving] … you could see the hesitation, obviously, in your managers, well is it worth putting me, (participants name) onto this because he is approaching fifty?" (Male 61, paid staff voluntary sector).

Several older volunteers had been displaced from the labour market whilst in their fifties, and reported prolonged periods of unemployment which they laid firmly at the door of age discrimination in recruitment and selection. Constant failure to break through this barrier had left some feeling as though it was futile to try, as they felt they were considered by employers to be 'too old' for work and hence they stopped looking.

"Well yeah I have [experienced discrimination] actually when I think of it now of being too old for work. When I was at the peak of my career (40-50 years old)…I was probably thinking of looking round for other work and found out that they wouldn't take you on over a certain age and so instead of pushing…I just gave up and just thought, well if that is the case I will stay in the job I have got…I just found it at the time very difficult and just kept coming across closed doors in that respect." (Male 62, Volunteer)

"[When I applied for a management role] I felt very disappointed and very hurt because I was told I hadn't got the job. When I went (left

> *employment) it came out, that the people said no they wouldn't give it to me because I was too old at fifty-three, because they expected somebody younger because …they wanted to it run for x number of years, so I didn't get it… I was disappointed, but afterwards I thought well that is life." (Female 62, Volunteer).*

However, on the whole, volunteers and paid staff in the voluntary sector were least likely to have reported experiencing age discrimination in previous employment (8% and 10% respectively) than those from the public and private sectors (24%). When employed staff in the voluntary sector had previously worked within the private sectors (24%) they were more likely to have experienced ageist attitudes, than those who had previously worked in public and voluntary sectors (10% for both). Taken together, this may suggest that more age positive approaches are adopted by the voluntary sector.

Gender Discrimination

Compared to age discrimination, there were much clearer differences between the numbers of men and women who reported gender discrimination earlier in their career. As might be expected experiences of gender discrimination were more prevalent among women (18% of all women, compared to only 6% of all men surveyed). As with age discrimination, the tendency to have perceived gender discrimination was stronger amongst the younger end of the cohort, particularly those in the 50-54 age group. One possible explanation for this trend is that profound changes regarding women's employment and equal opportunity legislation, during the last thirty years, impacted greatly on this group, simply by virtue of the fact that these women were more likely to have grown up and grown older under these changes. They witnessed the challenges, then and now, of gender inequalities being brought before the courts, providing a drip feed of evidence reinforcing the experiences of those who had faced the gender hurdles associated with maternity, promotion, and equal pay.

Gender discrimination was more keenly felt among women from the public and private sector who had previously taken time out of the labour market for childcare (72%, compared to 27% of those who had not taken time out of the labour market). Many of the women interviewed had

confronted classic gendered discourse about motherhood, the care of the family and their role within it. It was felt that employers at that time (1960's, 1970's) thought women were only interested in work until they got married or had children,

> *"Just after I was married I went for a job and it was an internal promotion and it was between me and two men. Both of the men were the same age as me, they were less qualified than me, they had a worse sickness record than me, because I was always careful or conscientious about my days off, so on paper it looked like me. But at the interview, this man said to me, this is the gods honest truth, he said to me, 'you've recently been married?' I said 'yes'. 'So you'll be having children in a few years time?' I said 'no, I don't intend to have any children for a long while yet' 'But you will be having children?' It was an assumption he made without me saying anything. I didn't get the job, one of the men got the job, but I was so angry because I knew why they hadn't given it to me." (Female 55, working full-time).*

> *"They [employer] said, 'no I must have known [that I was pregnant] and that I was taking the place…that I was just messing around, because it takes you a few weeks you know to get trained …so they just said, 'you must have known you were pregnant' and I said, 'well I didn't' and they said, 'well we're terminating your contract'." (Female 58, carer of family and home).*

Other people gave examples of negative gendered stereotypes that they had experienced during their working lives. One woman told how sexist 'jibes' and 'jokes' had become a part of her everyday existence.

> *"I was whistled at I think every day I came to work and not just by the students, there was a lot of sexist banter and comments, nothing specifically insulting, but just low level boring crap, you know (laughs) and you can't be bothered to respond to it on a daily basis so it just becomes part of your daily existence." (Female 50, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

There were also examples of women in the 1970's, who had taken advantage of the new legislation and had fully supported the women's liberation movement, – they were the first to 'break though' and establish themselves in formerly male-dominated jobs, yet found themselves facing a new set of hurdles along the way. One woman recalled the trouble she had in being accepted in her post in an institution which has had a long history of male domination, the message conveyed back to her was that she was easily replaceable,

> *"When I went into X it was 1976 so it was just after the Equal Opportunities, but you know some people had claimed... for discrimination … I mean if I'd claimed for some of the things that were said to me when I went, and the way we were treated, because we were women, not by all of them, some of them were brilliant, but some of the things that were said, you could have taken them to a tribunal. But at the time you didn't realise, you're only young and you felt that if you stepped out of line that would be it, because they could do that at any time… just say that you're not suitable, and they didn't have to give you an explanation." (Female 50, job seeker).*

Time taken out of the labour market to have and raise children had a profound impact on the availability of opportunity and choice once women returned to work. Although most of them returned to their previous employer they had fewer years of service (compared to men and to single women) in which to progress and move up the career ladder. For those women who entered the job market at the time it was not only their gender and family status that conspired to discriminate but their age also, despite only being in their thirties.

> *"I was 36 years old and believe it or not, seventeen years ago they used to put on the notice board in the job centre [pause] they used to type it out [job advertisement] on a little postcard, so they would put something like, '18-30' and they would actually put that on…(pauses…the numbers of jobs, jobs I could have done quite easily… receptionist jobs, answering the telephone … that would have got me back into the workplace and I could have coped with that." (Female 55, working full-time).*

There were also examples of the negative effect that a double jeopardy of gender and age discrimination can have upon an individual. The two examples of double jeopardy cited below are quite different in that one is the experience of a man and the other of a woman, yet both felt that they were discriminated against because of their age and gender in respect to their past employment.

> *"[My past employer] got a new area manager who decided they didn't want older managers, she said, didn't want male managers and I was told,' I'm getting you out because you are an older person, I don't want you you're male and you're over 40, you're out', and so they put me through 9 months of hell because I wouldn't leave…when I left I was about as low as you could get…I don't think I have been treated like that any other time in my life, that was horrendous…she would tell me you are going, I don't want you here, you are too old and you are male you are going…The pressure was unbelievable, it wasn't good. I mean it was a gradual thing but at the end of it I felt totally devalued, no work, no value, no nothing… I was*

> *so low it was unbelievable and even now I am not as I was before…still not totally come back, I don't think I ever will, it scars…and that was all because I was too old and the wrong sex." (Male 55, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

> *"I have also been referred to, even in my later years, as 'eye candy' or we have got to have bit of glamour at this meeting, (participants name) will you come along?... which is all very nice in one way, but you know if I wasn't … presented in that way, what would [I be] the office croney? It is just not a very valuable way of assessing people's abilities I think." (Female 50, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

The psychological impact of discrimination

A spectrum of emotions related to the discriminatory experiences suffered were apparent amongst the sample They ranged from feelings of being hurt, upset, anxious, depressed, frustrated and angry at being denied the opportunity to be able to show employers what they had to offer. For some people their self-esteem and self-confidence had also taken a pounding. Such experiences and the internalisation of negative messages provoked feelings of frustration thus lowering expectations for advancement in a situation in which they had little control or alternatively, deciding to concentrate on other aspects of their lives, over which they could exert some control,

> *"I think at the time it just made me work harder. I feel I had to work twice as hard, but I think it made me a little bit introverted as well because you were frightened to discuss how you felt with other people and you (women) were in a minority…I suppose at the time because I was younger and it was a career I'd always wanted, it made me stronger but I also think that when my family came along, I had someone else to consider, so it was a disadvantage. I used to take things to heart and that is why I thought in the end, 'oh, I give up'. I think if I hadn't had any one else to consider I'd have dug my heels in." (Female 50, job seeker).*

> *"I remember coming home and saying to mum, 'I'm thirty six and I'm written off already - I can't believe it'. And I didn't feel old, but it made me feel worthless." (Female 55, working full-time).*

Gaps Out of the Labour Market

Overall, 74% of the sample had experienced periods of their life where they had found themselves without paid employment. As would be expected significant differences occurred between men and women with females being far more likely to have had these periods without employ-

ment (84%) than males (60%). There was little difference in terms of periods out of the labour market regardless of what their current status was and for whom they worked, with around 80% to almost 90% of women and between 60% and 71% of men having a period out of the labour market.

Within the volunteer group the average age was much higher than in the other groups 75% of males and 70% of females being over 60 years of age. Significantly male volunteers were less likely than other males to have had periods out of work (33%). However given the older age of the volunteers it could be argued that the differences could be explained in terms of the changes in labour market conditions that have occurred since the 1970's and onwards, being largely reflective of the times in which many have worked, when many men were fortunate to have held a job for life.

To explore these gaps out of work in more detail we need to investigate what the reasons for these were. For the individuals from the public and private employment sector (n=650) women were much more likely to have taken time out of employment for childcare (65%) and unpaid domestic work (20%). On the other hand, men were more likely to have been out of work because of an unforeseen circumstance such as redundancy (57%, compared to 30% of women) and unemployment (41%, compared to 16% of women).

Similarly for the paid staff from the voluntary sector (n=187) men were seven times more likely to have been out of work due to unemployment or redundancy (70%), than women (10%). Men were also more than three times as likely to give sickness and disability as their reason for being out of employment (14%) than women (4%). However, women were far more likely to be out of the workforce due to personal commitments and choice (such as child rearing or looking after the family or home) (87%) than men (16%).

These relationships were also evident for the volunteer sample whose average age was slightly older than the other groups (n=198). The

majority of female volunteers gave child rearing as their reason for their longest period out of employment (64%), compared to only 4% of males and 9% of females gave looking after home as their reason compared with none of the males citing this reason. Men however, were more likely to give redundancy (39%), sickness and disability (27%) or unemployed but looking for work (12%) as their reason for time out of work, than women (8%, 9% and 2% respectively).

With regards to the reasons that people gave for having been out of work, differences were apparent between the paid staff from the voluntary sector and volunteers[1]. Male paid staff were more likely to have had periods out of employment due to unemployment or redundancy (80%) than male volunteers (52%). However male volunteers were more likely to have had time out to look their after family and home (20%) or due to sickness and disability (28%), than male volunteers (5% and 15% respectively). There was no significant difference between female staff and volunteers and their reasons for periods out of employment.

It was found that for those from the PPE strand, women with children were those most likely to have had a break in employment (93%) than women with no children (69%). For paid staff in the voluntary sector, the relationship between having had children and the reasons for periods out employment was explored. Those that did have children were much more likely to give personal commitments as their reason for time out (72%) than those who had not had children (16%). However, those without children were more likely to have been out of work due to unemployment and redundancy (59%) or sickness and disability (24%), than those who had children (24% and 5% respectively). These differences applied to both men and women in the same way. There was however, no significant relationship between gender, periods out of employment and whether a participant had children, amongst the volunteers.

[1] The participants from the PPE strand cannot be directly compared in the way that voluntary sector paid staff and volunteers have been in this paragraph. This is due to the PPE survey enabling participants to choose more than one reason for their gaps out of employment, compared to the voluntary strand surveys which only requested one reason for the most recent period without work.

The lives of women have changed dramatically over the past 20-30 years. Perhaps one of the main changes is the rise in economic activity levels among women, as they have moved closer to those of men. Yet when the women from this study were first starting out, it was relatively unusual for women to return to work immediately after having children. Some women become 'homemakers' doing valuable unpaid work in the home. Other women returned to work part time employment, which allowed them to combine paid work with the care of children.

> *"I worked full-time when I left school, never had any qualifications or anything like that, and then I stayed in work until [pause] I think I was having my son at the time. I never went back to work after that when I had our X [name of son] he's my oldest, but I never worked then until my second son came along and he was ten." (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

Most women did not regret taking time out of employment to have and raise their children, although it was acknowledged that a break in the career might have adversely affected their opportunity for promotion.

> *"I have no regrets for that time [career break]. There is kind of a debate going on isn't there about career women who stay at home and I think it's a decision for each woman. But I certainly have no regrets for those years - I don't see them as wasted and I'm glad I took the time." (Female 56, working full-time).*

> *"I prefer working part time but the problem with part time work is that it can be difficult to move up. Basically if I wanted a promotion I'd have to go full time, which is…I think that it is one of the problems for older women, for women in general because I think a lot of women try even though my kids are older now I mean my youngest is 14 I still want to be there sometimes when she gets home from school. I still want to be there if she wanted help with her homework. I still want to be there if she wants a shoulder to cry on." (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

The most likely group of the paid staff in this sector to have had periods of their life without employment were those who felt that their career had peaked under the age of thirty or over the age of fifty, those who felt that their careers peaked between the ages 30-40 and 40-50 were less likely to have had time out (71% and 69% respectively). Furthermore the latter two groups, those who felt their career peaked between 30-40 and 40–50, were more likely to have time out due to unemployment and redundancy (40% and 34%) than those who felt they peaked under thirty

or over fifty (17% and 24%). Holding off a career because of other priorities was a theme which emerged during the interviews.

> *"I mean I suppose the gender issue comes in with me at my age now, where at times in my career I have worked part time and I have done, perhaps not had the career I might have had because of not wanting to at that time. So I have almost trodden water you know for reasons, well for personal family reasons really and that is why I am ready now to come forward, does that make sense? I am later than other people because of the things that have happened to me in my earlier life." (Female 53, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

Men and women who had previously most regularly worked in manual skilled occupations were more likely to say that they had been out of work due to unemployment and redundancy (40% and 62% respectively) as compared to those from non-manual skilled occupations (19% and 28% respectively). This is perhaps to be expected given the gradual and persistent decline in traditional manufacturing, which has occurred across the UK. Those most likely to have been without work due to ill health or disability were from unskilled occupations (26%), the least likely were from professional backgrounds (10%). Those most likely to have taken time out of work due to a personal commitment (i.e. childcare) were from non-manual skilled (64%) and unskilled (37%) occupations; the least likely were from semi-skilled (17%) and manual skilled (15%).

Paid staff in the voluntary sector identifying themselves as non-manual skilled, were the most likely to have had periods out of employment (85%). Those who felt they were lower skilled were the least likely (69%), with around three quarters of both the managerial/lower professionals and professionals having periods without work (79% and 73% respectively). Those paid staff that felt they were of a non-manual skilled level were the least likely to give unemployment or redundancy as reasons for their periods out of work (18%), compared to managerial (30%), lower and manual skilled (35%) and professionals (36%).

Similarly, the most likely to have had periods out of work for personal commitments were also those of non-manual skilled level (78%), followed by managerial (68%), then professional (50%) and the least likely being those of a lower/manual skilled level (48%). Paid staff from professional

and lower/manual skilled backgrounds were more likely to have been out of work due to sickness and disability (14% and 17% respectively) than those from non-manual skilled and managerial backgrounds (5% and 2% respectively).

With regards to the volunteers, those who classed themselves as non-manual skilled, were the most likely to have had periods out of employment (77%) and professionals were the least likely (43%), with just over half of the lower skilled and managerial/lower professionals having periods without work (54% and 55% respectively). With regards to the relationship between the reasons for gaps out of employment and socio-economic group, the volunteers displayed similar trends to the paid staff in the voluntary sector.

Paid staff in voluntary sector had spent most of their employed life in the voluntary sector and were the most likely to have had periods without employment (86%) compared to 80% of those from those working in the private sector. Those least likely to have had time out of employment were those with public sector backgrounds (61%). The public sector also showed itself to be the most stable environment, with only half of the volunteers who had previously worked in this sector having periods without employment. This may indicate the lack of security of associated with the contract culture, due to short-term funding and short contract lengths. However, both the voluntary and private sectors seem to offer less job security than the public sector, which had the least number of people with gaps out of work.

Redundancy

A third of the sample had experienced compulsory redundancy (36%), this was experienced more so by men (43%) than women (30%) (n=1035). Whilst the number of people who experienced redundancy is high it should also be remembered that it was perhaps quite likely that this age group may have had more experience of redundancy in particular periods in their lives, due to the economic downturns during their working lives and that for some, the experience had been repeated on

more than one occasion. Thus the extent of redundancy found in this group is not a major interest but how that experience has impacted upon them throughout their lives.

Just under half of the sample (46%) had experienced redundancy in their work history. In terms of the nature of the redundancy, 36% had experienced compulsory redundancy while 11% had experienced voluntary redundancy. Men were more likely to have experienced compulsory redundancy (43%) than women (30%). They were also more likely to have experienced voluntary redundancy (16%) than women (8%). Age also played a part. Those aged 50-59 were more likely to have experienced compulsory redundancy (40%) than those aged 60 and over (30%). However, no significant relationship was found between age and peoples' experiences of voluntary redundancy.

In terms of occupational background, those who placed themselves at managerial/lower professional level were the least likely to have experienced voluntary redundancy in their lifetime (8%), followed by professionals and non-manual skilled (11% for both). The most likely to have experienced voluntary redundancy were those from lower skilled backgrounds (18%). There was no significant relationship between compulsory redundancy and occupational background, although professionals were the least likely to have experienced it compared to all other levels. It was also noted that those who achieved in higher education in their initial education were the least likely to have experienced compulsory redundancy, than any other education age level (e.g., ages associated with the end of elementary, secondary or further education). This is perhaps to be expected given the strong association between education and employability (mentioned earlier).

Redundancy experiences of those currently working in the voluntary sector

Those volunteering or currently working in the voluntary sector were asked to give specific information about their past experiences of redundancy. There were some clear gender differences in the paid staffs' experiences of redundancy. Of those whose main employer had been

different to their current one, over half of the men had been made redundant in the past (52%), compared to just over a quarter of the women (28%). With regards to the nature of the redundancy males were more than twice as likely to have experienced compulsory redundancy (48%) than females (21%). Similarly, the males were more than three times as likely to have experienced voluntary redundancy (20%) than the females (6%).

Paid staffs' employment histories could also be related to experiences of redundancy. Those with public sector histories were the least likely to have experienced compulsory redundancy (16%), compared to those who had worked mostly in the private and voluntary sectors (37% and 33% respectively) with similar trends amongst the volunteers who had experienced redundancy, again supporting the previous section in which the public sector appears to be a more secure working environment than the voluntary and private sectors.

Of those who experienced compulsory redundancy under the age of forty, all said that the experience was a negative one. However, of those experiencing it aged 40-49 only 20% said it was a negative experience, followed by those aged 50-59 (27%) and those 60 plus (25%).

Some paid staff interviewed felt that their redundancy was a positive experience and had no problems accessing more paid employment.

> *"In some ways I saw it as an opportunity and obviously it was a need for money so you had to weigh one side against the other so there was a downside to it, in that I had lost the security of quite a good income, and …again because I think because I was young, I was 28, rather than now, I saw it was in some ways positive because it gave me a chance perhaps to move on to do something different." (Male 50, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

Despite having favorable attitudes towards their redundancies some felt their situation was made more difficult at work due to the inflexibility of management; redundancy was a way out of a difficult period.

> *"It came about because we had a change of (manager) and the outgoing (manager) was on cruise control to retirement, but the*

> *person who replaced him told me quite openly that she didn't like women with children and she didn't feel I gave 100%... I came back from maternity leave…I went back to work and I had engaged a nanny to look after our little boy, who didn't turn up on the first morning, and that is a total childcare nightmare and there is literally nothing else for it except for me to phone up my partner who was already at work and say look you are going to have to take the day off and come back. The sorting out took about an hour so by the time I got to (work) I was an hour late, I had phoned to say that I was late and I had said why and when. I got there this women was standing there with her arms folded and as I got in the door she started ranting at me and I thought OK, great welcome…then the voluntary redundancy opportunities came up and I felt that was my way out. So it was my choice but it was also a set of circumstances that clearly indicated one way rather than another." (Female 50, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

A lack of appreciation and the feeling of being willed out of the organisation was apparent here,

> *"It was a totally negative experience. I had worked there for 25 years full time and I worked for two and half years part time and I think I was always, well you know we had assessments every year and I think I was well thought of and yet when the redundancies came round…I felt that they grabbed my redundancy with both hands and I have said it to many people I think once I said I was interested in redundancy, showed that interest, and asked what the figures would be, it was just then, out the door (X name) and no questions asked, that is how I felt, very, very, hurt." (Female 54, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

This leads us to question whether the negative effects of redundancy are compounded by age. One of the main aims of the research was to know more about how people over fifty had fared in the job market. It is generally accepted that displaced older workers were much less likely than displaced younger workers to be re-employed quickly and that they had a high probability towards taking on part time work and experiencing reduction in waged income (Chan and Stevens, 2001). Relatively little is known, however, about what happens to a person immediately after they have experienced or been made redundant or the effects of job loss on a worker's self esteem and life satisfaction as well as their employment and retirement decisions.

Redundancy experiences for past or present workers in the private and public sectors

Forty-seven percent of the sample in the public and private sectors (n= 650) had experienced job loss at age fifty or over. The majority had left employment because of an external cause beyond their control, for example a business or plant closure or the restructuring of an organisation. Of these, 47% had experienced compulsory redundancy, 29% and 24% preferred not say whether the redundancy was compulsory or voluntary. The majority of people who had experienced compulsory redundancy had previously had a period of long-standing employment in one job or job type. Of these, most had been made redundant by a technical or manufacturing firm. They recognised that profound changes to the UK economy that had taken place over the past 20-30 years that had made their industry vulnerable and unstable. In this respect, they placed their redundancy in the context of the demise of the primary sector and manufacturing. Compulsory redundancies were, in most cases, across the whole of the workforce, at all levels within the organisations, taking the form of closures, take-overs and major layoffs.

> *"It's only in the last two years now that I haven't worked much you know because the engineering is all finishing now. It's all getting made abroad." (Male 55-60, unemployed).*

Men were more likely than women to have experienced redundancy at age fifty or over (64% of all men, compared to 36% of all women surveyed). This is hardly surprising given that redundancy affected a significant proportion of manual employees (59%). These are typically in manufacturing in which men have, traditionally, been over-represented, many of which have collapsed in recent years. However many other occupational groups had also been hit by redundancy. Overall, 39% of all professionals and managers had experienced redundancy at age 50 or over, 35% of those from non-manual skilled occupations and 55% of those from semi-skilled or unskilled occupations.

Clearly redundancy has no boundaries: it can affect all grades of staff, to varying degrees. Some clear trends were apparent, compulsory redun-

dancies were higher amongst those who had experienced redundancy from manual occupations (63%, compared to 45% of those from semi-skilled occupations). In contrast, voluntary redundancies were higher amongst those from semi-skilled occupations (55%, compared to 37% of those from manual occupations).

Those who had experienced compulsory redundancy were more likely to interpret the experience as negative. It was noted that people felt more positive when they were informed of a possible job loss prior to their redundancy and when they had an element of control and choice over the management of their redundancy. It was also the case that those who had experienced redundancy - especially compulsory redundancy - were more likely to feel that they had been discriminated against on account of their age (60%, compared to 40% of those who had not experienced redundancy). This would suggest that the over fifties were the main target for redundancy, often believing that their age was proffered as a reason to 'step aside' for younger workers. Hence, the targeting of the over fifties for redundancy was seen by this group as the least controversial and more socially acceptable option for selection. This vision is, of course, at odds with the ethos of the forthcoming age legislation, where decisions based upon age alone would constitute a civil offence.

The interview data highlighted a myriad of ways in which people reacted to redundancy. Some were ambivalent – they had to weigh-up the advantage of a relatively attractive redundancy package against the disadvantage of leaving a job they enjoyed. One woman explained how she had to trade off the enjoyable social aspect of work for a relatively generous redundancy payment. For her, ill health was also a factor.

> *"I liked the [name of company] where I was working at the time I really did. But I think that if I hadn't of got out when I did, I'd still be working there for less money, being ill and maybe there till I retired type of thing. So I think what I did, I did at the right time." (Female 54, job seeker).*

Yet whilst some drew beneficial advantages from redundancy, because it created an exit route out of employment or meant early retirement from

a job that they did not like or were dissatisfied with, others were upset and angry that they had been made redundant.

Although many were expecting the redundancy, it was still a shock when it happened. Those in their fifties felt particularly vulnerable – many felt that their redundancy status left them trapped between being, 'too old' to find work but 'too young' to retire an intermediate status found in previous studies (see Casey and Laczko, 1989). For most people, job loss at age 50 or over meant a long duration of unemployment or permanent exclusion from the labour market.

> *"I'd say I'm frustrated. Because obviously, as I said before, I've got to work because I'd have nothing to live on otherwise. But it's just going out there and finding it. I've been to all the agencies but nothing seems to be coming from it." (Male 54, job seeker, experienced redundancy).*

> *"I was made redundant years ago and what I found, it puts a lot of pressure on you. Your wife has got to work and you're sitting there trying to get work." (Male 55-60, working part-time, experienced redundancy).*

Age as a factor in redundancy

It was clear from the interview data that age had often been a criterion or factor in the redundancy *"they [employer] were targeting the over 65's at first and then targeting the over 55's to go out".* Again, the suggestion was made that the over fifties were an easy target because of their mid to later stage of their working life. Age was a factor in the decision making by those facing voluntary redundancy. Several interviewees felt a certain amount of pressure to leave the company in return for a redundancy payment or pension package that was attractive for long-serving staff. The vulnerability of their future job role, declining health and the instability of the pensions industry were also cited as important factors.

> *"They [over fifties] felt as if they had to go because I got the feeling at that particular time last year that the pensions didn't seem very stable if you remember and they still aren't now, you read how people with their pensions - the money they've lost is just unbelievable." (Male 55-60, working part-time).*

> *"Well I was there for 25 years as I say, … I'm not in the best of health and I told my wife and my family and they said, 'I think you should pull out'. Because they [company] were going to review the redundancies in two years time anyway and they [family] said, 'you're getting what you're getting now plus your pension'. They said, 'in two years time you know you might come out with nothing after all those years service'. So we had a family discussion and decided that I'd take it." (Male 54, job seeker, experienced redundancy).*

Similarly others worked alongside younger men who had young families and a mortgage, with fewer years of service, redundancy for them would represent very little in terms of remuneration. One respondent with four children told of how he had been handed his compulsory redundancy letter, only to find the next day that his colleague, in the same department had applied for voluntary redundancy, the respondents ninety days notice was withdrawn. The colleague was older, had paid off his mortgage and decided to take the voluntary severance package. The respondent felt his own position, known by his colleague played a part in that decision.

Current Situation

In terms of their current situation, 47% of those who left work because of redundancy were re-employed, with slightly more women than men finding work, 28% were retired, 18% were unemployed and the remaining, 7% were economically inactive (not actively seeking work). The proportion of those in the category of retired was relatively similar to those who did not leave work because of redundancy (28% and to 24% respectively). However, dividing the sample into groups aged 50-59 and 60 and over, a difference is revealed. Over 13% of those who had experienced redundancy were now early retired (retired at 50-59 years old) as compared to only 2% of those who had not experienced redundancy. This is a particularly interesting finding. It could be due to the lack of personal expectations about the likelihood of finding alternative employment and/or age discrimination in the job search process. Alternatively, it could reflect a decrease in the desire for work amongst this group, with people 'opting out' through personal choice (Pinch and Mason, 1991).

The younger ends of the cohort (those currently aged 50-54) were more likely to have returned to work (57%). Return rates for those in their sixties were substantially lower (30%). As expected, those experiencing ill health or a disability had less opportunity to return to work. Educational attainment also affected the probability of employment, those with higher educational attainment (but not a trade qualification) were more likely to return to work than those with lower educational attainment. Those with trade qualifications were only slightly more likely to return to work than those with low or no qualifications (43%, compared to 36% respectively). This was probably due to the fall in the demand for former manual employees with experience in (for example) building and construction.

Re-employment

The respondents were asked how long after the redundancy did they consider work. Almost three-quarters of those made redundant began to look for work or were re-employed straight away, 15% started looking for work less than 6 months after redundancy and the rest (12%) had a break before they considered work, extending from more than six months to 2 years or more. The length of time was dependent to a large extent, on their personal circumstances; those who were better off financially were more likely to take a major break from employment as were those who had a long history of full time employment with their previous employer. By contrast, some, especially those who were single or divorced began to look for a job straight away or before, during the period of their redundancy notice. This was a particularly stressful and difficult situation to be in,

> *"I thought I'll take three months out, have a good relax, just pot about the house for three months then start looking for work." (Male 54, job seeker, experienced redundancy).*

> *"I knew this [redundancy] was going to happen in September and in October I started scanning the papers, various professional journals and asking people and started to apply. I had an interview in the January at which I was unsuccessful because at that stage I actually hadn't done my interviewing skills and just then started to apply, apply, apply, but it was very demoralising because I was applying for all these jobs, I was still doing my work and still trying to prepare for the redundancy and it was really bad." (Female 50-54, working full-time, experienced redundancy).*

The number of women who returned to work full time was almost equal to the number of women who returned to work part time. However the majority of men returned to work full time rather than part time. The type of redundancy experienced (i.e. voluntary or compulsory) also affected whether the respondents returned to full time or part time employment. Those who had experienced compulsory redundancy were much more likely to return to work full time (39% compared to 14% those taking voluntary redundancy). In contrast, those who had experienced voluntary redundancy were more likely to return to work part time (22%, compared to 10% those who had experienced compulsory redundancy). The reasons for taking up part-time work were wide and diverse. They included elements of choice and necessity, namely, ill health, additional income (from private pension or redundancy payment), personal preference or an inability to find a full time job. Increased care commitments also featured highly amongst the female interviewees. One man had chosen part time employment to free up more time to concentrate on other aspects of his life. He wanted a less stressful and strenuous job role that would carry him though until retirement.

> *"Now I mean could have got another factory job, but I thought I don't want that you know I'm 58 this year… I love my holidays... We went away four times last year, so you know…this job that I've got… it's a little cleaning job, just in you know a bingo hall picking up the papers, throwing them in the bin bags. It suits me. It's an easy job." (Male 57, working part-time, experienced redundancy).*

In terms of the type of work undertaken, over a third of respondents (35%) were re-employed in professional and managerial jobs, followed by non-manual skilled (27%), semi-skilled (12%) and unskilled and below (16%). Only 9% were re-employed in manual skilled jobs, despite the fact that 58% of those from manual skilled backgrounds had left work in their fifties because of redundancy). This may indicate that former manual employees have not wanted or been able to find work in the same sector or in a similar occupation. As Pinch and Mason (1991) noted, the chances of finding work in the same or similar occupation would also depend upon the number and type of job opportunities available in the area. In addition, ill health can reduce the appeal of heavy- manual labour work.

There was also evidence of diminished income following re-employment after redundancy. Of those who returned to employment, approximately 60% had taken a reduction in their annual income. It was found that 62% of respondents currently earned a low income of under £15,000, compared to only 39% who had earned this figure in a previous role. However only 11% currently earned £25,000 or over, compared to 30% who had earned this amount previously. Although, of course, it is hard to tell from the data whether people have moved into better or worse jobs for example, whether they had been forced to take a pay cut or chosen to scale down or move into a less demanding job role.

It was also the case that displaced workers were less likely to be employed in higher level occupations (for example, 34% were currently employed in professional or managerial occupations, as compared to 43% of non-displaced workers). There was a disparity in pay whereby displaced workers tended, generally, to earn less than non-displaced workers (62% under £15,000, compared to 48% non-displaced workers, 27% earned between £15,000 and £24,000, compared to 36% of non-displaced workers and 11% earned £25,000 and over, compared to 16% of non-displaced workers). It is difficult to make any definitive conclusions based on average income levels because of the vagaries of employment types, industrial sectors and regional differences.

There were no significant differences when it came to opportunities for training for workers previously made redundant, although displaced workers were slightly more likely to have ‘never been offered training’ (26%, compared 19% of non-displaced workers). It is also of interest to note that displaced workers were more likely to have reported experiencing age discrimination in their current job role (18%, compared to 8% of non-displaced workers). This may mean that they have moved into sectors in which discrimination is more prevalent, or that they have internalised the negative effects of their job loss and have become more aware of possible acts of discrimination.

These results have shown that experiences of redundancy vary considerably and are interpreted in a variety of ways. For some, redundancy

can be a relief from a job that they had wanted to leave or were dissatisfied with, or comes at an appropriate time of life for those nearing retirement and able to take advantage of early retirement packages. On the other hand, it can be a traumatic event, resulting in self-doubt, feeling that they may be to old to find work, unwanted, inadequate and insecure especially when the awareness of the lack of re-employment opportunities begins to manifest. Losing ones job also affects confidence and self esteem, as work routines are lost alongside the social support and camaraderie once enjoyed.

Unemployment and Barriers to Employment

One of the aims of this study was to identify the experiences of the over fifties relating to unemployment and what barriers, if any, they faced in gaining entry into the workforce. In addition the study focused upon what happens to people post redundancy.

An association was found between redundancy and employability. Approximately 18% of those who left employment because of redundancy were currently unemployed, compared to only 8% of those who left employment because of a different reason. Of those who had experienced redundancy and were currently unemployed, 95% wanted to return to work, compared to only 29% who had experienced redundancy and were currently economically inactive (but had other responsibilities e.g. carers of family, or were permanently sick or disabled). However we do not have enough detailed information to tell how many of those who were early retired or economically inactive, had previously been unemployed following the redundancy. In addition, it is unclear as to whether their decision to not look for work or to stop looking for work was taken out of choice or necessity. For example, access to a private pension or redundancy payment can reduce the appeal of continued work after redundancy. Alternatively, the ‘discouraged worker effect’ or the belief that there is no work available can push a person into early retirement. Age discrimination can also make a person withdraw from the job market. It is also difficult to tell how many people who were currently economically inactive planned to return to work at some point in the future.

As expected, the desire for work was strongest among those currently unemployed, with over half (54%) of those who were sick or disabled similarly expressing a desire to be employed. The majority of non-working 50-54 year olds claimed they would like a job (78%), this compared with 67% of 55-59 year olds, 39% of 60-64 year olds and only 10% of the over 65's. The desire to return to work progressively declined as people got older.

Perceived Barriers to Work

Those who wanted to return to work were asked what they felt held them back. The most frequently cited barrier was not being able to find suitable work (work that people are able and willing to take) was cited by around 40%. Common barriers holding people back included, lack of formal qualifications, ill health and competition from younger people for work.

As regards to age, there was a firm belief that age discrimination may intensify the job search and some felt they were, or would be seen as being perhaps too old to return to work. Indeed multiple barriers were identified as creating a complex matrix of internal and external hurdles for people seeking work to overcome with between 6% - 15% identifying several barriers including lack of self confidence, depression, lack of qualifications, ill health, inability to find work, and age discrimination compounded by their own feeling that they may be too old to start work, with men more likely than women to feel that there were no jobs available for them.

In terms of the respondents' age, the tendency to report barriers to work tended, to be stronger amongst the younger end of the cohort (those in their fifties), although equal proportions of respondents of all ages cited age discrimination as a barrier (25%). With the exception of ageism, experiences of other forms discrimination in the work history did not appear to affect their perception of gaining work in the future. However three-quarters of those who cited age discrimination as a barrier to gaining employment stated that they had experienced this form of discrimination at some point in their work history.

Similarly, 64% of people who cited depression as a barrier felt that they had experienced age discrimination at some point in the work history. Although, it is impossible to tell from the statistical data, how many of the barriers overlap to lead ultimately to permanent exclusion.

Interviews took place with fifty men and women over the age of fifty, providing detailed information on the interplay of barriers faced by people trying to access employment. Age discrimination featured highly amongst the barriers encountered.

> *"It was hard as I was not getting jobs, negative experience really as, well I am now 55 years old so people perceive you as old, but I don't feel it, but when looking for work you are confronted with it really." (Male 55, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

> *"I was looking for another full time job…I kept coming across all these brick walls you know and I begun to realise that there were really not many full time jobs available and my age didn't help, because I went to interviews for things and I thought this isn't real, because you read about it in the papers, not getting taken on because of your age, but until it happens to you." (Male 62, Volunteer).*

> *"I worked for thirty years with X (Blue chip company), I worked my way up in that time from a packer to a quality planning engineer… after I got made redundant and started to look for work I was surprised that I was not getting any interviews. How can it be that one week you are a valued member of a team for a top company and the next week no one wants you? It had to be my age, simple as that…the company once did an age audit and found the average age of their workforce was around mid forties, so they actively pursued a recruitment drive to target younger people. They eventually lost experienced workers – now look at them, they lost their place in the market." (Male 54, public sector worker).*

> *"I had an interview which was unsuccessful and I was very, you know [depressed]…three weeks later, another post with (voluntary organisation) came up and I applied again and I didn't get it again… I can't understand why I was called in for that second post if there was something glaringly bad after the first interview, surely I shouldn't have been short listed for the second post and I was quite distressed about that, knocked my confidence and I did wonder again whether it was an ageist thing but I just don't know." (Female 54, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

> *"I don't know whether it was because I'd been away and out of this country or whether it was my age, but I found it difficult and I'm still finding it difficult to get work. I just seem to get part-time work…I didn't think I'd have any problem at all, no, but I did you know. I got*

> *a short term contract at [name of company] for six months and then after that I couldn't get any work, so I did some temp work." (Female 50-54, student).*

Gaps in employment highlighted amongst the women in the sample had tended to create major barriers for them when trying to access work. Their gaps in economic activity were largely due to maternity, child care and family commitments. The typical male pattern of employment is usually fluid, uninterrupted and clearly defined whilst the typical female pattern of employment is broken and reduced on account of women's childcare and domestic work (Warren et al, 2001). It was not surprising therefore that several of the women were looking for work because their children had recently left home or gone to university. These women had found that their role within the home had changed, giving them the opportunity to participate in employment. Other women were undergoing major life transitions: divorce, separation, returning home from living abroad, wanting work to top-up their pension or pursue a long-held career ambition. It was felt that a break in employment was held against them, or interpreted as a lack of commitment, showing poor motivation or an unwillingness to work. Being a mother or caregiver was often referred to as a "job in itself", work that entailed skills in negotiation, adaptability and control – skills which were overlooked by an employer.

> *"But you see you can start a job and do these NVQs, but nobody gives you an NVQ for being a mother…I mean you know a house-wife, a manager, you're budgeting for a things or when a problem comes up, or you've got sickness in the house, your children are ill, or you're off to hospital or whatever you've got to think on you're feet a lot of the time." (Female 50, Job Seeker).*

In addition the interviewee highlighted how none of the above skills equated to formal qualifications:

> *"I enjoy meeting people and helping them sort out their problems and that, but for anything like that you need qualifications." (Female 50, Job Seeker).*

Being detached from the labour market had created a huge void in computer based knowledge, in which a multitude of new ways of working had taken place:

> *"…and it's the computer side of it because the technology, then, there was no such thing as e-mails and…you had to type up your own work, there was no word processors, things like that have changed and I think that's what's holding people like me back, you know." (Female 50, job seeker).*

Although gaps in employment can impact on women whatever their age, it was felt that the length of time out of work was often compounded by age, meaning that older women tended to be those more harshly affected. This had the effect of lowering their self-confidence and expectation about finding suitable employment. For women who had been away from the labour market for some time or who strongly identified with a role in the home, the transition was particularly difficult.

> *"There are women I know from [area in city] and you'll find that that's their community, their boundary, and you'll find that they won't cross that boundary, they won't venture out. If you're our age and like they've had… no income or their marriage had broken down or whatever, you'll get some who haven't done well in their education for example, who are frightened because that's their safety net, do you understand what I mean?" (Female 57, job seeker).*

> *"I think when you have been out of the jobs market as well, you know intermittent, it becomes really difficult, especially at my age." (Female 55, job seeker).*

> *"If qualifications are low or skills are out of date, confidence drops even further. I feel that the barriers are obviously [that] my skills aren't up to date. You get a lack of confidence as well, because you realise that everybody else is up to speed on computers and things and when you've been out of the full-time workforce for any length of time, you do lose your confidence and you know it's hard." (Female 50, job seeker).*

For those who had experienced compulsory redundancy the desire to work was higher than for those who took voluntary redundancy and/or left employment because of different reasons. Not being able to find work given as an explanation of the barriers to returning to work, and was higher for those who had experienced redundancy (49% compared to 36% for those who had not experienced redundancy). A perceived lack of formal qualifications was cited by 34% (compared to 17% not experiencing redundancy). Another significant barrier was the threat of competition from younger people cited by 21% (compared to 15% not experiencing redundancy). A notable proportion (18%) cited age discrim-

ination as a barrier to re-employment (compared to 29% not experiencing redundancy). In addition, those who had experienced redundancy were more likely to feel that they were, perhaps, 'too old' to return to work (23%, compared to only 10% not experiencing redundancy). This tendency was stronger amongst younger respondents, particularly those aged 50-54.

The view from interviewees that there was no work available, or that work was difficult to come by was widespread among the redundancy group. It was said to be a difficult time with work drying up or disappearing - low labour market demand was thought to affect displaced younger workers as well as older workers, with both age-groups sharing a disadvantaged location in the labour market related to their relative youth or their maturity.

> *"I've got three lads and lucky enough they're all working now but sometimes they've been out of work because they can't get a job, except a couple of weeks here and there and a couple of days. I feel sorry for them." (Male 55-60, unemployed).*

There were other structural and economic factors e.g. the downturn in manufacturing employment, which often affected whole families.

> *"…in fact my father and my brother and myself were all unemployed at the same time, which was deeply depressing. We all went to sign on the same day at the same time; it was a bit like the Royle family only without the humour and the smoking. My mum was the only employed person in the family so that was pretty grim." (Female 50, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

Those who had served for a long time in the same job or job type tended to feel that their expertise might not be as desirable as it had been in the past. There was a sense that jobs were more available to those who possessed a broad range of skills or skills that were in short supply.

In addition, the research to date has found that men who have spent the majority of their working life, in work that is construed as masculine and, in the main, carried out by men (i.e. iron and steel production, shipbuilding) often experienced a reduction in their social worth if they were unable to do or find work in the same or similar area (see for example, Grimshaw et al, 2002; McDowell, 2000). Yet this was not the case for the majority of people in our redundancy group. Some were continuing to target the

so-called 'traditional' sectors or blue-collar work because they identified with it and it was familiar to them. Others were slowly realising that the availability of this type of job was restricted. Many were willing to take any available job even if it was low paid, temporary or insecure. The reason for the differences observed, included elements of choice and necessity. Some people felt that they had made an economic contribution to society through their many years of hard work – they were now more willing to consider the type of work where required skills could be accessed at a low cost. Others were actively pursuing work in, for example, the service sector because it was a growth area or because it displayed a more positive approach to the employment of older people, or because it provided flexible work - which gave them more choice over how they could spend their time outside of work. How people left employment seemed to have an effect on the income they were able to command in future employment. For example, those who left voluntarily or were happy to leave tended to have higher levels of income and had more choice in the decision to leave. Those who were forced to leave tended to have lower levels of income and had less choice in the decision to leave.

Those interviewed felt that age discrimination had a role to play in terms of the number and type of job opportunities available. Age was often cited as the main reason why some older people felt that they were the least likely to find further employment, although it should be noted that some people were highly sensitive to age-related issues or simply perceived discrimination when it was not there. It was also the case that age discrimination could be extremely difficult to detect, especially in its more subtle and unspoken forms – as one respondent put it:

> *"People have said to me that they felt discriminated against because they are older. It's a very personal thing you can only really say how it affects you…I mean I'm sure that if they are not the best candidate they might then take umbrage because they thought it was an age thing and it mightn't be anything to do with that at all." (Female 54, working full time).*

> *"I wouldn't say directly but I got the feeling that, you know, you write after jobs and you know. 'sorry we can't take you on'. They don't specify why. They can't really, can they? They just can't do it." (Male 55-60, working part-time, experienced redundancy).*

Those suffering from ill health were at a heightened disadvantage. Age discrimination intersected and interacted with ill health to form a double whammy. (White and Loretto, 2004).

> *"I don't know whether it's age. Maybe it's because I've got the health problem? Or … I don't really know. Maybe my face doesn't fit? Who knows? They [employer] may get first impressions of you and say. 'don't want him'. I don't know why they don't want me? But I mean that's what I'm surmising. I'm not saying it's true. I'm only surmising that you know. I mean no one knows what you're thinking [directing question to interviewer]. The same as you don't know what I'm thinking you know what I mean. It's just… [pause] I don't know whether there's an age barrier or what. But I'm 55 next month I've still got at least 10 years work left and even though I say it myself I'm a good worker. Health wise as long as I'm healthy enough I'd be prepared to work for as long as I can because I've still got like however many years on the mortgage. I mean obviously I get my state pension when I'm 65, but I would sooner be working personally. But unfortunately there's nothing out there. You get promised all kinds, but nothing comes of it. It's been, what now, 14 months?" (Male 54, job seeker, experienced redundancy).*

> *"Well my ex-partner he's worked all his life in [name of organisation] err took a heart-attack because they nearly worked him to death, came out of that. In my eyes he went back to work a bit too soon, but you know what men are like. He goes back to work and gets a job as X in a well-known place. He was there for nearly three years it was just a bit too much so he came out of that job and because he wasn't feeling too good he went on the sick and he's now just gone on to that job seekers thing and he's finding it really hard. He just thought he'd walk from one job to the other because of his experience, but he can't and he's just…they (employers) either don't answer him or he's getting refused. And the minute they find out he's had health problems, the heart attack a couple of years back, they don't want to know." (Female 54, job seeker).*

Age discrimination in recruitment was also cited as the reason why very few people thought that they would find a suitable work or why they applied for 'inferior' jobs or jobs that they were over-qualified for. One interviewee explained how discrimination can undermine a person's confidence, causing them to be self-limiting or self-deselecting, or put themselves down or undersell themselves.

> *"I think I got a couple of interviews but just didn't get anywhere with it, but by that time my confidence was really knocked. I wasn't performing very well because usually I can get interviews no problem and if I do get an interview I'm not saying I'd get the job, but coming back again now [pause] it took me a long time and it knocked my confidence a lot…I went for an interview, the person there fed back to me,… she said that…I'd sort of given negative*

> *answers. I seemed to be identifying problems rather than solutions so I must have had a negative turn of mind then…I'll undersell myself and I'll go for jobs that are less than £30,000 and I shouldn't." (Female 50-54, student).*

> *"…. I mean some of the jobs that I got offered were diabolical, you know, I wanted to do what I was doing…and then they start offering me all kinds of silly jobs, you know which I would have just probably found boring you know, like repetitious." (Male 62, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

There was also the perception amongst the sample that employers regard specific jobs as being more suitable or appropriate for older people wanting work. These jobs tended to be sex-segregated, entry-level work in the retail or service sector and included, customer care, hospitality, cleaning and caretaking. There was evidence that employers adhered to the stereotypical image of the older woman working for pin money or the older man looking to wind down to retirement. While this may be the case for some people, it is certainly not true of all. The stereotyping or typecasting of older people into particular types of work – typically part-time and low-paid can have the negative effect of limiting or restricting the range of job opportunities for this group. For example, older people tend not to be considered for jobs that are traditionally the preserve of younger people – "a younger person's role".

> *"It's the language as well, ''office junior' well I think I could be trained up…but then again if you're over 21 they've got to pay you a certain wage haven't they. I think I'd like to work in a solicitors you know I think that would be quite good because I'd know a lot about criminal law but you think oh 'office junior' they'd laugh at you if you turned up, 'I've come for the office junior job'. But how do they know? I might make a great office junior but it's what you expect out of it all isn't it?" (Female 50, job seeker).*

> *"I think basically they [employers] feel that a lot of older women who have got family and kids are working for what they class as pin money… and just something to do and to keep them occupied because they're bored basically. I think that's how they see us, I mean I'm divorced now and there's a lot of women living on their own but still getting paid this pin money wage, which is quite hard to live on if you're on your tod." (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

It is hardly surprising then that many people expected to face age discrimination in some shape or form. Their biggest concern was how employers came to choose who they hired. Several felt that the request

for information on age on an application form could prejudice or influence an employer regardless of whether that employer expressed a commitment to the employment of older workers.

> *"they could paper sift anyone over the age of 40 or 45 they don't want and so you end up in the bin, you haven't even had a chance have you?" (Female 50, Job Seeker).*

As a result, many people changed their job search strategy – deliberately targeting and applying for jobs in growth areas or where there were shortages of younger people, or jobs in which life experience and maturity are regarded as an advantage.

> *"I suppose nobody ever turned round and said 'no Mr X you're too old'… because I was careful not to apply for jobs that specified … well they didn't actually [specify] age groups, but you could tell really by reading the advertisement what kind of person they were looking for. So because of that I didn't perhaps put myself in a position where I might have been discriminated against." (Male 55-6, working full-time).*

> *"What I tended to do, I think what I tended to do was to try and avoid putting my age down because I know that I don't look, you know, that old – you know what I mean – I can get away with it. But I know other people who have lied about their age to get jobs." (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

This interviewee chose to apply for a job as a support worker in the knowledge that there were shortages in the area and that she knew she would not be discriminated against on the basis of age.

> *"I went after this particular job knowing, that because it was for the over 50's, that if I went for an interview they wouldn't possibly discriminate against me because of the nature of the work that I'd be doing and they'd probably be more amenable to someone who understood the situation, so that's why I did it." (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

Another interviewee who had been long term unemployed intended to apply for a job that positively discriminated in favour of older people. These types of jobs were commonly referred to as 'older persons' jobs'.

> *"I was reading this morning or yesterday in the news that X [supermarket] are taking on over 5000 over fifties so I wouldn't mind applying for one of them." (Male 55-60, job seeker).*

However rejection from such 'exemplars' of good practice in the employment of middle-aged and older people was extremely difficult to take, leaving one respondent feeling that re-employment was difficult if not impossible.

> *"I've applied for X and X [supermarkets] and what's the other one down the road there err the big one [self-question] X [supermarket] and I've had no luck there. I think it's my age. I know the girl next door's daughter she works in X [supermarket] and she said it shouldn't be the age because they have women of 60 odd and 70 odd working there. But I got a letter off them - unsuccessful." (Male 54, job seeker, experienced redundancy).*

There was an overwhelming sense that older people have a lot to offer an employer but were not being given the opportunity to prove their worth or showcase their talents. The out of work over fifties in our study were keen and eager to work. Many had dependent children to support or were single or divorced. It was felt that employer prejudice prevented the majority of older people from regaining a place in the labour market or ushered them into work that was unsuitable, temporary or inferior. The waste of talent of people in their fifties and sixties was a common theme in the data.

> *"I feel a lot of older people have got an awful lot to offer and what happens is I think their experience of life is overlooked and the fact that maybe they **can** pick things up quickly. I find, and I say it to myself all the time, 'well if only I could get in a place and they showed me exactly what to do, then I'd pick it up no problem'. But it's actually going in with that bit of paper, which obviously a younger person will do because they're taught computers at school." (Female 50, job seeker).*

It is clear from the data that job opportunities for older workers were constrained. Many people recounted both external and internal barriers to work, some of which appeared insurmountable, undermining their confidence and sapping self-esteem. Yet support for this group was felt to be lacking. In general, voluntary and community projects were rated favourably. Most people felt that they did a good job of encouraging displaced older workers and providing age-sensitive support. By contrast, commercial or state sponsored projects (recruitment agency, job seeker system) were rated less favourably. Many people who were on the job

seeker system recalled a sense of exploitation – that they were merely a number or a statistic or that they were being past from pillar to post, out of one scheme and into another.

> *"See they move you on from like a job search thing, which then you're not classed as unemployed but you're still not working. But you're getting moved from different areas in a section - you're sick, you're not unemployed. See if they put you on like a work related scheme, you're not classed as unemployed then until you go back on to the job seekers allowance. To me it's just juggling the figures." (Male 54, job seeker, experienced redundancy).*

> *"In fact there's only one agency who got me a job and I was fortunate that I didn't sign off [job seekers allowance] because the job was suppose to be permanent, but became temporary and all I got out of it was one day because they said, 'we only wanted you for one day'. Now if I had signed off [unemployment list] I'd have lost all my insurance and everything just for one day because it happened to my mate. But if I'd had signed off I would have lost everything. Its rip off. You see the agencies don't worry about you. They're paying you what? Five or six pounds an hour but they get about nine pounds for you." (Male 54, job seeker, experienced redundancy).*

> *"I took a job at the council it was a scheme, I thought there might be a job at the end of it, but soon realised we were just doing work on the cheap. I did not need job skills training – I knew about computers, I had a good job before I was made redundant… they paid us about £130 a week. I decided to take any job to get out of it, I got a part time job in the civil service and from that moved on to a full time job in a different department." (Male 54, employed, public sector)*

Some people felt that they were being shepherded into insecure or temporary work. They found this extremely demoralising given their level of past experience.

> *"But… there just doesn't seem to be anything [jobs] about or its just one weeks work…that's no good to me. I want full time work or nothing, or even part time leading to full time you know. I wouldn't mind that, but I couldn't be going like from one job to another job all the time. That's just no good to anybody." (Male 54, job seeker, experienced redundancy).*

There was also an issue with the benefit system.

> *"I came out of there [job centre] and cried. I thought how am I going to manage on the money because I literally got £X on Monday, which is from the work I did from November and December because I didn't have my register in - I have to get my register in on the X of the month if I want the money for the end of the month - its ridiculous*

and I get £X from the Job Seekers while I'm not [doing sessional work] so how am I suppose to pay the bills?" (Female 56, full-time carer of family and home).

"My mate got one day [temporary work] and he was on the disability [incapacity benefit]. He's younger than me. He's only 40 odd but he's had three heart attacks and he went to an agency even put his P45 in, signed off the sick…he was on the highest rate you can get [on the sick] and he said, 'I'm starting work'. Okay. They signed him off. He got one day. They [employer] said, 'that's it, you're finished'. Now he tried to get back on the sick but they wouldn't let him because he signed himself off." (Male 54, job seeker, experienced redundancy).

In addition, a number of people who had left work because of redundancy were shocked to discover that they were unable to claim Job Seeker Allowance if they had accessed their private pension. This it was felt was particularly unjust since most had made lifelong contributions, including economic, to society and hence they should be treated with respect and consideration.

"But my kick back was that when you go to claim something [after the redundancy payment] they say at the job centre. 'you're not allowed anything because you're on a private pension'. So then you're left to live on the money that you worked all your life to get then. I thought that was quite wrong that. But no one states that." (Male 55-60, working part-time, experienced redundancy).

"But the redundancy came and I went to sign on and its: 'you're not getting any money'. I'd been out of work three months then. …I can't claim a penny off anyone because I get a monthly pension off the company and it's worth more than the job seekers allowance so I mean, I had murder with them [job centre]. I said. 'I've worked all my life and you're saying I've got to live off my own money?' They said. 'yes'. Which to me is a bloody disgrace. You know I've never been out of work since I left school." (Male 54, job seeker, experienced redundancy).

Current Employment

Of the total 1035 respondents, 62% were currently in paid employment, including 18% within the voluntary sector, 20% were volunteers with the final 29% being economically inactive. In terms of the types of employment performed, 9% could be described as professional, 30% managerial/middle management/supervisory, 30% non-manual skilled

with 28% lower skilled. In terms of gender no recognisable differences were found with either professionals or middle management but women were much more likely to be unskilled non-manual than men, (43% and 16% respectively), with this trend being reversed in consideration of unskilled manual. This of course on one hand may be related to the nature of the organisations involved, (for example the focus upon voluntary organisations), however it could also be reflective of the nature of men's and women's work. Regardless of the cause it does suggest that, given occupation was linked with educational achievement, those with higher levels education are best placed to challenge such stereotypes.

In consideration of whether one worked as a volunteer or not, what did seem to have influence was indeed ones age. Those over sixty years were significantly more likely to be volunteers then those aged 50-59 years. This does suggest a particular dynamic may be at work, and this will be examined presently within the context of motivations to, and benefits of, work. However, the voluntary sector may have a fundamental difference in terms of the relationship it may have with many of its workforce. Our data shows that the majority of the paid workers within the voluntary sector had a connection with the sector prior to their employment, thus suggesting a different dynamic may be at work. Also our data suggests paid workers in the voluntary sector generally feel more positive about their work than those in the public/private sectors. That being so, it does seem sensible to examine the two groups independently to examine what the differences may be and how we may pinpoint best practice.

Work-Life Balance: PPE

Fifty-two percent of those who work, or had worked in the public and private sector were economically active at the time. The majority (40%) of those currently employed were concentrated in professional, managerial or supervisory occupations and roles, while 32% were employed in non-manual skilled occupations with the remaining 27% were relatively evenly spread out amongst manual (8%), semi-skilled (10%) and unskilled (10%) work. That the majority of people surveyed were employed in professional, managerial and supervisory occupations is perhaps to be expected given the association between seniority and age.

In terms of hours worked, whereas 17% of respondents had previously worked more part time than full time hours, this figure has now risen to 32%. Interestingly, there had been a marked increase in part time work amongst men (20%, compared to less than 3% earlier in their career). That said older women were almost twice as likely as older men to be working part time (42%, compared to 2% respectively). This raises a number of issues. The demand for part time employment might increase progressively with age, and thus some people might choose to combine elements of work and retirement. On the other hand, some people might be forced into part-time work because of ill health or disability, redundancy, early retirement or the unavailability of full time work. Hence the growth in demand for part time work may include elements of choice and necessity.

From the interview data there was a clear demand for more flexible forms of working.

> *"I've been working since I was 15 and that's coming on 35 years, that's a lot of work, that's a long working life and now I'd rather do less work perhaps 3 or 4 days a week." (Female 50-54, student).*

> *"I mind my grandson a couple of afternoons a week and I've also got another granddaughter…I'm going to be here whenever I'm needed because I enjoy doing that really as well. I would need to work ... but to work twenty-five hours gives me the best of both worlds really …" (Female 50-54, working part-time).*

Indeed, an increasing number of middle aged and older women have specific care responsibilities for older (parents, spouse or partner) as well as younger (children, grandchildren) family members. As Yeandle (2005) pointed out, the period between 50 and 75 is complex and diverse. Some people experience bereavement and loss, as well as the departure of grown-up children. Many other people become parents or grandparents. Over a third of grandparents help out with the care of their grandchildren, either regularly or occasionally. As the people in our study have shown, modern grand-parenthood can be both a pleasure and a joy whilst at the same time being an increasingly demanding role with many trying to juggle the twin pressures of work and family life. One respondent enjoyed taking care of her grandchildren – it was a role that she felt was deeply

enriching, but she also felt a sense of exploitation by government and society.

> *"…a lot of my generation are starting to do unpaid work looking after the grandchildren because you feel responsible, you have to give them a helping hand, rightly or wrongly, and some children expect their parents to reduce their hours perhaps, if they're working full-time to make sure that their child is looked after." (Female 55, working full-time).*

> *"I think the government plays on us…at the end of the day they're stopping us from working because they know it's costing too much to put their babies into nursery." (Female 54, job seeker).*

The comments above suggest that these women were making decisions that still reflect caring responsibilities, even though the detail of that responsibility may have changed over the years. So in some ways the greater flexibility gained from part-time work, is both a consequence of, and a precursor to, care provision. Regardless however of the reason for the take up of part-time employment, we found that right across our sample the respondents were more likely to be working part-time now than previously. Indeed, the incidence of part-time work, we found, correlated with age, rising fast after 55 years, again after 60 years and again after 65 years.

This gradual withdrawal from the labour market may have mixed blessings. On one hand it may provide a soft landing into retirement, thus being part of a pre-planned exit strategy. Equally, it may be that given the financial pressures of family responsibilities may have diminished, time is taken for oneself. On the other hand, some of the evidence above suggests that not all may welcome such a transition. That the responsibilities many women feel they have in terms of care provision does have influence upon the work patterns they follow. It is interesting to note that whilst there is a significant increase in male part-time work, non suggested this was a consequence of care provision. This is not to say men do not become involved in providing care, clearly many do, but the pressure to actively accept less hours, and consequently, less money, to provide care for others is perhaps not the primary motivation.

When looking at this pattern of part-time work, one does have to consider the organisational structure of the workplace one may be employed in. That is, can one be employed there part-time or not? We found that men tended to work in male dominated organisations, in terms of numbers, whilst a similar pattern emerged with respect to women. Whilst it is impossible to say if such organisations were actively sought that allowed part-time work, our findings did indicate that the organisations men tended to work in were not as orientated towards part-time work as the organisations that were female dominated. There are of course sociological and cultural explanations for this, but, put simply, the opportunity for women to work part- time in their normal place of work is greater than that for men. We have to remember here that twice as many women worked part-time as did men, and therefore it does follow that more women have the opportunity to provide care, regardless of the motives or influences. This balance may be redressed by a change of organisational cultures, but this will be examined elsewhere.

Training and Promotion: PPE

In terms of training, the vast majority (71%) of those currently employed had received training in their current job role. Of these, 65% had received training in the past thirteen weeks, whilst 35% had a least been offered training in the same timescale but had declined the offer. Interestingly, twice as many women had declined their training opportunity than men however, but little difference was found between those who had taken it up.

This may be encouraging on face value, however qualitative data provided a somewhat different picture. Many interviewees felt that employers were more willing to train younger rather than older workers. That said, basic or statutory training was readily provided and on an equal opportunity basis, but , access to additional training or training for career progression was considered to be more limited or provided in an ad hoc manner. Plenty of evidence surfaced of indirect discrimination in the form of training provided on a pot luck basis or “names out of a hat.” However, as one respondent put it, *“I often wondered whether my name was ever in the hat”*. Others did not consider they were encouraged to participate

in training and were defiantly not encouraged to pursue it. The assumed pay back period in investment in training was often given as the reason why older workers were overlooked in terms of training, in spite of the evidence that older age groups exhibit lower turnover rates as compared to younger ones. Nevertheless this overt discrimination was evident, and indeed was seen to be so.

> *"As far as going to university and getting other qualifications within my line of work, it was said that it's not really worth it for people who have only got a couple of years left because if you've got it, you'd only be doing it for another four or five years. So that is ageism isn't it? That is direct ageism." (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

This quote above is of course unambiguous in its message in that this interviewee feels she would not be given the opportunity to progress because of her age and the pay back time mentioned above. Discrimination can also be subtle, in that some may accept the status quo, without questioning the rationale for it, or indeed the consequences. For example:

> *"Personally there isn't a problem with the company I'm with now. But again if you're looking to train people with a view to gaining from the training as a company, somebody who is in their 50s maybe isn't going to want to be that flexible, maybe isn't going to want to take on a long-term view that the company wants, and so by virtue of that, I feel that training can be a problem." (Male 55-60, working full-time).*

Whilst these comments provide some evidence of the way in which work based training and/or educational opportunities are denied, they have to be seen within the context of how older workers viewed their promotion prospects. Clearly, if they are not seen to be accessible, then the motivation to access avenues that may lead to promotion will understandably be lacking. Also, past experience will be an influencing factor and this is supported when one considers that those who had experienced age discrimination in the work history were more likely to think they received fewer opportunities for promotion in their current job role (60%) than those who had not (32%). This may be that they are just aware of the nature of discriminatory practices a little more, or it may be that, as with the quote above, they understand the experience of it.

Nevertheless, some interviewees told of people in their organisation who "won't put that extra bit in" because there is not considered to be any point, mainly for some of the reasons outlined above. For women especially, there was a 'glass ceiling of age' (Itzin and Pillipsin, 1994) which accounted for the under-representation of women in general, and specifically older women, in senior management. Even in workplaces where the majority of employees were women, those at the very top were usually male. Successful women were thought to have achieved because they "played the game a little bit more" or "acted like men" or because they fit the male culture of management.

What came through clearly from the qualitative data was that there was an accumulation of negative treatment and/or missed opportunities, for both men and women, but women more so, resulting in many individuals being less willing to attempt to access training/education that may lead to promotion. This may, in some way, lead to the under-representation, referred to above, in senior management. This is not to say the outside effects of discriminatory practices are not important influences, of course they are, but that people also act on what they *believe* to be true.

The effects of this are, as suggested by one interviewee:

> *"I don't know whether it's because of my age or the way I've been treated in the department that I've lost that respect. I don't have the confidence to take on new challenges in the workplace because I feel as if I've had the stuffing knocked out of me so I don't have the confidence I had say five years ago, which I think is quite sad. I do my job to get my money…don't worry about the promotional side of it and look after myself outside of work." (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

So clearly personal experience is a telling factor. If people are repeatedly denied opportunities, they are quite understandably going to become reluctant to continually challenge structures beyond their control. They are going to lose heart. Consider the comments below.

> *"If a woman of fifty wanted promotion she could certainly apply for it because they have equal opportunities legislation, but realistically she has to ask herself 'does she stand a chance?' Yes she might be qualified. Yes she might have all the experience, but the big draw-*

> *back is she's in her fifties. They'll look at it, 'well how long has she got left before she retires?'" (Female 55, working full-time).*

Whilst there are resonances and similarities with earlier comments, the difference here is that this interviewee is not just talking about people over fifty years, she is referring to the added dimension of *women* in their fifties. One may not know if this interviewee had direct experience of overt discrimination or been actively denied, for example, training at her place of work, but, to a large degree that does not matter. We not only learn from personal experience, but we also learn vicariously. Take this comment:

> *"They restructured the company a while ago so there must have been about a dozen jobs or so that came up and there was a mixture of people going for them and every single one of them went to someone under twenty-five and then everyone just sort of felt, well there's no point is there?" (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

The overall message here is that organisations do need to consider why the older members of their workforce are often reluctant to pursue work based training/education and promotion. Our recommendations will detail our response to this presently, but suffice to say for now, that it is not just enough to provide avenues towards promotion, but all people have to be seen to be able to follow them through. Promotion should be based upon ability and competence, and not some variable one may have completely no control over.

Motivation

When asked about motivation for work, 84% cited *income* as the primary motivation, with a similarly high number (80%) rating *enjoyment of work* as an important motivation. *Work as a challenge* and *contribution to society* were rated equally as important as each other (66% and 67% respectively) with *time for myself* and *status from work* also cited as being important, although not so strongly (59% and 54% respectively). The only difference between men's and women's responses was found to be in relation to *contribution to society,* with more women rating this motivation as important (73%, compared to 57% of men).

Those who had experienced involuntary redundancy cited the primary motivation for work was income (90%) and were more likely to rate *status from work* as an important motivation (64%), compared to those who had experienced voluntary redundancy (39%). This perhaps reflects the way that self definition is often dependent upon work and it may be that those who did not have a choice in losing their job had yet to negotiate an alternative way of looking at themselves. Full time workers also rated *income* as the most important factor in working (92%), however part-time workers rated *enjoyment of work* as being the most important (82%).

What motivated people to work therefore tended to be related to the different meanings that people attached to work in terms of seeing it as a necessary chore, as a choice, as a central life interest, as a source of pleasure and satisfaction, as a means of meeting people and socialising, and all of which were evident among the interviewees.

As Fennell et al (1998) argue, a common assumption is that while work may be regarded as an important source of identity for men, the same is not true of women. Yet there is little evidence to suggest that women are any less committed or interested in work than men. In fact, for some of the women in our study, occupational ambition actually increased with age. These women, especially those who have previously been absent from work bringing up children, found that their career had taken off in their fifties or that they regarded mid-life as a special time to achieve career ambitions that were once put on hold. As one interviewee put it:

> *"As the kids got older, I became ambitious but I never really thought about it when they were little because I liked looking after them. But I suppose so, yes, and now they're very much bigger, yes, I'd like to do something else." (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

Equally the gap from employment did in some ways help to drive some women. For example.

> *"Some women in their 50s have got kind of ambitious characters, but I think some have done what I've done – taken a long time out and then come back and then realised that they're good at the job and actually get a taste for that kind of power and perhaps become*

more ambitious than their male colleagues because they've had a lot of making up to do." (Female 56, working full-time).

These comments reflect the diverse nature of motivations for paid employment and how personal histories and circumstances can have influence. It equally stresses the importance of taking a broad view when attempting to encourage women, especially older women, back to, or to continue with paid employment.

Working in the Voluntary Sector

One of the key points to emerge from data concerning the public and private sector employees was that there appeared to be in some ways an acceptance, however grudgingly, that older workers are treated differently. However as was stated earlier, a different dynamic may be at work within the voluntary sector in that firstly, the economic (or indeed statutory) imperative may not be the overriding motivation for the existence of the organisation and therefore a more altruistic and egalitarian organisational culture may have developed. If this is so one may reasonably expect older workers, both paid and unpaid, to be viewed differently and indeed treated differently.

With this is mind, participants from the voluntary sector were asked about their organisations' attitudes towards older staff and volunteers, with particular reference to how they felt they were treated with regards to their age, how they thought their organisations viewed people aged over fifty.

The experiences and perceptions of voluntary sector employees

Around half of the paid staff over 50 years felt that their organisation actively recruited people aged 50 plus, but around half did not. This is not necessarily something that is negative, and maybe reflective of a neutral attitude to the over 50's. This is perhaps reflected in our data, given that the majority (81%) said that their organisation did have a positive attitude towards workers aged 50 and over, with a similarly high number (88%) considering that their organisation treated them just the same as any other employee, despite their age. Additionally, those that felt that their organisation treated them the same as younger workers, were much

more likely to feel satisfied or valued in their current paid role compared to those that did not, and many of the comments from interviews supported this. For example.

> *"…everybody is seen as an individual and it is your ability to carry out your role, not how old you are." (Male 50, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

Also, some thought of the benefits that accrue with age and how that influenced the way one may be treated.

> *"(Age)…not a draw back at all, in fact I think they do look at it as an experience thing you know." (Female 54, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

However, many of the paid staff simply felt that their organisations did not have any type of attitude towards age at all - it just was not an issue.

> *"[Age is] not an issue at all, not with this company it is not." (Male 61, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

The most important thing however was the notion of equity. Just being treated fairly, based upon ability, was a key consideration in how the study group viewed their organisations attitudes towards them.

> *"They just treat everyone the same don't they…I get what I get because I show an interest not because I am sixty-five or because I am twenty-five…Its all about who I am, which is what I like, about what I can give as opposed to anything else about me, whether I am black, gay, male, female, twenty-five, fifty, doesn't seem to matter." (Male 55, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

The picture to emerge then from the paid staff within the voluntary sector was that the dimension of age did not appear to be something that was viewed negatively. Indeed in some ways it was seen as a positive thing. Equally, with regards to gender, the interviewees also highlighted a positive approach within their organisations. Taking this into account, the suggestion therefore is that a difference is apparent in the way paid staff are treated and indeed how they seem to be more valued in comparison to the public and private sectors. That the culture of the organisations are

far more inclusive and therefore make for a settled, more contented workforce.

Volunteers experiences and perceptions of voluntary sector

The majority of volunteers felt that that their organisation had a positive attitude towards workers over fifty (94%), that their organisation actively recruited workers over fifty (81%) and that their organisation treated them just the same as anyone else despite their age (96%). Volunteers were also asked whether they felt that their contribution to their organisation was recognised and were given a list of ways this may be done. We found that the more ways that a volunteer felt their organisation recognised them, the more likely they were to be satisfied in their role and, alternatively, the lower the number of ways, the more likely they were not to be satisfied. Things like, expenses paid, letters of appreciation, events and so on, resulted in volunteers being much more satisfied with their organisation, and their role within it, than those who do not have these types of appreciation.

These of course are measurable, individual items but they do come together to form an impression of how one may be viewed. For example, the following comment demonstrates the cumulative effect of positive experience.

> *"…organisations look after their volunteers very well…they pay our travel expenses, they offer training to all their volunteers, we can do computer courses, lots of different courses, all free and then they have a kind of a celebration every year when the award different kinds of volunteers, so it is good and it does make you feel that you are part of an organisation when they look after their volunteers." (Female 57, volunteer).*

This general feeling one may have is of course based upon the totality of experience, and one way older volunteers are defined is of course by their age. Here however, unlike other sectors, and specifically unlike the public and private sector workforce, age was seen to be actively valued.

> *"I guess because as you get older you have more skills and more experience …So I think it's an appreciation…of the build up of skills." (Female 57, volunteer).*

In a similar way to how paid staff in the sector appeared to feel their age was not an issue, the same applied to volunteers. It is worth pointing out however that both the paid staff and many of the volunteers were doing work that was very similar in terms of responsibility, in terms of the skills needed and in terms of the level of commitment required to that in other work sectors. That is, volunteers were performing tasks that were central to the overall effectiveness of the agency.

In terms of satisfaction, the majority of both the paid staff and the volunteers felt satisfied in their current roles at their organisations (92% of both) and this appeared to be related to issues such as feeling valued and having the ability to reach ones potential. Whilst this is their actual experience, it would appear that it is founded upon the culture of the organisation itself. This egalitarian, inclusive approach mentioned above, did foster a positive feeling amongst many about their relationship with their respective organisations. For some it was being able to have input into organisational issues and feeling that their voice is heard, for others it was the openness of the management structures and the accessibility of the senior management.

Training

The paid staff and volunteers were asked about training and how they considered their organisations responded to their training needs. Quantitative data does indicate that that training is available for both volunteers and paid staff, and that broadly similar numbers had undertook training as compared to those in the public and private sectors. Again, however, it was our interview data that highlighted the way in which training was viewed, and generally, our interviewees were far more positive in their appraisal than those in the public/private sectors. For example, many of the paid staff emphasised the numerous training courses that were available to them.

> *"I would say once you are actually a member of staff, the opportunity for training both internal and external is very good. Yes I have done (lists courses)… I have to say there are lots of opportunities there for training." (Female 54, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

Comments such as this were commonplace with paid staff and volunteers alike.

> *"There are huge opportunities for training, which is fantastic." (Female 57, volunteer).*

A fundamental difference however in the nature of training between the voluntary and other sectors was not *whether* training was available, but *what* training was available. For example, as one member of the paid staff noted.

> *"I am at the stage again as I said because of my experience and my levels of skills and my qualifications background as well, I don't actually feel I need a set training package. That is available for other staff and other levels of staff, so for me it tends to be things that we identify as and when they come up…I wouldn't say I have got a definite training path because I don't feel I need that, I tend to identify things and then I say to my supervisor and then do that… I don't think I have been refused anything, but then I wouldn't ask for anything that I didn't need and wasn't going to get really." (Female 53, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

The above comment probably sets into context the main differences between the voluntary and other sectors. That fact that the interviewee was able to negotiate a training package for herself, and to suit her needs, is demonstrative of the relationship between the voluntary sector as an employer and its employees, whereby there is a recognition of the mutual dependency upon each, by both. This is perhaps lacking in the public/private sectors and this is without doubt related to organisational culture. The different imperative upon which the voluntary sector is founded has arguably allowed a culture to develop that is more in tune with the needs of its workforce and those needs seem able to be articulated with greater confidence. Another difference is that personal goals are seen to be more achievable and this no doubt facilitates a greater confidence, and as such willingness, to pursue such goals.

Whilst these comments are applicable to all the sector's employees, both paid and unpaid, when placed together with the data concerning age and gender, one can see that so long as equitable treatment is provided, then this can make for a more settled contented workforce. One has to be

aware however that this must involve a proactive approach by employers that recognises the diversity of the over-fifties age group and within that, the differences between men and women. That subtle changes on work practices can open the door of opportunity for a considerably greater number of people

Current Experiences of Discrimination and Impact

Those who were employed at the time of the survey in the public or private sector (n=352) or those working paid or unpaid in the voluntary sector (n=398) were asked whether or not they had experienced discrimination in their current job role, this mirroring the question that asked about previous work experience.

Overall, responses indicated that most people had experienced little or no discrimination of any sort. Of all 748 respondents who were currently working (paid or unpaid), 7% had experienced age discrimination and 9% gender discrimination at their current organisations. Relationships were evident however between experiences of past and present discrimination. Those that reported having experienced age discrimination in their past were more than twelve times as likely to have also reported this for their current organisation (25%), than those who had not experienced this previously. Similarly, those with age discrimination experiences in their past were over four times as likely to feel that they had similar experiences at their current organisation (28%), than those who had not.

One may argue here that possibly having had an experience that one considered to be discriminatory, does heighten awareness of how discrimination may be manifest. This is perhaps supported when one considers that those having experienced age discrimination previously, were far more likely to experience gender discrimination now, and indeed visa versa. Yet the manner in which such discrimination is experienced can of course differ not only from person to person, but, as we argue elsewhere in this report, from sector to sector. For example our data does indicate that the voluntary sector operates within a far more inclusive organisational culture, regardless of organisational policy, and therefore to include

it within analysis here may not give a true reflection of the experiences people may have. It does seem sensible then to offer some analysis relating to the public/private sectors only.

To begin with, whereas above we saw that for all sectors relatively low numbers considered they had experienced little or no discrimination, when considering the public/private sectors only, figures were substantially higher. Nearly one quarter had experienced age discrimination with 16% experiencing gender discrimination. As may have been expected, more women had experienced gender discrimination than men (10% as opposed to 3%), whereas when considering age this trend was very much reversed, with 30% of men answering that they had experienced discrimination compared to 10% of women. Less than 4% of men had experienced both forms, quite lower than that reported by women at around 10%.

To return specifically to age discrimination we were interested to examine the strength of feeling about discrimination. For example, one may tentatively consider one has experienced unfavourable treatment, or one may feel that feel quite vehemently that it has occurred. To this end, respondents were asked to rate on a 5 point scale how much they agreed with 5 statements that were designed to examine the strength of such feelings. The items asked if respondents believed that, because of their age, they received less favourable treatment from co-workers, had less say in decision making, received less pay, had fewer training opportunities and had less chance for promotion. Scores from 5 to 25 were available with a higher score indicating higher agreement with the scale and thus a higher strength of feeling.

As may have been expected, those who had experienced age discrimination previously recorded significantly higher scores than those who had suggested they had not. However, those who had not indicated they had experienced unfavourable treatment still recorded a mean score of 10.60, with some 32% having a higher score than this. The highest recording a score here was the maximum available of 25. Given this, it may have been the case that some of those who had indicated they had not been

the subject of discriminatory practices, indeed had, but either in isolated incidences, or possibly as we will see below, they had failed to reflect fully upon their experiences.

It is generally accepted that such measurements are designed to examine the totality of feeling towards, or about, something and as such it is unadvisable to examine individual items in isolation. However we were interested to see where this strength of feeling came from. The data showed that across the scale the percentages for the first three items were relatively stable yet for the final two, there was a sharp increase in those indicating agreement. These items dealt with issues of training and promotion and as such this does in many ways support the findings elsewhere in this report concerning levels of dissatisfaction with regards to the opportunities or both.

It would appear then that strength of feeling is not necessarily about individual relationships, but is reflective of organisational culture beyond the control of the workforce. Elsewhere in this report we do discuss organisational culture and how this impacts upon the perceptions one may have of how we are viewed. To extend this a little further it was felt important to, in the light of the results above, to determine if the age/gender profile of the workforce had any influence upon one experiences. What we found that experiences of discrimination were consistent regardless of the age and gender profiles of the workforce, with the exception of those from mixed age and gender workforces who tended, generally, to experience low levels of discrimination of any sort. The most obvious implication here is that, possibly, individuals do not become isolated because of age and/or gender and that there is, in effect, safety in numbers. Yet our data also suggest that having a mixed profile workforce actually encourages different groups to recognise other groups' strengths, so it may be that in such organisations preconceived beliefs are consistently challenged and adapted.

The Mismatch Between Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Comparing the qualitative and quantitative data revealed an inconsistency in that, particularly women, indicated much higher levels of perceived

discrimination during interview than their closed responses in the questionnaire. This inconsistency is perhaps to be expected given the sensitive and emotional nature of the subject matter. It is possible than that the respondents preferred to talk about their experiences in their own words, or on their own terms, or that rapport was perhaps established between interviewer and respondent, thus encouraging verbalisation of their experiences. It is also likely that the potential to perceive discrimination, especially in its more subtle and disguised forms is affected to some extent by the interview process in which respondents are encouraged to reflect on specific problems they may have encountered at work. It is reasonable to assume therefore that some of the respondents were previously unaware that they had been discriminated against.

According to the quantitative data from those working in public or private organisations, age discrimination tended to be more prevalent among men than women. Yet many of the women interviewed claimed to have experienced or observed age discrimination in their most recent employment. From the perspective of these women there seemed to be a great deal of truth in the concept of a *double jeopardy*.

> *"I think there is such a thing as a double discrimination, age and gender, then you've got race and disability, and it's all compounded by age." (Female 50-54, student).*

It was therefore felt that stereotypical beliefs about gender and age combine to form a distinct form of prejudice with unique characteristics and discriminatory processes. This point is articulated by Itzin and Phillipson (1995) who conceptualised gendered ageism to describe the combination of, or intersection and interaction between, ageism and sexism (Itzin and Phillipson, 1995), and there were clear examples of many ways in which this interaction impacted on the availability of opportunity and choice for women in the workplace.

> *"In my estimation a woman in her fifties might be equally qualified, she might even have more experience certainly she'll have more life experience than a younger woman, but the majority of people who interview in management positions, are men and they're going to think well she's not got long to go, how much can she give the company, is she going to have the energy to do this, this and this?*

> *Then there's this young girl she's quite pleasant and attractive she'll have the get up and go." (Female 55, working full-time).*
>
> *"If you're a female in a meeting, you'll see nobody will take any notice, then some bloke will just repeat what you said and they'll say, " yes, oh yes", you think, why did I bother? As you get older you care less about what certain people think in a way - you're more ready to speak you're mind, but then people don't like it, you're aggressive then, intimidating and scary." (Female 50-54, student).*

Many of these women indicated that their age had often been an issue in the way their employer regarded them. Other women were aware of ageism of this kind, but had never experienced or observed it in relation to their own workplace. Some women felt that they would be denied promotion on account of their (older) age. In addition, several of the women in jobs that demanded considerable adaptability or technical knowledge reported confrontation with age-based stereotypes about mental competence and intellectual decline, some of which contained or were felt to have contained a gendered element (for example, the impact of the menopause),

> *"We've got a new computer and everybody's having difficulty with it. It's a bit awkward. X [co-worker] said to me 'Have you had your test yet?' I said 'No I haven't had it'. She said, 'Well you've got to remember that as you get older it takes longer for your brain to absorb all that information'. I felt like screaming, 'No, no it doesn't it's just your perception of it.'" (Female 57, professional).*

Many of these women were concerned that such age-related thinking might result in their work being discounted or undervalued by their employer. This, it was felt, was particularly unjust since they had re-mained, or felt that they had remained, unchanged over time, this had the effect of making women feel invisible and undervalued in comparison to younger women and to men in general. There was also mention of a "double standard" in respect to male and female ageing in employment,

> *"I know they say there is a male menopause but I think men of that age group tend to get a bit more respect… they look more distin-guished so for a women who's 50 and going grey, people go on appearances - I'm sure if you go for an interview…a nice, young smart woman stood in front of you - she could work for the next thirty years, who are you going to take on?" (Female 50, job seeker).*

That women are “never the right age” (Duncan and Loretto, 2004) was also supported by the data.

> *“…although people try and be very good and not be very sexist, I think they’re [women] still looked upon either if they’re young, well they’re going to leave and start a family or if they’re older? They just sort of favour somebody maybe a bit younger and possibly male, definitely.” (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

However despite the fact that gendered ageism can impact on women whatever their age, the accumulation of negative treatment and/or missed opportunity may result in greater inequality with increased age (Barnum, et al, 1995, Barnard at al, 1995, Browne, 1998). In addition, the notion that women are valued in accordance to the conditions ascribed to their youth (sexual appeal, reproductive capacity) has meant that that older women have tended to be those more harshly affected,

> *“I guess at fifty as well there’s all the health issues about menopausal women ‘we don’t want neurotic, emotional women in our employment’. What else? Yes, women’s expectations of themselves as well. There is influence, certainly, I guess from the media as well, that employees are young, beautiful, glamorous female employees, so that’s another aspect.” (Female 50-54, working full-time, experienced redundancy).*

Another question that was addressed is how the concept of gendered ageism related to, and compared against, the experiences of older men in paid employment. The legitimacy of the concept has so far been tested from the perspective of women only. However, several of the participants in our study have alluded to the idea that it is perhaps more acceptable for older women to admit the need for freedom from the work ethic or to scale down into part time work because female identity is not (traditionally) interwoven with or dependent upon an ability to earn a decent wage. Implicit within this view is the idea of work as an essential, masculine affair and that movement away from the worker role might be read as a sign of weakness or loss of control.

> *“It’s certainly difficult for men because I know some men who have been made redundant at 50 and they just haven’t been able to get back into the job market at all and hired in except very, very low paid jobs… it’s very easy to lose confidence.” (Female 50-54, working full-time, experienced redundancy).*

What emerges here is that whilst one set of data is quite encouraging in that a relatively small number of respondents considered they had been the subject of discrimination, when examined a little closer, the data does suggest the practice is much more widespread. Overall, all the data together indicates that previous experience of discrimination does make one more aware of how it can be manifest and that one may be able to recognise it more easily. Equally, the data also indicates that, when given the opportunity and/or encouragement to reflect on experience, one is able to see where and how discrimination occurs. The suggestion here also is that too many accept current practice and attitudes as the norm, or indeed as isolated incidents, often without challenge and often without consideration of what it actually represents.

Retirement

The evidence for this section was found amongst quantitative information gathered from paid staff and volunteers in the community and voluntary sectors (398) and from interviews with a cross section of men and women form all sectors who took part in the survey. As might be expected for both types of retirement (voluntary and enforced), the older age group of 60 plus were the most likely to have experienced retirement and those ages 50-54 were the least likely. Amongst the paid staff 10% of paid staff had experienced enforced retirement and 8% had chosen to retire. Of the volunteers 28% had experienced voluntary retirement and 15% had experienced enforced retirement. Volunteers have more experience of retirement, which may explain why volunteers were more likely to view retirement as a new and exciting life stage (72%) than the paid staff (61%), having entered this stage already and using their time productively, for example through voluntary work. Female volunteers (73%) were more likely to view retirement as a new and challenging stage in life than female paid staff (59%).

From interviews conducted with the men and women a common theme found was that in the main, those who had chosen to retire, were more likely to view retirement as a new and exciting life stage than those who had not chosen retire. Having an enforced retirement may result in

negative attitudes towards retirement, compared to a more positive event for those who retire at a time of their own choosing. Thus, the choice or lack of choice in retirement age is important in determining how people view their retirement (Barnes et al, 2002). Freely choosing to retire fostered positive reasons to retire, for example as a time for self-fulfilment, or continued social contact or to adopt a leisure-orientated lifestyle.

> *"I always said that when I retired I was going to set my own agenda … I think I retired at the right time, yes." (Male 66, retired).*

In contrast, those who had left work involuntary or for whom the timing of the retirement was unexpected or beyond their control (for example because of ill health) were more likely to view retirement in negative terms and/or find it difficult to adjust to retirement. As one respondent explained.

> *"I mean I know I can retire now quite willingly (laughing) because at the moment that's how I feel, do you know what I mean? I will pick myself up, it may take a while, but I mean I've seen girls of fifty, like another mate, she took a stroke last year so she's finished…they miss that social aspect." (Female 54, job seeker).*

Whilst most did not want to ever have to retire, they felt that if the time did come they would have to be doing something to keep themselves active.

> *"I suppose I am not looking forward to having nothing to do. I mean I have known so many people over the years…who have retired, they just went to work, OK they went to the pub a little bit and socialised, but suddenly found they had nothing to do, they and no outside hobbies." (Male 55-59, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

Retirement was a positive measure taken by some to enable them to escape from the stress and strains of working, allowing them the chance to be busy with other things in this period.

> *"Oh yes…you retire at sixty from (company name), but I wanted to take retirement early at fifty-six because it wasn't worth working the last 4 years…That was to get out of the rat race, I had had enough for 30 odd years…[and] I have been a volunteer all my life, so I was going to still." (Male 73, volunteer).*

> *"… when I was younger my plans were that I would never really retire…I could just go on and on until nobody wants me anymore,*

but when I was probably around fifty… you know I started to feel rather burnt out by the time I was finishing." (Female 62, volunteer).

Similarly, there was reluctance on the part of some people from the public and private sector to retire or to think about the future in terms of retirement. The reasons for this varied. Some people said that they enjoyed their jobs and wanted to continue working for the foreseeable future. Others felt that they would miss the routine of work and the social contacts that they had built up. For many, work was important to their sense of worth and where they fit in the greater scheme of things. Feeling as though they were fit and well enough to work they questioned why an arbitrary age (sixty-five) should be applied, and how difficult it may be in adapting to retirement.

"I would like to think that you know…I quite enjoy what I'm doing. I don't know what I would do with myself to be perfectly honest with you… right you've come to a certain age and now you've got to go. I would have hoped that that would have largely disappeared by the time my turn comes… again it's a form of discrimination isn't it. You're sixty-five and you can't work anymore?" (Male 55-60, working full-time).

While other people were looking forward to retiring and having more time for rest and relaxation and for spending time with loved ones, others were looking forward to having free time. As one interviewee explained:

"I think he [husband] would go now if they offered something because our children have finished University now, you see, our daughter's just finishing now…and we won't have anybody you know that we're sort of responsible for, so we could afford to take a reduction and have a bit a time…time is important to us now because as you get older, time is more important, its not about working your socks off, its about having holidays and thinking of your recreation, isn't it?" (Female 54, working full-time).

Scaling down financially was for some a difficult concept. The need to keep up with current activities, hobbies and social outings were felt to be important reasons for not finishing work at a specified age.

"… She wants to pack up work tomorrow. I don't want to pack up work and sit and watch telly all day. I have a few hobbies…[but] I'm not sure whether the way pensions are at the moment that I will have enough to be happy?..holidays and that. I have not got no real

> *problem with working past retirement age…It would depend on my financial situation." (Male 55-59, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

> *"I don't know what I would do with myself… I really can't afford to live on an old age pension... I have an occupational pension, but…doesn't make me a millionaire by any manner or means." (Male 55-60, working full-time).*

Some women especially those who were single or divorced – expressed considerable concern over their pension situation.

> *"I think that's another problem with the pension income because I didn't go out to work for so long, I didn't have a pension to build up and because I wasn't I married I don't get any of my partner's pension and there are a lot of people in that position…, they still tend to take more responsibility for the family and the kids and they tend to earn less so when any relationship splits up, with married couples now, is there an entitlement to a portion of the pension? … Even if I worked full-time now I would never put enough into a pension to make…I've got a pension here, which I've just sorted out… the best it's likely to do is to make me just ineligible for state benefits you know what I mean? It's that poverty trap and if I work full-time to…it's not worth a carrot because I'm not going to be working long enough or earning enough to put into it." (Female 50-54, working full-time).*

Women's typically lower paid and discontinuous or part-time work can therefore adversely affected their ability to secure a safety net of income for their retirement, which in some cases will exceed the time they spent in active employment. Indeed it is for this reason that the face of pensioner poverty is often said to be female. Hardest hit are those who have been unable to accumulate significant pension entitlement in their own right because of the valuable time spent caring for others and the persistent gender pay gap.

Most people realised that retirement was a very personal issue and as such is likely to be viewed and experienced in different ways depending upon the individual and the circumstances they found themselves in. In light of this, they put forward the idea of flexible or phased retirement and with it, more flexibility and choice in respect to the state pension age. Indeed, even those who could not see themselves or their partner wanting to work past a given age, the need for flexibility and to work until one chose to or needed to stop was strongly voiced. As with most of the

employers we interviewed, there was support for equalising the state pension age for men and women. Many people felt that the current gender difference in the SPA was in itself a direct form of age discrimination and that changes to the world of work, which have occurred over the past 20-30, were at odds with what was generally regarded as an outdated and dogmatic policy.

> *"I think the retirement age is a number, you know, sixty-five or sixty if you're a woman…these figures were set a couple of generations ago and people now are far more active, far more able and I think it's also a different mind set. [they think] I am sixty-five, I don't want to collect my bus pass. I don't want to think about retiring. I'm not there yet and I don't think I will be. When I'm sixty-five I'm going to say, well what else can I do?" (Male 55-60, working full-time).*

Perceptions of Older Adults

The interviews identified how they perceived older adulthood and the qualities that they felt older people could bring to their roles.

> *"I think people who are over fifty are more hard-working than younger people and I do really think that is true…and I think they are more reliable." (Female 58, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

> *"I think they bring a lot of patience, which you need…and I think that they know because I am an older person that I can be relied on to be here, you know they can say well (X name) will be in tomorrow." (Female 58, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

Growing older also brought about a wealth of experience that workers could bring to their employer. Interviewees particularly referred to how this experience can aid them when having to overcome various problems and obstacles.

> *"Experience and wisdom, which has been thoroughly worked out. Expertise as well, which can be from different aspects of life that they have been involved in. They are on their journey of life and have seen and done things that they can bring to us… and be comfortable with change and realise that things may be frustrating now, but that can be handled in a constructive way and we feel that problems can be opportunities can't they… and use it to be helpful. I am not saying other ages can't do that, but I think, when you get older and you have been through various issues and things, you can help people with that and you bring that sense of hope, harbour good relationships." (Male 58, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

> *"If I just think about my colleagues who are over fifty, I think we have got a lot of experience, we have got a lot of life experience, we have got a lot of common sense between us. When problems come up there is almost a sense of, well, we have see this before, so it doesn't phase us, I think we are quite, I think we can be quite level headed, but I mean that is certainly my own personal experience…I know I can solve them because I have done it before. So there is that depth of experience and skills. I think also you get quite a high level of loyalty from people over fifty.." (Female 53, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

With regards to experience, life experience was particularly highlighted as an asset to the organisations that have older workers.

> *"I think they bring a lot of life expertise, that is what I feel because we have had all sorts of things, ups and downs in our life and we recognise that people are going through ups and down, it is good and bad, black and white it is a mixture of both." (Female 55, volunteer).*

One of the paid staff that also identified life experience as a quality unique to older workers indicated that he does not class himself as 'old' and had not thought of himself in this category before.

> *"To be honest I have never really thought about it, I don't really think of myself as an old person really, I am I know that I am sixty-two coming up, but basically perhaps life experience is probably one of the main things, you know… and that you sort of chat to colleagues and all the rest of it and sort of try and point them in the right direction, you know, and perhaps are a bit more steady that the younger ones who come in first off." (Male 61, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

Stereotyping based upon age and the double jeopardy of age and gender prompted this interviewee to voice how she feels, explaining that older women may lose their confidence when going through the menopause.

> *I do think it's like the stereotype thing. OK, you're up against younger women…just talking about the gender thing…who look good you know, I mean if you're fifty, you're coming up to the menopause or whatever, so you're facing a lot of other problems you know, you're getting grey and you do lose confidence even if you might have been a very confident person before." (Female 50, job seeker).*

Often stereotypes were internalised by individuals, forming nagging doubts about their own abilities, that were instantly dispelled once given the chance to challenge those doubts.

> *"I have in the back of my mind that because of my age I don't learn as fast as a younger person, but experience has told me that once I've learned, I've learned and I can learn to do new things. The job that I started has changed so much…we have to work with computers and once you're resigned to the fact that you've got to do this then you have to do it." (Female 55, working full-time).*

Ageism is deeply embedded and very widespread in our society. For many in their fifties the chance to conquer internalised views is somewhat denied in the world of work, purely on the grounds of their chronological age and this is despite a shortage in the labour force.

Societal perceptions of older adults

The interviewees talked about how negative views and perceptions they have personally encountered and witnessed in society have been internalised by some and

> *"...other people [have] perceptions of who you are and what you are…and say 'you can't do this and you can't do that' and I would think, it isn't like that, because I can do things, because I have got a lot of experience in lots of different settings. Although I do think other peoples perception is that you don't have that level of energy you did when you were younger." (Female 53, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

> *"I think society makes it very clear and I think that is the way we tend to think you are getting older, things are limited, less energy. It is how you are viewed I think as you get older as well, especially in the workplace." (Female 55, volunteer).*

The blatant ageism which is faced by the vast majority of elder people, contrasting with 'youth's obsessive fear of getting older as witnessed by this interviewee in her dealings with young people, sheds some light on how media influences and stereotyped images formulate opinions and create insecurities which this person challenges everyday in her work.

> *"I know that ageism is there and I know people view somebody with white hair and write them off, and another thing that I find a lot in the work I do…especially [with] young people they are terrified of getting old… They are telling you this, and you are sitting there, as an older person, that they have a fear of being old and I suppose that is part of our role really, is to show them that we are old and yes, we are still alive and having fun and whatever…it is just fascinating where all that negative stuff is coming from. I mean there is a fear of getting old, none of us can deny that, I mean I look in the mirror in the*

morning, and then you pick yourself up and think, well I am never going to be this young again." (Female 57, volunteer).

It was also outlined how the media's obsessions with celebrity and the insatiable appetite by their consumers, especially the younger end of the market for information, has, according to this interviewee created an us and them scenario, whereby if you ignore the hype and the marketers message to stay young, you have somehow given up on life,

"Well because young people now have got money I think the media aims adverts at them and it's all part of this [pause] youth culture…[daughter] buys a book and it's Hello or something like that full of young celebrities who are fighting to keep looking young, looking youthful and to look older is to say that you have given up, and I think that's why younger people now look at older people and think they're second class because they don't fit the youthful image…that's my personal take on it." (Female 55, working full-time).

The constant negativity associated with getting older, faced by this generation on a daily basis, is vehemently rejected, as based upon unsubstantiated preconceptions that older people are less able and willing than their younger counterparts.
"I think people see a number and they associate a number with a picture they have got somewhere in their head and they think, 'oh no she is old' and I am convinced until they meet you…they see this number and they think that I am going to have set ideas and set ways and … be.. I don't know, less able, less strong…it is such a shock, because I had never come across it before and because I am not set in my ways and thoughts." (Female 62, volunteer).

Identifying how they felt that they were sidelined and that once they reached a certain age they were actually 'invisible' to society.

"We just get sidelined as if we don't have an opinion or we've never been there but that's age for you." (Female 50-54, working full-time).

"I think it's good that there should be an investigation into employment opportunities for women over fifty because we are the invisible generation. We do work…we do still work, but I don't think we're valued." (Female 55, working full-time).

It is evident that although people over fifty feel that they have many unique qualities and are quite capable of working (paid or unpaid) well into their older years, negative preconceptions and stereotypes in society can inhibit the potential of this age group. This is not only as a result of these negative pre-conceived ideas in the mind of the employer or

recruiter around the capabilities and attitudes of this group, but may also be attributed to older adults internalising the messages in some subliminal way, believing them to be true of themselves.

Influences on Self Efficacy and Life Satisfaction

What has emerged from this research is that issues of confidence are central to how those involved in the study viewed themselves and what they believed their future to hold. Indeed, this was in many ways to be expected in that previous research has highlighted the manner in which positive mental well-being can have a positive effect upon ones life. For example, Nuehs (1990) found that life satisfaction was a key indicator of the readiness in which retirement was viewed, whilst Robertson et al (2002), found, amongst their sample of 50-74 year olds, that life satisfaction was significantly related to the world of work. Specifically, when individuals are not able to do what they want, in that particular case, work, there follows negative evaluations of quality of life.

These constructs are of course useful. The pattern of discriminatory practices may be able to be mapped statistically, in that one can chart the numbers of returnees to education and/or training and examine if there is a relationship with age, gender, race or indeed any other variable one may wish to use. However, given that the effects of discriminatory practices are experienced at a personal level, it makes sense to attempt to determine what these subjective effects are. Here we decided to measure two dimensions of subjective evaluation of ones self. Firstly, life satisfaction, that is, the judgments we make about our lives, and secondly, self-efficacy, this being the beliefs we have in our abilities to succeed in particular tasks (this can of course be measured globally to assess the overall level of self efficacy we may have). This, it was hoped, would be able to offer some insight as to whether negative life experiences were affecting global self judgements.

Methods

Participants were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements about themselves and their lives as a whole. The scale

used to measure self efficacy was adapted from that developed by Jerusalem and Schwartzer (1992) while the scale used to measure life satisfaction was taken from Pavot and Dienener (1993).

Results

Results indicate a statistical difference did exist dependent upon the experiences, both past and current, one may, or may have had and, in most cases, these were with life satisfaction scores. For example, significantly higher scores were recorded by those working as volunteers, compared to those who were paid workers. This in some ways supports the findings of Robertson et al (2002), whereby employment is not necessarily a precursor to positive mental well-being, but engaging in practices for intrinsic reasons often is. However, Robertson et al also found that overall life satisfaction was often dependent upon evaluations one may make of oneself, or indeed ones situation, but over a period of time. That is, current life experiences are placed into a context of personal history and previous experience.

For example, our own research shows that those who had experienced involuntary redundancy have significantly lower life satisfaction scores than those who have not. Equally those who had been out of work at some point because of sickness also had lower scores than those who had not. The same pattern emerged when considering whether people had ever experienced age discrimination in employment, with this also having a negative affect upon life satisfaction. Perhaps the most telling point here is that being out of work due to unemployment also had highly significant negative effects upon life satisfaction. A clear relationship has therefore developed here whereby levels of life satisfaction were lower when people were affected by events or circumstances, or a series of either or both which they had little or no control over.

A similar trend was also evident when considering those individuals who had reported having experienced gender discrimination ever in employment. However when controlling for respondents' gender, this was wholly dependent upon the scores for the women in the group. That is, the score for men was not significant. When considered together with the qualita-

tive data, what emerges is that women are perhaps more likely to internalise the effects of the discrimination, due to the nature of the workplace in which discriminatory practices are likely to occur at different points across the life course. Therefore, for men, such practices may be an infrequent occurrence and thus perhaps more easily dealt with and less likely to have been internalised.

Despite this suggested tendency for women to internalise the effects of gender discrimination more so than men, one of the interview participants, a male paid member of staff in the voluntary sector, had been severely affected by the double jeopardy of age and gender discrimination, which had impacted upon him throughout his life and was still having a negative effect on him today.

> *"When I left I was about as low as you could get…I don't think I have been treated like that any other time in my life; that was horrendous…The pressure was unbelievable, it wasn't good. I mean it was a gradual thing but at the end of it I felt totally devalued no work, no value, no nothing… I was so low it was unbelievable and even now I am not as I was before." (Male 55, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

In relation to self efficacy, correlations were found between the life satisfaction scores and the self efficacy scores, whereby the scores on one scale mirrored those on the other. Of course we are not claiming a cause and effect relationship here, but are suggesting that there is likely to be some other unseen commonality at work. One particular way in which one may view this is that our findings demonstrate levels of self efficacy to be related to employment status, that is, the lowest levels of self efficacy were found amongst those members of the sample who reported themselves to be not working. We cannot claim at this point which is dependent upon the other in that it may be that a withdrawal from the workplace facilitates a decline in confidence and therefore self efficacy. Equally it may be that self efficacy has reduced on account of something else and that this has hindered a reconnection with the workplace. Regardless of where the lack of self efficacy comes from it is clear therefore that it does have influence upon some of the decisions that may be taken.

This is perhaps the key finding to emerge when examining the data in relation to the two constructs: life satisfaction and self efficacy. Both past and current experiences play a major role in determining the position that many find themselves in. For example, the comment below, highlighting an incident that occurred some 11 years previously, is still clearly emotive for the interviewee.

> *“When I applied for a management role] I felt very disappointed and very hurt because I was told I hadn't got the job. When I went it came out that the people said no they wouldn't give it to me because I was too old at 53 because they expected somebody younger." (Female 62, volunteer).*

Whilst this comment shows how current experience clearly effects level of confidence:

> *"…negative experience really, as, well I am now 55 years old so people perceive you as old but I don't feel it, but when looking for work you are confronted with it really." (Male 55, paid staff, voluntary sector).*

Clearly then, issues of life satisfaction and self efficacy are interrelated and do have impact upon the choices we are able to make. However, the underpinning element to this is concerned with the amount of control one is able to exert over life's challenges and the direction ones life may go in. This is being pursued elsewhere in this report, but suffice to say for now, that a body of literature does exist (for example see Warr 1985) that supports our findings here, that good mental well-being is not necessarily a matter of chance. Our environment, coupled with our ability to influence it, unquestionably has influence.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Significant relationships were found between the operation of age restrictions by organisations when recruiting, and the incidence of skills shortages and/or retention problems. Over a third of organisations in the public and private sector reported they were experiencing labour shortages, with larger organisations seen to be suffering the most. Whilst the voluntary sector also exhibited similar problems in recruitment, the causes were largely due to competition for skilled professionals. Operating within a vibrant economy results in higher employment rates in which potential voluntary sector workers may be attracted to work in other sectors, by the higher wages offered.

Recruitment processes followed traditional selection patterns in that a whole range of criteria were being used to determine suitability. However, there was evidence of inconsistency in practices, with some employers feeling people were too old to recruit at forty (and below). This contrasts with the positive ways in which some employers viewed their older employees, particularly in the voluntary sector. There was some evidence of organisations considering a change in recruitment policies and practices in the light of their particular labour shortages and what emerged from the results was that those organisations that had implemented change, were less likely to experience problems of retention.

Those organisations that operated age restrictions for specific job roles were particularly likely to have problems in recruitment and retention of staff. This practice has negative implications for both the employer and potential job seeker in that the financial cost of advertising, interviewing and/or buying the services of recruitment agencies makes the management of labour shortages a costly occurrence. This no doubt impinges upon the organisations' profitability or their ability to perform their statutory duties effectively. Whilst more employers in the private and public sectors, as opposed to the voluntary sector, were applying age restric-

tions, not all those who did so were able to identify valid reasons for the application of those barriers, indicating that overt or covert ageism is operating within the workplace. Thus the applications of age restrictions in the context of this study would lead us to believe that age discrimination not only has a damaging human cost but also imposes serious financial pressures upon organisations.

The age legislation regulations are not complicated; they make it unlawful to base any decisions on access to employment or training, on a person's age rather than their competence, skills, and experience. Age neutral recruitment processes will need to be developed that enable applicants to be considered on their ability and merits and not be exposed to subjective assessments of age, and assumptions of competency.

Examples of good practice are to be found within the private, public and voluntary sectors. In particular the ethos in the voluntary sector is translated into age positive working practices, which appear to recognise and value the skills and maturity of people over fifty. In the private sector some innovative methods of recruitment are being used to place less emphasis upon the application form, through the use of telephone interviewing and role play scenarios in a work situation, as well as developing age neutral application forms. There was scepticism about simply removing an applicant's date of birth. Emphasis should be placed upon the experience of the various roles and responsibilities and competencies which are pertinent to the application, rather than the chronological and detailed information spanning the working life which is current practice and used heavily in short-listing procedures.

Gender balances were different between various types and sizes of organisation. Generally, the larger employers were significantly more likely to have a balanced gender workforce as opposed to small businesses. The proportion of older workers employed by these organisations reduced as the organisation became smaller. Small organisations had more than double the percentage of older men in the workforce compared to women, yet no such differences were found for medium and large organisations. In the voluntary sector the workforce has been traditionally

female dominated; however, there was some evidence to suggest that this may be changing as more men seek to enter the voluntary sector. Whilst evidence of age positive practices was found within some organisations who had mixed age and gender workforces, some traditional views of what constitutes women's work were held by employers and therefore continue to need challenging. Gender disadvantage in terms of promotion are still key issues within the workforce, and are now seemingly to be compounded by the double jeopardy of age and gender; however, as yet these interactions remain under researched as do interactions of race, age and/or disability. Cultural diversity should be supported through all structures within the workplace, with regular training opportunities in equal opportunities and through regular monitoring processes.

An organisation's culture and ethos may attract potential workers or induce movement from one sector to another. Organisations that had adopted a more flexible approach, not only in working hours, but also by offering gradual or partial retirement as an option, should it be wanted, drew benefits for both workers and employers. These organisations reported fewer problems with skills shortages and retention difficulties as opposed to other firms. Those organisations that were least likely to offer flexible employment or had set retirement ages were those more likely to be experiencing skills shortages and retention problems. Moving away from the restrictions of traditional ways of working and being more creative and adaptable to the flexible working requirement of the workforce, may be one way in which older workers can be attracted back into work, if they so wish. We need to recognise that personal choice is a factor in taking on new roles in paid or unpaid work and will be based upon levels of income, autonomy and work satisfaction as being important criterion for those seeking to re-enter or change employment in midlife.

Despite recruitment and retention issues across the sectors there was reluctance upon the part of some employers to explore the possibilities of changing their pre-conceived ideas about older applicants' capabilities. Potential areas of discrimination in terms of age were identified as emanating from subjective views about the suitability and capability of

older applicants, rather than following a policy line. Some of the organisations surveyed did identify age, or the assumptions about age, and perceived negativities regarding physical ability or mental acuity as a factor in selection; thus these were being played out in the recruitment process. A notable proportion of employers was certainly reticent to identify an age at which they would consider a person to be too old to employ. More enlightened employers could see that holding on to their experienced workers by offering flexible working, was better than risking losing them completely. Having a mixed age environment also had beneficial effects, creating a more positive working atmosphere for all, thus going some way to breaking down ageist stereotypes within the workplace and creating a more inclusive organisational culture.

This study found that age positive attitudes were most prevalent in the voluntary and public sector organisations. In the private sector, the advantages of closer lines of communication that smaller companies had with their staff also culminated in a greater appreciation of the mixed workforce. Larger organisations, although having in place equal opportunities policies, were found to be those least likely to be perceived by the sample as age positive. This suggests that, whilst policies may be in place, they have still to permeate into the consciousness of people within their organisations.

It has to be remembered that many in this age cohort of people in their fifties and sixties largely entered working class occupations without the benefit of formal qualifications and managed to work themselves into and up to various positions through learning on the job, perhaps serving their time in apprenticeships or gaining valuable experience in the offices or production departments. Some undertook additional study some did not. To find now that they may be considered too old to work by employers is both demoralising and discriminatory. For many men the realisation that they faced ageist barriers because of their older age was a new phenomenon, and did elicit a higher degree of acknowledgement of discrimination than it did for women. However, women have for over thirty years been battling against male dominance in the workforce, and for equality of treatment, which has still to be achieved, although there are improve-

ments without doubt. Women now face the dual challenges of being female and trying to break through the glass ceiling, and of being positioned with men in dealing with the silver ceiling of ageism. The difficulty is that prolonged periods out of employment have often been viewed as being unproductive by employers, yet for many disengaged in mid life, the cumulative experience of disregarded applications has resulted in a withdrawal from the application process. Success has to be seen to be achievable.

We found there was both a need for organisations to recruit and retain staff, and a strong desire from those disengaged from the workforce in our sample to find meaningful work. On the whole the employers' requirements for prior qualifications for some appointments is clearly understandable; however, for other appointments, on the job training supported by opportunities for further learning may be a way forward for both employer and employee. On the subject of staff training, there were clear examples of how bespoke training was viewed as being beneficial and meaningful, a point which perhaps offers some solutions to the lack of training opportunities and uptake amongst those in mid life. Failing to take up offers of training may be symptomatic of the lack of recognition or promotional opportunities, characterised by the statement: *"I don't see the point".*

The argument put forward by some companies that training is costly and that the payback period is reduced when training older age groups, is somewhat flawed, in that studies have shown that younger workers move on from job to job building up a range of experiences to add to their CV, whilst the older worker does tend to stay on longer with their employer, thus negating the argument regarding payback period (Magd, 2003).

Some age restrictions reduced an employer's ability to include workers on training schemes. If they did not fit in with funding age criteria they could not provide the training to older age groups. In terms of creating a skilled workforce for the future such policies would, on the face of it, be deemed to be short-sighted for the future competitiveness of employers.

The hierarchical structures which have tended to dominate within the workforce and as such have presided over, if not created, much of the inequities between men and women and more recently the use of age as a mechanism for downsizing or redundancy, now face additional pressures in the form of the age legislation. Many of the following recommendations will be either wholly or partly addressed by this legislation. However the subtleties of the research and the possible crossovers between practices within different sectors and how they have impacted upon people in this study enabled the researchers to identify possible ways forward which may be innovative and politically challenging.

To begin with, we found that levels of satisfaction were highest when democratic forms of management and leadership were adopted. Models of best practice included for example, clear and open lines of communication with management and the impression that such dialogue was actually meaningful and that management listened and acted upon the concerns and worries their employees had. This is of course the case for both men and women and for all age groups, yet in the context of an ageing workforce, an ageing population and new legislation, employees and organisations who are willing to offer such open communication structures would, for many of the reasons outlined in this report, (for example costs of recruitment and training) be much better placed to achieve their objectives. Public and private sector organisations have much to learn from the voluntary sector here.

We also need to recognise that this democracy does also apply in terms of personal choice and ambition. We found that far too often older workers were either not considered for training or promotion, a situation which is about to be legislated against, or did not consider it was worth their while even applying. Goals have to be seen to be achievable, otherwise, as we found here, too many with talent and experience may just opt to tread water when they feel that they have a lot to offer, and still do.

Methods of good practice which we found included allowing workers to identify skill shortages they would like to address. So, rather than provid-

ing a blanket package of training, workers could put together a bespoke training package that suited both their, and their organisation's needs. If we recognise diversity and its subsequent needs across other personal characteristics, it is right we should do it for age.

The key then is flexibility and one may argue that whilst employees have been encouraged to accept greater flexibility in working practices, some employers have yet to make complimentary adjustments. Again, in addition to the points mentioned above, the best practice we found allowed workers to negotiate for example, working hours, and in some cases when during the year they would work. Benefits to organisations were apparent, yet the actual costs of this were limited. Some older workers want a soft landing into retirement. Some have highlighted how they are helping their children by providing childcare for grandchildren. Such flexibility on behalf of all, unquestionably has benefit for all.

The nature of the workplace has changed and employers and employees are much more cognisant of how internal strife and poor industrial relations have negative effects on all parties. Whether because of legislation, or a shift in mindset, employees are much more ready to accept the loss of the concept of a job for life. Yet we found that far too many of our study cohort were not equipped to retrain, re-skill or to take on the mantel of fresh educational challenge when faced with redundancy or other forms of job loss.

The main problem we found was that whilst a small number of the cohort were what we termed *serial learners*, the vast majority of the cohort only considered learning as a reaction *to* something. This could have been redundancy, ill health, or even bereavement. The issue here is that the learning culture, so eagerly promoted by amongst others, government, may pass many by. The question has to be, can we reasonably expect people who have been out of education for many years to be able to readily change employment direction? The personal costs and the economic costs are eminently obvious. The key then is to encourage learning across the life course, and like that with training, allow flexibility in the learning experience that suits the individual. This may allow the forthcom-

ing generation to have the experience of learning and to be more proactive in accessing it. For the present generation however, the flexibility called for has to be in terms of admissions procedures and added support in formal education. For community based education, this has to be in the provision of learning that is seen as relevant and accessible.

What perhaps is the underpinning element in all the above is the notion of control and choice. Far too often individuals are denied the chance to have control over the direction of their life due to control being taken away. Whist this is true for many social groups, we have to remember that, as we have highlighted throughout this report, being discriminated against because we are too old, that is losing an element of control, may be a relatively new phenomena for individuals to deal with. As such, it is likely to be the case that many are lacking the experience to deal with this new, added aspect. The consequence is a denial of choice, due to the interaction between both internal and external factors.

Therefore, based upon the evidence presented in this report we would make the following recommendations:

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that age be incorporated into an Equal Opportunities statement or policy. Age should be considered on an equal footing to discrimination on such grounds as race and sex.

Recommendation 2

Recruitment should seek the best talent pool for the job. All decisions should be based upon the suitability of applicants for work, volunteering or education and upon an age neutral set of criteria which values experience and competency.

Recommendation 3

The double jeopardy of age and gender discrimination is often expressed in the form of ageist and sexist stereotypes which are internalised by

women, preventing them from reaching their full potential. Adopting a proactive approach should seek to monitor organisations' performances through the conducting of regular gender and age audits in employment to ensure that career progression is age neutral.

Recommendation 4

The recruitment of older workers into all types of occupations and positions within a company, not just to fill jobs in areas of skill shortages or recruitment difficulties, should be encouraged. Age restrictions on specific roles or tasks need to removed (unless absolutely necessary[1]) to offer age equality and to overcome any preconceptions that people of a specific age are incapable of particular roles.

Recommendation 5

Equality of opportunity for career development and progression must be transparent and achievable regardless of age. Also, training opportunities should be available to all, regardless of age. Negotiation of needs for training, between employer and employee, should be part of the performance criteria. Employers will need to provide information on training opportunities available, and encourage their employees to take part.

Recommendation 6

Flexibility in working patterns has been identified as a benefit most appreciated by work forces. Larger organisations may consider a flexible training facility within their premises, enabling staff to access various opportunities as they feel suitable.

Recommendation 7

Age diversity should form part of equal opportunities training and should be mandatory for all personnel. As employers are responsible for the actions of their employees, awareness of the age legislation will ensure that possible claims for unlawful discrimination will be minimised. Development of good practice now will be beneficial for all organisations in

[1] Organisations would need to refer to the 2006 Age Discrimination legislation to understand under what circumstances such age restrictions would be lawful. Exemptions will be allowed on Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR) and if there is an objective justification.

terms of expanding the pool of available applicants and creating the opportunities to develop a mixed workforce in terms of both age and gender.

Recommendation 8

It is recommended that an age diversity champion be appointed from the workforce to advise staff of their rights and to ensure that company diversity and equality obligations are met. Equally, formal written policy for line managers should also be developed to provide guidance on good practice across the employment lifecycle from recruitment right through to career exit. In line with this, managers should be encouraged to learn more about age discrimination and take part in age diversity training both within and outside of the organisation.

Recommendation 9

In larger organisations equal opportunities legislation has been a factor in reducing gender disadvantage. Raising awareness of how gender and age stereotypes and assumptions conspire to limit access to employment, education and training and thus perpetuate disadvantage, should form part of basic employee training in equal opportunities.

Recommendation 10

Overcoming the barriers facing people disengaged from work for long periods requires an appreciation of the psychological hurdles of lack of confidence or low self-esteem. Women, especially, returning to work in their fifties, face a combination of barriers, including perhaps a lack of currency in job specific skills or recent (paid) employment experience. It is important therefore that the value of transferable skills that may be acquired through unpaid work in the home (e.g. communication skills, organisational skills and managing a budget) be recognised by a request for this information on the job application.

Recommendation 11

All applicants for employment posts should receive some form of feedback to identify what stage of a recruitment process they reached when applying for a position. It is acknowledged that this attracts a cost and

time element in personnel terms; however, methods for standardising feedback forms should be actively pursued and piloted.

Recommendation 12

Flexibility of work opportunities should be encouraged for all age groups. This is especially important for the male-dominated workplace in which the traditional pattern of work continues to predominate. The monitoring of flexible working agreements should ensure that they are equally available to all who need them and that they should not be age biased.

Recommendation 13

State pension age is set to rise in stages to 68 by 2046, signalling a belief that people are living longer and are able to continue working into later life. Flexible and negotiated retirement is valued by both employers and employees as a way of either easing into retirement or of continuing work into later life. Development of flexible retirement options should in some cases aid and support the passing on of skills and experience to new recruits as well as providing a buffer zone for employers when seeking to recruit to their organisations. All employees should also have equal rights to later retirement, regardless of their status or level within a company.

Recommendation 14

Under the terms of the forthcoming Age Discrimination legislation, employees may request to remain in employment later than the retirement age. Therefore, employees who are approaching this age must be given the relevant information on this retirement policy and be made aware of their rights on this issue in sufficient time to request to stay on if they wish.

Recommendation 15

In the case of redundancy, whilst some employers do actively support the promotion of job seeking skills for those being made redundant, it is certainly not widespread and due to economies of scale may be difficult for smaller businesses to provide. There are good examples within local community groups and agencies whereby partnership working could bring together small businesses and local community organisations with

experience and contacts within localities to assist employees with their job finding skills.

Recommendation 16

The perception that voluntary sector workers are predominantly female is historical and enduring. The predominance of women in caring and supporting roles is to be found throughout the voluntary and care sectors and is indicative of gendered job typing. Mixed age and gendered work-forces have been shown to create more inclusive environments; thus, the opening up of opportunities to men should be encouraged. Also organi-sations involved with pre-retirement schemes may find that forming partnerships with the voluntary sector can create another avenue of support for those contemplating a phased retirement and/or wishing to make the transition into volunteering.

Recommendation 17

Higher education institutions should endeavour to review and improve their support mechanisms for older students. This may take the form of an older students' advisor on age issues in the same way that disability rights or race relations officers are currently available. Support should incorporate literature or groups for study skills, financial advice forums and acknowledgement of the need for flexible study, for example distance learning.

Recommendation 18

Older students face a complex of barriers, some of which are to do with their own levels of self-confidence and the feeling of being too old to learn, which for some has translated into a halting of the education process, due to the perception they were unable to compete. Forging links with community initiatives and learning groups in local communities would help to break the perceived elitist assumptions with which univer-sities are often credited.

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