

Agenda



Career Guidance and Advancement

A policy charter to make the new Adult Advancement and Careers Service work for people in mid and later life

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Introduction

People who have had successful careers often tell of defining moments which set them on their paths to success. Generally they were lucky to get good advice - well aimed and well heeded. Help delivered in the right way, at the right time, changes lives. Professional, sensitively delivered help of this kind is something we can all use; and this applies as much to mid-career and older people as anyone.

Too often, the construction and delivery of careers support services are directed only towards the younger person or the out of work – frequently the young *and* out of work. Their pressing needs are evident but careers support and guidance messages for this section of society are not necessarily valid for someone who has followed one career and now seeks a change of direction.

But a genuine ‘new broom’ departure is now possible with the announcement by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills to form a new adult advancement and careers service. Information, advice and guidance across a range of interconnected issues will now become a possibility for all. It will be available for those in work and those currently outside the workforce. It is with this exciting development in mind that TAEN publishes this document as the first in its *Agenda* series of policy *arguments* around age and employment.

The timeliness of this development may be judged by considering the context. Demographic change (including longer life expectancy) and the drift of government policies on work and retirement, are all pointing to the need for people to work longer. On the other hand, we know that when people fall out of the workforce in their 50s and 60s it becomes incredibly difficult to climb back in. Good practice in talent management besides the natural desire of individuals to realise personal ambitions in mid-life, make the provision of mid-life guidance services a logical issue to consider.

TAEN speaks daily to people in mid and later life who have reached turning points in their careers. Whilst we try to point them in the right direction, too often the right support is simply not conveniently available. For many years TAEN’s small group of experts have laid down markers in several seminal works, indicating the sorts of standards which should be sought in designing and delivering guidance services to people in mid and later life. Foremost among these contributors was the late Geoff Ford, for many years a member of TAEN’s consultancy team. Much of Geoff’s thinking and experience are reflected in this publication, and we acknowledge his role with affection in dedicating our pamphlet to his memory.

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TAEN leads campaigning on issues of age and employment for older people. This paper explains our ***Ten Point Manifesto*** of necessary actions to ensure that career advice services meet the needs of older workers.

Good career, learning and advancement advice in mid and later life matters because it is an essential part of our response to longer lives and careers.

Older people need advice from a trustworthy, accessible source about their employment options, about learning for work or for leisure, and about volunteering.

If they are employed, they need to plan the next stage of their career; if not, they may need special help to re-enter the labour market. People whose first main career has ended or who have been absent from the labour market for family or other reasons may need help to explore and balance learning, work and personal options.

People may need to find such support and advice in the workplace, from their college or other learning provider, or from independent advisers.

We welcome work currently under way to develop an all-age guidance service for adults. But positive attention is required in each of the following areas if older people are to benefit.

1. Information
2. Advice and guidance
3. Job search
4. Staffing
5. ICT skills
6. A comprehensive referral network
7. Marketing and outreach
8. Advocacy
9. Workplace guidance
10. Monitoring and tracking

Later in this Agenda paper we provide more detail on how providers could address each requirement and the supporting research.

Five years ago a number of specialist advice services for older people were emerging throughout England. There are now fewer than there were then, apparently for two reasons:

- they were only financed through short-term project funding;
- government policy now favours an all-age service approach.

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The world has changed radically and this impacts not only on decisions about learning and work but also about transitions from work into retirement.

Getting all this right is a precondition for the success in training and work for mid and later life adults that must happen if the Public Service Agreement targets for adult skills, productivity and the employment rate are to be met.

Longer lives and older populations are among the greatest changes facing us. Demographic trends are having a profound effect on the economy, the pattern of our lives, on careers and families.

Attitudes towards age, work and retirement have shifted in the last few years. Employment amongst people in their 50s and 60s is rising. Pensions are rarely out of the headlines. The purchasing power of the 'grey pound' is recognised. But age discrimination remains a problem.

For equality of opportunity through guidance and advancement, the stakes could not be higher.

An all-age service will only work for all ages if there is a conscious, focused and public effort to demonstrate that it is relevant to the rather different circumstance of young people and adults in mid and later life.

The Context for Adult Guidance

It is essential that guidance policy-makers and providers should understand the particular needs of older people in designing the parameters for services. Where there are obstacles, either internal or external, facing older adults, it has been shown that good guidance can help overcome them.

- **How old is an 'older adult'?**

Age can become a problem at almost any chronological point in the life span, but also it may never be. Some people in their 80s are working and wish to continue, some in their 40s or even younger have to leave work for age-related reasons. People wishing to re-enter the labour market can experience age-related barriers at a time when people their same age in employment are operating at the height of their powers.

The notion of 'older adult' also varies by occupational area, culture and century ('60 is the new 40'). We believe that 'stage' is a more meaningful marker than 'age' (Soulsby, 2004) but many official documents consider 'older adults' to mean those over age 50.

- **What economic benefit is there in careers advice for older adults?**

The state pension age is to rise. There are numbers of people over age 50 on incapacity benefit who would work if they could. People who are able to stay active are less likely to need health care. Employers need skills, and people who wish to learn new skills, as the 'baby-boomer' cohort moves through their 50s and 60s. Employers also need staff who understand their business, who have a strong work ethos and who are dependable.

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- **Are there personal or social benefits?**

We seem to begin to prioritise personal fulfilment as we get older, either through work or in leisure activities, and this may involve changes, either minor or more radical. Local communities are crucial to social cohesion and inclusion, and the skills and knowledge contributed by older people in the form of voluntary work are essential to maintain those communities.

- **Decisions are rarely just about work or learning. Is it too complicated?**

Any adult may have to include financial, caring, accommodation, health, physical stamina or even legal considerations when thinking about jobs or learning. This gets increasingly likely with age. No one service can provide the necessary expertise in all this, but a central service that is resourced with staff, information and time to listen, can serve as the central point to refer clients, and then help them make good use of the specialist advice they get elsewhere.

- **On what are we basing our recommendations?**

We have looked at research findings about what older people want in terms of learning, work and careers advice, and our sources are listed in the reference section on page 15. Policy changes in all relevant government departments reflect the need, and the commitment, to prolong working life for those who want it, and promote an active and healthy old age for those who leave it.

- **What is careers guidance?**

Our ***Ten Point Manifesto*** is about how careers guidance should be shaped to help older users. It assumes the existence of the strong basic service that everyone needs. Recent research into public policy for career guidance in 53 countries (OECD, 2004) has used the following definition:

Career guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers.

Such services may be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector and in the private sector.

The activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including help lines and web-based services).

They include career information provision (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education programmes (to help individuals develop their self awareness, opportunity awareness, and career management skills), taster programmes (to sample options before choosing them), work search programmes, and transition services.

TAEN's Ten Point Manifesto

1. Information

Topics of particular relevance to older clients need to be covered in the information resources provided.

2. Advice and guidance

Support for older adults should offer the full range of activities and services needed by everyone, but specialist assessment, motivational and peer group activities and extra time resources may be additional requirements for older age clients.

3. Job search

The wide variation in job-seeking abilities of older clients may require additional skilled support. They may need information and skills to challenge age stereotyping and promote age diversity across occupational sectors.

4. Staffing

All service staff, supported by training and continuing professional development, must demonstrate understanding and respect for the individual's cumulative experiences and the needs of an older client group.

5. ICT skills

No assumptions should be made about anyone's level of computer literacy, but support should be available for older clients to make the best use of information and communications technology (ICT) resources.

6. A comprehensive referral network

Referral networks must include the agencies that reflect the needs of older clients, so that guidance workers can provide the advice, the advocacy with employers and learning providers, and the feedback about unmet needs, that this group requires.

7. Marketing and outreach

Marketing must ensure that services are visible, accessible, and motivational and also demonstrate that they are relevant to all people in mid and later life.

8. Advocacy

Career guidance services should be ready and able to provide advocacy on behalf of older clients, and encourage individuals and groups of older people to become their own self-advocates.

9. Workplace guidance

Older employees should be encouraged to consider current and extended working life plans in terms of relevant training, flexible working and transition from work.

10. Monitoring and tracking

Monitoring and tracking older clients is essential. Systems must be used to ensure that a target percentage of the mid and later life population are using the service and that their needs are being met.

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Explaining the Ten Points

This section provides the 'back story' explanation and summarises findings from the research. The evidence is drawn from the sources given in the references on page 15, and especially Collins (2006), Ford et al (2007) and Hawthorn (2008). Other findings are referenced individually.

1. Information

Topics of particular relevance to older clients need to be covered in the information resources provided.

All guidance services need information on local work opportunities and local skill requirements and on trends, education and training, transport arrangements and childcare arrangements. All these are equally relevant to older people. Many older people have child-minding as well as elder-care responsibilities.

- As well, services should hold information about:
- examples of shifting to part-time or flexible working;
- examples of making late career changes;
- options for extending working life;
- volunteering and active retirement;
- finance and benefits relating to older adults;
- learning provision at times and places favourable to older people;
- information on concessions available to older people;
- Equality (Employment) Age Regulations 2006 on age discrimination in employment and training;
- training and employment programmes targeted at older people.

2. Advice and guidance

Support for older adults should offer the full range of activities and services needed by everyone, but specialist assessment, motivational and peer group activities, and extra time resources may be additional requirements for older age clients.

Advice and guidance should be perceived as client-centred. Older people particularly react against the impersonal attitudes that service targets can generate in front-line staff.

It may take longer for older clients to tell and to make sense of their personal story, and to plan ahead.

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Guidance practitioners need to be expert in motivating older people. This can include:

- encouraging people to return to, or stay in, a labour market. Some may have actual, or perceived, experience of age barriers;
- helping them to visualise themselves in new roles either in their existing situation or in new ones;
- reviewing and taking seriously earlier or discarded interests and aspirations; working out how best to implement their objectives and achieve a satisfactory balance between work and quality of life;
- in depth skills health checks that recognise the experience and competence at work of older people.

Older people are less likely to have formal qualifications in spite of considerable skills and experience. Assessment should include values and skills acquired through a range of life and work experiences.

Older clients may need coaching in career management skills. Guidance should not encourage dependency on a service, but help clients to acquire the skills they need to make career decisions independently in future.

Older clients benefit from peer group support. Consider groups of people with particular needs, eg older people from ethnic minorities; those with disabilities; unemployed older men with no tradition of learning. Older people are often able to provide mentoring and encouragement to each other, particularly where individuals are thinking about changing jobs or even occupational sector.

3. Jobsearch

The wide variation in job-seeking abilities of older clients may require additional skilled support. They may need information and skills to challenge age stereotyping and promote age diversity across occupational sectors.

In working with clients, support services should:

- help older clients to identify ambitions, skills and experience, and relate these to opportunities in the local labour market;
- help them to identify their own personal barriers and adopt a positive attitude;
- offer coaching and support in job-search skills. It may be some time since they last applied for a job;
- encourage applicants to evidence the benefits of mature workers to employers.

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In working with employers, services need to:

- use the networks established for feedback purposes (see 6 iii) to develop an up-to-date picture of the local labour market and offer job-brokerage where appropriate. If a guidance service can demonstrate its usefulness to an employer over recruitment, advocacy (see 8) and workplace guidance (see 9) feedback can grow naturally;
- encourage local employers to offer work sampling and job trials so older people can explore new jobs and demonstrate their skills;
- organise events for employers such as job-fairs for mid and later life job seekers;
- develop links with local employment agencies and help them to appreciate the business benefits of deliberately targeting older people and marketing their skills, qualities and experience to employers.

4. Staffing

All service staff, supported by training and continuing professional development, must demonstrate understanding and respect for the individual's cumulative experiences and the needs of an older client group.

In developing staff, organisations should:

- instil total commitment to the principles and practice of equal opportunities and age diverse working practices;
- where possible include some older people amongst the front-line staff;
- designate a 'third age champion' among the staff, who is able to review progress, identify gaps and potential initiatives, drive the policy forward, and act as a source of expertise;
- find ways to involve older people as volunteers to information, advice and guidance services, perhaps as mentors to other older people, or in researching local opportunities.

5. ICT skills

No assumptions should be made about anyone's level of computer literacy, but support should be available for older clients to make the best use of information and communications technology (ICT) resources.

Even where older people have an internet link at home they may not be confident users of it. Sensitive assessment of actual ICT skills should be made before recommending internet searches or computer-based assessment tools.

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Where older adults can use the internet and e-mail comfortably, and have ready access to a computer, e-guidance can contribute to the guidance process.

But it is only one part of the process. Many who are computer literate also want the opportunity to discuss their situation with an expert. Where at all possible, face-to-face help and paper-based information should also be available. Some older people are uneasy giving personal information on the telephone, and hearing loss and other practical factors give rise to a strong preference among some for face-to-face help.

6. A comprehensive referral network

Referral networks must include the agencies that reflect the needs of older clients, so that guidance workers can provide the advice, the advocacy with employers and learning providers, and the feedback about unmet needs, that this group requires.

Advice for older people often needs to take into account health, financial circumstances and retirement plans of the person concerned and other family members. Guidance staff need to understand these issues at least in outline, and be able to refer to experts both local and national.

Government policy relating to the employment of older people and retirement is complex and continually shifting. Practitioners cannot hope to be expert on all initiatives, but should keep themselves informed on the main developments. Again, the ability to refer to local expertise is important.

Guidance services are an important source of information on the needs and wishes of older learners and employees. A local network permits guidance workers to feed back to learning providers and recruiters the needs of this group.

Three kinds of networks are needed.

- i)** Agencies with an understanding of age issues both local and national, such as Help the Aged, Age Concern, Better Government for Older People and TAEN - The Age and Employment Network.
- ii)** Local agencies with special understanding in relation to older people on topics such as financial planning, benefits, specific occupational areas and self-employment.
- iii)** A network of local providers of learning opportunities, employers, employer organisations and trade unions, for brokerage, advocacy and feedback.

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7. Marketing and outreach

Marketing must ensure that services are visible, accessible and motivational, and also demonstrate that they are relevant to all people in mid and later life.

Marketing needs to clarify what services and initiatives are on offer, as this generation even more than others may not be aware of the existence of such services. It should explain how they can access the service.

Thought should be given to the media most likely to reach older people, including local papers, local television and radio, and locally produced leaflets.

Active outreach is essential. Marketing strategies should be designed to reach and attract the 'hidden' un- and under-employed and those who might have written themselves off as too old for work.

While telephone advice lines and websites are valuable, some older adults particularly need face-to-face advice in their own locality.

8. Advocacy

Career guidance services should be ready and able to provide advocacy on behalf of older clients, and encourage individuals and groups of older people to become their own self-advocates.

Advocacy can relate to individual cases, and also to the age group as a whole. Peer support groups may be able to develop collective advocacy and self-help.

Advocacy can be used positively with employers to:

- promote the advantages of older employees. For example, older people often have skills vital to workplace teams, and insights that can ensure organisations are 'customer friendly';
- help employers understand relevant legislation and sources of help;
- collect local and national exemplars demonstrating the commercial benefits of employing, training and developing an age diverse workforce.

Advocacy can encourage learning providers such as local colleges to:

- develop marketing and outreach strategies that positively include older people and make them feel welcome;
- offer learning opportunities free, or at subsidised rates, to older people who cannot afford to pay;

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- employ tutors who understand the particular needs of older people, are attuned to their learning styles, and are supportive, encouraging and able to motivate older learners;
- consider in their course time-tabling the needs of older people who may not be able to go out in the evenings, or who may have caring responsibilities.

Advocacy can address more negative aspects of discrimination by:

- challenging apparent discrimination in recruitment and instances of targeting older people for redundancy;
- referring clients for advocacy over issues such as finance or benefits using the relevant specialists in local networks;
- liaising closely with trade unions in promoting the advantages of lifelong learning and workforce development for older age groups;
- support individuals to manage institutional barriers to work and learning.

9. Workplace guidance

Older employees should be encouraged to consider current and extended working life plans in terms of relevant training, flexible working and transition from work.

Guidance for people in work may cover a wide spectrum of needs, from professionals at one end to staff who lack basic skills at the other. All have career development needs in their 50s and 60s and beyond. Guidance professionals working with staff in the workplace should encourage and help employers to:

- avoid making assumptions about staff motivation, strength or ability on the basis of chronological age;
- understand age discrimination regulations and changes to pensions and tax regulations and to interpret them in ways positive both to staff and the workplace;
- ensure that older workers are properly considered in workforce development strategies and in initiatives such as Train to Gain;
- introduce phased retirement and flexible working patterns for older people;
- be ready to review practical workplace arrangements to enable older staff with health or strength issues to continue to contribute their skills;
- consider ways of capitalising on the experience of older staff in new ways if they wish;
- consider constructively applications to learn new skills from older workers who are getting bored with long-held jobs.

Union Learning Representatives (Unionlearn, 2008) are key to the training needs of older employees, and they should be particularly aware of the learning potential and needs of older staff.

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10. Monitoring and tracking

Monitoring and tracking older clients is essential. Systems must be used to ensure that a target percentage of the mid and later life population are using the service and that their needs are being met.

Monitoring provides the means for evaluation of services in relation to age.

Guidance providers are covered by the age discrimination regulations, so all services must monitor take-up and use by age to ensure that they are not discriminating illegally.

Monitoring also enables providers to demonstrate the benefits to individuals, employers and the government in devising a service which is effective for older people.

It provides the basis for a provider's advocacy and feedback roles, enabling the provision of useful information to employers and to learning providers.

Ongoing follow-up to service provision is now regarded as an essential element of good guidance. It supports the individual and also enables the service to evaluate the effectiveness of the help it offers.

**TAEN – The Age and Employment Network
April 2008**

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TAEN - The Age and Employment Network

Our mission is to promote an effective job market that serves the needs of people in mid and later life, employers and the economy.

We inform and advocate for effective age management policies to be adopted at all levels - in employing organisations, by individuals and across the labour market.

TAEN's role is to interpret demographic change and help society - individuals and organisations - build advantage from it. We seek to remove age barriers to opportunity. We learn from the best, most forward-looking practices in human capital development, particularly those aimed at maintaining health, optimising work design, planning and delivering learning, and changing the structures of careers.

We work with individuals and organisations seeking progress in these areas. These include government agencies, academic bodies, employers and unions.

Our members are drawn from across the labour market. We offer all of them the possibility of sharing knowledge and influencing policy in this crucial sphere.

For more information or details of our other Publications, please visit our website at www.taen.org.uk or email us at info@taen.org.uk

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