



Finding Employment After 50



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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements: The IES wishes to record its thanks to the members who took the time to participate in the survey questionnaire.

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A visionary organisation leading debate, dissemination and promotion of environmental science and sustainability, the IES promotes an evidence-based approach to decision and policy making.

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Date: November 2014

Executive Summary

The rising age of retirement means older workers as a proportion of the UK workforce will increase, yet those over 50 seeking work face many obstacles. The problem is often overlooked or underestimated, with employers discriminating against older workers despite government legislation intended to prevent this.

The specific objectives of this report are:

- Present case studies, in order to identify issues facing environmental scientists over 50 years of age looking for work;
- Establish how the situation within the sector relates to wider trends identified by UK government and advisory bodies; and
- Provide guidance and advice to both job-seekers and employers.

Method

Members aged over 50 were surveyed for their experiences of seeking work, with a number of case studies of their experiences

situated throughout this report. Names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Key Findings

70 per cent of respondents cited age as a direct or indirect factor preventing them from returning to work. A third of respondents believed they had been the direct victim of ageism, either in the workplace or from potential employers.

Conclusions

Findings indicated that environmental scientists over 50 face similar problems returning to work as identified across the rest of the UK. There are clear social and economic benefits to individuals remaining in work to retirement age – and sometimes beyond. The sector needs to do more to ensure best practice.

Introduction

With a high number of graduates unemployed in the UK, and many people in their early 20s out of work or underemployed, headlines over the past few years have been dominated by dire warnings of a new ‘lost generation’^{1,2,3}. However this demographic is not the only one to be struggling to find or retain employment. Little mention is made of an older ‘lost generation’: those who have found themselves unemployed or underemployed over the age of 50, and often discriminated against by employers⁴.

The extent of the problem

The combination of an aging population and the rising age of retirement means older workers as a proportion of the workforce will continue to increase. The proportion of the population over 50 is forecast to grow from 35 per cent to 39 per cent in the next 18 years, rising to 28 million by 2032^{5, 6}. Encouraging people to stay in work longer is a governmental policy; announced in the Chancellors 2013 Autumn Statement, State Pension Age (SPA) should be expected to rise to 69 by the late 2040s⁷.

Those unable to find work are subsequently at risk of descending into poverty before reaching SPA. The majority of saving for retirement is done after the age of 50⁸ and UK state pension funds compare unfavourably with other Northern European countries^{5, 9}. Furthermore, only 1 in 4 people will reach their target income by SPA⁵. Encouraging and supporting older workers is therefore beneficial to both the individual and society, yet there seems to be little or inadequate support for this group.

The overlooking of older workers is perhaps due to an ostensibly lower effect of the unemployment crisis. The number of 50-64 year olds in employment has grown by 2 million over the last 15 years, making this demographic the only age group to be bigger than before the recession^{10, 11}. There has been a steady increase in those working past State Pension Age (SPA) to nearly double over the past 20 years¹⁰ –which might go some way to explain the increase in employment within this demographic. Those aged 55-64 also have a lower employment hazard rate compared with 16-24 and 25-39 year olds¹².

However, those unemployed and over the age of 50 face different issues to other demographics. Estimates suggest that fewer than 40 per cent of those seeking work over the age of 50 will find any form of work within a year⁴. Older workers are the least likely to move from unemployment to employment than all other age groups¹¹, 15 per cent of employers had a maximum recruitment age, and often employers without a set maximum retirement age will not consider hiring beyond their normal retirement age¹¹. Age also negatively affects pay, pension accrual, sick pay and other benefits. Government policy has arguably encouraged ageism by supporting employers hiring based solely on age – usually the younger 18-25 demographic – rather than individual characteristics, or barriers faced to employment^{2, 3 & 10}.

There is also an issue in identifying the extent of the problem. Of the 1.4 million people currently unemployed in the UK, approximately 18 per cent of those claiming job seekers allowance are over 50¹⁴. However, this is likely to be an underestimation of the real figure, with those over 50 either not claiming benefits or living on accumulated savings not available to those starting in their careers. Those over 50 are also more likely to flow into economic inactivity, retiring unintentionally early⁵.

The Environment Sector

There is little data relating to how these trends reflect within the environmental sciences. In agriculture, forestry and fishery 53 per cent of workers are over the age of 50, compared to 34 per cent across the whole working population⁵. The 50+ workforce tends to be less qualified (though not less skilled) than younger generations⁵. Potentially, older workers within the sector could be being retained due to their technical skills necessary for many environmental science disciplines, whilst those unable to work could be being discriminated against due to lack of qualifications (e.g. Masters degrees) that were not necessary when they entered the workforce. On the other hand, age discrimination appears to be more prevalent in skilled, manual trades¹⁵ and so may be less prevalent within the environmental sciences.

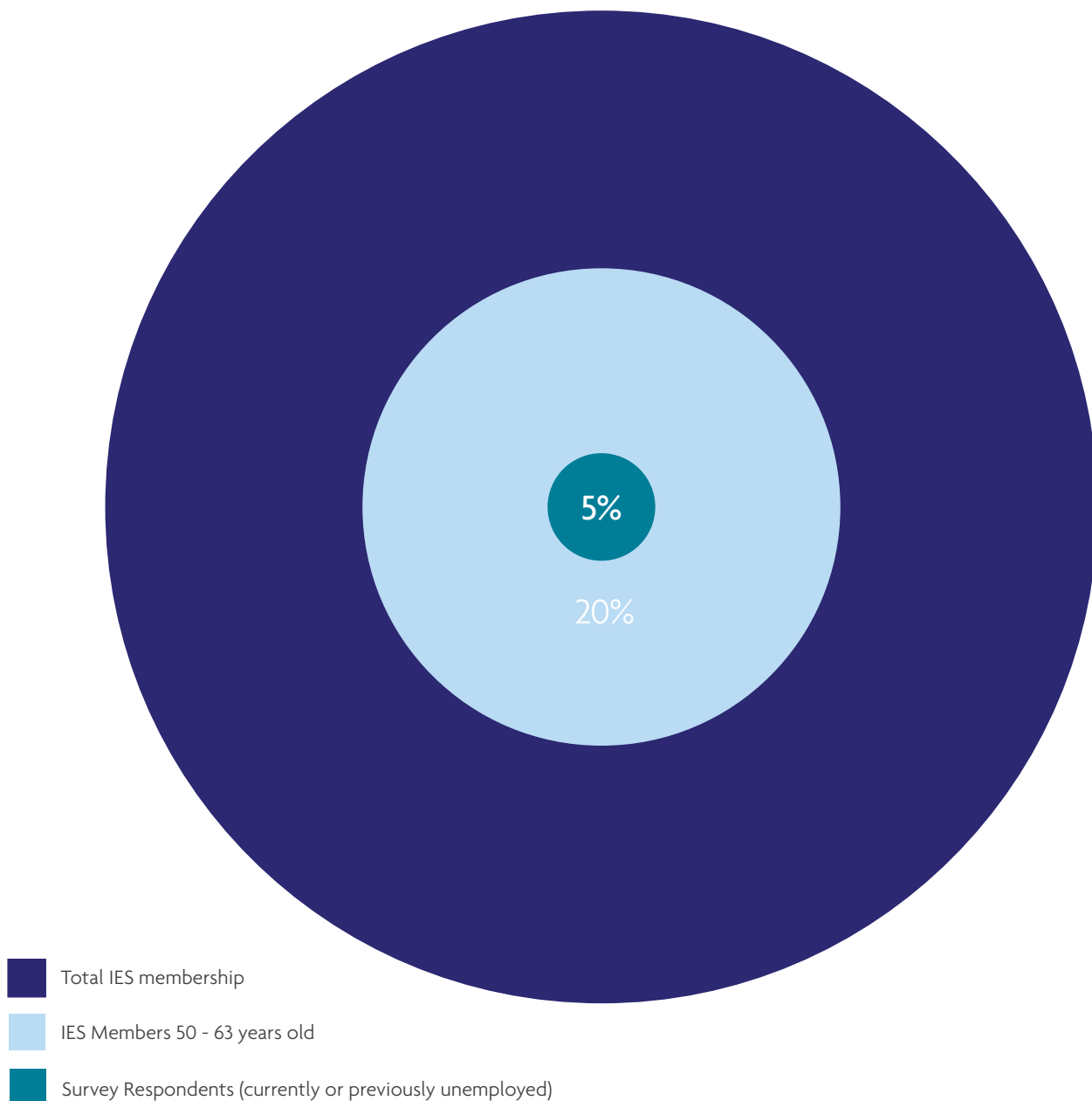
Taking jobs from the young

It has been claimed that an increase in employment of older workers will be at the expense of the younger generation struggling to get a foothold in employment. However, a recent study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies concluded that there was little long-term evidence to support the notion that older workers prevent younger individuals from entering employment¹⁵.

Methodology

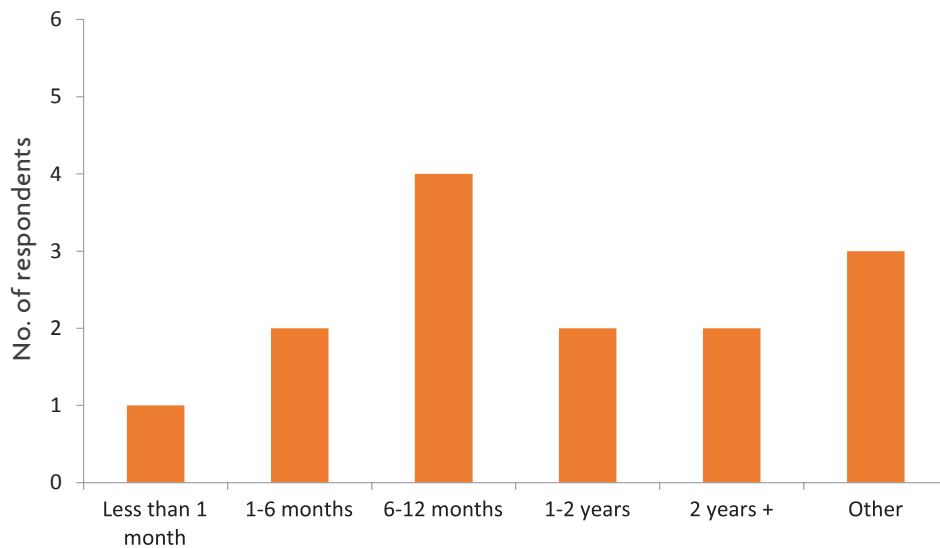
All IES members born between 1948–1964 were contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire if they satisfied the criteria of being over 50, and currently unemployed or previously unemployed past this age. Below, qualitative responses are presented as case studies with quantitative measures of envisioned future success and employment issues. Though too small a sample size for rigorous statistical analysis, we are able to ascertain broad conclusions on the issues facing environmental scientists over the age of 50.

Of the 336 IES members canvased for opinion, ~5 percent responded with confirmation that either they currently were or previously had been unemployed over 50. The age range of the responses was 50–63, with 20 per cent being female. All held a degree, with the majority having Masters or PhDs. The range of professional experience was 5–42 years, with the average being 21 years.



Ageism in the Workplace

How long have you been seeking work?



Following the national trend, IES members also seem to be stuck out-of-work for longer than six months to a year, although only 10 per cent stated they were claiming Job Seeker's allowance.

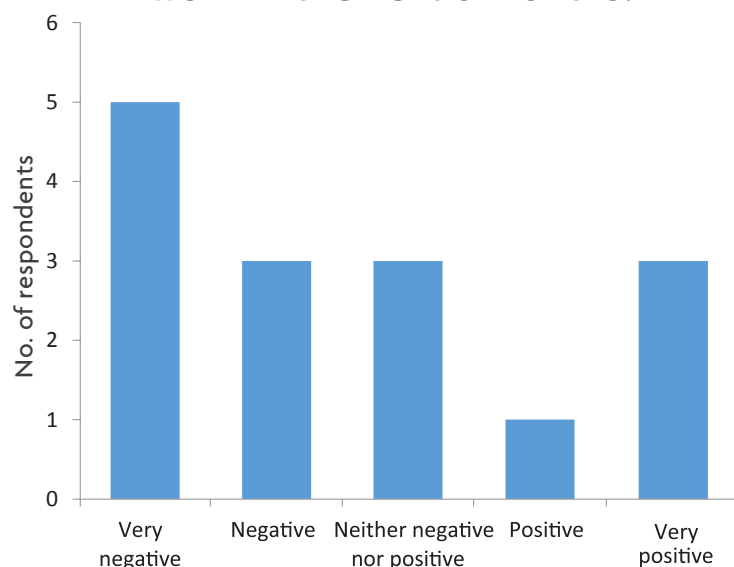
Case Study 1

Adam, 51 left the UK to move to New Zealand in pursuit of a better and less stressful life. Prior to his emigration he amassed ten years of experience within Environmental Management. He feels that a combination of the condensed job market, academic cross-over of legislation, being over-qualified and covert favouring of Kiwi nationals are preventing him from finding work.

"I have encountered a bias towards home-grown talent even if less experienced and qualified."

Adam was not alone in his pursuit of work abroad, although other respondents stated that other countries have a less negative view of older workers.

How optimistic are you about finding work in the next 6 months?

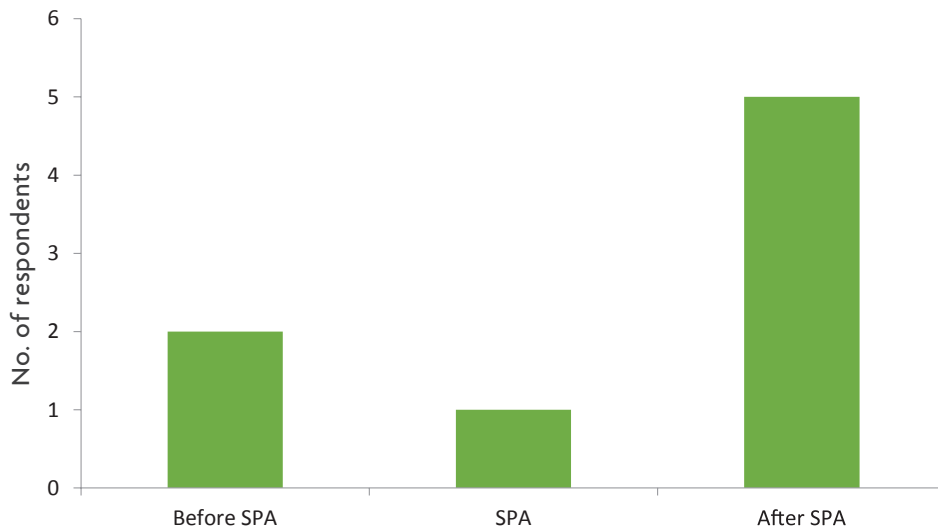


When asked about their optimism in finding work in the next 6 months, optimism was generally low.

Case Study 2

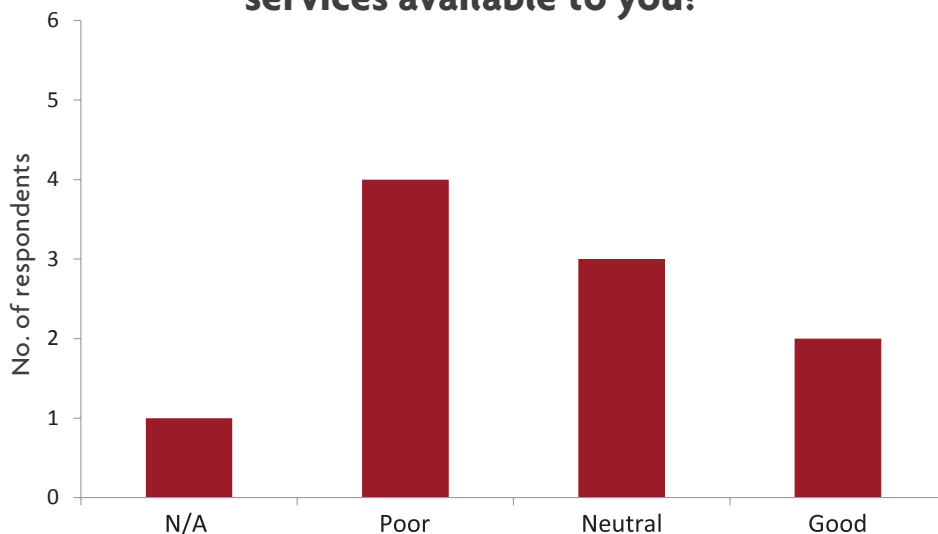
Norman, 54 has been seeking work for over 2 years after returning from Japan where he accrued over 14 years within environmental intellectual property. Upon his return to Europe he studied for a Masters in Sustainable Energy Engineering and is hoping to work within renewable energy or sustainability. He believes his difficulties finding long term employment stem from his age, and experience working at a tangent to pure environmental fields, which did not necessarily exist when he graduated from his degree.

What age do you hope to retire?



Citing reasons of both necessity and enjoyment, 50% of respondents want to remain in work past state pension age.

How would you rate (UK) government services available to you?



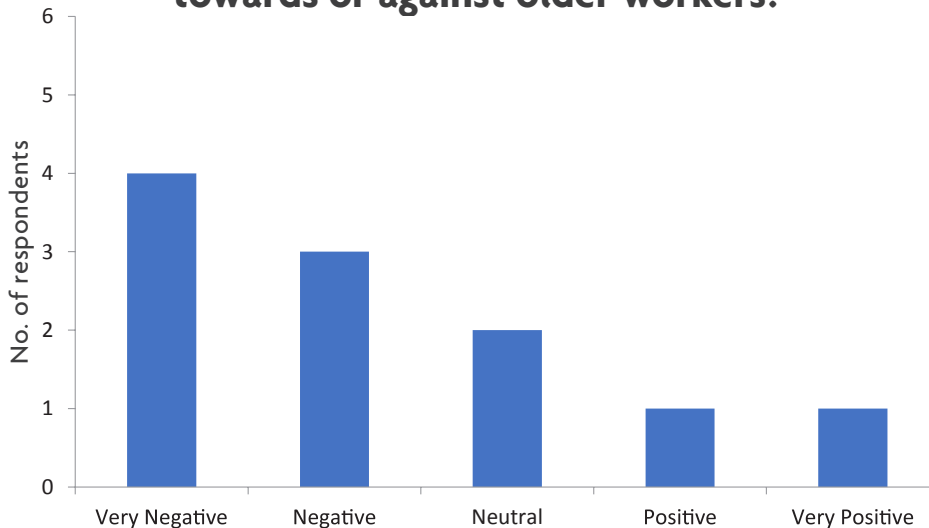
There was a suggestion that government services were too geared towards younger, more generalist workers, and not adept enough at dealing with specific issues facing older environmental scientists.

Case Study 3

Natasha, 53, is employed full time but is currently seeking other work. She has 25 years of experience within the field and graduated in the early '80s, when environmental jobs were hard to come by. She remembers moving between short-term projects, government-funded schemes and voluntary work in order to build up the required expertise to gain a full time post, when she was 30. Consequently, her pension contributions are well below those of her contemporaries and this has had a knock-on effect for her future options:

...I feel trapped in my current post, unable to take advantage of any early retirement options, until statutory retirement age because I feel it would be virtually impossible to find alternative employment post-50 in my chosen field at even my lowly position on the career ladder. I have witnessed friends face this difficulty after they have been forced to jump.

How would you rate employers' bias towards or against older workers?



The majority of respondents believed that employers held a negative bias towards older workers. 70 per cent of respondents cited age as a direct or indirect factor preventing them from returning to work. Indirect reasons included degrees now seen as irrelevant or too generalist but which had evolved and fed into emerging specialities. The economic downturn was suggested to be responsible for job loss, and budgetary cuts were also cited as having a knock-on effect in encouraging early retirement, or a focus on younger, cheaper, “easy-to-mould” staff.

A third of the respondents believed they had been direct victims of ageism, and another third were unsure or believed it had indirectly affected them. One respondent was under the impression that the CEO of his company had stated that he was unhappy with anyone over 50 being considered for an advertised vacancy. Another was made redundant in his 50s - 6 months prior to anti-ageism legislation coming in to effect - and believes his age was the reason he was unable to find new employment within the environmental sector.

Case study 4:

Harold, 63 has 42 years' experience and has been seeking work for over 6 months after leaving a senior academic position. He believes age is strongly against him as he tries to search for other work, and feels he was forced to take voluntary early retirement:

“[The] School suddenly closed [and I was] redeployed to a group not keen to have additions and soon a financial deficit found to encourage ‘redeployment’ or Voluntary Early Retirement ... strange the deficit seems to have gone away once the remains of the old closed school left.”

Harold is hoping to work until several years past state pension age but has so far been unable to find a suitable post within the UK and has now expanded his search overseas.

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006

On the 1st October 2006, Regulations passed into law making it unlawful to discriminate against employees, job applicants or trainees on grounds of age (young or old.) However, it may not be unlawful for employers to discriminate against a job applicant when the applicant is over the employer's normal retirement age or within six months of reaching it when applying for the job.

Conclusions & Advice

The case studies and statistics presented in this report illustrate that environmental scientists do suffer some age-related difficulties seeking or staying in work past the age of 50. A negative employer bias and difficulties finding work after leaving a position reflect national trends, with professionals holding low expectations of future success. Environmental Scientists over 50 appear to be more likely to hold post-graduate qualifications than their contemporaries in other sectors. This suggests that a lack of qualifications is not the issue although employers may be concerned about the relevance of these degrees today.

Thoughts from the IES

Clearly, there are extensive issues facing environmental scientists over 50. Ensuring people remain in fulfilling work for as long as possible not only has social and economic benefits, but can benefit employers by preserving an extensive, broader skill-set.

The environmental sector has long been associated with open, forward-thinking values which promote equality, not just for the planet but for people as well. Professionals who are looking to transition into the environmental sector in later life should be encouraged to do so, for the betterment of society. For this reason, the IES believes that the sector can act as a beacon of best practice for others to follow.

Advice for employers

The majority of members surveyed wished to continue working after current state pension age of 66, and investment in older workers should not be viewed as 'time-wasting'. In our study, respondents had a range of experience from 5–42 years and employers can benefit from older workers by utilising their extensive experience. There is also an opportunity to allow them to act as role-models for younger members of staff. Employers are encouraged to ensure continued professional development of their employees.

As highlighted in a previous IES report (Graduate Employment and Internships: issues from the environmental sciences and sustainability sectors) little feedback was received from employers by applicants as to the reasons for their failure. Wherever possible, feedback should be provided. There is also a danger in the 'tick-box' approach to hiring by human resource specialists who might not have a full understanding of the sector, and therefore discard candidates for not meeting the essential criteria (Such as qualifications not necessary 30 years ago). Employers are also encouraged to enforce an age anonymous application system, where applicants are encouraged to submit 'age-' and 'date-blind' CVs.

Advice for job seekers

The IES offers a mentoring scheme, which pairs mentees up with members in positions to be able to advise them on returning to work, and a CV clinic designed to ensure applicants are presenting themselves in the best possible way. The schemes are open to all members and we would strongly encourage those looking for work to take full advantage of them, especially older workers who have transitioned into the sector and consequently have less experience. More information can be found here: www.the-ies.org

Resources

Below are useful links for both older people seeking work and employers. Please be aware that these resources are external and unaffiliated to the IES, and therefore do not necessarily represent our views or policies.

nidirect

Governmental services guide and advice for looking for work over-50: www.nidirect.gov.uk/looking-for-work-over-50s

Department for work and pensions

The 'Age Positive' initiative was a DWP project to advise employers on effectively managing an ageing workforce: www.gov.uk/government/collections/age-positive

UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES)

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills is a publicly funded, industry led organisation providing strategic leadership on skills and employment issues in the four home nations of the UK: www.ukces.org.uk

Acas

Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) guidelines on retirement and age-related dismissal: www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=3203

In my prime

In my prime is a career coaching consultancy whose aim is to assist employers, marketing organisations, policy makers and over 50s themselves in issues relating to management and employment of older workers: www.inmyprime.co.uk

Resolution Foundation

An independent think tank aiming to improve living standards lower to middle income households: www.resolutionfoundation.org

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Europe's unemployed youths face years trapped in a downward spiral of poverty and exclusion (www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/a-lost-generation-europes-unemployed-youths-face-years-trapped-in-a-downward-spiral-of-poverty-and-exclusion-8677508.html) Accessed on 14 October 2014
- 4. DWP (2012)**
Attitudes to age in Britain 2010 (www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214361/ihr7.pdf)
- 5. Resolution Foundation (2012)**
Unfinished Business: Barriers and opportunities for older workers (www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/media/downloads/Unfinished_Business_FINAL_2.pdf)
- 6. Policy Exchange (2012)**
Too Much to Lose: Understanding & Supporting Britain's older workers (www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/too%20much%20to%20lose.pdf)
- 7. HM Treasury (2013)**
Autumn Statement 2013 www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/263942/35062_Autumn_Statement_2013.pdf
- 8. Cabinet Office - Performance & Innovation Group (2000)**
Winning the generation game" (www.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/generationdocument_tcm6-2218.pdf)
- 9. OECD (2004)**
Employment Outlook www.oecd.org/els/emp/32494755.pdf
- 10. ONS Press Release (2012)**
Working past state pension age nearly doubles in past 20 years www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp29904_268067.pdf
- 11. DWP (2013)**
Older Workers Statistical Information Booklet 2013 www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/264899/older-workers-statistical-information-booklet-2013.pdf
- 12. ONS Report (2013 a)**
Moving between Unemployment and Employment (www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_335141.pdf)
- 13. GOV.UK (2010)**
Second survey of employers' policies, practices and preferences relating to age (www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214453/rrep682.pdf)
- 14. ONS (2013 b).**
Middle Income Households, 1977 - 2010/11. (www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_303386.pdf)
- 15. IFS (2008)**
Releasing Jobs for the Young? Early Retirement and Youth Unemployment in the United Kingdom (www.ifs.org.uk/wps/wp1002.pdf)



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