

Response



No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility

Response to Consultation from:
TAEN - The Age and Employment Network

October 2008

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TAEN response to the consultation *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility*

Introduction

The overall scope of the document is to set out the next steps in implementing the government's welfare to work programme. TAEN's response to the Green Paper on Welfare to Work *In Work Better Off: Next Steps to Full Employment*, prepared in October 2007, outlined our views on the developing programme and the outline of the Flexible New Deal at the time. *No-one Written Off* develops the government's plans focusing in particular on sections of society sometimes regarded as being *beyond work*, but for whom greater efforts could be made, hence its title.

The chapter headings of the Green Paper following the Executive Summary are as follows:

- Chapter 1 Promoting opportunity to work and realising potential
- Chapter 2 An obligation to work
- Chapter 3 No one written off
- Chapter 4 Ending child poverty
- Chapter 5 Delivering choice and control for disabled people
- Chapter 6 Simplifying and streamlining the benefits system
- Chapter 7 Empowerment and devolution – a new way of delivering services
- Chapter 8 Next steps – our commitment to listen

TAEN's comments will not cover all of the foregoing chapters but will deal with issues central to our mission and expertise. The Green Paper poses some 29 questions and invites comments. Few of these raise issues that are specifically relevant to the older segment of the labour market and our response will only deal with those we believe we are able to comment on usefully. Our commentary is principally on the proposals outlined in Chapter 2: *An obligation to work*. We will also provide information about a survey of older jobseekers which we believe may inform understanding of the needs of this section of the labour force.

Chapter 1: *Promoting opportunities to work and realising potential*

The thrust of this chapter is that the role of welfare policies should be to promote work as the best way to self help, self esteem and overall happiness in the population, besides making sound economic sense. **The description of past failings of the welfare state in encouraging dependency accords with much of TAEN's thinking.** For the past ten years of its existence, TAEN has promoted the idea of a labour market that both allows and supports older and mid life people in remaining in and gaining employment. **TAEN supports the essence of the argument set out here.**

With regard to the goal of achieving an employment rate of 80 per cent of the working age population, we note that no date is set for the achievement of this target and that there is no recognition of the enormous role that increased employment of 50+ people will have to play in this. Neither is there any reference to the increasing numbers of people over state pension age (SPA) who want to work and would be likely to work on if fewer employers resorted to compulsorily retiring them. In relation to the employment of older people, the paper ignores these policy contradictions and it would be more helpful if they were addressed frankly.

With regard to the claim on page 28, Chapter 1 that “the employment rate of people aged 50 to pension age has increased by over seven percentage points since 1997 with 500,000 more people who are over state pension age remaining in work”, we note that the *male* employment rate of this cohort at 72 per cent remains below what it was in 1980 (then at over 80 per cent) and we note also that the average age of males exiting from the labour market in 2007 was around 63 years compared with 67 in 1950. Measuring the activity of the older section of the workforce therefore does not give a uniformly rosy picture.

The Green Paper states that the government aims to provide disabled people with more control over services by enhancing their access to work via increased support and various initiatives to enhance capability to work and finally by promoting a system of rights and responsibilities including by the establishment of two benefits, the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and the Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). Disabled people fall into all age ranges but it is a medical fact that older age is accompanied by an increased frequency of disabling illnesses and conditions. The impact of disabling conditions should not however be taken to automatically disbar anyone from work and this is as much the case with older people who suffer them as younger people. Supportive approaches can keep people active, employed and therefore allow them to lead richer, happier, better off and more successful lives. TAEN supports the general scenario and conceptual model within which this section of the Green Paper is written, including the proposals set out in *Ready for Work: full employment in our generation* (2007, Cm 7290) and summarised in box 1.1 of the Green Paper. **TAEN supports these initiatives.**

The Green Paper makes a strong case that people who are placed on Incapacity Benefit should be helped to return to work, noting in paragraph 1.22 that “80 to 90 per cent of people who move onto incapacity benefits want or expect to return to work. Research has shown that being in work generally improves people’s health, increasingly doctors agree that remaining in work is often in their patients’ best interests and should be seen as a successful clinical outcome.” **TAEN supports these sentiments and has for some years argued in favour of this approach.**

Chapter 2: *An Obligation to work*

In Chapter 2 the Green Paper sets out a new approach to the mixture of benefits and support which individuals might in future expect from the state. The essence is that no one should be written off and everyone should contribute. “We want to prevent people from drifting into long term unemployment and inactivity and becoming detached from the labour market,” it states in the summary to Chapter 2. Much of this chapter is about tackling long term benefit dependency.

TAEN agrees with and supports this collection of policy initiatives, noting that they are based heavily on the Danish *flexicurity* approach in which individuals are expected to improve skills and engage with an active labour market as part of a more dynamic approach to work careers and welfare. However, positive though many features of this approach are, we believe that alone they do not deal adequately with the real issues facing older people who fall outside the labour market and wish to return to work.

The biggest issue for many older people is that try as they may, it is often difficult to return to work, in large part because of irrational prejudices of some employers against hiring people in their 50s and 60s. Various surveys have shown how older people, once unemployed, tend to find it more difficult to secure work than their younger counterparts. TAEN's experience, both anecdotally and empirically, supports this.

It seems that no amount of exhortation will bring an end to discrimination against older people *seeking work* even though age discrimination against existing employees is far less common. **TAEN believes the failure of the Green Paper to pay more than passing acknowledgement to the problem of discrimination against older jobseekers is a serious weakness.**

TAEN's view is that this failure is compounded by a further weakness in that the remedies offered in the Green Paper are skewed one-sidedly in the direction of supply side solutions aimed at the individual jobseeker or benefits claimant. These solutions focus strongly on the socially difficult to place, including sick and disabled people, the long term unemployed and people with drug addiction problems, etc. **TAEN does not believe that these solutions touch the most significant issues faced by older people in returning to work once they have lost their jobs for some reason.**

TAEN believes that the disadvantages faced by older people in the labour market, in fact, require a mixture of supply and demand side interventions. While any detailed discussion of the nature of demand side interventions needed is beyond the scope of this response, we would be happy to elaborate our thinking and hope that the government will consider this point further outside the ambit of this consultation. We believe that this is particularly important now that it is clear the economy is heading for recession. We believe there is evidence that older people will be among the most severely affected by the economic slow down, not least because they will find it harder to recover from job losses once they have been inflicted.

TAEN supports the various measures to tackle inactivity and long-term benefit dependency outlined in Chapter 2, including the more personalised approach to those receiving Jobseekers Allowance. We think it is reasonable that older jobseekers, along with other jobseekers, should be both encouraged and challenged in the ways outlined in sections 2.8 to 2.13 of the Green Paper. We do not disagree in general with the steps outlined and we think that on the whole they are realistic and sensible measures to focus and improve job search efforts.

However, we have a note of caution in respect of the idea of applying benefits sanctions against older jobseekers who fail to comply with agreed activity in an action plan. We should point out that many older people tell us that they are dismayed at the lack of understanding of their position and that they believe their needs are not properly understood by Jobcentre advisers, people offering information advice and guidance, and, more generally, in the employment search and placement industry. It is possible that older people, despite being very keen to find work, could in

frustration, reject advice which they regard as patronising or misguided. Until high levels of competence in dealing with older jobseekers can be guaranteed by Jobcentre Plus advisers, there could be situations where threats of withdrawal or actual withdrawal of benefits from an older person would simply serve to alienate the jobseeker and create a feeling that the system does not take proper account of their needs or particular difficulties.

Under paragraph 2.15 *Work for your benefit* and subsequent sections, details of the flexible new deal are described. Whilst we support the proposals in general, we think there is a strong emphasis here on the needs of the reluctant jobseeker, who wants to avoid working. We accept that there may be some older long term unemployed people for whom these increasingly demanding measures would seem appropriate. In the main they would seem designed to encourage the jobseeker to take job searching seriously. Our general feeling, however, is that older jobseekers may not be the most usual people to find in the “reluctant jobseekers” category, for whom these measures are principally devised.

Question 1: How could capacity and capability to provide full time work experience in the community sector be provided and incentivised to produce the best employment outcomes for participants?

Answer: Full time work experience in the community sector may well provide older jobseekers with opportunities to re-enter a work environment. They may allow them to use skills they have not previously practised or help them become better equipped to gain work. However, older people may react against roles which described as offering “work experience”, implying some kind of junior status and seeming intended for much younger, perhaps post-school jobseekers. Whilst such roles may in fact be helpful up to a point, image and labelling will therefore be important. Community roles for seniors should place value on the experience, skills and knowledge of those who do them, emphasise that they must have worked in other roles, sectors and industries, and the roles and organisations should be worthwhile and in tune with the values of individuals concerned.

Sections on drug users – no comment.

Paragraphs 2.50 to 2.54 *A work focused regime for people aged 60 to 65*

We highlight this small section of the Green Paper as the only section which looks specifically at the older workforce rather than other sections/groups or unemployed people in general. We have no major problems with the initial analysis of this section.

We agree with the point in paragraph 2.51 that “Many of those aged 60 or over who do not have a job would like to work but are concerned that they will be considered too old and do not have the right skills.”

We welcome the statement that the government is committed to increasing their employment opportunities and that older people will be given the same support as is given to younger people looking for work.

We do not think, however, that the mere fact that age discrimination legislation has been introduced is an adequate response to this recognition.

We agree with the point in paragraph 2.52 that people are not “over the hill” at 60. However the law at present legitimises the dangerous fallacy that people are “over the hill” at 65. We find the contradictions in the stated point in paragraph 2.52 and the present reality of legislation in the UK perplexing. The default retirement age is offensive to older people and wasteful of human resources. On one hand it is government policy to state that “no one should be written off,” and on the other, people are routinely written off when they reach a certain age, irrespective of their willingness or ability to continue in work. We call on the government to introduce consistency into its policies by abandoning the default retirement age sooner than the review currently scheduled for 2011.

Much though we admire the diligent and energetic work of the people in the Age Positive team in the DWP in promoting positive workplace employment policies for older people, we note that the campaign has been starved of funds for some time. We believe the comment on the Age Positive campaign in paragraph 2.54 and the commitment to “...promoting the benefits of recruiting, training and retaining older workers who by 2020 will comprise 30 per cent of the workforce,” unconvincing unless there is an intention to provide the necessary resources.

We believe that while the Age Positive Campaign has been successful up to a point, the measures advocated and showcased tend to emphasise only a limited range of the scope of possible measures employers have followed internationally, and we express our willingness to work with the Age Positive team in the DWP to enhance its contribution.

TAEN believes that there is a great deal more that is needed to raise employer understanding of age management approaches. We believe that limited tax advantages to encourage employers to engage or retain older workers could have a place in a regime adopting a more proactive approach to age management interventions and emphasising the need for other proactive measures at the workplace to make remaining at work beyond 60 a realistic possibility for more workers.

For example, we believe very strongly that greater flexibility, support for older carers, promotion of partial retirement, and an aggressive approach to advertise and educate managements and union officials on the full range of good and positive policies around age, health, work design, new approaches to careers, the retention of knowledge, the flexible use of older workers remaining in work and returning, in some cases, after retirement would make more convincing responses to the context described in this section.

Paragraphs 2.55 to 2.61 *Work Skills* and related headings

We accept the reasoning of these sections. We support the concepts of the skills health check, the skills account and the adult careers and advancement agency. We note and support the concept of training in work skills.

Question 8: What is the right time to require ESA claimants to take a skills health check?

Answer: We think probably as soon as practicable after the person has registered for the ESA

Question 9: Should ESA customers be required to attend training in order to acquire the identified skills they need to enter work?

Answer: For older people in particular we believe that a voluntary approach is desirable. A gradual and respectful increasing pressure could be applied to encourage the reluctant older jobseeker to embark on training, particularly if there was mounting evidence that lack of a skill was proving a draw back to re-entering work. Eventually compulsion would be logical if an individual refused to accept evidence and reason.

Paragraphs 2.79 to 2.81 *Engaging with Employers*

We note that the reference to engaging with employers relates firstly to offering job opportunities to lone parents, people with disabilities and the long term unemployed. Whilst we understand these priorities we believe there is a strong case for engaging with employers over the issue of their policies in the context of population ageing, skills and knowledge shortages in some sectors, and the need for older people to remain in work longer.

Paragraphs 2.82 to 2.87 *Volunteering and developing skills for work*

Question 13: How might we build on the foundations of the current rules so that they do not discourage unemployed people from volunteering as a deliberate back to work strategy whilst retaining a clear focus on moving off welfare and back into employment?

Answer: Find ways of encouraging employers to see the value of volunteering, ensure that volunteering organisations offer flexible approaches to encourage a range of people to join them, try to get volunteering organisations to include an element of development and training for their volunteers, try to get volunteering organisations to emphasise the good qualities and employment behaviours – punctuality, manners, dress, competencies, etc, for all workers and get them to place a high value on older volunteers as potential mentors and role models for younger volunteers.

Appendix 1

Additional Comments on Needs of Older People in the Labour Market

TAEN believes that if the right approaches are taken there could be better prospects of success for everyone out of work, including older people. We accept everyone who is out of work should, as far as possible, be encouraged to help themselves. We also believe that where necessary people should be helped by timely advice, support, practical guidance and training, to return to work.

Talking about “the needs of older people” in the labour market obscures the fact that people’s needs are in fact all individual and unique. This applies just as much to older people as a category as to the population as a whole. We accept that a “personalised” approach is needed to understand needs and address issues. One might for example consider the different sets of problems around remaining in work, which are experienced by older people of the following broad descriptions:

- Older people who are to some extent less “work –able” as result of a disability or an illness, who may need specialist help to encourage and help them return to work, including dealing with their medical conditions, making adjustments to the work place, offering flexible working conditions, etc.
- People entering mid life in good health but who still need to adjust their working lives because of social or personal issues which might be either temporary or permanent.
- People who are contemplating retirement and wish to scale down their work commitments but don’t wish to quit altogether.
- People who are willing and happy to work but find they are obliged to adjust to the idea that society *expects* them to retire shortly, even though they may personally have a mixture of feelings on the issue and are keen to remain in work and earning.

The needs of all of these categories of older people cannot all be encompassed in a single approach to getting them back into work. There is a need for flexibility, multiple approaches and different sorts of support if they are to be assisted with their very different kinds of problems.

Moreover, solutions to individuals’ problems of getting and maintaining work are not necessarily achieved by specialists focusing on the individual him or herself as “the problem” as though there were some fault at that level - as opposed to more generally or in work organisations themselves, etc. In other words, it may be important to look at the work that is being done, the organisation offering it, and the community in which the individual lives including their home and family, if we are to truly understand their work possibilities and problems.

Therefore it is important to remember that older people seeking work often have very different reasons for being there, have different orientations to work, different problems and different value systems compared with many who are unemployed and hard to place in work. Many older people who have had successful working lives are very keen to return to work, like work for the social contacts it provides, enjoy using skills and knowledge they have acquired at work and so on. They may also need work for financial reasons but they, like others in society, often have competing

commitments which they need to balance including caring for another family member.

For all these reasons, there is a need for more flexibility, more subtlety, more specific training and experience in guidance and help for the older jobseeker.

Specific Problems of Job Seeking for Older Workers

One is sometimes asked, “What do we mean by old?” or “What do we mean by too old to work?” We might take an arbitrary age of 50 as a convenient but crude definition of “older workers” because at this age people often become aware of changing expectations towards them. However, there are many people who remain happily in work at 50 and beyond.

Age is at best an arbitrary and crude yard stick of capability in people. There is no reason why people of any particular age should be regarded as “too old” to work, particularly if they wish and need to do so. Nor is there any reason to assume that people over a certain age, have less commitment to work *merely because* of the age attained.

A great deal depends on their attitudes, the physical and mental conditions of individuals, as well as the work itself and its demands, and the conditions in which it is done or are otherwise associated with it. The healthy, positive and experienced person who wants to work, should be allowed and helped to do so irrespective of their chronological age. It seems likely that with demographic change and increasing life expectancy, more people will *choose* to work into their late 60s and 70s and in some cases perhaps even longer.

All this is with the proviso that suitable hours and working conditions are available for them. People in their late 40s and 50s should have no reason to think that their ages will tell against them, but sadly this is far from the case at present. The provision of jobs with such conditions is therefore an essential condition to employing larger numbers of older people, in line with the UK’s commitment to achieve the Lisbon and Stockholm employment targets.

Many older people want to work or *need* to work. They may leave the employed workforce prematurely because of redundancy, reorganisation issues or for a variety of reasons completely unrelated to their ability to work or do the job. Once out of work however, the older jobseeker will generally discover that it is a lot harder to return to work than it was to remain in his or her former job. The evidence of our survey – reported below in Appendix 2 – bears this out.

The older person who finds himself or herself out of work may have previously done a satisfying job, perhaps demanding a great deal in terms of skill and responsibility. Newly unemployed, older jobseekers generally start off looking for jobs with responsibilities and pay at a similar level to those they are used to. Often they find it impossible to secure such roles and they may adjust their expectations accordingly. They end up accepting work roles which are less than their capability, or alternatively they may decide that they don’t want such reductions in status, and they may remain outside the workforce. Again, the remedy, if not entirely outside the scope of the worker him or herself, is surely one which should encompass a *demand adjusting* component – influencing the employer’s decision and offsetting in some way, the intrinsic market disadvantages that age appears to bring in its own right.

If an older jobseeker has an illness or medical condition so that they may no longer feel able to work to the same level as previously, this is often what drives them out of work. If such a condition is associated with other changes in the workplace, the pressures on him or her to leave may be greater. Even with a relatively minor medical condition, the prospect of disruptive change may be daunting and the individual may not be ready for it. The precise causes of exit may be complex and may include a combination of psychological and emotional disappointments, dissatisfaction with management decisions, disappointing or stressful work relationships and so on.

Hence the combined impact of a medical condition on one hand, with a mixture of issues and inflexibility in the workplace or the job on offer on the other, may be what contributes to individual decisions of older workers to quit in the hope of finding something else. State and employer policies should be focused on keeping older workers in employment rather than the more difficult task of placing them in jobs once they fall out of work. Recognising the cost of such policies to employers as well as the need for *active* absenteeism policies (rather than passive ones) would be an important start.

Keeping Older Workers in Employment

Arising from the foregoing, one would want to see more evidence of interventions targeted at reforming workplace practices rather than purely at the worker himself. So for example, supporting workers back to work by work capacity tests and rehabilitation programmes should not be seen as the only solution. It may be easier, and more effective to keep workers in employment (albeit, undergoing rehabilitation) rather than to allow them to leave their jobs and then go through the long, difficult and dispiriting process of recovering both their health and status as employees when the odds seem so much more stacked against them.

Strong, proactive long term sickness policies that intervene and help people back to work would help to avoid long term sick leave becoming the negative, damaging experience it so often is. Providing timely help and advice for employers to retain employees with difficult health conditions could result in fewer people needing to register for the Employment and Support Allowance in the first instance. Better knowledge of good workplace age management practices could make a useful contribution to this end.

The Older Jobseeker

Factors leading the older jobseeker to accommodate to premature worklessness can be varied and have several components. Many older people have roles combining employment with caring. They may spend time caring for another person – a spouse/partner, child or parent. They may have a pension from a former employer even though they may be still below state pension age, and may feel capable of work for a number of years into the future. An individual may have a medical condition which allows them to claim Incapacity Benefit (or if they have recently registered, the Employment and Support Allowance) but the medical condition may only be one of several factors which lead to a decision (or accommodation) to accept economic inactivity/unemployment. Often a combination factors and influences may cause individuals to become resigned to not working, even though they may feel inside themselves that there is *surely something* that they could continue to do.

Older people who are out of employment often meet with remarkable difficulty in returning to work after being displaced. Frequently, they start out with good intentions, become disillusioned and give up. They may certainly need help to get work, or to prepare themselves for work, though they may not always recognise it.

More to the point, however, the experience of older people seeking work is that those who purport to give advice often treat them in the same way as they would treat any other jobseeker without recognising their particular needs and circumstances.

Older jobseekers who have had years of successful employment in good jobs tell us that they are shocked at being interviewed and treated much as other clients who are finding it hard to gain or hold onto employment because of low skills, health issues, drug problems or because they are lone parents or ex-offenders.

The older person seeking work may be unskilled, semi-skilled, highly skilled or professionally qualified. They may find it hard to re-enter the workforce for a variety of reasons. Being obliged to attend interviews and “jump through a series of hoops,” as they may see it, may be very discouraging, especially if they feel that their *job problem* is implied to be caused by a fault in their own application and commitment.

A job and an income are usually the essential elements for anyone to have independence and financial dignity. These things should be everyone’s right including the older person. Premature unemployment and financial insecurity can be a very poor way to prepare for the time when retirement truly beckons.

Appendix 2

Points from TAEN Survey of Jobseekers Aged 50+

The following points from the concluding section of a recent TAEN survey of 50+ jobseekers summarise the survey's findings. They are provided as background information on the experiences of older (50+) jobseekers. In TAEN's view, they bear out many of our points concerning the specific issues older jobseekers have to face, particularly the common experience of age discrimination in the process of application and appointment.

TAEN believes that the experiences of older jobseekers underline the case for more proactive work with employers on age management, changing attitudes and understanding the business case to use older workers. They also support our suggestion that demand side interventions are needed to offset the reality of age discrimination in appointments.

Conclusions of TAEN's Survey of 50+ Jobseekers (published October 2008).

There are few barriers to employment experienced by older jobseekers so dispiriting as attitudes of age discrimination. Whilst not *everyone* in the 50+ plus age group, experiences difficulties in seeking suitable work, we believe such problems are very widespread. Indeed, the survey responses suggest that such difficulties are *routinely* the lot of those who seek to return to work in their 50s. Forty-two per cent of our sample said that they were seen as "too experienced" or "over-qualified" and 63 per cent said they were seen quite simply as "too old." Moreover, there has been a steady stream of anecdotal evidence supplied to TAEN over a period of time which is also supportive of this survey – indeed one of the prime motivating factors behind it. And though the UK has had legislation supposedly outlawing age discrimination for the past two years, the evidence of our survey suggests discrimination is durable and endemic among British employers.

It may be argued that surely these difficulties faced by older workers in the labour market can be explained by their skills and knowledge deficiencies or other factors which might be expected to make them harder to place in jobs. Were our sample to have been composed of an evenly distributed cross section of older workers, one might find some justification for this view in the low qualifications of participants. However, this was not so. Our survey participants were in fact comprised of unemployed 50+ people seeking work and visiting our web site. Responses showed it was in fact skewed in the direction of better than average qualification levels: 32 per cent were degree educated and a further 23 per cent had professional qualifications with only 17 per cent being without paper qualifications of any kind. With positive work orientations and generally good qualifications, it seems reasonable to assume that high proportions should have been easy to place in jobs; the evidence did not suggest that this was in fact the case.

The reality was that high proportions of our respondents were worried, even desperate, about getting jobs. Forty-five per cent had been looking for work for more than six months with a third of this number having searched for work for more than two years. Skills qualifications may indeed have been one factor among others but 60 per cent of respondents felt that employers placed too much emphasis on *qualifications* rather than *experience* and many implied in their comments that they felt their experience was every bit as valid as a formal written qualification.

This impression is confirmed by the 67 per cent of respondents who felt they had “the right skills for today’s labour market”. Opinion was divided among respondents over whether they had “every opportunity to upgrade their skills to the needs of today’s employers”, 42 per cent believing this to be the case and 33 per cent stating the contrary. It would seem then that while there is recognition here that improving skill sets could make a difference to the job prospects of a third of respondents, skills and qualifications for the job are not the whole picture.

Considering other factors leading to problems obtaining work, lack of knowledge of where to go for help was a problem affecting a surprising 34 per cent of respondents. (A further 28 per cent were not certain in their responses on this question.) Stronger, clearer pointers to sources of advice and guidance would seem to be potentially helpful to older and mid life jobseekers. On the other hand, 85 per cent of respondents said that they had indeed sought assistance in their job search activities from organisations and personal contacts with a clear majority of these (62 per cent) citing Jobcentre Plus as a source of support, while 52 per cent said they had gone to a private employment agency. (Some appear to have visited both.) Only 15 per cent rated the quality of support received from their chosen sources as “good or excellent”; 39 per cent said it was “OK” while 46 per cent reported that they considered the advice sources rendered “not very good or poor” support.

A huge majority (89%) were aware of the existence of age discrimination legislation, with 63 per cent of the total being aware of roughly what it comprised and the rights it conferred. On the other hand, only 13 per cent said they thought the legislation had helped older people to get work. Just 10 per cent could say they had never experienced age discrimination while looking for work. And although half (50%) believed they had experienced it, a great many pointed out how difficult it would be to prove. And with 38 per cent affirming to have experienced age discrimination at work (and a further 34 per cent being “unsure” on the point), one is obliged to return to the issue and observe that for older jobseekers at least, age discrimination seems one of the most significant of barriers that they face in returning to the workforce. As one respondent put it: “Age appears to be a new disability.”

One is drawn to conclude that, for unemployed 50+ jobseekers, no programme to help them return to work would be complete without measures aimed at the demand side of the economic equation. On the other hand, the government’s preponderantly supply side programme, set out in the Green Paper: *No one written off: reforming welfare to reward responsibility* from the Department for Work and Pensions, outlines the obligations of individuals to seek work and lays out a ‘work focused’ regime for people aged 60-65. Quite correctly it states: “People are no longer considered ‘over the hill’ at age 60,” though there is little reason to believe that the kinds of problems highlighted by our survey will be easily overcome.

In light of the foregoing, the reference in *No-one written off* to the government’s Age Positive Initiative as “promoting the benefits to employers of recruiting, training and retaining older workers who will by 2020 comprise 30 per cent of the workforce” seems pitifully inadequate. The evidence points to widespread and systematic discrimination against older workers, making it difficult for them to re-enter the workforce. Numbers of workers over state pension age in employment have been rising due very largely to the fact that women have been exercising their rights to remain in existing jobs beyond female state pension age (60 years). But it is worth noting that around half of women in the workforce work only part time and even those who work for only a few hours a week are included in the employment figures. Workers over 50 seeking to return to new jobs, as this survey confirms, find it very hard to realise their ambitions.

