‘Not ready for the scrapheap’
Looking for work after 50
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Age Concern believes that people aged over 50 should be able to participate fully in society and the economy, and to be fairly rewarded for so doing. Work in later life gives people the opportunity to enhance their incomes through earnings, savings and pensions. Many also find work makes an important contribution to their overall health and well-being.

Since the 1990s there has been a steady increase in the employment rate for men and women aged over 50; however there is still much to do. Employment rates for older workers remain well below those for adults aged 25 to 49\(^1\) and close to a million people aged over 50 want to work\(^2\). There are over 1.2 million people over 50 receiving Incapacity Benefits, 150,000 receiving Job Seekers’ Allowance, and more who are not claiming benefits at all\(^3\). Many older people out of work and wanting a job face considerable disadvantage, with many experiencing a combination of age discrimination, poor health and/or low skills.

The Government has introduced a range of support for people out of work, including the New Deal, the Pathways to Work programme for people on incapacity benefits, and new learning entitlements for people without qualifications. However most of the evidence shows that these initiatives are much less effective for people aged over 50 than for younger adults.

These are the statistics. At Age Concern we believe strongly in the importance of looking not just at numbers but at the people behind them. This research aimed to do just that – to find out more about the views, experiences, hopes and fears of men and women in their 50s and 60s looking for work. We wanted to find out about barriers they faced, and things that have helped to overcome them. We also wanted to find out their opinions on key specific issues such as how older job seekers could be better supported.

This report sets out the research findings and our recommendations to policy makers and service providers.

**Introduction**

2. Factors Affecting the Labour Market Participation of Older Workers, DWP, 2003
3. DWP administrative data, 2006
We asked participants to recommend one type of practical support that would in their view make a real difference to them. They said:

- A worker who could give one-on-one support to the individual, assessing their skills and experience and giving them realistic advice on potential jobs and training opportunities (this was the most popular idea)
- Action to change the attitudes of employers and/or society to employing older workers and to older people in general
- Providing psychological or emotional support for older jobseekers
- Short paid work placements or trial work periods
- Support to improve access to IT
- Regular contact and feedback from recruitment agencies
- The provision of mutual support and information groups for people over 50.

In light of these proposals and the findings of the research Age Concern’s recommendations are:

**Government departments** and **public services** providing training and employment support for people who want to work should ‘age proof’ their policies and practices to ensure they meet the needs of people over 50. Age specific monitoring, targets or incentives should be introduced to achieve a sustained focus on delivery for people of all ages.

**Jobcentre Plus and other providers** of services for older people seeking work should improve:

- The provision of psychological support
- The provision of health-related support (other than for recipients of incapacity benefits)
Recommendations

- The provision of one-to-one personalised support from a dedicated caseworker
- The provision of peer-support activities, work placements and computer facilities
- The range of vacancies on offer and the matching of jobs to the skills and experience of older clients
- Training for staff in the needs and expectations of older clients
- The age diversity of frontline workers

The **Department for Work and Pensions** should consider how to improve support for people who are ineligible for benefits or unwilling to sign on, as part of its strategy for extending working life and preventing pensioner poverty.

The **Department for Education and Skills** and the **skills sector** should re-design training provision and qualifications so they are relevant to older people changing career and to their future employers.

The **Disability Rights Commission** and the **Commission for Equality and Human Rights** should review guidance to employers regarding the design of jobs and requirements for health information in recruitment, to ensure that neither put-off people with disabilities. The commissions should also take further action to promote awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act to people with health conditions who do not consider themselves disabled.

The **Equal Opportunities Commission** and the **Commission for Equality and Human Rights** should carry out further work on the impact of the menopause on women’s working lives and provide guidance to relevant public services on this issue to help them meet the requirements of the Gender Equality Duty.

**ACAS** and the **Commission for Equality and Human Rights** should consider developing guidance to employers on age discrimination to:

- ‘Personalise’ the case for ending age discrimination by presenting evidence, such as the findings of this report, to show the difficulties skilled and employable applicants face when looking for work
- Provide advice on how to avoid discriminating against older people for being ‘over qualified’ or by making assumptions about their expectations or preferences on the basis of their previous work history
- Provide advice on avoiding discrimination against older women on the basis of both age and sex
- Provide advice on avoiding discrimination against older people with health problems on the basis of both age and disability
The aims of the research were to find out more about:

- the personal experiences, feelings and opinions of men and women aged over 50 who are looking for work
- the difficulties they have faced
- the things which have helped them.

The research took the form of six qualitative focus groups – three men’s and three women’s groups. Participants were recruited from among clients of three Age Concern employment projects in London, the North East and the South West of England.

Four fifths of the group participants were in their 50s; just over one quarter had some form of disability; and four fifths were from non-professional/manual backgrounds.

The focus groups covered a wide range of skills and job experience. Some participants had been looking for work for a very long time - some for several years – where others had been looking for only a few weeks or months. The most frequently cited reason for leaving work was redundancy. Several participants had left their work owing to health problems, while several others had left their work voluntarily in order to care for family members.

Some participants commented that they had originally faced unemployment with equanimity, but that this attitude had changed over time. For others being made redundant had been a traumatic experience with which they had found it difficult to come to terms. Both male and female participants described the effect of being out of work on their self esteem, morale and
Summary of research findings

confidence. Many also expressed severe anxiety about financial security. Only a few had experienced support in coming to terms with the psychological effects of being out of work.

Many participants were ineligible for benefits or unwilling to sign on, and were living on savings and/or being helped by family members. Many found coming into contact with the benefits system to be a confusing and traumatic process, and for some the benefit system posed a disincentive to finding work due to the fear of losing ‘passported’ benefits. It also appeared for many to be against their lifelong ethos of working for a living, although others felt that they had earned the right to such support.

The financial problems that many were experiencing were a major motivation for participants to seek work, but only a minority expressed finance as their sole motivation. The majority of men and women across focus groups felt strongly that paid work was key to leading a fulfilling life, with factors such as self esteem and personal identity, self motivation and general interest in life being particularly strongly emphasised. Several participants commented that when they were young they had never imagined what it would be like to be old, some observing that they had certainly never expected life to be so hard or to be facing such insecurity in their 50s and 60s. Participants across all groups highlighted the increased insecurity and complexity of the modern labour market, highlighting issues such as globalisation, rapid technological change, the decline of manufacturing industry and the changing role and expectations of women in relation to paid work.

Some male and female participants expressed willingness to make major changes to their circumstances in order to gain work, such as relocating or self employment, but others highlighted practical or psychological barriers. Training and education was a more popular aspect of change, with many participants keen to take up opportunities, but several raised concerns about access to meaningful training that addresses the real needs of individuals and employers rather than ‘ticking boxes’. While some wished to continue to achieve their previous job/income level, several felt ready to ‘take a step down the ladder’ in order to get work. Some positively desired a less stressful or physically demanding work environment as they grew older, and expressed frustration at their inability to find work matching their changed expectations/needs. Some participants were willing to consider doing voluntary work, although others expressed scepticism, describing voluntary work as ‘something for nothing’.

Many participants described how health issues had affected their experience of the workplace and impinged on their ability to seek work. Some described how the effect of age and increasing ill health, or the effect of the type of work they had been doing, meant that they now needed to change direction in the workplace. Some described the limits placed upon them by conditions such as diabetes or the effects of workplace injuries, and their fear that they would find it difficult to find an appropriate job. Several participants described their fear of the ‘health section’ on application forms. Few reported having had any specific support in relation to the effect of their health issues on their ability to look for work. Some women highlighted the menopause and its ‘hidden’ effects on women in the workplace.
Summary of research findings

Strong themes emerged across focus groups in terms of people’s experiences of searching and applying for jobs. Participant after participant told of being advised/required to apply for jobs that they knew were not suitable for them, and of multiple rejections usually without feedback or even a reply. Transport was also a barrier, particularly the associated costs, and the difficulty of accessing interviews and training courses. All groups felt that employers’ attitude to their age was a key factor in their difficulties in finding a job. Some had been told that they were too expensive and/or over-qualified for certain roles or felt they were perceived as a threat. Several participants stated that they now left their qualifications off their CVs. Many participants unprompted used terms such as ‘ageism’ or ‘age discrimination’ to describe their experiences, and this issue was usually raised in groups very early on by the participants themselves. Some participants said they had lied, or were considering lying, about their age. Awareness of the new age legislation was high and some expressed hope that it would improve matters. Several women highlighted that older women face particular barriers. Some participants highlighted gaps in their experience and skills as a factor in their lack of success in finding work. Overall, both men and women expressed – equally strongly – their desire to get back to work.

While the attitude and behaviour of employers were in general felt by groups to be the key drivers of their negative experience, many were also critical of the job seeking system in which they found themselves. Although some participants had positive experiences of Jobcentre Plus workers, many more were strongly negative, usually less on the grounds of behaviour of individuals than about the system itself. Several felt that Jobcentre Plus employees were insufficiently trained and too young to be able to understand and meet their needs. There was a strong feeling across groups about the quality and/or suitability of the jobs available at Jobcentre Plus, and several participants in the North East reported feeling intimidated on Jobcentre Plus premises. Several participants across groups also had negative perceptions of recruitment agencies.

More positive examples of support were given about individual projects set up to provide one-on-one tailored advice. In general groups felt that this ‘personal touch’, help with CVs, matching skills and experiences to the needs of employers, or identifying their training gaps and helping them plan to address them, was what they needed. Some participants stated that they would like to have information about local ‘age-friendly’ employers. They also welcomed facilities enabling them to make more effective job searches than possible at Jobcentre Plus.
The focus groups covered a **wide range of skills and job experience**. Participants’ previous work included:

- teachers and trainers, including IT trainers
- clerical workers
- retail workers (shop floor and management)
- manual workers such as building and warehouse work
- skilled workers eg brush making, heating engineer and electrician
- publishing
- paid care work
- posts in publicly funded agencies
- pub management
- engineering
- graphic design
- musicians
- business management
- insurance
- photography
- media
- merchant navy.

Some participants had been looking for work for a **number of years** – some for several years – where others had been looking for only a **few weeks or months**.

The most frequently cited reason for leaving work was redundancy, as a result of closures, downsizing, restructuring or relocation. Several participants had left their work owing to **health problems**. In some cases these had been brought on by their work (for example the effect of continuous lifting, accident at work, or work-related stress). Several others (mainly but not only women) had left their work voluntarily owing to **caring responsibilities** – for example, in order to bring up children or care for a sick sibling or parent – and were attempting to re-enter the workforce. Some were looking for work after the end of short term contracts.
Some participants commented that they had originally faced unemployment with equanimity, but that this had changed over time – for example as they experienced boredom and/or increasing fears that they would not be able to get another job.

When I finished work first I thought ‘well, that’s alright, I’m going to finish work now and not work again’ …But after a little while you think ‘well, perhaps I could be doing something’, cause it’s like every day’s the same isn’t it like?

Male South West

[being made redundant] very much felt like a relief at first, it was ‘right it’s out of my hands now – I haven’t given up the job, the job’s gone, oh thank God what a relief – now I can just look for a job … a nice little job’. … But it didn’t work out. …

Female North East

For others being made redundant had been a traumatic experience with which they had found it difficult to come to terms.

I’m like a fish out of water, because I’ve never prepared myself for unemployment… if you’re in work for a very long time, and you’re my age, nearly 60 … the trouble is you’re going out to a world which to somebody like me, essentially a factory worker, it’s an alien world, everything in it is alien to you.

Male London

[redundancy] was a terrible shock. I don’t know if I’ve really recovered.

Male North East
Both male and female participants described the effect of being out of work on their self esteem, morale and confidence, although self-confidence was an issue particularly emphasised in each of the female groups, with females in the South West and North East groups describing the knock on effects on their ability to do everyday tasks such as housework. Men and women in the South West and North East groups emphasised feelings of isolation and depression.

It certainly hits you when it happens. For a while you feel inadequate. … I get situations where I wake up in the morning and I think quite frankly I can’t be bothered to do anything today. … So you’ve got to remotivate yourself.

You’ve worked for 40 years on something in employment, and then you’ve got to say ‘well I’ve got no flippin’ chance at this’, and you can’t go and tell people, ‘well, what’s your occupation? – well actually I’m an unemployed person, you know’.

Males South West

I used to be confident, I used to be very confident … if I look back I can see, I’ve done that, I’ve had that kind of job. But now I’m terrified, and I feel like I’m setting myself up for a fall each time. …

I was more organised at work … I was far better at doing me housework than what I am now. … I’ve always said, if I wasn’t at work my house would be tidier. It’s not…

Females North East

Only a few had experienced support in coming to terms with the psychological effects of being out of work, with these stating that this had been helpful.

I came across an organisation for older people just after I’d been made redundant, and I was just so pleased to find them online, because I felt incredibly alone, although I have got a husband. But it was the whole thing of, you know, being chucked out.

Female South West

Many participants, across all focus groups but particularly in the North East, also expressed severe anxiety about financial insecurity, as people went through their savings and/or redundancy money to pay basic bills.

You’re not motivated so you actually become slower. … being off you actually stagnate, and I find myself waking up on a night with anxiety … and I think ‘where’s the money coming from?’ … if it wasn’t for my parents actually lending me that little bit extra I would have had the house taken off me months ago. … you lose your confidence and you get slow at thinking … and I find by God, I’m really boring.

Female North East

Men and women across the focus groups expressed the feeling that being out of work went against the basic values and norms of people of their generation, who had been taught to work and be self sufficient.

I’ve always worked, from the age of 15. … Everything, the finances and the self esteem, it just goes down the pan, the lot.

Female London
**Research findings: Being out of work**

We’re all working class people, and that’s the way we’ve been brought up. You earn a living and you pay your way, and that’s how our life’s been, you know.  
**Male South West**

Many of the participants in the groups, some of whom had been unemployed for long periods of time, were either **not entitled or unwilling to sign on** and were living off savings and/or loans, some of them living very frugally as a result.

I’ve been living off savings last two year.  
It’s gradually disappearing.  
**Male North East**

The [TV] licence fee’s expensive so without work, it’s an expense that I do without … I have been officially without work for about 4 or 5 years … I don’t get any kind of benefit whatever, I don’t have a pension coming in or anything, rather raided my savings which I’m doing now, and my life has been drastically reduced.  
**Male London**

Several participants across focus groups expressed resentment at the **perceived unfairness of the benefits system**, seen as penalising people such as married men or those who had worked all their life and thereby accrued capital.

I know so many people who don’t work or don’t do anything because they don’t want to work basically, and I object to that very much, and nothing seems to be done about it. … it’s my savings which are probably too high. … [but] I’ve never cost anybody money in that way…  
**Male London**

Maybe it’s a bit wrong, but you see a lot of people who live on benefits all their life, and you work really hard and when you really need it you ask for a little bit, and they say I’m sorry you’ve got £1 over the limit, or you can walk three blocks instead of one block, so you’re not ill enough. It’s just the feeling I was left with, it makes you a little bit bitter.  
**Female London**

Feeling that being out of work went against the basic values and norms of people of their generation, who had been taught to work and be self sufficient.
Research findings: Being out of work

For some the benefits system posed a disincentive to finding work, for example the fear of losing ‘passported’ benefits, or the complications caused by finding temporary work while on benefits.

It’s going to have to be a hell of a well paid job. It costs me £60 a month for me medication if I got a job.
Female North East

Because I was teaching, every time I gave them a pay slip they generated another ten page letter … I would be almost suicidal simply because, you know, I just couldn’t cope … with this paperwork, you know, with these pages and pages of what seemed to be gibberish…
Female South West

Some participants across the groups particularly warned of the penalties of being self employed for a period of time, in terms of consequent loss of financial support from the Government.

I was self employed for six years and we ran our own store … they didn’t pay the stamp. They didn’t tell me until after I’d finished that I was supposed to have been paying a higher stamp.
Female South West

Some participants stressed the importance of getting to know the system, with a few particularly emphasising the beneficial effect of coming into contact with people who had taken the trouble to explain their rights and to treat them with dignity.

I must admit I know quite a few of the wrinkles and I know what to ask for. But there is a lot of people that go in there and they haven’t got a clue … but if you ask for certain things you can get them.

This guy took an interest and worked it out on the computer that I’ll get £203 a week on minimum wage. Now if he hadn’t taken an interest I wouldn’t have known that. … He was very helpful, this guy. He took an interest, he seemed to want to help. He did a bit extra.
Males North East

My experience [claiming incapacity benefit] was extremely scary … but I felt I was treated with a lot of dignity … I think it has a lot to do with the person you meet, doesn’t it?
Female London

However most participants had more negative experiences and felt confused and discouraged, many stating that they felt treated simply as a number rather than as a human being. Several participants across focus groups found their contacts with the benefits system to be complex, bureaucratic, and/or demeaning.

It’s a long time since I was on the dole, you just went in and signed and said you were willing and available for work if you could get a job, and that was it. Now you have to say well I’m going to write after a job every week, I’m going to phone after a job every week, and then I’m going to check the paper and I’m going to go in and phone this place twice a week. … that part … got to us a little bit, so I’m having to get used to that, it’s like a trauma. … plus we were brought up to work … to me it’s a
I should have gone immediately and signed on and not hung about. But I didn’t want to get into the whole bureaucracy thing and that nightmare. And signing on is almost like an admission of failure. But I would advise anyone just to sign on immediately.

Female North East

I got to a stage where the people with that authority made me feel about this big like … and you’re almost frightened to ask for help … because of what they think of you. And they’ve got that type of power, you know, over what to do with your life …

Female South West

Several participants in both the male and female North East groups also highlighted feeling intimidated by other Jobcentre Plus users and/or by security staff at the door described by some as being like ‘bouncers’.

Male North East

I go down there and I want to hide…

Some participants chose not to claim benefits, although some others felt that they were entitled to and had indeed earned this assistance. This issue came up across groups but was particularly discussed by the female group in London:

Female London

I have been living without the dole for months and months because I will not go down to somebody to have somebody decide whether or not I’m entitled to a measly amount of money.

I didn’t go in for any claims … I look at myself and say ‘no, I’m not a failure, why should I be living on the dole?’

In the church they were not asking for my life history … these ones they want your life history, you cough, they want to know, you sneeze, they want to know.

This participant was of Black African heritage, potentially highlighting cultural/faith-related attitudes towards the provision of assistance as an issue that may need further exploration.
Research findings: Why over 50s want to work

The financial problems that many participants were experiencing were a major motivation for people to seek work, with some needing to pay basic bills and others needing to build up a pension or meet financial commitments. Many participants, therefore stressed that looking for work was a matter of real necessity.

I had my own business for 10 years … and I was headhunted to go and work for [name of national company] … then I went to [an international company] where I was assistant manager … [after redundancy] I wasn’t able to get any money on the dole, and at the moment I’m pushing magazines through the door … my savings are just going, and I’m very concerned. … People who have retired on a good pension don’t realise how fortunate they are. I expect now to have to work until I’m 70, and I want a job.

Male North East

Some people can call it a day, some people can’t. … just because you’re older don’t mean to say you’ve got a pension or you’ve got a house … I did actually start paying for a pension when they said about all these pension things, but … if you’re out of work, I was disabled, you couldn’t keep paying for a pension … I had the opportunity to get my money back so I thought I might as well get the money back.

Male South West

I live on my own. I mean and in the country, if I don’t support myself, I don’t have a car. And what bus service … there just isn’t one.

Female South West
Research findings: Why over 50s want to work

However only a minority expressed finance as their absolute sole motivation. Although a few felt that they would have plenty of other means to occupy their time and engage their interest if they did not need to earn an income, the majority of male and female participants felt strongly that paid work was key to leading a fulfilling life, many participants across groups stressing issues around personal identity, self esteem/motivation and general interest in life.

You tend to start to close in and become less alive. There’s something about getting up and getting out … it’s just that liveliness as well.

When I was working, I was important. … all of a sudden you’re nothing.

Males London

It’s only money, it’s not the forefront … you haven’t got to get up in the morning thinking about what are you going to do? … when you’re 65 you expect to do that, not when you’re 50…

Male North East

There’s a lot of pride in actually getting that job, and self satisfaction … for my pride, for my self esteem, I’ve got to get myself work.

Male South West

You don’t want to think that you’re a waste of space … my sister and brothers they all have been working and I don’t want [my son] to feel there’s something wrong with me.

Female London

Some also highlighted the social aspect of work and the desire to continue to exercise their skills.

There’s a social aspect to work. You’re with a whole lot of people. You’re meeting people … and maybe otherwise you’d be at home alone.

Female South West

The reason I want to work is … I’m 60, I’m still fit and I’m just not ready for the scrap heap yet. It’s as simple as that.

Male North East

A participant in the male North East group felt that finding work was a particularly important issue for men:

I think working is something we’re made for as men … there’s nothing worse than a man not having a job if he wants one. … the group you’re having this afternoon is ladies … well, they’ll have different views.

In fact, however, this was not the case – there was little gender difference in this respect. The main themes for wishing to work, as set out above, were emphasised by both women and men - including, particularly but not only for the many female participants who were divorced/single/widowed, sheer financial necessity.

I’ve been divorced a number of years so I’ve been the breadwinner.

The whole family, we always worked. My husband paid the utility bills, the mortgage … It was up to me to pay food and clothing for the family, shoes etc. Believe me you can’t feed a family of five on £57 a week, it’s impossible, it really is. So the redundancy money goes. Once it’s gone then what, what do you do? You know, then you worry about pensions. I mean I’ve got 15 years to go to
Research findings: Why over 50s want to work

Retirement, I haven’t paid a pension for 2 years. What are we facing in retirement?

**Females North East**

Both male and female groups expressed a strong desire to continue to look for work, despite the setbacks they were experiencing. A couple of participants in the North East groups stated that they were on the verge of giving up and asking the doctor to ‘sign them off sick’ until pensionable age. A male participant in the South West group felt that he would survive whether or not he got a job. However these views were very much in a minority. Participants across the focus groups were almost unanimous in their desire to carry on looking for work, on the grounds of financial necessity and/or the strength of their wish to work.

I won’t lay down and die, because I think basically that’s what they want you to do, you’ve had it now, just lay down and die ... because you’re old. My daughter actually said to me, ‘I don’t know why you’re worried, Mum’ she said, ‘you’ve had your life, you’ve had a good life, now it’s time to sit in a rocking chair … doing some knitting.’ I went, ‘I don’t think so…’

**Female London**

A few participants in the London female and North East male focus groups saw voluntary work as a means of keeping older people busy and enabling them to find fulfilment by putting something back into society. A woman in the London group expressed vividly the positive effect on her own well being of becoming involved in voluntary work:

You can’t give up but I thought the only thing I could allow really, until I get something, is to go and work for charity ... and I’m feeling really great at that for the time being ... I see people living on the streets, who have got nothing ... I’ve been compensated by that. ... I really do think we need to help people who are worse off than ourselves.

Some others however raised the fact that they still needed to earn an income, or were sceptical feeling that voluntary work was exploitative and providing ‘something for nothing’:

I’m teaching IT every week [as a volunteer] ... I will do the volunteer but I do need to earn money...

I will not go out and do voluntary work, I will not do it ... whatever you get in this life you work for, nobody has ever gone out and helped me so I’ve got no intentions of going out there.

**Females London**

All these [voluntary organisation] top cats make a fortune, and you’re going and doing it for nothing! No way.

**Male North East**

...
Participants were asked to compare their experience of being over 50 with what they had expected when they were young. Several commented that when they were young they had never really imagined what it would be like to be old, with many expressing bitterness at the perceived failure of employers and people younger than themselves to appreciate the skills and wisdom they had gained since then.

You haven’t got … that swiftness that young people have … but you’ve got a lot more sensibilities and understanding of people, you know.

Female North East

If I was to go in there again, I would employ someone 50+, because you know damn well you can trust them, they’re reliable. Get a young ‘un in and you pull your hair out.

Male North East

Some observed that they had certainly never expected life to be so hard or to be facing such insecurity in their 50s and 60s.

It came terribly quickly and, you know, I never thought this would be happening to me. … I didn’t think it would be so hard to get work if … through no fault of your own you came out of work.

Female South West

I just didn’t think that I would be on the dole at this time [of life] … there’s just no jobs about … I didn’t think that I’d have to go through this at this time of life.

Female North East

Research findings:
Experiences of and attitudes to change
Participants across all groups highlighted the **increased insecurity and complexity of the modern labour market**. Many contrasted it to their youth when work was perceived as having been plentiful, and finding and changing jobs relatively easy and straightforward.

You’ve got to be available for seven days a week. You’ve got to literally sit by the phone and they can ring you up at any time day and night and ask you to come and do a small amount of work for them… it’s rather unsettling if you’re used to just going to work in the morning, you get home at night, have your dinner and watch television or whatever you do.

**Male South West**

Fixed term contract … is the way things are going unfortunately. I’ve spent since 1999 I think until now constantly worrying. Six months into the contract, ‘God where’s the next job going to be coming from?’ … The biggest problem is the sort of insecurity there is these days. A lack of decent jobs. … I was quite shocked to find how few jobs there are out there, even if you’re prepared to take the minimum wage.

**Female North East**

For some male participants modern skills training contrasted badly with the apprenticeship system of their youth, perceived as a more meaningful and effective process.

They go to skill college and within 6 months they’re a tradesman like, you know. 6 years I had to learn that.

**Male South West**

A few participants raised the impact of immigration and/or globalisation on the job market and their own job opportunities.

Now because of European rules all my qualifications are out of date. They’re no use to me. … it’s illegal for me to work now …

**Male South West**

The time came when all the other companies decided that they would find it preferable to go to China … so we had a series of redundancies, bit by bit.

**Male London**

These Polish people have turned up and are doing the jobs.

**Male North East**

The London group particularly stressed the impact of **rapid technological change** on the ability of older people to find work and operate effectively in the workplace, while the North East groups focussed on the **decline of manufacturing industry** and the general **lack of employment opportunities** locally. The female North East group also highlighted the **changing role and expectations of women** in relation to paid work.

I honestly thought ‘well ship building’s there for life isn’t it’.

**Male North East**

That’s the jobs you get offered in the North East. Call centres. They’ve taken all the ship yards and the mines and everything away, and even for the men it’s call centre work. … when we were
Research findings: Experiences of and attitudes to change

younger we were told to get a man who had a good job. He would support you. Didn’t matter too much about qualifications because you’d be in the house looking after the children and helping them get through school. And you’d be working part-time, you wouldn’t need a full time job. But now it’s totally different. … I made sure that me daughter got a good job because she might sometime in the future get divorced like me. And it’s harder again to be a woman divorced with a mortgage, and you’re needing a job and elderly.

Female North East

The older generation … [has] been so wrapped up in their work for years and years and years you don’t realise what is exactly going on outside of your job. People have qualifications, different types of certificates which you need nowadays for work, and until you’re actually made redundant you don’t realise that you need all these qualifications…

Male South West

A few participants felt a sense of no longer fitting into the workplace as they grew older.

The last job I had was in catering … I left it because I found it too fast paced and quite a young environment, and I felt very much like a fish out of water, really.

Female London

Some male and female participants expressed a willingness to make major changes to their circumstances in order to gain work, for example telling how they were considering/taking steps to change career, travel/relocate or become self employed. However some highlighted practical barriers, such as the ability of people to change direction completely at this stage of their life, or school age children.

[completely] retraining is really quite unrealistic… by the time you’d acquire the skills I’d be in my retirement. … it’s not an option.

Male London

Some, particularly women, highlighted psychological barriers such as lack of confidence or willingness to take risks.

The problem is I’m not very confident. … I’ve never been self employed and I don’t want to be self employed. … I’ve got a real phobia about being self employed.

Female South West

I’m seriously thinking about self employment, because I’m just terrified of being made redundant again… I’m wondering whether self employment is the answer to the over 50 person. … So that’s maybe where we need more support … Take us into self employment, show us what to do. … but … It’s not easy to take risks … when I was 30 I was quite happy to take the risks. It’s frightening now because … you just know things can go wrong.

Male North East

Two female participants in the London group who had moved 40 years ago to Britain from other countries, and who had travelled/lived abroad, expressed their changed attitude to risk in response to another participant who was prepared to go abroad to find work:
Research findings: Experiences of and attitudes to change

I’d like to be able to get enough courage to take a job abroad, but for some reason I’m feeling a little bit afraid, I don’t know why.

I’m thinking, oh my God, at my age if anything happens how am I going to cope? … the young-sters can adapt easily, but when you reach my age … to adapt in these places, you know, that’s the fear.

For many, although not all participants, undertaking training/education was a change which they were very willing to consider and indeed many were planning to attend or had been on courses, particularly but not only in relation to gaining IT skills.

Once upon a time I could have probably done a receptionist’s job or something but nowadays you do need computer skills even with that.

Before computers came along … I could walk into any job. … that’s why I’ve had to do this [IT] course. It’s the only way I’m going to get back into the workforce.

Females London

Some highlighted however the importance of tailored training in relation to areas such as IT, taking into account the different starting points among older people who varied considerably in their knowledge of and comfort levels. Some of the participants in the London and South West groups were themselves IT trainers or proficient users, while others had had no familiarity at all with computers. One participant in the London group was finding that the course he was attending was pitched too far over his head and was increasing his anxieties:

I remember in the company I worked in, I’d see all these things coming in and I asked the chap what they were … and he said, ‘they’re PCs’. I said,’ what are PCs?’ … I’m doing this employability course … the only one who’s the idiot of the group is me … I’m trying to grapple with something that has a mind of its own.

Others emphasised that rapid technological developments required people constantly to update knowledge, rather than merely gaining basic skills.

There’s new stuff coming out all the time, so if you’ve been out of work and you haven’t used a computer for a year, when you go back you’re immediately behind… I think it’s not an age thing at all, I think it’s an access thing…

Male London

Some participants were pleased with training/education they had received, and found it to be a positive experience.

I think it’s worth doing, because it does keep you young doing these skills…

Male London
However some felt that the courses on offer to unemployed people did not adequately match their real needs and/or the jobs available. Some perceived a ‘tick box’ culture to meet Government targets rather than meeting the real needs of individuals and employers, while others expressed disappointment that their new skills and knowledge had not led to employment.

All what I learnt … by going back in to higher education to better yourself in the future – ‘oh wow, it’s took us four year, God I’m surely going to get a good job now’. But like, you know … I’ve applied for four posts nearly a year ago and I’m still waiting.

Female North East

The Job Centre, they have compulsorily made me go on a course, a 3 week course, which I thought was a complete waste of time and of money. Money which I could have utilised better for my training purposes.

Female South West

You know, you apply for a job – what experience have you got? … I did the plumbing course – it was a fortnight. … I can do a few odd jobs around the house, but that’s as far as it goes. … that’s a false promise. You know, the Government say ‘oh well we’ll put a few courses on’ … but I mean people come along and you’re not qualified … it’s false, it’s false, it’s just a complete waste of time.

Male North East

Some highlighted practical barriers such as the ability of unemployed people to fund courses, or Jobcentre Plus procedural barriers.

The first thing [at the Job Centre] is well you’ve got to wait 6 months before you can receive any support with training. … This 6 month block was definitely a block … the longer you go on in to being unemployed, then obviously the harder it gets for employers to take you back on then.

Female North East

I need to train up [to expand existing beauty therapy/massage skills to use them to gain income] … but it’s expensive, and I’ve got to get a job to pay for it.

Females South West

One participant in the South West group told how he was a qualified heating engineer, who had subsequently changed career. Owing to changes in the law he needed to take a course costing a few thousand pounds to enable him to be legally registered to work as an engineer again. As an unemployed person he could not afford this, and expressed extreme frustration that the Job Centre was prepared to keep him on the dole for two years and fund what were perceived as ineffective mechanisms such as ‘useless’ courses and mentors, but not take the one practical step which would enable him to go out and earn his own living.
My course will only take a few months … but they won’t fund it. Yet they’ll send me on a course to learn how to get a job, how to speak to people, how to go to interviews, how to shoot paintballing … but they will not pay for practical job costs. … I had a mentor which I got through this careers development at the Job Centre … There was nothing he could do. … One of the most annoying things is when you look in the paper and you’re looking for an engineering qualification, just updating what I already have, and you can go on these courses, you know, for acupuncture, you name it … it’s a disgrace really…we are capable of putting money back into the country, but not going on cake making. So why doesn’t the Government cater for us. We’re not past it yet.

Although a few, mainly professional, participants still felt that they needed to concentrate on achieving their previous income level in order to meet their financial commitments and/or their personal aspirations, several male and female participants told how their expectations had changed and that they were prepared to ‘take a step down the ladder’ if that was what it took to get work. This was a stronger theme in the North East and South West groups, in which some participants became quite moved or upset as they discussed their experience of being out of work, than in the London groups where in general participants seemed more upbeat.

You just keep going and going, and you think ‘well, I’ll go for something a bit less under myself’. And then you get to a stage where you end up sweeping the roads.

Male South West

You start off ‘well that’s the salary I want’, and it starts to come down … and then you get to the point, ‘well, minimum wage is better than the dole, I’ll take that.’

Female North East

For some this was a deliberate strategy, in that they felt that they could no longer meet the physical and/or mental demands of their previous employment, with some expressing frustration at their inability to find work appropriate to their changing expectations/needs as they grew older.

The last, what I would call a proper job I had two years ago I was earning a very good salary. I also wasn’t sleeping at nights. … [after redundancy] I thought right, I’ll just get a job, a nice little job. Go to work, put in your hours, come home, leave it behind. Great. But it didn’t work out…

Females North East

If you’ve got a degree, if you’ve got some languages, if you’ve got good work experience, they assume that you want to be up here on a fantastic salary. And they don’t accept when you tell them that ‘actually no, where I am at the moment I don’t want that.’ … and they think there’s something wrong with you. …

Male London

At my age my imperative is to live as long as possible, and to be in good health. I don’t want to go back to a stressful environment, because that could ruin my health.

‘Not ready for the scrap heap’ Looking for work after 50
Research findings:
Health issues

Many participants across all focus groups described how health issues had affected their **experience of the workplace** and impinged on their ability to seek work.

I used to work through lots of health issues, you know, push myself, push myself. I physically couldn’t do it now. … I can’t physically stretch myself like that now. … And I think that’s one thing that bosses might think of, you know.

**Female North East**

I can’t work on anymore because of a back injury … I can’t look for different sorts of work what I’m used to doing like bricklaying and kerb laying … I can no longer do it. So I’m just looking for little part-time jobs and that’s it.

**Male South West**

Some described how the effect of age and increasing ill health, or the effect of the type of work they had been doing, meant that they now needed to **change direction** in the workplace. For example many reported muscular and/or back problems, sometimes as a result of lifting, for example in warehouses or care homes, or carrying large amounts of books as a teacher.

Some described the **limits placed upon them** by conditions such as diabetes or the effects of workplace injuries, and their fear that they would find it difficult to find an appropriate job. A few described how being unemployed and the frustrations of the process of jobseeking had exacerbated pre-existing feelings of **depression or stress-related conditions**. A male participant in the South West felt that exacerbating further his physical difficulties, caused by ‘overdoing it’ on his previous job, would be preferable to remaining unemployed after years out of work.
Several participants across the focus groups described their fear of the ‘health section’ on application forms. Many felt that filling in this section – even if the health issue in question did not affect their ability to do the actual job, and/or they had a good record in terms of sick leave - might mean that they would be automatically discounted by employers.

I’ve become diabetic, and of course when you fill in these forms … well I’ve never been on the sick for 10 and a half years. You know, once you become diabetic they put you on all kinds of medication just as a precaution. … you have to take them as a precaution because they say you’re at risk. But I thought ‘well how do I fill in the form?’

**Female North East**

One of the things I’ve found is even if you look at things like kitchen assistant in a care home, they will ask you have you had any time off sick … have you had any operations … are you on medication. So absolutely they seem to use that as a way of filtering.

**Female South West**

Then you read that last page [health section] and say oh no … so I don’t even bother. I phone them up first and tell them about the health, and they say alright send it back.

**Male South West**

Few participants reported having had any specific support in relation to the effect of their health issues on their ability to look for work, but those who had had welcomed it. A London participant described how the Age Concern project worker had helped her by discussing with her how best to present her periods of illness-related absence from the workplace on her CV. A male participant in the North East with severe health conditions felt there had been real benefits from the support given him by the Shaw Trust, an organisation working with people with disabilities. He had received a specific health/employment assessment and ongoing support, such as being sent on training courses and assistance in jobseeking.

I was there for about two weeks and they said you can’t handle the physical work … there was a mix up with the agency … I thought it was a desk job I was going to.
I found that confidence went for me. The fact that I’ve got loads now, well that’s because I’m 10 years away from menopause onwards. … that knocked me completely … it took a lot out of me. … [but] there is life after it. … I used to have to go to a lot of meetings, and all this flooding would carry on, and I was so embarrassed. So I felt that, you know, I had to engineer a redundancy. It was a nightmare. And, you know, when I went back to work some 6 months later … I took a 50% pay cut. … The major issue was that I could no longer do the job to the degree required because of the menopause.

My speed in thinking is nowhere near as fast as it was before.

I just spend four days at home, Saturday to Tuesday, because of flooding … so I have to rethink what I’m going to do.

It’s hidden. … You think, am I normal going through this?

Female North East

Women in the North East group, and particularly in the South West group, where this led to an emotional discussion, highlighted the menopause as a key issue affecting older women. They saw this as affecting them and their friends both in the workplace and in terms of society’s attitude towards older women in general. Some felt that the menopause remained a hidden issue and that the needs of women workers during this key transitional time in their life remained unrecognised and unmet, one participant contrasting it to the efforts made by employers to accommodate the needs of younger childbearing women in relation to childcare. As a result participants felt the implications for women’s ability to work effectively and their self esteem could be severe.

It’s like prejudice not only of women but even women overweight and also age. And that tends to happen when you go through the menopause … and I think that’s all against us women, never mind about the men. But I think it’s menopausal, and it’s age and, you know, being a woman really.

Female North East

Females South West
Strong themes emerged across focus groups in terms of people’s experiences of searching and applying for jobs. Participant after participant told of multiple rejections usually without feedback or even a reply (the lack of replies being something that particularly upset people across all groups).

I’m not saying you’re sitting by the phone, or waiting for the postman, but to an extent you are! … It’s very discourteous for employers not to respond.

Male South West

I’m just on tenterhooks waiting every day for a letter or phone call, or some correspondence. Tomorrow, yeah.

Female North East

The London and South West groups strongly felt that potential employers’ attitudes to their age was a key factor in their difficulties in finding a job, while the North East groups also felt this very important but stressed the general lack of jobs in the area for people, whatever their age. Many participants unprompted used terms such as ‘ageism’ or ‘age discrimination’ to describe their experience, and this issue was usually raised in groups very early on by the participants themselves. Some participants said that they had lied, or were considering lying, about their age, and some expressed the hope that the new legislation might be able to improve matters, though groups often felt that employers would be able to find a way around it eg by asking for a photograph or birth certificate.

If you’re being discriminated against, how do you prove it?

Female North East

Research findings:
Applying for jobs
A few participants in the female South West group cited evidence of age discrimination:

I decided I’ll phone up the head of the training organization … whom I had met a number of years ago … ‘Well how old are you?’ ‘59.’ ‘Oh you’re much too old.’ So that was it, done. End of story.

I’ve been told once that even though I don’t look 55, on paper I am. So that’s like a punch in the stomach really, because if you’ve got the will to work and they say that to you, it makes you feel not so good. … It was reorganization … in an airport, and they wanted young people to work meeting the public. But because I was not so young I was made redundant. And that was the reason they gave me.

Most participants however felt age discrimination to exist by implication, feeling that there could be no other explanation for the fact that it was so hard to find work, particularly those who had previously found it relatively easy to move between jobs. Some also cited indirect evidence, such as firms who had turned them down having asked their age at the end of interviews, or using only younger people in their advertising.

I applied to [a company] for an interview … I had the skills and everything they were asking for – didn’t get it. My daughter … no qualifications or anything … no work experience in anything … she’s in.

Female North East

Age is treated like a disability, you want to hide your age. … I’ve been asked my age at interviews at the end, ‘what’s your date of birth?’ and then ‘oh’. And nothing.

I went for this job and this guy … looked me up and down and went, ‘you do know there are stairs in this building, don’t you? … And would you be able to carry files?’ … Ageism is there 100% as far as I’m concerned…

Females London
Research findings: Applying for jobs

I was made redundant … there was … contro-
versy over the people who they picked because
nowadays you sometimes think when you get
made redundant ‘last in, first out’, and that wasn’t
the case, it was a lot of people who had actually
worked for the company a long, long time that
were actually made redundant. … I’ve had quite a
few interviews, but … just as soon as you walk in
the door you feel it…
Female North East

I’ve never had a problem getting a job before, now
I’m struggling.
Male North East

One participant in London also felt that ethnicity had
been an issue for him, and several women highlighted
that older women faced particular barriers, for example in terms of social attitudes and stereotypes, issues
around the menopause (see above) or caring responsi-
bilities. However these participants nonetheless felt that
age was the most significant factor in terms of the
perceived discrimination they faced.

Because I’ve looked after my family is my role,
‘you shouldn’t be doing that, you should be work-
ing’. But there’s nobody else to do it, you can’t
leave your father dying…
Females London

I’m 50 … I’ve got 3 children, 18, 16 and 9 …
I’ve got the combined problems of perhaps
employers seeing me as being over the hill but
at the same time still having childcare problems.

You don’t hear of the women going and getting …
jobs like new industry … it’s not for women, it’s
for men.
Females North East

Some participants in the South West and North East
groups also raised transport as a particular barrier,
whether the difficulties of accessing interviews/training
courses when having to rely on very limited bus serv-
ces, or transport costs such as bus/train fares or
petrol.

Some participants highlighted gaps in their experi-
ence and skills as a factor in their lack of success in
finding work, while several had found that they were
over qualified. For some this was related to their
potential income levels. A participant in London who
had worked as a shop assistant all her life found that
she was now ‘too expensive’ to hire, while a teacher
in the South West who had undertaken a post
successfully on a year-long contract was discouraged
from applying for it on a permanent basis:

The head teacher said ‘we love having you here …
but I can hire two teachers for the price of you.’
Female South West

Several participants stated that they now left their
qualifications off their CV, with many feeling that their
skills and experience meant that they were seen as a
potential threat by employers and/or colleagues.
negative experience, many were also critical of the job seeking system in which they found themselves. Although some participants had positive experiences of useful advice (e.g., on how to get bank charges paid or income calculations), and polite, respectful treatment by Jobcentre Plus workers, many more were strongly negative. This was usually less on the grounds of behaviour of individuals than about the system itself, perceived as being impersonal and remote, about box ticking and statistics rather than providing a service genuinely useful to individuals and employers.

Some felt that the job recruitment system was generally unfair—too often a charade with jobs advertised already earmarked for an insider.

The disappointment is they have all these jobs and they fill you full of hope as you apply, and you find they’ve either been filled, or it’s a shoe-in job.

They’re just going through the motions … the people are marked … you just turn up to make the numbers up.

Males North East

While some participants assumed that they had more hope of fair treatment in public sector jobs owing to equal opportunities policies, others, particularly in the North East groups, felt that unfair treatment was more likely in the public sector where insiders were deemed to be favoured or where organizations were perceived as seeking to tick boxes e.g., diversity targets.

Some participants felt that personal networks were the best means of gaining employment, some pointing out that this could particularly tell against unemployed older people who could quickly become isolated.

While the attitude and behaviour of employers were in general felt by groups to be the key drivers of their
Research findings: Applying for jobs

They’re quite young some of them and they’ve very little experience of life. You need somebody more mature, more caring.

Female London

It’s very prejudiced I feel when you go in [to the Job Centre]. It’s not very helpful towards older people. … what they need is older people working there.

Female North East

There was a strong feeling across groups about the quality and/or suitability for them of the jobs at the Jobcentre Plus. This was a general feeling but a few also raised the particular lack of appropriate support for professional people.

Male South West

Some of [the jobs] are totally unsuitable … all they want to try and do is to get you into a job, therefore they give you jobs, just so from their point of view they can be seen to be doing something.

Male South West

Several participants across groups also had negative perceptions of recruitment agencies, in terms of infrequent or complete lack of communication from them after registering, and/or their inability to match them realistically against jobs.

I said ‘how the hell does she think I’ll have a chance of getting this job?’ [in a laboratory] … I couldn’t believe the answer – ‘well you’ve washed glasses in the pub before haven’t you?’ … I got a letter saying ‘sorry you’re not qualified’. And I was going to phone and say ‘I knew that!' 

Male North East

They’re a complete waste of time, all they want to do is get your name down. … And when you look at these jobs they’re the same jobs you’ve been looking at every flipping month.

Male South West

The lack of realistic advice and support available to them was raised by many participants, some giving examples of being sent by Jobcentre Plus or recruitment agencies to apply for inappropriate posts.
The way they’re doing [the ‘dole’ system] now I find not very clever because I’m going after jobs that I cannot even do!

Female North East

Some stated that they would like to have information about local ‘age friendly’ employers but none said that this was currently available to them. Some felt that agencies sometimes shared negative attitudes to older people. For example, one female participant in London expressed anger at having been advised by a recruitment agency to dye her hair and have the hair from the mole on her face removed before going to interviews.

Most positive examples of support were given about individual projects set up to provide one to one tailored advice. In general groups felt that this ‘personal touch’, matching the skills and experiences of individuals against the needs of employers, or identifying their training gaps and helping them plan to address them, was what they needed. Some in the North East groups particularly praised a ‘job shop’ style project called Back Up North, which they described as an offshoot of Jobcentre Plus. Some participants however had never heard of it. Some in the South West groups had also found a local centre called Pearl House particularly helpful, which they said was available to people unemployed for over six months who had been recommended to it by Jobcentre Plus. Again, some participants were not aware of this service.

I think they were more helpful … They advise you and put you on to things and talk to you. … When you’ve got a big call centre type thing no-one knows who you are, and no-one knows nothing, and you get no sort of personal treatment. … you’re anonymous.

Job Centre people but they’re 100% better and always say ‘this is the answer’. What you want, you want like local services where people take an interest.

Males North East

You get free internet, free e-mail, free telephone, free postage, and most importantly … you get the one to one advisors. … It needn’t cost you a penny. They spend the time and trouble talking to you about what you want. They review you every month. I’ve always found the people there extremely helpful.

Male South West

Some participants in both London groups praised an individual worker at the host Age Concern project whose ability to combine personal empathy with practical and realistic advice had clearly made a strong impression.
The main thing was finding that emotional support and counselling in a difficult time … it’s worked out because I have got part-time work … the first couple of sessions you have with him, he brings out, what are you looking for? … the people in our position … you’ve got to start from that approach … not the alternative at the Job Centre.

Male London

You can talk to him, tell him how you feel and he’ll come back with a solution … but all these agencies … they’ll take a photo of you … do all these tests … and at the end you hear nothing from them.

Female London

Many participants across all groups particularly appreciated advice they had received on putting together an appropriate and updated CV.

I realized that my CV was, you know, out of date, and I knew that I needed it to be rejigged and made acceptable from now … so it was wonderful to find out about this, and to have help with my CV, because it was, you know, the support, the idea that you’re not alone, haven’t got to do it all on your own, you know.

Female South West

They also welcomed facilities enabling them to make more effective job searches than possible at Jobcentre Plus, particularly those enabling access to computers which many participants reported to be the key means of getting access to the widest range of job vacancies, with some London participants also highlighting the greater effectiveness of sending emails than letters to prospective employers. It was clear however that some participants needed more support if they were to be able to maximize the internet as a jobsearch tool.

When you get on the computer you just sit there looking at the screen … I just sat there reading the newspaper in the end… I didn’t get the help.

Male South West

Some felt that this computer access was very important as the only way they would be able to find a job would be to find it themselves rather than rely on Jobcentre Plus or agencies.

They’re [the jobs advertised at the Job Centre] pretty much, for me certainly, a waste of time… They didn’t actually find this job [which the participant had just got], I search [the internet] from home… [I found] a professional section … and when I showed [the Job Centre staff] this … they say, ‘where did you find that?’

Male London
Each participant was given the opportunity towards the end of the discussion to offer a recommendation regarding a type of practical support that would be of real benefit to jobseekers. Nearly all took up this opportunity.

These were unprompted ideas and a wide range of suggestions was made. Across the focus groups, easily the most popular suggestion was:

- make available one to one personal support for the older jobseeker from a trained worker. The latter could offer them realistic advice and practical help – eg matching them to jobs/training opportunities – based on an assessment of their skills and needs as an individual.

I would like them to be a bit more transparent … and maybe a little bit more personal on a one to one. They’re not dealing with a number, they’re dealing with a person, dealing with somebody that’s got feelings, that’s got aspirations and what have you.

Male North East

If you have a support worker, and that support worker takes you as an individual, works with you, not just gives you some papers to go and look through and then, okay, in another two or three weeks come back. No, sit down and then get this worked through, because such a support worker would be the one that knows that for whatever reason you’ve been out of the system.

Female London
Recommendations made by participants

Just a person that is willing to be in your corner and actually find a job that suits you the most, to have an interest in you. Not just be a statistic or a number in the Job Centre.

Female North East

Other popular suggestions included:

- **Changing the attitudes of employers and/or society** to employing older workers/older people in general eg a publicity campaign to highlight what older people have to offer and to change stereotypes.

Female South West

- **Psychological/emotional support** for the older jobseeker – eg to help people overcome confidence/self esteem issues and analyse how best to move forward

Male North East

- **Availability of short paid work placements/trial work periods**, to enable the jobseeker to gain experience with employers and have the opportunity to show their worth.

I would like to see maybe a scheme – I know they do it for like the disabled or something like that where they can get back in to work on a trial … You might be kept on if they think you’re any good, if not you go. But you’ve had that opportunity to prove yourself.

Female North East

- **Improve older people’s access to IT** – whether training, or to the internet to facilitate jobsearches.

Female South West

- **Recruitment agencies** to keep in touch better with their clients and **improve their communications**.

Male London

- **Availability of short paid work placements/trial work periods**, to enable the jobseeker to gain experience with employers and have the opportunity to show their worth.

I would like to see maybe a scheme – I know they do it for like the disabled or something like that where they can get back in to work on a trial … You might be kept on if they think you’re any good, if not you go. But you’ve had that opportunity to prove yourself.

Female North East

- **Improve older people’s access to IT** – whether training, or to the internet to facilitate jobsearches.

Male London
• Facilitate **mutual support and information workshops/groups** for people aged over 50.

I’d like to see a lot of workshops open up for the over 50s, for us to go in and chat to each other … [with] lists of all the education available, the courses available.

**Female North East**

I have felt alone when trying to apply for jobs, and you think it’s a great big brick wall that you can’t get through. But being in this situation [ie the focus group] you feel far more relaxed, you feel you’re going to get the help.

I think just being together in a group like this … it makes you feel so much less alone, less isolated … and that is a relatively cheap thing for people to put on I should think.

**Females South West**
The research was aimed at understanding the experiences and views of people aged over 50 who were interested in work or actively seeking work. Qualitative focus group research was chosen for this project to obtain a comprehensive view of all the relevant issues, including some complex and sensitive areas.

Age Concern Research Services (ACRS) managed the recruitment process, enlisting three Age Concern employment projects in diverse geographical areas to host the focus groups, and to recruit group participants from their client bases.

The Age Concern employment projects approached a random selection of their clients, and selected participants for the groups from those who were interested. The projects were requested to provide as diverse a range of clients as possible, and to organise separate groups of men and women. This was to ensure group participants felt comfortable and able to express themselves.

There were 6 focus groups in total (a separate group for males and females held at each location). Overall 49 people participated in the research.

According to the breakdown of participants:

**Gender**
- 49% male
- 51% female

**Age range**
- 33% 50-54
- 49% 55-59
- 18% 60-64

**Ethnicity**
- 80% White British
- 4% White Irish
- 8% White Other
- 4% Black Caribbean
- 2% Black African
- 2% Mixed White/Black Caribbean

**Disability**
- 72% None
- 10% Mobility difficulty
- 2% Visual impairment
- 16% Other

**Social class**
- 12% AB
- 41% C1
- 41% C2/D
- 6% Unrecorded

Although as diverse a sample as possible was aimed for, participants’ characteristics were reliant upon the make-up of the client base of the Age Concern projects. Since ethnicity is likely to be an important issue within jobseeking, further study with people from minority ethnic backgrounds would be warranted.
Age Concern provides services for people aged over 50 facing disadvantage in the labour market. In Autumn 2006 eight local Age Concerns have specific employment projects offering advice and assistance to older jobseekers. These are:

- Barrow and District
- Camden
- Enfield
- Leicestershire and Rutland
- Milton Keynes
- North Tyneside
- Slough
- Sunderland

All but one are targeted at the 50+ age group (the exception is targeted at those aged over 45), with their number of clients ranging from 25 to 200.

Age Concern Training (ACT) is Age Concern England’s Training and Work Division and undertakes bespoke practical initiatives to help people aged 50 and over maximise their work and learning options. This includes two WorkWise initiatives, in the South West and North West, for people over 50. ACT is also a national training provider of vocational programmes to people of all ages for Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council.

PRIME, the initiative for mature enterprise, is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Age Concern which supports older people to set up in business.
About the research

Age Concern England commissioned Dr Clare Collins of Elborough Consulting Ltd to carry out qualitative research with people aged 50 and over looking for work. The aims of the research were to find out more about:

- their personal experiences, feelings and opinions
- the difficulties they have faced
- the things which have helped them.

The research took the form of six focus groups – three men’s and three women’s groups. In total 49 people aged between 50 and 65 were included.

Participants were recruited from among clients of three Age Concern employment projects in London, the North East and the South West of England, all with a target client group of people aged 50+.

The former two projects have a client base of 200, with the latter serving 65 scattered over a large rural area.
Age Concern is the UK’s largest organisation working for and with older people. In England, we are a federation of over 370 charities working together to promote the well-being of all older people.

Age Concern’s work ranges from providing vital local services to influencing public opinion and government. Every day we are in touch with thousands of older people from all kinds of backgrounds – enabling them to make more of life.