

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: [Older people and employment](#), HC 359

Wednesday 24 January 2018

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; Angela Crawley; Philip Davies; Kirstene Hair; Eddie Hughes.

Questions 98–153

Witnesses

[I](#): Tom Hadley, Director of Policy, Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC); Jane Shepherd, National Education Officer, UNISON; Teresa Donegan, Head of Learning and Organising Services, UNISON.

[II](#): Ben Willmott, Head of Public Policy, CIPD; Ruby Peacock, Deputy Head of Public Affairs, Federation of Small Businesses.

Written evidence from witnesses:

Panel 1 – [Recruitment and Employment Confederation](#)
– [Trades Union Congress](#)

Panel 2 – [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Tom Hadley, Jane Shepherd and Teresa Donegan.

Q98 Chair: I would like to welcome our witnesses and the people who are watching in the gallery or online. This is the third oral evidence session that we have held in this inquiry into older people in the workplace. We have two panels of witnesses today, and this is the first. The focus will be on recruitment and reskilling of older workers. This follows on from evidence that we have heard about the problem of recruitment bias affecting older workers in the job market. We will be tweeting about this inquiry with the hashtag #olderworkers. Before we go any further, I will just do two things. One is to apologise for the acoustics in this place, so can I encourage all of us to snuggle up a bit closer to the microphones and project our voices? The Victorians were not very good at thinking about these things. Secondly, could you just say your name and the organisation that you represent?

Teresa Donegan: My name is Teresa Donegan, and I am the Head of Learning and Organising Services for UNISON, the public service union.

Jane Shepherd: My name is Jane Shepherd. I am an Education Officer in Learning and Organising Services for UNISON.

Tom Hadley: I am Tom Hadley, Director of Policy at the Recruitment and Employment Confederation. We are the professional body for the UK recruitment sector.

Chair: Brilliant. That is great. You know the form: Members have questions to ask; do not feel obliged to try to answer every single question; just answer the ones where you feel you have something extra to add.

Q99 Eddie Hughes: Previous witnesses have told us there are significant problems with age bias; does your experience reflect that?

Tom Hadley: From our perspective, any people-focused business has a risk of bias, whether it is recruitment, HR or customer service, so we recognise that. Within our space, our members sit between employers and the jobseekers and, yes, it does happen. You tend to default to recruit in your own like, do you not? That is the challenge. What we have seen over the last couple of years is a recognition of that risk, which is a positive step forward. People are investing in training in unconscious bias, for example. That is really starting to happen.

It is also about looking at how we can, almost, change recruitment in this country. How can we put the processes in place that take away some of those biases? We have heard about name-blind recruitment, taking age off the application forms and taking universities off—all of these kind of things are starting to happen. We have not yet reached a tipping point,



but there is a lot of innovation happening in recruitment, which we think we can build on. Yes, it is there and we have to recognise that. It is what we do about it that is key, and we are starting to see some good activities. Part of our role, as a professional body, is to chivvy things along, to work with people like Age UK and try to make a difference, and then it is to start showcasing what is working, and there are things that are working. We take that very seriously. The more we can do that, that is when you start to get to a tipping point of more employers and recruiters in this country making sure that we address this issue of bias.

Teresa Donegan: From our perspective, we run a number of learning courses: Get That Job, on interview skills and on how to complete application forms. Many older workers come on to those courses and express the view to us that they feel they have been overlooked for promotion and that they are not considered. Whereas a perception may be that younger workers in the workforce may get access to training more easily, older workers feel that they are not considered. That is the perception: that they will not be interested in promotion. That is made clear in a couple of reports. You have seen the TUC submission that references that. I cannot remember the statistic, but in our own report, called "Women deserve better", something like one third of women felt that they would be overlooked for promotion so did not even bother applying for jobs.

How we try to encourage that through our union learning rep networks, where we have engagement with employers, is to try to encourage, if you like, pre-application-for-job days, so employers, certainly in larger sectors like health or local government, can talk about vacancies that may be coming up and perhaps give overviews of what those jobs may entail. We try to work with employers to either jointly run our learning programmes, such as Get That Job and Moving On—on interview skills and all those sorts of techniques—to upskill and to give confidence, particularly to older women. We try to do that jointly with employers, but we often do run these courses on our own, and many of those courses are funded through the Union Learning Fund monies that we receive, and very good value it is as well.

Q100 **Eddie Hughes:** Do employment agencies and recruiters generally collect data that would show you whether there is a problem? For example, in terms of where age bias might bite, do you know that applicants of a certain age would only make it to various stages of the process?

Tom Hadley: We are very pro-transparency. At the moment, it is more collected in areas like gender, to be fair. One of the areas we are looking at is can we do more to capture evidence of shortlists and looking at age. At the same time, we need to be very clear with our members how to do it, because on one hand we are saying we need to take age out of the equation—

Q101 **Eddie Hughes:** Sorry. Do they collect the data that allows them to do this sort of analysis?



Tom Hadley: Some will. It is hard to quantify how many will do it systematically. We think it is an area we can do more about to capture the data on shortlists and not just who has been placed into jobs. When you are putting forward a shortlist, what are the age brackets within that? The other thing we do know is it does vary a lot by sector. Some sectors will have particular jobs where it is perhaps harder to put forward older candidates.

Q102 **Eddie Hughes:** Do you want to give us a flavour of where that might be?

Tom Hadley: Our own industry, for example—recruitment—tends to be quite a young industry, so, again, it is good for us to talk about our own sector. I guess we are in quite a unique position in trying to work with employers to make a difference, but we take it very seriously in terms of what we do within our own sector. It has always been quite a young industry, and that is where our members are starting to be proactive in reaching out and thinking about what other channels we can use and how we can change our job descriptions so we do reflect the population. Our sector is one, but this is also for our members who work in sectors like advertising and PR, which have historically been seen as quite young industries. The way forward is for specialist recruiters to be working with employer organisations in those sectors to change things, and you are right that measuring the impact is one of the things that we do need to do so that we can make sure that we are making progress on that.

Q103 **Eddie Hughes:** How common would it be for an employer to request a specific age group, perhaps?

Tom Hadley: I would say it is not very frequent nowadays. We did used to hear stories from our members about quite blatant discriminatory instructions. As the professional body for the sector, we are not a regulatory body but we take standards very seriously. We would expect a member, even if it is turning away money, to say, "We cannot take that." That is certainly what we would expect from our members. What you do see, though, is ignorance. You will see job descriptions with words that potentially would be a barrier and turn people off.

Q104 **Eddie Hughes:** And illegal.

Tom Hadley: And illegal, possibly, sometimes. It could be words that could be misinterpreted, so sometimes it is about educating. The way forward for our sector is not just transactional; it is not just, "I need somebody", "Okay, here are some candidates." It is to sit down with employers and have perhaps more detailed conversations about job description and job design. Sometimes it is not just the words; it is how the job is constructed: could we make this job more flexible? That could attract more people from different backgrounds to come to it. That is where we are trying to equip our members to have different discussions with employers. It is not only about the transaction; it is having a more detailed think about how we could do things differently when it comes to



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recruitment, and that is something that we are committed to doing as we move forward over the coming months and years.

Q105 **Eddie Hughes:** Why do you think your industry attracts young people? Why would a particular industry have a particular demographic?

Tom Hadley: With our one, it is because people tend to fall into recruitment. There is a lack of awareness about jobs in our industry, and part of our role is to raise awareness that it is a good sector to work in. There are 100,000 people in this country working in the recruitment sector, so I will use our sector as an example, but often it is not a sector that people would think of working in, and it is also changing. Yes, it is quite a sales-type environment, which is not for everybody, but there are lots of great back-office jobs. You do not have to be in a client-facing role; for example, there are a lot of compliance roles in our sector. It is trying to raise awareness of the variety of jobs that exist in our sector that will appeal to different people, so again there is an awareness-raising priority for us, as an industry, which I am sure happens in other sectors as well.

Q106 **Eddie Hughes:** Let's dwell on the compliance, then. Do you think recruiters know enough about the law to know when they might be breaking it?

Tom Hadley: Certainly our members do. We represent over 80% of the industry by turnover. The ones that join REC have to pass a compliance test to join and to remain in membership. There is a complaints line that we run, which the TUC sit on, and our complaints panel. Part of our work is to make sure that people do understand, so the work we have done with Age UK has been good on the good practice agenda, and we take that extremely seriously. There are 16,000 calls to our legal helpline every year, which is people checking they are doing the right thing. Part of our role is to give confidence to people that they are doing the right thing, so I do not think there is a lack of awareness. We are trying to take it to the next step, in terms of how we can innovate. Compliance is really important, but it is how we take it a step further and try to make some changes to the way that we recruit in this country. That is where we want to drive activity, so we work with Age UK and with the Centre for Ageing Better, for example, trying to bring together a lot of that expertise to inform our members so that they can not only comply but innovate and really start to change things.

Q107 **Eddie Hughes:** You make a very powerful and persuasive case. I just wonder about the trickle-down to your members.

Tom Hadley: That is a great question. We are like a lot of organisations: you have to have leadership to make a difference. We expect a lot from our corporate members, but the things that we do that are unique are about how you have a bottom-up approach as well. Within REC, you have the Institute of Recruitment Professionals, which is the individual frontline recruitment consultants being part of an institute



and taking qualifications, having regular CPD training, and we think that is the trickle down. We are like any sector: you can have big corporates signing up to things, and the CEO will sign up to this, that and the other, but the key for us is that bottom-up approach as well. It is the individual people working within our sector, getting the right training and guidance so they can make a difference. That trickle down, for us, is a big part of our work, and that is why we run our own institute within the REC. That is quite unique, and it is exactly for that point: to make sure there is a trickle down.

Q108 Tonia Antoniazzi: In previous sessions, we have heard that age bias is often augmented by other identities, such as being an older woman or an older black woman. Do you have evidence or experience that shows that such groups want or need different things from the workplace, including in terms of access to training and development?

Teresa Donegan: Yes. I referenced the report we did before, "Women deserve better". We have also conducted large surveys with our schools workforce. Perhaps I should explain a wee bit about UNISON. I pulled off some stats yesterday, and they did not come as a shock, because they perhaps are reflected in the ONS stats on trade union membership: 58% of our members are over 40; 30% are over 50. Over 74% of our membership are women, and we have a membership of over 1.2 million.

Overwhelmingly, our experience on the learning front is coming across older workers in the workplace, and their needs are different; there is an argument to say that, in many instances, their needs are being ignored. For instance, many older women now find themselves responsible for older parents. Much has been said about the sandwich generation, where older parents are assisting with their children's children and looking after them. From our experience, the bigger impact on hindering older women at work and perhaps hindering them in promotion and accessing training is their caring responsibilities. Some of this is anecdotal, but it is something that we are going to measure, and I know the TUC will as well, to drill down on that and find out where there are good practices with employers, because undoubtedly some employers do have good practices. More and more, we hear of scenarios where there is not the empathy or the sympathy from the employer; there are difficulties in obtaining time off and, if that time off is obtained, it is often unpaid.

Bear in mind that many of our older women members in UNISON are low paid and, by that, we estimate that they are on earnings of £11,000 or less, so they are in our lower subs band, and we have approximately 102,000 of them. Some of them will obviously be part-time, but more and more we are coming across members who are on the minimum wage and are working full-time. For them, if they are having to access unpaid leave to look after carers, then that can have quite a significant economic impact on them.

Other reasons why women are finding it difficult to access training is because of the expansion of things like zero-hour contracts, variable



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hours or fixed minimum hours. For instance, we try to be very flexible in when and how we run our courses, and we are finding more and more with older women that we are having to make those much shorter, so one or two-hour sessions in the evening or on Saturdays. Long gone are the days when you can run a whole day's course and expect many members, especially in the older age group, to turn up. Many of them have other jobs as well. It depends what you are training in, but if we take confidence skills and trying to upgrade your skills generally to be able to seek and look for promotion, clearly a one-day course is far better to run. You are going to learn more, you are going to network, you are going to share practices, rather than trying to run these very short sessions.

Accessing online training is also more difficult for older members. That is not to say that they are all digitally not educated—many are—but it is still knowing where to, knowing how to and having the facilities. We recently did a pilot with cleaners, who were all very savvy on their mobile phones, but when it came to doing a piece of online training, whether or not it was our online training, some of which is not accessible via a mobile app—that is something we have to take on board—it was quite difficult for them to engage in that kind of online training. That is happening more and more.

That is relevant because where employers, such as in the care sector, may have introduced new practices or procedures, they will often roll out a very short, maybe online, piece of training, which they expect all their employees to access. That then covers them in terms of, "Well, we have done this training", even though that employee may struggle with being able to do that online training. Another example is in our refuse sector, for instance, and across the care sector. More and more, what used to be paper completion of forms is now done electronically, and it is like anything: if you have never used that kind of technology, it is very difficult to access.

Tom Hadley: Perhaps just a quick comment. We have been doing some work with the Centre for Ageing Better. They are putting some research out in the next few weeks that they are just finishing at the moment, which shows that, with older women, there is a particular challenge there that we need to address, so I completely concur with that. From the discussions we have had with them and organisations like Timewise, one of the challenges is flexible hiring. We talk about flexible working, but flexible hiring is where you have the confidence that you can do that job in a flexible way. It is interesting. We do some work with Indeed, the jobs board, and one of the most searched things is, "Is this job available for flexible working?" Only 9% of jobs make it clear that jobs are open for flexible-type working, so we think there is a big change in that, about flexible hiring and making it absolutely clear to people that, "We are happy to have a discussion, right from the outset, about how you could do this particular job flexibly."



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The progression point was a very good one as well. A lot of people work in different ways in this country. What we need to be able to say is, irrespective of what type of contract you are, you can progress. That was one of the conclusions of the Matthew Taylor report. Our suggestion is about whether we could make the apprenticeship levy into something a bit more flexible, like a training levy that could be applied better to people working under different types of contracts. There is something there for us to look at, about evolving the apprenticeship levy into something slightly different, which could work for all workers even if you are on a part-time or temporary contract, et cetera. That would really help in that area.

Q109 Tonia Antoniazzi: Are older women any less likely to be shortlisted or selected for roles than other job applicants? Do you see that happening, Jane?

Jane Shepherd: It does come down to making both jobs and training as flexible as possible to cover all the barriers and challenges that we have flagged up here. Anecdotally, older working women are interested in going for these jobs, but, for whatever reason, they feel less confident in applying, which is where we come in with our training. We have run programmes such as Women's Lives for over 25 years now, and it is about developing skills and confidence for women so that they feel empowered to apply for whatever position they are keen on applying for. That is very much the good-practice approach that we take.

It is step-by-step skills development as well, so we look at CV skills, and we will need to look at the changing ways of applying for jobs as well. In our Moving On toolkit, which we have developed for union learning reps, we do sessions about asking our learners to look at the different approaches. Some of our members might not have needed to apply for a job for quite a long time, so they might have been out of the employment market and are needing to apply, so again it is very much about the flexibility of looking at their needs to enable them to feel confident in applying for positions and getting the best outcome for them.

Tom Hadley: That is a great point about confidence. Our members will say that, often, people are not putting themselves forward for jobs, so part of the role of our members is to give people the confidence and give them the briefing. There is a point of public policy here. We do think we need to look at developing some sort of all-age careers advice network in this country that is leading-edge. The challenge there is who is giving that advice. I know Jobcentres have work coaches, but you cannot be a specialist in all the different sectors, especially the emerging ones. One of our suggestions is about whether you could create a network of employers, possibly union reps and some of our members, who are specialists in all these different sectors, who could be referred from Jobcentres to get the advice you need to give you the confidence to take the next step in your career.

Q110 Tonia Antoniazzi: Are you aware of any particularly good practice either



in the recruitment agency or within the workplace on responding to these needs?

Tom Hadley: Yes, absolutely. Just last week, we had the roundtable with the Centre for Ageing Better. Some of our members have dedicated people within their organisation to take a particular look at this. They have a mentoring programme for older workers, providing extra support and guidance. So our members are doing that. The work we have done with Age UK has been great, because it is about giving practical tips to our members about things that they can do slightly differently. That has definitely worked.

The big priority for us is about how our members work with their clients, with employers. I suppose our most important campaign at the moment, which is quite a broad one, is the Good Recruitment Campaign. We are asking our members to get more of their clients to sign up to this. How can we create, almost, a genuine desire to shake things up? Many employers in this country are using the same process for recruitment they have used for 10 or 15 years. They are using the same job description. There is some good practice out there, but how do we make that not the exception but the norm? That is the big area for us. It is about getting more employers to be open to challenge and say, "Yes, let's change things". Our industry has a turnover of £32 billion, and we have thousands of members within that who want to have those conversations, but often there is inertia among some employers—"We are going to stick to what we have always done." That is the biggest barrier we face.

Jane Shepherd: Just to add to what Tom was saying, there is quite a different experience across different sectors within the members we represent. The experience of being in social care, for example, might be very different from if you are a woman member working as support staff in a school. There are so many; there is no one-size-fits-all, from our learning experience, so we try to tailor our programmes as much as we can for those very individual and specialist groups of learners.

Q111 **Chair:** Jane, just going back to that very important point that you raised about women not necessarily putting themselves forward for a job because they are not confident they are going to get it. If they have plucked up enough confidence to apply, is it their experience that they are less likely to be shortlisted or to get the job? It might be one of the reasons why they are less likely to apply in the first place, because they have heard it is more difficult, or do you think that once they have plucked up their courage to apply, they find it is not any more difficult than it would be for their male counterparts?

Jane Shepherd: Anecdotally, I would think that they probably do still feel that they are less likely to get that opportunity. Anecdotally, that does come through from our learners: that even though they have plucked up the courage, there are still some issues they may perceive, and barriers to progressing. What we try to do on our course is give them the skills to feel confident to not only apply but then to go into an



interview, so we do interview skills as well. That is one of the biggest calls that we get for member learning as well, in terms of applying; it is about refreshing skills gaps there.

Tom Hadley: The key thing is what happens next. If you put yourself forward for a job, which might be quite daunting, and you do not get the job, what happens? One area that we are not great at in this country is giving feedback to unsuccessful candidates. One of the central themes of the Good Recruitment Campaign is about how we find a way to do that, because it might be, "I did not get this one, but I have some good feedback; I can work on that, which will perhaps give me more confidence next time. I am going to continue putting myself forward, because I understand why I did not get this job." That is an area that we are keen to push: this idea of systematically giving feedback to unsuccessful candidates, so that they learn from it and can get the job the next time around.

Jane Shepherd: From one of our surveys, a third of women from this group said they did want career progression, so there is not a lack of interest, certainly, but it is a very complex area about why there may be potentially barriers or perceived barriers.

Q112 **Kirstene Hair:** To follow on from the topic of training, how common is it for an older person seeking to change their career to seek out that training and development? How easy is it for them to access? You mentioned that there are perhaps differences between different sectors, so could you expand on that part as well?

Teresa Donegan: One route for us is we put out a great deal of publicity and information to advertise the courses we run. Where we have learning agreements, we can often do that jointly with the employer, and there are some fantastic examples, such as King's Lynn Hospital, where we have a joint learning centre; Camden Council comes to mind and is very good. We have very good relationships with a number in the private sector, so we can put out publicity to encourage older workers to access that training.

I am sorry, what was the rest of the question?

Kirstene Hair: It was about how easy it is for them to access.

Teresa Donegan: Therein lies the difficulty, because where we have learning agreements it tends to be easier for employers to agree to time off, notwithstanding what I said earlier about it being harder to get the whole-day training. A good example is, recently, with one of the energy sectors in the East Midlands region. The employer had noticed that a significant number of the letters that were being sent out by the call centre staff had really poor grammatical errors in them, so they talked to us, because we have an agreement with them. We said, "There are these great courses"—some of them were one day a week, lasting eight weeks. They were not interested in that, so we have agreed and tailored them,



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working with organisations like the WEA and other providers, and have come up with a two-day course about brushing up on your grammatical skills and your writing skills.

There are those examples where employers will agree. On the other hand, taking time off is an incredible difficulty for many older women, particularly in our schools sector and in our care sector. That is because of shortages of staff. So they can do the training in their own time, which then may incur a cost for them. Accessing training for many older workers is very difficult. I said we are very good at publicity, and we have come into contact with 22,000 individuals over the last two quarters, but those 22,000 will not all be involved in face-to-face informal information, advice and guidance; much of it will be by email. That is a drop in the ocean. That is completely a drop in the ocean compared to how many people we could be accessing, so what we need to do is to better engage with employers. Some employers, as I said, are brilliant, but many are hostile. If we do things jointly with an employer, it is more likely to be fed out across the workforce.

Hard-to-reach workers, who work shifts, who work in isolated care homes, who work in schools, may not always see employer information or our information. Accessing training still remains a difficulty. Along with other organisations, we welcome the fact that the Government are going to be investing money into more flexible learning, and we are going to be working with the Open University and the WEA to look at more flexible provision of working, but until we can get to these hard-to-reach workers it is going to continue to be an uphill battle for us.

Q113 Kirstene Hair: An older person does want to seek that training. It is just that there is difficulty around them accessing it.

Teresa Donegan: Yes.

Tom Hadley: We have picked that up. There is a definite desire to progress; that is absolutely true. One thing we do need to bear in mind is, in big public sector institutions and large corporates, there are progression opportunities. The vast majority of people in this country work for relatively small businesses. Where is the progression? Often, to progress you have to leave the company. That is just the nature of it, so if the progression is not internal, where do you go to get advice and a bit of support to do that? This brings us back to our point: that we think there needs to be some focus on an all-age careers advice service where you can go to get that guidance, because often you progress by moving out. That is just the reality of it if you are in a small business. We are keen to look at that and, potentially, at whether you could harness the contribution of experts in different sectors to provide some of that advice, because we know it is hard to find people who can understand all the different sectors where there is availability of jobs at the moment.

Q114 Kirstene Hair: Are there certain types of skills development that are most valuable to older people, which you have identified?



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Tom Hadley: For us, one of the priorities in this country is being better at identifying what the current skill needs are and what they are going to be. We do a lot of work on immigration. We publish monthly data in terms of what the most in-demand skill needs are across all the different sectors, and over 70 are in shortage. There are 70 roles within all the different sectors where there is a shortage of candidates, which is interesting. We feed that into the Migration Advisory Committee. Could we have something like that on skills? It would be a skills advisory committee, which would bring together a lot of this data and provide some really good insight into where your training is going to have the most impact in terms of the job opportunities that are there at the end of it. Digital is one of the areas, as is management; we do a lot of work with the Chartered Management Institute. Management skills is an area where we perhaps have not put enough resource into the business community in this country.

It does cut across sectors and, increasingly, a lot of it is about understanding the niche sectors that are going to be recruiting, what the skills are and how we can plug that in and get ahead of the game on this. Rather than reacting, it is about trying to pre-empt where these skill needs are going to be in the next few years, so that we can plug that gap. There is no better opportunity for under-represented groups in our jobs market, and if we could get really good at pre-empting the skill needs and providing that training, bang, when the demand really hits, we have people who are trained, who can get into those jobs quickly.

Teresa Donegan: Maths, English and digital are the functional skills, and it is not just the low-paid or the expected low-skilled sectors; it is right across the piece. For instance, we have case studies where somebody may have been in an admin role for 20 or 30 years; they might have done an O level in maths, so they have qualifications, because many of our members will have, at entry level, a degree or four or five O levels, but they have not been back into the learning environment for many years. Those functional skills are not just applicable to where we think it is the lower paid; it is right across the piece and, in particular, digital and getting to grips with automation, how that is changing jobs right across the public sector and where it will take us in the future.

I do concur that, in terms of areas around middle management, many of our members report that they do not get access to training there. They do not get that continuing professional development and they do not get easy access to taking up a degree. A big part of our training is encouraging workers to go on to further and higher education, perhaps through the Open University, because it is cheaper, more cost effective and they cannot get the time of work. On the other side of this, the fees and costs of education are considerably putting off many individuals, even if they are in our middle to higher-income categories.

The skills requirements are right across the sector. Certainly our experience in the public sector is, while there are some flagships, there is



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still a considerable gap in what is going to be needed for the future in our public services and how we are going to shape those public services in order to meet those challenges that just automation will bring along and an ageing population will bring along—a third of the workforce will be over 50 by 2020.

Q115 Kirstene Hair: Earlier, you touched on how some employers probably recognise the value of skills development a little more than others. Are there particular areas that you think could do better in terms of pushing development in the older age group?

Teresa Donegan: Right across the care sector. It is disgraceful across the care sector how little training is given to those workers who work across that sector. We run dementia courses through the OU to fill some of those gaps. For instance, many of our members working with older residents in the care sector have not had that training provided by their employer—again, just dealing with things like manual handling. Right across the care sector, we believe there is a significant problem, and more needs to be done. You can look at the telly and you see reports about some dreadful scenarios that have happened in care centres. Often, if there was proper training, it is better for the worker, it is better for the residents and it is better for the clients that the care workers are dealing with. The care sector stands out, amongst others.

Across schools, there could be better training for teaching assistants and for other support staff. We believe that they are often overlooked. Every school will have inset days, for example. Often, the teaching assistants and other support staff are told—and this is a genuine comment by a member—“Go and sort out the cupboard and sort out the pencils and the paper and the paints.” Again, we—and other unions and others—will provide training that schools just are not accessing for their support workers. That holds them back. One of our big pushes at the moment is supporting teaching assistants with acquiring a GCSE in science if they want to move on into teaching, because many of them may have maths and English. That is something that schools could do easily. We are heading for a crisis in teaching, and I do believe that you could encourage more people, through those channels in schools, to access the relevant qualifications to take up teaching.

Jane Shepherd: To follow on from what Teresa was saying there, I do a lot of work with our schools members. We have developed a really good practice that we will deliver on an inset day for our support staff members. We do one session delivered by the Open University around either challenging behaviour or autism awareness; these are very practical skills that will help as part of their CPD. We will then couple that with one of our own sessions around an area such as “How to be you”, which is about confidence-building and skills development. These go together as a whole package, and they have been very popular with our members and employers.



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Teresa Donegan: Can I just say something, because I do want to sound a bit positive here? Where we have engaged with delivering those courses, we have then started engaging with the school, and we have some fantastic examples of where that then has filtered through the whole of the academy chain. We are doing fantastic work. In the West Midlands, we are about to roll out a programme of training across 12 schools over a period of the next six months to one year. That directly arose because of one of these courses we ran, and the head teacher found out about it, so there can be lots of positive stuff as well.

Q116 **Kirstene Hair:** I just want a brief answer from you all. Is there a risk that by focusing on skills development and the promotion of lifelong learning, we reinforce the stereotype that older people's skills are outdated?

Tom Hadley: Certainly not from our perspective. You made a great point about thinking about the future of work and how all this impacts. For us, the future of jobs is one where people will have to take accountability for their own development; it is not going to be something that companies do for you. Increasingly, it is about understanding where you want to get to and building your own career plan. We need to get that message over in schools, so that people have that. I do not think it is reinforcing; it is an absolute prerequisite. Things are going to start changing really quickly in our jobs market. Jobs are going to evolve. It is going to be less and less common that you do the same job or work in the same role or sector for your whole career, so we need to get that message over. That it is not just employers doing stuff; it is also individuals taking accountability.

The other big-picture point that I wanted to pick up on is, if we can get better at promoting these development opportunities, we will help address one of the biggest challenges that we have in our jobs market, which is finding candidates to fill the roles. Every month, our members are saying that it is getting harder and harder to fill jobs in care and other sectors. We have done focus groups of individuals, asking, "Why do you not want to work in hospitality? Why do you not want to work in care?" Sometimes it is pay, but mostly it is, "Because I do not see the development opportunities." If we can nail that, we address that big challenge, to some extent, about why we cannot get more UK nationals to come into some of these sectors. It is a big challenge.

Jane Shepherd: On some of our courses we try to break down those stereotypes. We ask our learners to reflect upon their own skills, which they might use not only in their working lives but in their personal lives as well. It is that bigger holistic approach and, again, they are skills that involve very much building step-by-step support, which we use to help to develop our own union reps as well. That is a good way forward.

Q117 **Kirstene Hair:** I just want to touch on apprenticeships, which were mentioned earlier. Do you believe that that is an appropriate route to training for older workers, because there probably is a bit of a perception



that apprenticeships are more directed at the younger workforce?

Teresa Donegan: No, I think apprenticeships can be equally valuable for everybody. We would like to see more specific targeting of the older workforce. We have had very useful discussions with, say, the Department of Health. It is still early stages. There is a perception that apprenticeships are for the younger workforce, but we are beginning to chip away at that. I say “we”—employers and all of us. Apprenticeships could have a very valuable role in filling recruitment vacancies, where we have them across the sector, and we have them across the health sector, as well as education and other sectors. They could also be a very valuable tool in encouraging individuals to take that route to progression through that industry they are working in. They have an incredibly valuable role to play in health, and we will very much support and work with employers to encourage that learner and to encourage that that learner gets the right access to learning.

I cannot remember which one it was, but one of the apprenticeships encourages and does training up to level 2 but does not then require a qualification in that level 2, so there is still a lot to unravel around apprenticeships so that employers are clearer and individual employees are clearer about what it can mean for them. We are discussing apprenticeships in my own organisation, UNISON, and a dilemma we have is, if we put individual workers on to apprenticeships who are employed by the union, and they are going to need 20% training, how do we cover that role and that job that is left behind? We have to do a lot more thinking around that as well, because you do not want to put unnecessary pressure on the apprentice or on the organisation. Generally speaking, apprenticeships can be a good thing for the whole workforce.

Tom Hadley: That is a really good point. We are starting to see it work more for bringing people back into the jobs market and helping people make career transitions. There is something about the terminology, though—“apprenticeship”—so perhaps that could evolve. More and more, as we move on in our jobs market, there will be a need to help people make quite radical career transitions. Could apprenticeships be part of the system? As I said, a lot of employers are paying the levy now, so that is happening. Could we get more bang for our buck in terms of, perhaps, it not being just about apprenticeships? There is a lot of training, which would benefit workers and help them progress. That is not technically part of apprenticeships, which is a shame, because we are missing a trick, and, again, apprenticeships do not work for everybody. Our take would be that, if we could create a training levy that is a little broader than apprenticeships, it might help.

Q118 **Kirstene Hair:** The next question is specifically for you, Tom. You have called for a national skills strategy to enable people to train and upskill throughout their lives. What do you think this would look like?



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Tom Hadley: When we were thinking about this, our model would be a bit like the Migration Advisory Committee, where you have a body that collates lots of evidence and data. We produce our own data every month. There is a lot of good stuff out there. Some of the regional data could be better in terms of jobs, skill needs, et cetera. That could be collated and reports could be published to help make sure that the training being delivered to everybody is meeting the needs now and those that will evolve in the future. We still hear from our people who work in technology, for example, such as in IT recruitment, saying that though people were receiving training, they were training on the wrong computer programs, not the ones that would be in demand the following year. It would help to build as much of that link as possible.

The other part of a skills strategy for us would be the point I mentioned about where you go to get advice on taking the next step in your career. We do a lot of work with Jobcentres. I should have said at the start that the REC has a formal partnership agreement with the Department for Work and Pensions, which involves private sector recruitment agencies working on a local level with local Jobcentres. It is a great initiative to do that. What we know is that for work coaches in Jobcentres it is very hard for them to have specialist knowledge of all of the different sectors. We are advocates of having some sort of system, as part of a skills strategy, where you can harness existing expertise.

On a local level, if I go into a Jobcentre and want to make a career transition into creative design, engineering or whatever, then I could be referred to an employer, learning rep or specialist recruiter in that sector in order for me to get the specific advice that I need. We think that would be a cost-effective model. It would be based on something that worked. At the height of the downturn, we helped run a system like that. You would be referring people to existing expertise. In that case it was about helping people who were quite senior, had been in senior roles, had lost their jobs and had never had to look for work before. They were getting good advice from local employers and local recruiters. There is a model for how this worked in the past. We think that will work. It is hard to find people who can be specialists in all of the different sectors. That would be one of the other areas we would be keen to feed into.

The final thing is that we think the Government's industrial strategy has to have skills and people at the forefront of it, because it will not work unless we have the skills we need to deliver these big infrastructure projects, et cetera. Bear in mind what I said before: that our members are saying recruitment is becoming harder; 85% of our members are saying that recruitment in the last year has got harder. We do need to take that into account. It has real implications in health, care, construction and hospitality, et cetera.

Q119 **Kirstene Hair:** You touched on older workers there. Do you think a tailored provision for older workers would be needed within the strategy? Do you think that the strategy would look the same for older women as it



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would for older men?

Tom Hadley: I think so. We were having an interesting debate outside about terminology. The roundtable we had last week was talking about mid-life career reviews. Why do you need to call it that? Why do you not just call it "career reviews"? What we need to have in this country is more regular discussions about where you are going to take your career, et cetera. It does not necessarily need to be positioned particularly, but it would certainly help people who are moving on with their career.

One thing we are clear about, when we have looked at the future of the jobs market, is that sectors will change quite quickly, jobs will disappear quite quickly and new jobs will be created. We will need to create better bridges to help people make those transitions. It probably will benefit older workers more, but it should benefit everybody. Incidentally, it is not just about the support we give to individuals. I go back to the first point about how companies hire in this country. The other side of this coin is that we need to get employers to not just recruit on the basis of, "You have done this job for five years." Employers need to get better at understanding the transferrable skills that are out there. If we are going to become a country where people can make career transitions and can progress, then we need to change some of the criteria we currently look at when we are hiring. Giving better support to individuals and trying to change the way we currently hire in this country have to work in parallel.

Q120 **Chair:** Just before I bring Philip in, could I ask whether the data that is available on skills is broken down by age?

Tom Hadley: No, it is not. What we track is the demand side. We track the specific job roles where there is a shortage of workers. That is the survey we have had going for 16 years. The Bank of England quotes it. It is good at identifying where the opportunities are, but it does not break it down.

Q121 **Philip Davies:** I am sorry that I missed the start of the evidence session. Business in the Community have encouraged employers to publish data on the age profile of their workforce. Do you think that would, first of all, make any difference to employers' employment practices amongst older people, and do you think it would be a good idea?

Teresa Donegan: Yes, I do. Producing more workforce data can help you target such things as your training needs, and you begin to understand the make-up of that employer. So you can tackle inequality and disadvantage as part of one side of the argument, but you can also target your own internal resources. When we work with employers around training, our data will break it down as best as we can. I am not saying it is always collected perfectly, but we do break it down by age, by gender and by black and other ethnic minorities. We attempt to gather disability information. We find increasing numbers of older workers, women workers and black and ethnic minorities accessing the lower skills. We can take that back to an employer sometimes and try to



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negotiate with them in order for them to review and to look at their training strategy. It could also assist if they better understood the make-up of their workforce. It may help target their recruitment practices. One of the things we have not touched on is that, certainly in the public sector, there is a lot of collection of information. Every time you fill in an application form, you complete an equality monitoring form. What we are never clear on is what employers do with that.

Q122 Philip Davies: Would you say that this should be something that employers should be encouraged to do, or should it be mandatory?

Teresa Donegan: It should be mandatory. I hate things that are mandatory, but you could wait forever and a day for things to be voluntarily introduced. A good example of that is around the gender pay gap, for instance. It is not that hard to collect. If you have trust with your employees, and you are explaining why you want to collect this data—and it should be for positive reasons—then it should be mandatory, because so many employers do not act upon what is perhaps very obvious and in front of them.

Q123 Philip Davies: What does an age-positive employer look like? What are the things that age-positive employers do?

Teresa Donegan: They probably have a thought-through training strategy. They would have very clear and well publicised equality policies that make it clear that they will not discriminate from the start to the end of the employment, such as in recruitment practices. They would have flexible working arrangements known to all employees. They should have various policies and procedures that enable employees to access time off if they want to look after an older parent. They should have an approach so that work can be carried out as flexibly as possible without it leading to exploitation. A lot is said about zero-hours and variable contracts, and, while there can be a positive side to that, we also forget the other side. It can also bind people and can be exploited.

Somebody could come along and say, "I work in an industry where I could work six hours in the morning and four hours in the afternoon, and in the afternoon I can go and look after my elderly parent." Wherever possible, employers should introduce flexible working policies such as that, which accommodate older workers' needs in the workplace.

That should also apply to training. I would like to see a national skills strategy, by the way, and I would like to see training where employers are incentivised—because some of them are not going to do it any other way—to encourage all employees to undertake minimum amounts of training each year. It does not matter how old you are or what you are learning sometimes, because learning and education is never a waste on anybody in our society. It will always bring benefits. A good employer will have those kinds of very transparent, well-known and publicised policies and put them into practice.



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Tom Hadley: I would agree with that. Certainly, it would be one that focused on the recruitment process and all the things we discussed about how you look at job design, as well as wording and applications. The one extra I would add is that it is an employer that invests in management training, and particularly it is about how you manage multi-generational workforces. It is an interesting dynamic, and employers are investing in how you manage all of these different generations in a workforce and what that means for individual managers. That would be the other factor.

The final point I would make is that, as we move ahead, it is important to see how we can join up this agenda with all of the other strands of inclusion. When we speak to our members, we are having the same debates on race, on gender, et cetera. A lot of it involves the same principles, doesn't it? You want to be able to hire and manage people irrespective of their background, et cetera. That is why the overall umbrella for a lot of our work is around good recruitment practice. What is good recruitment? It is just giving everybody a shot. It is purely objective recruitment procedures. It will help to get more within the business community onside, if you can link a lot of these different agendas up. That is certainly something that we try to do as part of our role as a professional body—to say, "This is what is happening on age, gender, race, et cetera." We have to try to bring it together into something that our members can buy in to, rather than it being machine-gun fire on all of the different strands.

Q124 **Philip Davies:** Age UK have proposed a kitemark for flexible working. Do I take it from what you have said that you all agree with that?

Tom Hadley: Yes. It is not just flexible working; we have said that it is also flexible hiring. One thing that we will continue to monitor is how many employers, when they are placing job ads, make it explicitly clear that, right from the outset, they were happy to have a discussion about flexible hiring. We talk about confidence. One reason that people do not go for jobs is they think, "I do not want to move, because I have a decent flexible working arrangement in my current business." It is a major disincentive for people to go and look for a different job, because people do not think they are going to get the same flexibility, whereas in reality you probably would be able to have that conversation. Employers need to make it explicit in their job adverts that that discussion about flexible working is something they are very happy to have right from the outset. That is certainly something we would advocate.

Teresa Donegan: If you set a kitemark, then at least you set a minimum standard, without it being overly bureaucratic. I remember some of the process around IIP. Benchmarking a minimum standard and recognising that can only be a good thing, as long as it is not bureaucratic.

Q125 **Chair:** Teresa and Jane, I have a quick question to end with. Obviously, your union has a lot of things on its plate. It is doing a lot of things.



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Where does this issue lie in terms of priorities in all of the different issues that your union is tackling at the moment?

Teresa Donegan: It is the history of Unison. We have always been a union that reflects the makeup of the public services. We have always had over 60% women members, and it is now 73% or 74%. We have always high numbers of black and ethnic minority workers. We have always had large numbers of migrant workers. We are a union that has always had large numbers of individuals who have traditionally faced discrimination in a number of areas in society and employment.

Q126 **Chair:** When it comes specifically to the issue of age, and you are tackling and juggling all of those things, how high up the priority list is age and older workers?

Teresa Donegan: It is quite a complex question, and I do not want to mislead you. With learning about and tackling discrimination in employment, and recognising that older women in particular are facing difficulties in our current working environment because of fragmentation and privatisation, it is relatively high. We do not benchmark things, because, as part of our organising and learning agenda they are all—

Chair: It is relatively high, but it is not at the top.

Teresa Donegan: I would say it is quite near the top, and that is why we produced this report a couple of years ago in terms of our organising agenda. As I said earlier, 30% of our members are over the age of 50. They make those demands on us. It is quite high up there. I will be very honest. The top agenda item for us is dealing with austerity and the difficulties that our members are facing in the workplace because of lack of staff, vacancies and pay. Learning is all part of it.

Q127 **Chair:** Tom, in terms of your view of age and older workers, where is it on the employers' agenda?

Tom Hadley: It is massive. The point I made earlier is that our members and the business community are looking at this in the round. We call it the inclusion agenda. Absolutely, older workers are a key part of that. We are also very supportive of Disability Confident, for example.

Q128 **Chair:** Is it more important or less important than women or disability?

Tom Hadley: I would not be able to break that down. It is not just us; 78% of employers responded to a LinkedIn poll saying it was their number one issue. The number one issue for them in terms of hiring managers is an inclusion agenda.

Q129 **Chair:** It is not particularly age, but rather inclusion.

Tom Hadley: We are working on all of these different strands. It is very difficult to say that is more important than the others. For us, it is bringing all of this together. That is why the Good Recruitment Campaign is big for us, because it is the umbrella. What we will do is monitor



progress on all of them, including disability, because we want to progress in all of these areas. Our industry can play a key role in making things happen and not just talking a good game. That is our commitment on this agenda.

Chair: That is brilliant. Thank you very much for the time you have taken to be here today, but also the time I know will have gone into preparing for being here. We are very grateful for that. Thank you for answering all of our questions so fully. We are really grateful. Thank you very much.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Ben Willmott and Ruby Peacock.

Q130 **Chair:** I would very much like to welcome our second panel of witnesses, with whom we will be looking at the challenges in the retention of older workers, including the impact of health conditions and caring responsibilities, and how employers can respond. Before we go into questions, perhaps you could each say your name and the organisation you represent.

Ruby Peacock: I am Ruby Peacock and I am here from the Federation of Small Businesses.

Ben Willmott: I am Ben Willmott. I head up the Public Policy team for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. We are the professional institute for HR and people management in the UK. We have 145,000 members, who are responsible for helping to recruit, manage and develop a large part of the UK workforce.

Q131 **Eddie Hughes:** Good morning. How significant a problem is it retaining people in the workplace past 50 years old?

Ben Willmott: All the information we have shows that it is a very significant challenge. We did a piece of work with the International Longevity Centre in 2015, which showed that the employment rate for people aged between 53 to 67 drops by 64 percentage points. It literally goes off the cliff. We know it is a major problem. The key drivers are issues around health and caring responsibilities. They are two very material issues for why that happens, but not the only issues.

Ruby Peacock: I would just like to raise one extra point that is quite important for us, which is about self-employment and small business owners themselves, who are disproportionately older. If we look at people over 70, nearly 50% of those who are still in work are in self-employment. Looking at the specific challenges that they face alongside retention in the workplace is really important, particularly when we start



to look at family businesses and how someone ageing as a business owner might impact on the whole business and the staff there.

Q132 Eddie Hughes: You mentioned a couple of reasons why people would not be retained in the workplace. Could you just elaborate? In terms of health, is the issue that their employers do not accommodate changes in their health condition?

Ben Willmott: If you look at the proportion of employers that provide access to occupational health services, it is about 40%, so the majority of employers do not provide any access to occupational health services. If you look at the wider support available, we have the Fit for Work service, but we know from our members that there are issues around awareness. A lot of employers, particularly smaller employers, do not know that the Fit for Work service exists, but the experience when they do access it is quite positive. What we have also seen recently, which has been a bit disappointing, is the referral and assessment bit of the Fit for Work service has been discontinued. Just before Christmas it was announced that that was the case. It was only introduced in 2015. I think the issue was that take-up has been low. These sorts of things take a long time to pervade, in particular, small firms' consciousness and awareness. You have to stick with this sort of support for a decade. That is when you start getting traction.

If we are looking strategically at the sorts of things that Government and employers should be looking at, it is about how we can provide good-quality access to occupational health support, particularly things like physiotherapy and counselling services.

Q133 Eddie Hughes: Health is one factor. What else would be significant?

Ben Willmott: The other is caring responsibilities. We know that older workers will quite often have multiple caring responsibilities. It is not just about caring for children. It is about caring for parents and potentially spouses or partners. As people get older, they are under more pressure in terms of their caring responsibilities. Although 99% of employers say that they provide flexible working opportunities for people, the uptake of flexible working has broadly plateaued over the last 15 years. We have seen a slight increase in part-time working, but, overall, things like flexitime, job share, annualised hours, home working and these sorts of things have not actually shifted in terms of people's ability to access them.

The other thing we need to look at is how we really unlock the potential of flexible working, and make flexible working more inclusive rather than exclusive, which it is within some organisations. There are some reasons I can go into on that issue. Those are definitely material factors.

Ruby Peacock: I would just add that one of the things that we have seen is that our members' views on flexible working are changing. We found that our younger business owners are much more open to thinking



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about job design and flexibility right at the start of when they are taking on staff. You will see a change. It tends to be those people who are younger who are coming in; flexibility is more important for them, and it is something they also want to offer their staff.

Q134 Tonia Antoniazzi: The current government policy uses an employer-led approach. Do you think this is the right way to ensure that older workers are able to remain in employment, or are there other things that the Government needs to be doing as well?

Ruby Peacock: An employer-led approach is quite important. Businesses should be at the forefront of how we address these issues. They understand the workforce that they have, but they also understand the specific needs of themselves as employers and what they are able to deliver. One thing is that smaller businesses do disproportionately have an older workforce than larger firms, but they are not always involved in those conversations, and it can be a real challenge for Government to look at how they engage with small businesses. One of the things that we think the Government can look at is maybe the role of the supply chain, and asking some of the leading larger businesses to look at how they might be able to communicate with smaller people within their supply chain, but also looking at organisations like ours and how we might be able to facilitate some of those conversations.

Ben Willmott: The CIPD has been very supportive of the Fuller Working Lives strategy, its focus on partnership working with employers and particularly a sector focus, as well as the dissemination of good practice. They are all really important and will have an impact.

The area where there does need to be more focus is probably on providing more support for small firms. The BEIS Select Committee inquiry into the industrial strategy, which came out last year, highlighted the fragmented and inadequate level of support for small firms. That was evidence that came from the FSB on the quality of local business support that is provided. If you go to any local enterprise partnership, for example, or go to a growth hub, and look at what business support is available for the smallest firms, then there will be very little, if anything, on people management issues. That is a real missed opportunity.

Over the last two years we have done a lot of work looking at the sort of support that small firms, employing between one and 50 staff, really need around people management, how you deliver that support and what that support delivers in terms of benefits for employers. We have been piloting some HR support pilots in different parts of the UK, and that has shown that the provision of high-quality HR support to small firms can make a material difference and you can deliver in a cost-effective way at local enterprise partnership level. There are real positives from exploring that in more detail and maybe trialling that more fully over the next two to three years.

Q135 Tonia Antoniazzi: You have answered my next question in a way. As



we have said, we have heard small employers face the most difficulty in understanding the rules around age discrimination. Do you feel this is the case?

Ben Willmott: The sort of support that small firms went to ask our HR support service for was really basic. It was things like clarity over terms and conditions, job descriptions, the basics of recruiting people within the law. Until you get these people management basics in place, you will not get small firms to engage in more value-added activity like investing in training, leadership, management development and thinking more strategically about their people. These are the essential building blocks for building owner/manager confidence so that they start thinking more strategically about their firms from a people management perspective.

Q136 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** What could be done to better target small employers, specifically, with this information?

Ben Willmott: For example, in Stoke, where we ran our pilot called People Skills, we worked with the local chamber and the growth hub. There was a one-stop-shop number. If you were a small firm and you had a people issue, you would be referred to one of the locally recruited HR consultants and given up to two days of free HR support on whatever your people issue was. That would give the hand-holding and the pump-priming to help them stand on their two feet and start to make a material difference.

Where I would focus attention on is the delivery of better quality local business support and really tapping into existing central Government initiatives, like the Access to Work programme, which our members describe as the best-kept secret, and Fit for Work. You still have a free helpline, but if you go to a growth hub and you are a small firm, there is no visibility. Why is that the case? There needs to be more join-up at a local level if we are thinking about helping small firms to improve their people management capability. This needs to be a long-term investment and commitment if it is going to make a difference.

Ruby Peacock: We would agree, particularly around the growth hubs. One of the things we find is that people often have a particular support scheme, and if you go and speak to your growth hub, they will tell you about exporting, but that is not necessarily how a business thinks about their growth or thinks about their strategy going forward. They do not want to just hear about exports. That is your opportunity to be able to talk to them about a whole variety of issues, whether that is leadership and management training, looking at apprenticeships or exporting—it is that wide variety. We need to have a much more co-ordinated approach about how we are providing that support to small businesses.

Q137 **Tonia Antoniazzi:** The Centre for Ageing Better says that the greatest driver that will support more people to work for longer is improving job quality. Do you agree, and how can this be achieved?



Ruby Peacock: For us, job quality is hugely important. One of the things that we want to do is not only look at what changes we might be able to encourage within our membership, but also celebrate the great jobs that there are in small businesses and the self-employed. It is important that we recognise that there are good-quality jobs out there and that we celebrate those ones, as well as looking at what changes we might be able to make. One of the things we have done is we have been part of the Matthew Taylor "Good Work" conversations and his campaign around that. We have also looked at skills and training within our own membership, and what you might be able to do to support small businesses to deliver more training for their staff and themselves. We also held a wellbeing campaign in September. All of that looked at appropriate options for small businesses about how they might be able to improve the wellbeing of their staff, whether that is starting a conversation about flexible working, looking at training or looking at what could be done to encourage staff to be healthier.

Ben Willmott: I would absolutely agree. The key is that job quality has different elements and means different things for different people. Some of the key areas that Ruby has already touched on, such as access to training, support for health and wellbeing, flexibility and autonomy are the sorts of things we know from lots of research are really material to the discussion about job quality.

Underlying all of this is management capability. A job description is only as good as the manager who will manage someone. Increasingly, we need managers who will win people's hearts and minds, who really understand what makes individuals tick, and who know people well enough that they will trust them, so if they have a health issue or caring issue, they will talk to their line manager. That is the real challenge. Across the UK economy and over time, how do we support an increase in management capability? It is not easy, but there are things Government can do, working with employers, professional bodies and unions, that, if there is a commitment and a strategy, can make a difference.

Q138 **Angela Crawley:** Do you know of any companies that have used tools such as the Acas Age Audit, or have engaged with the Commit and Publish strategy, and any business community who have advocated for those tools?

Ruby Peacock: One of the things in terms of toolkits and kitemarks more generally is that there are two big problems, particularly when you look at the small business community as a whole. One is about how you communicate that they exist. The second one is about whether what that toolkit is providing, or that kitemark is asking, is too bureaucratic, but also whether it is appropriate for the wide span of businesses that you are trying to target. Is that something that people want to do? Again, we would say perhaps you want to look at what you might be able to ask large businesses to do with their supply chain. They might be able to have that communication, but it also about knowing what is possible and



appropriate within a small business, and looking at other ways of communicating it. Those are a consistent challenge.

Q139 **Angela Crawley:** Do you know of any companies that have used it?

Ruby Peacock: I am not aware of any companies that have used it.

Ben Willmott: We would not have any data on that, but we do know that only 17% of employers collect data on their workforce demographics. There is a long way to go before it becomes common practice for employers to look at the age profile of their workforce and use that to inform their workforce planning. On the toolkit and the digital support, it is important and valuable but, again, our people skills research project showed that for hard-pressed owner-managers, a lot of this stuff is just digital noise, and they actually need hand-holding and support. They need somebody who can understand the context of the business and then help them make sense of what they need to do. Toolkits, websites and hubs are really important, but they are only part of the solution.

Q140 **Angela Crawley:** You would suggest more of the localised approach of having the Chambers of Commerce and other examples instead. From your experience, then, do line managers need specific training to manage an older workforce? You covered that briefly. Do employers offer access to training and development to older workers at the same rate as younger workers, and if not why not?

Ben Willmott: On the line manager front, we did a piece of research that informed some guidance we produced about two years ago on managing a healthy ageing workforce. We have conducted focus groups in different parts of the UK. What that showed, with employers both large and small, is there is a significant bias and myth amongst, particularly, managers. It is things like, "Older workers are just waiting to retire. They will not necessarily work as hard", "They will not want to learn new skills at their age" or, "They will not stay as long." Actually, all of those are completely wrong. In most cases, the opposite is true. Those are some of the biases that managers have. It is some managers and not all, of course. We know that managers will quite often recruit in their own image from a default bias perspective. It is crucial that HR works with managers to really explain why it is so valuable to invest in and support older workers as you would anyone else in the organisation.

On the training front, we know that older workers are less likely to receive training and, worryingly, they are less likely to have access to a formal performance appraisal process. From memory, about 50% of people aged 60 or more said they had not had an annual appraisal within the last three years, or had never had an annual appraisal. Those are quite worrying findings.

There are some reasons. Sometimes managers can make assumptions that older workers do not want or need training, and older workers will



sometimes be reluctant to put themselves forward for training. This is where we do need HR and business leaders to really work together to make sure that opportunities for training are inclusive and absolutely include older workers as well as younger workers

Ruby Peacock: We did a report recently that looked at training within small businesses, and we found the top three reasons that small businesses felt that there were barriers to training themselves or their staff. The first was cost, at about 25%. The second one was resource; it was taking time away from the business. If you think about it, if you only have two members of staff, then someone being away for a day or two does have a huge impact on what you are able to deliver.

The third one was that within their local area there was not anything appropriate. At times it can be a real challenge for a small business owner to know what training will be useful for their staff and what it will be able to deliver. If you think about it, you might just sit there and Google training courses, and it is very hard. For most of them, if they just have two members of staff, they do not have the experience and knowledge about types of training. There are consistent barriers to that.

I would say that small businesses tend to have a very different relationship with their staff from that which larger businesses do. They know their staff in a much more personal way and understand the role that they are delivering. At times there is a different relationship, whether they are older or younger, and you might not see some of the same practices that happen in large businesses happening in small businesses.

Q141 Angela Crawley: Finally, then, which is more important in ensuring that line managers offer things like training and flexible working for older workers? Is it training on the details or on the workplace culture that openly values older workers?

Ben Willmott: It is the culture. Sometimes just focusing on the practices can create a tick-box approach. Royal Mail has a fantastic e-learning module—this is on manager training. There is a scenario where a depot manager is conducting a return-to-work interview with a postman. In the first scenario, you see the interview and you think, “He has asked all of the right questions.” They run through it again, and this time the manager is actually listening, empathising and asking the same questions, but they have a completely different conversation. The individual then opens up and talks about the problems he is having around debt and why that has created stress.

This is about the “how” of management and the “what” of management, and that can only flourish in an organisation where you have a culture where people management is invested in and supported. That starts at the top. That gets back to how we encourage more organisations to invest more in their people and think more strategically about their people. The discussion around data and understanding the profile of your



workforce is crucial. For large organisations, a good nudge would be much more encouragement to report annually on key workforce metrics, including data around investment in training development per employee, number of apprenticeships, absence and disciplinary and grievance cases, which can give much greater transparency and focus on how organisations are operating and what the culture of the organisation is. There is more that could be done to support better human capital management reporting, which some people will recognise it as.

Ruby Peacock: We would agree that it is cultural rather than focusing on practices.

Q142 **Chair:** I want to move on a bit to health conditions and managing those in the workplace. Whilst not everybody, as they get older, has to tackle this sort of health problem, the likelihood of acquiring a disability or an impairment obviously increases with age. How widespread is the problem of employers viewing older workers, frankly, as if they are past it when they develop health problems?

Ruby Peacock: I would say that small employers are not immune to wider society perceptions about people who are older. One thing I would say is if we think about family businesses, that is not necessarily the case. It is a different relationship between your employer and your employees in very small businesses, and some of our family businesses understand what role that person is undertaking and the contribution that makes to the business, and they want to find a solution for it. It is not always clear that they know what the right solution is, but they certainly will want to be able to deliver that for their staff.

Q143 **Chair:** Ben, what about your experience?

Ben Willmott: We know that that is one of the concerns that some managers can have. If you look at the overall data, it suggests that older workers are less likely to take time off, in terms of frequency, but when they do go off sick they go off for longer periods. It is a different sort of management challenge, but the response to dealing with both is the same, which is early access to an occupational health service. We know that, for example, companies like BT and Royal Mail will refer people who have stress, other mental health issues or a musculoskeletal problem to their occupational health services on day one, because they recognise that these sorts of issues are either likely to be recurrent or long-term. They are doing it because it is the right thing to do, but they are also doing it because they get a better return on their rehabilitation and occupational health services, because that person will come back to work longer. That issue around early referral to occupational health services is crucial, as is that management issue. How managers manage people when they are off, how they manage the return to work and how they manage their rehabilitation is fundamental to whether they will have a successful long-term return to work in many instances.

Q144 **Chair:** Do you think that employers understand how difficult it can be for



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older workers to discuss the sorts of adjustments that they might need?

Ben Willmott: It is not just about older workers. Any health condition for anyone can be a sensitive and difficult issue, and something they will not necessarily want to disclose. They may not feel confident to disclose it. That again is where we get to the issue of trust. Unless you trust your line manager you will not disclose something that is potentially sensitive or that you think might be perceived in a certain way and could have an impact on how you are perceived at work.

It comes back to the cultural issue in terms of how you create an environment where people trust their managers. I do not know if they still do this, but Timpson used to ask their managers to know a certain amount of information about their staff, such as where they went on holiday, whether they had a pet and whether they are married. The idea is to encourage managers to actually get to know their staff so that starts to create a culture of trust. Whether you use that approach or not, I am not sure, but the point is that, in order to have those sorts of employment relationships based on trust and mutual respect, you have to have managers who care about people and invest a bit of time in them.

Q145 **Chair:** We have talked a lot this morning about older women and the barriers they can face getting into work, and the menopause has been highlighted by a number of the submissions we have had to the inquiry as a time when women can face particular problems in remaining in work. What do you think about that?

Ruby Peacock: Picking up on a lot of what Ben has said, this is a cultural issue. It is not something that is widely talked about at the moment in society. Starting that conversation with your employer or your line manager might be a real challenge. Actually, it is about driving cultural change and, partly, doing that in business is driving cultural change across the public. One of the things that we find is that small business owners, listen, like we do, to the radio and the TV; they are listening to the same media and getting their news and information from the same places as the general public. Some of that cultural change can be driven through that aspect. That would mean that you also have other employees who are open to having those sorts of conversations. That is one of the ways to drive that cultural change.

Q146 **Chair:** Ben, under the current law, women who need reasonable adjustments to remain in work while they are going through the menopause have to rely on either having a good-practice employer or successfully arguing that they come within the definition of “disabled”. What do you think about that? Is that something the CIPD have ever looked at?

Ben Willmott: We have not looked at that specifically. Rather than regulation or whether you are covered by disability provisions of the Equality Act, it again goes back to the issue of line managers. The EHRC has published a lot of quite worrying research on the level of pregnancy and maternity discrimination, and there is a lot of regulation to prevent



that, but it has not prevented the discrimination, because of the ignorance of too many managers. Regulation is important but will only take you so far. Of course, we need full compliance with existing laws.

Q147 Chair: One suggestion that has been made to the Committee is to extend the duty to make reasonable adjustments from disability to include age. It is becoming a concept that is more understood. It is not universally understood. Do you think it might help employers understand how they might approach this more positively?

Ruby Peacock: Our view is that you might not need to go down the legislation route. As well as looking at things like whether that is trying to drive culture, and people being more comfortable talking about the menopause and the issues that they may have, there is the question of what can employers do. Is it making adjustments to uniforms? Is it providing water? At the moment, they might not know what adjustments they need. As an employee, you might also not know what adjustments you will need. We think the way to drive the most cultural change in small businesses would be providing that information and advice, rather than legislation.

Ben Willmott: The definition for “disability” is already very broad, talking about physical or mental impairment and long-term adverse effects on people’s day-to-day activities. It is quite broad and should apply to anyone. The danger of making something age-specific is it could potentially reinforce stereotypes that older workers are a bigger health risk. That may not necessarily be true, and the big data will show that, as people get older, they are more likely to have certain health conditions, but overall you can have an extremely fit older person and a very unfit younger person. The definition around “disability” is more focused on impairment and, from our perspective, that is probably the right way.

Q148 Eddie Hughes: What type of flexibility in employment do older workers need? Given those challenges with regard to help, perhaps some flexibility would be useful.

Ben Willmott: It depends on the individual. A lot of older workers want to downshift and work more flexibly as they move towards retirement, rather than having a hard stop at retirement as we used to see maybe 20 years ago. That can be a whole range of different sorts of flexible working. There is a place for flexible employment contracts. Used responsibly in the right way, things like zero-hour contracts can be quite useful for older workers in certain circumstances. We had a case study in our guidance about a bus company that was struggling to find enough drivers. They focused on recruiting retirees. They sponsored these retired people to do their HGV licence. They employed them on an ad hoc basis, as and when, and it worked for both parties. There are instances where flexible employment contracts can really work.



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This is another anecdote, but it is quite revealing. I was talking to the chief executive of a major disability charity, and she told me that their members quite liked zero-hour contracts because a lot of them have fluctuating health conditions, and they want to be able to work when they can work and not work when their health condition flares up. She did not want to go public because of the negative publicity about zero-hour contracts, but that illustrates that, used responsibly and in the right way, where they are a win-win for both parties, atypical working can be a positive solution.

Q149 Eddie Hughes: Do the rules around flexible working allow employers to be flexible?

Ben Willmott: Yes, in most cases they do. For some people, the types of jobs they are doing can mean flexible working is harder, but the biggest obstacles are around culture and the negative attitudes of leaders and line managers to flexible working. Those are some of the issues we really have to grapple with over time.

Q150 Eddie Hughes: Do we have any stats for those people who are doing flexible working?

Ben Willmott: We have a report coming out next month on this issue, covering trends on flexible working, which is everything you need to know about flexible working, written by our senior labour market analyst. We will send you a copy.

Q151 Eddie Hughes: That is excellent. Ruby, do you have any comments?

Ruby Peacock: Flexible working is something that we are seeing increasingly amongst our businesses, as I said. Everyone has the right to request flexible working, but our younger businesses are more likely to think about it at the start. There is a woman I know who set up her business around caring for her children, and that meant that she wanted, when she took on staff, for them to be able to have that kind of flexibility in terms of their caring responsibilities.

I would also say that self-employment is really important. Many of our members are over 50 when they start their businesses, and they are doing it so that they can have more flexibility. For example, I was speaking to a driving instructor recently, and he likes it because he is able to choose his hours and can work around caring for his grandchildren. It is about that flexibility and also, sometimes, the increased job enjoyment they get out of having that self-employment aspect.

Q152 Chair: Do you think that flexible working should be offered from day one when it comes to employment? I know that is something that the Prime Minister has been talking about recently.

Ruby Peacock: We do not think that legislation is needed at the moment, but there is more that can be done to help, particularly, small



employers think about how they might be able to design jobs more flexibly, and that can be looked at from recruitment all the way through. It can be quite difficult, if you have a job that has been done the same way for years, to think at the start about how that might be delivered flexibly and what you can and cannot accommodate. Providing some of that support is probably the best way to drive that day-one flexibility.

Q153 Eddie Hughes: I understand that, typically, it is women who tend to be in jobs that have flexible working—more so than men. Is there a difference in the needs between men and women when it comes to flexible working?

Ruby Peacock: As we know, women still have greater caring responsibilities within their families, and that means that they are likely to make choices around flexible working in a different way. It might be that men find it more difficult to ask their employers about flexible working, particularly when they become older, if they are caring for an older parent, but you would see the same things that we see when women are younger, which is that they tend to have more of the responsibility for caring and, therefore, are more likely to ask for flexible working.

Ben Willmott: To reinforce that, we have previous survey data on the reasons why employees use flexible working, and women are more likely to say that they use flexible working for caring responsibilities. Men also do value flexible working very much, and that will increasingly be the case. The other big drivers are around supporting people's work-life balance, managing stress and reducing the time spent commuting, in many instances.

Chair: Thank you so much for your time today. It has been really helpful to go through these questions in relation to our inquiry. Obviously, we know it takes a lot of time out of your diary, so thank you so much for coming in. I really appreciate it. On behalf of the whole Committee, thank you for your time.