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Investing in jobs and skills

## Welcome to the May e-newsletter

Welcome to the latest edition of our **50+ Matters** e-newsletter. This month we take a look at changes for jobseekers under the coalition government, new skillsets in the latest UKCES report, and Adult Learners' Week 2010.

We welcome your views and comments about the content of this e-newsletter and any suggestions you have for items and features you would like to see included in future.

## New Government, New Policies Impacting Older Workers

With the elections over, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government has settled down to arrive at an agreement on joint policy and the **official document** setting out the terms of the deal has been published.

Some of the new policies proposed will impact on the older workforce, whether in jobs or unemployed, and the people providing employment support to them. Although not all the decisions have come with timelines for their introduction and roll-out, all were included in party

manifestos and we would expect to see these introduced during the five-year term of the new government.

### Default Retirement Age

The coalition parties have agreed to phase out the default retirement age and hold a review to set the date at which the state



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pension age starts to rise to 66, although it will not be sooner than 2016 for men and 2020 for women.

### Pensions and Welfare

Both parties recognised the fact that mature workers may find it more difficult to rejoin the workforce following a period of unemployment or redundancy and would benefit from additional support.

The parties, therefore, agreed to end all existing welfare to work programmes and to create a single welfare to work programme to help all unemployed people get back into work (details to be confirmed).

Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who are facing the most significant barriers to work should be referred to the aforementioned newly created welfare to work programme immediately, not after 12 months as is currently the case. (And Jobseeker's Allowance claimants aged under 25 should be referred to the programme after a maximum of six months.)

Important reforms proposed for welfare to work provision include agreement to:

- realign contracts with welfare to work service providers to reflect more closely

the results they achieve in getting people back into work;

- reform the funding mechanism used by government to finance welfare to work programmes to reflect the fact that initial investment delivers later savings in lower benefit expenditure; and
- make receipt of benefits for those able to work conditional on the willingness to work.

An independent commission will be set up to review the long-term affordability of public sector pensions, while protecting accrued rights.

And the coalition government agreed to end the rules requiring compulsory annuitisation at 75, giving people greater flexibility in the management of their occupational pension entitlements.

Both parties pledged in their manifesto to extend the right to request flexible working.

Information for employers about flexible working and the benefits of recruiting an age diverse workforce can be found on the Business Link website. <sup>[1]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/layer?topicId=1082249786>

## UKCES Employability Skills Report

The changing structure of the labour market (the continued growth of the service sector, decline of manufacturing, and the expansion of professional occupations) has meant a marked change in the UK's employment profile <sup>[1]</sup> and brought about new skills demands.

In a recent report from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, <sup>[2]</sup> key findings from more than ten years' research into 'employability' highlight the need for a broader definition of 'employability' skills.

The expanded definition goes beyond the generic 'employability' skills of literacy, language, numeracy and basic IT to include additional skills associated with attitudes

and behaviour needed to gain, retain and progress in employment, namely:

- Self-management,
- Thinking and solving problems,
- Working together and communicating, and
- Understanding the business.

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Among the new skills in demand are “aesthetic skills”, a skillset needed in the customer service sector. (The fact that employees are often now regarded as a crucial part of the service product they sell or provide and how they are perceived by customers mean these skills are crucially important in the modern workplace.) And ‘influence skills’, defined as a closely related set of activities associated with communicating, analysing and persuading.

However, demand for these new skills is not matched by supply, according to the report.

Commentators have suggested that the skills system has failed to interpret the true meaning of ‘employer-led’ skills development, responding to short-term labour needs of the employer rather than ensuring development of sustainable employment skills. [3]

Looking in more detail at the evidence from the national employer skills surveys in recent years, skills gaps are mainly related to weaknesses in softer core skills, which are central to employability (oral communication and team working skills, customer-handling and problem-solving skills).

The strong focus that employers place on personal characteristics and soft skills means that any employment preparation, which leads candidates to improve and hone soft skills is likely to contribute to a positive employment outcome.

Report findings maintain that increasing employability skills in isolation may not be enough to move people into employment and employability skills are best delivered as part of a holistic package of support that meets individual need.



**Among the new skills in demand are “aesthetic skills”, needed in the customer services sector.**



## Employability Skills: A Research and Policy Briefing

Briefing Paper Series  
March 2010

Analysis > Understanding > Insight > Expert Advice

One pilot programme in Glasgow sought to build the confidence of participants, to improve social skills, motivation and widen perceptions of the job opportunities available in the local economy.

The training programme also aimed to educate participants about the recruitment and selection criteria used by local employers, and offered training in the skills needed to come through these processes successfully, as well as advice on how to maintain and progress in employment. [4]

Local employer involvement in employability programmes, forming a link between the supply and demand sides of the labour market, is recommended good practice.

In conclusion, sustainable employment relies on equipping people with the skills they need to stay in work rather than just get a job, and on ensuring that they continue to update these skills to remain employable.

[1] National Strategic Skills Audit for England 2010;

[2] Employability Skills, UKCES, April 2010, <http://www.ukces.org.uk/reports/employability-skills-a-research-and-policy-briefing>;

[3] Gore, 2005;

[4] Nickerson et al, 2003.

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## Red Card Shown to Ageism

Sheffield Employment Tribunal has cried ‘foul’ and shown a red card to ageism. It has ruled that four assistant soccer referees were unlawfully discriminated against when they were retired from officiating at top-level football games at the age of 48.

The tribunal found that Professional Game Match Officials Ltd (PGMOL), which appoints referees and assistant referees to Premier League and League football matches, could not justify having a set retirement age for match officials, or for that age to be 48.

Robert Martin, John Stokes and Andy Williams were until recently assistant referees on the select group and officiated at matches in the Premier League. Mark Hutchinson was an assistant on the national list officiating at matches in the Championship and Football League.

The four officials succeeded in their claim that the retirement age and the enforced retirement is discriminatory under the age discrimination law.

The tribunal held that PGMOL could not satisfy the hearing that the retirement age policy it had adopted was a proportionate means to a legitimate aim, such as to justify the disadvantage to the match officials.

It also found that even if PGMOL had been justified in having a retirement age, it had not satisfied the tribunal that



the appropriate age was 48.

The judgment says, “We cannot be satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the means adopted is the only means of achieving their aim and cannot be satisfied that there are not alternatives which are less discriminatory.”

The ruling could also have implications for other officials due to retire at the end of this season.

The tribunal will set a further hearing shortly to determine whether the four officials will be reinstated and, if not, the amount of compensation to which they will be entitled.

## Skills Shortages and Gaps Remain an Issue for Employers

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills has recently published the National Employer Skills Survey 2009. Based on responses from over 79,000 employers, the NESS 2009 survey considers the extent and nature of skills problems facing employers. The impact of the recession is clear in many of its findings.

The proportion of employers reporting vacancies (12%), hard-to-fill vacancies (3%) and skill-shortage vacancies (3%) had all fallen in 2009 compared to the levels found in previous NESS studies in 2003, 2005 and 2007.

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Just over two thirds of employers (68%) had provided any training or development in the previous 12 months but the number and proportion of staff receiving training fell from 14 million workers (63% of the workforce) in 2007 to 12.8 million (56%) in 2009. The total number of training days equated to 8.5 days, per person trained.

### Skill Shortages

Technical, practical and job-specific skills continue to be lacking in nearly two thirds (62%) of the skill shortage vacancies reported, and 'soft skills', including customer-handling (41%), problem-solving (38%) and team working skills (37%) were the next most likely to be missing in skill-shortage vacancies. There has also been a notable rise in the proportion of skill shortages attributed to poor literacy and numeracy.

### Skill Gaps

Nearly 1 in 5 (19%) employers reported skills gaps within their own workforces and around 1.7 million employees (equivalent to 7% of the total workforce in England) were described as having skills gaps.

Counter-intuitively perhaps, skills gaps were more common in lower level occupations, both in absolute terms and in terms of the proportion of those in the occupations lacking proficiency. For instance, 10% of sales and customer service and 9% of

elementary staff were described by their employers as lacking proficiency. This compared with just 6% of managers and professionals who were identified as having skills gaps.

The incidence of skills gaps was highest in Hotels and Catering (26%); Education (25%); Health and Social Work and Public Administration and Defence (both 23%).

### Upskilling

Almost 7 in 10 employers (69%) expected that some of their staff would need to acquire new skills or knowledge over the next 12 months. Nearly half (47%) of employers mentioned a need to upskill because of new legislative or regulatory requirements, 44% because of the development of new products and services and 42% because of the introduction of new working practices or new technologies/equipment.

Across all occupational types, the types of skills most likely to need improving or updating were technical, practical and job-specific skills, mentioned by nearly two thirds of employers (63%).

Next came management, general IT user, customer-handling, problem-solving and team working skills, mentioned by nearly 2 out of 5 employers, and communication skills (both oral and written) mentioned by nearly a third.

## News Briefs

### Adult Learners' Week - 15-21 May

Adult Learners' Week <sup>[1]</sup> comes around again, celebrating learning and learners in all their diversity.

During this week-long festival of learning, events take place in workplaces, libraries, cafes, prisons, museums and colleges across the country, inspiring adults to take up new activities.

Adult Learners' Week is a chance for trainees and clients, organisations and staff,

anyone, to try out learning, whether it is for fun or leading to a qualification.

Thousands of taster sessions and events will take place across the country. Check out what is happening in your local area [www.alw.org.uk/courses-events](http://www.alw.org.uk/courses-events) or call 0800 100 900 for free local advice.

<sup>[1]</sup> Campaign for Learning, Adult Learners' Week, 15-21 May <http://www.alw.org.uk/the-campaign>.

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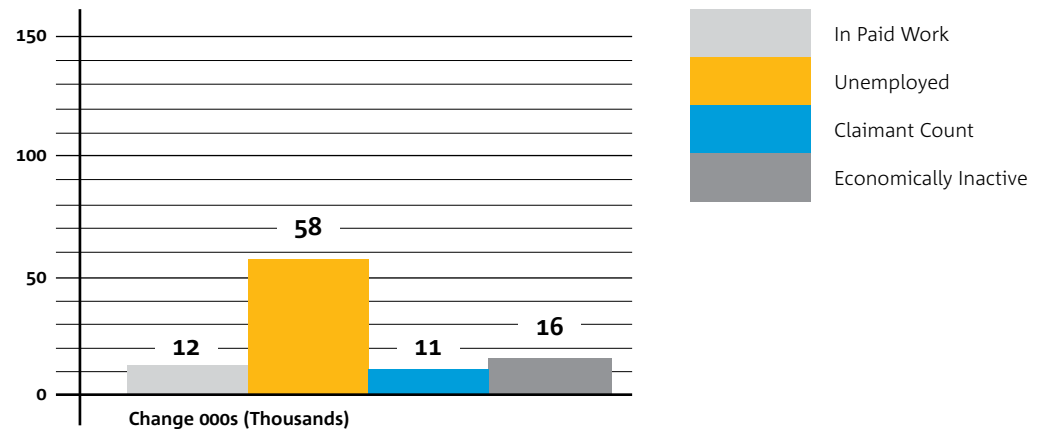
# 50+ Labour Market Spotlight

A monthly look at the 50 to state pension age employment figures and a specific item of interest regarding older workers.

## Latest 50-State Pension Age Employment Figures

Dec 2009 - Feb 2010: Changes versus same period last year

Source: Labour Market Statistics: April 2010, Office for National Statistics



## UK Employment Rates of Men and Women 50-State Pension Age Over Past 5 Years (Dec-Feb 2006 – Dec-Feb 2010)

Source: Office for National Statistics

Employment Rate	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Men 50/64	72.2%	72.3%	73.2%	72.5%	71.2%
Women 50/59	68.2%	68.8%	70.1%	70.1%	70.8%

## Ask TAEN

**Can you please settle a bet for me? In headline employment terms, have men or women fared worse in the recent recession and what has been the main reason for any difference?**

Although in the early months of the downturn it was feared that women might be affected to a greater extent, more recent labour market data from the Office for National Statistics shows the reverse to have

been the case. In labour market terms, men have fared worse than women during the recession.

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The total employment level for men aged 16 and over fell by 556,000 to 15.4 million in the three months to January 2010 compared with the same period two years ago.



## In labour market terms, men have fared worse than women during the recession.

For women, the decline was much smaller as employment levels fell over that same period by 17,000 to 13.5 million.

In employment rate terms, for men aged 16 and over, there was a 3.9% drop to 75.0% while the employment rate for women fell by 1.1% to 69.2%.

The total number of men aged 16 and over who were defined as unemployed rose by 572,000 to 1.511 million, compared with a rise of 254,000 to 938,000 for women.

The unemployment rate for men aged 16 and over rose by 3.4% to 9.0%, while the increase for women was 1.7%, taking their unemployment rate up to 6.5%.

The main reason why male employment has been affected more is that the recession had greater impact on the sectors of the economy where male employment is traditionally higher, such as manufacturing and construction.

In sectors where the employment mix was more equal (such as the business and financial services sector or the distribution, hotels and restaurants sector) the fall in jobs experienced by men and women was very similar.

One other main factor was that the sector which continued to grow throughout the recession (education, health and public administration) was one where seven out of ten jobs were held by females.

### Fact

**The unemployment rate for men rose by 3.4% to 9%, while for women it increased by 1.7% to 6.5%**



## Did You Know?

### Disability, Age and No Qualifications

The possession, or not, of formal qualifications can seriously affect an individual's chances of getting a job and / or the type of jobs open to them.

The employment rate among disabled people in the UK is typically less than 50%, compared with nearly 80% among the non-disabled group.

According to an article\* in April's Economic and Labour Market review, studies investigating this employment disadvantage have shown that it is linked to a gap in the

educational attainment between the two groups, with disabled people being less likely to hold academic qualifications.

The proportion of the working age population in both groups aged 25 and over who have no formal qualifications increases with age.

As the table over the page shows, the gap between the two groups in each of the age bands shown is more than double in most instances.

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## Percentage without formal qualifications by age and disability status, 2008<sup>1</sup>

Source: Average of the 4 Quarters of the Labour Force Survey, 2008

Age Group	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64
DDA Disabled <sup>2</sup>	17.99%	19.84%	26.47%	29.75%
Non-disabled	6.84%	7.81%	11.02%	16.19%

<sup>1</sup> Data weighted

<sup>2</sup> 'DDA Disabled': Labour Force Survey definition: someone who has a 'physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or

her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'.

\* 'Disability, education and training', article by Melanie Jones, School of Business and Economics, Swansea University

## ESF News

### Good Practice Guide : Not Too Late to Contribute

The development of the Good Practice Guide on working with clients aged 50+ is continuing apace but it is still not too late to contribute to it.

The Guide is primarily intended for use by frontline advisers at the DWP's prime contractors and their sub-contractors working on any of the employment support

programmes.

If you are willing to contribute knowledge, expertise or experience of helping people aged 50+ to get back into, or stay in, work, we'd like to hear from you.

Our contact details are shown at the bottom the page.

### Forthcoming 50+ Matters Seminars

Next seminar for frontline staff: Newcastle - July (date to be confirmed).

Further details will be available shortly on the ESF section of our website <http://taen.org.uk/esf/events> and in the June edition of the e-letter.

### Publicising Your Projects and Good Practice

Would you like to let the wider ESF-involved community of organisations know about your Project and its achievements, particularly in respect of clients/participants aged 50+? If so, contact us and help us to showcase what you are doing in future editions of this newsletter.



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