# Centre for Ageing Better

# Reframing ageing and demographic change

# About us

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### Centre for Ageing Better

The UK's population is undergoing a massive age shift. In less than 20 years, one in four people will be over 65.

The fact that many of us are living longer is a great achievement. But unless radical action is taken by government, business and others in society, millions of us risk missing out on enjoying those extra years.

At the Centre for Ageing Better we want everyone to enjoy later life. We create change in policy and practice informed by evidence and work with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities.

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1        https://grandmawilliams.com

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# Introduction

## What is values-based framing?

The language we use matters because it influences public opinion. And public opinion matters because it influences and justifies policy. Values-based framing is an approach to achieve long-term social change, based on the best evidence available from cognitive science about how we think and form opinions.

**Frames** are clusters of ideas, words, images and associations (frame elements) that we use, usually subconsciously, as mental shortcuts to make sense of the world around us.[1] The frame through which we view something has implications for how we understand that issue, and what solutions we will support.

An example of the difference framing makes is how we think and talk about taxes. If we think of taxes in terms of a heavy burden we desire relief from – a common and well-established frame – we are more likely to support arguments for lower taxes and a smaller public sector. But if we think of taxes as the building blocks underlying our society – the foundations that allow us to have schools, hospitals, roads and so on – we are more likely to support higher taxes and a larger public sector.

We never communicate in a vacuum: framing is happening all the time, with or without our deliberate input. If we do not set the frame, our audience will default to dominant frames that are shaping how issues are already discussed or thought about.[2]

**Reframing** is therefore about making conscious and intentional choices about what to put in and leave out of communications in order to influence what people think, feel, and do about a social issue.

Framing is about long-term, large-scale social change. It takes time to establish and popularise a frame. They are strengthened through consistent use and repetition; once a frame is established, it is difficult to dislodge and can tip the scales on so many different debates.

All frames are underpinned by **values** – the things that really matter to us. No matter how much we think we are rational beings, how we feel about and respond to a message is based on our values; our hearts, not our heads, dictate the choices and decisions we make.

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1    Goffman, E. (1974). Frame analysis: An essay on the organisation of experience. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

2    Lakoff, George. (2004). Don't think of an elephant! Know your values and frame the debate. Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing

There are several human values that reoccur consistently across countries and cultures. These have been mapped by Schwartz,[3] and exist on a spectrum of **intrinsic values** (such as freedom, honesty, loyalty, responsibility, equality, social justice) and **extrinsic values** (such as success, material wealth, social power, image, popularity). The values are in groups, and we are all motivated by each of these values to differing degrees.

When you tap into people's intrinsic values in a message, you promote a more pro-social, compassionate outlook and increase support for social change on a range of issues. Similarly, when you activate people's extrinsic values, you tip people's brains into thinking in a more self-centred way and decrease support for social change.[4]

Values function a bit like muscles: the more you activate specific values in communications, the stronger they become (and the more opposing values are suppressed). This is why they are so important in the long-term.[5]

Another key aspect of framing for social change is increasing the understanding of the causes and solutions of social issues, and who or what is responsible. Dominant framing around most social issues tends to place all or most of the blame for the causes of problems on individuals and their perceived failings, and little or none on structural factors – the way in which our political, legal, economic and cultural systems and institutions, for example, are designed, organised, funded and operate. This, in turn, influences what policy solutions people will – or will not – support.

The more a social issue is framed as being about individual decisions, choices and behaviour, the less likely it is that people will hold government and public bodies accountable for solving the problem. And the more it is framed as being about wider societal structures and systems, the more likely it is that people will see the issue as one appropriate to government and public body resolution.[6] For example, reframing research commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that the belief of 'self-makingness' – that anyone can pull themselves out of poverty if they work hard enough – is one of the barriers to a more accurate and helpful public understanding of the causes of, and therefore solutions to, poverty. This dominant frame is continually activated and reinforced by phrases like 'hard-working people'.[7]

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3    Schwartz, S.H. (2006) Basic Human Values: theory, measurement and applications. Revue Française de sociologie, 47:259-299

4    Crompton, T. and Weinstein, N. (2015). Common cause communication: A toolkit for charities. Woking: Common Cause Foundation

5    Lakoff, ibid

6    Iyengar, S. (1991). Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

7    https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/publication/how-to-talk-about-poverty-in-the-united-kingdom/

In summary, framing research and practice has shown that, to create social change, any new narrative needs to:

– Be hopeful but realistic and credible to counter fatalism and show that change is possible. If it is too positive or utopian, the narrative risks being dismissed out of hand.

– Tell an alternative story, rather than reinforce the existing negative or counter-productive frames, using intrinsic values to build support for progressive, not individualistic, policies.

– Foreground social systems which significantly shape how we experience an issue, and which can be redesigned to resolve or ameliorate the problem and create a better outcome.

– Be used consistently and at scale over time.

## What are our objectives?

The Centre for Ageing Better's long-term objectives are to change the way that the public think and talk about ageing to create more fertile ground for achieving a society where everyone enjoys later life. In order to provide insight to achieve these goals, the research objectives for this project were to:

– Review the existing academic literature and policy documents to establish an evidence baseline to inform the research and focus our efforts.

– Understand the differences and similarities between how ageing is talked about in various sectors and industries of society.

– Understand what the general public in England think and feel about ageing, how they talk about it, and how they encounter it in daily life (i.e. language, values, imagery, impact on behaviour).

– Collect real-life examples and stories of how ageing is talked about in public life.

– Ultimately: create a new and more constructive story of ageing by developing new ways to talk about ageing, using framing techniques, and testing how these messages drive positivity towards, and a structural view[8] of, ageing.

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8       In other words, supporting structural and societal policy responses to ageing and not seeing the experience of ageing primarily as an issue or responsibility for individuals.

## What do we know already?

To date, we have conducted and published a literature review which studied the existing research and policy documents focusing on representations of age, ageing and older people, and on language and framing used around ageing in the UK.[9]

In addition, we conducted 20 telephone interviews with key stakeholders of The Centre for Ageing Better, along with an extensive analysis of how ageing is talked about in influential sectors and industries. These revealed the dominant narratives currently being used in society. Parliament and government departments, health and social care organisations, the media and advertising industries, and ageing-focused charities are all contributing to narratives which influence how the public think and feel about ageing and therefore the frames and language they naturally adopt. The stereotypes, common ageist constructs, and dominant themes identified in society presented a complex picture of attitudes to ageing, older people and demographic change.

The current **dominant view** of ageing and demographic change derived from the literature review and discourse analysis is summarised in the table below (left column). This is underpinned largely by extrinsic values and the different parts of this view appear to be mutually reinforcing. The right column summarises an alternative view that is underpinned by intrinsic values.

**The alternative view** has been developed over several years of researching ageing and how people experience later life. Many already advocate for this view and ascribe to it, however, many do not. The gap between these two views represents the framing challenge and the shift required from the dominant view to the alternative view.

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9    www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/doddery-dear-examining-age-related-stereotypes

**Figure 1. Gap analysis**

| The dominant view | The alternative view |
| --- | --- |
| Ageing is about old people | Ageing is a life-long process |
| Ageing is an inevitable process of physical and cognitive decline, leading to the destination of old and, ultimately, death | With the right policies, environments and support people can age well, extending healthy life expectancy, leading fulfilling lives and having a purpose |
| Old people are frail, vulnerable and dependent, which makes them low in competence | Older people can live healthy active lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large |
| Demographic change is a growing and unsustainable economic and social cost and burden | Our longer lives are an opportunity – for the economy, for society and for us as individuals |
| There is an unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities across generations, with older people benefiting at the expense of younger people | Inequality exists across the life course, and age is not a proxy for opportunity or wealth |
| Ageing is something to defy | Ageing is something for individuals to accept and for society to adapt to |
| How an individual ages is primarily their responsibility and within their control | An individual's experiences of ageing are largely determined by wider society. How an individual ages can be negatively affected by a range of structural issues, including: society's discriminatory attitudes and policies; poorly designed systems and services; national and local level budget decisions; problems in the built environment, etc. |

## How do we bridge the gap?

To bridge the gap between the current dominant view and the more constructive alternative view, we applied evidence-based framing practice to develop three new ways of talking – three 'reframing routes' – about ageing and demographic change. One route focuses on reframing ageing, one on reframing older age and the third on reframing demographic change:

A. **Ageing is a continuous process of change across the life course** (as the alternative to ageing is an inevitable process of decline and loss, leading to the destination of death)

B. **We have equal value and purpose in older age** (as the alternative to older age is associated with low competence, frailty, vulnerability and dependency)

C. **Our longer lives are a mutually beneficial opportunity** (as the alternative to our longer lives are a societal and economic burden)

Furthermore, we identified three intrinsic value groups to invoke through the reframing, focusing on two values within each group in particular.

## Figure 2. Values

| Value group | Values |
| --- | --- |
| Self-direction | **Freedom and control** are invoked in the messages developed to counter the paternalistic benevolence embodied in the idea of older age being a time of vulnerability and dependency; to give agency, competence and empowerment to us all across the life course; and therefore to drive positive sentiment towards ageing and later life. |
| Benevolence | **Community and interdependence** are invoked to highlight our interdependence based on our shared humanity and our mutual need to care for one another across our lives, which also serves to drive positive sentiment towards ageing and later life. |
| Universalism | **Equality and social justice** values are the key values to engage to highlight the structural factors that shape our experience of ageing and later life, and therefore drive support for more progressive policy solutions.[10] |

The three reframing routes (A, B, C) were initially explored in eight 90-minute focus groups in Manchester and Bournemouth (across four age groups: 18-34, 35-49, 50-69, 70+) to see how receptive the public were to them and the intrinsic values they aim to invoke.

Informed by the focus groups, we broke down the three reframing routes into fifteen shorter messages that were tested in a nationally representative survey among more than 2,000 adults in England. These short messages are components of a complete message, each designed to do specific things.

We used regression analysis to gauge the extent to which these messages drive positive sentiment towards ageing, and/or drive a structural view of ageing.[11] The regression analysis (also known as a Key Drivers Analysis) examines the correlation between each independent variable (in this case, each message) and a dependent variable (in this case we had two: driving positive sentiment towards ageing and driving a structural view of ageing). This allows us to identify which independent variable might have the biggest impact on the dependent variable.

Using these research methods, along with a five-day diary completed by focus group participants, we also examined the public's experiences and views of ageing and demographic change, and the extent to which these mirror the current dominant narrative of ageing and demographic change. We spoke to a cross-section of the general public who had a range of demographic characteristics including age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, level of education, social grade and region.

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10  Community and independence and equality and social justice also serve to widen the sphere of concern – that this concerns all of us, not just some of us. This is an important counter to the 'us and them' narrative, which invokes intergenerational unfairness and competition.

11  In other words, supporting structural and societal policy responses to ageing and not seeing the experience of ageing primarily as an issue or responsibility for individuals.

It is important to bear in mind that while the qualitative research took place just before COVID-19, in January 2020, the quantitative research took place in June 2020, in the middle of the pandemic. A brief discussion on the narratives on ageing and older age during COVID-19 is outlined in the Research in practice section.

All comparisons made in the quantitative data between sub-groups are statistically significant to the 95% level.

# 1. What are the dominant narratives in society that influence our perceptions of ageing?

**Section highlights**

– The dominant narratives in society that were identified in the literature review[12] and discourse analysis[13] were also observed by participants in the diaries and focus groups.

– Ageing was seen to be negatively characterised in society and the media as a decline and a loss – of physical, cognitive and mental health, ability, beauty, sexuality, fun, independence and freedom.

– Participants noticed examples of intergenerational conflict and discussions about demographic change as a challenge to society in the media and in political discourse, noticing older people often being referred to as a burden.

– Weak, stereotyped, homogenised, unrealistic representations of older people dominated. However, participants noticed attempts to counter these with more progressive, realistic, diverse representations of older people as funny, sexual, successful people with intricate personalities and lives.

– Participants also saw narratives that they perceived to be positive, such as a drive to encourage older people to embrace the physical signs of ageing, enjoy later life and to stay active and healthy.

– A variety of role models were identified as being abundant in society and the media, and were acknowledged as being important to determining people's views on ageing and older age.

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12    www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/doddery-dear-examining-age-related-stereotypes

13    www.ageing-better.org.uk/news/uks-damaging-views-ageing-revealed-new-report-analysing-language-used-across-society

During the focus groups and five-day diaries, participants spoke about their interactions with ageing in society in many aspects of their daily lives: during conversations with family, friends and colleagues, in the news and in magazines, films, TV programmes, advertisements and also in charity communications. Participants predominantly observed negative portrayals of ageing in society, such as a decline in health, ability and beauty, a cause to prepare financially for later life, becoming a burden to society and links to intergenerational conflict, all leading to a cultural aversion towards ageing.

These portrayals of ageing that were highlighted by participants closely reflect those identified in the discourse analysis. However, participants most profusely talked about their interactions with ageing in the media, advertising and in social media. This highlights the influence that these sectors have on the dominant narratives on ageing.

**Figure 3. Summary of key findings from the discourse analysis**

| News media, advertising and social media | The deficit narrative prevails with portrayals of ageing not reflecting the diversity which exists in our society, using binary and emotive stereotypes covering vulnerability, health, ability, loneliness, politics, wealth, beauty and sex. In turn, we found that this presents ageing as something you do successfully or unsuccessfully depending on choices made. |
| --- | --- |
| Policy sectors | Ageing is talked about in economic terms, as a challenge to be tackled (including the social care crisis), and as a conflict of resources between younger and older generations. |
| Ageing-focused charities | Ageing is more likely to be talked about holistically, as more of a process than a destination (tending to refer to distinct age groups rather than 'old people' as a homogenous group). They are also likely to discuss 'issues' related to ageing ranging from financial, social and health, along with providing support, advice and inspiration. |

## Negative narratives on ageing dominate in society

### 'We should defy the physical signs of ageing'

Participants commented on the narrative in media and advertising to defy the physical signs of ageing, noticing words being used such as "wrinkly", "anti-ageing", "grey", "withered" and "decrepit". Multiple participants from the 35-49, 50-69 and 70+ focus groups felt overwhelmed by the number of adverts that dominated their social media feeds and day-time TV relating to life insurance, mobility aids, pensions, funeral plans, hair loss, anti-ageing cream, false teeth, incontinence and so on, leaving them feeling directly targeted because of their age.

Both female and male participants in the focus groups noticed how there tended to be "subtle sexism" in the way that beauty products are advertised, with older women being told they should "fight the signs of ageing", "look 20 years younger", "age gracefully" while using models who "in the adverts were not even that old".[14] This was seen to convey that older women are "no longer seen as beautiful". In comparison, "no such products were aimed at changing the appearances of men". One female participant felt strongly that the beauty industry has created a profitable environment where ageing is something to be feared. Another noticed how the physical signs of ageing are often the butt of the joke on TV.

**"Watched a Michael McIntyre show with Sharon Osbourne as a guest. They made many jokes about her "youth" and many jokes about her Botox/ plastic surgery keeping her always looking young. Again, reinforcing stereotypes, as women are expected to maintain beautiful, youthful appearances. Sharon's husband Ozzy did not get the same scrutiny about his ageing appearance. Joking and banter around Botox for concealing ageing signs, also a lot of comments on wealth and how the rich can hide their age."**

**Female, 18-34, Manchester**



**"Flicked through some magazines noticed ads for ageing. Read them but don't really affect me, only anti-ageing cream – I've bought buckets full of the stuff, but it doesn't work. Age is just a number. You have to push yourself to do what you want to do."**

**Female, 70+, Manchester**

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14      This reflects an 'individualistic' view of ageing, confirming a finding from the discourse analysis and literature review that ageing well is primarily the responsibility of individuals (see row 7 in Figure 1 on page 5).

## 1. What are the dominant narratives in society that influence our perceptions of ageing?

> **"I find that a lot of roles that I see, for like a lady she'll be someone's grandma or whatever but then still you look at James Bond who is in his fifties and is still this lothario, you know, chasing after all these girls my age and I think it is just a little bit ridiculous how it is the complete other end of the spectrum."**

**Female, 18-34, Manchester**

### 'Older age brings disease and dependency'

Participants also observed ageing being spoken about in association with health, disease, social care and loneliness. They discussed how older people are often presented as physically and cognitively ill, frail, vulnerable and dependent on care. They also noticed advertisements directed towards older people for hearing aids, mobility aids, incontinence, care agencies and retirement homes. A few 70+ year olds spotted a lot of adverts and programmes about dementia, cancer and loneliness on the TV, ranging from commercial ads through to charity ads. Participants observed language being used that focuses on the pressures that ageing and demographic change place on health and social care systems, whilst also diminishing older people to "being of little use".

One individual noticed an article about an app for Parkinson's sufferers where the article did not use the words "older" or "ageing" but still used an image of an older person. Another individual something similar, where articles contained "people talking about their elderly relatives" but didn't notice any older people "talking for themselves". This reflects how physiological and neurological diseases that are more common among older people can act as a mental shortcut for a whole host of associations, feelings and images related to ageing – contributing to the framing of mental decline and dependency.

> **"Never at any point is the word used. [The media] never address the elderly and they never talk in the language that, kind of, is old, they just have a visual representation."**

**Male, 50-69, Bournemouth**

Many participants perceived there to be ageist structures in healthcare settings, a belief fed by news stories where older people and people with dementia are abused in care homes; the articles describing them as "vulnerable", "victims" and "defenceless," and leaving the reader angry and

depressed. Similarly, one individual, aged 35-49 and from Bournemouth, said that "when you get older you're sidelined [in health and social care settings] because of your age" while younger individuals are prioritised as they have longer to live.[15]

The focus groups among 35-49, 50-69 and 70+ year olds extended the discussion on ageing and healthcare to address how ageing is often portrayed in the media and in political discourse as a "burden" and a "drain" on NHS resources: "blocking beds", "wast[ing]" time and resources and creating problems for their families, the Government and society at large. A few participants from these age groups felt strongly that the UK Government does not support or take care of older people enough to be able to live independently in financial, social and health terms.

**"The time has come for the government to get a grip on the problem and inject the funds to take care of the old folk who in many cases gave so much for this country. If I was on my own, I would be very worried. But I am lucky, because my family really look after me, which is a blessing. It appears that many people in positions of power think family members will bear the brunt of looking after their loved ones. In their opinion, family members would not fail in their duty."**

**Male, 70+, Manchester**

Similarly, others saw how older people are presented as a burden on society in non-healthcare settings. This includes one individual who noticed some comments on an article that blamed older people as being "a drain on local resources". The authors of the comments also argued that the investment should have been spent on encouraging employment to the area for working adults, indicating intergenerational conflict. This supports a finding from the discourse analysis and literature review that demographic change is a growing and unsustainable economic and social cost and burden.

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15      These findings relate to the literature review where research showed that healthcare workers may prefer not to work with older people because they remind them of their own inevitable ageing, ill health and mortality (reviewed in Martens, Goldenberg, & Greenberg, 2005; Chrisler et al., 2016).

**"Read an article in the Daily Echo about plans to build 60 retirement apartments in Canford Cliffs. Some comments were not particularly sympathetic to older people. Whilst I'm not keen on the idea of this development I found it sad that people could feel this way about the older generation. Can't believe people would say these things! I think it's probably more prevalent around here because there's an old-age pension home everywhere you look. I think stats say there's more old people living here than there are younger. It's dying."**

**Female, 35-49, Bournemouth**

### 'Intergenerational conflict is rife'

Both younger and older participants spotted intergenerational conflict, largely prevailing in political discourse in the media. A key example from the focus groups was the EU Referendum vote, where participants recognised that younger people were being pitted against older people in the media and in politics due to their conflicting voting behaviours, contributing to blame falling upon older people for Brexit and thus creating a "cheap stereotype". Other participants noticed intergenerational conflict in discourse around the climate movement, with younger activists blaming older generations for inaction in combatting climate change. In addition, one participant noticed ageism in the way that the media refer to political figures:

**"Donald Trump, everyone always picks up on his age, he's an old man. Yes, okay, he's an old man but he's a racist, that's what he is... And Jeremy Corbyn and all that lot, we'll always focus on their age, it's an extra thing to put them down with... Everyone [says] "Why should I listen to [Greta Thunberg], she's only 16?" So, you know it kind of works in both ways."**

**Male, 18-34, Bournemouth**

> **"It made me feel very annoyed that young people feel older people are taking away their futures... They have no idea how little older people had at their age, what is classed as a necessity now would have been luxuries as recently as the fifties and sixties. They are the ones that want and are using the things that create greenhouse gases, they always have to have the latest gadget, but it is the old people that they are blaming."**

**Female, 50-69, Manchester**

Notably, the survey results showed that while a third of 18-34 year olds hold negative attitudes towards older generations, the majority of ages do not hold these views. The fact that intergenerational conflict emerged in the discourse analysis, diaries and focus groups suggests that this narrative is largely driven by the media and government and does not reflect public opinion. However, it might be responsible for stoking tension amongst 18-34 year olds who are worried about their future prospects.

**'We should all prepare financially for older age and death'**

Participants also observed a focus in the media and in advertisements on the financial aspects of ageing. Advertisements for funeral plans, life insurance, pensions, equity release, downsizing property and holiday deals for older people were prevalent. Others noted the multitude of articles discussing the social care crisis and how costly it is for older people and their families, along with TV programmes relating to fraud, scams and the victimisation of older people. Many described the adverts they saw as "negative", "depressing" and sometimes "patronising", with one participant saying that the life insurance adverts reminded him about his imminent death and responsibility to prepare for it - "if you are old you need to get your skates on, time is running out". On the other hand, some participants said it did not affect them in any way. One 70+ year old from Manchester thought that the adverts are aimed at preparing people for "whatever comes with old age" and did not perceive them to be either negative or positive.

## 1. What are the dominant narratives in society that influence our perceptions of ageing?

> "I think a lot of the time, I guess it depends on if you're watching television or what you're watching, there are certain times of the day and there are certain channels that just continually run ads for life insurance or insurance for when you pass away."

**Male, 50-69, Manchester**

> "I can recall advertising for funerals and equity release on the TV. I [also] heard a couple of songs whilst driving which have a very personal meaning for me. These are songs we had at my wife's funeral service. I guess I could recall an advertisement from Legal and General that offers life insurance for people aged 50-80 years of age, no questions asked. This puts things into perspective. I guess the message is clear. Death! It made me think I should make every day count and live life. It also makes me wish I'd done some things differently over the years."



**Male, 50-69, Manchester**

### However, there are some 'positive' narratives on ageing in society

In contrast to the predominantly negative portrayals of ageing that participants observed in the media and advertising, participants did spot certain instances where they perceived ageing to be represented positively. Examples included magazine pieces about women embracing greying hair rather than dying it, men embracing greying hair because it has a "silver fox" appeal, Saga holidays for older people as well as stand-out stories of older people defying expectations and stereotypes, such as an 80 year old speaking on This Morning about having sex with younger men, and a woman getting married at 90. While they appear positive on the surface, these narratives serve to reinforce existing tropes, expectations and ageist representations of older age, along with individualistic perspectives (that people's own choices, decisions and behaviours determine how they experience ageing).

**"I read an article in Good Housekeeping about stopping dying hair and going grey. I thought about how I lost all my hair recently due to illness, shaved it all off and am now more than 50% grey. It made me feel better about not having dark hair anymore. [An] overall positive tone [was] used. [Key phrases used:] 'I looked like an older person with dyed hair - who was I trying to kid?' 'She went an elegant grey first and looked fabulous.'"**



**Female, 50-69, Manchester**

**"The first thing I thought of was a Dove advert I saw earlier today when it was empowering women especially older woman. The message was to embrace the changes to our skin. The advert was for a skin moisturiser and aimed at the older lady. It gave me a good feeling. It was empowering older people to appreciate the skin they are in and it was using older women in their adverts. It was a positive, real message."**



**Female, 35-49, Manchester**

A few participants even noticed a shift towards more 'positive' portrayals of older people online, in the news, in TV programmes, advertisements and social media compared to 10 years ago, with one individual, aged 50-69 from Manchester, saying that they observed attempts to try to present ageing in a positive way, by emphasising the idea of keeping older people active longer and eating healthier. While the participant saw this as a positive step, this observation plays into the view that individuals have the greatest influence on how they age rather than society's structures.

**"A lot more emphasis in the media and that's across the spectrum on things like Twitter, online and on TV programmes, compared to even ten years ago, there's a lot more programmes that seem to be aimed at the demographic and there are all these TV programmes about buying your retirement properties abroad. There seems to be a lot more trying to be positive to be ageing and trying to keep the demographic active longer as well and make us eat healthier."**

**Female, 50-69, Manchester**

Two female participants from the 18 to 34 year old groups in Bournemouth and Manchester spoke about how they had recently watched a Netflix series that presented older people in new ways, and how they thought this was a good step towards counteracting stereotypes of older people. The Bournemouth participant talked about Grace and Frankie and the Mancunian about watching the Kominsky Method. Both reflected on how important and "empowering" it is to see older women represented in diverse ways: fun, witty, outgoing, entrepreneurial, and sexual.

**"They're dating people slightly younger... They start their own company for vibrators for women that have arthritis... It's really funny. It's a really dirty show, but it's kind of nice to see... The show makes me think about older people in a new way, purely because Grace and Frankie are portrayed in a way that you don't often see older people (particularly older women) portrayed in the media. The show is a really great example of subverting stereotypes of older people. The characters are very different from each other but neither fit into traditional 'old lady' roles. Grace is a fashionable, intelligent, business-minded woman who actively attempts to defy ageing, while Frankie is a pot-smoking, artist, who doesn't take anything too seriously. It is refreshing to see older women represented by something other than the sweet loving grandmotherly archetype."**

**Female, 18-34, Bournemouth**

During the literature review and stakeholder interviews, social media was found to have the potential to offer a platform for people to share more diverse perspectives related to ageing, challenge accepted stereotypes and forge new narratives on old age more attuned to individuals' experiences. Demonstrating this point, one participant in the Bournemouth focus groups, reflected on a Facebook post she saw and how it made her feel confident, self-love and accepting of her changing appearance.



**"For me, it's acceptance because when you grow older, I feel like your body's been with you through all of it. Just accept it."**
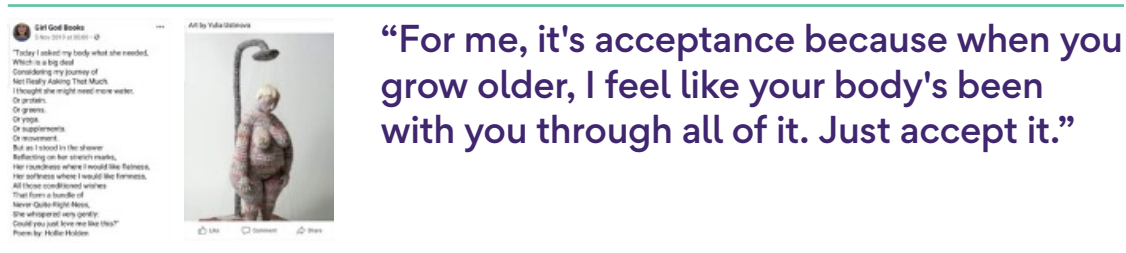
**Female, 18-34, Bournemouth**

Participants also noted a range of older celebrities appearing across media and advertising and explained how they crucially form positive role models for people of all ages.[16] Notable examples include: the Queen, David Attenborough, P!nk, Colonel Sanders, the Rolling Stones, Tina Turner and Danny DeVito. Contrastingly, while occurrences of older celebrities in the discourse analysis often embodied tropes and stereotypes, focus group participants only spoke about older celebrities in a positive light, respecting them as good role models.

Some participants noted that they think they have seen a greater number of more older people in the media in recent years, including one participant who said, "Years ago, you wouldn't have had people in their 70's presenting on ITV… like Angela Rippon, Julia Somerville and Gloria Hunniford from Rip Off Britain". However, many participants think that the media does not go far enough in sufficiently and accurately representing older people across all areas of society, including the workplace, politics, and healthcare.

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16    This is confirmed by the literature review, where role models were found to be important in shaping our perceptions of when someone becomes 'old' and our expectations of old age. (Swift, Abrams, & Lamont, in press; Ayalon, Doron, Bodner, & Inbar 2014.)

> **"Look through the legal figures, boardrooms, directors, MPs, I guess senior professionals in the health service, the surgeons, they're an older person. All of a sudden, that doesn't come across in the media. Instead of being a positive conversation, look, there is something positive. You've got Sir Alan Sugar, you've got people there that can influence the younger people."**

**Male, 50-69, Manchester**

While participants did notice some positive portrayals of ageing in the media, advertising and social media, some noted a complete lack of positive portrayals of ageing. One participant even suggested that positive stories related to ageing categorically do not make media headlines and so are excluded from the news, TV and advertisements. Other participants reflected on how ageing and older people can be represented in starkly contrasting ways, with some noting a complete lack of balanced and realistic representations of ageing and older people in the media. This echoes findings in the literature review, where older people are under-represented, and when occasionally represented, they are portrayed largely as a homogenous group lacking individual differentiation (Kessler, 2004).

> **"The narrative of ageing falls into two camps, it's either 'it's time to go away, shuffle off your mortal coil, pack up your stuff, leave it to your family' or it's 'go buy a property in Spain and retire there'. There's not enough positive representation of older people, either in the media, on TV or in films. I mean, when do you ever see a film with an older couple who have fallen in love? It's young people out dating, life isn't that simple. So, I think if there was more positive representation that would feedback to other areas."**

**Male, 50-69, Manchester**

**Alyssa is a 28 year old American who is currently on maternity leave with a newly born son. She lives in Bournemouth with her partner and has a post-graduate degree.**

**Alyssa comments on how she sees older people being talked about in society, "the overall perception of old people in the media, and the way society thinks, is almost as if they are not capable or not attractive. And that is ageist."**

"There are very very few accurate representations of older people, especially in TV and film. The stories that are told all seem to fit into the same 'grandmotherly' or 'grandfatherly' types, or there is the 'lonely old person' trope. Those are the only two that you see in the media."

Alyssa stresses that society and the media need a make-over, "I think that older people need to get more representation and more accurate and versatile representation should be seen. For example, older people who are still working, sexually active. Maybe people who never had kids or grandkids but don't feel lonely and still live very full lives."

Looking at other areas of society, Alyssa reflects on how the workplace can be a boiling pot of ageist behaviours and expectations, describing it as being "completely catered towards and designed around young people." "There is a perception that once you get to a certain age you should slow down and stop working, but that might change now that the retirement age keeps getting pushed." She sighs and remarks, "although there are a lot of older people who don't have the means to stop working. Financially, it is not an option for them."

Alyssa goes on to comment about her recent experiences of becoming a new mum, and how this has impacted the way she sees her own ageing. "I now have a 3-month-old son, so my views about ageing have changed a little bit over the past few months. I have started thinking about ageing in terms of him as well as myself. So there is definitely a more positive aspect now as I get to watch my son grow up. On the other hand, there are some aspects of ageing that I find quite scary. Going into the unknown is scary – I have never been 'older' than I am now – so that brings along typical fears, such as not being able to look after myself or getting sick."

# 2. What are the leading views and experiences of ageing in England?

**Section highlights**

– Adults in England hold mixed views about ageing, with under half (46%) expressing a positive view, and the rest holding neutral (35%) or negative (16%) views.

– 70+ year olds are more positive towards ageing than any other age group (18-34 44%, 35-49 46%, 50-69 41%, 70+ 59%). This aligns with the focus group discussions and suggests that lived experience can counter the negative perceptions and fear created by dominant views and language about ageing in society.

– Those who think that society's structures have the greatest influence on how we age (rather than our own choices) are more likely to be positive towards ageing (62% vs 43%). This offers a strong rationale for the need to shift conversations on ageing away from individualistic notions of ageing to more structural ones.

– The public are split almost evenly on whether older age is characterised by frailty, vulnerability, and dependency (37% agree, 35% disagree). Furthermore, almost half (46%) agree that everyone should expect to deteriorate physically and cognitively.

– Participants observed clear social expectations and norms at different life stages, including when to act maturely, find a job, be financially stable, 'settle down', have children and retire.

– Old age was widely seen to be relative to your age with many middle and older aged individuals 'feeling younger' than their age.

– Many also saw ageing as a source of freedom as a result of having more life experience, money and time to enjoy life. However, this was often dependent on people's financial circumstances.

## Sentiment towards ageing is mixed

Overall, from a representative survey of over 2,000 adults in England, respondents report mixed views about their feelings towards ageing. Nearly half (46%) express positive feelings about ageing, as opposed to a third (35%) who feel neutral and one in six (16%) who report feeling negatively.

Positive sentiment is more commonly found among men than women (53% vs 40%). However, it is at its highest prevalence among older adults aged 70+. Three in five (59%) report feeling positive about ageing, significantly higher than all other age groups (18-34 44%, 35-49 46%, 50-69 41%). This may reflect the benefit of lived experience, while younger adults may be more influenced by the dominant discourses about ageing. Alternatively, this could be due to generational differences in experiences, views and culture.

Those who place greater importance on the structure of society, rather than the choices of individuals in shaping the ageing experience,[17] exhibit higher levels of positive sentiment towards ageing (62% vs 43%). This offers a strong rationale for the need to shift conversations on ageing from individualistic notions of ageing to structural ones.

In addition, adults who have frequent contact with others aged 10+ years younger than themselves report more positive attitudes towards ageing than those with infrequent contact (48% vs 42%), as do those with adult children (50%) or minor children (49%) as opposed to no children (41%), potentially demonstrating the tangible benefits of intergenerational socialising.

17  The survey asked: Who or what do you think has the biggest influence on how you and others experience ageing? Choose a number on the scale below, according to whether you agree more closely with the option on the right, the option on the left, or you are in between. 0 = Your choices, decisions and behaviours as an individual; 10 = The way society is organised and funded (including work, health and social care, education, housing, pensions, transport etc.)
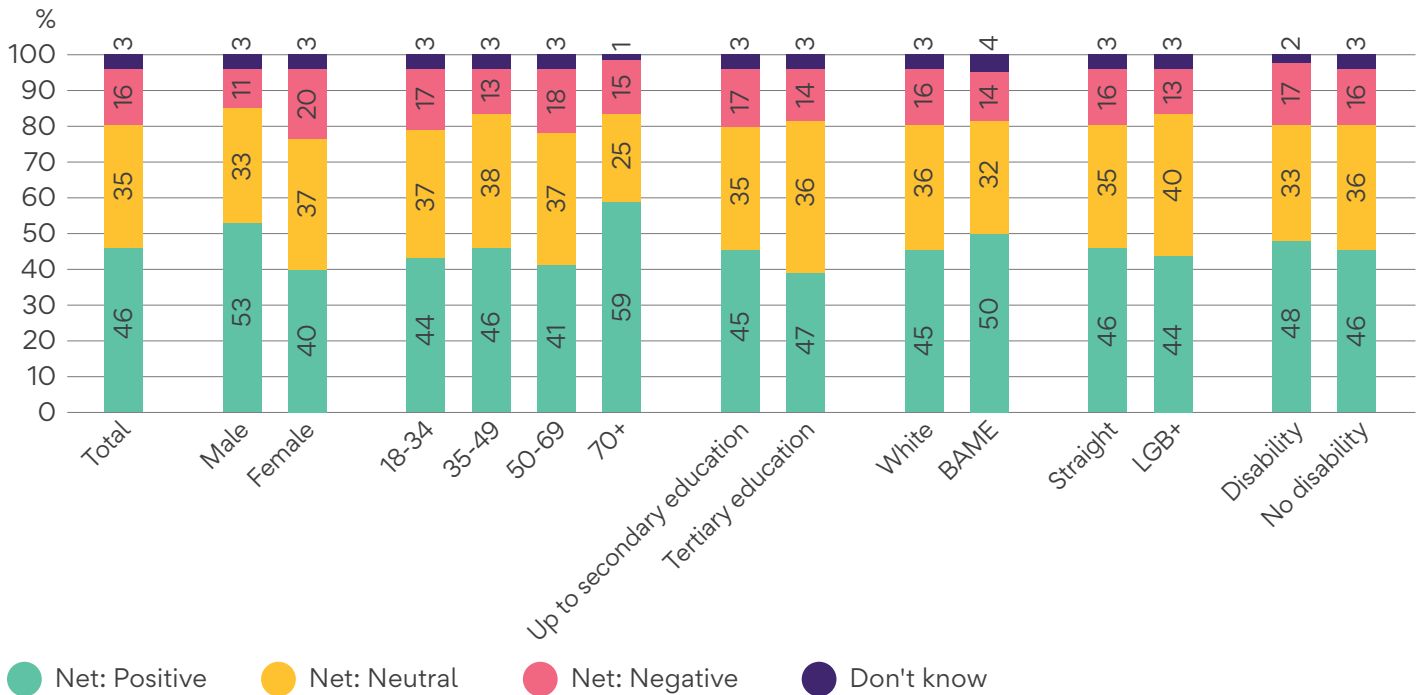
Q2. To what extent, if at all, do you feel positively or negatively about ageing? Scale o-10 where 0 is very negative and 10 is very positive. Net: Negative (0-3), Net: Neutral (4-6), Net: Positive (7-10).
Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

In the focus groups, while some 18-34 year olds were positive and hopeful about their future, many remained fearful of the unknown and anticipated decline and dependency in older age. The middle-aged groups (35-49 and 50-69) often felt overstretched from the pressure to work hard and look after their children, with some distance towards retirement, which many were looking forward to. The 70+ group seemed most positive towards and accepting of ageing, and, noticeably, mentioned the physical impacts of ageing less frequently than other age groups.

When interpreting the discussions from the focus groups, it is important to bear in mind two things. The first is that they were held in a location that respondents had to travel to in the evening. This may have discouraged 70+ year olds in poorer states of health and mobility and with reduced independence, potentially skewing group participation towards encouraging individuals with a more positive outlook. Secondly, while we are looking at the experiences, feelings and attitudes towards ageing across various age groups, only older individuals have direct experience of older age. On the whole, 18-34 year olds' attitudes and views are likely to be shaped by external influences, such as people they know and the dominant narratives in society. Therefore, it might be useful to imagine the experience of moving into older age as transitioning from an externally influenced set of beliefs to those that are largely informed by personal experience. Hence, the fear of older age may decline as age increases and as it becomes more of a lived experience.

## Ageing is associated with physical decline

The public are split on whether or not older age is characterised by frailty, vulnerability, and dependency. Just over a third of the public both agree (37%) and disagree (35%) with this statement, and over a quarter are neutral (27%). Agreement is higher among men than women (39% vs 35%), and conversely, disagreement is higher among women than men (38% vs 32%).

While more than two in five (43%) 18-34 year olds agree with the statement, half (49%) of adults aged 70+ disagree. Three in ten (28%) adults aged 70+ do agree with the statement, perhaps indicating that their own experiences of ageing have been defined by those traits or that ageism has become internalised. However, this stands alongside the more positive view of ageing amongst this age group, perhaps indicating some acceptance of a degree of decline in quality of health.

BAME adults are also more likely than white adults to agree that older age is characterised by frailty, vulnerability, and dependency (45% vs 36%).[18] Again, this may be indicative of different lived and witnessed experiences of ageing. Overall, BAME adults are almost twice as likely to agree than disagree with the statement (45% agree vs 26% disagree), as opposed to the parity among white adults (36% agree vs 36% disagree).
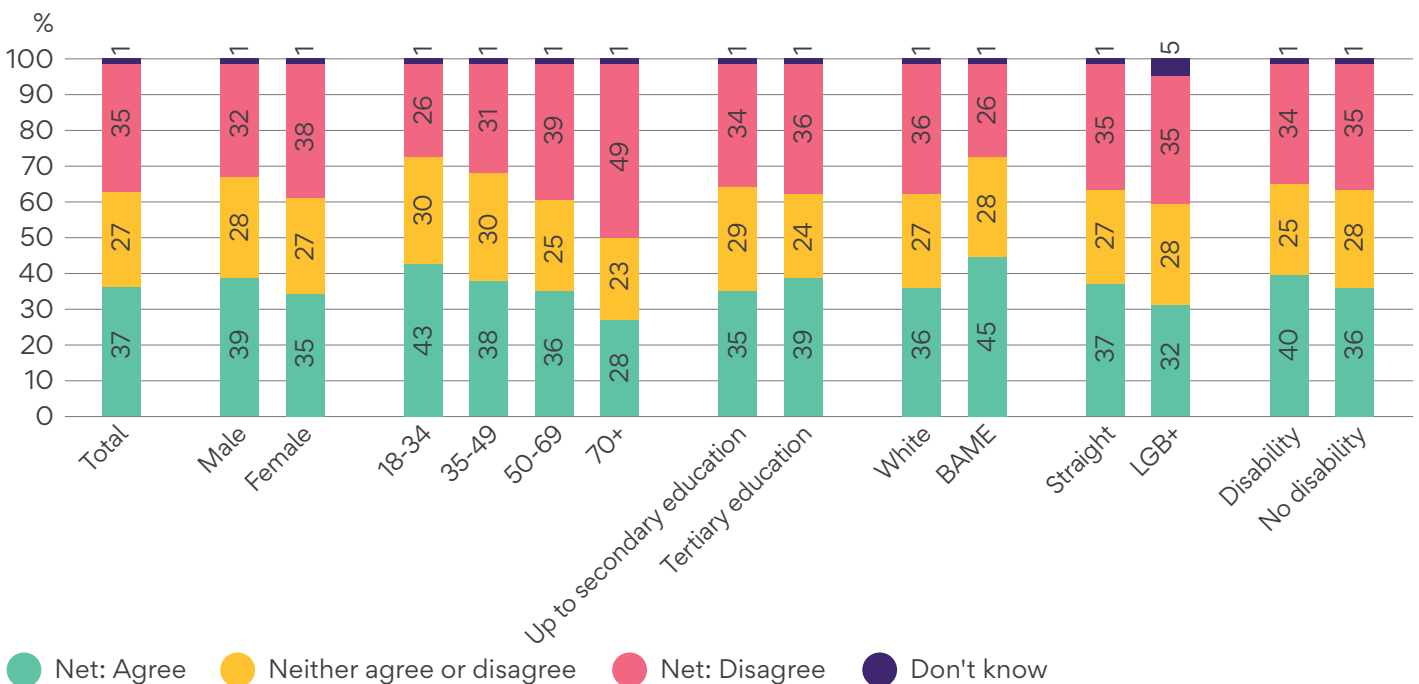


Net: Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Net: Disagree | Don't know

Q4. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about older people? Older age is characterised by frailty, vulnerability, and dependency. Net: Agree (Strongly agree or agree), Net: Disagree (Strongly disagree or disagree). Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

18    Note that the BAME sample (n=506) will have a bias towards a younger demographic compared to the age profile of the white sample, in line with the age profile of these groups. This means that there will be some age differences contributing towards the differences by ethnicity found in the survey.

Almost half (46%) of respondents agree that all people should expect to deteriorate physically and cognitively when they get to old age. Women are more likely than men to disagree with this statement (30% vs 20%), along with older adults as compared to younger adults (18-34 21%, 35-49 23%, 50-69 27%, 70+ 30%), indicating that experience of older age does not necessarily reflect this counterproductive narrative.

On the other hand, BAME adults are more likely than white adults to agree that all people should expect to deteriorate physically and cognitively when they get to old age (51% vs 45%). The same trend is true among those with a tertiary education compared to those with an education up to secondary (50% vs 43%). This could reflect the younger composition of each of those groups, in line with our age findings.

These findings appear to highlight the demographic groups that have adopted this narrative of deterioration and are arguably most 'in need' of the a shift in opinion through reframing: men, younger adults, BAME adults and those with a tertiary education.
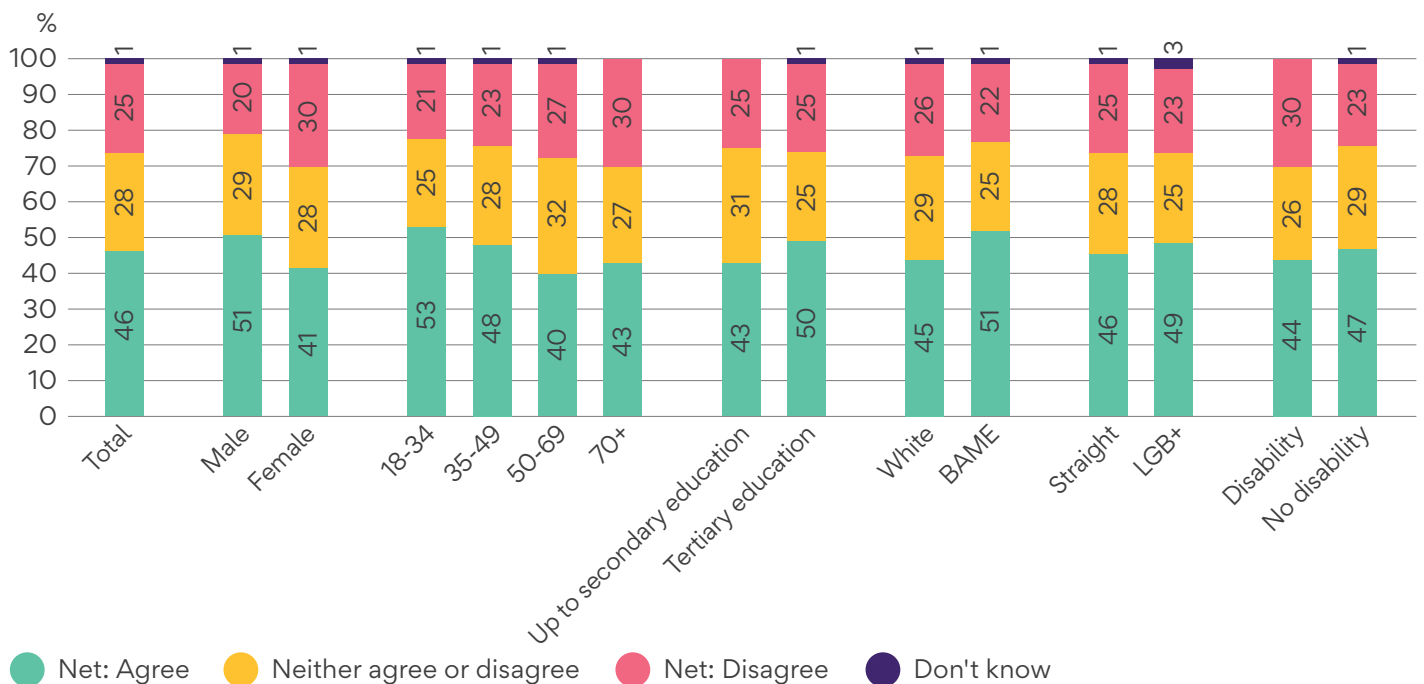


Q4. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about older people? All people should expect to deteriorate physically and cognitively (i.e. their mental function) when they get to old age. Net: Agree (Strongly agree or agree), Net: Disagree (Strongly disagree or disagree).
Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

In the focus group discussions, all age cohorts voiced some associations, concerns or experiences about the physical impacts of ageing.

For the younger age groups, they tended to associate ageing with physical decline such as the onset of aches and pains, limited or loss of mobility, frailty and weakness, sports injuries, arthritis, and other health problems.

This was based on assumptions of what the ageing process would be like or observations of older relatives experiencing physical difficulties or deterioration. Many expressed some fear towards their futures, with an expected decline in health and ability, loss of control and increased likelihood of loneliness.

**"With age comes health problems, and that's certainly something that... is part of ageing."**

**Female, 18-34, Bournemouth**

**"My Grandad used to always say, "once a man, twice a child". You start off your life having to be looked after and cared for, and then you end your life the same."**

**Male, 18-34, Manchester**

**"[My nan] lived on her own... and it just got to the point, where she couldn't look after herself anymore. She kept falling down and things like that..."**

**Male, 18-34, Manchester**

For those who were in the middle aged and older age groups, their associations were based more on their personal experiences of getting older and noting these changes in their own bodies and amongst friends. Several expressed concerns that this would only get worse.

**"You know when you used to hear people and they'd say, they'd get up and they'd go, oh my back, or my knees. Suddenly I'm saying it and I'm like, flipping heck, what's going on here, you know?"**

**Female, 35-49, Manchester**

Among the 70+ age group, there was a degree of acceptance of physical ailments and that various health impacts "inevitably happen" to older people. Concerns about physical decline were often relativised. Rather than focussing on what they lacked, several preferred to take pride is mentioning what they did still have and could still do. One spoke about being only slightly hard of hearing and not using a hearing aid. Others who had personally experienced (or whose friend had experienced) life-changing health conditions, such as cancer, described the gratitude they had for their lives and for their good health.

Across all of the age groups, it was also recognised that ageing is frequently associated with a decline in cognitive health. Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease were named specifically.

### "You develop more conditions, like arthritis is quite a normal thing for older people."

**Male, 18-34, Bournemouth**

### "My biggest fear is dementia, and ending up not knowing who I am or my children."

**Female, 50-69, Bournemouth**

### Older people seemed to make a distinction between their physical age and the age they felt themselves to be

While physical decline was a strong theme in the focus groups, many felt that, although they were not able to do as much as they could before, they remained feeling "young inside". This acknowledgement became more prominent as the conversations developed and were more common among 50-69 and 70+ year olds. Comments included: "I still feel 30 in my head", and, "I've been 25 for the past 30 years". Two women in the 70+ group used the phrase: "You are as old as you feel".

Older age was also discussed as something that "crept up on you", with some noting that it was only when they went to do something physical, something that they used to do and valued, that it became apparent to them they were "getting older". This was mainly related to everyday errands, DIY in the house or sport.

> **"I feel young until I start doing jobs. That's when your body starts to say to you, hang on a minute here, you've gone past that mark. Many a time a young'un's turned around and said to me, "Do you think we should get somebody in, Dad?""**

**Male, 70+, Manchester**

> **"I was an ex-national cyclist and I've just been out today for my first ride of the season and I feel like I've aged about ten years from last season... Even though you are very healthy and look after yourself, you cannot prevent this ageing process, it's there."**

**Male, 50-69, Manchester**

Amongst the younger age groups, some recognised that they know older people who have good, active lives and whose signs of physical decline are not so apparent. One described his gran as still climbing up a 6-foot ladder trying to decorate her house:

> **"There's nothing mentally wrong with her. She just can't believe that she's ageing... Some old people are old in their body but still young in their mind. They just can't do what we can do."**

**Male, 18-34, Manchester**

One woman recalled her dismay at turning 30, but then reflected that what is considered old changes across the lifecycle and so is relative. Some also linked the feeling of being old to what you do at each stage of your life. They suggested that if a person put in the effort to stay engaged and as active as possible, this would impact how old they felt.

> **"I think it's all relative, isn't it? Probably when you're 25 you think, my goodness, I'm getting old. One day you just realise you are old. You suddenly reach an age where actually, more people are younger than you than older than you."**

**Male, 50-69, Bournemouth**

**"I think old age or age is merely a name or a number. Depends on your lifestyle or how you actually go about your day-to-day life."**

**Male, 70+, Manchester**

## Many feel pressured by ageist social expectations

There was considerable discussion around ageing and how this related to different expectations that people in society have of you as you age. Life stages and achievements mentioned as important were: finding jobs and achieving financial stability, settling down with a partner and having children, and retiring. There was some acknowledgement that these were traditional expectations and that they were changing, but people, particularly from the younger age groups still felt under pressure. Pressure dealing with social expectations at different ages were particularly experienced by women (see page 34).

**"I went to university about six years later than my friends, so they've all got their jobs, some of them have bought a house in London, and I'm just still on my degree... People [say], "Oh, what do you do?" It's sort of the perception if you're older and you're not doing ... what society seems to want you to be doing at that point of life [you are falling behind]."**

**Female, 18-34, Bournemouth**

There were also some stereotypes expressed about how older people should be treated and are expected to be doing. These centred around taking more care of themselves and winding down as well as others taking care of them. However, one woman in the 70+ group pointed out that she does not have to act like a "stereotypical older person" just because of her age. There were some examples from the 35-49 age groups where participants referenced a parent and recognised that they did not necessarily fulfil the stereotype of an older person.

**"My sister rang me the other day, and she said, 'Right, it's Mum's 70th this year, and by the way, you've got to start treating her a bit, you know, she's a bit more delicate.' And I was like, 'Mum is never going to be delicate. She's a Brummie, for a start.'"**

**Female, 35-49, Bournemouth**

It was recognised across the age groups, particularly as the discussion developed, that attaching life stages to particular ages can be arbitrary. This was even the case amongst the younger age group. One woman in this group described how her attitudes to life stages and ageing had already changed.

**"You become more aware that there isn't a set rule for: by this age, I should do this, by that age, I should do that. Ten years ago, everyone was like, "By the time I'm 25 I'm going to be married with four kids, and own my house." And that could be realistic for some people, but your priorities change, and the things that you want change, and you realise that it doesn't really have anything to do with age, the way you think it does when you're younger."**

**Female, 18-34, Bournemouth**

These findings echo the literature review, where prescriptive age stereotypes were found to define what we think older people should and should not do: that older people should pass on power to younger people (succession), not consume too many shared resources (consumption), and not engage in activities more associated with younger people (identity).[19] Research in the US suggests that when older people behave in line with these prescriptive age stereotypes they are rewarded and viewed more favourably. When they violate them, they can experience backlash and face criticism and censure.

## Older age can be a source of freedom for some

Some people saw freedom coming with older age and ageing, whilst others saw this as only available to those who had a good income and had saved, which we explore later (see section 4, page 35). Freedom was often related to retirement and the end of paid employment, particularly among the middle-aged groups, many of whom were looking forward to retiring. People who were under the State Pension age referenced witnessing their older relatives or friends enjoying their retirement. Activities that were mentioned included an increased amount of time available for hobbies, travel and spending time with friends, partners and family.

19    North, M. S., & Fiske, S. T. (2013a). Act your (old) age: Prescriptive, ageist biases over succession, consumption and identity. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 39(6), 720-734. doi:10.1177/0146167213480043

"I just look forward to being able to spend that time with my wife where we don't have to worry about anyone else. Where it's just me and her and we can spend our time together."

**Male, 18-34, Bournemouth**

"My in-laws, all they do is travel, now. That's all they do. They love, you know, they love their kids, and they love their grandkids, but they're hardly ever here. They just travel. They're just making the most of the time that they've got left, and they're making the most of their time with each other, and their dogs."

**Female, 35-49, Bournemouth**

"You've got more choice about when you go on holiday, you don't have to fit it in with work or school term. So, timewise, as long as your health is reasonable, it opens everything up. I can do it when I want. I can get up when I want. When you're younger, you usually can't."

**Male, 70+, Bournemouth**

Several people in the 70+ age group recommended making the most of the time, living life to the full and taking advantage of this freedom while it was available. One woman said: "nobody knows what is around the corner" and that one should "do as much as you can while you can".

A growth in self-confidence and becoming more self-assured as a result of having more life experience were seen as positive aspects of ageing. In some cases, younger people suggested that they looked forward to this happening. Those in the middle-aged groups felt positive about this change in confidence, with one man (aged 50-69) saying he had become a better worker because he was not bothered about what people thought about him. Another reflected:

> **"Just to think that you can relax a bit when you're older, you don't have to keep trying all the time, and that's quite nice. I remember back in my thirties, it was like constantly running uphill, trying to keep up with everyone. When I hit 50, it was like a giant weight had been lifted. 50 was, like, "This is good, I can deal with this, this is fine.""**

**Male, 50-69, Manchester**

On the other hand, one woman described her responsibilities caring for her mother and her family and said that she could not retire even though she would like to, describing herself as "busier than ever" rather than "free". This emphasises the point that freedom in older age is not the case for everyone.

> **"I've got my mother to look after, and I've got so much [to do], you know, the children to look after, and I feel like I'm still chasing my tail at 62."**

**Female, 50-69, Manchester**

**James** is a 42 year old who is currently working as a Data Analyst for a vehicles company and lives in Bournemouth with his two children.

**"The concept of being old isn't a separate thing from the rest of your life. Everybody is constantly getting old and changes throughout their life. It is not something that is going to suddenly hit you, it is a continual process." Having said this, James then contradicts this view of ageing by saying, "If you are a younger person or if you are ageist, let's say, it is going to hit you one day too. In my head, there is no point in being ageist, because eventually you will wish that people weren't like that to you."**

Being half-British and half-Malaysian, James has noticed some cultural differences between his two families and the societal expectations of older people. "My grandparents weren't looked after by their children because their children had emigrated to Australia, England and the Netherlands. So they had one child left in Malaysia. It is all about your personal circumstances and your family's circumstances. In previous generations, the older people in the family were to be looked up to and respected. The rest of the family stayed very close to them to help and support them in later life. Now societies have progressed to a Westernised view of how old people are valued in society, and the amount of respect given to old people has been taken over."

James goes on to say how he thinks this intergenerational arrangement persists in some places but is something that is gradually dying over time as societies become more homogenised and globalised. "Historical societal differences probably don't exist as much now or at least aren't as strong as they used to be."

He also shows an awareness of dominant narratives on ageing, and he separates these negative stereotypes from what he believes individuals actually feel about ageing. "I would say our society is fairly ageist in the way that we use language around people getting older. In the session today, we were able to recall a lot more negative words than positive words form what

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we heard or saw in society. I don't think this is necessarily to do with people's personal beliefs – I don't think anybody would say older people are terrible – but as a society, we have these tropes, which are predominantly negative."

James thinks that marketing companies target certain age groups so that once you reach a certain age, they bombard you with ads. He describes the journey he went on from having a much more diverse range of adverts for box sets and T-shirts to having adverts about men's fertility products, naming a company called Men's Manual in particular, and baldness remedies. "I have had a lot of targeted adverts on hair loss and fertility treatments, which I hadn't been subjected to until I turned 40, and I don't need yet or am not interested in. It was like an onslaught, every four of five things on my feed were one of these two things, so in the end, I had enough of it, and I blocked them all so that I don't have to think about it as it was being constantly being brought to the forefront of my mind."

# 3. What do the public think about demographic change?

**Section highlights**

– Most respondents agree that UK society is ageist (55% vs 29% who do not).

– Despite the literature review and discourse analysis showing it is a common narrative, particularly among government and media, most respondents reject the idea that the growing number of older people are an economic and social burden to society (50% vs 25% who agree).

– Similarly, the majority of ages disagree that older people benefit at the expense of younger people (54% vs 20% who agree) and that the spending on older people is a waste (80% vs 16% who agree).

– Attitudes towards demographic change are consistently determined by age. Younger people are more likely to agree that older people are a burden, that they benefit at the expense of younger people, and that spending on older people is a waste of resources. This indicates that younger adults are more likely to possess an openly dismissive attitude towards the experiences of older people.

– Nevertheless, the public believe it is important for the government to respond to the UK's ageing population (82% vs 3% who disagree).

## At least half of all ages think UK society is ageist

In the previous section we saw that focus group participants identified a wide range of areas in which ageing is characterised negatively in UK society. This is not only supported by the literature review and discourse analysis but also the survey results where most respondents agree that UK society is ageist (55%).

# 3. What do the public think about demographic change?



**Legend:** Net: Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Net: Disagree | Don't know

| Category | Net: Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Net: Disagree | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 55 | 29 | 13 | 3 |
| Male | 55 | 28 | 15 | 2 |
| Female | 55 | 30 | 11 | 4 |
| 18-34 | 57 | 26 | 14 | 3 |
| 35-49 | 49 | 32 | 15 | 4 |
| 50-69 | 58 | 29 | 11 | 2 |
| 70+ | 57 | 28 | 12 | 3 |
| Up to secondary education | 53 | 31 | 13 | 3 |
| Tertiary education | 59 | 26 | 13 | 2 |
| White | 55 | 29 | 13 | 3 |
| BAME | 56 | 30 | 11 | 3 |
| Straight | 55 | 29 | 13 | 3 |
| LGB+ | 58 | 24 | 14 | 3 |
| Disability | 62 | 26 | 10 | 3 |
| No disability | 52 | 30 | 14 | 3 |
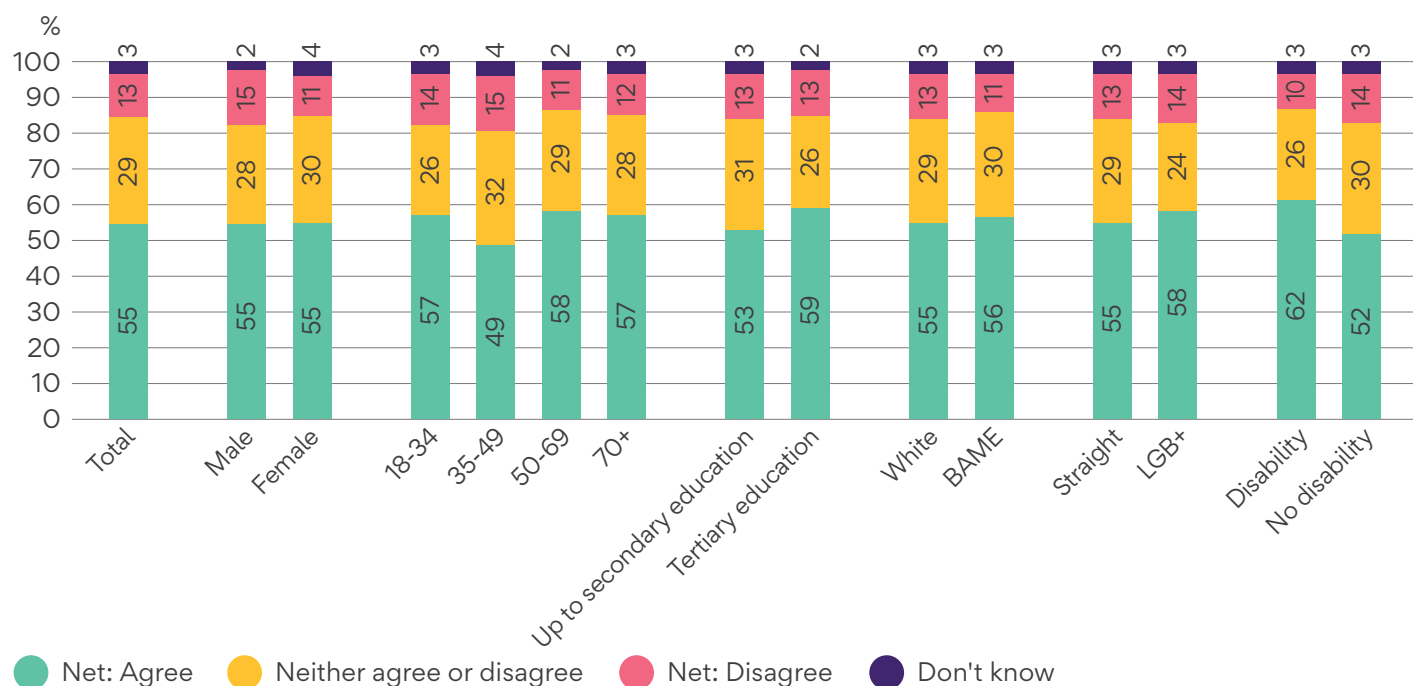
Q6. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree that UK society is ageist? Net: Agree (Strongly agree or agree), Net: Disagree (Strongly disagree or disagree). Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

Of all age groups, 35-49 year olds are the least likely to say that UK society is ageist (49% vs 57-58% of other age groups), perhaps indicating that they are less likely to experience ageism than younger and older adults. Agreement is higher among those who identify as disabled (62% vs 52% who do not). This may indicate that lived experiences of other forms of discrimination or hardship can contribute towards personal experiences of ageism.

Londoners are also notably more likely than those from many other parts of England to agree that UK society is ageist (62%). This may reflect ageism being more widespread in the capital or perhaps that Londoners have a greater awareness of everyday ageism and ageist structures. This interpretation is supported by the finding that those who think the structures of society are more influential in shaping the ageing experience (a view that Londoners ascribe to more than other regions) are more likely to agree that the UK society is ageist (63% vs 51%).

## Most do not support statements that incite intergenerational conflict

Half (50%) of respondents disagree that the growing number of older people is an economic and social burden on our society, with only a quarter (25%) agreeing. This might illustrate a gap between the public view and one of the common narratives in government and media discourse as found in our previous report.[20]

Younger adults are more likely to agree with these statements (18-34 31%, 35-49 27%, 50-69 17%, 70+ 24%), along with those with a tertiary education (31% vs 20% who have a secondary education). The latter may reflect people's engagement with the political and media narratives of intergenerational conflict.
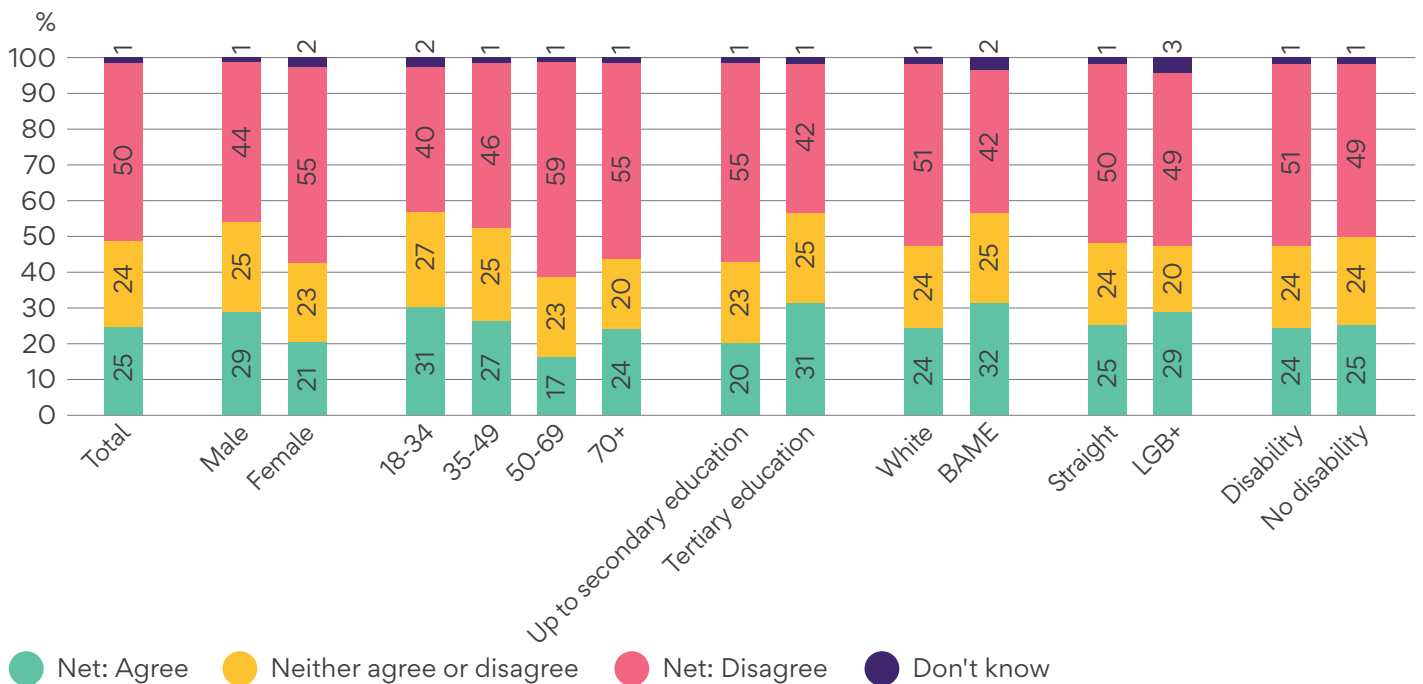
| | Net: Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Net: Disagree | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 25 | 24 | 50 | 1 |
| Male | 29 | 25 | 44 | 1 |
| Female | 21 | 23 | 55 | 2 |
| 18-34 | 31 | 27 | 40 | 2 |
| 35-49 | 27 | 25 | 46 | 1 |
| 50-69 | 17 | 23 | 59 | 1 |
| 70+ | 24 | 20 | 55 | 1 |
| Up to secondary education | 20 | 23 | 55 | 1 |
| Tertiary education | 31 | 25 | 42 | 1 |
| White | 24 | 24 | 51 | 1 |
| BAME | 32 | 25 | 42 | 2 |
| Straight | 25 | 24 | 50 | 1 |
| LGB+ | 29 | 20 | 49 | 3 |
| Disability | 24 | 24 | 51 | 1 |
| No disability | 25 | 24 | 49 | 1 |

Q4. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about older people?
The growing number of older people is an economic and social burden on our society. Net: Agree (Strongly agree or agree), Net: Disagree (Strongly disagree or disagree). Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

Most respondents disagree that older people today benefit at the expense of younger people, with 54% disagreeing and 20% agreeing. However, as with other statements tested, a positive overall result masks some nuance amongst age groups. For instance, among 18-34 year olds there is an even split (34% vs 34%) as to whether or not older people today benefit at the expense of younger people. It is possible that this mirrors the previous question as to whether older people are an economic and social burden,

20    https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/news/uks-damaging-views-ageing-revealed-new-report-analysing-language-used-across-society

## 3. What do the public think about demographic change?

with younger people perceiving that they are disadvantaged compared to older people because of a battle over finite resources. As our discourse analysis showed, this idea of "intergenerational conflict" is often perpetuated by government and media narratives.
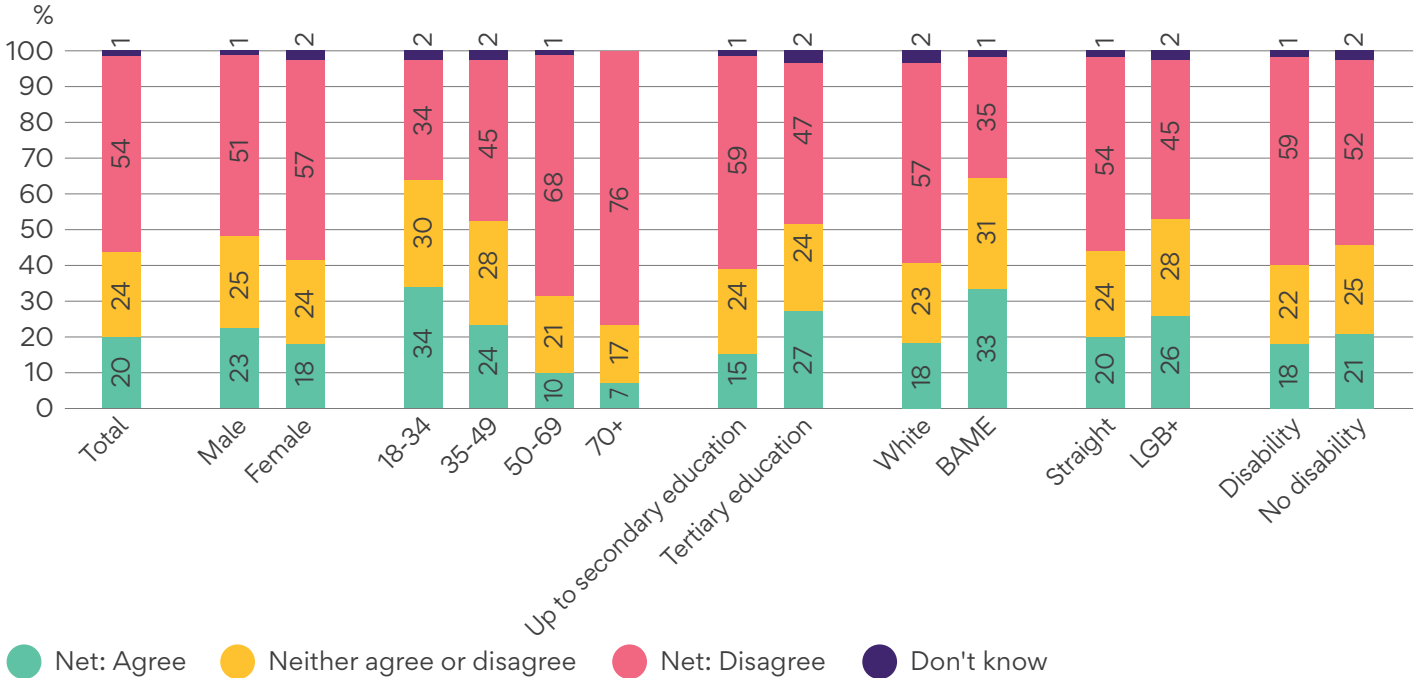
**%**

| Category | Net: Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Net: Disagree | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 20 | 24 | 54 | 1 |
| Male | 23 | 25 | 51 | 1 |
| Female | 18 | 24 | 57 | 2 |
| 18-34 | 34 | 30 | 34 | 2 |
| 35-49 | 24 | 28 | 45 | 2 |
| 50-69 | 10 | 21 | 68 | 1 |
| 70+ | 7 | 17 | 76 | |
| Up to secondary education | 15 | 24 | 59 | 1 |
| Tertiary education | 27 | 24 | 47 | 2 |
| White | 18 | 23 | 57 | 2 |
| BAME | 33 | 31 | 35 | 1 |
| Straight | 20 | 24 | 54 | 1 |
| LGB+ | 26 | 28 | 45 | 2 |
| Disability | 18 | 22 | 59 | 1 |
| No disability | 21 | 25 | 52 | 2 |

● Net: Agree  ● Neither agree or disagree  ● Net: Disagree  ● Don't know

Q4. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about older people? Older people today benefit at the expense of younger people. Net: Agree (Strongly agree or agree), Net: Disagree (Strongly disagree or disagree). Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

On the other hand, four in five (80%) respondents believe older people have a wealth of experience and perspectives to offer society today, compared to less than one in five (17%) who believe that the experiences of older people have little relevance. This narrative of opinion applies to the majority of demographic groups tested, except for 18-34 year olds who agree less strongly (63% vs 32% respectively).
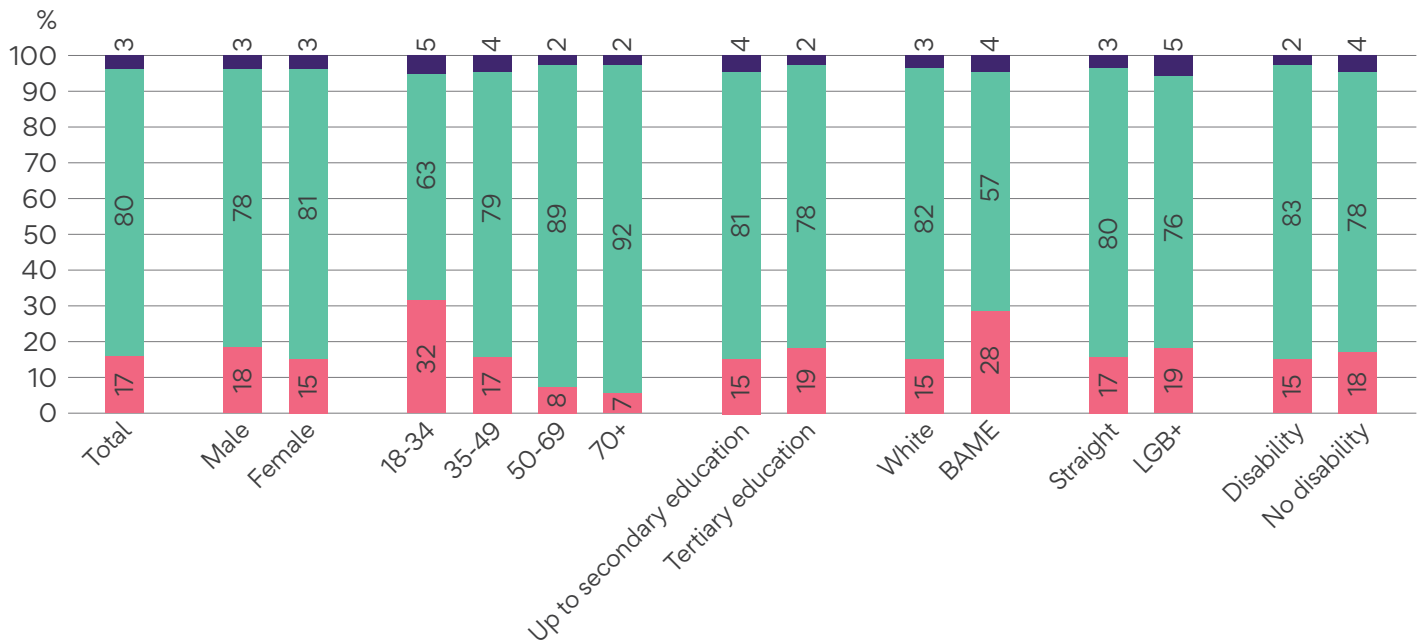
%

- Net: Older people have a wealth of experience and perspectives to offer society
- Net: The experiences of older people have little relevance in society today
- Don't know

Q5. Please read the following statements carefully and indicate which of the following is closer to your beliefs.
The experiences of older people have little relevance in society today / Older people have a wealth of experience and perspectives to offer society today
Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

## All ages think it is important for the government to respond to the UK's ageing population

The public are united behind the importance of the need for government to respond to the UK's ageing population (82%). Again, this rises from 72% among 18-34 year olds to virtually all adults aged 70+ (95%).

While importance levels are high across the board, there are higher levels among both ABC1 adults - in comparison to C2DE (84% vs 78%), and among those who identify as disabled - against those who do not (85% vs 81%).

These results reflect a strong receptiveness to a structural response to demographic change, aligning with findings in the next section that 40% of respondents believe society's structures have a greater influence on ageing than individuals (21%).

# 3. What do the public think about demographic change?



**Legend:** ● Net: Important  ● Neither important nor unimportant  ● Net: Unimportant  ● Don't know

Chart data (percentages):

| Category | Net: Important | Neither | Net: Unimportant | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 82 | 14 | 3 | 1 |
| Male | 81 | 14 | 3 | 1 |
| Female | 82 | 13 | 3 | 1 |
| 18-34 | 72 | 21 | 5 | 2 |
| 35-49 | 77 | 17 | 4 | 3 |
| 50-69 | 88 | 11 | — | 1 |
| 70+ | 95 | 3 | — | 2 |
| Up to secondary education | 81 | 15 | 3 | 1 |
| Tertiary education | 83 | 13 | 3 | 1 |
| White | 83 | 13 | 2 | 1 |
| BAME | 74 | 18 | 6 | 2 |
| Straight | 82 | 14 | 3 | 1 |
| LGB+ | 78 | 9 | 11 | 2 |
| Disability | 85 | 11 | 3 | 1 |
| No disability | 81 | 15 | 3 | 2 |

Q7. How important, if at all, do you think it is for the Government to respond to the UK's ageing population? By 'ageing population' we mean the increased proportion of older age groups compared to younger age groups in the UK's population. Net: Important (Very or somewhat important), Net: Unimportant (Very or somewhat unimportant). Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

Reinforcing the above findings, the belief that government expenditure on older people is a waste of resources is a minority view across all demographics and represents just under one in six (16%). In contrast, believing that government spending reflects a belief in everybody mattering is a view shared by four in five (80%) respondents. As before, adults aged 18-34 are more likely to agree that spending on older people is a waste of resources (29%).
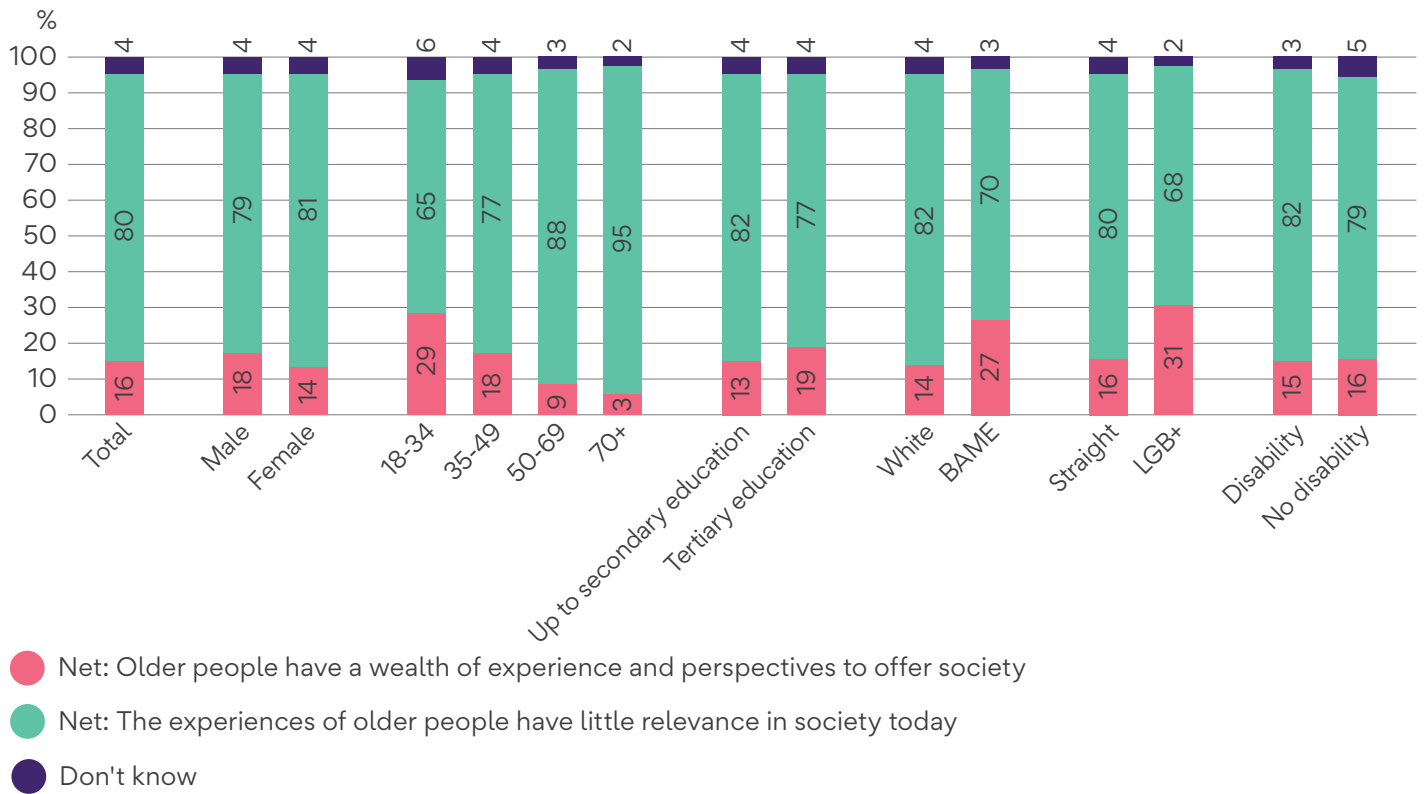
%



Net: Older people have a wealth of experience and perspectives to offer society

Net: The experiences of older people have little relevance in society today

Don't know

Q5. Please read the following statements carefully and indicate which of the following is closer to your beliefs.
UK Government spending on older people (e.g. state pensions, health and social care, social housing) is a waste of resources / UK Government spending on older people reflects our belief that everybody matters
Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

**James** is a 75 year old from Bournemouth who left school after completing his A Levels and went on to work as a car dealer. James is now retired and receives Pension Credit to top up his income.

"Ageing is really a challenge. But having said that, that is not necessarily in a negative way. It is a challenge, but it can be rewarding. There are plenty of things that I do that are enjoyable, pleasurable and I cannot wait to do again."

"There have been negative issues with illness and physical mobility problems, but you weigh them up – there are positives and negatives as you go along." He gives an example to illustrate this point, "I am not as articulate as I was 10 years ago and I also struggle with my hearing. I often wonder how this will develop in the next 10 years, looking forward. But you learn to live with it and accept it as it is part of life. There are plenty worse things than not being able to put a sentence together occasionally."

James also reflects upon his life choices and how it is important to be responsible for your own health and how you age, indicating a fairly individualistic ideology. "I think the secret is to be here as long as you can. I don't drink as much as I used to as that was considered to be unhealthy. I haven't eaten red meat for 10 years – I had colon cancer which, allegedly, was caused by eating red meat. That was 10 years ago."

James goes on to explain how he feels there are certain triggers that make him think about ageing. "You don't think about ageing all day long, but something will happen that will make you think about it. For example, I was talking to a friend whose mother is 97 and had a mini-stroke last night. He phoned the doctor at 8pm but the doctor couldn't get there until 12pm. That prompted me to think – that could be me in 10 or 12 years' time or even tomorrow. My neighbour has lost his wife and he is suffering really badly. He needs support and has no family. So that makes me think about ageing. We do worry about ageing – it is not fun getting old. You have lots of limitations the older you get."

James also feels there is an aspect of luck to ageing, describing himself as "fortunate at this stage". He has a good support network around him – he

has been happily married to his wife for 54 years – "we are very much a team" – he has two children aged 35 and 45, and seven grandchildren who treat him with respect and care. "But if that suddenly changed, it could be a whole new ball game. I would have to look for other ways to overcome that situation."

Looking at society, James generally thinks that the people he meets and socialises with are fairly age-friendly. But he also comments on his own experiences of receiving ageist language or behaviour, and shares his philosophy for how he deals with it by taking the higher ground. "Generally speaking, I think people are age-friendly and polite. But you do, on occasion, get the odd negative issue but they are the minority. You have to be "old enough" to manage it. It is pointless to react to it. You listen and acknowledge what that person has said or done, but you've got to put it down to the fact that they have got a lot to learn – they will be older one day. That's the best way, I've found."

More broadly, James also thinks that the media, newspapers and films present older people in a positive way, giving the example of a film he watched recently that inspired him and impacted his outlook. "There was a film recently called Finding Your Feet with Timothy Spall and Imelda Staunton as an old couple – he has to sell his house and he lived on a broken down narrowboat because his wife was in full time care,  and he couldn't afford the house. His wife is in hospital all the time with serious dementia and he adapted by joining a dance club, met lots of people and it ended up very positive for him. If it worked for him then I guess it is going to work out for me."

Instead of seeing ageism in society as an issue, James thinks the challenge lies with demographic change and its related impacts. In this regard, James thinks the government should step up and intervene. "How society needs to change is a difficult question because it is dependent on so many issues like the way that the government view and prioritise older people. The problem is, the older you get, you do get a little bit more dependent on people. And there are a lot more of us now than there were before. You've got to hope that the new government are going to make positive changes and make sure there are facilities for people who are retired or the very elderly – I am only 75 and there are a lot more people who are older than me. It is really down to the government to handle this problem."

While James's attitude largely indicates an individualist view – that the way he and others age are determined by their own life choices – he also recognises the need for policy change with regards to demographic change.

# 4. Whose responsibility is it for us to age well and how do our personal circumstances affect our views?

**Section highlights**

– 40% of survey respondents believe that the way society is organised and funded (including work, health and social care, education, housing, pensions and transport) has a greater influence on how people age than their own choices, decisions and behaviours as an individual (which is supported by 21%).

– Reinforcing this 'structural' view, two thirds (64%) of respondents think that people's socio-economic circumstances affect their ability to age well, compared to a third (33%) who think that everyone has an equal chance to age well.

– When prompted, some focus group participants spoke about how men and women have differing experiences of ageing, predominantly due to diverging social expectations relating to having children, the menopause, and changing physical appearance.

– People's financial position often having a strong influence on how people age and experience later life.

– Some individuals with a debilitating illness or disability had a graver outlook on life, particularly if it impacted their ability to carry out day-to-day tasks. They saw the onset of their illness or disability as an important marker of how their views on ageing had shifted over time.

– Expectations and social norms with regards to ageing and older age differ by ethnicity and cultural background. Some contrast perceived English culture with other cultures, suggesting that those in later life are treated with more respect outside of England.

– In contrast to the above findings, the vast majority of participants in the focus groups also emphasised the importance of self-direction and that individuals are primarily responsible for determining their life course by staying physically and mentally active, healthy, engaged and connected to people. This is supported by the survey finding that 73% of the public agree that those who stay healthy and live longer are the true winners of ageing – an 'individual' viewpoint. This indicates that people can hold complex, and often conflicting, views on ageing at any one time.

## Twice as many think that society's structures determine how we age, rather than our life choices

Overall, about twice as many respondents believe that society's structures (40%) have a greater influence on ageing in the UK than individuals (21%). Around a third (34%) of respondents remain to be convinced that society's structures have a greater influence on ageing than individuals and may be the audience to focus reframing efforts on. This differs from the discourse analysis findings where the individualistic view dominates the narrative in the media and in advertising. This highlights the gap between the public view and the dominant narrative in these sectors.

This emphasis on society's structures is strongest among those who are male (43% vs 38% women), BAME (51% vs 38% white), LGB+ (51% vs 40% heterosexual), disabled (44% vs 39% who do not), with a tertiary education (43% vs 38% secondary) and those who are city-dwellers (45% vs 37% town-dwellers). Londoners are also more likely to share this structural view (45%) compared to other regions in England. Conversely, the individualistic view is supported more strongly among ABC1 adults (24%) than C2DE adults (18%).

Older respondents seem to be more individualistic than younger respondents who are more attuned to a structural way of thinking (18-34 43%, 35-49 46%, 50-69 38%, 70+ 32%). This could be a result of older people absorbing widespread and historical narratives in society that encourage this attitude. It may also be due to the fact that many younger people currently have worse life prospects than older generations, particularly in terms of jobs and housing, and therefore see the structural barriers preventing them achieving the same quality-of-life that some older generations experience.

It is important to note that while we have asked respondents to place themselves on a scale from structural to individual, these two concepts are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The way society is organised and funded can support or present barriers to an individual's choices, decisions and behaviours.

## 4. Whose responsibility is it for us to age well and how do our personal circumstances affect our views?



**%**

| Category | Net: Individual | Neither agree or disagree | Net: Structural | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 21 | 34 | 40 | 5 |
| Male | 21 | 31 | 43 | 4 |
| Female | 22 | 36 | 38 | 5 |
| 18-34 | 14 | 39 | 43 | 4 |
| 35-49 | 15 | 35 | 46 | 4 |
| 50-69 | 26 | 31 | 38 | 6 |
| 70+ | 35 | 28 | 32 | 5 |
| Up to secondary education | 21 | 35 | 38 | 6 |
| Tertiary education | 22 | 32 | 43 | 3 |
| White | 23 | 34 | 38 | 5 |
| BAME | 14 | 31 | 51 | 4 |
| Straight | 22 | 34 | 40 | 5 |
| LGB+ | 16 | 28 | 51 | 5 |
| Disability | 20 | 31 | 44 | 4 |
| No disability | 22 | 34 | 39 | 5 |

**Legend:**
- Don't know
- Neither agree or disagree
- Net: Structural (The way society is organised and funded)
- Net: Individual (Your choices, decisions and behaviours)

Q3. Who or what do you think has the biggest influence on how you and others experience ageing? (0-10 scale)
0 - Your choices, decisions and behaviours as an individual / 10 - The way society is organised and funded (including work, health and social care, education, housing, pensions, transport etc.) Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

Nevertheless, many people in the focus groups felt they had some control over how they age. They emphasised the responsibility that individuals have to themselves to stay physically and mentally active, healthy, engaged and connected to people and society. Some even linked this to slowing down the ageing process and "feeling younger".

In one exercise of the focus groups, participants were asked to create a campaign that would foster positive views towards ageing. The resulting campaigns were predominantly underpinned by the notion that it is your own responsibility to make the right decisions to ensure you age well. Examples included encouraging older people to socialise, go outside, be active, eat well and take care of yourself. However, there were a minority of campaigns that aimed to tackle the stigma of ageing and older age.

"I think old age is merely a word or a number. It depends on your lifestyle or how you actually go about your day-to-day life. People who retire usually go for it at an age of 65, it's not set in stone. Then all of a sudden people sometimes say to themselves, 'That's it, I don't do much now.' They don't have a hobby, they don't have an interest. If they have a hobby and an interest then I think it makes you feel younger and have a younger outlook if you go out to places, if you go out maybe for a meal or you try and do some work like in a charity shop, so you're meeting people all the time. You don't get old as fast. It's when you sit somewhere and do nothing, like at home."

**Male, 70+, Manchester**

"I'm 70 but I don't feel old. I mean, I still play cricket with the kids and I still get on the floor and play with the kids. As you say, 'old' is just a number. I lived in Greece for years and old to me is old Riley sitting on the doorstep doing her crocheting."

**Female, 70+, Bournemouth**

Furthermore, several people focused on the importance of social connections and tackling social isolation to support positive experiences of ageing. Another wanted to emphasise the mutual benefit of befriending others, to younger and older people. They suggested that social isolation and loneliness was not just something that happened at Christmas.

"You've got to try and stay in employment for as long as possible. Keep active. Join clubs. Creative classes. Basically, just keep active as long as possible. Keep the mind active and positive, encourage connections. Basically, don't be lonely. Keep going out and joining people in conversation. Friends, neighbours, clubs, family. Just keep talking. Don't sit in your house on your own. You've got to get out and connect. Connect with anybody."

**Male, 70+, Manchester**

## 4. Whose responsibility is it for us to age well and how do our personal circumstances affect our views?

Three quarters of the public (73%) agree that those who stay healthy and live longer are the true winners of ageing. Agreement with this statement is significantly higher among older age groups, suggesting a growing awareness of the need to maintain a healthy lifestyle as you age (18-34 62%, 35-49 68%, 50-69 79%, 70+ 86%). Agreement is also higher among ABC1 (75%), white (74%) and heterosexual (73%) adults, than among their C2DE (70%), BAME (65%) or LGB+ (59%) counterparts. This indicates that among these audiences – for whom many would argue enjoy structural privilege in England – good health and longevity are more commonly experienced as part of the ageing process.
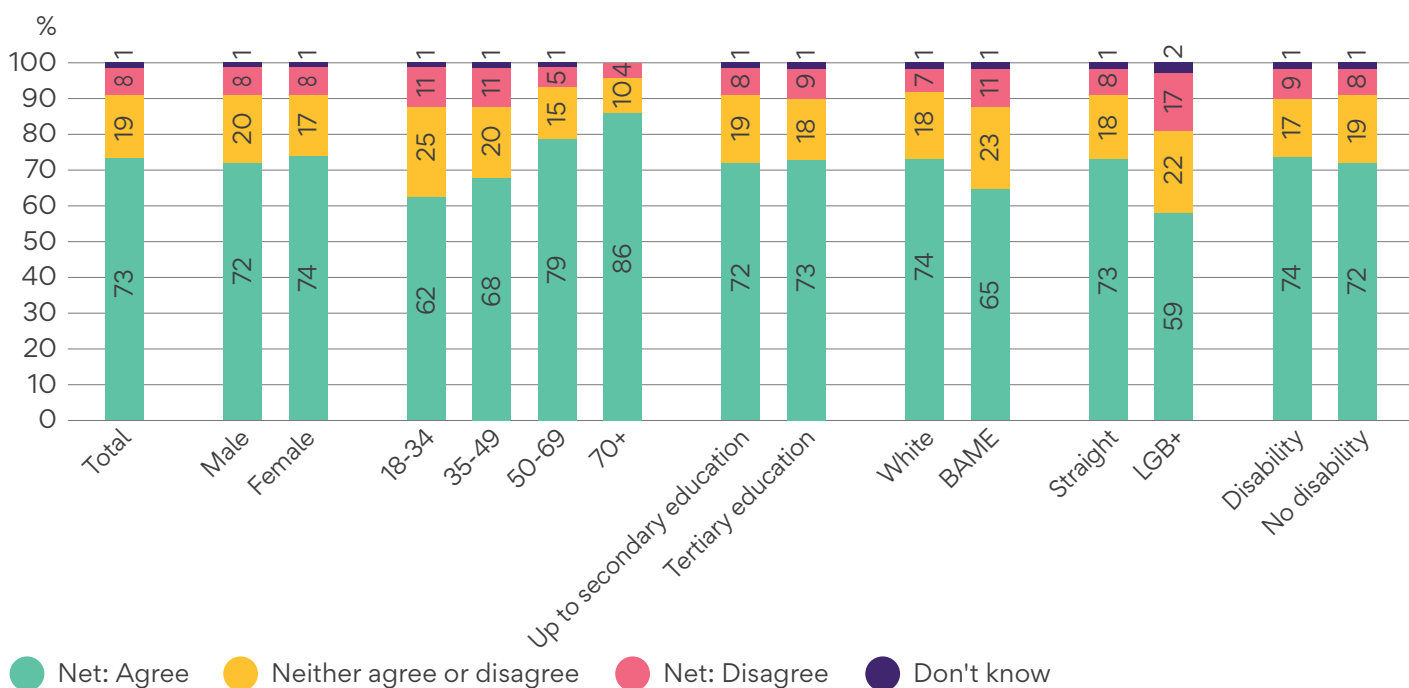


Q4. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about older people? Those who stay healthy and live longer are the true winners of ageing. Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

## Most people agree that ageing well is determined by your circumstances

The public are more likely to believe that people's circumstances affect their ability to age well (64%) than they are to hold the view that everyone has an equal chance to age well (33%). While this trend applies to most demographic groups, there are some notable exceptions where the pattern is less pronounced. For example, three in five adults aged 18-34 or 35-49 (60% each) lean towards the structural explanation, as opposed to seven in ten adults aged 50-69 (68%) or 70+ (70%). This finding is reinforced by those that identify as disabled (68%) and those who have suffered bereavement in the last 5 years (67%).

## 4. Whose responsibility is it for us to age well and how do our personal circumstances affect our views?



Net: In the UK everyone has an equal chance to age well

Net: In the UK, people have differing chances to age well depending on their background and circumstances

Don't know

Q5. Please read the following statements carefully and indicate which of the following is closer to your beliefs.
In the UK everyone has an equal chance to age well / In the UK, people have differing chances to age well depending on their background and circumstances. Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

While the group discussions tended towards an individualistic view of ageing, there were examples raised where protected characteristics were recognised as having an impact on experiences of ageing, such as gender, ethnicity, disability or illness and low socio-economic status. While many concurred that "age is just a number" and people are as young as they feel, they also appreciated that it can be down to your circumstances due to structural inequality. This highlights a recurring finding that people hold conflicting views on ageing and older age, creating tension.

In the literature review, the cumulative effect of old age combined with other stigmatised characteristics is highlighted as causing a double jeopardy, where members of marginalised groups experience further stigmatisation as they age.[21]

21      Bugental & Hehman, www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/doddery-dear-examining-age-related-stereotypes

4. Whose responsibility is it for us to age well and how do our personal circumstances affect our views?

## Women and men experience ageing differently due to views that couple sexism and ageism

As discussed in section 2, positive sentiment towards ageing is less common among women than men (40% vs 53%), suggesting there are some gendered factors at play that influence the way women and men experience ageing.

In the focus groups, female participants reported feeling the pressure of social expectations in relation to age more strongly than their male counterparts. These expectations were in relation to their appearance and attractiveness, role in society, fertility and menopause.

While many associated ageing with a change in physical appearance, such as wrinkles and grey hair, women mentioned this to a greater extent. One woman in the 18-34 group talked about her shock at seeing her first grey hair, which she described as a "huge thing" for her, and she decided not to tell anyone about this. Many women referenced the pressure they felt from the beauty industry in encouraging this association, particularly for women where ageing is considered something to fight. This supports the finding from the literature review and discourse analysis that ageing is currently viewed as something to defy (see row 6 in Figure 1 on page 5).

**"I'm losing my hair, I'm losing my eyesight, I smoke… I'm 45 now, I've got wrinkles and I'm being superficial, but I'd say one word, I'm devastated about getting older."**

**Male, 35-49, Manchester**

**"It's the ladies that are written off and thought, okay, once you're past 40 then that's it."**

**Female, 18-34, Manchester**

Women described experiencing pressure relating to their age and comments from others that "time is running out" for them to find someone to have children with and "settle down". One man described when his wife was 40 and had just given birth. She was described as "geriatric" at the hospital, which he said she found "highly offensive". In this instance, her older age was defined medically in terms of her fertility.

> **"I've got a friend, she's just turned 40, and literally... whenever she goes to any sort of event... they always ask, "Have you met someone?" There's also pressure from her brother who lives abroad, he always asking her, "Are you with someone?" So, she has that kind of pressure to settle down."**

**Female, 18-34, Bournemouth**

> **"I'm 31, and I was talking to one of the guys at work. He's 27 and he's on his fourth kid and he looked at me and he's like, "Well, shouldn't you be starting soon? You're getting old.""**

**Female, 18-34, Manchester**

Several women mentioned the menopause in relation to older age and described the symptoms they had experienced such as hot flushes and hair loss. One man described his wife's menopause and her recognition that she could no longer have children as a significant point in her ageing and feeling old. In contrast, one woman described the menopause as "the best thing that ever happened" to her, suggesting that this gave her freedom and was liberating.

> **"For blokes, you know, we've got an extended ability to produce children, but for my wife, she found that it was almost like she'd reached the third stage of her life when she hit the menopause, because she knew that the second stage of, you know, being able to have children, had ended. So, for her, it was entering that third stage of life, that's where I experienced [ageing] in our household."**

**Male, 50-69, Bournemouth**

## Low finances can limit people from enjoying later life

It was widely acknowledged in the focus groups that freedom in retirement and older age was not available to everyone. All age groups referenced the varying experiences that people have and the limiting impact of low finances, not only restricting opportunities to travel but could make day-to-

day life more challenging. One mentioned their concerns about the increasing pension age, others mentioned their concerns about not saving enough for later years.

People's position financially also appears to influence whether they are worried about their finances in later life. For example, those in younger age groups with reduced savings and disposable income were notably more concerned about the logistical steps they knew they needed to take to prepare financially for later life. One woman in the 70+ group described the discounts including bus passes and heating allowance that were now available to her as a "nice" aspect of ageing and retirement. This highlights the value and importance those in lower socio-economic groups place on meeting day-to-day needs as opposed to the international travel and expensive retirement pursuits mentioned by some participants.

## Poor health can make people feel that old age has come early

Similarly to having poor finances, participants highlighted that those who experience ill health or are disabled, can in fact feel a lot 'older' than their age, and this is out of their control. One woman in the 50-69 age group had Multiple Sclerosis and described her condition as very limiting. She said that she did not go out very often, and experienced a great deal of physical pain. She said that she felt old age had come early for her – contributing to a notably graver and more negative outlook on her future. She saw the onset of her illness as an important marker of reaching old age. One man in the same age group also described having a heart operation recently. He said this made him suddenly feel older than his years as it impacted his ability to carry out day-to-day tasks. In addition to direct personal experiences, some of those in various age groups described the impact of cancer or other diseases or illnesses that came suddenly and marked a notable change to a more challenging stage of ageing.

## Social expectations and family structures can vary among different cultures

Several people said that they thought older people were respected more in some countries outside of the UK. For example, Japanese culture was referenced on a number of occasions. One woman said that in some other countries, ageing is aligned with increasing wisdom and respect. However, these perceptions could be based on stereotypes and generalisations.

> **"In some foreign countries, grandma and granddad are the kingpin of the family, and the rest of the people look up to that, and in England, we just put them in nursing homes, we do the best for our families, but we don't look after them the way they do abroad."**

**Female, 50-69, Manchester**

One individual, who described himself as half Asian and half European, highlighted that some families maintain a traditional structure where they live in the same house or nearby, with one matriarch or patriarch. While this is still a well-held stereotype, he noted that globalisation was changing this. He mentioned that his mother had been in England since the 1960s and that she did not stay close to her wider family who emigrated here, and that her sisters had also moved away.

An Indian woman told the group that, in her community, ageing was associated with the expectation of behaving maturely and more reserved. She suggested that this could make people feel older more quickly.

> **"Your appearance [reflects on your expected] personality. If you're behaving like a child with a jolly nature, [people say,] "Oh you don't look [young], you should behave more mature." This stereotype is in society as well. They make you feel older than what you are."**

**Female, 35-49, Manchester**

The literature review highlights that research into representations of older age among minority ethnic groups can assume a homogeneity that masks the diversity of experiences[22] in this group. With a similar understanding, we should be mindful that the impact on ageing will be experienced very differently between the wide range of minority ethnic groups in the UK, of which only a few are highlighted here.

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22    Zubair & Norris, www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/doddery-dear-examining-age-related-stereotypes

**Poonam** is a 42 year old from Manchester who works in healthcare as a Systems Officer, having studied a postgraduate degree. She has two children and says she is "looking forward to being a grandparent and when [her] kids will marry". Poonam receives council tax support, working tax credit, child benefit and child tax credit.

During Poonam's one-to-one interview, she commented on people's tendency to make assumptions based on perceived age. "One girl earlier today asked me whether I am married, because I told her I have two children. She said, "You don't look like you would be married with children, you look 25". I said, "Thank you very much, but you can't judge how old I am, or my circumstances based on my appearance." Age doesn't define when you should get married or get an education. Ageing is not a state of body, ageing is a state of mind."

Poonam also observes how men and women are perceived and treated differently as they age, particularly in her culture. "You can see gender differences in the way people are treated in society. Men go to work and come home and show that they are doing so much, but women are multi-tasking and having to do more, such as looking after the family, which means they are more stressed and more likely to get dementia and other diseases when they grow older."

She goes on to explain how these gender roles can have an impact on mental health in later life. "If I am stressed and talking about my mental health with others, then they will judge me and ask me why I am not going to see the GP to get help. So women don't talk openly about mental health. Whereas men are a little bit more open with their friends, and they don't judge each other that badly."

Poonam explains how in Indian culture, there is a lot of respect given to elders. "When I need advice about something in my life, I will always go to

someone more mature than me because they have more experience and more skills – they can guide me."

Whilst Poonam values the respect given to elders in her culture, she also challenges the fact that older people are restricted to perform expected roles. Poonam says her culture has more traditional and clearly defined roles in terms of what is expected for different ages. "Because I am divorced at 42, and if I find a partner when I am older, I will be judged and defined by my age. People will say "Why is she getting married at her age?""

She delves further to explain how these cultural norms and expectations have also impacted her mum and dad. They also feel pressure to present themselves to society in a certain way. "Last year I lost my younger brother, and my father had two strokes at 65 years old. People started criticising him if he was ever in a happy mood, saying that he shouldn't be happy because he lost his son and is old." Similarly, "if my mum ever dresses up, the community start judging her based on what she is wearing and saying that she shouldn't dress in that way because she lost her son. So we will insist to her that she should be able to wear whatever is comfortable for her, that this is not the end of our lives, whatever happened, happened, he is gone, you have only a few years to live and they are in front of you. Society should not judge people who are still smiling after losing loved ones, let them live on their own terms."

When asked about whether she thinks our society is ageist or age-friendly, Poonam says that she has experienced her fair share of ageism. "I think our society is quite ageist. I have experienced ageism in the workplace where some jobs say that they want young people as they will bring 'innovative ideas'. But it doesn't work like that. People might have been working the last 15 years, have more knowledge and skills – if you give them the chance, they might be more successful. We need the workplace to be more open – it doesn't matter what age you are."

Poonam's life experiences and culture have shaped her outlook on ageing. With her brother passing away, she has realised how important it is to make the most of life and have a positive and optimistic stance. "Everything is connected to age, and our society stereotypes you based on your age. This needs to be changed. Society should provide more freedom to everyone – everyone has different stories, experiences and complexities in their lives – we can't judge them in the same scenario."

Following the discussion in the focus group, she said she was left feeling more positive about ageing and thinking about how she would "worry less about ageing and my future – ageing is a process that is part of life."

# 5. Developing a new narrative on ageing and demographic change

The task of the reframe is to consciously create a new, more constructive narrative on ageing and demographic change to replace, through repetition of the new narrative over time, the current dominant, largely regressive, narratives on ageing. In this way, we can influence what people think and feel about ageing and demographic change, and, ultimately, policy decisions.

As outlined in more detail in the Introduction, we do this by using values-based framing to bridge the gaps between the current dominant view and the alternative view of ageing and demographic change. This includes expanding people's thinking on what shapes our experience of ageing: specifically, the structural factors at play, such as discriminatory attitudes and policies, poorly designed systems and services, and national and local level budget decisions.

This rebalancing in favour of a structural understanding of ageing will increase support for systemic policy change, thus supporting individual behaviour change. In essence, this contributes to more people in later life having good health, being financially secure, having social connections, and feeling that their lives are meaningful and purposeful.

As outlined in the Introduction, the current dominant framing is largely rooted in extrinsic values such as social status, capability, success and wealth, and neighbouring values such as social order and stability. We identified three intrinsic value groups to invoke through the reframing, ultimately focusing on two values within each group in particular. These were self-direction (specifically, freedom and control), benevolence (specifically, community and interdependence), and universalism (specifically, equality and social justice). See Figure 4 below for more on the values and their intended use.

**Figure 4. Values**

| Value group | Values |
|---|---|
| Self-direction | **Freedom and control** are invoked in the reframe to counter the paternalistic benevolence embodied in the idea of older age being a time of vulnerability and dependency; to give agency, competence and empowerment to us all across the life course; and therefore to drive positive sentiment towards ageing and later life. |
| Benevolence | **Community and interdependence** are invoked to highlight our interdependence based on our shared humanity and our mutual need to care for one another across our lives, which also serves to drive positive sentiment towards ageing and later life. |
| Universalism | **Equality and social justice** values are the key values to engage to highlight the structural factors that shape our experience of ageing and later life, and therefore drive support for more progressive policy solutions.[23] |

## Development and testing of three routes to reframing

### Development of the routes

As outlined in the Introduction, the literature review[24] and discourse analysis informed the development of three reframing routes to bridge the gap between the current dominant view and the alternative view, which includes expanding public understanding of the nature of ageing and demographic change. Each route approaches the reframe from a different angle, outlined in the table below.

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23  Community and independence and equality and social justice also serve to widen the sphere of concern – that this concerns all of us, not just some of us. This is an important counter to the 'us and them' narrative, which invokes intergenerational unfairness and competition.

24  www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/doddery-dear-examining-age-related-stereotypes

## 5. Developing a new narrative on ageing and demographic change

**Figure 5. The three reframing routes**

| Route | Purpose | Message |
|---|---|---|
| **A – Reframe ageing** | Shift understanding of ageing as an inevitable process of decline and loss to a continuous process of change | Ageing is living – a process of continuous change. Throughout our lives, we have different experiences, opportunities and challenges, and contribute and need different things. But [what] we all need is freedom to decide how we live, and recognition and support from one another to thrive. And we all benefit from communities, workplaces and services that give us an equal chance to live the best lives we can. |
| **B – Reframe older age** | Shift associations with frailty, vulnerability, dependency and low competence towards living lives of equal value and purpose | As we get older, many of us report a stronger sense of purpose and wellbeing. And our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute. Our communities, workplaces and services can be designed in a way that fully unlocks what we all have to offer in older age. This would give us the freedom to decide how we live, the opportunity to give and receive the recognition and support we all need, and an equal chance to thrive throughout our lives. |
| **C – Reframe longer lives** | Shift understanding of longer lives as a societal and economic burden to a mutually beneficial opportunity | Most of us will live longer than the generations before us – an achievement we should all feel proud of as a society. By designing our communities, workplaces and services so that we can all contribute, live well together and thrive, we can fully unlock the benefits and opportunities of our extra time. |

Our working hypothesis was that reframing ageing (route A) would be the most fruitful route for long-term, progressive narrative change. This is because it decouples 'ageing' from 'old age' (in other words, that ageing is a process of continuous change and not a destination) and frames it as an issue of universal interest and concern. In doing so, it also helps to address the 'othering' that presently shapes prejudicial thinking about older people in society.

### Testing the reframing routes

The three reframing routes were explored in a series of qualitative discussions with members of the public of different age groups. They were tested in a co-creative style, allowing participants to propose edits to improve on each route in their own eyes. This provided a detailed understanding of how each route was received, and the ideas and language that were most likely to be accepted by and resonate with the general public.

**Liked features across all routes:**

– "Ageing is living" – seeing and accepting ageing as a natural process; portraying ageing as something that does not define a person as part of everyday life. This was perhaps the most relatable phrase across all groups.

– Freedom – life enjoyment; self-fulfilment; ability to live independently.

- Recognition of the diversity of different experiences and skills.

- The ideas of equality and greater inclusiveness in society (although they may be viewed as unrealistic or utopian).

**Key points of feedback across all routes:**

- Mention of quantity of years lived – it is important to highlight the quality of life as opposed to quantity.

- Designing communities, workplaces or services – this is hard to imagine for some participants and is often seen as idealistic, unrealistic or utopian.

- References to older age – drawing lines between generations creates a sense of competition between young and old. Or it shifts the focus on the later stages of life, bringing the idea of death into the fore.

- Long messages can be difficult to understand; length can suggest trying to please everyone or trying to include all the right buzzwords resulting in a loss of authenticity.

Overall, the preferred route in the focus groups reframing ageing (A). See the Appendix for more detail, including a breakdown of responses by age group.

## Development and testing of the values-based messages

### Development of the values-based messages

Based on the insights from the qualitative testing of the three reframing routes, the gaps identified between the dominant and alternative view of ageing and demographic change, and evidence-based framing practice, we developed a set of fifteen shorter messages to test in the quantitative research.

Eight messages focused on reframing ageing (route A), five on reframing older age (route B) and two on reframing longer lives (route C).[25]

These fifteen short messages are different components ('frame elements') of a complete message, each designed to do particular things (see Figure 6 for the full list of messages). They are designed to work together to influence the way people think about ageing more generally and create more positive associations with it; highlight the systemic factors that shape our experience of ageing and later life; and build public support for policies that enable us all to 'age well.'

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25    The higher number of messages for route A is because this was the preferred route in the focus groups.

**In line with evidence-based framing practice, used in combination, the messages**:

– **Tap into and strengthen the intrinsic values** identified and deliberately avoid activating (and therefore suppress) the extrinsic values identified in the dominant narrative through the literature review, discourse analysis and public research.

– **Tell a different story** to the dominant, problematic and regressive narrative about ageing, older age and demographic change, rather than repeat (to refute it) and therefore reinforce it.

– **Focus on the better world we want to create** and which we are working towards to counter fatalism – making this concrete so that it feels reachable and credible.

– **Highlight the structural nature** of our experience of ageing and older age, and show that those structures – and therefore the experience – can be changed.

– **Promote a broad and diverse 'us'** appealing to people's sense of community and connectedness, while being explicit about the inequalities at play and calling for solidarity.

**Each of the messages are designed to communicate one of three primary purposes:**

1. **Positivity:** to drive more positive sentiment towards ageing.

2. **Structural explanation:** to increase understanding that a person's experiences of ageing are largely determined by wider society – things like discriminatory attitudes and policies, poorly designed systems and services, and national and local level budget decisions.

3. **Structural solution:** to increase understanding that the experience of ageing can therefore be improved for us all if we organise society differently.

Using message components in combination is important when communicating for social change; if used in isolation, some messages may have the opposite effect to the intended one. For example, invoking freedom and control values alone (rather than coupling with equality and social justice) could drive a more individualistic view – that how we age is mostly influenced by our choices and behaviours rather than society's structures.

**Figure 6. Messaging matrix – design of the values-based messages**

| Reframing route | Message | Primary purpose | | | Values invoked | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Positivity | Structural explanation | Structural solution | Equality & social justice | Freedom & control | Community & interdependence |
| **A. Reframe ageing** | 1. Ageing is living. Across our lives we have different experiences, opportunities and challenges, and we contribute and need different things. | ■ | | | | ■ | ■ |
| | 2. Ageing is living – a lifelong process of growth. Whatever our age, we all want good health, purpose and connection with others. | ■ | | | | ■ | ■ |
| | 3. Because of the way our society currently works, some of us are more likely than others to be able to age well. | | ■ | | ■ | | |
| | 4. Things like poorly designed services, an economy that doesn't work for everyone, and discriminatory attitudes mean that some of us are less likely to be able to age well than others. | | ■ | | ■ | | |
| | 5. Our experience of ageing can be improved if we invest and work together to change the way our society is organised. | | | ■ | ■ | | ■ |
| | 6. If we improve the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities, we can all have the best chance possible to lead healthy, purposeful and fulfilling lives. | | | ■ | ■ | | |
| | 7. When our society enables us all to have freedom and control over our own lives, we have the chance to live the best lives we can, whatever our age. | | | ■ | | ■ | ■ |
| | 8. We all need support at different times across our lives, and we all want to live in communities where we look out for one another. | None – see notes below | | | | | ■ |
| **B. Reframe older age** | 9. As we age, many of us report a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing. Our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute in later life. | ■ | | | | ■ | |
| | 10. It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large. | ■ | | | | ■ | ■ |
| | 11. Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could. | | ■ | | ■ | | |
| | 12. Because of the way our society currently works, some of us aren't given the same opportunities to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could. | | ■ | | ■ | | |
| | 13. Our experience of later life can be improved for us all if we change the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities. | | | ■ | | | ■ |
| **C. Reframe longer lives** | 14. Our longer lives are an opportunity – for the economy, for society and for us all as individuals. | ■ | | | | ■ | |
| | 15. Most of us will live longer than the generations before us. If we organise and fund work, housing, healthcare and our communities better, we can all benefit from our longer lives. | | | ■ | ■ | | |

**Notes on the Messaging matrix**

- Messages that are different articulations of the same thing are coloured the same (e.g. 1 and 2 which both communicate positivity) – we were interested in finding out which of the articulations is most effective against the measures.
- Some of the messages intentionally invoke more than one group of values – such as message 1 which invokes freedom and control as well as community and interdependence.
- Message number 8 is purely a values-based message. It is designed to invoke community and interdependence values in order to strengthen these and, in doing so, widen the sphere of concern – it is about all of us, not some of us – and encourage both a more positive view of ageing and support for structural solutions.

## Testing the values-based messages

The fifteen values-based messages were tested in a nationally representative survey of more than 2,000 adults in England to identify which hold most promise for reframing ageing and demographic change. They were tested in two stages:

**Stage 1:** to evaluate them based on how accurate and persuasive respondents viewed them to ensure that they are broadly accepted by the public.

**Stage 2:** to test whether the messages have the potential to drive a change in views according to their intended design, using a regression analysis.

A regression analysis (also known as a Key Drivers Analysis) examines the correlation between multiple independent variables and a dependent variable. In this study, the fifteen messages formed the **independent variables**, which were tested against **two dependent variables** in two separate models:

**Dependent variable 1 (model 1):** Driving people to have a more positive sentiment towards ageing.

**Dependent variable 2 (model 2):** Driving people to view ageing through a structural lens rather than an individual lens (in other words, understanding the structural nature of ageing and supporting structural and societal policy responses to ageing rather than seeing the experience of ageing primarily as an issue or responsibility for individuals).

# 6. What works to shift public attitudes on ageing and demographic change

## Section highlights

– Of the three routes to reframing tested, the route focused on shifting negative associations with older age performed the best.

– Of the fifteen messages tested, seven performed particularly well at driving positivity towards ageing and driving the view that how we age is influenced by the way society is organised and funded ('structural' view of ageing).

– The best performing message overall, in terms of its potential to drive both a positive and a structural view of ageing, was: "It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large." (The exception being older age groups for whom it doesn't drive a more structural view.)

– Messages designed with the primary purpose of driving a positive view of ageing performed particularly well among younger and middle-aged groups (18-50). The two messages that performed best overall in this regard were: "As we age, many of us report a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing. Our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute in later life" and "It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large."

– Messages designed with the primary purpose of driving a structural view of ageing achieved this. The most effective message overall in this regard was: "Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could."

– It appears that messages with the primary purpose of creating a more positive sentiment towards ageing may also drive people towards a more individualistic stance – how we age is down to our choices, decision and behaviours. This highlights the importance of using messages in combination.

## The messages were seen as accurate and persuasive

As public opinion increasingly influences and justifies government action, it is crucial that the messages are deemed to be accepted by the public in this regard. Broadly, all fifteen messages were rated as both accurate and persuasive by adults across the board in England.

At least seven in ten respondents viewed all fifteen of the messages as accurate. There is minimal variance between the messages (72%-86%), indicating that the messages are well-attuned to the feedback from the qualitative testing. While more than half of respondents rate all fifteen messages as persuasive, there is greater variation between the messages for this metric (53%-72%).

On the whole, the messages were seen as more accurate and more persuasive by older adults than by younger adults, perhaps resonating with older adults' greater lived experience of ageing and older age.

In general, while all messages were seen as accurate, those with the primary purpose of communicating a more positive viewpoint or increasing understanding that a person's experiences of ageing are largely shaped by wider society were viewed as more persuasive than those designed to increase understanding that the experience of ageing can be improved for us all if we organise society differently. As outlined, in Section 7, this underlines the importance of using messages in combination.

For more detail on the accuracy and persuasiveness of the messages, including analysis by demographic groups, please see the Appendix .

## Messages that reframe older age performed the best

As outlined in Section 6, we hypothesised that reframing ageing from an inevitable process of decline and loss to a continuous process of change across the life course (route A) would be the most fertile way to disrupt and change the dominant narrative and, ultimately, shift public attitudes on ageing. This is because it appeared to offer the greater prospect of being able to speak to the population at large, by decoupling ageing from older people, which in turn may help uproot ideas of ageing that underpin prejudicial attitudes towards older people.

Messages designed to reframe ageing (route A) received a better response in the qualitative research. However, messages designed to reframe older age (route B) received a better response in the quantitative research and should be prioritised due to its larger sample size.

Narrative change – and so decoupling ageing from older age – will take time. The individual messages that tested well are therefore the ones we know people find easier to conceptualise currently with regard to ageing and older age.

## The messages achieved what they were designed to

Messages expressly designed with the primary purpose of driving more positive sentiment towards ageing, invoking values of freedom and control and community and interdependence, achieved this.

Similarly, messages designed with the primary purpose of providing a structural explanation for differing experiences of ageing or showing how the experience of ageing can be improved for us all if we organise society differently, invoking equality and social justice values, drove more structural view of ageing. This is encouraging, given that around a third (34%) of respondents remain to be convinced that society's structures have a greater influence on ageing than our own choices.

Focusing on the values embedded in the messages, the values of freedom and control and (to a lesser degree) community and interdependence performed best at driving positive sentiment towards ageing. Messages invoking equality and justice performed best at driving a structural view of ageing. This demonstrates that, when used in combination, these values work to achieve both these aims.

Despite those messages designed with the primary purpose of communicating that we can improve our experience of ageing by organising society differently being deemed accurate and persuasive in the self-reported data, the regression analysis shows that these messages tended to drive a structural view of ageing to a lesser extent than those messages designed with the primary purpose of explaining the structural factors at play in our differing experiences of ageing. This may indicate that the general public are more receptive to understanding existing structural issues and how these impact on our experience of ageing than being ready to have their ideas challenged with new ideas on how we can all age well. Again, this highlights the importance of using messages in combination. In this case, combining messages that explain the bigger structural picture with those that show how we can change how society is currently organised to give all of us a better chance of 'ageing well', to aid understanding and drive support for policy change. In addition, the structural solutions offered need to be deemed concrete, credible and achievable – typically reflecting specific policy goals. The testing of solutions linked to specific policy goals would be a key part of any further development and testing.

It appears that messages with the primary purpose of creating a more positive sentiment towards ageing may also drive people towards a more individualistic stance – how we age is down to our choices, decision and behaviours. Again, this highlights the importance of using messages in combination.

When you look across the age groups, there are variations and some interesting and notable exceptions to how the messages performed. For example, messages designed with the primary purpose of driving positivity towards ageing were also more effective at driving a structural view of

ageing among those aged 18-24 than those message designed specifically to do so. An example is message 11 ('Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could") which was designed to provide a structural explanation for the differing experiences of ageing and was effective at driving a structural view of ageing among all age groups except the over 70s. As outlined in section 4, we also know that older respondents are less likely than younger respondents to think that society's structures have the biggest influence on how we age (18-34 43%, 35-49 46%, 50-69 38%, 70+ 32%), reminding us of the importance that the messages we use are effective among older age groups. These age differences also highlight the importance of audience segmentation and the targeting of tailored messages: see Figure 8 below for recommendations on effective messages to use for different age groups.

## Top-performing messages

Overall, the top-performing message across all measures is message 10, designed to encourage a more positive view of ageing, invoking values of freedom and control and community and interdependence to do so:

"It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large."

This message is a top-performing message in driving positivity and performs well across all age bands in this regard (although slightly less so amongst the 50-69 and 70+ year olds). While not designed to drive a structural view of ageing, it also performs reasonably well against this measure, and amongst younger age groups (18-34 and 35-49), although the message has little impact on driving a structural view of ageing amongst older groups (50-69 and 70+).

A summary of the top seven performing messages overall is provided in Figure 8 below, including key age differences. For more detail on the results of the quantitative message testing see the Appendix which includes a chart of the overall performance of all fifteen messages.

– Three out of the five top messages were written to reframe older age (route B), consistent with the finding that this reframing route performed best overall.

– Only one message (message 14) features in the top seven messages that reframes longer lives (route C). Its performance is driven by effectiveness amongst 18-34s and especially amongst 35-45s who may be responding to the mention of 'opportunity'.

– Messages designed to communicate positivity and provide a structural explanation for the differing experiences of ageing both perform well overall and appear in the top seven messages – driven by their performance at driving positivity and a structural view, respectively.

– Messages designed to communicate that we can improve our experience of ageing if we organise society differently are less effective in driving both a positive and structural view of ageing, with none appearing in the top seven.

– As expected, the top performing messages communicating positivity invoke values of freedom and control and community and interdependence, and those communicating the structural nature of our experience of ageing, invoke values of equality and social justice.

As outlined above, the messages have been designed with the intention of working together in combination to achieve the desired aim. An initial proposal of how the messages might be combined for maximum effect overall, and amongst each age band can be found in Figure 10.

**Figure 8. Top seven performing messages overall (in descending order of total regression scores: sum of overall scores for model 1 + model 2)**

| Reframing route | Primary purpose* | Values invoked | | | # | Message component | Summary of performance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Equality & social justice | Freedom & control | Community & interdependence | | | |
| B | Positivity | | Freedom & control | Community & interdependence | 10 | It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large. | -Top performing message overall.<br>-Top message at driving positivity (tie with message 9).<br>-Top amongst 18-34s in both driving positivity and a structural view.<br>-Strong driver of both positivity and a structural view amongst 35-49s. |
| B | Positivity | | Freedom & control | | 9 | As we age, many of us report a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing. Our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute in later life. | -Top message at driving positivity overall (tie with message 10).<br>-Top driver of positivity for 18-34s, 50-69s and over 70s; amongst top performing drivers of positivity for 35-49s.<br>-Good driver of structural view amongst 18-34s and 35-49s. |
| A | Structural explanation | Equality & social justice | | | 3 | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us are more likely than others to be able to age well. | -Moderate driver of positivity overall, with best performance amongst 18-34s.<br>-Good driver of a structural view across age bands, although weaker amongst 50-69s.<br>-Top performing message overall amongst those aged 70+, driven by strong performance in driving a structural view. |
| A | | | | Community & interdependence | 8 | We all need support at different times across our lives, and we all want to live in communities where we look out for one another. | -Moderate driver of positivity overall, although weaker amongst 50-69s.<br>-Good driver of a structural view amongst 18-34s. |
| B | Structural explanation | Equality & social justice | | | 11 | Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could. | -No impact on driving positivity overall, or amongst age bands.<br>-Top driver of driving a structural view overall, and amongst 35-49s and 50-69s.<br>-No impact on structural view of those 70+. |
| C | Positivity | | Freedom & control | | 14 | Our longer lives are an opportunity – for the economy, for society and for us all as individuals. | -Moderate driver of positivity and a structural view overall, although good amongst 18-34s.<br>-Amongst top performing drivers of positivity for 35-49s. |
| B | Structural explanation | Equality & social justice | | | 12 | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us aren't given the same opportunities to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could. | -Strong driver of positivity amongst 18-34s and 70+.<br>-Moderate driver of a structural view overall, but strong performance amongst 18-34s and good amongst 35-49s. |

*Primary purpose: ● Positivity  ● Structural explanation  ● Structural solution

## Preferred language for those aged 65 and over

In the quantitative survey, we tested various terms to describe people aged 65+ by asking them to rate the terms on a scale of 0-10 where 0 is very negative and 10 is very positive.

Mature is seen as the most positive with three in five (60%) rating it between 7-10 (positive) on the scale. This may be due to the term being associated with growth and the acquisition of knowledge. The American term senior places second, perhaps due to it communicating a position of higher rank and therefore something to aspire to.

All other terms tested are seen as positive by less than half of respondents (49% or less). Rather than respondents feeling negatively about the terms, the remainder are largely neutral towards them (39%-46%).

The only term deemed by the public to have more negative connotations than positive is the term old (31% vs 26% respectively), providing a strong indication from the public that this term should be avoided when referring to older people. While ageing is theoretically a more progressive term than old (since it is less othering and communicates a journey rather than destination) only 30% view it positively and 23% negatively. Notably, it is perceived as neutral by the largest proportion of respondents out of the terms tested (46%). This raises the question whether a neutral term rather than a positive term should be sought, since neutral terms may be less likely to risk inciting attitudes of high warmth but low competence towards older people.

Among respondents aged 70+, there are slight differences in how positively the terms fare compared to adults of all ages. While the terms mature (68%) and senior (56%) remain the most positive, this is followed by people in later life (48%), silver surfers (44%), older (42%), pensioner (40%), elderly (37%), Old Age Pensioner (34%), ageing (30%), and finally old (21%). The notable uptick in preference for silver surfers among older adults compared to younger adults (18-34 28%, 35-49 37%, 50-69 33%, 70+ 44%) shows a level of disconnect across the generations about this term and whether it conveys a positive or negative image of digitally savvy 65+ year olds.

## 6. What works to shift public attitudes on ageing and demographic change



%

| | Net: Positive | Net: Neutral | Net: Negative | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mature | 60 | 34 | 6 | |
| Senior | 49 | 39 | 12 | 1 |
| Older | 45 | 43 | 12 | |
| People in later life | 44 | 41 | 14 | 1 |
| Pensioner | 38 | 43 | 19 | 1 |
| Elderly | 38 | 40 | 22 | |
| Silver surfers | 34 | 42 | 22 | 2 |
| Old age pensioner (OAP) | 33 | 40 | 26 | 1 |
| Ageing | 30 | 46 | 23 | |
| Old | 26 | 42 | 31 | |

● Don't know    ● Net: Negative    ● Net: Neutral    ● Net: Positive
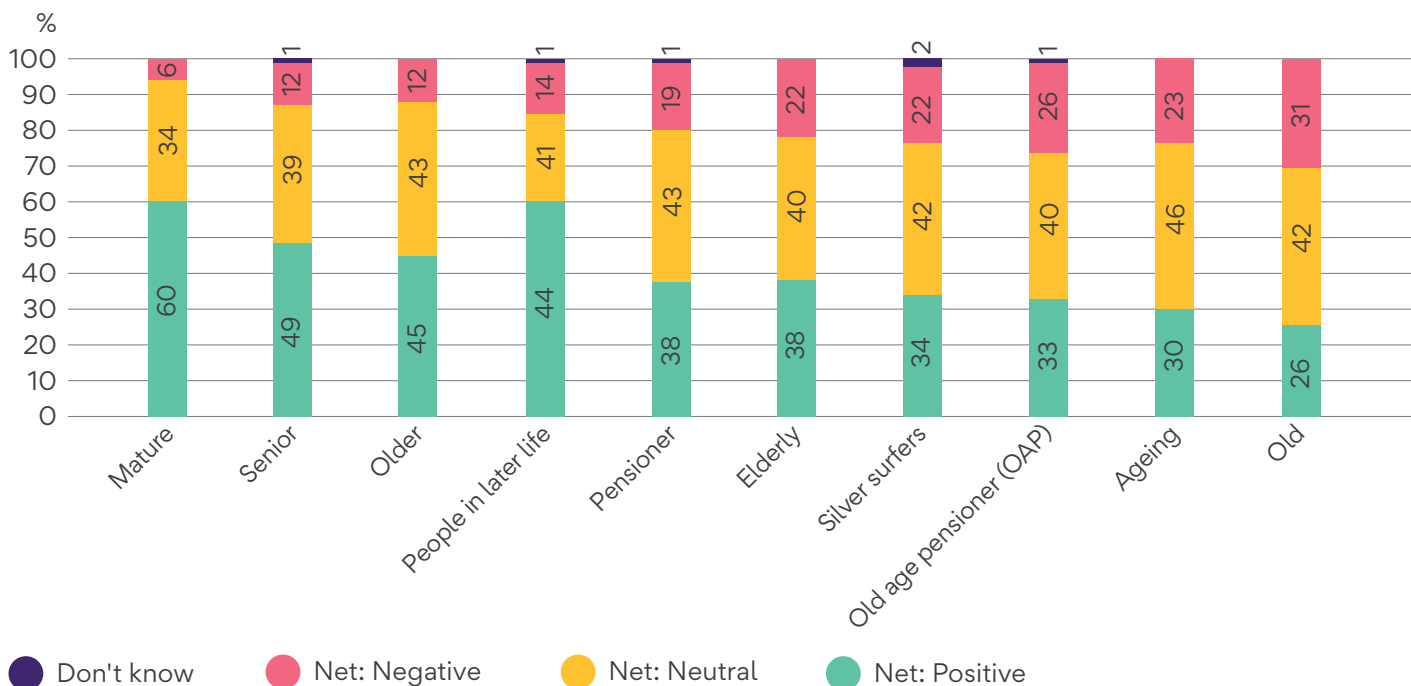
Q1. To what extent, if at all, do you feel positively or negatively about the terms listed below describing people aged 65 and over? Scale 1-10 where 0 = Very negative and 10 = Very positive. Net: Negative includes those rating between 0 and 3, Net: neutral between 4 and 6, and Net: Positive between 7 and 10.
Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

# Research in practice

This research has generated some important insights that can be applied in the way we communicate about ageing, older age and demographic change, to start the process of long-term narrative change.

## Key findings

**The key findings from the qualitative and quantitative research among the public are outlined below.**

1. The research shows that public attitudes towards ageing and demographic change mirror the dominant negative narratives on ageing identified in the discourse analysis report. That is, that older age is associated with frailty, vulnerability and dependency; that ageing is an inevitable process of decline leading to the destination of older age, and is something to defy; that demographic change is a growing, unsustainable economic and social cost and burden; and that there is an unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities across the generations.

2. The survey showed that adults in England hold mixed views about ageing, with under half (46%) expressing a positive view, and the rest holding neutral (35%) or negative (16%) views. Over 70 year olds held the most positive views towards ageing than any other age group, which aligned with the focus group discussions and suggests that lived experience can counter the negative perceptions and fear created by dominant views and language about ageing in society.

3. In the qualitative groups, we observed that the older you are the more likely you are to view ageing as a process rather than a destination. However, overall, people often conflate ageing and 'older age' without any real distinction between the two.

4. Twice as many survey respondents think that how we experience ageing is predominantly influenced by society's structures rather than our own choices and behaviours (40% vs 21% respectively). A third (34%) remain to be convinced that society's structures have a greater influence on ageing than our choices, and may be a potential audience to focus reframing efforts on.

5. In contrast to the previous finding, focus group participants only spoke about structural explanations for how we experience ageing when prompted, for example, how ageing is different depending on your circumstances (gender, ethnicity, financial position or health status). On the whole, they talked about their views and experiences of ageing in a way that indicates an individualistic view – we are responsible for

making the right decisions to age well. This suggests that people can often hold complex and conflicting views on ageing at the same time, and perhaps feel less able to articulate their views on this. It also mirrors similar observations in previous public research on communicating structural inequality, conducted by Savanta ComRes for Equally Ours.[26]

6. Those who think that society's structures have the greatest influence on how we age (rather than our own choices) are more likely to be positive towards ageing (62% vs 43%). This offers a strong rationale for the need to shift conversations on ageing away from individualistic notions of ageing to more structural ones.

7. Messages designed to reframe ageing (route A) received a better response in the qualitative research. However, messages designed to reframe older age (route B) received a better response in the quantitative research and should be prioritised due to its larger sample size.

8. Of the fifteen values-based messages tested, seven performed particularly well at driving positivity towards ageing and driving the view that how we age is influenced by the way society is organised and funded (see Figure 8, page 48).

9. The best performing message overall, in terms of its potential to drive both a positive and a structural view of ageing, was: "It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large." The exception being older age groups for whom it doesn't drive a more structural view.

## Messaging guidance

Below is some overall headline messaging guidance to apply in practice, based on both the specific insights from this research and general evidence-based framing good practice.

Further development and testing are required to present more specific and nuanced recommendations.

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26      www.equallyours.org.uk/communicating-equality-comres-and-equally-ours/

## Figure 9. Dos and don'ts of framing good practice

| Dos | Don'ts |
| --- | --- |
| Root messages in values of:<br>- freedom and control to give agency, competence and empowerment<br>- community and interdependence to highlight our interdependence and mutual need to care for one another<br>- equality and social justice to highlight the systemic factors that shape our experience of ageing and drive support for structural solutions.<br>For example, 'We all need support at different times across our lives, and we all want to live in communities where we look out for one another', rooted in community and interdependence.<br>Values-based messaging maximises both the chances of messages being heard and, crucially, acted on – encouraging pro-social policy change. | Make arguments in economic terms alone – even if for short-term gain – as this invokes and reinforces extrinsic values, which mitigates against long-term social change.<br>Invoke freedom and control alone as this will strengthen the dominant individualistic view of ageing. |
| Tell a story about ageing, older age and demographic change that is new and different to the dominant one. For example, 'Ageing is living' or 'It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large'. | Focus on and repeat the claim you want to refute, as this just reinforces it in people's minds. For example, 'Ageing isn't a process of inevitable decline and loss' or 'Older people aren't frail, dependent and incompetent'. And the campaign idea, 'Don't be old, be bold' from one of the groups is also a good example of this common communications pitfall.<br><br>In particular, at this time, avoid the term "vulnerable" or "vulnerability", which reinforces the association of older age with vulnerability and frailty, diminishing people's value and worth and marginalising them. |
| Paint a picture of the better world you are working towards. For example, 'One where more people approaching later life are living in communities where social connection can thrive.'<br><br>Show that change is possible by offering concrete solutions (usually linked to specific policy goals) to make this vision feel credible and achievable. For example, "Growing the already established and successful UK network of age-friendly communities." | Use crisis talk. For example, "The social care system is broken". This leads to fatalism – that the situation is impossible to change – and will not move people to act. Such fatalistic thinking is a major blocker to effective policy change. |
| Be clear that the experience of ageing is shaped by society's systems and structures. For example, "Things like poorly designed services, an economy that doesn't work for everyone, and discriminatory attitudes mean that some of us are less likely to be able to age well than others".<br>Link any personal stories that you use to the structures behind them.<br>Always be clear that those systems and structures are changeable. | Focus solely on individual stories as this risks them being viewed as one-offs or exceptions to the general rule, and reinforces an individualistic view of ageing.<br><br>Do not talk about the structures behind them like they are fixed and cannot be changed.<br><br>Avoid terms like "active", "healthy" or "positive" ageing without making the structural nature of this clear, as they reinforce rather than counter the dominant narrative of both inevitable decline and that our good or bad experiences of ageing are mainly down to individual choice alone. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Use metaphors to help make frames and messages stick, but make sure you test these to ensure they do the job you intend them to. | Use a metaphor that could have unhelpful unintended consequences. For example, "We are facing a demographic time-bomb", which suggests significant threat and evokes and reinforces the frame of intergenerational fairness and therefore competition. |
| Promote a broad and diverse "us" appealing to people's sense of community and interconnectedness. For example, "Whatever our age, we all want good health, purpose and connection with others."<br><br>Be explicit about the inequalities at play and call for solidarity across these. | Evoke "them and us" (particularly in the case of demographic change). Or suggest that we are all in the same boat when we are not. |

## How to use the messages

The fifteen short messages tested are different components of a complete message, each designed to do specific things (as detailed in section 6). They are intended to work together to influence the way people feel and think about ageing more generally; highlight the systemic factors that shape our experience of ageing and later life; and build public support for progressive policies that enable us all to 'age well.'

In line with evidence-based framing good practice, complete messages should start with a 'gateway' statement invoking intrinsic values and establishing a 'wider us'. This shows how the issue or problem you are seeking to address is counter to these intrinsic values that we all share, and it maximises the chance that that issue will be both heard and acted on. This should then be followed by an articulation of the issue (structural explanation) and solution (structural solution).

In brief, below is a basic formula for structuring messages. This is a simple guide only for illustration purposes.

**Start with values-based 'gateway' statement to show why issue matters to us all and drive positive sentiment**

→

**State what the problem counter to that statement is and who or what is responsible for it (structural explanation)**

→

**Offer vision (hope) and show how problem can be solved by giving concrete, achievable solutions (structural solution)**

In the qualitative research, "Ageing is living" was shown to be a relatable across all groups and message 2 (Ageing is living – a lifelong process of growth. Whatever our age, we all want good health, purpose and connection with others) in its entirety was reported as the most accurate and persuasive message overall in the survey. While this message did not perform as well as others in driving positive sentiment and a structural view in the regression models, it is a very good example of an effective values-based 'gateway' message. People found it relatable, it invokes community and interdependence, and widens the sphere of concern. As such, it works to make people more receptive to what follows: the structural view.

Below is an illustration of how the tested messages could work in combination in practice based on the best performing messages. This is indicative only – the exact wording needs to be developed and flexed depending on the context and channel, and so that they read well as complete messages.

## Figure 10. Combining the messages

| | Overall | 18-24s | 35-49 | 50-69 | Over 70s |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Positivity** | It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large. | It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large. | Our longer lives are an opportunity – for the economy, for society and for us all as individuals. | It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large. | We all need support at different times across our lives, and we all want to live in communities where we look out for one another. |
| **Structural explanation** | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us are more likely than others to be able to age well. | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us aren't given the same opportunities to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could. | Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could. | Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could. | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us are more likely than others to be able to age well. |
| **Structural solution** | Our experience of ageing can be improved if we invest and work together to change the way our society is organised. | Most of us will live longer than the generations before us. If we organise and fund work, housing, healthcare and our communities better, we can all benefit from our longer lives. | When our society enables us all to have freedom and control over our own lives, we have the chance to live the best lives we can, whatever our age. | Our experience of later life can be improved for us all if we change the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities. | Our experience of ageing can be improved if we invest and work together to change the way our society is organised. |

## Narratives in the time of COVID-19

It is a time of flux for narratives, which presents opportunities for narrative change. The qualitative research took place just before COVID-19 and quantitative research in the middle of the pandemic. So, while it is not possible to determine in any robust way in what way and to what extent the pandemic impacted on attitudes and responses to frames and messages in the survey, it is likely there was some impact. Here we offer a few reflections on current narrative trends and the implications of these.

There has been a marked increase in the use of paternalistic language. Through terms like "vulnerable" and "shielding", associations of older age with vulnerability, frailty and diminishing value and worth have been reinforced and deepened – with, as we have seen, catastrophic consequences in our care homes. Older and disabled people are not just marginalised, they have literally become out of sight. This risks reinforcing the idea that not only is social care not worth solving, it is also impossible to do.

Connected to this, we think it is likely that the pandemic has reinforced the belief that social care is mostly about older people and, in particular, care homes – a hypothesis that is currently being explored in reframing research commissioned by Social Care Future.

With the increased risks of COVID-19 with age, and the likely related hardening of associations of older age and vulnerability, we have also observed the narrative of intergenerational divide and conflict play out in the media at this time – specifically, the relative value of the lives of older and younger people, and the blaming of "selfish" and "irresponsible" younger people for spreading the virus through their lack of social distancing (as illustrated bluntly in the message, "Don't Kill Granny" adopted in Preston in Lancashire).

On a more encouraging note, while COVID-19 has brought existing inequalities into stark relief and exacerbated those inequalities, we have observed a concomitant greater awareness of the structural nature of inequality (regarding race and gender, in particular) – encouraging because it suggests a greater acknowledgment of and support for structural solutions. Indeed, public polling conducted by Savanta ComRes for Equally Ours in July 2020 found that 63% of the public think that the Government should do more to address inequality.

In addition, one of the clearest positive things we have seen, particularly at the start of the pandemic, is the strength of communities in supporting one another (for example, with the many community-based mutual aid groups) and, therefore, a greater awareness of our interconnectedness in society. This provides fertile ground for strengthening those intrinsic benevolence values, and supports the importance of widening the sphere of concern in

messaging. The importance of compassion, equality and social justice was also highlighted in the recent polling mentioned above – nearly three quarters (72%) of the public said that after COVID-19 they want UK society to be more compassionate; 67% more equal; and 65% more just.

There is therefore a significant opportunity to influence and steer narratives at this time – to strengthen those pro-social values, offer a better understanding of inequality, and deepen support for real solutions. We suggest that this has implications for the ageing charity sector and the advertising industry, in particular.

# Methodology

## Qualitative research: focus groups and diaries

A programme of 8 focus groups were conducted in Manchester and Bournemouth to: delve into people's perceptions of ageing in society; uncover underlying emotions and feelings associated with ageing; explore values and frames with the general public; and test and develop potential frames which could be used in messaging to reframe ageing.

We conducted 4 groups in each location, one per following age cohort to capture a range of views: 18-34, 35-49, 50-69 and 70+. We spoke to 70 people in total, with the attendance noted in the below table, and used screening criteria to ensure we spoke to a mix of participants by gender, level of education, ethnicity, social grade and employment status. Participants were incentivised for taking part and an additional incentive was provided to contribute towards childcare or carer costs where appropriate. The Manchester groups took place on Tuesday 28th and Wednesday 29th January, and the Bournemouth groups took place on Tuesday 21st and Wednesday 22nd January 2020.

| Age group | Bournemouth | Manchester | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 18-34 | 8 | 9 | 17 |
| 35-49 | 9 | 9 | 18 |
| 50-69 | 10 | 9 | 19 |
| 70+ | 9 | 7 | 16 |
| Total | 36 | 34 | 70 |

In the week ahead of each focus group, respondents were asked to complete a 5-day diary, available digitally on their mobile, tablet or computer or by paper copy. This semi-ethnographic pre-task exercise was designed to encourage participants to think about the topic of ageing in advance of the focus group, for example, what aspects of ageing they come into contact in their daily lives, what they think and how they feel when they see/hear/read about ageing. These interactions with ageing in their daily lives included, but were not limited to, conversations with friends, family and colleagues; social media; stories in newspapers, articles, magazines, books; advertisements on TV, in magazines, on the internet, on social media; films, TV shows, music.

Each focus group lasted 90 minutes and covered the below topics:

– Perceptions of society's portrayal of ageing. This section was informed by their 5-day diaries and covered questions on how they have seen ageing being talked about in society, they ways in which ageing is talked about positively and negatively in society, the words, images, ideas or metaphors that they commonly hear in society.

– Personal views of ageing, such as what ageing means to them, how they feel about ageing, what their expectations, fears and hopes are of ageing.

– Exercise in pairs to create a positive campaign (e.g. a charity TV advert, poster or radio discussion etc.) to improve the way people view ageing in society, using worksheets. Pairs then presented their campaigns to the group whilst being filmed.

– Exploration of the three reframing routes in the form of long messages. Each message was shown to participants on paper and were asked to annotate with red and green pens what they liked and disliked.

– To wrap up, each participant was asked to say one thing they had learnt in the session.

– Two individuals from each group were asked to stay behind for a short 1:1 interview on camera. Questions covered aspects such as whether they think society is ageist or age-friendly, what they think needs to be changed in the way older people are represented, as well as intersectional and structural aspects relating to ageing.

The three messages tested in the focus groups were developed to reflect the three reframing routes. Following the exploration of the messages in the focus group, the messages were then broken down into 15 shorter messages for the quantitative survey. This process was informed by an analysis of participants' verbal and non-verbal feedback on the messages; how it made them feel, what they associated with the messages, what the messages meant to them, whether it made them feel more positive or negative about ageing, and what they liked and disliked about the wording. For a detailed analysis of the messages tested in the qualitative focus groups see the Appendix.

## Quantitative research: online survey

Savanta ComRes conducted an online survey in which adults living in England were interviewed about their attitudes towards ageing and demographic change as well as their perceptions of language related to ageing and our proposed messages to reframe ageing.

We interviewed 2,185 adults aged 18+ and living in England online between 9th and 21st July 2020, in the middle of the pandemic. The data were

weighted to be nationally representative by key demographics including age, gender, region, social grade, ethnicity, and sexuality. For the full breakdown of the weights applied to the data and the final sample, please see the table below.

When interpreting the figures in this report, please note that only statistically significant differences (at the 95% level) are reported and that the effect of weighting is taken into account when significance tests are conducted. Differences are highlighted in the full data tables and calculated as the differences between the subgroup in question and the other subgroups identified – subgroup differences highlighted in the analytical report are therefore always relative to other directly relevant subgroups (e.g. men vs women). Where differences between subgroups and the total sample have been given for any question, this is based on a statistical significance test for the subgroup relative to the total including the subgroup.

### Key Drivers Analysis (KDA)

Two regression analyses, or Key Drivers Analyses, were conducted on the quantitative data to identify which of the 15 messages tested most strongly shifted people towards:

a)      A positive sentiment towards ageing; and

b)      Agreement with a 'structural' view of ageing rather than 'individualistic' one.

The models were developed to two drivers outlined above. In both models, each message was run on its own. This means that if we were to remove any of the messages the results would not change. In other words, the results are not shown in relation to each other.

## Sample breakdown and weights applied

| Demographic group | Sample size (n) | Weights applied to the data (% of adults in England) |
|---|---|---|
| TOTAL | 2,185 | 100% |
| **Age[27]** | | |
| 18-24 | 240 | 10.9% |
| 25-34 | 377 | 17.3% |
| 35-44 | 353 | 16.1% |
| 45-54 | 381 | 17.5% |
| 55-64 | 329 | 15.0% |
| 65-74 | 275 | 12.6% |
| 75+ | 229 | 10.5% |
| **Gender** | | |
| Male | 1043 | 48.9% |
| Female | 1132 | 51.1% |
| **Region** | | |
| North East | 103 | 4.9% |
| North West | 288 | 13.1% |
| Yorkshire & Humber | 217 | 9.8% |
| East Midlands | 198 | 8.6% |
| West Midlands | 244 | 10.4% |
| East | 205 | 11.1% |
| London | 367 | 15.4% |
| South East | 344 | 16.4% |
| South West | 219 | 10.3% |
| **Socio-economic grade[28]** | | |
| AB | 597 | 27.3% |
| C1 | 611 | 28.0% |
| C2 | 447 | 20.5% |
| D | 323 | 14.8% |
| E | 207 | 9.4% |
| **Ethnicity[29]** | | |
| BAME | 506 | 15.1% |
| White | 1679 | 84.9% |

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27    Age, gender and regional data sourced from the ONS, 2018

28    National Readership Survey, 2017

29    BAME includes Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups, Asian, Black / African/ Caribbean or another ethnic group. White includes White British and all other White ethnicities. Ethnicity data sourced from the ONS, 2016

| Sexuality[30] | | |
|---|---|---|
| LGB+ | 117 | 2.8% |
| Hetero | 2068 | 97.2% |
| **EU Referendum** | | |
| Remain voters | 849 | |
| Leave voters | 953 | |
| Did not vote/do not remember | 361 | |
| **Highest education level** | | |
| Up to secondary | 1157 | |
| Tertiary | 1012 | |
| **Working status** | | |
| Employed or self-employed | 1444 | |
| Unemployed | 142 | |
| Homemaker | 82 | |
| Student | 98 | |
| Retired | 414 | |
| **Disability or illness** | | |
| Yes | 612 | |
| No | 1539 | Weights were not applied for these demographics |
| **Bereavement in the last 5 years** | | |
| Yes | 1031 | |
| No | 1122 | |
| **Children** | | |
| Yes, youngest child is aged 17 or under | 655 | |
| Yes, youngest child is aged 18 or over | 734 | |
| No | 776 | |
| **Dwelling** | | |
| Town | 1079 | |
| City | 680 | |
| Village /isolated settlement /hamlet | 421 | |
| **Intergenerational contact** | | |
| 10 years older – frequently | 1466 | |
| 10 years older – infrequently | 699 | |
| 10 years younger – frequently | 1407 | |
| 10 years younger – infrequently | 751 | |

30      Sexuality data sourced from the ONS, 2017

# Appendix

## Qualitative testing of the reframing routes in detail

Below are the three reframing routes tested in the focus groups in Manchester and Bournemouth.

| Manchester | Bournemouth |
|---|---|
| **A.** Ageing is living and living means change. Throughout our lives, we have different experiences, opportunities and challenges, and contribute and need different things. But we all need freedom to decide how we live, and recognition and support from one another to thrive. And we all benefit when we design our communities, workplaces and services to give us an equal chance to live the best lives we can. | **A.** Ageing is living **– a process of continuous change**. Throughout our lives, we have different experiences, opportunities and challenges, and contribute and need different things. But we all need freedom to decide how we live, and recognition and support from one another to thrive. And we all benefit **from communities, workplaces and services that** give us an equal chance to live the best lives we can. |
| **B.** As we get older, many of us report a stronger sense of purpose and wellbeing. And our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute. We can design our communities, workplaces and services in a way that fully unlocks what we all have to offer in older age. This will give us the freedom to decide how we live, the opportunity to give and receive the recognition and support we all need, and an equal chance to thrive throughout our lives. | **B.** As we get older, many of us report a stronger sense of purpose and wellbeing. And our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute. **Our communities, workplaces and services can be designed** in a way that fully unlocks what we all have to offer in older age. This would give us the freedom to decide how we live, the opportunity to give and receive the recognition and support we all need, and an equal chance to thrive throughout our lives. |
| **C.** Most of us will live longer than the generations before us – an achievement we should all feel proud of as a society. By designing our communities, workplaces and services so that we can all contribute, live well together and thrive, we can fully unlock the benefits and opportunities of our extra time. | **C.** Most of us will live longer than the generations before us – an achievement we should all feel proud of as a society. By designing our communities, workplaces and services so that we can all contribute, live well together and thrive, we can fully unlock the benefits and opportunities of our extra time. |

The overall preference for these reframing routes in the focus groups are shown below. Please note this is indicative as the sample was among 69 participants.

| All | 18-34 | 35-49 | 50-69 | 70+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A (37/69) – 54% | A (14/17) – 82% | B (9/18) – 50% | C (9/18) – 50% | A (9/16) – 56% |
| B (19/69) – 28% | B (2/17) – 12% | A (8/18) – 44% | A (6/18) – 33% | B (5/16) – 31% |
| C (13/69) – 19% | C (1/17) – 6% | C (1/18) – 6% | B (3/18) – 17% | C (2/16) – 13% |

Key findings from the qualitative discussions of the three reframing routes are outlined below, using a traffic light system to indicate aspects that were broadly liked (**green**), disliked (**red**) or that received mixed views (**amber**).

**Reframing pathway A** – Reframe ageing from an inevitable process of decline and loss to a continuous process of change

**Ageing is living – a process of continuous change**. Throughout our lives, we have **different experiences, opportunities and challenges, and contribute and need different things**. But [what] we all need is **freedom to decide how we live**, and recognition and **support from one another to thrive**. And **we all benefit from** communities, workplaces and services that give us an **equal chance to live the best lives we can**.

| Likes | Dislikes |
|---|---|
| 1. **"Ageing is living"** – encourages to live life the fullest; enjoy life; empowering; relatable for all age groups; ageing as a natural process; would be enough as a standalone sentence <br><br> 2. **"A process of continuous change"** - those who like it highlight the positivity of the idea of being able to change, making the most of life, acceptance, ageing as gradual as opposed to a sudden event in life, a natural process <br><br> 3. **"Different experiences, opportunities and challenges" / "contribute and need different things"** – recognition of diversity <br><br> 4. **"Freedom to decide how we live" / "Live the best life we can"** – idea of independent decisions; individual responsibility; self-fulfilment | 1. **"Recognition and support from one another to thrive"** – thrive as a word is often disliked; sounds unrelatable; often suggested that it is preachy; difficult to understand <br><br> 2. **"A process of continuous change"** – some respondents question it, why do they need change? Idea that change is only necessary when something has gone wrong <br><br> 3. **"Freedom to decide how we live"** – fails to recognise individual circumstances such as finances, society, health – as a result it is sometimes seen as misleading; should be greater acknowledgement of different backgrounds – not everyone has the same level of empowerment |

**Reframing pathway B** – Reframe older age to shift associations with frailty, vulnerability, dependency and low competence towards living lives of equal value and purpose

**As we get older, many of us** report **a stronger sense of purpose and wellbeing.** And our **diverse life experience and skills**, perspective and **resilience** mean we have much to **contribute**. Our **communities, workplaces and services can be designed** in a way that fully **unlocks** what we all have to offer in older age. This would give us the **freedom** to decide how we live, the opportunity to **give and receive the recognition and support we all need**, and an equal chance to **thrive** throughout our lives.

| Likes | Dislikes |
|---|---|
| 1. **"Stronger sense of purpose and wellbeing"** – feeling of collectedness at an older age; usefulness; idea of being able to contribute to society<br><br>2. **"Diverse life experiences and skills"** – often highlighted as a positive; recognising a variety of things people are able to offer; inclusive of both mental and physical<br><br>3. **Resilience, freedom** – idea of being able to live independently; older people aren't always dependent/vulnerable<br><br>4. **Community-oriented**; including the workplace widens associations of ageing, older people are and not limited to retirement; enabling environment; inclusiveness; respect<br><br>5. **"Give and receive the recognition"** – those who like it focus on recognition by society as opposed to recognising individuals – value of older people in society as a group | 1. **"As we get older"** – patronising; built on assumptions, may be unrelatable for some people; shifts the focus to be on the later stages of life;<br><br>2. **Designing communities/workplaces/services** – complex, unrealistic, cannot have a solution that works for everyone; would be better to say 'work together as a community"<br><br>3. **Unlock** – sense of incompleteness; suggests that this is currently unavailable; 'embrace' could be a better word to use?<br><br>4. Some questions whether there really is a need for **recognition**? – these comments are mainly focused on individual recognition as opposed to recognition on a societal level    suggests that the message may be unclear |

**Reframing pathway C** – Reframe longer lives from a societal and economic burden to a mutually beneficial opportunity

**Most of us will live longer than the generations before us** – **an achievement we should all feel proud of as a society**. By **designing our communities, workplaces and services so that we can all contribute**, live well together and **thrive**, we can fully **unlock** the benefits and opportunities of **our extra time**.

| Likes | Dislikes |
|---|---|
| 1. **"Most of us will live longer than the generations before us"** – people often like that it starts with a fact; seen as a nice thought although the focus is more on quantity rather than quality/conditions<br><br>2. More uplifting – **not using words like ageing or old**<br><br>3. Redesign - signals a positive change in society, **greater integration** | 1. **Focus is put on quantity rather than quality of life**; fails to recognise that 'ageing well' remains a privilege; – doesn't portray ageing as a process, it is more focused on an end point of when we die; misses the point?<br><br>"I'd rather be proud of the way that we run our society rather than just be proud of the fact that there's loads of 90 year olds where there weren't before."<br><br>2. **Achievement / proud** – forcing a sense of pride on the reader; unrelatable; suggests that ageing is a competition / implies that there are some divisions in society; some suggests that feeling lucky other than proud may be a more relatable way of saying this<br><br>3. Idea of **re-designing** –confusing; unrealistic; not inclusive enough? – raises questions about those who may be unable to contribute<br><br>4. **"Our extra time"** – associations of the short time between now and death; forces you to think/plan further ahead in life than you'd prefer to |

## Quantitative message testing in detail

The fifteen values-based messages were tested in two stages:

**Stage 1:** to evaluate them based on how accurate and persuasive respondents viewed them as to ensure that they are broadly accepted by the public.

**Stage 2:** to test whether the messages drive a change in views according to their intended design, using a regression analysis.

### Stage 1. Are the messages viewed as accurate and persuasive?

#### Accuracy

Broadly, adults in England rate all fifteen messages as accurate, with at least seven out of ten saying so and only 8-17% rating them as inaccurate. In general, messages with all three primary purposes of communicating either positivity, a structural solution or a structural explanation are rated as accurate in the eyes of respondents.

%

| Route | Message | Net: Accurate | Net: Neutral | Net: Inaccurate | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Ageing is living – a lifelong process of growth. Whatever our age, we all want good health, purpose and connection with others | 86 | 11 | 8 | 1 |
| A | Ageing is living. Across our lives we have different experiences, opportunities and challenges, and we contribute and need different things | 83 | 13 | 8 | 2 |
| A | We all need support at different times across our lives, and we all want to live in communities where we look out for one another | 81 | 16 | 11 | 2 |
| A | If we improve the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities, we can all have the best chance possible to lead healthy, purposeful and fulfilling lives | 80 | 14 | 11 | 2 |
| C | Most of us will live longer than the generations before us. If we organise and fund work, housing, healthcare and our communities better, we can all benefit from our longer lives. | 80 | 16 | 11 | 2 |
| B | Our experience of later life can be improved for us all if we change the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities | 78 | 16 | 11 | 3 |
| A | Our experience of ageing can be improved if we organise and fund our society better and work together as a community | 77 | 18 | 13 | 2 |
| A | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us are more likely than others to be able to age well | 77 | 17 | 13 | 3 |
| B | As we age, many of us report a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing. Our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute in later life | 76 | 18 | 12 | 3 |
| B | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us aren't given the same opportunities to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could | 75 | 18 | 14 | 2 |
| B | It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large | 73 | 20 | 15 | 2 |
| B | Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could | 73 | 19 | 17 | 2 |
| A | Things like poorly designed services, an economy that doesn't work for everyone, and discriminatory attitudes mean that some of us are less likely to be able to age well than others | 72 | 20 | 16 | 3 |
| A | When our society enables us all to have freedom and control over our own lives, we have the chance to live the best lives we can, whatever our age | 72 | 21 | 16 | 2 |
| C | Our longer lives are an opportunity – for the economy, for society and for us all as individuals | 72 | 21 | 16 | 3 |

**Reframing route**
A Reframe ageing
B Reframe older age
C Reframe longer lives

**Primary purpose**
Positivity
Structural explanation
Structural solution

**Value set invoked**
Equality and social justice
Freedom and control
Community & interdependence

Net: Accurate
Net: Neutral
Net: Inaccurate
Don't know

Q. To what extent, if at all, do you think the message above is accurate or inaccurate? Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

All messages are seen as more accurate among older adults than younger adults, with the exception of one message[31] in which all age groups concurred in its degree of accuracy (18-34: 71%, 35-49: 72%, 50-69: 74%, 70+: 73%). This pattern could be due to older adults' experiences and perspectives they have accrued over their life, contributing to them agreeing more strongly that the messages are in line with their lived experience.

The two most accurate messages in the table above are more likely to be seen as accurate by white adults in England than by BAME adults (1st message: 87% vs 80%, 2nd message: 84% vs 78% respectively) as well as by heterosexual adults than by LGB+ adults (1st message: 86% vs 77%, 2nd message: 83% vs 76% respectively). In addition, adults who are retired are the most likely working status to say the messages are accurate, with students the least likely.[32] All messages are considered to have comparable levels of accuracy (i.e. no or minimal significant differences) across education level and social grade.

## Persuasiveness

The majority of adults in England rate all fifteen messages as persuasive, however, there is a larger degree of variation in the way they rate the messages compared to how they rate them in terms of accuracy.

Messages communicating positivity or a structural solution are most persuasive in the eyes of the public. Messages with the primary purpose of communicating a structural explanation are distinctly seen as less persuasive by the public compared to other messages, falling in the bottom four out of fifteen, with only 53% or 54% rating them as persuasive and 26-28% rating them as unpersuasive.

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31    Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could.

32    Please note that there was a small sample size of students (n=74) and so results should be treated as indicative only.

%

| Route | Purpose | Value | Message | Net: Persuasive | Net: Neutral | Net: Unpersuasive | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | | | Ageing is living - a lifelong process of growth. Whatever our age, we all want good health, purpose and connection with others | 72 | 21 | 15 | 3 |
| A | | | If we improve the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities, we can all have the best chance possible to lead | 68 | 24 | 17 | 4 |
| C | | | Most of us will live longer than the generations before us. If we organise and fund work, housing, healthcare and our communities better, we can all benefit from our longer lives. | 67 | 26 | 18 | 4 |
| A | | | We all need support at different times across our lives, and we all want to live in communities where we look out for one another | 67 | 26 | 19 | 3 |
| A | | | Ageing is living. Across our lives we have different experiences, opportunities and challenges, and we contribute and need different things | 65 | 26 | 18 | 4 |
| B | | | As we age, many of us report a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing. Our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute in later life | 64 | 26 | 19 | 5 |
| A | | | Our experience of ageing can be improved if we organise and fund our society better and work together as a community | 64 | 26 | 20 | 4 |
| B | | | Our experience of later life can be improved for us all if we change the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities | 63 | 28 | 21 | 4 |
| B | | | It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large | 62 | 28 | 22 | 5 |
| A | | | When our society enables us all to have freedom and control over our own lives, we have the chance to live the best lives we can, whatever our age | 60 | 28 | 23 | 5 |
| C | | | Our longer lives are an opportunity - for the economy, for society and for us all as individuals | 57 | 31 | 25 | 5 |
| B | | | Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could | 54 | 32 | 28 | 6 |
| A | | | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us are more likely than others to be able to age well | 54 | 34 | 26 | 5 |
| B | | | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us aren't given the same opportunities to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could | 53 | 33 | 27 | 6 |
| A | | | Things like poorly designed services, an economy that doesn't work for everyone, and discriminatory attitudes mean that some of us are less likely to be able to age well than others | 53 | 33 | 27 | 7 |

**Reframing route**
A Reframe ageing
B Reframe older age
C Reframe longer lives

**Primary purpose**
● Positivity
● Structural explanation
● Structural solution

**Value set invoked**
● Equality and social justice
● Freedom and control
● Community & interdependence

● Net: Persuasive
● Net: Neutral
● Net: Unpersuasive
● Don't know

Q. To what extent, if at all, do you think the message above is persuasive or unpersuasive? Base: All respondents (n=2,185)

In line with the findings for the accuracy of the messages, 50-69 and 70+ year olds are, on the whole, more likely to rate the messages as persuasive than younger adults. However, 70+ year olds were least convinced by the messages communicating a structural explanation. In contrast, BAME adults are more likely than white adults to rate structural explanations as persuasive, however, no differences existed between these two groups for any other messages. Minimal or insignificant differences exist by sexual orientation, disability, experience of bereavement in the last 5 years, or educational level.

**Stage 2. Do the messages drive a change in views according to their intended design?**

Positive sentiment towards ageing alone is not enough to change attitudes and therefore policy and behaviour. An understanding of the influence of society's structures is also needed to achieve social change.

We used a regression analysis (also known as a Key Drivers Analysis) to examine the correlation between the fifteen messages (our independent variables) against two different dependent variables in two separate models:

Dependent variable 1 (model 1): Driving people to have a more positive sentiment towards ageing.

Dependent variable 2 (model 2): Driving people to view ageing through a structural lens rather than an individual lens (in other words, supporting structural and societal policy responses to ageing and not seeing the experience of ageing primarily as an issue or responsibility for individuals).

### Why a Key Drivers Analysis?

The strength of this approach is that it goes beyond respondents' claimed responses to the messages and their impact, which is often vulnerable to the natural mode of response by different demographic groups (for example, younger people and women tend to be more generous in the claimed impact of messages on their views). Respondents' claimed impact is often more related to messages they like, rather than the ones that predict a shift in the specific view that we would like to shift with that message. The KDA therefore enables us to bypass participants' natural biases and be more precise about which messages are not only warmly received, but also effective.
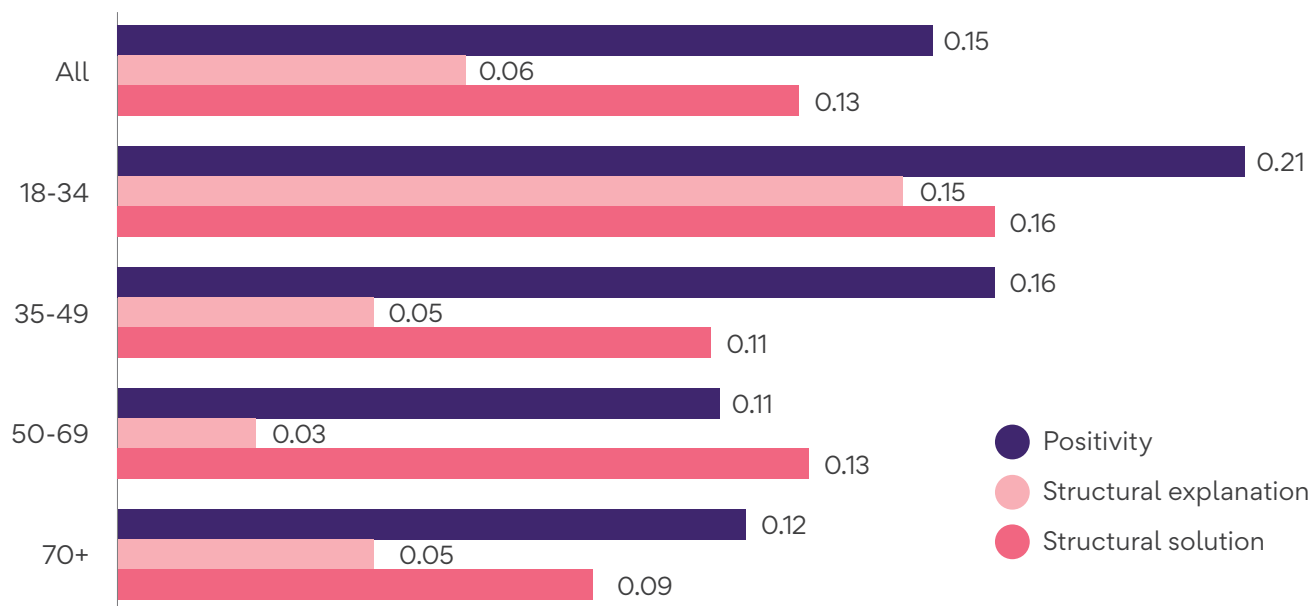
### Reading the Key Drivers Analysis (KDA) Models:

The two KDA models identify which messages are most influential in driving positivity towards ageing (model 1) and a structural view of ageing (model 2). The model has been run at an overall level, and for four age groups (18-34, 45-49, 50-69, 70+), enabling us to identify message combinations that are most effective amongst target audiences of different ages.

– The regression coefficients show the extent to which a message drives either positivity, or a structural view, towards ageing. The higher the number, the greater the impact, with positive numbers in green indicating a positive impact, negative numbers in red indicating a negative impact.

– Each coefficient score is the product of an individual regression analysis, meaning that the coefficient scores are not affected by the scores for other messages in any way.

– For a more technical reading of the coefficient scores, what they signify is that for each increase of 1 in the mean score for persuasiveness of the message, we will see an increase in agreement with the dependent variable by the value of the coefficient for that message. The coefficients do indicate fairly small shifts, but this is not unusual when trying to shift complex views on a topic we know will require sustained exposure to the messages to change an audience's perceptions.

– Each chart or table also indicates the original reframing route, the primary purpose of the message, and which values are invoked. This enables us to identify not only individual messages, but also types of messages (i.e. based on the reframing route, purpose, and values) that are more effective in driving each dependent variable.

– All tested messages have been included in each model, irrespective of whether they have been specifically designed to drive positivity or a structural view. This allows for a more complete analysis of how the messages are performing, how well the messages perform in their intended aim, and the extent to which any messages also help to shift views in the other aim.
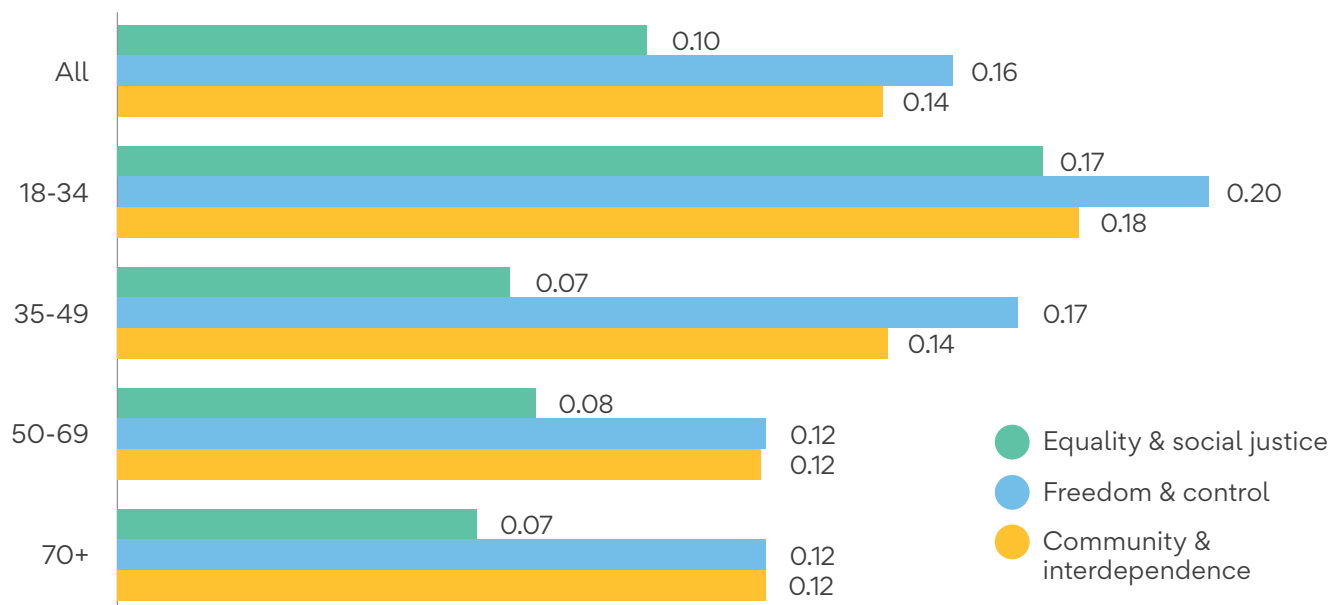
**Model 1: Which messages drive positive sentiment towards ageing?**

Average scores how the primary purpose of each message drives positivity towards ageing (model 1)

| | Positivity | Structural explanation | Structural solution |
|---|---|---|---|
| All | 0.15 | 0.06 | 0.13 |
| 18-34 | 0.21 | 0.15 | 0.16 |
| 35-49 | 0.16 | 0.05 | 0.11 |
| 50-69 | 0.11 | 0.03 | 0.13 |
| 70+ | 0.12 | 0.05 | 0.09 |

The messages designed with the primary purpose of communicating positivity are stronger drivers of positivity towards ageing, compared with the messages designed to communicate a structural explanation or solution. The messages designed to drive positivity are also seen to be particularly effective amongst younger ages, working particularly well among those aged 18-34 and 35-50, compared to those aged 50-69 or 70+.

Average scores for how the values drive positivity towards ageing (model 1)

| | Equality & social justice | Freedom & control | Community & interdependence |
|---|---|---|---|
| All | 0.10 | 0.16 | 0.14 |
| 18-34 | 0.17 | 0.20 | 0.18 |
| 35-49 | 0.07 | 0.17 | 0.14 |
| 50-69 | 0.08 | 0.12 | 0.12 |
| 70+ | 0.07 | 0.12 | 0.12 |

Again, the messages designed to invoke values of freedom and control and community and interdependence are also generally effective in driving positivity, while those designed to invoke equality and social justice are less so. Messages that invoke freedom and control and community and interdependence values tend to relate to having a purposeful life, participating and contributing to society, and having freedom.

Average scores for how each reframing route drives positivity towards ageing (model 1)



| | A. Ageing | B. Older age | C. Longer lives |
|---|---|---|---|
| All | 0.12 | 0.14 | 0.12 |
| 18-34 | 0.16 | 0.21 | 0.21 |
| 35-49 | 0.11 | 0.12 | 0.14 |
| 50-69 | 0.09 | 0.11 | 0.09 |
| 70+ | 0.10 | 0.12 | 0.02 |
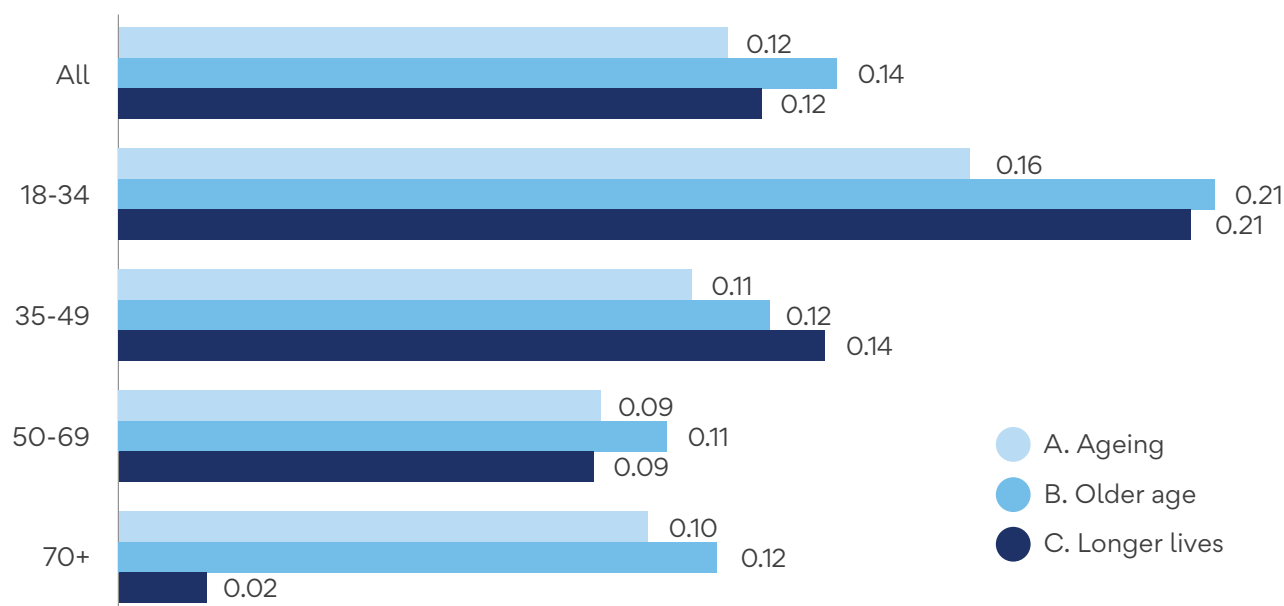
At an overall population level, the messages designed to reframe older age (B) perform best. Amongst those aged 18-34 the messages designed to reframe older age (B) and longer lives (C) are more effective at driving positivity about ageing compared to those designed to reframe ageing (A). However, amongst those aged 70+ the messages designed to reframe ageing (A) and older age (B) are generally stronger in driving positivity towards ageing compared to those designed to reframe longer lives (C).

Two messages stand out in performing best overall at driving a more positive view of ageing. These messages are both designed to communicate positivity, so it is an encouraging finding to see them perform well in this aim. They are both messages written to reframe older age (route B) and designed to invoke the values of freedom and control and community and interdependence.

These leading messages are message 9 "As we age, many of us report a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing. Our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute in later life" And message 10 "It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large".

When looking at how the model varies between the four age groups, the top performing messages are reasonably consistent. However, some variations do exist:

– Younger respondents seem to be more strongly driven by the messages relating to purpose, contribution, freedom and control, invoking freedom and control and community and interdependence values. The message that performs the best among 18-34 year olds is message 10 "It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large."

– Those aged 35-49 are most strongly driven by message 7, designed as a structural solution and to invoke the values of freedom and control and community and interdependence: "When our society enables us all to have freedom and control over our own lives, we have the chance to live the best lives we can, whatever our age". However, of the messages designed with a primary purpose of communicating positivity, three messages perform well – those designed to reframe older age and longer lives. These messages are the two which performed best overall, plus message 14 "Our longer lives are an opportunity – for the economy, for society and for us all as individuals".

– Messages relating to purpose and valuing individuals' experiences and perspectives, invoking freedom and control values, most strongly drive positive sentiment towards ageing among older age groups. For both 50-69 and 70+ year olds, message 9 is the strongest driver of positivity towards ageing: "As we age, many of us report a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing. Our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute in later life."

– Interestingly, message 12, designed to communicate a structural explanation, invoking values of equality and social justice performs well among 18-34 year olds and 70+ year olds (1.30) but not among 35-49 and 50-69 year olds: "Because of the way our society currently works, some of us aren't given the same opportunities to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could"

## Message performance in driving positivity towards ageing (model 1)

Note: Messages in **bold text** are designed to communicate **positivity**.

| Reframing route | Primary purpose* | Values invoked | | | # | Message component | POSITIVITY: Regression coefficients | | | | |
| | | Equality & social justice | Freedom & control | Community & interdependence | | | All | 18-34 | 35-49 | 50-69 | 70+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. Ageing | ● | | ● | | 1 | **Ageing is living. Across our lives we have different experiences, opportunities and challenges, and we contribute and need different things.** | 0.14 | 0.19 | 0.14 | 0.11 | 0.10 |
| | ● | | ● | | 2 | **Ageing is living – a lifelong process of growth. Whatever our age, we all want good health, purpose and connection with others.** | 0.07 | 0.10 | 0.09 | 0.00 | 0.12 |
| | ● | ● | | | 3 | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us are more likely than others to be able to age well. | 0.11 | 0.17 | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.09 |
| | ● | ● | | | 4 | Things like poorly designed services, an economy that doesn't work for everyone, and discriminatory attitudes mean that some of us are less likely to be able to age well than others. | 0.05 | 0.18 | 0.01 | -0.01 | -0.02 |
| | ● | ● | | ● | 5 | Our experience of ageing can be improved if we invest and work together to change the way our society is organised. | 0.14 | 0.18 | 0.11 | 0.16 | 0.09 |
| | ● | ● | | | 6 | If we improve the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities, we can all have the best chance possible to lead healthy, purposeful and fulfilling lives. | 0.11 | 0.14 | 0.07 | 0.13 | 0.12 |
| | ● | | ● | ● | 7 | When our society enables us all to have freedom and control over our own lives, we have the chance to live the best lives we can, whatever our age. | 0.17 | 0.17 | 0.21 | 0.16 | 0.15 |
| | | | | ● | 8 | We all need support at different times across our lives, and we all want to live in communities where we look out for one another. | 0.16 | 0.18 | 0.18 | 0.12 | 0.17 |

Continued overleaf

*Primary purpose:   ● Positivity   ● Structural explanation   ● Structural solution

| | | | | # | Statement | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B. Older age | | | | 9 | **As we age, many of us report a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing. Our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute in later life.** | 0.20 | 0.24 | 0.20 | 0.18 | 0.20 |
| | | | | 10 | **It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large.** | 0.20 | 0.29 | 0.19 | 0.15 | 0.14 |
| | | | | 11 | Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could. | 0.06 | 0.14 | 0.07 | 0.04 | -0.02 |
| | | | | 12 | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us aren't given the same opportunities to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could. | 0.11 | 0.24 | 0.07 | 0.02 | 0.19 |
| | | | | 13 | Our experience of later life can be improved for us all if we change the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities. | 0.12 | 0.14 | 0.10 | 0.14 | 0.08 |
| C. Longer lives | | | | 14 | **Our longer lives are an opportunity – for the economy, for society and for us all as individuals.** | 0.15 | 0.23 | 0.20 | 0.12 | 0.03 |
| | | | | 15 | Most of us will live longer than the generations before us. If we organise and fund work, housing, healthcare and our communities better, we can all benefit from our longer lives. | 0.09 | 0.18 | 0.07 | 0.06 | 0.01 |

Base: All respondents (n=2,185): 18-34 (n= 674), 35-49 (n=535), 50-69 (n=663), 70+ (n=313)

*Primary purpose:  ● Positivity  ● Structural explanation  ● Structural solution

## Model 2: Which messages drive a structural view of ageing?

Average scores for how the primary purpose of each message drives a structural view of ageing (model 2)
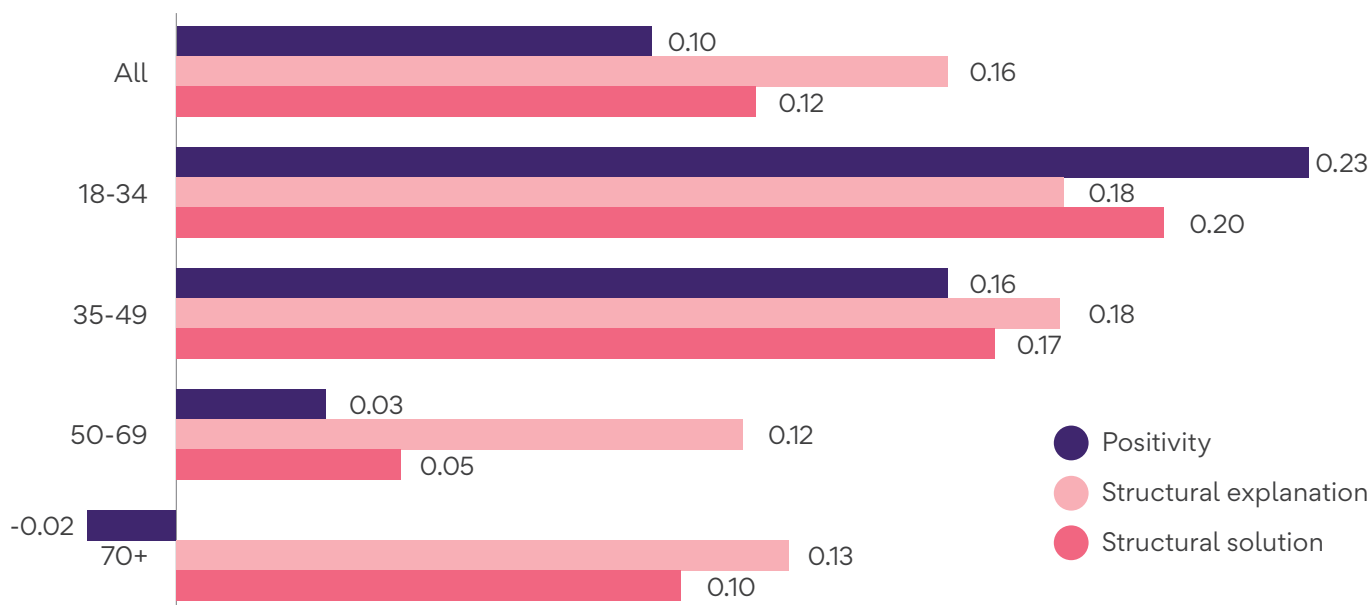


The messages designed with the primary purpose of communicating a structural explanation perform best at driving a structural view of ageing, more so than messages designed to communicate positivity (as to be expected) and, interestingly, a structural solution. This may indicate that the general public are more receptive to understanding existing structural issues related to ageing than being ready to understand what the solution to these issues looks like.[33] Combining the messages could rely on the 'explanation' to move people and shift their views, while the 'solution' might be the practical element that fills in what needs to be done. Furthermore, from the qualitative focus groups, we found that the public did not like, or could not conceive, the idea of 'designing' our society – finding it unachievable and not credible. While the word 'design' was therefore excluded from the structural solution messages tested in the survey, the same meaning is present, for example, 'organise and fund work, housing, healthcare and our local communities'.

However, messages designed to communicate positivity are more effective at driving a structural view amongst those aged 18-24, again potentially reflecting the readiness of this age group to be as receptive to messages on structural aspects of ageing.

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33    This is consistent with the findings from previous research projects. For example, in the Communicating Equality report, conducted by Savanta ComRes for Equally Ours, we observed that respondents found it easier to understand – and were therefore more receptive to – concepts related to inequality affecting individuals than concepts related to the structural aspects of inequality. This is logical given that individualist narratives are dominant in the UK. It serves to highlight the challenge we face for achieving social change, and the need to provide alternative narratives at scale and over time.

In contrast, the messages with the primary purpose of communicating a structural solution tend to drive a structural view of ageing to a lesser extent.

It appears that messages with the primary purpose of communicating positivity may drive peoples' views of ageing towards an individualist view, and away from a structural view of ageing. Messages designed to drive more positive sentiment about ageing are particularly unlikely to drive a structural view amongst those aged 50-69 and 70+. This highlights both the importance of using message components in combination – in the first instance, coupling explanations with solutions and in the second coupling messages designed to drive positivity with those designed to drive a structural understanding – and of offering concrete and credible solutions (in line with framing good practice) to increase support for structural solutions. This is explored further in the conclusions and recommendations section.
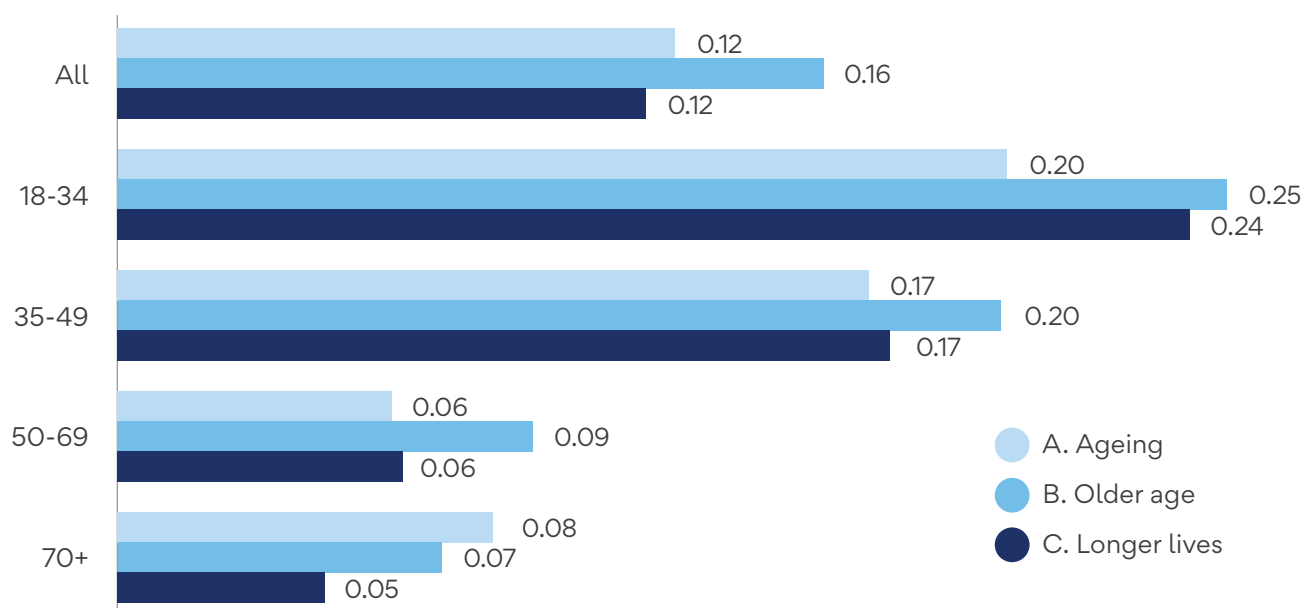
Average scores for how the values drive a structural view of ageing (model 2)
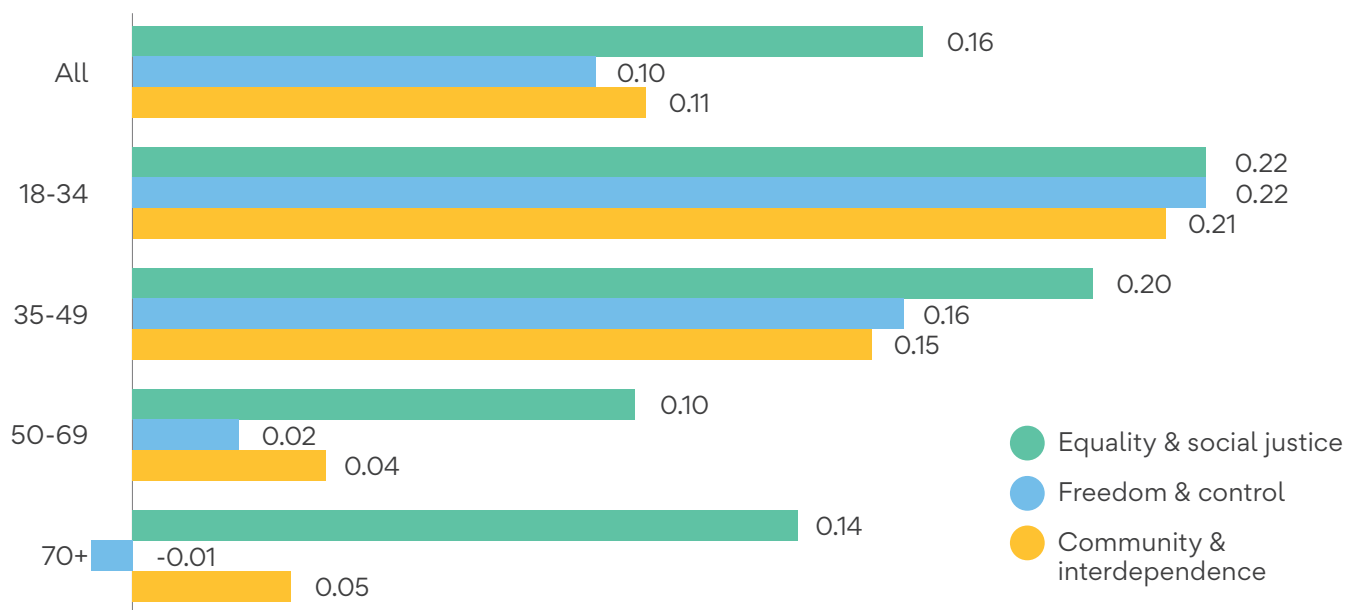


As one would expect, messages designed to invoke equality and social justice are most likely to drive a structural view of ageing, compared to messages invoking freedom and control and community and interdependence (which were stronger at driving positivity, as seen in the results in model 1). This trend becomes more pronounced with age: all three values are equally likely to drive a structural view amongst 18-24s, but equality and social justice values become an increasingly important driver for the other age bands, especially for those aged 50-69 and 70+.

Average scores for each reframing route in driving a structural view of ageing (model 2)



**All**
- 0.12
- 0.16
- 0.12

**18-34**
- 0.20
- 0.25
- 0.24

**35-49**
- 0.17
- 0.20
- 0.17

**50-69**
- 0.06
- 0.09
- 0.06

**70+**
- 0.08
- 0.07
- 0.05

A. Ageing
B. Older age
C. Longer lives

Messages that relate to the routes to reframe older age (B) perform well at driving a structural view of ageing, compared to those designed to reframe ageing (A) or longer lives (C). This pattern is consistent across all age bands too, although the messages to reframe longer lives (C) are also effective amongst those 18-24s, and those for reframing ageing (A) are also effective amongst those aged 70+.

The message that performs best at driving a structural view of ageing overall is message 11, designed to communicate a structural explanation and to invoke equality and social justice values. It has also been designed to reframe ageing (route B). "Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could."

However, message 4 also performs well – also designed to communicate a structural explanation and invoke equality and social justice values: "Things like poorly designed services, an economy that doesn't work for everyone, and discriminatory attitudes mean that some of us are less likely to be able to age well than others."

When comparing how the messages perform among the four age groups, clear frontrunners emerge:

– The top performing message in driving a structural view amongst 18-24s invokes the values of freedom and control and community and interdependence, rather than equality and social justice which is seen to be a more effective at driving a structural view for the other age groups. Message 10: "It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large." This message, however, does not perform well in driving a structural view amongst the other age groups. Message 10 was designed to communicate positivity and was also the message that was most effective at driving positivity amongst this age group. This may support the hypothesis that this age band may be most receptive to messages related to positivity overall, and may be less able to appreciate the impact of structural aspects on experiences of ageing.

– Message 11, designed to provide a structural explanation and invoke equality and social justice values, is most effective at shifting both 35-49 and 50-69 year olds towards a structural view of ageing "Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could." (This message performed well across all age groups, except for those aged 70+.)

– Among 70+ year olds, message 3 (designed to communicate a structural explanation and invoke equality and social justice values) stands out as the most effective at driving a structural view: "Because of the way our society currently works, some of us are more likely than others to be able to age well." This message performs well for all age groups, although less so for those aged 50-69.

## Message performance in driving a structural view of ageing (model 2)

Note: Messages in **bold text** are designed to communicate **a structural view**.

| Reframing route | Primary purpose* | Values invoked | | | # | Message component | STRUCTURAL: Regression coefficients | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Equality & social justice | Freedom & control | Community & interdependence | | | All | 18-34 | 35-49 | 50-69 | 70+ |
| A. Ageing | | | | | 1 | Ageing is living. Across our lives we have different experiences, opportunities and challenges, and we contribute and need different things. | 0.06 | 0.21 | 0.13 | 0.01 | -0.12 |
| | | | | | 2 | Ageing is living – a lifelong process of growth. Whatever our age, we all want good health, purpose and connection with others. | 0.04 | 0.18 | 0.13 | -0.04 | -0.07 |
| | | | | | 3 | **Because of the way our society currently works, some of us are more likely than others to be able to age well.** | 0.19 | 0.20 | 0.22 | 0.12 | 0.27 |
| | | | | | 4 | **Things like poorly designed services, an economy that doesn't work for everyone, and discriminatory attitudes mean that some of us are less likely to be able to age well than others.** | 0.21 | 0.22 | 0.22 | 0.18 | 0.15 |
| | | | | | 5 | **Our experience of ageing can be improved if we invest and work together to change the way our society is organised.** | 0.13 | 0.21 | 0.18 | 0.05 | 0.15 |
| | | | | | 6 | **If we improve the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities, we can all have the best chance possible to lead healthy, purposeful and fulfilling lives.** | 0.15 | 0.21 | 0.18 | 0.08 | 0.17 |
| | | | | | 7 | **When our society enables us all to have freedom and control over our own lives, we have the chance to live the best lives we can, whatever our age.** | 0.08 | 0.16 | 0.17 | -0.02 | 0.05 |
| | | | | | 8 | We all need support at different times across our lives, and we all want to live in communities where we look out for one another. | 0.14 | 0.22 | 0.14 | 0.11 | 0.07 |

*Primary purpose: ● Positivity ● Structural explanation ● Structural solution

| Group | # | Statement | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **B. Older age** | 9 | As we age, many of us report a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing. Our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute in later life. | 0.10 | 0.22 | 0.18 | 0.01 | 0.02 |
| | 10 | It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large. | 0.15 | 0.30 | 0.18 | 0.09 | 0.04 |
| | 11 | **Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could.** | 0.23 | 0.23 | 0.30 | 0.21 | 0.09 |
| | 12 | **Because of the way our society currently works, some of us aren't given the same opportunities to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could.** | 0.17 | 0.28 | 0.19 | 0.07 | 0.12 |
| | 13 | **Our experience of later life can be improved for us all if we change the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities.** | 0.14 | 0.22 | 0.16 | 0.08 | 0.10 |
| **C. Longer lives** | 14 | Our longer lives are an opportunity – for the economy, for society and for us all as individuals. | 0.14 | 0.26 | 0.19 | 0.08 | 0.04 |
| | 15 | **Most of us will live longer than the generations before us. If we organise and fund work, housing, healthcare and our communities better, we can all benefit from our longer lives.** | 0.10 | 0.22 | 0.16 | 0.05 | 0.06 |

Base: All respondents (n=2,185): 18-34 (n= 674), 35-49 (n=535), 50-69 (n=663), 70+ (n=313)

*Primary purpose:  ● Positivity    ● Structural explanation    ● Structural solution

## Model 1 and 2 combined: Which messages drive positive sentiment and a structural view of ageing?

Overall message performance for driving a positive sentiment towards (model 1) and a structural view of ageing (model 2)

Note: The score for the **top-performing message** within each primary purpose in **bold text**.

| Reframing route | Primary purpose* | Values invoked | | | # | Message component | Total: model 1 + model 2 | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Equality & social justice | Freedom & control | Community & interdependence | | | All | 18-34 | 35-49 | 50-69 | 70+ |
| B | Positivity | | Freedom & control | Community & interdependence | 10 | It's possible for us all to live meaningful and purposeful later lives, participating in and contributing to the workplace, community and society at large. | 0.35 | 0.60 | 0.36 | 0.24 | 0.18 |
| B | Positivity | | Freedom & control | | 9 | As we age, many of us report a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing. Our diverse life experience and skills, perspective and resilience mean we have much to contribute in later life. | 0.30 | 0.46 | 0.37 | 0.19 | 0.21 |
| A | | | | Community & interdependence | 8 | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us are more likely than others to be able to age well. | 0.29 | 0.39 | 0.32 | 0.23 | 0.25 |
| C | Positivity | | Freedom & control | | 14 | Our longer lives are an opportunity – for the economy, for society and for us all as individuals. | 0.29 | 0.49 | 0.39 | 0.21 | 0.07 |
| A | Positivity | | Freedom & control | Community & interdependence | 1 | Ageing is living. Across our lives we have different experiences, opportunities and challenges, and we contribute and need different things. | 0.20 | 0.40 | 0.26 | 0.12 | -0.02 |
| A | Positivity | | Freedom & control | Community & interdependence | 2 | Ageing is living – a lifelong process of growth. Whatever our age, we all want good health, purpose and connection with others. | 0.11 | 0.28 | 0.21 | -0.03 | 0.05 |
| A | Structural solution | Equality and social justice | | | 3 | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us are more likely than others to be able to age well. | 0.30 | 0.37 | 0.30 | 0.21 | 0.36 |
| B | Structural solution | Equality and social justice | | | 11 | Because of things like discriminatory attitudes, poorly designed services, and an economy that doesn't work for everyone, many of us aren't able to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could. | 0.29 | 0.37 | 0.37 | 0.25 | 0.06 |

**Reframing route**

A  Reframe ageing

B  Reframe older age

C  Reframe longer lives

**Primary purpose**

● Positivity

● Structural explanation

● Structural solution

**Value set invoked**

● Equality and social justice

● Freedom and control

● Community & interdependence

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **B** | | | | | 12 | Because of the way our society currently works, some of us aren't given the same opportunities to live as healthy and purposeful later lives as we could. | 0.29 | 0.52 | 0.26 | 0.09 | 0.30 |
| **A** | | | | | 4 | Things like poorly designed services, an economy that doesn't work for everyone, and discriminatory attitudes mean that some of us are less likely to be able to age well than others. | 0.25 | 0.40 | 0.23 | 0.17 | 0.14 |
| **A** | | | | | 5 | Our experience of ageing can be improved if we invest and work together to change the way our society is organised. | 0.27 | 0.39 | 0.29 | 0.20 | 0.25 |
| **A** | | | | | 6 | If we improve the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities, we can all have the best chance possible to lead healthy, purposeful and fulfilling lives. | 0.26 | 0.35 | 0.25 | 0.20 | 0.28 |
| **B** | | | | | 13 | Our experience of later life can be improved for us all if we change the way we organise and fund things like work, housing, healthcare and our local communities. | 0.26 | 0.36 | 0.26 | 0.23 | 0.18 |
| **A** | | | | | 7 | When our society enables us all to have freedom and control over our own lives, we have the chance to live the best lives we can, whatever our age. | 0.25 | 0.34 | 0.37 | 0.14 | 0.19 |
| **C** | | | | | 15 | Most of us will live longer than the generations before us. If we organise and fund work, housing, healthcare and our communities better, we can all benefit from our longer lives. | 0.19 | 0.41 | 0.23 | 0.11 | 0.06 |

# Centre for Ageing Better

Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
**Let's make ageing better.**

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