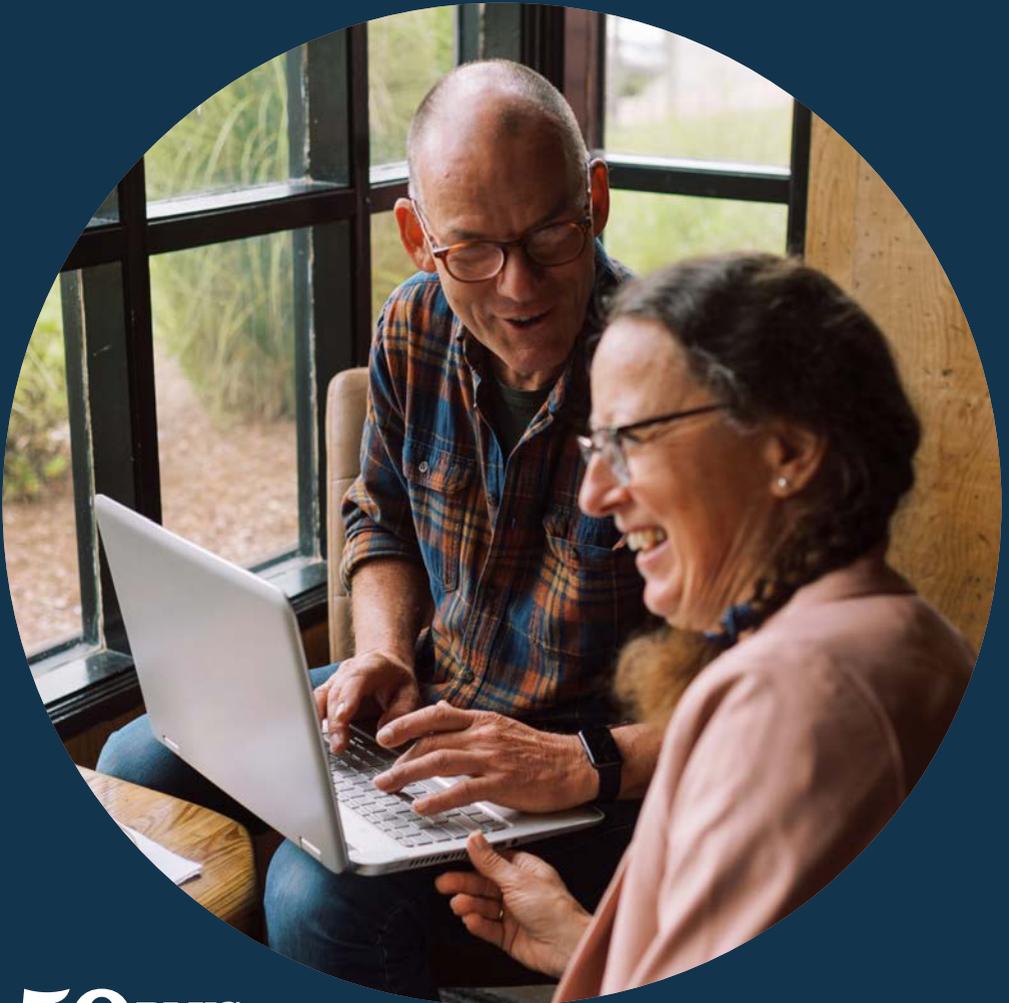


Flexible After Fifty

Why flexible working after fifty
should be a priority



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30%

of the working age
population is now made up
of people over 50

Foreword

Peter Cheese, Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

We welcome the opportunity presented to this group, by the Minister and Andy Briggs, Group CEO Phoenix Group and government Business Champion for Older Workers, to work together to examine the importance of flexible working for the over-50s. We know the difference that supportive and creative practices from employers can make in enabling people to balance their work and their personal lives and have fulfilling working lives in the latter stage of their careers.

Roundtable representatives from a range of organisations with wide reach and influence – the CIPD; the British Chamber of Commerce (BCC); the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB); the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC); UK Hospitality; Institute of Directors (IOD), Make UK; and Business in the Community (BITC) – worked together to distil the key recommendations, to business and to the Government, set out in this report.

Its purpose, and its recommendations, are aimed at enhancing flexible working provisions to help employers recruit and retain all workers but with a particular focus on the growing over-50s demographic. Roundtable members recognise the valuable skills and experience that the over-50s bring to the workplace, but also the importance of providing opportunities to this

demographic to have meaningful work that not only supports their financial security, but is also good for wellbeing and sense of purpose.

People in the U.K. are living longer, and the proportion of over-50s in the workforce is increasing. Considering the needs of this demographic is vital if the country is to benefit from their skills and experience.

Flexible working is highly valued by over-50s and is fundamental to recruit and retain older workers who make up more than 30% of the working age population.

This report explores what flexible working means for the over-50s and assesses the benefits for individuals and organisations.

Why flexible work should be a priority for the over-50s and for business

Businesses must prepare for a workforce containing a growing proportion of over-50s, who want and need to work for longer.

Over-50s possess skills and knowledge that businesses can struggle to replace. Harnessing the power of over-50s will boost productivity and benefit the economy.

72% of older workers either work flexibly already or want to do so. Yet many are not aware of their right to request flexible working and are not comfortable discussing it.

Many over-50s face significant shortfalls in their pensions savings, so helping them to stay in good work is essential. Lack of access to flexible working can result in a complete exit from the workforce.

Over-50s are important to improving UK productivity. Staying in good work for longer improves their financial wellbeing which benefits them and the wider economy. Employers must therefore raise their game in retaining, retraining and recruiting over-50s workers.

What's new?

New research by the CIPD for this report found that part-time working is the most common form of flexible working among over-50s (33.2%). It varies considerably from sector to sector, suggesting some employers need support to successfully embrace it.

22.4% of the over-50 workforce work from home, while 12.9% use flexible time. Giving more support to older workers to access formal flexibility arrangements can benefit both workers and businesses.

Retain, Re/train, Recruit

Flexible work is important for both people and businesses in terms of retaining, re/training and recruiting.

Retain

Retention of talent is vital to increase skills and productivity. Flexible working is the most important consideration for over-50 workers wishing to remain in their current roles.

More must be done to help older employees to access flexible work. Normalising conversations about flexible working and removing stigma surrounding it, are important steps. Employers must be more proactive in promoting flexible working options.

Re/train

Improving productivity depends on retraining in new technologies. 96% of over-50s say they will need additional training to continue doing their jobs until they retire.

Flexible options make retraining more accessible by overcoming barriers such as caring responsibilities. Tailoring training to individual needs increases the likelihood of success.

Recruit

The proportion of job adverts offering flexible working has stalled at 31%. Flexibility is not routinely promoted during the recruitment process.

Supply of vacancies offering flexibility lags far behind demand with only 3 in 10 vacancies advertising flexible working options. Employers could be alienating a huge amount of potential over-50 talent.

The considerations of flexible work on over-50s health and wellbeing

Being in work is good for physical and mental health and wellbeing. Re-employment improves health and self-esteem.

The circumstances surrounding early retirement can greatly influence an individual's wellbeing with forced early retirement having a detrimental effect.

Matching work circumstances to the changing needs of older workers helps to maintain their health and safety at work, allowing them to work longer.

Expert interviews

Expert stakeholders from unions and employer organisations were consulted regarding flexible working for over-50s and its practical application in different sectors.

Smaller organisations, in particular, are under pressure as they try to manage many different types of flexible working arrangements, without proper HR support.

Recommendations for government and business

Government

- Should lead by example by [monitoring uptake and effectiveness of flexible working](#). This should be broken down by age.
- Should provide [a range of practical examples for use specifically with over-50s](#) (including case studies) to help illustrate how flexible working can be used to aid retention, retraining and recruitment.
- Ensure resources on [HR support](#) are available for small and medium employers (SMEs) to help them with the implementation of Flexible Work legislation, including issues such as phased retirement.
- Should review the skills and training offering in both Job Center Plus and via Department for Education to [ensure training offered can be undertaken on a flexible basis](#) (e.g. apprenticeships/bootcamps).
- Back the Centre for Ageing Better's [Age Friendly Employer Pledge](#).

Business

- Should [actively promote](#) the availability and range of [flexible work options](#) to both new and existing employees, monitoring the uptake and effectiveness of flexible working.
- Should offer [support to people managers](#) to better support flexible workers of all ages.
- Should [include promotion of flexible work](#) in all job adverts and/or discuss this early in the recruitment process.
- Should ensure training and skills opportunities can be [taken flexibly](#).
- Should actively adopt and sign the Centre for Ageing Better's [Age Friendly Employer Pledge](#).

We hope that the recommendations to employers and to the government outlined in this report will help accelerate greater access to a range of flexible working arrangements for the growing demographic of workers over 50. There are clear benefits to businesses of all kinds, as well as in supporting people to have longer fulfilling working lives which is good for them, but ultimately also good for our communities and society.

CIPD



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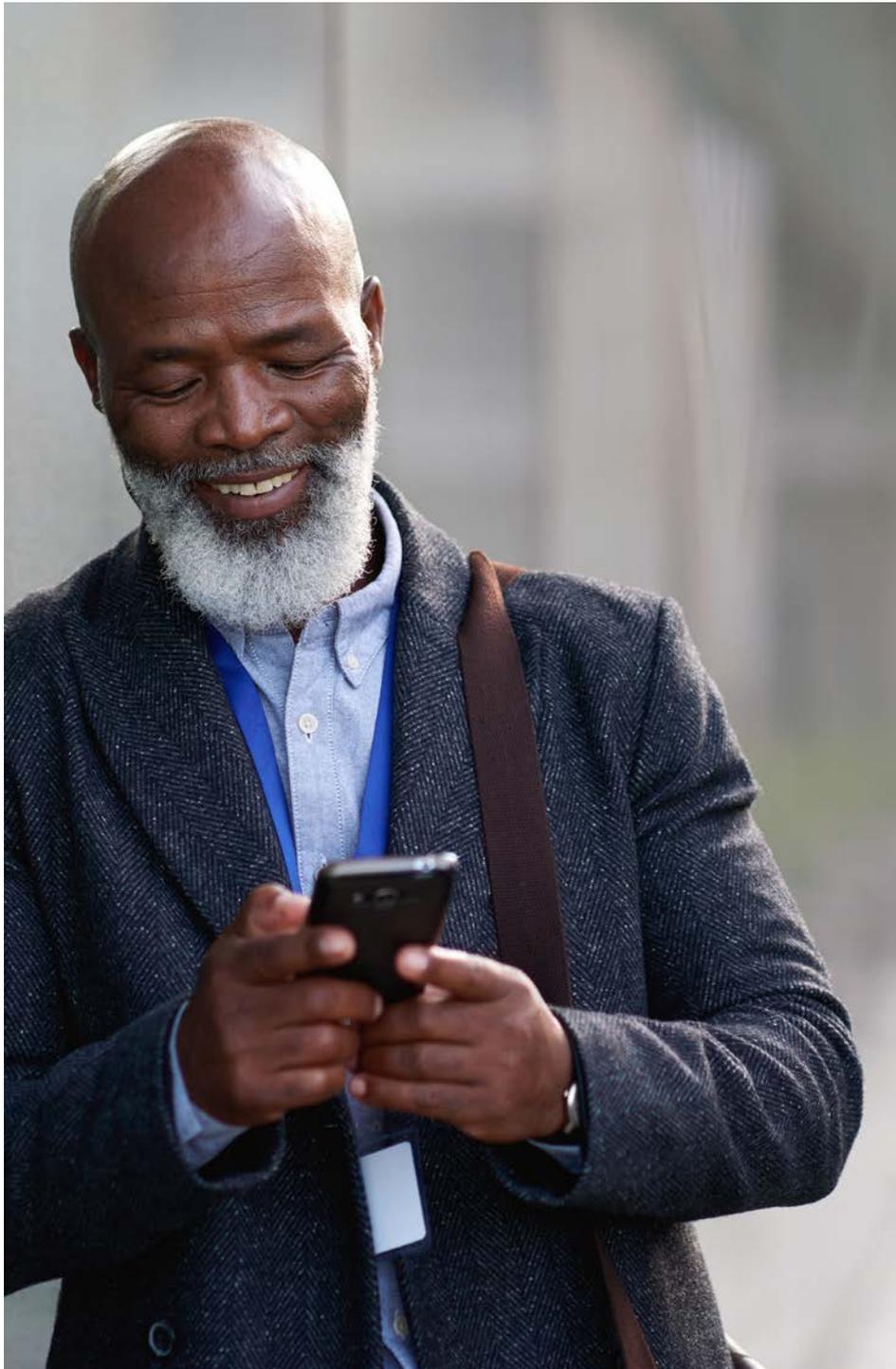
Phoenix



UKH
UKHOSPITALITY

MAKEuk
The Manufacturers' Organisation





Introduction

People in the U.K. are living longer, and the proportion of over 50s in the workforce is increasing. Considering the needs of these workers is vital if the country is to benefit from the huge resource of skills and experience that they offer. Discussion and research tends to focus on workers in the earlier years of their career, while relatively little attention is given to their more mature colleagues as they enter the later stages of their working lives.

A large body of work from a variety of organisations demonstrates the advantages of flexible working. However, there is a lack of research into flexible working among the over-50s, as highlighted by [Chartered Institute of Personnel Development \(CIPD\)](#). This lack of attention directed towards older workers is also felt by them with 88% respondents in the recent [Phoenix Insights research](#) agreeing with the statement “older people are left behind by employers” (PI). Research from the [Centre for Ageing Better and Timewise](#) reveals that flexible working is a highly valued benefit for those over-50s currently in work, and that lack of access to it is a key reason for leaving work. Raising awareness and consideration of flexible work is fundamental to both recruitment and retention of older workers who make up [more than 30% of the working age population](#).

From a legislative perspective, The Flexible Working Act, coming into force April 2024, means employees have the right to request flexible work from day one, and employers must consider any request. Flexible working is a broad term. It can relate to working hours or patterns including part-time, term-time, compressed hours, or adjusted start and finish times. It can also include flexibility over where someone works, whether that be from home or a satellite office ([Department for Business and Trade](#)). The introduction of the act compels employers to understand how they can make this work best for their workforce and obliges the government to do all it can to support both employers and employees.

The government-appointed Flexible Working Taskforce has been investigating the issues and opportunities offered by flexible working. The Taskforce is co-chaired by Peter Cheese, CEO CIPD and the Minister for Trade. Its membership includes representatives of the Older Workers Roundtable, co-chaired by the Minister for Employment and Andy Briggs, CEO Phoenix Group and government Business Champion for Older Workers.

Given the particular importance of flexible work for people over 50, as well as the introduction of the Flexible Working Act, the Minister for Employment and Andy Briggs, have encouraged roundtable members to focus on and promote the benefits of flexible working for older workers, complementing the work of that Taskforce.

This report explores what 'flexible working' means for the over-50s and assess evidence that indicates it can be mutually beneficial for the individual and the organisation ([De Menezes and Keliher, 2011](#)). As well as consolidating previous research on flexible working, the report introduces new data analysis conducted by the CIPD that focuses on people aged over 50. It also discusses why flexible work is important to this group, exploring the positive impact it has on the business world's 'three Rs' (retain, retrain and recruit) and the health and wellbeing of older workers. Finally, the report considers the 'how' of flexible work after 50, considering the views of subject-matter experts in the field and introducing case studies from various sectors where flexible work is already paying dividends. Throughout the report, recommendations will be made for meaningful action that can be taken by government and business. These are summarised at the end.



34%

cited caregiving
responsibilities as a
reason for wanting
to work flexibly

Why flexible work should be a priority for the over-50s and for business

People are living longer, meaning that the proportion of older workers in the UK workforce is steadily increasing. Already, around one in three workers are over the age of 50 and this increasing trend is expected to continue. On average, 65-year-olds in the UK are now expected to live for another 20 years and this longevity is projected to rise further ([Office for National Statistics](#)). This means it is increasingly important that businesses prepare for a workforce that will comprise five generations and contain a growing proportion of over-50s. This demographic change coincides with an increase in the state pension age, a reduction in the number of final salary pension schemes and an associated requirement for individuals to self-fund their lifestyles when they no longer work. Consequently, more people want and need to work for longer, but not necessarily in the same way as they have done previously; for many this means embracing flexible work.

In 2017, the DWP published [Fuller Working Lives: a partnership approach](#) which discussed the business case for, and the importance of, focusing on the over-50s as a segment of the workforce. Seven years on, the main issues remain, but the importance of tackling them is becoming greater and more urgent.

The 2020 research from [Centre for Ageing Better & Timewise](#) provides much of the insight for this report. One issue it highlighted is an increase in the demand for knowledge-based roles. People aged over 50 often possess a wealth of skills and knowledge that businesses struggle to replace when they leave the workforce; their experience means that the contribution of older workers can be essential to the success of a business. In many sectors, the skills gap exacerbates the challenges faced by employers; harnessing the power of the over-50s presents an opportunity to boost productivity and benefit the economy.

We know that flexibility is an essential part of good work and that it is even more important to older workers than to other age groups. Research from the Centre for Ageing Better and Timewise looked at how flexibility for people aged 50 and over can be made practicable. The research shows that while there is demand for flexibility across all age groups, that demand is higher among older workers, with 72% of those workers either working flexibly already, or wanting to do so. According to a [study conducted by the DWP](#), for people aged over 50, flexible working is the number one workplace practice that would allow them to work for longer. This also echoed in Phoenix Insights research which shows how important flex is as a factor to encourage economically inactive over 50s back to work.

Yet nearly one in three do not realise that they have the right to request flexible working and almost one in four are not comfortable discussing this issue with their employer.

However, it is important to note the research conducted by DWP was conducted in 2015. While the specific data will have evolved, the results nevertheless illustrate the important role of government and business in providing and promoting flexible work. The DWP findings are reinforced by the more recent Centre for Ageing Better and Timewise research which shows that many in this group are not aware that all employees have the same rights to flexible working. Addressing this lack of awareness is a key requirement needing action.



Recommendations

Business should actively promote the availability and range of flexible work options to both new and existing employees, monitoring the uptake and effectiveness of flexible working.

Businesses should ensure,

- This is done in gender and reason neutral way.
- Possibilities are showcased in a wide range of roles, including senior ones.
- Clear communication that flex is for all, not just parents and carers.

Government should provide a range of practical examples including case studies for use specifically with over 50's to help illustrate how flexible working can be used to encourage retention, retraining and recruitment.

50 PLUS Choices Employer Taskforce: Flexible After Fifty

Why flexible work should be a priority for the over-50s and for business

Enabling businesses to make use of the talents of the entire UK workforce and supporting more people to be economically independent is mutually beneficial. Many older workers want or need to keep working to supplement their savings and pensions. The introduction of automatic enrolment into pensions has seen a huge shift in default pension contributions, but many people only became auto-enrolled mid-career and are now facing significant shortfalls in their pensions savings. This potential savings gap is exacerbated by the increase in the retirement age. [Research published by the Social Market Foundation](#) found that among people aged 50-64, two-fifths are not confident of being able to meet their desired income in retirement. [Phoenix Insights' Great Expectations](#) report quantified the gap between expectations and reality. For many, their future finances are uncertain. Helping people to stay in good work by providing supportive employment policies like flexible working is essential.

Offering flexibility to older workers through methods such as phased retirement (workers gradually reduce hours as they move towards retirement) is an important measure to ensure people can continue to work longer, both to support themselves financially and to balance other personal priorities. Flexibility can provide a bridge to retirement, giving workers more control over how long they remain in employment, and allowing them the time to build a life beyond work.



At every life stage, people's priorities, needs and motivations can change. Those over 50 are no different. The Centre for Ageing Better and Timewise research looked at older workers over a wide range of job types, skill sets and levels of seniority across different employers. Despite the variations in their circumstances, their reasons for wanting more flexibility were universal:

- caring responsibilities
- physical aspects of ageing
- support for extended family
- wanting to enjoy other aspects of life
- managing the transition to retirement.

Flexibility in work can enable people to continue to balance work with other life demands. The majority of people (72%) cited work-life balance as a reason for flexible working. Having more time for themselves (34%), caring commitments (34%), managing commutes (31%) and health reasons (29%) are also stated as reasons for flexibility. This shows a keen level of awareness of the benefits of flexible working in the over-50 age group and their desire to experience these benefits. It also reveals that not having flexibility can result in people choosing to leave the workplace.

50 PLUS Choices Employer Taskforce: Flexible After Fifty

Why flexible work should be a priority for the over-50s and for business

With increasing life expectancy, an ageing UK workforce, and the ever-increasing demand for skilled workers, workers aged over 50 have never been more important to the economy. Indeed, they could be the key to greater productivity in the UK workforce. Being able to stay in good work for longer can also have a positive impact on older workers' financial wellbeing; it enables millions of people to boost their savings by returning to the workforce or remaining in work for longer. This benefits both the individual workers and the wider economy. In order to reap these economic benefits, employers must raise their game in terms of how they retain, re/train and recruit over-50s workers. If employers can utilise flexible working to make the most of the knowledge, skills, and talents of older workers they could be trailblazers for growth and wellbeing over the next decades.



What's new?

To support this report, the CIPD conducted a new analysis of formal and informal flexible working arrangements in the over 50s age group.

This analysis found that the most common formal flexible working arrangement within the over-50s age group is part-time working (33.2%), representing 3.6m people. The rate of part-time working in the over-50s age group has remained at around 33% since 2011 but the level of over 50 working part-time has been increasing. This maybe because part-time working is the best-known form of flexible working and there is a lack of awareness of other arrangements. The use of part-time work is most common in the health and social care industry (666,606 workers) and education (544,141 workers). Interestingly part-time working is the most common in industries thought of as vocational. It is least common for workers in occupations involving process, plant, and machinery (157,151 workers) and among skilled traders (230,671 workers). This may suggest that part-time work is largely accounted for by those wishing to carry on with work in sectors that can facilitate it. It could also suggest that in sectors where part-time work is not common, employers may need more support to successfully embrace flexible work arrangements.

The number of workers aged over 50 who work from their own home has rapidly increased from 10% in April to June 2020

to 22.4% in same period in 2023. Home working is most popular with over-50s working in professional, scientific, and technical activities (408,845 workers) and public administration and defence (344,317 workers). Pre-pandemic, working from home was most common among the over-50s, now it is most popular among workers aged 40-44 years old. Over-50s workers sit in the middle of the range in terms of their propensity to work from home. Only among workers aged 16-19 and 20-24 were there lower percentages of home working.

The CIPD's research also considered workers aged over 50 using flexi-time (a working schedule which allows employees to choose when to start and end their workday, and/or how long to take their break for, within agreed limits). 12.9% of the over-50 workforce fall into this category with flexi-time being most popular in the public administration and defence industry (340,490 workers) and in the health and social care industry (185,265 workers).

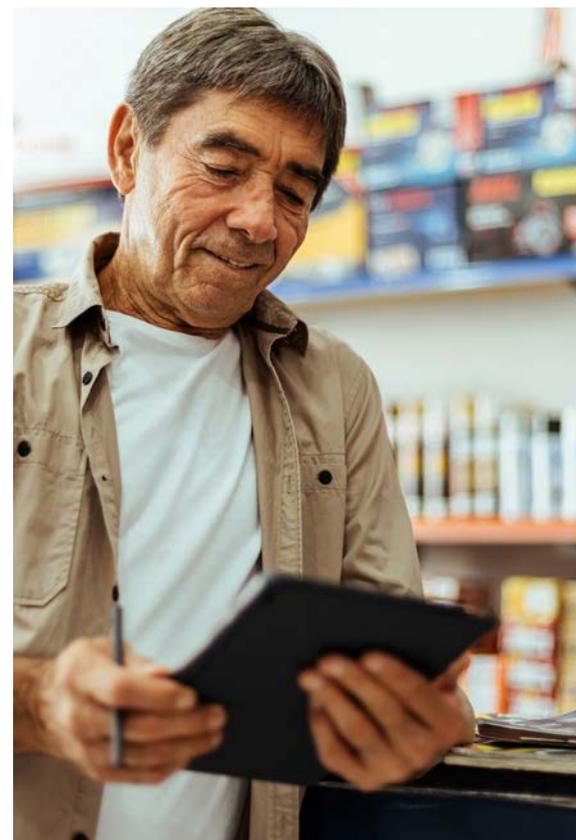
Other arrangements include the 5% of over-50s workers who are contracted to annualised hours, 4.6% who have term time working agreements, 2.6% of workers who are on zero-hour contracts, 2.4% work on call, 1.5% work condensed hours and 0.3% of over-50s workers job share. Older workers are clearly making use of various flexible working arrangements although this suggests that they may be missing out on the benefits of

the less commonly used formal flexible arrangements.

The difference in usage levels could be down to preference or suitability to role. If employers were to give more support to older workers wanting to access formal flexibility arrangements – that suited both the individual's and business's needs – this could increase the use of these arrangements and, in turn, improve the benefits they provide to both workers and businesses.

In general, the use of informal flexible working arrangements increases among over-50s, with workers being able to make decisions on many arrangements without any restrictions. Workers in the over-50s age bracket see the most flexibility when it comes to making decisions around the start and end time of their working day and the possibility of taking one or two hours out of the normal working day for personal or family matters. The expert interviews conducted for this report suggested that this increase in access to informal flexibility among older workers could suggest that employers place more trust in older worker and thus are more accepting of this type of flexibility for this cohort.

It is also important to note that, given the lack of clarity among some employers as to what constitutes flexible working, many people may be engaged in a form of flexible working without it being defined or recorded as such. Often employers don't



keep records of the flexible working methods that they use, especially informal arrangements, as this can be challenging, particularly for smaller business who do not have dedicated HR departments.

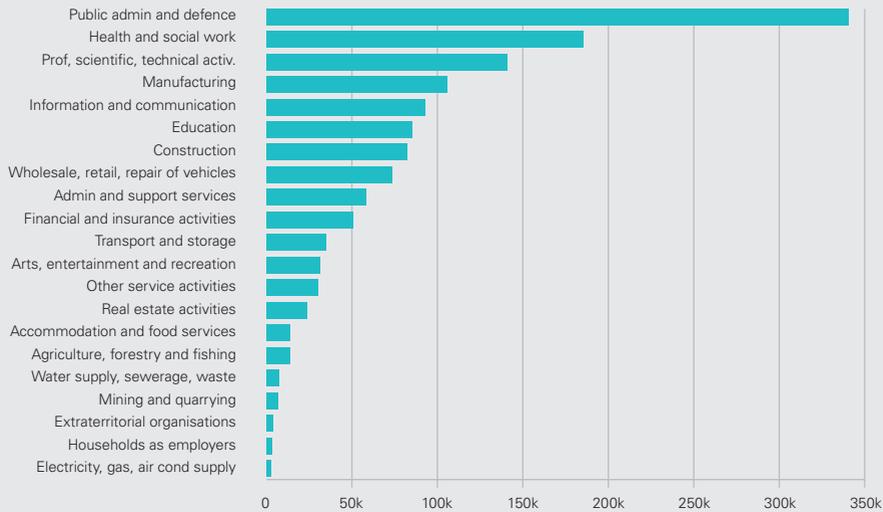
Recommendations

Recognising this challenge government should lead by example by monitoring uptake and effectiveness of flexible working. This should be broken down by age (refer to graphs on following pages).

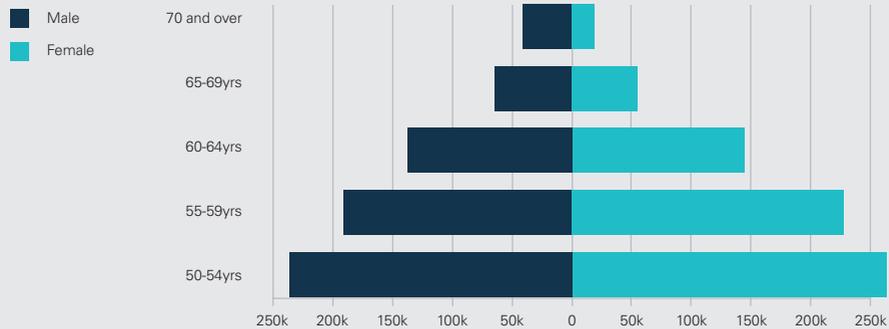
What's new?

12.9% of workers aged 50+ use flexi-time

Flexi-time workers by industry

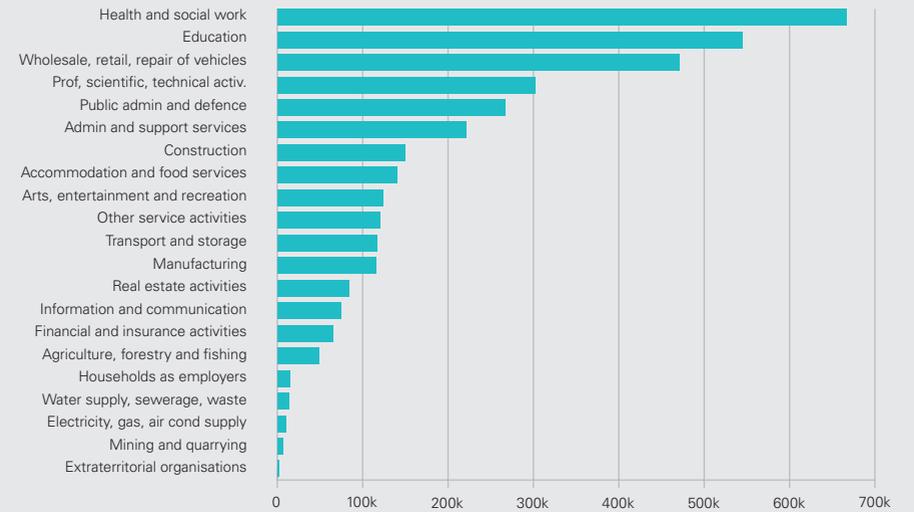


Age and sex breakdown of flexi-time workers

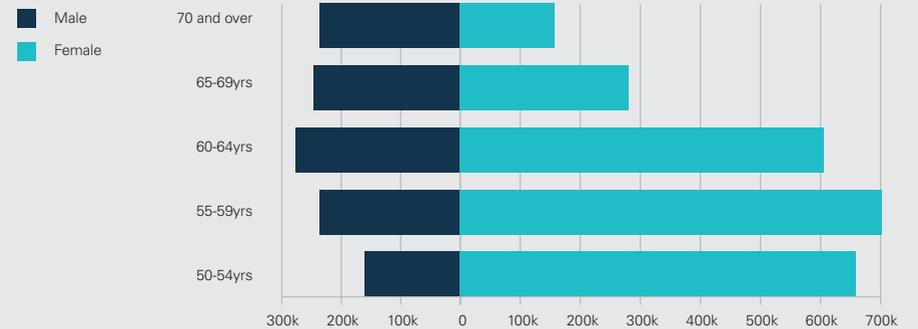


33.2% of people aged 50+ who work, work part-time

Part-time workers by industry



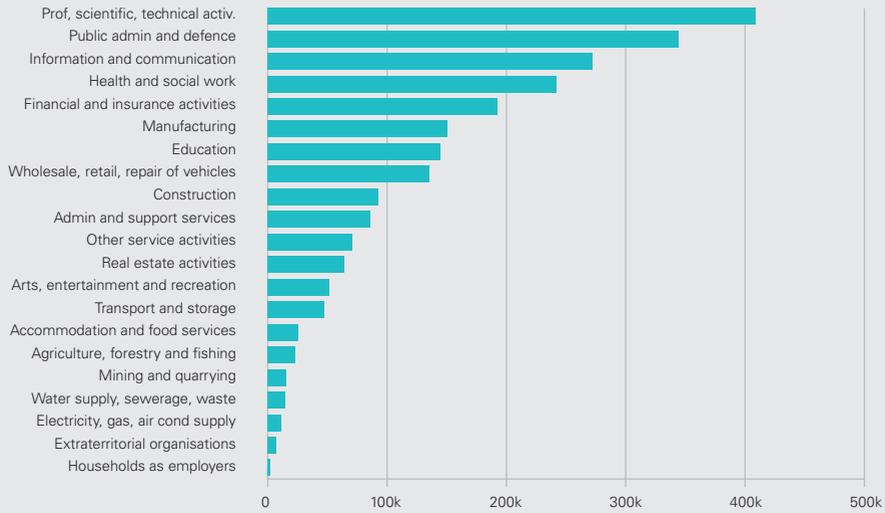
Age and sex breakdown of part-time workers



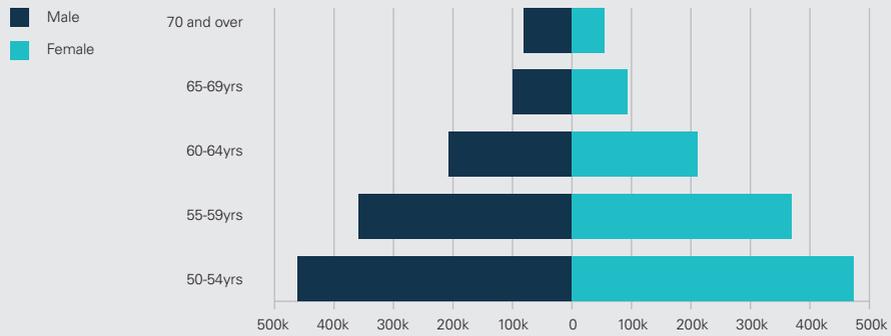
50 PLUS Choices Employer Taskforce: Flexible After Fifty
 What's new?

22.4% of aged 50+ in work,
 work from their own home

Home workers by industry



Age and sex breakdown of home workers



Retain, Re/train, Recruit

Flexible work is important for both people and businesses across the employee lifecycle whether the focus is to retain, re/train or recruit.

Retain

Retention of talent is arguably the most effective lever available to a business in the drive for increasing skills and productivity. Flexible working options are not only an important consideration for over-50 workers when they are seeking a new role; they are also extremely important in retaining older workers. The research referenced earlier, from the Centre for Ageing Better and Timewise, highlighted that offering more flexible working options was the most powerful action an employer can take to retain the over-50s age. It also allows older workers to continue in good work for longer. [Another study, conducted by Osborne and Clark](#), confirmed this insight with its finding that flexible working hours ranked in the top five benefits cited by employees responding to its survey.

However, recognition is only a precursor to action. More must be done to help the current generation of older employees to access flexible work that meets their needs, in order to prevent them leaving the workforce. Increasing awareness of

the role of flexible work in increasing retention can be achieved by normalising conversations about it and taking actions to remove the lingering stigma surrounding it. Expert interviews conducted for this report revealed that some over-50s believe there is still stigma attached to flexible working as they consider it unprofessional.

This lack of awareness and normalisation among the workforce is just one side of the equation. Employers also lack confidence when it comes to promoting and discussing flexible working options. The Centre for Ageing Better and Timewise found low levels of employer proactivity on the issue of flexible working with four in five line managers saying they have never taken the initiative in raising flexible working at annual appraisals. If they are to proactively manage the retention of their workforces, employers must do more to reassure their people that their managers have the necessary skills to successfully implement and manage flexible working for all team members.

Recommendations

Business should offer support to people managers to better support flexible workers of all ages.



Re/train

As the world of work progresses towards a more varied lifetime of career moves, it's important to acknowledge the need for retraining throughout this process. Improving productivity depends on all areas of the workplace adapting and retraining to embrace new technologies and emerging business needs. The over-50s have an important role to play here and Osborne and Clark's study of our ageing workforce indicates that they are well aware of this. 96% of respondents stated that they will need additional training to ensure they can do their job until their intended retirement age. The report's findings demonstrated not only that older workers understood the importance of training in later career stages but also that they viewed this positively.

69% of participants felt optimistic about learning new skills and 62% were ambitious and wanted to better themselves. However, 40% were concerned that they would not be able to grasp the new skills required by their changing roles, with 38% of respondents feeling pressure from their company to learn new skills but believing that they were not up to it. This shows a clear need for employers to ensure that training is tailored to support different learning styles and needs. [The Phoenix Insights report 'Never too Late to Learn'](#) explored this topic and suggested solutions that could be adopted to make structural changes around funding and access to training.

The Phoenix Insights report highlighted that offering flexible training options is a positive way to make retraining more accessible and effective. People can face significant barriers to taking part in training, such as caring responsibilities, lack of confidence about their ability or capacity to return to academic study, fear of being 'shamed' or 'embarrassed', and physical or mental ill-health. Tailoring training to the individual needs increases the likelihood of success.

Both business and government have roles to play in encouraging flexible access to training. While the Department for Education's skills white paper endorses flexible access to training, there is more that can be done as, currently, flexible access is largely discretionary and based on the approach of the education or training provider.

Recommendation

Government should review the skills and training offering in both Job Center Plus and via Department for Education to ensure training offered can be undertaken on a flexible basis. (e.g. apprenticeships/ bootcamps).

Business should ensure training and skills opportunities can be taken flexibly.

This should include work experience and returner programmes can be taken flexibly to encourage both retention and attract new talent.



Recruit

The proportion of job adverts which state that the employer offers flexible working has stalled, with the 2023 level of 31% showing barely any increase on the 2022 level of 30%. The previous three years, over the course of the pandemic, had seen a steadily rising trend (Centre for Ageing Better and Timewise). Nor is flexibility routinely promoted during the recruitment process. Without any discussion of flexible work in recruitment, employers risk missing the talent in the workforce that requires a level of flexibility.

The supply of vacancies offering flexibility lags far behind current demand. We know that currently 6 in 10 employees can access flexibility within their current role, and with many more looking to work flexibly it is clear how important such arrangements are to employees. Some leading bodies even suggest that job candidates now consider flexible working to be as important as wages when applying for vacancies. However, only 3 in 10 jobs vacancies advertise flexible working as an option. The same research showed that employers could be missing out on 7 out of 10 potential candidates who would be looking for flexibility in a new role. This means employers could be alienating a huge amount of potential talent in their recruitment process, particularly those over-50s who value flexible work so highly.

Neither should employers assume during their recruitment process that candidates will be aware of flexible working or comfortable asking about it. As previously stated, one in three over-50s are not aware that they have the right to request flexible working and almost [one in four are not comfortable discussing this with their employer](#). People who need flexibility want to know it's on offer before they apply for a vacancy. This is especially important to older workers who have been away from the workplace as they may need flexibility in order to start a job. When advertising job vacancies, employers must state clearly if they offer flexibility in the role and discuss this with candidates during the recruitment process. This will ensure that roles are accessible to all and enable employers to tap into the skills that older workers can bring to their business.

Recommendation

Business should include promotion of flexible work in all job adverts and/or discuss this early in the recruitment process.

(The Flexible Working Taskforce are promoting the [Happy to Talk Flexible Working campaign](#). Working Families, with the support of the Government's Flexible Working Taskforce, have developed the Happy To Talk Flexible Working strapline and logo to support employers on their journey to designing more flexible roles.)



72%

of over-50s seek flexible
working to achieve a
better work-life balance

The considerations of flexible work on over-50s health and wellbeing

It is also important to consider the impact that flexible work can have on the health and wellbeing of workers over 50.

There is strong evidence to indicate that being in work is [generally good](#) for physical and mental health and wellbeing. It can even be argued that, for those who are physically able, work is the most effective way to [improve the wellbeing](#) of individuals, their families, and the communities that they live in. Working can provide a [sense of purpose and self-worth](#) to individuals and gives them opportunities to socialise. Employment and socio-economic status are also the main drivers of [social differences](#) in physical and mental health and mortality. There is strong evidence that re-employment leads to improved self-esteem, improved physical and mental health, and reduced psychological distress. For all these reasons, we can confidently assert that good work is generally good for physical and mental health and wellbeing.

For workers aged over 50 who are approaching the later stages of their career, other factors must be considered when discussing the effect of good work on health and wellbeing. The circumstances surrounding early retirement, particularly whether it was a matter of choice or necessity, have a great deal of influence on individuals' wellbeing. While retirement is a positive experience for many, those who are forced into early retirement can experience [detrimental effects](#) on health and wellbeing.

It is therefore essential that roles adapt to the needs of older workers. There is a broad consensus that matching work circumstances to the changing capabilities and needs of older workers will help to maintain their health and safety at work. Flexible working, such as phased return to work, can also be key to supporting workers aged over 50 returning to work after illness. Doing so will allow people to work longer and avoid the negative effects on their wellbeing that can result from forced early retirement, unemployment or extended sickness.

Recommendation

Business should actively adopt and sign the Centre for Ageing Better's Age Friendly Employer Pledge

Government should back the Centre for Ageing Better's Age Friendly Employer Pledge

(The Age-friendly Employer Pledge is a nationwide programme run by the Centre for Ageing Better for employers who recognise the importance and value of older workers. Employers commit to improving work for people in their 50s and 60s and to taking the necessary action to help them flourish in a multigenerational workforce.)

Expert interviews and case studies

During the preparation of this report, expert stakeholders were consulted on their views regarding flexible working for over-50s in the sectors they represent. Stakeholders consulted included MAKE UK, The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Business in the Community (BITC), the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), and the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC). UK Hospitality and the Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD) were also consulted in their capacity as key members of the Taskforce with Phoenix Group. This section will discuss the findings of these interviews and provide case studies that highlight how flexible working can be applied in different sectors. This section will also touch on the trade organisations' reflections on the three Rs for older workers and on attitudes to flexible working among employers in small and medium-sized businesses.

The TUC, BCC and FSB all acknowledged that the proportion of workers over 50 is increasing in their membership organisations and that this has implications for their respective sectors. Challenges with recruitment and skills came through as a clear theme, confirming that many sectors are facing skills gaps. The BCC emphasised the increased level of anxiety they are seeing among the employers they represent as well as the increased concern these employers feel as they face losing the skills and talent of their older workers. Member organisations expressed eagerness to do what they can to help retain their

older workers, given the difficulty of finding people with the right skills to fill vacancies. The construction sector, for example, has specific concerns given the lack of a talent pipeline and the physical demands on its older workers.

“Older workers have the experience; we are quite specific in what we do, so we need people with experience of being on-site in construction. The business recently hired another older worker, 60 years of age, because of his wide experience. Although flexible working can pose its difficulties in this sector, the business enables staff to work on flexible time hours and/or work from home where possible. Training and development are vital within the business and we ensure it is available for all ages and for the 38% of staff who are older workers.”

Worker in construction

The trade organisations also recognised that the employers they represent are realising the importance of flexibility to workers aged over 50. BITC, the UK's largest responsible business network, outlined how its members had noticed that the flexible working practices of choosing a finishing time, compressed hours, and hybrid working had proved to be the most important and popular among older workers. The TUC discussed how flexible working is particularly important to older workers who are disabled and to older women. This is

highlighted in the following case study provided by the REC, which drives standards and empowers recruitment businesses to build better futures for their candidates and themselves. It shares the experiences of a nurse who moved to more flexible working arrangements.

"I've been temping now for 11 years. Before I joined the agency, I was a community nurse, and I did that for six years. And before that I worked in a doctor's surgery as a practice nurse. I was reluctant to leave my job, obviously, because of the security that comes from working for the NHS and because I enjoy it. But I had a problem at home. My oldest daughter was having panic attacks at the time, and I felt I needed to be around in case she ever phoned. I felt that working nights would be better and give flexibility as well so that I could be home at quite short notice. I continued to do agency work because of the flexibility. I enjoy being at home. I've got lots of other things that I need to do. I help my husband, I sing in a ladies' choir, I spend time in my family and that's really important. I don't want to be getting to the end of my career and being worn out and not having spent any time at home."

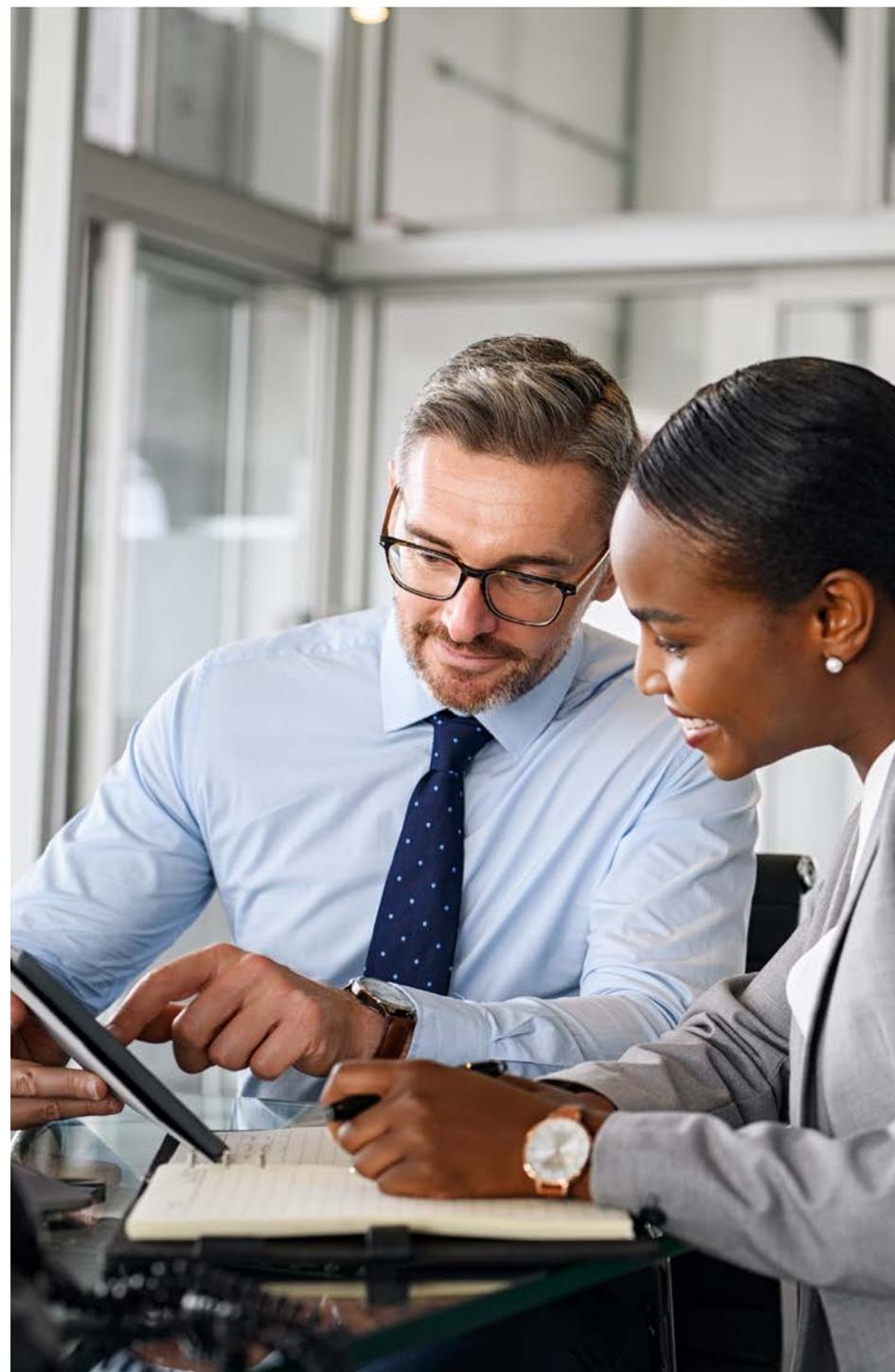
Older worker in health care

All the business organisations highlighted the importance of employers being able to recruit workers aged over 50 and offer flexible working in their job adverts. The FSB said that while their members are still seeing high levels of diversity during the recruitment process, most job adverts were very focused on full/part-time working rather than on full flexibility. A lack of awareness and understanding among member businesses with regards to flexible work and its benefits was cited as a factor that is impeding progress. The TUC took the view that better definitions of flexible working were needed to support employers in using flexibility better. The TUC discussed the importance of employers retaining workers aged over 50 and pointed out that flexible working is vital for both retention and for supporting workers on their road to retirement. The FSB discussed the importance of job design in making roles more flexible, thus meeting the needs of older workers and allowing them to work for longer.

Challenges

The expert stakeholders also highlighted some of the biggest challenges that their members faced when it comes to flexible work, with the right to request it being considered a barrier. Despite the legislative change, the TUC observed that people don't feel comfortable asking for flexible working and often fear being rejected or facing negative comments. They also mentioned that their members are experiencing high rates of rejection of flexible working requests.

Business groups also outlined how important training is for both employees and employer in making flexible working a success for both groups. The BITC drew attention to how much the world of work has changed in recent years and how this is affecting line managers who need the skills to create a culture of inclusivity around flexible working. Employers need to ensure that they are offering the correct training to line managers in order to support this. It is clear that a lack of training for employees can be a real barrier to working flexibly. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), who have more constrained resources would benefit from specific support. However, it is evident that while there are challenges, many SMEs have embraced flexible work through informal arrangements and that there is an increasing acceptance of flexible working.



The FSB pointed out that one reason why smaller employers use informal arrangements is that they do not have formal HR departments. FSB members have stated that this can work well but that it depends on trust between the employer and employee which can lead to grey areas.

“I offer flexible working arrangements to all my staff. This is all based around trust. One of my employees is 78 and works two days a week. He chooses which days he works. Another employee is 73 and cares for his wife, so he uses flexible working, working part-time and flexitime to accommodate his caring responsibilities. We gain because we really value his work, and he gains because he can earn a wage and still look after his wife.”

Employer and FSB member in the professional, scientific, and technical services sector

Smaller organisations in particular are under pressure as they try to manage many different types of flexible working arrangements, all without proper HR support. The frequency of calls about flexible work from employers to the FSB’s helpline is evidence of the extent of the issue.

Recommendation

Government should ensure resources on HR support are available for SMEs to help them with the implementation of Flexible Work legislation, including issues such as phased retirement.





22%

The number of over-50s who work from their own home has rapidly increased, from 10% in April to June 2020, to 22.4% in the same period in 2023

Recommendations for government and business

This section lists the recommendations given throughout this report for both government and business.

Government

- Should lead by example by monitoring uptake and effectiveness of flexible working. This should be broken down by age.
- Should provide a range of practical examples for use specifically with over 50's (including case studies) to help illustrate how flexible working can be used to aid retention, retraining and recruitment.
- Ensure resources on HR support are available for SMEs to help them with the implementation of Flexible Work legislation, including issues such as phased retirement.
- Should review the skills and training offering in both Job Center Plus and via Department for Education to ensure training offered can be undertaken on a flexible basis (e.g. apprenticeships/ bootcamps).
- Back the Centre for Ageing Better's [Age Friendly Employer Pledge](#).

Business

- Should actively promote the availability and range of flexible work options to both new and existing employees, monitoring the uptake and effectiveness of flexible working.
- Should offer support to people managers to better support flexible workers of all ages.
- Should include promotion of flexible work in all job adverts and/or discuss this early in the recruitment process.
- Should ensure training and skills opportunities can be taken flexibly.
- Should actively adopt and sign the Centre for Ageing Better's [Age Friendly Employer Pledge](#).

CIPD



fsb⁸

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