

Active Ageing
through Social Partnership
and Industrial Relations in Europe.
Workshop Report
for the United Kingdom

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Workshop report: United Kingdom

Report on discussions with employers and unions across six sectors and three regions

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The ASPIRE project is funded with the financial support of the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, budget heading VP/2016/004 (Grant agreement VS/2016/0379), Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue.

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Introduction and key points

This report is a summary of the workshops conducted in the UK as part of the ASPIRE project. It is based on discussions with managers and union representatives across five sectors and three regions. Workshop discussions are as follows:

With employers and unions

- Higher education, Hull
- Public sector, London

With employers

- Construction and manufacturing sectors, Middlesbrough (IOSH)
- Health and social care services, Hull
- Regional workshop, Newcastle
- Regional workshop, Hull
- Regional workshop, London (webinar)

With trade unions

- Construction sector, London
- Finance sector unions Newcastle
- Health, social care and voluntary services in London

In addition, we have incorporated discussions which we have had with the following respondents:

- Trades Union Congress, Equalities Officer
- Employers Network on Equality and Inclusion, Engagement Officer
- UnionLearn Project Manager
- EEF Manufacturing Union National Officer
- Occupational Health Officer
- ACAS Senior Adviser/Conciliator

Key points

In each of the workshops, we discussed how ageing demographics are impacting on UK workplaces and how unions and employers are addressing the challenges of older and intergenerational workforces, including through social dialogue. Much of the discussions reflect universal experiences of older workers and social partners within the context of workplace ageing and will show similar patterns to workshops in Italy, Poland and Spain. The following are some points which were raised within the context of the UK which may be distinct in considering how the Joint Declaration on Active Ageing and Intergenerational Support is implemented in the UK:

- Awareness of the Declaration¹ is very low with both employer and union representatives. In fact, only the TUC Equalities Officer- who was involved in negotiating the agreement- discussed it at all. That said, there was broad understanding of the policy and organisational

¹ European Social Partners' Autonomous Framework Agreement on Active Ageing and an Intergenerational Approach: 8 March 2017

issues around ageing workforces and high level of awareness of national government initiatives like *Fuller Working Lives* (DWP, 2014) and the Midlife Career Review.

- Initiatives on active ageing focused on individual rather than collective rights. Dialogue on interventions to support older workers usually occurs directly between the employee and their employer and often in an unstructured way. Trade unions may facilitate the discussion by representing workers, advising employers or promoting good practice. However, the responsibility for managing one's career rests with the employee. Initiatives like the Midlife Career Review are intended to upskill workers so that they can make better choices for themselves but take as a starting point that it is the individual who will make those choices.
- Dissemination of good practice and social dialogue occurs in a bottom up rather than top down way. Rather than national agreements structuring how organisations respond to workplace ageing, respondents talked about sharing good practice and trying new approaches to managing work within or even between organisations. There was widespread agreement amongst both employers and union representatives that sharing good practices between workplaces in a practical oriented way could encourage employers, unions and employees themselves to adapt new approaches to managing age. The sharing of good practice was thought to occur within sectors and regions.
- Discussion around active ageing primarily focused on economic factors like skills and labour shortages. Respondents talked about the business case for managing age better and ways in which organisations could benefit. Concerns over labour shortages have increased because of Brexit.
- Culturally, it was thought that many British workers think about extended working life because work is a significant part of life both for individuals and society as a whole. For many, work is a central part of identity, social networks and life structure. Leaving work can create a sense of loss. Many older workers feel a sense of obligation to continue in work so long as they are healthy enough to do so.
- Regionally, there is some coordination between employers, union and government to address ageing workforces as an issue which impacts local economics. Upskilling workers, ensuring skilled labour is available for new businesses and addressing long term joblessness were considered to be priority areas for social partners in the three regions where we conducted the workshops.
- Many of the workshop discussions centred on issues of inequality in later life with a recognition that policy reforms to support older workers have benefited some people more than others. Older women, low skilled workers and those in precarious work were thought to be benefiting less from employment rights aimed at helping people delay retirement and were more negatively impacted by the raising of pension ages and erosion of social welfare.
- Discussion around intergenerational issues was mixed. While workshop participants recognised that in general work is becoming more precarious and social welfare is being rolled back, it was also noted that social inequalities exist across class, gender, education and other ways and some participants questioned the significance of generational inequalities relative to others. Further, workshop discussants talked about ways in which younger workers have *more* opportunities than previous generations such as access to higher education. The idea that older workers crowd out younger ones did not seem to emerge in the discussions.



- There was a great deal of discussion about how workplace ageing intersects with precarious work. Although some employers have demonstrated an interest in better managing workplace ageing, it was recognised that for many workers (i.e. those on fixed term contracts, casual work, agency work, etc), there is very little that they can expect from their employer in terms of employability support.
- Traditional collective bargaining was thought to inadequately support many of the workers who are most at risk of old age poverty and isolation- for example, those without jobs, workers in small businesses, self-employed and casual workers. Both union and employers discussed initiatives like regional based programmes to upskill older workers and support economically inactive back into work.

In sum, the UK, as a liberal market economy follows the pattern of limited coordination between social partners on active ageing. However, there were activities between the social partners which occurred in response to the national government's broad agenda on fuller working lives. The policy implication in terms of dissemination of the Declaration in the UK context is that recognising the importance of targeting local managers, union representatives and other stakeholders in training as well as sharing good practices and supporting activities, are all of considerable importance.

Barriers and facilitators to active ageing

Barriers

Individual

Workshop participants discussed the barriers which older workers face in remaining economically active. Several discussions centred on the increased precariousness of work for many, but not all, older workers. Although changes in the law and organisational HR policies have been intended to enable extended working life, many older workers are nonetheless being pushed out of work or into work which does not make good use of their skills and abilities. Therefore, one of the most important challenges for employers and unions is to create pathways for older workers to transition into work which suit older workers' changing lifestyles and keeps them productive.

“It's almost like we've put you on the rubbish heap and saying you're not wanted, and you actually started seeing that you're adding a value...and in what role can you play that somebody for the last five years of their career feels valued and useful at work”
(Hull workshop)

Both union and employer discussants talked about three interlinked challenges which older workers face in staying economically active: First, the skills which older workers have, and those they lack, can put them at a disadvantage in the labour market. Union representatives argued that employers tend to prefer younger workers with more recent qualifications. This can render older job applicants less employable than younger ones. One participant talked about returning to work in teaching and finding the work environment requiring a whole new set of skills.

“it's absolutely blew me away how the profession has changed, and when you're talking about the issue of *mature* teachers as not necessarily *really old* but teachers who have got more experience.... They maybe qualified at a later age, but there's a big emphasis on..[how] newly qualified you are, how relevant you are... (The more so), the more you're likely to be able to progress and move forward.” (Hull workshop)

Employers argued that older workers are often reluctant to ask for training. Some argued that learning opportunities are available within their organisations in order to keep skills updated, but older workers don't take them. In construction, managers discussed how workers need to have accreditation in order to work on different building sites. It is up to workers themselves to obtain accreditations and it was noted that as people age, they are less likely to seek the necessary qualifications.

“We've been sending people on these courses but the ones that had been there a long time, they're like, 'Well why do I need to do this? Because I've got the knowledge. I know what I'm doing.' Because it's an NVQ, they're not seeing this as learning any additional skills” (IOSH event)

The second issue identified was that of balancing careers with caring and family responsibilities - “work-life balance”. Career interruptions due to childcare responsibilities have knocked many older women off their career paths which are difficult to resume on return to work. This has the effect of reducing both lifetime earnings and pension savings. Union representatives discussed the WASPI (Women Against the State Pension Increase) campaign arising from the gender equalisation of pension age. Additionally, union representatives discussed the impact which eldercare and grandparenting can have on older workers' employability. Although they have the *right to request* flexible working, it was noted that many are reluctant to do so for fear of being seen as less committed to work than their colleagues.

The third issue which was noted was managing health issues. Both managers and union representatives discussed the health issues facing older workers within particular industries. Examples given included back problems, musculo-skeletal disorders, cardio-vascular conditions and problems associated with poor diets. Stress was a problem mentioned by union representatives in NHS Ambulance Service and the social care sector and was thought to be caused by long hours and work intensification. Employers noted that managing the health of employees of all ages, but older workers in particular, can be challenging, particularly as employees can be worried that talking about health issues may be interpreted as a signal that they are unable to continue in work.

“We do occupational health, medicals with all our [staff]... but we had an awful fight with the guys thinking it's a way of getting rid of them. Instead of being a way of identifying you have an issue and that we need to protect you better and working out how we're doing it that way, they thought it was a way of stopping them working in order to get them out of the company, type of thing.” (IOSH Event)

Overlapping the discussions about the barriers which older workers face (in terms of skills, work-life balance and health) was a recognition of the difficulty many have in discussing support which they may need from their managers. This included asking for help in terms of changes to working hours, work stations or job roles. In some cases, older workers are afraid of being *at risk* of performance related dismissals. They do not ask for help such as training for fear of signalling capabilities deficiencies.

Many older workers are on contingent employment contracts (such as fixed term contracts or agency work) and these workers have little or no expectations of support from their employers. This was noted by a manager from the transport sector who observed that businesses in his sector sometimes prefer to pay agency rates in order to avoid the cost of managing workforces. One union representative, for example, talked about a woman in her early sixties who was asked to reapply for

her job. Given her age, her employer had expected her to retire. However, she lacked the resources to leave work and needed support to stay in work.

“And the idea that she was winding down to retirement was just laughable. She said, how am I going to retire? How could I afford to do that? And these are the sorts of assumptions made about older workers and how long they plan to work, or *need* to work for, and about their finances.” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

The TUC Equalities Officer (EO) noted that the flexible workforce is a particular challenge for implementing active ageing in the UK. She noted that precarious work is a primary reason for a divergent workforce leading to a large segment of the older population being at risk of being pushed out of work. Without a baseline of job security, individuals are reluctant to raise awareness of support they need and they therefore attempt to carry on with work without help from their managers. In discussing the experience of older women, she discussed how issues of caring responsibilities, health and skills can follow similar patterns leading to economic exclusion.

“I was doing a piece of work that all these discreet areas of work I was looking for. They weren't discreet at all and they were all completely interlinked. Caring was a huge part of it which seemed to kind of feed into all the other areas as well. Older women's caring responsibilities as grandparents as sort of sandwich generation caring for elderly parents and caring for their partners as well linking in to austerity issues around cut backs to social care and other support networks and cuts to the NHS. Health issues particularly in menopause but also stress and mental health issues are featured as well. Discrimination, age discrimination and how that intersects with discrimination.” (TUC Equalities Officer)

In conclusion, barriers which older workers face in remaining economically active are reinforced by a reluctance and/or inability to discuss problems that they may be facing with their managers. Without such conversations, support such as training, changes to work routine and/or work stations and flexible working is not considered even though such interventions could benefit the employer (in terms of increased productivity) and older workers themselves.

Industrial relations systems

Two points were raised about the UK industrial relations system which would inhibit the implementation of agreed approaches to active ageing. First, the UK has low levels of trade union membership and many sectors, including hospitality, retail and business services have majority nonunionised workplaces. Further, most older workers are employed by small and medium sized businesses. Not only do SMEs have low levels of unionisations, but many do not even have formal HRM policies and practices. Focusing on collective agreements as vehicles for adapting workplaces to ageing demographics would therefore be patchy, missing out on large parts of the UK economy.

Second, even where workplaces are covered by union recognition agreements, collective bargaining on work processes are relatively rare. Increasingly in the UK, HR management decision-making is delegated to line managers which can additionally make it difficult to implement agreements on work processes. Employers in the construction sector argued that systems of co-determination in Europe produce agreements on work processes result in lower levels of workplace disruptions. Managing workplaces in the UK it was argued can be made difficult by the fragmented way in which work is organised.



Macro-economic and social issues

The impact of demographic change was discussed in several of the workshops and it was noted that some sectors are being significantly impacted by ageing labour markets. Manufacturing businesses have older workforces with large cohorts of workers close to retirement age. In other sectors like finance and retail, employers are facing significant skills shortages and businesses are looking for ways to recruit and retain talent.

“We said this is an issue for you. It's going to affect your bottom line because you can't find that person who fits into that gap that's your white middle class between 25 and 35 university graduate. And no disrespect to anyone who's in that category.” (Humber LEP)

It was thought that Brexit will exacerbate many of problems of ageing workforces and skills shortages. Limitations on migrations are expected by employers to create challenges for organisations to find staff, requiring them to make better use of staff available. While many employers recognise the labour market problems coming from ageing demographics, they may also lack the tools to make adjustments to respond. For example, while skills shortages were thought by employers to constrain activities, many organisations lack the resources to train staff to keep their skills up to date.

“I think it's there but business isn't cut to the bone in a lot of places particularly in food industry for instance. There's no scope for that time to be given to the guys to teach. It's a case of go, go, go. And then if you've got five minutes spare, the last thing you wanted to do is teaching somebody else to do your job.” (IOSH event)

Older joblessness was thought to be a particularly intractable problem facing the UK economy affecting both local economies and individual workers. The threat of technology displacing workers was thought to be particularly problematic. Many older workers are now either self-employed or portfolio workers not out of choice but because these were the only jobs available. The example of paid translators was given in one of the workshops. While the work is highly skilled, translators have seen their job opportunities reduced by software and agency workers. While self-employment was thought to be attractive to some older workers- those with marketable skills and extended business networks, for many it was thought would lead to underemployment.

“I would hazard a guess that there's quite a high proportion in the 50 to 64-year-old age group who are actually in—who are underemployed, who are working fewer hours than they would like to work who are probably working in quite vulnerable employment situations like on zero-hour contracts, example, and so it's not a—I don't think it's a terribly comfortable situation.” (ENEI representative)

There was some question over whether social partnership could adequately address the challenge of unemployment and underemployment. Trade unions' constituencies are people in paid work while employers are primarily interested in supporting and fostering their own employees. Therefore, neither has a direct interest in supporting people who are out of work into sustainable employment. It was thought that there may be an indirect 'business case' for both sides to take an interest in older joblessness since creating a labour market which could better deploy skills within and between organisations would be more productive and create better opportunities for workers to transition into jobs which suit their circumstances.

“Older unemployed still face substantial age discrimination in seeking reemployment. I think in many ways that’s too simplistic, and I think it’s easy for somebody to say that they’re suffering from age discrimination when in fact it may be that they are—they’re using that as a—to excuse other reasons why they may not be able to get back into employment. I think— however, I think that there are—there are still—there’s still a substantial amount of stereotyping that does place older workers at a disadvantage.”
(ENEI representative)

There was some discussion about the regional impact of ageing workforces. In workshops in the North of England, it was thought that economic stagnation made it difficult for older workers to cope with rising pension ages. The loss of manufacturing jobs have meant that a large cohort of workers have been pushed out of work in the 1990’s and have struggled to get back into sustainable work. The closure of steel refineries was thought to increase the problem of older joblessness. On the other hand, it was also thought that regional government and employers would need to ensure that skilled labour is available in order to attract businesses. For example, it was noted that Siemens has built a major factory in the Humber region and the availability of trained engineers was thought to be crucial.

In some of the workshops, there was a discussion of the impact of public policy on organisational practices. The 2010 abolition of the default retirement age was thought by some employers to make conversations with employees of retirement plans difficult. Although the government had issued guidelines to employers which had stated discussions around retirement could be part of the overall appraisal process, many employers are concerned about talking to older staff about their retirement plans. Accordingly, employers are uncertain of when to start conversations of how and when retirement happens.

“I think that’s potentially a barrier because in some cases, you may want to start some kind of dialogue because you see somebody starting to struggle. Well then there’s a barrier discriminating. So actually, more often than not, the only way for that person to come to you to actually say ‘I’m starting to struggle’ because, and they’re starting the dialogue. So actually in some cases that could be about conversations that might be more helpful and they will change.” (Humber LEP)

It was noted that some employers like BAE Systems have introduced phased retirement options (whereby employees can reduce their working hours on a phased basis in the year before retirement) in part in order to trigger a conversation on retirement plans.

Organisational issues

While employers recognised the long-term issues relating to ageing demographics, they also discussed the intensification of work which makes workforce planning and investment in staff difficult. Therefore, pressure to complete short-term tasks and maintain profitability restrict their ability to make significant changes to work processes. One manager talked about her struggle in convincing senior managers in her organisation to think about the age balance of the workplace. She discussed how her organisation had a large cohort of workers who were close to retirement and, absent an organisational intervention, they would face a staff shortage within a five-year period.

The impact of work intensification on long term planning was discussed in three contexts. First, although employers recognised the importance of recruiting from as large a labour pool as possible in order to find the best qualified candidates, it was recognised that implicit biases still exist when recruiting staff. These can manifest themselves in terms of job specifications, how posts are advertised and how workers are selected. Many large organisations monitor recruitment processes to identify and address such biases. However, as line managers are responsible for recruiting within their teams, equal opportunity policies do not always disseminate to the workplace level. One equal opportunities manager, for example, discussed how he had reviewed two job specifications for equivalent posts. One had attracted almost exclusively male job applicants and the other attracted mostly women. On reviewing the job specifications, he noted that small differences in wording had created gender biases with implicit messaging of what kind of worker the recruiter was seeking.

The second issue discussed was training and development. Although employers talked about the importance of training to maintain a skilled workforce, they also argued that it is difficult to invest in workers within the context of both a flexible labour market and short-term profitability. With the former, organisations may be reluctant to invest in workers if they think that employees will use the skills they attain to find a better paying job with another organisation. With the latter, organisations have budgetary constraints in putting aside resources to upskill staff. Accordingly, employers in the manufacturing sector noted that it can make more sense for managers to rely on agencies to supply skilled workers than to make the investment in staff themselves.

The investment in people is key... We found it very, very difficult to fill those skill gaps. We've got a very ageing population in terms of our growers and engineers. And we have to either outsource or we have to train. And there are government initiatives such as apprenticeship levy and whatever else that businesses eventually have drawn into now to upskill their workforce and to bring new blood into the business." (IOSH event)

It was not universally the case that employers reported being reluctant to train. Managers in higher education argued that there are many opportunities for staff of all ages to train. The fact that there is a budget held at faculty level was thought to create an incentive for line managers to send staff to train without worrying about the impact on their respective budgets. Further, one manager of a startup company argued that older workers can benefit organisations because they already have the skills which the organisation is seeking and can support the training of younger staff.

"We are mainly hiring really young graduates coming out of University, which is really what we can afford. These older guys are providing an amazing ability to upskill and develop these graduates without us needing to set up training courses, because we have got that kind of experience in house through them. So this has just come through hiring a different type of person really." (London workshop)

The third issue discussed was managing health issues. In some sectors, maintaining healthy work environments was considered a big challenge. For example, managers of ambulance services recognised the impact of long work hours, intensive work routines and ergonomic issues like carrying heavy pack had on paramedics' health and well-being. Similar health issues were recognised in social care services, especially domiciliary care, in which care workers spend a large amount of their time travelling from one client to another. In both cases, managers discussed the difficulty of managing

the work routines of staff who are out on call and who are having to respond to short term pressures.

“The work is quite demanding and people with perhaps not great health...I can see that it is difficult for the employer as well under those circumstances... More and more focus is on getting the job done in a number of hours and making sure that the client is kept reasonably happy, rather than concentrating on whether or not the worker is going to be able to do it. As I say, I don't really see that there is any sign of any movement in this regard.” (London workshop)

Social partner issues

Trade unions are supportive of initiatives to support older workers in maintaining high quality 'decent work'. Initiatives such as the Midlife Career Review service have involved trade union representatives in helping older workers better plan for their careers. These are discussed in the next section. However, it was noted that unions can struggle in reconciling initiatives to support older workers in extending working life with campaigns to maintain pensions and the 'right to retire'. Union representatives noted that older members want their unions to protect their pension rights within the context of constant pressure from employers to reduce benefits and shift risk onto employees. While initiatives to improve working conditions and job security for older workers was not thought to be inconsistent with the protection of pension rights, union representatives discussed the caution they have in messaging their approaches. It was also thought that unions need balance the interests of older and younger members, particularly as they are trying to recruit young people to join.

Facilitators

Individual

Workshop participants discussed the fact that people are living longer and healthier lives than in the past and there is therefore greater scope to take part in a range of activities including work. Both managers and union representatives thought that as longevity increases, people's expectations what they will do in later life are changing. Life milestones like buying a home or starting a family are being delayed and changes in career trajectories need to be seen within the context of life course patterns. One union representative argued that the current generation of older workers may have planned their life trajectories better than previous generations and therefore many have a clearer idea of what they want to do in their late stage careers.

“At the age of mid-40s to 50 is when you're making your decisions and thinking oh, how long have I got to go? Another 20 years or whatever? You know, that's part of the planning. You may be hanging on more to the job to see you kids through university and all the responsibilities you have from middle aged onwards. You need to be able to plan those things.” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

Work is an important part of lifestyles in the UK and therefore many people choose to work longer not just for financial reasons but also because work provides structure, meaning, and social networks. Union representatives in Finance noted that because work is a dominant part of people's life, for example where they socialise and engage- leaving work either voluntarily through retirement or involuntarily through job loss- creates a significant loss for many. The idea of phased retirement as

a way to gradually transition life stages was thought to be attractive to some older workers. In higher education it was noted that such transitions are fairly common.

Two caveats were made to the argument that life planning may be improving. First, it was noted that baby-boomers are in a 'golden age' of pensions and social welfare (although many older people are retiring with little or no savings). Millennials will be retiring on even worse pensions and savings and in the future it was expected that many more may be compelled to delay retirement for financial reasons. Second, it was noted that although life planning is important, individuals can be knocked off course by unexpected changes which occur both within and outside of the workplace including health problems, unexpected caring responsibilities, and changes in family circumstances like a divorce or remarriage. For older workers to be able to manage life disruptions while staying economically active, it is important to be able to have a discussion with their managers about support they may need. This can sometimes be difficult as asking for an accommodation like a reduction in working hours could be perceived as reduced commitment to work.

Disruptions can also occur in work such as a reorganisation of the workplace, job restructuring or job loss. Major changes to work can lead older workers to choose to retire early rather if coping with change proves difficult.

"They suddenly change the goalposts, it's quite tricky to adjust quite quickly...just what it's felt like. It's a very sudden thing rather than much more gradual thing." (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

It was thought that people in knowledge-based work have greater scope for active ageing both in and out of work whereas many older workers are in physically demanding and/or precarious work which is becoming increasingly precarious. Union representatives argued that interventions from employers to address issues of work intensification could persuade some older workers to extend working life, but expressed scepticism that such support would materialise. They argued that older workers are fatigued by the increased intensification from work.

"You know, a lot of people that have retired are just so *fed up* and they can't *wait* to retire, you know? And I think if there were alternatives available, if there was some sort of process and place that would protect your pay, and if management could do something about all the physical lifting, shifting, and the shift work.... maybe then staff would be staying on at work longer." (UNITE workshop)

Union representatives in ambulance services argued that the work which paramedics carry out involves high physical demand. However, they could use their knowledge and experience to stay economically active by resupplying ambulances and maintaining stock. The problem, it was noted, is that stock maintenance is contracted out by the NHS to private contractors.

"And while we have got people that...you know, we can't physically do it until we're 60, because it's so demanding. People are getting heavier. People are just... it is back-breaking. But there are plenty of other jobs that can be done such as making the ambulances ready. But these jobs are outsourced to private companies, where the workers are likely to be low paid, maybe more vulnerable. You know, you got jobs where someone who's been in the ambulance service 20, 30 years and knows the ins and outs of an ambulance." (UNITE workshop)

Finally, both managers and union representatives noted that while there are many positive reasons why older workers may choose to delay retirement, the primary driver for a large part of the population is finance- having inadequate pensions and savings to retire. Low income and low skilled workers are most likely to be compelled to work longer and usually have the fewest resources and social capital to make adequate adjustments in order to be able to work longer.

Industrial relations systems

Two points were raised about how the UK system can facilitate longer working life for some but not all older workers. First, there was some discussion around legislation and particularly the abolition of the default retirement age. Managers focused on the fact that older workers usually cannot be dismissed solely on the basis of their age. Therefore, they are having conversations with employees who want to delay retirement, although when and how those conversations occur is mixed. Some employers are reluctant to initiate a conversation even if their intent is to seek a mutually beneficial work arrangement such as phased retirement. While some older workers are able to extend working life beyond normal retirement age, many are still retiring early because of a health problem, work disruption or change in family situation.

“The government’s focus, which in the years following the repeal of the default retirement age, the emphasis had very much been on allowing people to extend their working lives beyond any retirement age that up until then had been fixed by employers. So, it focused on work from—typically from age 65 as long as you want, and that focus has substantially shifted in the last few years given that the proportion of people, the proportion of the population working post 65 has increased substantially and continues to increase, the focus much more now is ensuring people’s ability to remain actively at work post age 50.” (ENEI representative)

Second, some managers argued that the UK industrial relation system is less antagonistic than other parts of Europe and therefore can facilitate more constructive and mutually beneficial dialogue. Managers in higher education argued that the ‘us versus them’ mindset of social dialogue is not common in the UK, especially in non-unionised workplaces, and cooperation is more common. This was not a view shared by the union side.

Macro-economic and social issues

Demographic change was seen as having a significant impact on the UK labour market, albeit one which has not yet been recognised by most organisations. Managers argued that employers will be responsive to the needs of older workers once they face labour and skills shortages. This point may be accelerated because of Brexit should the availability of migrant labour reduce.

“Until people really start to feel the pain and see how demographic changes are going to impact on their ability to have the kind of organisation they need, there won’t be changes. Senior management need to understand the impact of demographic change on their position in the market place otherwise we are not going to see changes.”
(London workshop)

Some sectors are feeling the impact of ageing workforces. The TUC EO noted that in sectors like teaching and health services, employers are starting to construct new approaches to work in order to

attract workers who do not work a traditional full-time work week. For example, local authorities are trying to address skills gaps in their schools by attracting mid-career workers. Teaching assistant roles are being used to enable mid-career job changers to train to join teaching. She argued that for organisations to be successful in recruiting, they need to make work attractive enough to encourage people to make a mid-career change.

In the three regions in which workshops were carried out (London, Humberside and the North East), there was discussion around the importance of active ageing to region strategies for economic development. In London, the main issue was the competition for talent and the difficulty employers have in finding and retaining skilled labour. Discussions in both Humberside and the North East focused on the fact that both regions are older than most parts of Europe and have pockets of social isolation and deprivation. Small and medium sized businesses in particular find it difficult to find workers and the LEPs in the both regions are looking for ways to connect workers with local businesses. The North East Healthy Workplace Award was cited as an example of sharing and disseminating good practice in matching businesses with people who have been economically inactive for health-related reasons.

In many of the workshops, there was a discussion around how the UK's labour market is flexible relative to other parts of Europe. Although many older workers struggle to maintain work within the context of increased precariousness, some are able to benefit from a more transactional relationship with their employers. Older workers with marketable skills and good social networks are well positioned to negotiate phased retirement plans with their employers on an individual basis. Others can become self-employed and use their social networks to find work. However, union representatives argued that it is by no means the case that many nor even the majority of older workers are in a position to individually negotiate their retirement plans. They noted that the increase in 65+ workforce is clustered around male workers with university educations who are often in the most advantaged labour market position.

There was some discussion of how the apprenticeship levy would have on older workers' employability. Union representatives discussed how apprenticeships have been important in getting young workers into well paid and secure work and the role of unions in ensuring that they lead to sustainable employment.

“Traditionally, apprentices have always been kind of tied in with trade unions in terms of support, knowing your rights, thinking about right pay for the training, and being a member of staff as any other member of staff with the same terms and conditions and sort of for the TUC, that's a key priority, is about decent pay and conditions for workers of the UK and Europe, because the way industry and organisations are now, many of them are European or international, aren't they?” (TUC EO)

It was thought that apprenticeships could also support older workers, particularly those in precarious work into more secure employment.

Finally, there was some discussion about the impact of pension reform on older workers' employment. There was a view that pension ages need to be linked with rising longevity in order for both state and occupational pension systems to be sustainable. Union representatives argued that while life expectancy is generally rising, this is not universal. They expressed concern about rising

inequalities with many who are in physically demanding work having shorter retirement lifespans than before.

Organisational issues

Managers and union representatives discussed three areas of organisational activities which are facilitating dialogue on new approaches to active ageing. First, in some organisations, labour demands are compelling managers to consider a more diverse group of workers when recruiting for job vacancies. For example, an HR manager in a local authority talked about the challenges which they have in attracting young people to work in parts of local government through apprenticeships. The local authority is now investigating ways to attract older workers who are looking for a career change.

“A lot of our attention’s been on the younger side and especially recently, there were apprenticeship levies, you know, lots of work around apprentices and some of our interest has been in attraction to a fairly, not a very popular place to work really in the council, can be quite rigid in the way it works and so on. So it’s not very attractive for young people, we put a lot of focus I suppose into that. I suppose I am particularly interested today to see whether there’s anything we might have missed on the other side.” (Hull workshop)

She noted that in the local authority, there is an ageing workforce, and so the employer has been focusing on recruiting younger people in order to balance the demographic profile of the organisation. However, they are now looking for ways to redeploy older staff to parts of the local authority facing skills shortages and her focus is on how to make work more attractive to staff in order to encourage job change.

A second and associated issue concerned skills retention and deployment. Both managers and union representatives thought that employers generally value older workers’ skills, although they may be reluctant to provide training in order to keep those skills up to date. One union representative argued that employers have an incentive to support older employees who provide a wealth of tacit knowledge and skills.

“You know, you’re losing a lot of experience. You will go and you will get someone that retires after 30 years in the ambulance service. You lose 30 years of experience in the blink of an eye from our organisation.” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

A manager in the construction sector noted that there is a premium on older workers with traditional skills, especially those which young people are not acquiring. She talked about different trades which go out and then come into fashion, especially because of building restoration. Older tradespeople with niche skills can be highly valued by construction firm and companies like hers that employ them are especially keen to keep these staff.

“I was mentioning before about the asphalt. It's a dying trade but it's starting to come back in more on people and what to use that material now so we have to sort of still utilise these people who've got the skill which it's difficult to learn because it's a long apprenticeship to work up into that sort of material. And if it's not very widely used anymore, it's not something that people tend to want to do.” (IOSH workshop) An employer in a start-up organisation discussed recruiting older workers in order to

bring skills from other sectors into his business. He talked about employing staff on a part-time basis in order to provide available skills and mentor younger recruits.

“Of the last six people we have hired, three have been recent university graduates and three have been older workers whom we have engaged on a flexible basis. All three are 60 plus and one is 65 plus. They were hired mainly because of the experience they can bring to the technology team but we have hired them on a very flexible basis.” (London workshop)

Some employers discussed ageing workforces within the context of workforce flexibilization. One manager discussed flexibility as something which was mutually beneficial to him as manager and his employees. He said that employees were able to “work whatever hours they want to work” and it gave him an advantage over ‘big corporates’ in recruiting them. Other managers discussed using phased retirement as a way of managing workload. For example, older academics sometimes reduce working hours but can pick up lectures or dissertation supervisions where there is a need. As discussed above, workforce flexibility also has negative side in terms of increased precariousness which was an issue raised by union representatives extensively.

Finally, workshop participants discussed the ways in which communication between employers and older workers can facilitate good practice in terms of active ageing. In the UK context, employees’ relationship with their line managers was thought to be paramount in supporting older workers. This is because line managers have dominant responsibility in workforce managing including conducting appraisals, planning workload and providing training.

“But I think like what you’re looking for from employers is to value the value the people who have been there for a long time and given their service. But to then through appraisals or whatever, if those people are feeling a bit lacking in whatever, motivation, for those people to actually *have* the training programme and find out if there is there anything you’d like to be doing that you’re not doing?” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

This point is particularly important within the UK context and explains why many of the examples of social dialogue cited occur at the workplace or regional levels rather than national or even organisational initiatives.

Social partner issues

Union representatives discussed three ways in which they are facilitating dialogue on active ageing. First, they pointed to the role of union representatives in promoting training and career development opportunities. There was extensive discussion about the role of the TUC in the Mid-life Career Review project. Union representatives have been trained in many organisations to be career advisers to people seeking a review and can be well-placed to provide advice because older workers can have frank discussions about their career plans without worrying about the impact it would have on their present jobs. One representative argued that one of the ways in which unions can promote decent work is to help members transition to jobs which better suit their circumstances. It was also noted that the role of unions was crucial to the success of the programme because the union movement has an extensive network to reach workers.

“If I give a packet of Value My Skills card to one rep and that one rep uses them themselves and with one other person, that’s already double the number of packs.

We have reps that have met with two people, but we also have reps that have met with 2,000 people. So I can say I’ve sent out, last year, 418 packs for argument’s sake or it could be 5...it’s probably 523. But what is the impact? How many people have they reached? So I know that it’s going to be at least sort of 2,000 because I know that one person has done 2,000” (Unionlearn representative)

Second, unions are reaching beyond traditional activities in order to support vulnerable older workers who are not covered by collective bargaining. For example, some unions are devoting resources toward community outreach in order to support people working in small businesses, migrant workers, and those in precarious work.

“One of the key aims of that role is to engage with community widely...they’re interacting with a number of projects and it’s about those CV writing skills, interview skills and yeah, it’s kind of open sessions. The council is a partner in it. The council has been promoting it as well as the sort of like the projects teams and the union.” (Unionlearn representative)

Finally, union representatives emphasised their role in promoting ‘decent work’ which they argued is essential to managing work within the context of fuller working lives. It was argued that ensuring a basic standard of working conditions was important in order to avoid a race to the bottom in which older and younger workers would be competing for increasingly poorer jobs.

“The one thing that the TUC certainly are consistent is about priority areas and it’s about...as I sort of said earlier on, decent jobs with decent pay and conditions for the working people of the UK and more broadly, sort of really internationally, getting away from exploitation.” (TUC EO)

Perceptions of active ageing

In this section we will consider different perceptions of active ageing, starting with the ageing process and working through to the experience of work as part of active ageing. Comments were expressed by stakeholders, employing organisations, line managers, unions and employer associations in workshops and interviews.

Demographic change and active ageing

Participants in the workshops seemed broadly familiar with the facts around demographic change and the ageing of the workforce. They seemed aware of the main legislative changes on age discrimination and the end of mandatory retirement. At the beginning of each workshop we explained the meaning of the term active ageing as well as the aim of the project to identify interventions which would support an active ageing process.

There was little challenge to the idea that active ageing is a self-evident benefit to older workers, employers and society as a whole. In this sense, it was in effect, a non-issue. On the other hand, there were differing views on the questions of how well-placed workers were to age actively and how supportive employers were of older members of the workforce, both in and out of employment.

Most significantly, there were critical views on how willing employers were to adjust work tasks and employment conditions in acknowledgement of the needs of older workers.

Perceptions on ageing and working

While we did not define our understanding of the ageing process, each of our workshops discussed different perspectives on ageing. Participants appeared to recognise that views on old age had changed somewhat over recent decades. Employer and employee groups broadly agreed that society had benefited from developments in medical science, diet and the quality of social and working life. They acknowledged that life expectancy (including *healthy* life expectancy) was rising, and that governments of advanced countries had raised state pension ages in recognition of this. Hence, a broad societal wide narrative in relation to the ageing process appeared uncontentious. On the other hand, there were differences in the ways ageing, and the *challenge* to age actively, were viewed by the different parties. The following represent some insights.

Age and ageism

Employee views

Employee reps gave numerous examples of low key ageism in operation. A representative from an overseas aid NGO explained how her organisation was formally committed to equal opportunities policies, yet management had effectively side-lined older employees from meaningful work in postings abroad. Workers were typically engaged on fixed term contracts which were selectively renewed, with a tendency for newcomer younger staff to be brought in to replace older, longer serving staff:

“There’s quite a lot of movement going around, mainly around localising programme staff in the regions, as opposed to the UK....We are supposed to be given equal opportunities but in reality.... you know that people make their assumption when you work at a certain age Let’s say, you are in your early 40s, the assumption is that you don’t *want* progress in the workplace, that you don’t want to travel. So it’s all that kind of stuff going on and while people in the old contracts, have better conditions than the new contracts....the newcomers, who are mainly younger people...can earn less money and are being hired to replace the older people who are left without contracts.” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

Hence, in the above example, the employer was (allegedly) operating a subtle form of ageism against older staff. The nature of the employment terms (fixed term contracts to overseas located workers) meant it was relatively easy to dismiss older workers as they became more expensive (presumably, through promotions and salary increments of some form). The buzz and excitement of working for an overseas aid charity meant that there was a steady supply of younger staff willing to step into the shoes of older staff members upon completion of a tour of duty. Whether or not the rationale offered by management was genuine, is not clear. What was *said* however, was that, in effect, “this is a job for a younger person and we assumed you wouldn’t be interested in this any more.”

Age and arduous work

Employee reps explained that the physically tiring and stressful nature of their work made it difficult for many staff to contemplate significantly longer working lives. They saw the limitations of age as understandable only within the context of the kind of work and the extremes of pressures and workload it entailed:

“We are pushed to the limit because, you know, we are going to break. We are going to run out of fuel. And (management) are not even interested in *why* individuals are sick. They’re just saying, ‘Well, this person’s sick, they’ve had X amounts of periods of sickness. Let’s deal with it,’ rather than looking at the bigger picture and actually saying, ‘Why? *Why* are they burning out? *Why?*’ And these kids nowadays (at the age of) 20, they’re not going to reach retirement age if it keeps going the way it is.” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

Union representatives believed that a major cause of variation in individual capacity for working later could be put down to the specific job situation and the physical or mental demands of the job. This was evident in our workshops for NHS paramedics, workers in the financial services sector and construction in particular.

The paramedic reps explained that a new grading structure had been introduced, resulting in rebanding and creation of new career paths. In their view, this would create a ‘new breed’ of degree-qualified paramedics who would be able to “bail out,” of the more arduous aspects of the job. However, the opportunity to follow this new career pathway and escape from the more gruelling elements of the job, did not apply to the non-degree qualified paramedics.

Commenting on this, a paramedic rep explained:

“Well, the impact of that is on the older paramedics because actually, the younger paramedics can say, “I’ve got my degree certificate thank you very much, I can use my degree qualification to meet the requirements of the new role.” Whereas the older paramedics would be unable to make the same transitions and will be marooned in the same role with all its inadequacies, stresses, contradictions and unfairness.” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

Hence, they foresaw that working longer would be problematic for those who had not benefited from a degree level education and who would not therefore be able to adapt their work to their changing abilities as they aged.

One employer representative explained the impact of ageing on individual workers more in terms of personal characteristics of individuals. An individual representing an NHS Ambulance Trust pointed out that different individuals varied in their readiness or potential to age actively, and argued that this was largely a feature of individual differences. While she saw the arduousness of work and the working environment as important, she commented strongly that individuals’ personal attributes (their health and fitness in particular) were also material.

“There’s some idea that a paramedic of a certain age is the same as any other, whether of the same or a different age, but this is as barmy as the suggestion that any two human beings are just the same. So, you know, so you got to take and treat individuals according to their own abilities and their own wellness.” (Hull workshop).

Age and Pace of Work

A particular angle highlighted by union reps in the financial services sector, concerned workers who were expected to work at a high pace. Individual workers could be closely monitored and those who slowed down might find themselves facing “capability procedures” or even disciplinary action.

“Whether you are 50, 60 or 75 you are still expected to hit the targets that have been set by the company. If you are failing to hit those targets, it doesn’t matter how old you are, your manager is going to come down on you because you are not hitting the company expectations.... The company has set the targets according to how much money you are bringing in, how quickly you are on the phone, how quickly you are off the phone, how many calls you take in the call centre, the quality of the work you have done... If you are not hitting your targets, your manager will come down on you because *their* manager will come down on them. And somebody who is sitting on the other side of the world who may be a shareholder, will say, “*What’s going on?!*” (Union Finance Sector workshop)

Another rep made a similar point, specifically mentioning older women working in a bank call centre. “I work with Barclays and a number of the older women I work with in a call centre say they feel pressured because they are still expected to produce the same figures as anybody else. As you get older you are bound to slow down but no allowance is made for this by the management. As you get older your memory may not be quite so good, you may not be such a sharp thinker. Obviously, in the workplace, if you are registered as disabled the company must make adjustments to recognise your disability. On the other hand, older workers get no concessions at all. There’s nothing to put in place to account for the fact that this person may have started working for Barclays, thirty or forty years ago. The processes in a call centre can change daily and the older generation don’t seem to cope with that as well as the younger ones. It would be good if you could reach a certain age and acknowledge that you have slowed down and concessions would be made, but instead you end up on a capability procedure. There is no leeway at all for age and declining speed. They are aware they are not as quick, they feel harassed and wish they had retired.” (Union Finance Sector workshop).

Hence, union reps recognised that the pace of work was a significant problem facing older workers, arguing that concessions should be made to recognise the slower pace at which they were likely to work. According to their reports, this need was not recognised by management.

Dr Martin Davidson, an occupational health physician with extensive experience in companies such as Network Rail and Royal Mail, attended one of our workshops. He commented on the *pace of work* issue as follows:

“I think one of the big issues ... is the point about performance management. Older people may not be able to function as rapidly as somebody who is 40 years their junior either mentally or physically, and I don’t see an awful lot of recognition of that fact... in the way employers deal with people in their 50s or 60s. The expectation is that they must perform the same as everybody else, and that’s fine, but in a physical role, you might struggle and many of these people end up in capability dismissal, because they can’t keep up.

“But they don’t want to leave, and they could probably function very well at 75% or 80% productivity but their employer can’t or won’t tolerate that. I think it’s partly because the employer doesn’t want to be see different expectations of what people do. It’s easier for them just to apply a blanket rule and say, ‘If you can’t make the cut and knock out a thousand widgets a moment, we can’t use you.’ That’s easier done than to allow for performance differences.” (Martin Davidson, London Employers Webinar)

Dr Davidson was critical of many large employers he had encountered who failed to make such adjustments to expected outputs or pace of work for older workers.

“And I say to these employers, ‘Can’t we just go a little bit more gently with these guys? They’re good guys but expecting them to batter through a thousand cases a day is hard work. I mean, can’t we still use them usefully and make whatever financial alteration which we make, but allow them to go a little more slowly than their younger peers?’” (London workshop)

But nonetheless, he saw differences between larger and smaller employers in their abilities to make such adjustments to expectations for older individuals.

“If I am dealing with Unilever or that kind of organisation, changes can be made and Unilever are more philanthropic than many of them. In the less enlightened organisation the worker is given a mop and a bucket and a bunch of stairs, and told to get on with it. There is no easy fix for this. (Martin Davidson, London Employers Webinar)

Getting stuck in unfulfilling work

Reps in our financial services workshop commented on the ‘getting stuck’ phenomenon facing older workers.

“But the fear is because we’re reasonably well-paid, thankfully, in our jobs. But then, they’ve...so, there’s lack of motivation and they’ve been there for years, to look for the...there’s very poor chance of getting another job when you’re 60, 62, and 50s. So, it’s the thing’s stuck... And if they were to get another job, comparably, wage is much lower.” (Financial services rep)

One employer expressed empathy for the position of individuals who were stuck in jobs they found un-interesting in their later years. Commenting on the position of the WASPI women (those women born on or after April 1951) who have been subject to a succession of changes in state pension age, she offered the following view:

“My sister found that she could not retire at 60. ...They expected to go and now find they cannot go... you know, so you have got people hanging about unable to retire.... She spent at least three years just hanging about and that. The lack of motivation (this causes) in the last three years of work is very bad.... it is no way to end your working life is it? Wishing you were somewhere else? I really feel for people who want to retire and can’t. How do you motivate people in those last three or four years of work who just wish they weren’t there.” (Hull workshop)

Hence, her concerns were both for individuals locked into jobs from which they could not retire and as an HR professional, the idea of employing workers lacking motivation. The same employer advocated action to find useful and fulfilling roles for people *stuck* in jobs from which they could not afford to retire.

“We should get them to do something that’s valuable saying, it’s almost like we’ve put you on the rubbish heap and saying you’re not wanted. We should help them find roles for the last five years of their career so that they feel valued and useful at work.” (Hull workshop)

Policies to support active ageing

The term “active ageing” was recognised but not widely adopted by either our union representatives or our employers. Policies explicitly described as pursuing an “active ageing” agenda were therefore unlikely to appear. On the other hand, there was evidence that employers from all our sectors had changed policies around recruitment and retention of workers to comply with the law (now prohibiting age discrimination) and to that extent it could be said that “active ageing” policies are on the bargaining agenda. What evidence was there that this agenda has indeed moved forward? How far are measures being adopted as a matter of corporate policy or identified as necessary by one or other of the stakeholders in workplaces? To what extent could these be said to be supportive of an active ageing agenda?

Employers were positive regarding the need for policies and tools that would support a more concerted approach to encourage active ageing. An HR self-employed consultant who attended our London employers’ workshop offered the following comments:

“When I speak to HR managers they sometimes say, ‘Well, you know, we are already doing lots on this...’ So, I think we need something that says, ‘This is what you can do really differently so that they really want to pick it up and run with it.’ So to me it is primarily about promoting the concept and if I get a bit of facilitation and coaching out of it, then that’s great but it is a secondary issue.” (London workshop)

What might influence the willingness of organisations to adopt active ageing policies? Inevitably, it comes down to leadership in the organisation, according to one HR manager:

“A lot of this depends on the way the person in charge sees the whole thing and whether they give it any thought and think, “You know what, there is a working life and then you start to think about retiring. But there can be different approaches which may make a difference and perhaps we can start to get them embedded within the organisation’s culture so that people do things differently.”” (London workshop)

The ENEI has been advocating adoption of policies to support active ageing since before the 2006 Age Regulations were adopted.

“Clearly once the law had changed, it was important that people understood that there were strong compliance issues to make sure that the law was respected, and I think over time, we’ve seen a change. I don’t know that it’s as dramatic a change as the one—as one might have expected, but there’s now much more of a general perception that discrimination on grounds of age is just as damaging as discrimination, for example, in terms of race or gender.” (ENEI representative)

Intergenerational issues

Conflict

Both union representatives and managers discussed the needs of younger workers within the context of ageing workplaces. Union representatives pointed to the increasing precariousness of work and argued that this may be leading to greater social inequalities which will manifest themselves in future generations.

“Young people today need opportunities and they need something to aspire towards, something that enthruses them.” (Unionlearn representative)

Young people with formal qualifications will be able to escape work which is becoming intensified. Paramedics, for example, talked about the increased demands of their workloads. Young people coming into the occupation are starting with university degrees. As job demands increase, many are leaving the sector for less demanding and higher paid work.

“Because...and again, going back to we have got degree paramedics, we are getting people that are going through with a full on three-year degree. Why on earth would they stay in the ambulance service when they’ve got a three-year degree and they’re going to get paid buggar all? When they have got a full-on degree? They’re not going to stay. Whereas if they were to recruit people of my age and beyond, if you said (to them) ‘Go and be a paramedic,’ they’re going to get another 20 years out of you, 15, 20 years.” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

Young people without formal qualifications were thought to be more at risk of finding themselves in precarious work and some expressed concern that extended working life could make it more difficult for NEET young people to find sustainable work. On the other hand, some union representatives argued that older workers can support more vulnerable younger people in asserting their right to decent work.

“They don’t want to rock the boat or anything like that. So they will do as they’re told. Whereas the older generation have worked maybe in several jobs or they’ve been through several changes in work life. So they will know their rights and their wrongs and things like that.” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

Some managers discussed recruiting older people only after they were unable to attract younger staff. For example, in construction, long apprenticeships make it difficult for employers to find young people who are interested in coming into the industry. A manager from the transport sector noted that restrictions on HGV licences mean long-haul logistics companies are unable to recruit staff direct from secondary education and are therefore reliant on keeping older staff. Other managers noted that small businesses are looking to older workers because they find it difficult to compete with large organisations in recruiting young talent

In some sectors, respondents saw very few examples of conflict. Managers in higher education argued that younger and older academics tend to support one another in terms of research outputs and teaching. Departments which have a broader range of ages within their studentships also tend to have more intergenerational support. This is because the workforces are reflective of the people to whom their providing a service. In Finance, managers discussed the difficulties young managers can have in managing older staff. This can be due to perceptions about authority and age.

Finally, it was noted that although generational differences can exist in terms of careers, job security and precarious work, there are several other ways in which social inequalities exist. The TUC Equalities Officer thought the agreement on active ageing’s emphasis on intergenerational solidarity implicitly assumed older workers’ place in the job market is crowding out younger people whereas there are other much more important reasons behind the increased precariousness of work such as the flexibilization of the work contract.

“I think it might have started of a more negative way about intergenerational tensions and the idea of older workers working for longer and longer and blocking the labour market for younger workers. And so there were representatives there who were sort of coming from youth committees and there with the younger worker hat and there was a sense it was about broader issues to do with age in the workplace, not just issues facing older workers. So I think there were a lot of different things to balance in that negotiation.” (TUC Equalities Officer)

She also noted that many older workers are also in precarious work and it is therefore important not to generalise across generational lines.

“I think a lot of the public focus has been on younger workers being more likely to be in casualised work. But we actually find that older women were also quite likely to be in fairly precarious work.” (TUC Equalities Officer)

Perceptions of younger workers

A point was raised by a TUC representative concerning younger workers’ expectations from work. She talked about how assumptions are made that while baby boomers want security and structure from work, millennials crave spontaneity and flexibilization. She argued that what people want from work is governed less by what generation to which they belong and more toward their life stages. Therefore, many millennials want stable incomes because they have young families to support. Many older people on the other hand are looking for adventure and have the cushion of savings to take more risks in terms of job change and taking on new challenges.

“Many of the young people that I’ve worked with have quite often said to me they would rather still have the opportunity to sort of stay where they are and progress and I think what that shows is kind of a level commitment to an organisation.” (TUC Equalities Officer)

Support

Within the workplace, it was noted that some organisations have developed intergenerational networks to support learning between younger and older workers. The ENEI respondent noted that several government departments as well as IT companies now have formal networks to build intergenerational support. These networks he noted are usually HR management initiatives to identify and address potential age conflict issues like over succession planning.

Some respondents discussed ways in which younger and older workers can support one another. It was thought for example that intergenerational work teams could be the vehicle for retaining organisational knowledge. Older people can share their experiences with younger staff and pass on knowledge that they have gained through work experience.

“So I’m having conversations now about mentoring sort of newly qualified nurses and they’ve gone, “Yeah, yeah, we remember doing that, you know, 20 years ago.” And again, you know, within the university, you know, actually recognising that yes, we do need to focus on getting younger people into local authority into the health sector, into education, but actually that older generation, they’ve got the knowledge, the skills and that kind of history that they can look back and they can share that” (Hull workshop)

Mentoring

Few examples of mentoring were discussed in the workshops, although both managers and union representatives thought there are both organisational and individual benefits in doing so. For organisations, it was thought that mentoring could be a good way for older workers to pass knowledge onto younger colleagues. This could foster knowledge retention so that inhouse tacit knowledge is not lost when an employee retires.

“So I’m having conversations now about mentoring sort of newly qualified nurses and they’ve gone, “Yeah, yeah, we remember doing that, you know, 20 years ago.” And again, you know, within the university, you know, actually recognising that yes, we do need to focus on getting younger people into local authority into the health sector, into education, but actually that older generation, they’ve got the knowledge, the skills and that kind of history that they can look back and they can share that.” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

It was also thought that older workers can benefit from taking on mentoring roles by sharing their knowledge and feeling that their skills are valued by the organisation.

“Yeah, there’s all sorts of more interesting things that older people could be offered to make their twilight years in organisation fruitful and for them to share and maybe do mentoring. So why don’t you give something back to other people? Because, you know, older people have got knowledge and skills, and they don’t want to feel they’re on the scrap, they could give something back to younger people.” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

Good practice in active ageing

Our workshops explored good practices in managing ageing. At the beginning of each workshop we explained that quite a lot is known about the range of good practices on offer by employers from other research, much of this being described in guidance in the workshops and interviews, was to explore how far such policies are adopted in practice and reflected in social dialogue. A few examples of existing or future practice initiatives were described, very sketchily. In response, they gave instances of real life good practices, ideas of measures that might address problems facing older workers. Following the series of sub-headings adopted in the section below, we have analysed several hours of conversations. While following a formal HR frame of reference in analysing the discussions, in practice our lively workshops, did not stick rigidly to this format. Hence, some of the issues we expected to touch on (and the good practices they may have revealed) were in practice little mentioned. It may be supposed that more examples would have been discovered had additional workshop time been available.

Policies

Financial planning

A quarter of UK families have less than £100 in savings and there is a growing savings gap between people on lower and higher incomes. Many older individuals are severely challenged financially. Without financial security, a sudden change in circumstances can spell serious difficulty. An income from employment in later life can help considerably but individuals who lack knowledge on how to make the best use of their financial resources may benefit from advice. This may include guidance on

how to manage any property acquired over a life time or good and timely advice over one's future pension arrangements. Some employers facilitate such advice, usually from independent sources, as part of their employment benefits packages. We looked for evidence on the existence and nature of support offered.

Flexible working

There is evidence that offering a choice of flexible working arrangements can support older employees in remaining in the workforce for longer. On the other hand, there is also evidence that enforced reductions in working time or other imposed forms of flexibility can have a negative effect on retention of older workers. One participant in our London Union Reps workshop gave a personal insight into disadvantages that can come with employment that encourages or allows flexible working.

“I have been working part-time for nine years. Several members of staff (including myself) have disabilities. However, when I look at comparable jobs to my own with other employers, also offering flexibility, the salaries now are much, much lower - so that prevents me from moving. Also, I find that despite all the rhetoric about flexible hours and part-time jobs, only a tiny fraction of jobs offer such flexibility. So I think there's been very little movement on the whole concept of job sharing and part-time work and so on.” (Health and Voluntary sector workshop)

As may be seen, the commentator believes his future options for seeking alternative work are constrained by a tendency for flexible conditions to be limited to more junior job roles. If so, those who need flexibility (whether part time or variable hours) are clearly placed at a disadvantage when it comes to promotion. In the case in point, the commentator required flexibility because of a disability, hence there was little scope to move to full-time or less flexible conditions. The foregoing suggests that more needs to be known about the hidden advantages and disadvantages of working flexibly, with guidance to prevent flexible working arrangements from leading to hidden and unintended forms of discrimination.

Another union rep pointed to the fact that employers tend not to offer flexibility for certain kinds of work roles. This may work to the employer's disadvantage as it becomes ever more important to search for labour in all available talent pools:

“I attended a job centre in South London to work on a recruitment stall. A woman from St George's Hospital who was also there, trying to recruit staff, commented that she had had a very unsuccessful day because most of the people she had spoken to were mothers who could not work full time. I asked her why the hospital didn't employ more people on part time conditions to which she replied, 'You're absolutely right, but we can't get this idea through to the senior management.'” (Health and Voluntary sector workshop)

In contrast to the above example, we spoke to some employers who had clearly learned to make use of flexible conditions to recruit and employ the kinds of people they needed. One new start up employer in the IT sector, told us that his company had offered more or less unlimited flexibility to new recruits and as a result had been able to employ very skilled and experienced staff who had left jobs in larger organisations precisely because they wanted more freedom in their lives.

“We are a smaller organisation and can do things differently including offering different sorts of approaches to attract individuals away from larger organisations. Recently we hired 3 people aged 60+ very experienced in the areas they are working in. They have left their large organisations because we are offering flexibility in terms of working hours, location where they work from...” (London Workshop)

However, while clearly pleased to discover that by offering open ended flexibility, his company could match large corporate organisations in the jobs market, this employer had come to realise that such an approach could have its limitations.

“As I say, we are very flexible, but if you have someone who has been in job where they work in a rigid structure with an eight or nine hour day and maybe an hour for lunch every day, it takes a bit of time to find the best way to work without these structures. Getting to decide what you want to do and how you are going to work and not having that many rigid structures in place, can be tricky, though this is mainly as seen from the employees’ point of view, rather than that of the employer.....

“The arrangement has brought us benefits but to be honest, it has brought a bit of uncertainty at times too. I tell them, ‘Yes, come in whenever you want...’ but on reflection it might be helpful if we have a process where we are saying, ‘This is how it works in our company and this is what we expect of you, and these are the expectations we have... What are your expectations?’ We probably need a bit more of a collaborative process of working it out rather than putting all the onus on the employee to work out how they want to work.” (London workshop)

The above comments suggest that there could be benefits in an devising a tool or guidance note exploring the experience of organisations offering unlimited flexibility, both outlining the positive benefits and also the limitations and disadvantages so far as employees are concerned.

Gender

The challenges of working later are shaped by gender and society. The labour market experience of older women is predictably different to that of older men. Women age in the context of lower pay, markedly different pension expectations, inequality in promotion, power and status in the world of work. While strides have been made to narrow these inequalities, the journey to full-blown gender equality is long and arduous. Persistent sexism at work is simply one of a number of issues women must confront. Many issues relating to health and well-being at work are not examined through a gendered lens. The menopause can pose specific challenges for older women and is known to contribute unexpected pressures at work. Problems with ‘hot flushes’ and the temperature or ventilation in an office may cause difficulties and result in some women failing to meet normal standards of work. Others may need to be absent unexpectedly, or experience discomfort and embarrassment. Some women may leave their jobs prematurely or be obliged to defend disciplinary charges for below-par performance. Many of these issues may not be well understood by male managers.

Participants in our workshops and interviews reflected awareness of some of these issues in their discussions. The TUC Equalities Officer summarised union awareness of age and gender issues:

“I think in some of the more female dominated unions and female sectors such as health care, union officials have taken more of an interest in issues around older women in the workplace. Unison has done a lot of work around older women in everything from pensions to menopause to stress and age discrimination. It has been very much about older women rather than older workers in general...And some of the work British unions have done, around the menopause in particular, and on health issues facing older workers, particularly older *women*, has been ground breaking. It is true, there can sometimes be blank faces and embarrassment when the menopause is raised as an issue in meetings with male trade unionists, but they get used to it. The TUC has been working in this area for several years now. We have commissioned academic research, produced guidance for reps, a checklist for negotiators and we have held seminars on the subject. I get the impression that there is good practice happening here - particularly good practice driven by trade unions - though this may not be so much in evidence as elsewhere in Europe.” (TUC Equalities Officer)

The foregoing suggests that there is considerable scope for unions and employers to work in partnership around health issues for older women. The menopause in particular, would seem to be an issue where good practice guidance is needed. Support by union reps would seem to be a key area to develop in good practice guidance.

Healthy Workplace Initiatives

Discussion of healthy workplace initiatives in the UK, must be set in context. Employers in the UK are usually aware of their responsibilities under health and safety legislation. The 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act (HSWA) introduced a framework to ensure that companies have health and safety policies and safety *management structures* in their organisation. Union appointed safety representatives were given rights under this legislation and employers were required to establish health and safety consultation committees. As a result, British workplaces are now among the safest in the world, though there are still areas of working practices which contribute to ill health. The HSWA 1974 and the 1996 European Health and Safety Regulations created *rights* and *duties* for employees and employers to consult on health and safety issues. Hence, there is a strong framework and significant current social dialogue in this area. Unions campaign actively and train representatives on health, safety and well-being issues. Despite all this, it is widely acknowledged that, the employers’ duty to promote *employee well-being* has not been taken sufficiently seriously. There are some examples of good employee well-being initiatives, but many are not sustained or of marginal value.

The following issues emerged at various points in our workshops, including in a special workshop organised with the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH). Observations of employers and union reps are captured in some of the following statements.

“I am interested in the whole *workplace well-being* narrative. The way things are going we are all going to have to work a lot longer. Seeing as we spend so much time at work, it is becoming imperative that this kind of social dialogue to happen. However, I am not sure that my organisation is fully on board with this. Maybe the topic has to be raised for senior management to become more aware of it.

“Having spoken to some of my colleagues, we think maybe the organisation should become more aware of health promotion – you know, telling people that when they get to a certain

age they should watch out for certain conditions, taking exercise, eating well, knowing your blood pressure numbers and so on.... I have been trying to see how we can introduce this sort of thing.” (London workshop)

“If you are doing routine, repetitive work where you don’t need to use your brain much, but you do mainly simple physical tasks, then unfortunately, you are among those who are going to fall out of employment most quickly as you get older, and you will probably have the most to lose. On the other hand, you would probably really benefit most from having the ability to work a little longer, particularly if the retirement ages creeps towards 70. I deal with council workers from the west of Scotland, and as you might imagine there’s quite a lot of sort of late 50, early 60-year-old females in that part of that world who do not enjoy good health. They may enjoy better health in the coming years with the reduction of smoking and a fixed alcohol price and all the rest of it, but that’s going to take a while and there’s no guarantee.” (London workshop)

Any attempt to fully explore the range of possible measures to promote employee well-being, could add up to a very lengthy section in the tool-kit and resources offered to employers. Nonetheless, it would be possible to give examples and the identities of companies which have adopted good ideas, not limited to those offered by participants in the workshops. This would seem to be an area where a limited amount of additional desk research may be helpful.

Life Planning

Life planning is typically bracketed with financial planning, including planning for retirement. In earlier times, many employers offered pre-retirement courses for their employees to help them make a satisfactory transition from work to retirement. The provision of life planning and preretirement courses for employees, appears to have declined in recent years. (The Pre-Retirement Association (a national charity) was established in 1987 to provide pre-retirement courses in companies, but was dissolved in November 2016. The Life Academy was another pre-retirement preparing organisation, which has met a similar fate. A number of locally based pre-retirement training organisations continue to offer services. With the greater freedom given to individuals to choose their dates of retirement, it may be that fewer companies feel the need to prepare them for retirement.

TUC Union-Learn has participated in a pilot project to train employee representatives to deliver mid-life career reviews. These reviews are given by union representatives, TUC-Union Learn having enlisted the services of union learning representatives and trained them with this purpose in mind. The claimed value of such an arrangement is that employees have fewer inhibitions of sharing personal and private matters with union reps, compared with someone from their employer’s management team.

“Everyone is unique, and there are other life situations that individuals feel able to discuss with a trusted intermediary like a union learning rep or a rep, but they wouldn’t necessarily share, if, say, this process was being delivered by a manager because people have the right to keep their private lives private. In contrast they are willing to share information with their union learning rep because it comes with a badge of confidentiality.” (Unionlearn representative)



Lifelong Learning and Training

There is broad agreement that training older workers can play an important part in keeping them employable - both able to find work and contributing productively in their jobs. The role of TUC Union Learn is of particular interest. Over the past twelve years in the UK, more than 30,000 Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) have been trained and more than 220,000 workers are given training and learning opportunities by their union every year.

Participants in our workshops strongly endorsed the suggestion that older workers needed more help and more training to preserve their employability. Some expressed heartfelt criticism that as older workers they had been starved of opportunities to be trained in the most modern techniques or changing facets of jobs, particularly where they were affected by developments in information and communications technology. They recognised that a lack of training was denying many older workers opportunities to progress and has caused them to struggle in their jobs.

“We have zero training. You have to pick everything up as you go along. And I am struggling. And I *feel* I’m struggling. I’m not that old but I don’t know how I will make out when I am 20 years older....”

(On getting by in the job without training) “It was so stressful that, I mean, I didn’t think I would be able to cope....”

(On mentoring) “I think you could mentor people in different ways - like, the older people could mentor the younger people and the younger people could mentor the older people or train them. You know, there is scope for some exchange. They have different skills (which we need to learn) but it’s not as simple as that.

(On the need for lifelong learning) “I think in this day and age, you’re no longer able to be in a job for 40 years and then you retire. Now, if you lose your job at 55, you have to find something else to do, right? Because your pension is not going to kick in. So, it’s really tricky.” (Health and Voluntary sector union workshop)

As can be seen, this participant identified a kind of *training impoverishment* which led to deeper consequences, including in the way he felt about the job (being unable to cope, experiencing stress). On the positive side, he suggests possibilities for intergenerational mentoring to bridge the gulf between the knowledge and competencies of younger and older workers, at least in the area of information and communications technology. Older workers were treated unfairly in the following ways:

Mid-life Reviews

The idea of a mid-life career review (MLR) has been explored in a number of European countries. A particular version of this concept was piloted in 2013/14 in the UK by the National Association of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) with funding from the Government’s Department for Business Innovation and Skills². The pilot recruited 18 partner organisations, one of which was TUC Union

² Now known as the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)



Learn. The Union Learn pilot recruited 45 ULRs who were first trained in giving MLRs and then set a target of 360 reviews to be completed in some nine months. In fact 770 reviews were completed in this period. Promotional support was sent by Union Learn to all the ULRs and news about the project widely published, including in Learning Magazine, sent to over 10,000 recipients.³

All of our union reps were familiar with the work of the TUC and their own union in the field of supporting learning for union members. There was a healthy interest in the support of older workers and a number of suggestions were made, including in a long discussion in the financial services workshop concerning employability training and pre-job application training for older union members who had not had recent experience of the job application process. The following insight was offered by TUC Equalities Officer on the kinds of people who became Union Learning Representatives:

“They're often you know, older workers who have been working for longer than they had anticipated, and then they are finding themselves redundant, finding themselves needing to retrain or re-skill for different jobs or possibly just feeling incredibly left behind by changes in technology and IT. And often they're not first in line for those skills and training opportunities within the workplace.” (TUC Equalities Officer)

On the subject of the MLR as a means of supporting development of older workers, Harris made the following observations.

“Obviously, unions, obviously employers could just offer this within the workplace but I think there's a really clear role for ULR's in being that friendly face in the workplace to have those conversations about skills, needs and training opportunities and to broker some of those opportunities with employers. So I think that's one interesting development that seems not to be happening elsewhere in Europe.” (TUC Equalities Officer)

(Independent development review) “Certainly for us, one of the sort of campaigning issues or the bigger campaign is a right to have a midlife career review or a midlife development review and we put 50 on it because it's a milestone age, but unlike some other organisation and some government thinking, we would emphasise that it's with a trusted intermediary and it's not part of a development process and it's not with your line manager.” (Unionlearn representative)

(On materials and reps training) “Our commitment to the reps was training them, so that they could then go back to their respective workplaces and deliver midlife career reviews...we developed a lot of resources as part of the pilot including a 15-question statement asking people to prioritise what was most important to them. It had things in it like finances, health, keeping my current job, training for training's sake or looking for promotion and so on.” (Unionlearn representative)

(On age ranges of reviewees) “We didn't exclude anyone and whilst the materials were developed with midlife career changers in mind, they are not age-specific materials, so anyone could use them. And actually, it is better practice to continuously review what

³ More information about the project is available in *Helping Older Workers Plan their Future - Evaluation Report* TUC Union Learn 2014

you've done and where you currently are and what you need to do to go forwards, or sideways or start a new venture." (Unionlearn representative)

Clearly, the experience of the TUC Union Learn Mid-Life Review project is highly relevant to the development of a toolkit to support social dialogue around active ageing. Guidance on the use of ULRs to deliver such reviews and in particular to emphasise the elements of active ageing, could be included in materials produced as part of the ASPIRE project. Discussions with Unite and Union Learn could well develop the idea of employability training courses for older union members unversed in the complexities of the modern labour market.

Recruitment

Age discrimination in recruitment has been officially outlawed but this does not mean that older workers are free of barriers in getting new jobs. Employers may simply have a mental picture of their successful applicant as being of a certain age. They may have sound, legally justifiable reasons for an age preference or it may constitute unjustified age discrimination. There are various subtle processes which can act to screen out older applicants. Recruitment specialists and agencies are a prime means through which employers search for the right person, but these may in turn use recruitment techniques which directly or indirectly tilt the table against an older applicant. The older applicant may lack the right qualifications, quite simply because those demanded were devised after he or she finished school, college etc. Due allowance may not be given to experience over formal qualifications or the selection process may include elements which are baffling to the older applicant. On the other hand, employers need to know that they are not excluding good applicants merely because their recruitment processes are age biased.

Our workshops included one drawn from the Humber LEP Recruitment Network which had particular expertise to share in the area of recruitment. Union reps too were keenly aware of the problems older job applicants meet in the labour market. The impression we gained from our recruitment specialists' workshop, was that they were eager to follow age neutral approaches and give older applicants a chance, though sometimes they met resistance in individual cases from some of their clients/employers.

"When you apply for a job, you write out your CV or your application form in terms of meeting a criteria for a job. What isn't there is everything else that you've done on your path to that point. So what you have are all these other transferable skills that aren't mentioned." (Finance union workshop)

"In one case, an employer was having difficulty recruiting data analysis people. The union reps, who had been undertaking mid-life reviews for members, had conducted comprehensive skills assessments and had retained records of these. They were able to identify three people from the staff who had the skills that the organisation was looking for. The company interviewed all three, and they were appointed".

(Unionlearn representative)

"It is very easy to make some glib assumptions about people who are older. Recruiters can easily work out somebody's age because of the time they left school and University. If you are working on a commission, you end up discounting the ones who don't fit the profile of the manager's desired person. In one of the pilots that I've just started, we have adopted two changes to try and counteract these tendencies. One is to use video interview



technology, so hiring managers are introduced to individuals, not on paper but *in person*, straight up! So instead of receiving a word document, effectively, you'll receive a video file and you can see a real life person you can talk to and therefore overcome perhaps your initial prejudices of what a typical 55 year old looks like. And likewise, in the recruitment process, we have started using a lot more of the measures of fluid intelligence and soft skills and communication skills and have stressed experience over qualifications. And when we are able to use *objective, measurable* assessments (whether it's psychometric assessments or measures of emotional intelligence) in the recruitment process, it helps to overcome some of the barriers put up by managers who say, 'I cannot work with that person because they don't have this or that'. So from my perspective, those two changes in approach can make a big difference to the chances of an older applicant." (Hull workshop)

"Question: Has anybody had experience where you're trying to recruit somebody and it is a hard slog and you're trying to think of something new to do? What approach did you take and what skill shortage were you trying to overcome?" (Hull LEP workshop)

"Answer: We just recruited a young 71-year old receptionist. I was not sure we were going to find a receptionist. But it turns out she is a good cultural fit, and that's an important element. Her age was absolutely irrelevant but age still seems to be a factor in the role we were trying to fill. The vacancy was for specific hours and somebody at 71 happened to fit the bill very well." (Hull LEP Workshop)

The innovative approaches to job recruitment, each demonstrating that satisfactory appointments can be made from older applicants. Several novel approaches are suggested, including the involvement of union reps who were able to identify suitably qualified people from earlier work administering MLRs and helping members to fully describe their own skill sets.

Work-Life Balance

Recent reports suggest that the phenomenon of *presenteeism* has tripled in the past eight years in British workplaces. Employees often feel under pressure to appear at work despite illness and many appear to be reluctant to take the holidays they are due. Such developments coupled with a history of people in some jobs working excessively long hours, raises the importance of encouraging and allowing employees to balance their work commitments with the private life interests and duties. The term, 'work-life balance,' was coined to capture the importance of giving people time for other things than work. Trade union campaigns for work-life balance can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. (As long ago as 1817 Robert Owen formulated the demand of an eight hour day and students of labour history will be familiar with banners, posters and even a commemorative decorated pocket watch, echoing the demand for 'eight hours for labour, eight hours for our own instruction and eight hours for repose.' Whatever may be said about society's achievements and failings in this area, it remains the case that for older workers in particular *work-life balance* is an important issue. Our workshops revealed the following insights.

"I think a lot of employers are either unwilling to engage because they're fearful of what might happen if they sort of say to one person, okay, you don't need to do as much work as the next one, because they'll find it difficult to handle, to justify that difference reasonably objectively, and will immediately get complaints from the rest of the workforce that person A isn't working as hard as they are. However, I would've thought

that some of these people would be perfectly prepared to take sort of 80 or 90% of their existing salary but to work a little less less-rapidly, I earn a little less but I still got a job.” (London workshop)

“I guess how managers in HR departments could put in place those kind of arraignments for people in their early 60s, mid 60s, whatever who want to carry on working, it may not even have any particular health conditions, but just be getting old and slow, or may have a touch of COPD or arthritis or something, just may not be as quick up and down the stairs as the next man, but it’s kind of how to do that and how to organise it in a way that is manageable without taking lots of effort and without generating a kind of worries for the manager, which you then would wish you hadn’t bother doing, you know.” (Occupational Health representative) [What can help?](#)

Form of support

Our participants were invited to comment on the things that could be done which, in their views would encourage more productive social dialogue around active ageing. There was general agreement that information and examples of good practices would play an important part, though there were different views on the form this might take. The following comments from participants point us away from a single manual of good practices type of approach and towards a more versatile collection of practical tools and checklists, good information in ‘bite sized chunks,’ probably in a webbased form.

The following comments from one of interviewees are based on experience and insights from other campaigns.

“Having a book or a printed resource is not as useful in terms of dissemination of the messages you want to convey. ... We do e-notes, which fitted with a kind of online training course... but you have to be really quite committed to want to sit down and regularly do several hours or devote a period of time to undertake the course. What’s worked really well for us (in the past) has been checklist type resources. A guide in the form of a website would be useful. All the information could be assembled in one place so that you could pull off various different resources together, perhaps on different things like, say, a checklist on health and safety for older workers or say, a checklist, guidance, examples of best practice and case studies on training and skills for older workers. It would be helpful to have them all in the same place where you can dip in and out and access the bits that they’re particularly interested in. These could include checklists, guides, model agreements or a kind of that type of thing. You might have a short video, featuring a report or a little case study of someone talking about their own experiences as an older worker or something which they have negotiated in their workplace.

These are the kinds of things which in my experience have worked well. Perhaps you would include some employers looking at things they have done, commenting on this or that issue which they think needs addressing and saying what the benefits have been to them and showing the benefits of thinking a bit more creatively about age.” (TUC EO)

Participants felt that the emphasis should be on practical, convenient, not over ambitious nor flashy tools, but simple things that would be easy to use.

“Having things like a checklist or sort of a model agreement which somebody can go to is most helpful. Often it's a case of just getting everybody on board and saying, ‘This isn't going to be a massive amount of your time and resources. This is something where we can make, with a small amount of effort, we can make a really big difference for the organisation.’”
(TUC EO)

There was also comment on the style and tone of the resources. One participant expressed the view that a “horses for courses” type of approach was needed and resources should not necessarily be in the same style and format for both unions and employers.

“I guess resources might end up with different audiences... Employers might want different kinds of resources to those that the older worker or the trade unionist might want. I don't know whether you put them all in the same place and just kind of label them differently as to who that's for and whether you have different facing bits of the website and, ‘Here's the bit for employers and here's the bit for the workers...’ or what. I would think we would probably want you to signpost a lot as well because there are a lot of things that you've already had here through Union Learn and individual unions could just say, ‘Go here and you'll get the information that you need.’ It's almost like a toolkit kind of thing.” (Union rep)

Community of practice

Support was expressed for the idea of a *community of practice* being developed as part of the project. This was seen most in a more active sense by union reps who felt that the union ought to be responsible for sharing good practices.

“What else could the union's role be? It could be about the union hearing all these different stories and actually, trying to equalise conditions a bit more. So that's a way of spreading the "good practice", if you want to call it that, for example that people in particular professions might be able to retire at 55, or whatever. It could be that a particular practice developed in a particular line of work, could transfer and be applicable to other lines of work. And Unite, being the main union uniting across all these different professions, could say, well, ‘What do they do with the police that we're not allowed to do for people who work in the ambulance services, for example?’ I mean, isn't it the role of the union to try and get the good practices? And the union could help everyone up to that level rather than having all this inequality across all the different jobs.” (Unite Workshop, Public Services and Non Profit Sector)

Some employer reps saw the need for a network or similar community of knowledge sharing to support employers. In one case, an individual working as a coach / consultant to other organisations, saw the need in terms of a mission to promote change but also as a business opportunity.

“I am looking for information and an evidence base in order to sell the concept to senior leaders in their organisations. Until people really start to feel the pain and see how demographic changes are going to impact on their ability to have the kind of organisation

they need, there won't be changes. Senior management need to understand the impact of demographic change on their position in the market place otherwise we are not going to see changes. And I would like to try to land some that with people who are in charge of wellbeing and diversity because even in organisations that are quite good on diversity, they are not generally so good with older workers." (London Workshop)

This same individual explained her perspective and driving reasons as follows:

"I am coming at it from a leadership and facilitation angle. I am not coming at it from an expert angle. I am interested in leadership and transformation change. The things that would help me would be the kind of thing that would help senior people. I am talking of advice and facts on two sides of A4 saying, 'This is coming at us fast,' explaining the issues." (Employers' Workshop London)

Content

Employers and union reps alike seemed relatively sanguine regarding the content of materials or tools. On the whole, they seemed confident they would be suitable to support social dialogue, if emerging as part of the project. Whilst some broad themes were mentioned, our discussions did not result in any momentous "Eureka! Moments," where everything came together in a single idea. Most suggestions for interventions were not especially innovative but rather of a "nuts and bolts" character.

For employers, making the "business case" to decision makers in the organisation and influencing decision makers, seemed to be the key issue.

"Once you have got the general business case set out, there would need to be someone in the organisation who could say, 'Well what does this mean for our organisation?' So, something that helps to bridge the gap between the general and the specific would be useful." (Employers' Workshop London)

Several comments in similar vein were made to the effect that ammunition was needed to help persuade senior management of a need to adopt policy changes.

All of the issues covered in the section on good practice in active ageing, at some point were touched upon, mostly in ways that implied an interest in examples. Whether these should be in writing or other format was not especially dwelt on (though see suggestions above concerning format.) Reps and employers wanted to see arguments (including the business case), real life examples, models and practical guides covering such issues as the basic case for employing older workers. They wanted this to address issues such as hiring, training and re-training older workers. More specifically, they mentioned *arguments* around part time and flexible working, and *guidance* to prevent flexible working arrangements from leading to hidden and unintended forms of discrimination. In the area of health and well-being, employers made suggestions regarding the kinds of things that might help in *promoting employee consciousness of health issues*, including warning people of the kinds of health conditions that became more common in later life, information about the need to take exercise and to eat and live well as well as advising on warning signs and interpreting personal health data.

Union reps strongly believed that older workers needed help and advice on remaining employable and put forward interesting ideas for the union to put on courses or training to support this, particularly on how to navigate the modern recruitment landscape.

DWP. (2014). *Fuller Working Lives: a Framework for Action*. London: DWP.

