

# Supporting Over 50s Back to Work

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Understanding the  
Local Picture

Learning and Work Institute

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# 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.

We are a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and part of the government's What Works Network.

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## Learning and Work Institute

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy, research and development organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

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# Introduction

This document from Learning and Work Institute (L&W) presents the findings from a review of the labour market situation, barriers to work and progression, and the support available to the over 50s. The focus is on four local areas: Bristol, plus the three combined areas of Liverpool City Region, the West Midlands and the West of England.

The research set out in this document used a combination of methods:

- Document review of relevant literature and evidence related to nominated local services in the four local areas;
- Quantitative analysis of available local and national labour market statistics; and
- Qualitative interviews with local nominated service representatives

Through reviewing the types of provision available to older job seekers, and examining the barriers faced by the over 50s the document concludes by setting out a series of recommendations for any forthcoming pilot projects trialling new approaches to employment support.

The next section of this report sets out the labour market context for the over 50s through an analysis of a range of labour market statistics and a consideration of the barriers that older people face when seeking to re-enter work or progress within work. The subsequent section considers the support landscape for the over 50s. The support provided in the four study areas is reviewed. The key features of that support are analysed and the stages of support are assessed. The final section of the main report sets out the key conclusions from the research and the resulting recommendations for any future pilot provision. Annexes set out the detail of the statistics which are reviewed in the context section and the details of the models of support in the four study areas.

# The Context: People over 50 in the labour market

More people aged over 50 are in paid work than ever before. Participation and success in the labour market can arise in many forms. This may be an older person who has gained a promotion to a higher level for the first time, people who have made frequent career changes – whether voluntarily or as a result of external circumstances, or individuals who have returned to work after time out of the labour market.

Participation in the labour market can deliver a wide range of benefits to people's lives. Working provides a regular income and help individuals achieve financial stability and good living standards. People aged over 50 may also find their work enjoyable and fulfilling, with some experiencing the best times of their careers. In some workplaces this is delivered through finding a value placed on their skills and experience which is beyond monetary gain.

Previous research by DWP and others has shown that the UK labour market needs the participation of as many people aged 50+ as possible, partly to make up for lower numbers of younger people, and for their own economic situation as the state pension age (SPA) increases<sup>1</sup>. This demonstrates the economic and social importance of ensuring that over 50s can actively participate in the labour market.

However, evidence suggests that – whether in or out of work – some over 50s face many barriers to successful participation. For example, workers in industries which rely on strength and fitness, or the ability to adapt to technological change, may find themselves no longer able to work in their original trade<sup>2</sup>. Losing a job when aged 50 and over is more likely to lead to long-term worklessness relative to job loss earlier in life.

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1 DWP 2017 Fuller Working Lives - a partnership approach [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/587654/fuller-working-lives-a-partnership-approach.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/587654/fuller-working-lives-a-partnership-approach.pdf)

2 D. Parsons and K. Walsh (2019) Employment support for over 50s. Rapid Evidence Review. Ageing Better, DWP, GMCA

Over 50s that are out of work can face many obstacles to finding employment, preventing them from moving into work and sustaining the benefits deliverable to those in work. This includes; caring for older relatives, partners or peers; health concerns; lack of flexibility at work; supporting older children; debt; as well as job-related obstacles<sup>3</sup>.

There are support landscape gaps: In the past there has been anecdotal evidence of people over 55 being side-lined or ignored by Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and not required to look for work as they waited for their pensions, but the introduction of new benefits systems, including Universal Credit (UC) and the raising of the state pension age have changed attitudes. In addition, where support is offered it has often proved to be less effective than for younger age groups. Outcomes from the Work Programme were lower for those aged over 50 than for younger age groups.

In order to understand over 50s' experience of the labour market, it is important to consider the circumstances and experiences of individuals across their lives, not merely their work lives.

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### Labour market for the over 50s

There have been recent increases and changes in the patterns of participation of over 50s in the labour market. DWP reports that there have never been so many people over 50 taking part in the labour market, and unemployment in this group is low and falling. This conclusion is valid up until the onset of the Coronavirus crisis and the statistics below all relate to periods before the onset of this crisis. There is currently next to no official data available which covers periods since the onset of the crisis. Given this we have drawn together the data and research which provides an indication of the initial and expected impact of the crisis on the labour market in Box 1. In contrast with recent years, the conclusion is that the UK is expected to suffer a protracted period of high levels of unemployment.

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3 See for example: J. Watts and S. McNair, 2015 Midlife Career Review pilot projects Final report. <https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/MLCR-Final-Report.pdf>  
L. Grattan and A. Scott 2018 The 100 year life. London. Bloomsbury, CfAB / ILC

**Box 1: Potential Labour Market Impact of the Coronavirus**

The various statistics portrayed in this report relate to periods before the onset of the Corona Virus. The current state of the labour market will be very different. L&W’s own research<sup>4</sup> suggests that around five years of employment growth were wiped out in the first month of the crisis, and that the UK unemployment rate had reached 6% by the end of March compared to the 4% reported in the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) statistics published on 21 April 2020, which pertain to the three months December 2019 to February 2020.

The three-month January to March 2020 figures for job vacancies also released on 21 April by the ONS show some of the impact of the pandemic as they cover all of March and are down after three months of rises. The single month vacancy numbers for March show an impact even more strongly with total vacancies down by 10 percent compared to March 2019. Accommodation and hospitality, one of the sectors most affected by the lockdown measures, showed an annual fall in vacancy levels of 30 percent. Research by the Institute for Employment Studies<sup>5</sup> estimates that job vacancies fell by 42 percent between mid-March and mid-April 2020.

Unemployment is likely to rise further. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) released an economic scenario on 14 April 2020<sup>6</sup> which suggested that economic output could fall by 35 percent in the second quarter of this year with unemployment rising to 10 percent or 3.4 million in the quarter. This scenario assumes a three-month lockdown followed by three months when the lockdown measures are partially lifted. The scenario assumes a very rapid economic bounce back with GDP regaining its pre-outbreak level by the end of this year. As a consequence, the OBR envisage the unemployment rate falling rapidly to 7.0 percent by the end of this year and 5.5 percent by the end of 2021. The consensus amongst independent economic forecasters is very similar on unemployment to this OBR scenario. The average of new forecasts released this month projected the unemployment rate at 6.9 percent at the end of 2020 and 5.5 percent at the end of 2021. The Resolution Foundation released its own set of economic scenarios on 16 April 2020<sup>7</sup> based on the lockdown lasting three, six or twelve months. The results of the three-month scenario are similar to the OBR, but the six and twelve scenarios show unemployment averaging almost 5 million (14.1 percent) and over 7 million (20.8 percent) in 2021 respectively.

4 Evans, S. and Dromey, J., (2020) “Coronavirus and the labour market: Impacts and challenges”, Learning and Work Institute Report  
 5 Wilson, T., Papaoutsaki, D., Cockett, J., and Williams, M. (2020), “Real-time vacancy analysis: Early findings on changes in vacancy levels by local area and job type”, Institute for Employment Studies Briefing.  
 6 Office for Budget Responsibility (2020), “OBR coronavirus reference scenario”.  
 7 Hughes, R., Leslie, J., McCurdy, C., Pacitti, C., Smith, J., and Tomlinson, D. (2020), “Doing more of what it takes: Next steps in the economic response to coronavirus”.

In our view the rapid bounce back in the economy and unemployment levels, envisaged in the OBR scenario is overly optimistic. The history of economic recessions is one of prolonged reductions in economic activity not the rapid rebound assumed by the OBR. Furthermore, the recovery in unemployment levels is likely to lag that of output. The initial needs of rising production are likely to be met by formerly furloughed workers and not by hiring unemployed people. The Great Recession of 2008-09 engendered a much lower rise in unemployment than had been expected on the basis of previous UK recessions. However, even in this case it took over 7 years for the unemployment rate to return to its pre-crisis levels. The OBR scenario envisages this happening in 3 to 4 years. In our view a protracted period of high unemployment for the next few years is likely.

The above sets out the likely prospect for the overall labour market. Within this depressed labour market environment, the experience of over 50s may differ from other age groups. A survey undertaken in late March 2020<sup>8</sup> provides some insights into the initial effects of the Corona Virus and the associated lockdown measures. A higher percentage of workers aged up to 34 had worked fewer hours in the last week than workers aged 35 and above. The impact here was lowest for workers aged 50-54, but a similar percentage of workers aged 55 and over experienced a fall in working hours as workers in their forties. The percentage of workers in their twenties who earned less in the last week was also higher than for older age groups. Overall a similar percentage of workers aged 50 and over experienced lower earnings in the previous week as workers in their forties. Finally, there was a notable U-shaped relationship between the proportion of individuals who reported becoming unemployed within the previous four weeks “definitely” or “probably” as a result of the Coronavirus as a percentage of those employed in the previous four weeks. This proportion was lowest for those aged 45-49 but for those aged 50, it was similar to that for workers aged 25-39.

Beyond these immediate impacts, research has looked at workers who are most at risk of negative labour market outcomes due to the fact that they work in ‘lockdown sectors’ i.e. those most affected by the Government’s lockdown measures<sup>9</sup>. L&W’s own research<sup>10</sup> indicates that young people aged up to 24 are much more likely than older aged groups to work in a lockdown sector but that there is very little variation in the proportion of workers in lock

8 Adams-Prassl, A., Boneva, T., Golin, M. and Rauh, C. (2020), “Inequality in the impact of the coronavirus shock: New survey evidence for the UK”, Cambridge-INET Working Paper Series No: 2020/10.

9 Lockdown sectors have been defined as non-food retail which are not pharmacies, passenger transport, hospitality and accommodation, travel services, childcare services, arts and leisure, personal care excluding funeral and related services, and domestic services.

10 Evans, S. and Dromey, J., (2020), op cit



down sectors for workers aged 35 and above. These conclusions are very similar to those reported by the Institute for Fiscal Studies<sup>11</sup>.

The conclusion that comes out of the above is that while younger people in their twenties are more likely to be adversely impacted by the Coronavirus, there is no simple negative relationship between age and the expected impact of the Coronavirus on individuals' labour market prospects. The negative impact on the over 50s will probably be similar to that for workers in their thirties and forties. Beyond these expected impacts, the longer-term recovery needs to be considered. The experience of the years following the Great Recession of 2008/09 is that long term unemployment fell much less rapidly for those aged over 50 than it did for younger age groups.

Annex 1 contains a large number of graphs setting out the labour market position in England and the four case study areas. Below the main points are set out.

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## Population projections by age

Population projection data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that presently those aged 50-64 make up 19 per cent of the population in England as a whole (equivalent to 10.7 million people). Importantly, this means those aged 50-64 make up 30 per cent of the working age population and therefore (if in employment) make a considerable contribution towards to the economic health of the country. Projections show that the proportion of those aged 50-64 will fall slightly to 18.2 per cent by 2029 in England but will still make up 30 per cent of the working population. All other areas are also showing a small drop in the proportion aged 50-64. (See Figure A.1)

Just over 18 per cent of the national population are aged 65 or over (equivalent to 10.4 million people) – see Figure A.2. Projections show that this proportion is likely to rise to 21 per cent by 2029 for England as a whole, with other areas showing the same upward trend. This is equivalent to another 2 million people aged 65 or over by 2029. This group will still have an impact on labour market participation because of changes to the retirement age, and the rising tendency for people to work beyond the state pension age.

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<sup>11</sup> Joyce, R. and Xu, X. (2020), "Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed?". IFS Briefing Note BN278.

The age at which an individual can begin claiming their state pension has increased in three-month brackets depending on their date of birth. Those closest to retirement have seen the smallest increase, while younger workers can now expect to wait until they are 68 before they can claim.

While women have been subject to state pension age increases since April 2010 – after the Pensions Act 2011 brought their pension age up from 60 to 65, in line with men – this will be the first increase for men since the current system was introduced in 1948.

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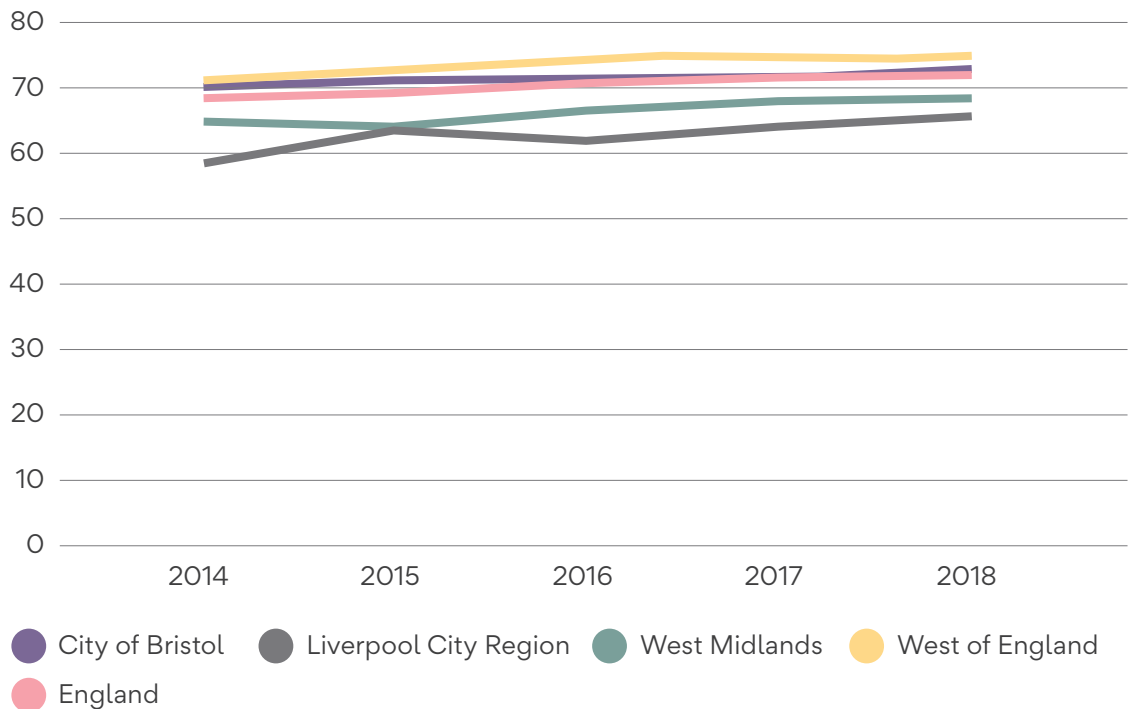
### Employment rates by age

Employment rates in England are at their highest since the last recession. (See Figure A.3) They have been rising steadily for all age groups. For those aged 50-64, the employment rate in 2009 was around 65 per cent, rising to 73 per cent in 2019.

The West of England had the highest employment rate for those aged 50-64 at 75%, three percentage points above the rate for England as a whole at 72%. Of the other areas, Liverpool City Region had the lowest employment rate for those aged 50-64 at 66% (see Figure A.4).

Employment rates in general have been rising for all the geographical areas researched – see Figure 1. A generally strong local labour market is important for the job prospects of the over 50s. In general, providers interviewed in the south-west were quite optimistic about the labour market, which was described as ‘buoyant’. Unemployment is low in this area in contrast to parts of Bristol. One adviser noted that when there are more jobs in their local area, it impacts positively ‘on people aged 50 to 60, because those that may not have been considered before for jobs, are now considered.’ This buoyancy in the labour market helps move older workers closer to the head of the queue for jobs.

Figure 1: Employment rates by area, 2014 to 2018 (ONS)



Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS

### Employment rate: by gender

Figures A.5 to A.8 show employment rates by gender. According to the ONS, both male and female employment rates have been rising, with female employment rates rising at a faster rate. However, despite this rise, the employment rate in England for women aged 50-64 is still 10 percentage points lower than the rate for men (67 per cent compared to 77 per cent).

Employment rates for men range from 78% in the West of England to 70% in Liverpool City Region. For women the rates range from 73% in the West of England to 62% in Liverpool City Region.

For women, caring responsibilities have typically been a major reason for older women’s lower employment rates. The Resolution Foundation has noted that people with caring responsibilities are significantly less likely than those without caring responsibilities to be in employment and more likely to be ‘economically inactive’ and that carers are disproportionately likely to be women and to be over 50.<sup>12</sup> The same report highlighted poor health and caring as “two of the major factors that push older people out of the labour market.”

12 Unfinished Business: Barriers and opportunities for older workers, Giselle Cory, Resolution Foundation, 2012, p. 34, [http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/media/downloads/Unfinished\\_Business\\_FINAL\\_2.pdf](http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/media/downloads/Unfinished_Business_FINAL_2.pdf)

Above we noted the importance of a generally buoyant labour market for the employment prospects of the over 50s, but other issues are also important here. For example there can be good transport links in cities, and this is positive support for jobs and particularly important for older people as it appears from this research that many older people are seeking work close to home.

For over 50s the jobs they find can be characterised by low pay, low skill, precariousness or all three. Sometimes in search of more flexible working, older employees change jobs in order to take on lower level positions which entail less responsibility and therefore attract lower wages. This is particularly true for women, and those men, who take on additional caring responsibilities, for example, for an older relative or partner. Other over 50s may just want to change in order to have an improved work-life balance.

Not all older people who make such changes in their lives are aware of the impact it will have on their incomes in later life and may not be making sufficient payments towards pensions or even keeping up sufficient National Insurance payments. The Fuller Working Lives team at DWP have highlighted this in their work.

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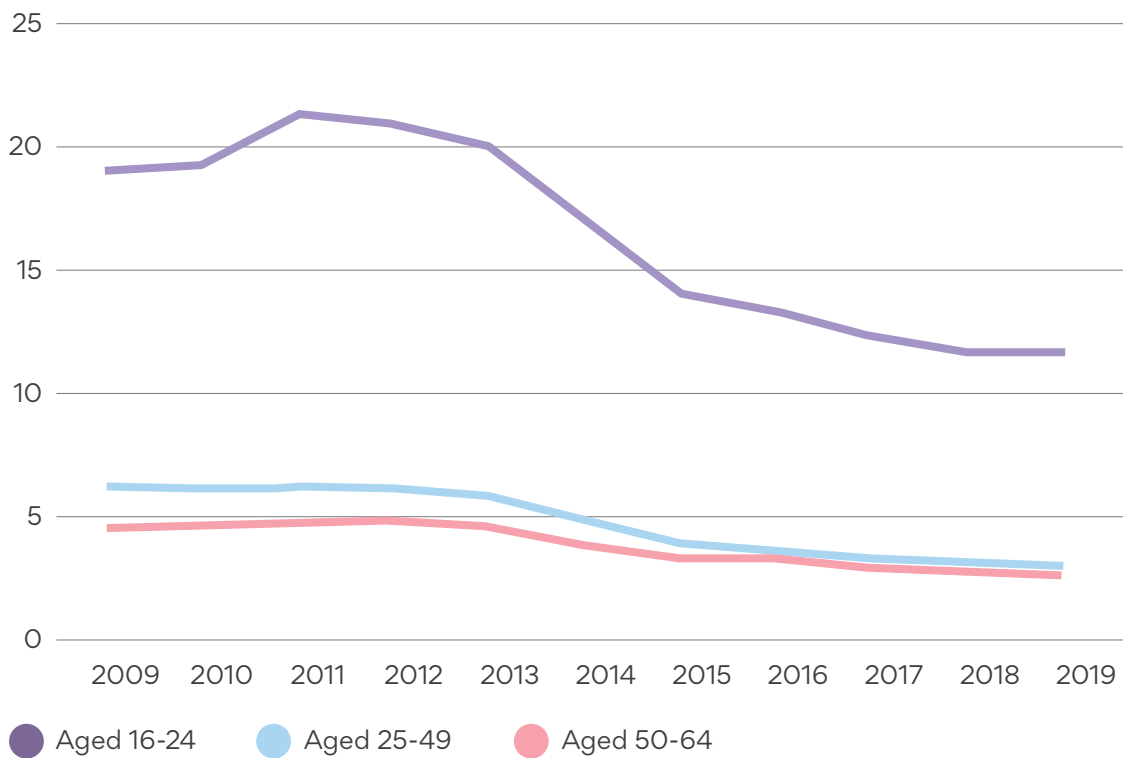
### **Worklessness**

Individuals who are workless are categorised as either unemployed or economically inactive. Unemployed people are those who are both searching for work and available to start work. If people are not in work and do not meet either or both of these search or availability requirements then they are considered to be economically inactive. Unemployed people are generally considered to be closer to moving into work than the economically inactive because of their job search activity and availability to start work.

Figure 2 shows that the proportion of those aged 50-64 that are unemployed has remained at five per cent or below for the last 10 years. The trend is downwards – as it is for other age groups. Data on unemployment when broken down by age is only reliable at the national level. Hence, this data is not available for the four case study areas.

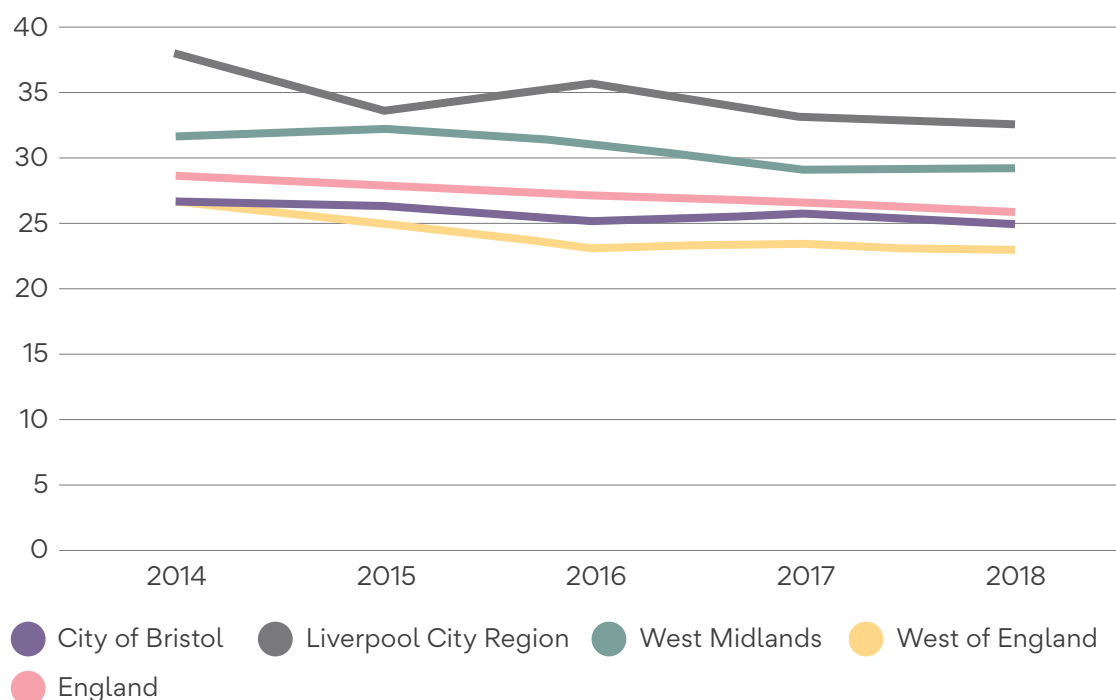
There are currently (2018/19) around 225,000 people aged 50-64 that are classified as unemployed in England. Figure 11 shows unemployment rates by area – these are modelled i.e. statistical techniques have been used to provide rates below the national level. However, these are only available for the working age population aged 16-64 year olds but shows that overall unemployment rates have been falling for all areas. Currently, the West Midlands has the highest unemployment rate, followed by Liverpool City Region which has seen a significant drop in unemployment since 2014.

Figure 2: Unemployment rates by age, England, trends: 2009 to 2019 (ONS)



There are considerable regional variations in economic inactivity across the four study areas: we found that nearly a third (32%) of those aged 50-64 in Liverpool City Region are economically inactive compared to 26% for England as a whole. The West of England has the lowest economic inactivity rate for those aged 50-64 at 23%. (Figure A.10). Inactivity rates have been falling over the last five years.

**Figure 3: Proportion who are economically inactive, age 50-64, trends: 2014 to 2018 (ONS)**



Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS

There are many reasons why people over 50 experience worklessness. Many people are now workless because of redundancy, sometimes because of industrial decline, sectoral changes or changing skill needs. The Job Centre manager interviewed noted that when extensive redundancies happen in certain sectors, this can result in a significant number of older employees losing their jobs. These individuals have often been in employment for decades and their initial reaction is one of shock, with no understanding of how to approach finding a job.

Additionally, there is a sizeable group of people who retire from one job but for a range of reasons seek to re-enter work. These reasons range from financial need to lack of socialisation and from mild boredom to economic necessity.

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### **Gender Differences in Worklessness**

The fall in economic inactivity is mostly due to a drop in inactive rates for women, whereas rates for men have remained static. One reason for this is the equalisation of pension ages with women now having higher state pension ages. In addition, for some women, a lack of awareness of the new state pension age has meant that they need to find work to meet the gap in income and may be re-entering the labour market after a long period of time.

Despite the drop-in inactivity rates for women the overall rates are still high: for example, 37% of women aged 50-64 in Liverpool City Region are economically inactive compared to 31% for England as a whole. Economic inactivity rates for women also remain higher than those for men, for example, in Liverpool City Region economic inactivity rates for men are 9 percentage points lower at 28%. The largest difference between male and female inactivity rates is 12 percentage points (23% v 35%) and for England as whole the difference is 10 percentage points (21% v 31%).

Research for the Department for Work and Pensions<sup>13</sup>, which looked at people aged between 50 and state pension age who were not in employment, found that, for both men and women, this was most commonly due to health or disability (given as their main reason for not looking for paid work). But the second most common reason for men was that they had retired or were financially secure or simply did not want work. For women, the second most common reason was that they were looking after their family or home. As we might expect those at most risk of non-participation are low skilled people with least previous experience of working and of education.

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## Part-time / full-time employment

Nationally, the part time employment rate of those aged 50-64 has remained at 28 per cent for the last five years – see Figure 4. Figure A.11 shows that part time rates are lower for those aged 25-49 – averaging 21 per cent and higher for those aged 16-24 with an average rate of 36 per cent. Bristol City has the lowest part time rate for those aged 50-64. At 24% and the West of England has the highest rate at 28%.

Older workers may want to carry on working but not at the same pace or for the same number of hours per week. There are many reasons why older people want to keep working. They could be financial, such as the need to boost their income for a potentially long retirement, or to continue supporting younger or older members of the family.

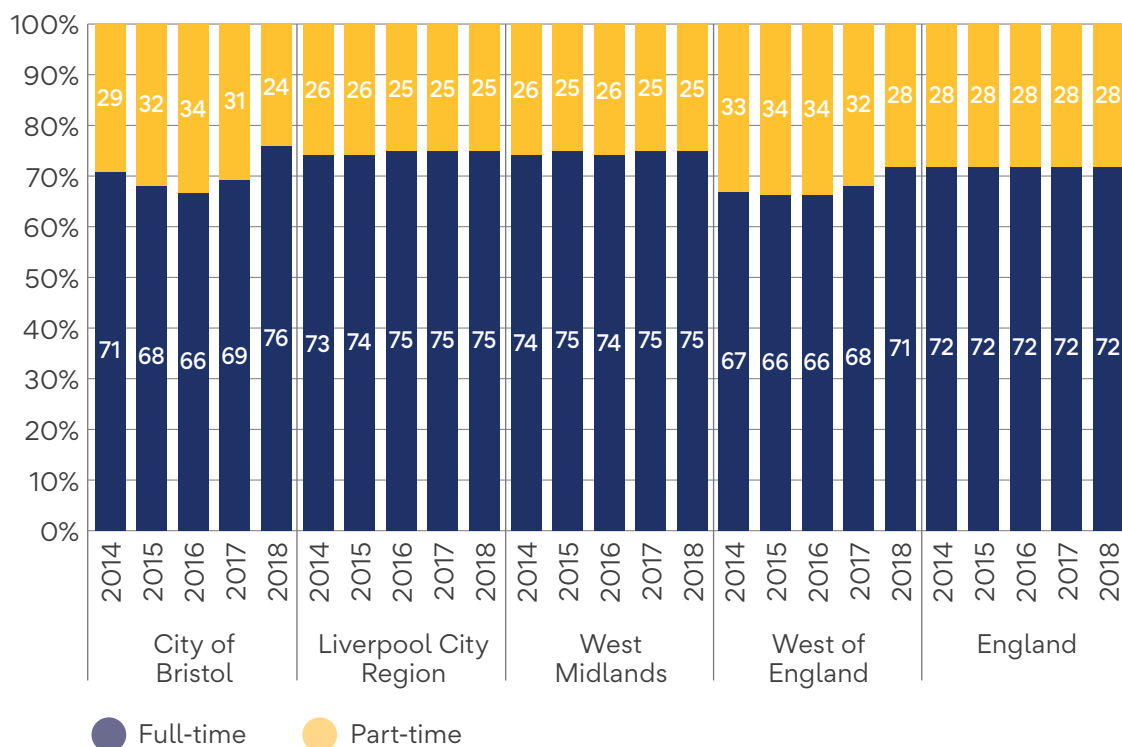
So, by staying in work longer, older people are less likely to fall into poverty and suffer from social isolation, both of which impact on their health as well as their quality of life. Older workers frequently have health conditions and caring responsibilities, which can cause them to exit full-time employment. These are reasons why they might need to work a bit less, or in a different way, therefore, flexible working can help people work for longer and overcome the above obstacles.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Factors Affecting the Labour Market Participation of Older Workers, Alun Humphrey, Paddy Costigan, Kevin Pickering, Nina Stratford and Matt Barnes, NatCen and IFS for DWP, Research Report 200, 2003, <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2003-2004/rrep200.pdf>

14 Stewart, Emma, Timewise, “Older workers need flexible working – and employers need to provide it”, 2019. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/older-workers-need-flexible-working/>

**Figure 4: Proportion who work full or part time by area, aged 50-64, trends: 2014 to 2018 (ONS)**



Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

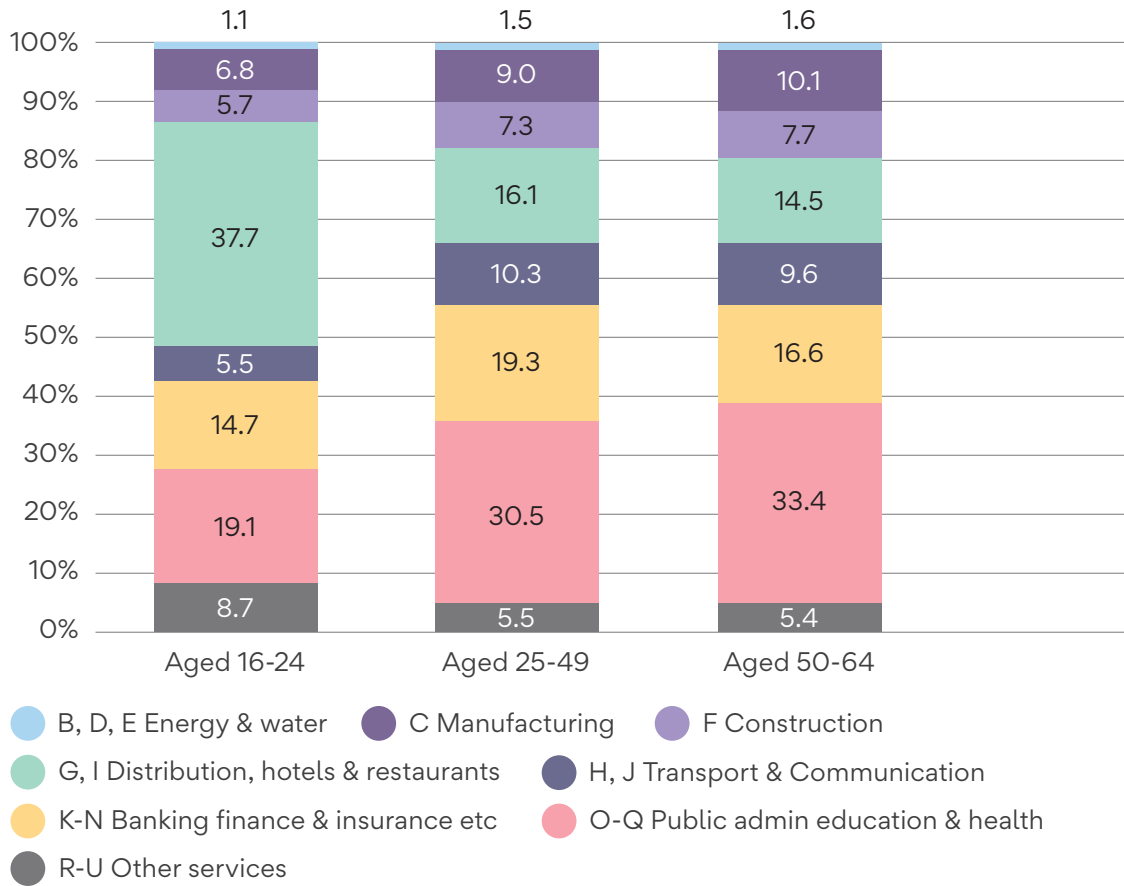
## Employment by industry and age

Nationally, around a third of those aged 50-64 work in the public sector, including health and education. A fuller breakdown of employment by industry is presented in Figure 5. The proportions in each industry, for those aged 50-64, have remained virtually unchanged over the last five years.

As can be seen below in Figure 6, the geographical areas in this research all have high proportions in the public sector, with Liverpool City Region the highest, employing just over 41% in this sector. The financial and hospitality sectors are also important, with both employing around 30% of those aged 50-64. However, the hospitality sector is dominated by younger workers as this sector has many lower paid entry level occupations as well as offering more flexible working in terms of evening and weekend hours – something some older workers may also find useful. Nationally 10 per cent are still employed in the manufacturing sector but this is set to fall with further automation, and many will require retraining in new technologies if they want to stay in this sector.

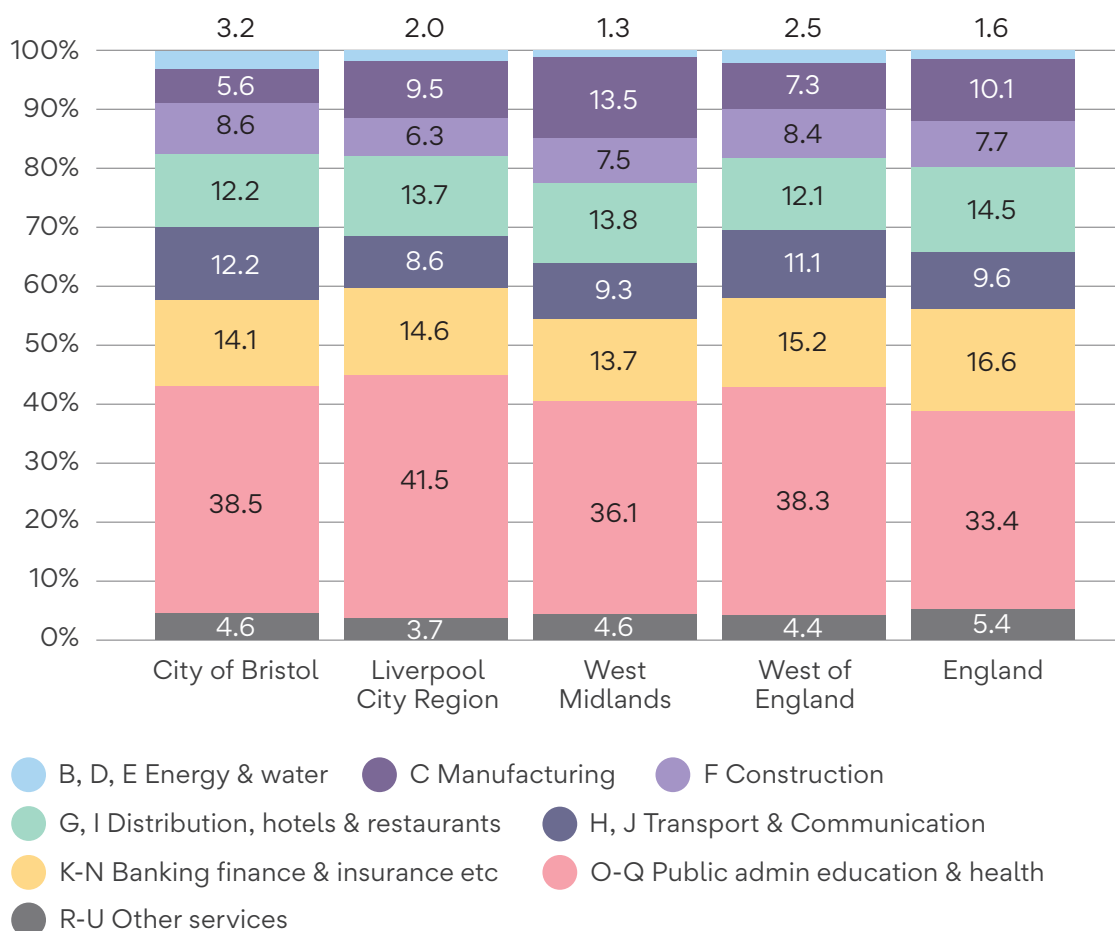


Figure 5: Employment by industry and age, England, 2018



Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS

**Figure 6: Employment by industry, aged 50-64, by area, 2018**



Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS

Looking to the future, there are some growth areas in the labour market which might attract and be suitable for people over 50. One adviser mentioned that their area was ‘quite lucky, we have quite a lot of employers, especially new employers with new estates coming to the area suggesting a range of potential employment opportunities. Interviewees most frequently mentioned hospitality, caring and cleaning in this context. However, these opportunities are not without drawbacks. They are not generally very well-paid options and suggest that many older workers are not able to make the most of any prior experience. In addition, for those workers who are no longer very physically able, these sectors may well not be suitable as they are characterised by quite physical work.

### The challenge for industry

Those industries at the top of the table below (Table 3) face the biggest challenge because they have a relatively high number and proportion of their workforce aged over 50 as well as experiencing a relatively high drop-off in the number of people employed at older ages. They are therefore

reliant on older workers but are relatively bad at retaining them. These industry groups include public administration and defence, education, manufacturing and health and social work. High replacement demand in these areas will represent a large cost to the organisations who will have to recruit and train new employees. In contrast, the industries at the bottom of the table, such as real estate and arts, entertainment and recreation, are relatively less reliant on older workers. This is not to say that all industries do not need to plan for a diverse workforce, but that, broadly speaking, population ageing is likely to pose a larger challenge for those at the top of the table than those at the bottom.

It is concerning that the table shows education facing one of the biggest challenges in the coming years. There is a large fall in employment of people between the ages of 45–49 and 60–64, suggesting that the sector struggles to retain its older employees. This may well be partly due to relatively good pension arrangements for some working in the education sector as well as the stressful nature of some of the work involved. Whatever the reason, quality education provision requires highly skilled, experienced, professional employees. When many of the experienced teachers leave the workforce over the coming decade, the sector will face a considerable challenge to fill the resulting gaps.

The health and social work sector, which ranks fourth in the table, faces a very challenging situation. Not only will it have to replace over 1.5 million retiring workers over the next two decades, it also has a below average record on retaining older workers, with a 36% fall in the number of people employed between the ages of 45–49 and 60–64. This perhaps reflects upon the stressful nature of the work as well as the fact that health and social work can be highly physically demanding. Manufacturing, despite not being a growth sector in employment terms, faces the recruitment challenge of attracting in people to replace older workers when they retire.

**Table 3: The workforce challenge of ageing for different industry groups**

Industry group	% aged over 50	Number aged over 50	% fall in employment age 60-64 relative to 45-49	Relative rank of industry
Public admin and defence	34.7%	731,000	-55.9%	1
Education	34.2%	1,147,000	-54.8%	2
Manufacturing	34.6%	1,019,000	-42.0%	3
Health and social work	35.9%	1,561,000	-35.5%	4
Transport and storage	37.9%	604,000	-40.3%	5
Construction	34.1%	804,000	-41.0%	6
Professional, scientific, and technical	31.0%	764,000	-48.9%	7
Wholesale, retail, repair of vehicles	29.2%	1,208,000	-38.2%	8
Information and communication	23.3%	315,000	-68.2%	9
Financial and insurance activities	22.7%	297,000	-70.4%	10
Water supply, sewerage, waste	34.3%	82,000	-52.7%	11
Mining and quarrying	36.5%	47,000	-47.9%	12
Accommodation and food services	18.1%	319,000	-55.5%	13
Admin and support services	34.0%	528,000	-38.1%	14
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	49.6%	171,000	-19.7%	15
Other services	32.2%	294,000	-41.7%	16
Real estate activities	39.7%	150,000	-34.9%	17
Electricity, gas, etc	26.7%	54,000	-59.3%	18
Arts, entertainment and recreation	27.5%	241,000	-37.6%	19

Source: Labour Force Survey, average for 2018 and 2019.

These industry challenges ought to offer some guidance as to where to focus attention for those who are supporting people back into the labour market, but we found little evidence of a relationship between this knowledge and what was happening on the ground.

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### Earnings and pay

It is well-established that on average pay differs by age. Earnings are typically lowest for the youngest workers, rising through to middle age, and then declining in the approach to retirement. Data from the 2019 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) show median hourly earnings rise with age, reaching a peak of £15.49 for those aged between 40 and 49, and then falling afterwards.

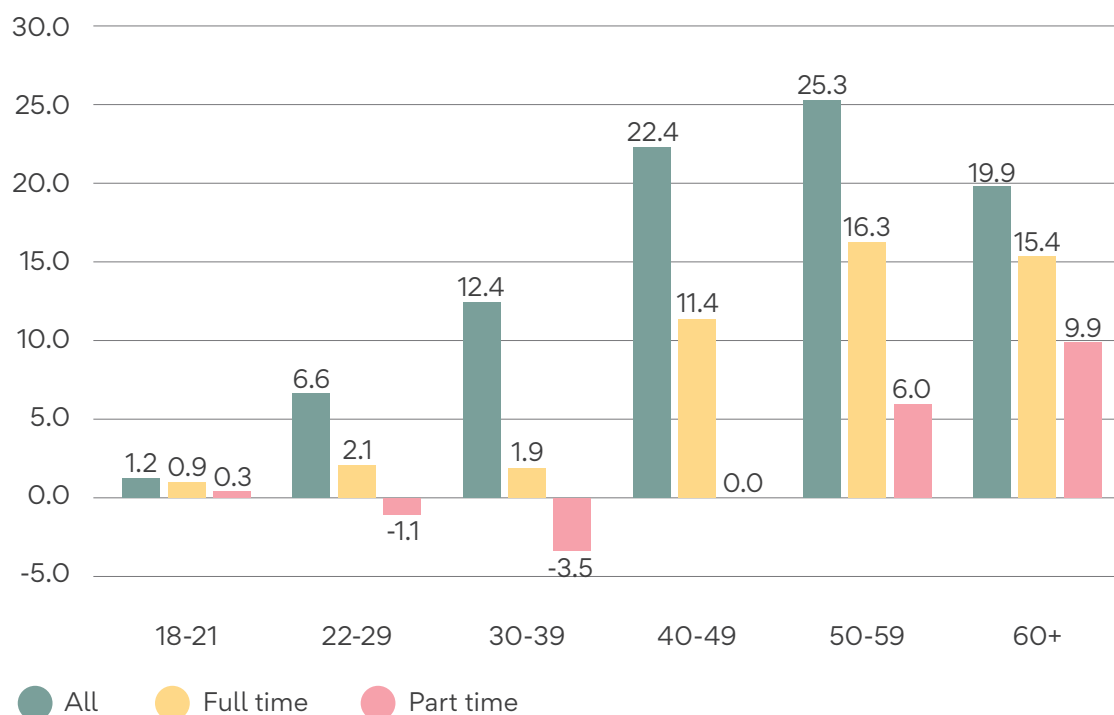
This decline in average earnings as individuals age past 50 may at least in part reflect a change in the composition of those remaining in work, as employment rates start to fall among this age group (as discussed earlier). While on average, older workers earn less than employees in the middle age groups, there is considerable variation between different occupations – see Figure A.12. For example, pay for Health professionals and those working as carers continues to increase when reaching 50 or over, as it does for some skilled trade occupations – this maybe because of a shortage of people working in these trades and therefore the pressure to retain older workers with these skills.

Wages for men and women follow the same trajectory in terms of age but women's pay is generally lower. Figure A.13 shows that on average (for all occupations) men were paid £16.43 compared to £12.19 for women – a significant difference. The only occupation to buck this trend is Secretarial and related occupations, with ASHE showing women earning £10.53 per hour compared to £9.79 for men.

Figure 7 shows that this gender pay gap is particularly pronounced for older workers. For age groups under 40 years, the gender pay gap for full-time employees is now close to zero. Among 40 to 49 year-olds the gap (currently 11.4 per cent) has decreased substantially over time while for those aged 50 to 59 year-olds and those over 60 years, the gender pay gap is over 15 per cent and is not declining strongly over time.

One of the reasons for differences in the gender pay gap between age groups is that women over 40 years are more likely to work in lower-paid occupations and, compared with younger women, are less likely to work as managers, directors or senior officials.

**Figure 7: Gender pay gap by age using median pay, for all employee jobs: United Kingdom, 2019<sup>15</sup>**



Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, ONS

## The barriers to employment of people over 50

This section describes the barriers to employment for people over 50. It draws on interviews with service leads and delivery staff to explore their perceptions of the types of barriers facing those over 50 who are looking for work.

Barriers to over 50s' labour market participation, including in employment support, are many and various have been reported in previous research for Ageing Better<sup>16</sup>. In summary, these include:

- lack of confidence, aspirations and expectations
- life issues - caring, health, finances, family, housing;
- out of date job search skills

<sup>15</sup> The gender pay gap is calculated as the difference between average hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of men and women as a proportion of average hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of men's earnings. It is a measure across all jobs in the UK, not of the difference in pay between men and women for doing the same job.

<sup>16</sup> D. Parsons and K. Walsh (2019) Employment support for over 50s. Rapid Evidence Review. Ageing Better, DWP, GMCA

- skills gaps / qualifications
- insufficient or out-dated digital skills
- need for flexible working
- age-bias by employers
- gender bias

These are explored in more detail below.

**a) Lack of confidence, aspirations and expectations.**

Service leads identified limited confidence, motivation and aspirations as one of the main barriers to finding a new job.

Interviewees reported widespread belief amongst their older service users that employers do not want to hire over 50s and prefer younger applicants. One adviser reported that if older workers cite barriers, '90% will say it is their age'. Another adviser noted that: 'It's really interesting that everybody comes in and the first thing they say if they're older is they tell me their age. I didn't ask'.

This interviewee commented that it is more from the client perspective where they think that; 'nobody's going to employ me because I'm 56' and they have that mindset, which in turn becomes self-fulfilling if the clients don't present well in interview.

There is some evidence of (perceived) internalised ageism from the interviews. From the perspective of one adviser the evidence of employers' ageism comes from people themselves, who believe they are not considered because of their age, as many do not seek or get feedback from unsuccessful interviews. In short, clients appear to try to explain their poor success in the labour market on the idea that employers discriminate on the basis of age and will always prefer someone younger. This also leads them to reduce their own expectations of themselves.

This interviewee works in a place where there is an ageing workforce and has even used that fact to demonstrate to clients that the colleagues in the organisation are largely older and has said to clients: 'Look around you ... look at all of us, we're all in that category ... so there are opportunities out there and you can get employment.' The interviewee said though that this did not appear to convince some clients.

In part, because of this a key barrier identified in interviews was that many older clients tend not to come across confidently in interviews and tend to lack confidence generally. For older clients a lot of the support organisation's work is around changing their mindset to help them to gain confidence and understand that their prior experience is a positive for employers. Confidence may well be at a low ebb, especially if the cause of worklessness such as redundancy is unanticipated.

Finally, there is a contrast in aspirations between older people who have been recently in work and those who are longer term unemployed. For example, wage levels can be a barrier for the recently employed; one adviser stated that ‘if someone has been earning a good salary for 20 years, they are unlikely to apply for work that pays £8.21/hour.’ Expectations as to the types of jobs on offer may not match reality for older workers who had been working in the same role or workplace for a long time.

### **b) Life issues**

Interviewees also identified a number of wider ‘life issues’ that commonly act as a barrier for over 50s while looking for work. This includes caring, health, finances, family and housing issues.

Service staff explained that these additional factors can act as obstacles to individuals, both preventing them from focusing on looking for work, and also meaning that some jobs are not suitable for them. For example, those with a caring responsibility are particularly affected if they cannot find work which fits around these responsibilities.

One service lead reported how wider life issues impact over 50s and may hinder success while looking for a new role:

‘for some people it's just like they gave up. For some it's sort of the personal side of things, so it's been marriage breakups, family bereavements. [...] There is loss of confidence and low self-esteem.’

One adviser shared an example whereby the additional factors also make it difficult for over 50s to find a suitable role:

‘People are having children later and can only work certain hours and don't want to work over the hours they need to get benefits. Over 50s have more health issues and mental health is a growing concern in this age group.’

### **c) Job seeking**

A considerable difficulty for many people over 50 in seeking work is their unfamiliarity with modern job search techniques and tactics. This can act as a major obstacle for individuals looking for a new role.

One adviser commented that ‘People who been in employment for years and need to make a career change, some [...] don't know where to start to look for work. It can be difficult for older clients to understand recruitment is different now especially as over 80% is done on-line, so you cannot ‘knock on the door’ of an employer and ask for a job as happened in the past.’

Older clients, one adviser believed, need a lot of help to complete applications and make sure that they have shown how their experience and skills match the requirements of the job. It is also difficult to help clients to understand that everyone gets rejections from applications, and that the reason for the rejection is not necessarily because the client is older.



Interviewees also made reference to clients aged over 50 struggling to work well with JCP in terms of meeting requirements for job search and in gaining an understanding of their circumstances. These were felt sometimes to be a barrier to finding work and also undermined some individuals' already low confidence.

### **d) Skills and skill gaps**

Although qualifications are not necessarily a proxy for skills, particularly for the older age group (many of whom did not have the opportunity to obtain qualifications at school), it is useful to look at the qualification levels below as it helps us to understand the skills barriers to employment.

The analysis below groups qualifications into four categories:

- No qualifications: no formal qualifications are held
- Low level qualifications: qualifications at NVQ Level 1 or other qualifications
- Mid-level qualifications: qualifications at NVQ levels 2 and 3 and trade apprenticeships
- High level qualifications: qualifications at level 4 and above, equivalent to a degree or higher

Overall in 2018, there were differences between the areas researched in terms qualification levels with 44% of those aged 50-64 in Bristol City with high level qualifications and only 9% with no qualifications. In the West Midlands only 27% of those aged 50-64 had a high level qualification and 17% had no qualifications. All areas have seen a fall in proportions without a qualification over the last 5 years and a rise in proportions with high level qualifications. Despite these improvements those aged 50-64 are more likely to have no qualifications or low levels of qualifications than the younger age groups and less likely than the prime age group to have high level qualifications.

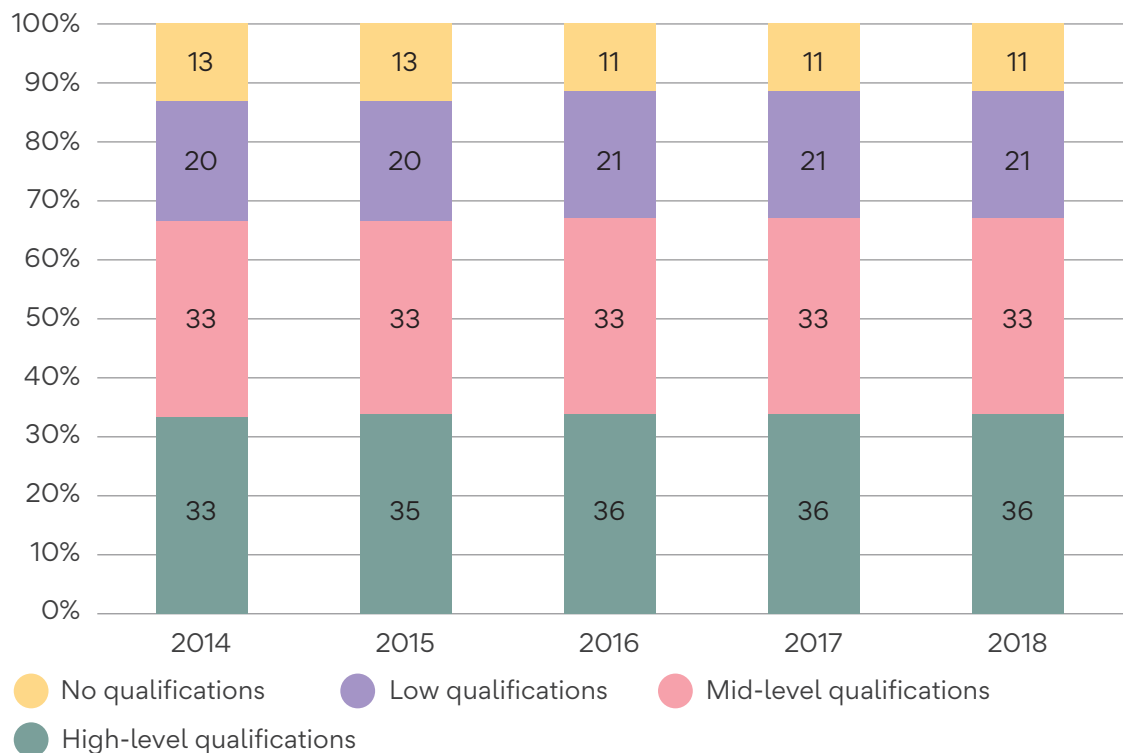
Skills gaps may increase older people's inability to find or return to work. We know that some older people in the workforce have low basic education. Some people over 50 did not complete school and may not have any qualifications. Some have poor literacy and numeracy which may be a real challenge and referral into adult education is often needed in this case as it is very hard to get jobs without basic skills. However, where jobs are available for this group advisers may need to give considerable support to enable people to apply for and succeed in them.

Other older workers find their skills are now out-dated. This is particularly so for those who have been in one workplace for a long time, where they, for example, gained an apprenticeship many years ago in their particular trade, now find that these skills are obsolete. Others are no longer physically strong enough to do their previous work. One provider gave the following

example: 'it might be that they were a tyre fitter and they are not fit enough to do that role anymore. Or they worked in construction and they have got bad knees.'

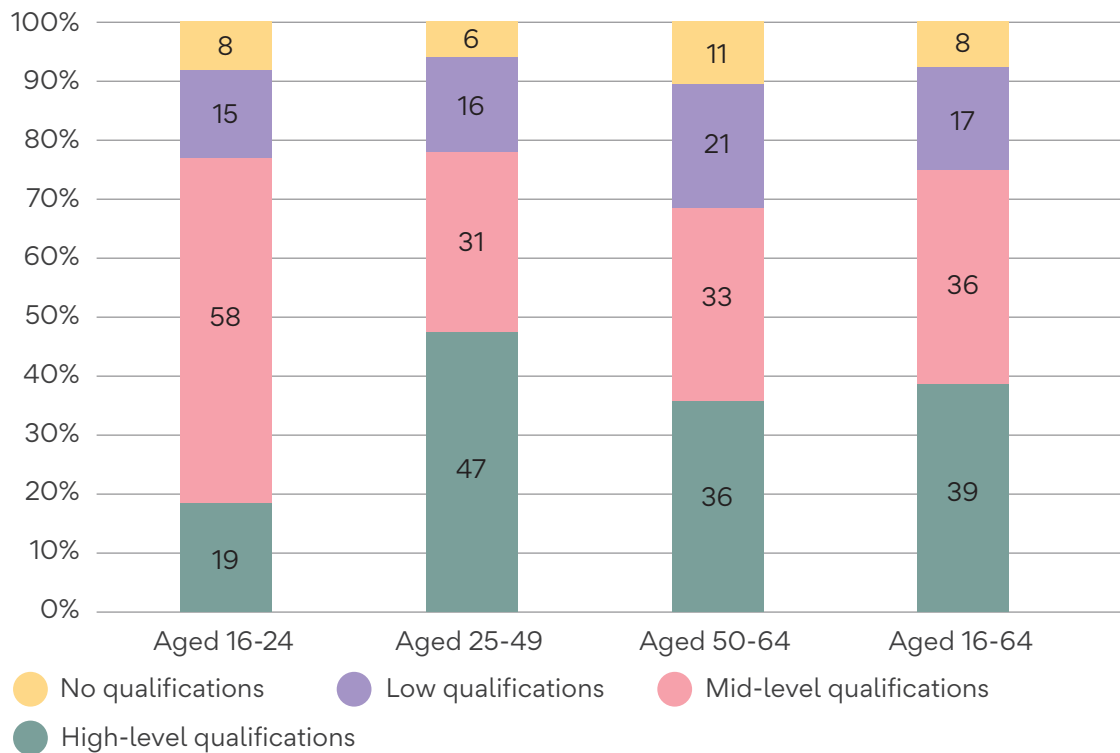
This situation can mean that people are left feeling unconfident, deskilled and 'on the scrapheap'. Considerable support may be needed to overcome this sense of hopelessness so that someone can find a new way forward.

**Figure 8: Qualification levels: aged 50-64, England (ONS)**



Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding  
Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS

Figure 9: Qualification levels by age, England, 2018 (ONS)



Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding  
 Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS

Where vocational skills are needed, they can be hard to get trained in, and there is low awareness amongst unemployed older people of opportunities that are perhaps new, such as the possibility of older people taking up apprenticeships. In addition, reported attitudes to training amongst the over 50s vary. There are older people in work who would welcome training, but other older people are reluctant to participate in in-work training as well as retraining later.

L&W’s adult participation in learning survey in 2019<sup>17</sup> reported an ever lower amount of people undertaking formal learning or training. In particular, older people report very little take up of training or learning: Participation in learning declines with age, with older adults being significantly less likely to participate in learning than younger age groups.

Part of the explanation may be around the risks in undertaking training; for example, someone newly redundant may not feel confident that if they spend time, energy and possibly money in retraining, they will be certain of a job in a new field. Retraining needs to be founded in confidence of its outcomes before people are confident to take it up.

17 L&W 2019 <https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2019-Participation-Survey-Report.pdf>

Finally, according to one adviser interviewed where older clients have transferable skills that they acquired over years they need considerable help to understand fully their experience and skills and how to translate those into a relevant offer to employers, and then to identify areas where they could retrain or gain new skills.

### **e) Digital skills**

The most frequently mentioned skill issue facing older people who want to work is IT. Many older workers, our interviewees report, are unconfident in or lack work related IT skills. Advisers suggested that many older clients who are ‘absolutely terrified’ of IT. One adviser identified technology as a barrier for half of their clients. It is important to note that basic skills overlap considerably with digital skills and the reason why some older people struggle with IT may be that literacy and numeracy skills are also needing improvement. Even though IT skills are a major issue for many, it should not be assumed that all older workers need additional IT skills as those who have been recently employed in some settings will be well versed in current IT.

### **f) Flexible working**

In order for older people to return to the labour market, it may be necessary for them to work flexibly. A number of factors can encourage this need, including health issues, caring responsibilities or an aspiration for good work-life balance. Flexible working practices would help to open the labour market up to more over 50s. However, most jobs are still offered according to rigid working hours and practices – with just 15% of jobs advertised across 2019 offering flexible working<sup>18</sup>.

### **g) Age-bias**

The role of perceived or internalised age discrimination has already been noted above. In addition, there is some evidence of actual age discrimination by employers. Some older people find that some employers will not consider them for positions: as one adviser commented: ‘If you look at apprenticeships, etc. I think often employers want to look to the young for apprenticeships where they can mould them...they struggle more with the idea of taking on an older person who might have had bad habits’.

This was further confirmed by another adviser, who thought that employers say will employ older people, but that it is hard to gauge if they will or not. The experience of some older workers is sometimes not valued, though the opposite can also be found in industries where skills are disproportionately invested in older people who learned their trade early in life and where younger people are not learning those skills in sufficient numbers.

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<sup>18</sup> Timewise 2020, ‘The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2019’

This mixed picture is supported by some advisers interviewed who suggested that employers nowadays were less likely to discriminate on the basis of age than in the past. Some providers felt that there has been a change and that ageism is no longer an issue, at least from better employers. One interviewee stated: 'I don't think there's much of a barrier from employers any more for people over 50. I think there was years ago - ten years ago.' Similarly, some providers report that employers are now 'waking up to the fact that they need to be less ageist.'

### **h) Gender**

Despite increases in the proportion of over 50s women working, it appears that gender remains a barrier to appropriate work and good pay rates in this age group.

Women face particular difficulties in accessing work in later life as women still do the majority of caring for children and other family members and are more likely to be in part-time work. One provider stated that women can face more barriers as they tend to have been away from the labour market earlier in life because of caring responsibilities. Older women may also face additional barriers such as digital skills, and gendered expectations with the types of jobs that they perceive themselves as being suitable for.

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## **Lessons**

The UK population is ageing. By 2020 1 in 3 workers will be over 50 and by 2030 half of all adults in the UK will be over 50. It is vital that people are helped to work for longer. There have been recent increases in the patterns of participation of over 50s in the labour market. However, evidence suggests that many face barriers to successful participation with the labour market – with substantial gaps in employment for over 50s. The onset of the Coronavirus crisis is likely to have had unparalleled impact on the labour market, with negative implications for the participation of over 50s, wiping out recent progress and contributing to a worsening situation for this age group.

Over 50s can face many obstacles to finding employment, preventing them from moving into work and sustaining the benefits deliverable to those in work. These barriers can also impact on over 50s that are in work, preventing them from finding a new job and progress in their career. Obstacles include:

- lack of confidence, aspirations and expectations
- life issues - caring, health, finances, family, housing;
- out of date job search skills
- skills gaps / qualifications
- insufficient or out-dated digital skills

## The Context: People over 50 in the labour market

- need for flexible working
- age-bias by employers
- gender bias

As a result, many people over 50 who are seeking work may be in need of support to help them tackle their underlying barriers and improve their circumstances. This can include employment, skills and other forms of support related to the obstacles listed above. However, there are gaps in the provision of especially tailored support suitable for helping to move over 50s into work. The next chapter considers the employment support offered to older people and what further support is needed.

# The support landscape for people aged over 50

**"It's very daunting for 50+ there are many barriers to finding work (Adviser)."**

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## Introduction

In examining the support provided and needed for people over 50 seeking work, we needed to look at the historical context of those in this age group. The labour market has changed considerably since this group of people left school/further or higher education and started work. These changes present considerable challenges to the older job seeker. At the point where they started work, low qualifications for the majority of school leavers were the norm, and yet many people could expect a job for life. Some of this cohort will have experienced the very high unemployment of previous recessions, especially in the 1980s, and some people will have experienced being overlooked for work and the feeling of being 'bottom of the heap'. Employers and employees now have different expectations of working life, but in addition new skills requirements, and automation and digitalisation have created an environment which can be unfamiliar and unsettling. Many have had the skills and resilience to cope with or embrace these changes, but others have not. In-work poverty has also changed the types of support needed, whether to stay in work, to progress into better-paid work or to move between periods of employment and unemployment.

Most employment support providers do not separate out provision according to age. Much of the provision reflected in this report is guided by government funding criteria. In previous National Careers Service (NCS) contracts for example, 'over 50s' were no longer a priority group. A minority of providers in this study, who appear not to feel over 50s need specific support interventions in place, contradict these initial comments by saying that they try to include in their wider provision some which is specifically tailored for the over 50s.

One interviewee concluded that the last 15 years has seen a decline in organisations that can support people, of any age group, into work. Job Centres are under-resourced. So, Sefton@Work is now the only provider in the Sefton, alongside Liverpool in Work, which covers the whole Liverpool City Region and is ESF funded.

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### **Barriers to work and finding support**

As noted in the previous chapter, some people within the 50+ group face considerable challenges in finding and retaining paid work.

As noted, these barriers include:

- lack of confidence, perceptions of age discrimination, aspirations and expectations
- life issues – including caring responsibilities, health, and family
- out of date job search skills
- skills gaps / qualifications
- insufficient or out-dated digital skills
- need for flexible working
- actual age-bias by employers
- impact of gender

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### **Employment support**

It would be fair to say that a minority of people at 50+ get any kind of support in terms of deciding to find or change jobs, undertake training or progress their career. The ‘Missing Million’ identified by BITC who were not in the labour market are frequently not reached.

Some of the projects in the research offer provision to people both in work and who are unemployed. Some projects offer their provision only to people who are unemployed and within that, mostly target those at furthest distance from the labour market and who face additional difficulties and challenges in gaining paid work.

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### **Employment Support provided in the four areas**

More detail of the areas can be found in separate area reports. To ascertain what kind of employment support is provided for people over 50, four areas were identified to participate in this research and provide examples of their provision examined:

- Liverpool Region Combined Authority (LRCA): the two examples here are delivered by Sefton@Work and Knowsley Works.
- West of England Combined Authority (WECA): including interviews with a project, Future Bright, and Adviza, a National Careers Service contractor, which provides services on behalf of the WECA.



- The Bristol City Region (BCR) again two agencies are included: Hartcliffe and Withywood Ventures who deliver WorkZone, and Jobcentre Plus.
- The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). three project managers were interviewed, and findings are included from the Connecting Communities Project, Prospects which also delivers Connecting Communities, and Release Potential which delivers ‘Returneeships’ courses. These projects are carried out on behalf of the WMCA.

Deliberately chosen, these areas face different challenges, with some being areas of higher unemployment and others facing fewer difficulties in terms of numbers of job vacancies; and some of the areas are considerably more prosperous. But challenges remain for job seekers - regardless of age. For example, an interviewee contrasted the labour market in Bristol with that of Somerset; there are jobs in both, but the city has better transport links and more options whereas in some parts of the rural area, transport links are few and many jobs are seasonal. Both areas have relatively low unemployment, but job seeking can still be problematic for some even in this relatively buoyant jobs market

The nine different agencies which were included in the field work for this report illustrate the complexities of this field as some are sub-contracted, part of a wider partnership and/or offer differing range of services, only some of which are targeted at people over 50.

Two interviewees worked for a prime contractor for the National Careers Service (NCS), four agencies interviewed were employment support services (voluntary or private sector, usually contracted by a local authority/local authorities) and one further organisation offering a similar service was an independent training provider, two were employment support services located within a local authority/local authorities; and one was a Jobcentre Plus office. The research scope therefore included a wide range of the possible providers of employment support.

Nine interviews were carried out with Service Managers in the four areas: LRCA x 2; WECA x 2; BCR x 2; WMCA x 3.

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## Liverpool City Region

### Ways to Work: Liverpool City Region

Ways to Work (W2W) project targets workless and inactive people, including those furthest from the labour market, providing a suite of tailored support and interventions. The programme builds on existing infrastructure of local provision, delivered through local authority partners. In the W2W programme there is a mix of approaches among local authorities in the Liverpool City Region, in terms of who delivers what and how delivery was structured within an authority, with different levels and types of in-house support in each authority. W2W aims to integrate, rather than duplicate, the

wider service offering available to help participants/potential participants address the multiple barriers/challenges that affect their ability to participate in the labour market, and providing a range of interventions, which ensure the case-managed support approach can be customised to suit individual needs. The underpinning rationale of W2W is that participants are best supported with an offer that is tailored to their specific needs, rather than a generic service.

As an example, Knowsley Works is a Knowsley MBC service, offers a comprehensive service to residents of Knowsley who are seeking work/require advice on employment and training. Services are delivered from centres in Huyton, Kirkby and Halewood and other community venues across the borough. Services include information, advice/guidance on careers, job opportunities, training/education, plus additional support with personal skills development/support to overcome barriers to work. These include CV building and job search, interview skills and job applications, referral to other council services and/or specialist support agencies. Work is done one to one and also includes tailoring and working with individual action plans. The service offers placement opportunities through its engagement with a large number of local businesses. This service is available for any age group, and therefore they do not target over 50s who are ‘treated the same as any other client’. Support is offered for as long as the client needs but find that many people are ‘job ready and just need advice with one or two things’ (SM5).

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## **WECA**

### **Future Bright**

Future Bright is managed by the West of England Combined Authority and delivered locally by Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire councils. Future Bright is open to local residents who are: aged 19 and over; living in the West of England (Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire); currently in paid work; and/or receiving benefits or tax credits (Universal Credit, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Job Seeker’s Allowance, Income Support, Employment Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, or Means-Tested Council tax Reduction).

Future Bright is a free service offering career advice, training and support to help people develop their skills, increase their income and progress in their career. A personal career progression coach provides three months of tailored support. An action plan is developed to help participants reach goals through achievable steps. A personal budget is available to cover costs like training, equipment and additional childcare.; Linked support connecting participants to other free services is also available. Future Bright works with local businesses, housing associations and community partners to deliver a wide range of options.

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## **Adviza**

Adviza is the prime contractor for NCS in the whole of the South West and Oxfordshire region and therefore includes the West of England CA which is one of the foci of this project. The offer is similar to that of all NCS prime contractors, which includes providing personalised careers information, advice and guidance services to adults via individual and group face to face sessions, over the telephone and through digital and social media platforms. Amongst many other offers, Adviza has advisers who can carry out midlife career reviews.

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## **Bristol City Area**

### **Hartcliffe and Withywood Ventures**

Hartcliffe and Withywood Ventures delivers Work Zone for Bristol City Council and is part of the Ways2Work Network which is a community of education, support and training organisations keeping each other updated about opportunities for supporting people in Bristol and the West of England into work. Work Zone was developed to respond to Bristol City Council's recognition that some areas of the city suffer from persistent unemployment and deprivation despite investment. The Work Zone model was developed by a group of local organisations to establish set of protocols to support individuals in areas of most persistent deprivation and unemployment. Advice is available in different community locations and there is no limit on number of sessions a person can have. Customers can be employed or unemployed. Work Zone provides free employability support delivering a more integrated and coordinated approach to local employment support and learning. This support is for all ages, not specifically the over 50s. Work Zone provides support from the Work Zone job club to vocational training, to in-work support. The 10-week Job Club, covering the basics of finding work, is where more of the clients over 50 go rather than other parts of the service. SM1 reports that the confidence courses for personal development are well attended by older women who have been at home a long time and have lost confidence, as are English and Maths courses. Men are reported to often feel demoralised and for them it is often ill health that has changed their circumstances; although they 'can see ill health as more of a barrier than it is'. Men tend to want help with CVs and printing them out, rather than attending courses.

IT courses are popular, and Work Zone aims to get everyone on-line to support their job search. Work experience is provided in the Work Zone building, so that the person can have a reference. Support not time limited, so people can come back and do other courses, and use facilities and resources.

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### **Jobcentre Plus, Bristol**

Jobcentre Plus in Bristol is a standard JCP office, but one that offers a wide range of support. SM7 reported that there had been a specific project called Fuller Working Lives, a pilot project, funded by government which has now ended, and the lessons integrated into the overall offering. The Fuller Working Lives project was intended to allow JCP officers some flexibility in working with over 50s and could include, for example, advisers and work coaches spending longer than usual with a client. In the case of the Bristol interviewee for this project, it was found that CV work with over 50s is different from younger age groups as older people need support to distil their longer experience. Retraining can also be available such as via 'Engage in Training' in Bristol who offer driving qualifications, including for a HGV driving licence (e.g. for bus driving).

SM7 also reported that they run group sessions with employers to alert them to "open their eyes" to taking on older employees and attend redundancy workshops (provided at no cost to the employer). These are used to highlight the skills of 50+ employees.

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### **West Midlands Combined Authority**

#### **Connecting Communities (WMCA Innovation Pilot)**

It had been agreed with DWP that WMCA as a devolved authority could commission and deliver employability programmes. This is a place-based model of delivery. The age range is 16+ unemployed and also those on low pay. There is a one stop shop to provide employability support/progression support inclusive of those 50+ (SM2). This Connecting Communities Pilot commenced delivery in June 2018.

Employment Support is part of a pilot, aimed at tackling unemployment and low pay within local communities. The intention is to support individuals to engage with targeted employability support, to raise aspirations within the community, and support individuals to transition into sustainable employment.

The project is based in the area "right on the doorstep" local to residents. Other advisers cover other specific postcode areas. According to the interviewee to begin with there was some 'negativity from local residents initially owing to scepticism' based on poor experience of other initiatives, but more people are willing to attend now.

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### **Release Potential Limited**

Release Potential Limited is an independent training provider and provides support to employers and both employed and unemployed learners. a training organisation delivering Returneeships for WMCA Returneeships are

particularly aimed at the 40+ age group. Returneeships are four-week pre-employment training programmes. Designed to focus on the employability skills of the unemployed, Returneeships comprise a two-day introductory activity followed by two weeks based in the classroom and two weeks on a work placement or other suitable opportunity. Returneeships offer the chance to gain nationally recognised qualifications.

Part of the provision is detailed information, advice and guidance which ensures that participants are engaged in the right programme and to ensure their positive onward progression. This helps them ‘to explore options and support them to access learning, training and employment opportunities that meet their individual needs’.

		Future Bright		WMCA		Knowsley		Sefton		Total	
		Count	% of total	Count	% of total	Count	% of total	Count	% of total	Count	% of total
All clients aged 50 or over		281		319		1,092		622		2,314	
Age	50-64	273	97%	300	94%	1,012	93%	604	97%	2,189	95%
	65+	8	3%	19	6%	80	7%	18	3%	125	5%
Gender	Male	103	37%	205	64%	639	59%	349	56%	1,296	56%
	Female	168	60%	114	36%	453	41%	273	44%	1,008	44%
Ethnicity	White	197	70%	266	83%	1,068	98%	612	98%	2,143	93%
	Ethnic	69	25%	45	14%	23	2%	10	2%	161	7%
Disabled		49	17%	118	37%	400	37%	237	38%	804	35%

## Outcomes achieved

It has been difficult to define the ‘hard’ outcomes achieved by the projects, as little data was available. Not all the interviewees were able to provide information on outcomes and some focused on ‘soft’ outcomes, such as behaviours and communication skills rather than destination outcomes. This has made it problematic to arrive at specific conclusions in this area.

Outcome data was only collected for the Sefton Programme - Sefton@ Work. This showed that 18% of their clients achieved a full-time job outcome and 10% achieved a part time job outcome – an overall job outcome rate of 28%.

In the West Midlands the Returneeships provider said that there was a 94% attendance rate. The achievement rate for passing qualifications is 99%. "Taster qualifications" include Level 1 IT, Level 1 Customer Service, and learning web marketing skills. In addition, CVs are reviewed, so that learners understand what they need to do to develop these. The key outcome is that the provider has "taken people closer to the job market". Some participants

attend full time courses (often IT related), and the support providers then ask the Job Centre if it is possible for the client to go to a sector based work academy for interview. Across the Returneeships programme, 70% make a "positive" move, 30% go into work, others start volunteering, but the provider does not see volunteering as a long-term solution.

Another West Midlands provider of Connecting Communities could show that the hardest to reach cohort was the most successfully engaged; of the 1600 starts 40% of those were people unemployed for more than two years. They are funded to work with those very far from the labour market but say that individuals that are hardest to help they are not necessarily the hardest to access.

It should be noted that these West Midlands providers are not just working with people aged over 50 so these outcomes are general rather than specific to the age-group. Returneeships are for 40+ and others are open to all ages.

Soft outcomes (e.g. communication skills and increase in confidence) are seen as important. People may not transition to employment as they are still so far from the labour market; these programmes may be a steppingstone to work. Individuals do not appear to go on to employment from some projects. In some cases, interviewees reflected that this is partly because they are still a long way from the labour market and progress instead onto training or other provision within the same centre or at another provider.

There appears to be a great need for IT skills as they were mentioned by every interviewee and this would be borne out by other research such as that carried out for the NRS. It was further assumed by all the interviewees, that, if people do not have or acquire IT skills then they appear to be less likely to progress into employment. It is unclear whether this is merely because most job search is now online.

But when there is success, it is important to all concerned:

**"Once they've [client] got their CV where they wanted, they went off looking for jobs and let our adviser know 'I'm in employment now, thanks for your help', it's actually great"**

**"It's quite demeaning [being on benefits] people hate it".**

The lack of information provided to us on outcomes makes it very difficult to reach conclusions as to what types of support has proved more effective and what has not. It is not clear the extent to which this information gap is due to such data not existing or to projects not supplying us with the data that they do have.



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## Joined Up Support

One interviewee set out the wide range of support available locally. This summary attempted to cover all the local provision in the Bristol area that would help people over 50 move into, retain or progress in work. In the interviewee's opinion, it had been difficult to support 50+ people historically as the majority of support was aimed towards young people rather than older people. There is now however some specific provision through Future Bright and also from the National Careers Service (Adviza), as detailed above. In addition, a range of training providers and age-focused voluntary sector organisations could provide some support and training. The likelihood would be that people might have to attend more than one provider to gain all-round support and not all of it would be free.

For example, LinkAge was providing three workshops to support people aged 50+ to plan and manage the shift into their next life phase but these workshops were priced at £25 each. Business in the Community also had a programme on offer for people aged 50+ which enables unemployed people over 50 in Bristol to 'access employment and re-enter the workforce'. This free project offers life skills and confidence building, including midlife reviews and one to one support, work placements and training, and is tailored around individual needs. It was clear from the flyer for this project that it was expected that people would be referred from other services.

Similarly, over 50s are reported to have more health issues and mental health is a growing concern amongst this group. One provider reported that there are gaps in mental health service provision. There needs to be "a catered package that does it all" but the mental health services are not joined up enough. Overall, this provider suggested that:

**"Someone might come to us with lots of barriers [who are not work ready] so we might put them on some voluntary work, we might ... sent them back to brush up their IT skills, brush up on their maths and English, but I feel like it's not joined up enough. I feel like there's not one course that caters for all from the very start of the journey to the end"**

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## Out of Work Support

Anyone over 50 who is actively seeking work should be able to access programmes such as those described in this research. However, they may not be in an area where there is plenty of support on offer or they may not know about it. In addition, people who might be described as economically inactive may be entirely missed by support services, even if they are seeking work.

Many people in this age group carry out unpaid work, whether taking on caring or other responsibilities within their immediate contacts or formally in the voluntary sector. If they also wish to take paid work, the voluntary sector option may offer training and support towards employment but individuals may not recognise the experience they are gaining from any form of unpaid work and may not know how to translate this into experience an employer might be looking for. Transferable skills are not readily understood by the public or employers.

Adult learners can encounter support services through providers of formal education. Adult learning providers, FE colleges or HE, often have IAG or other support services available and many embed employability content into their courses.

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### **In Work Support**

Some people in the 50+ age group who are employed will receive some support from their employers in the form of access to, for example, a midlife review, a health check, pension advice, and training or education for both work and personal development. Professionals are more likely to be able to access training and support of this kind, but many large employers have schemes available to their whole workforce.

Unionised workforces have access to some support such as midlife skills reviews through union learning representatives and this too may be backed up by training/education provided by unionlearn or a Trade Union, or by the employer where a partnership exists.

People working in SMEs, the gig economy and in low skilled work are less likely to have access to this type of broader support and training. For some specific work-related training is available, but this may sometimes only be compulsory training such as health and safety or food hygiene.

It was reported that there is not much funding if you are already in a job but want to up-skill and yet this is an important method for avoiding becoming unemployed. This may be helped in some cases by the new National Retraining Scheme and the recently announced National Skills Fund. However, if you do not match the criteria for these schemes, it will remain the case that some funding is available for people currently unemployed, but once in labour market "you're left to your own devices" as one provider reported.

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### **Stages of Support**

#### **Attracting and engaging over 50s**

The main route into provision is through referral (see below), however some of the projects researched have to recruit directly from the general public. For these providers encouraging older people to take up employment



support needs considerable effort by the provider. A range of methods of outreach and promotion were mentioned by the interviewees. For many word of mouth remains the most important, especially in local areas.

However, outreach work in communities, ranging from one to one meetings, informal chats at coffee mornings to community events were mentioned as good places to engage with people. Being visible in a community is vital.

The following methods have been deployed:

- word of mouth
- flyers and posters
- social media (but to a lesser extent than for younger people)
- events and drop-in sessions at community locations e.g. coffee mornings, faith groups, learning centres, job fairs,
- liaising with community development officers and other support services

Some providers reported that word of mouth was the most effective method according to what clients say on arrival. While, unfortunately little evidence was unearthed as to which approaches are most effective, it appears that providers should use a combination of a few separate methods, choosing carefully which work best for the 50+ age group in their locality. Most of the above methods are quite labour intensive and are best done when there is a project which can fund the staff time required.

There was a discrepancy between providers which target over 50s and those providing general support for all ages in terms of how they reached the older age group. Providers promoting a programme for all ages were less likely to single out over 50s in their advertising or outreach but might well encourage over 50s into particular courses or offers once they were there. This was seen as a subtle approach to persuade people to take up, for example, IT training. Some providers avoided the phrase 'over 50s' in their literature, believing that drawing attention to age was potentially off-putting to the client group. In all cases, though, there was a sense that it is important to help over 50s to understand that they have something positive to bring to the workforce from their prior life and/or work experience.

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### **Recruitment through referral**

As mentioned above many of the participants in over 50s support have been referred to the project or programme. Referral routes include:

- Job Centre Plus (the most frequently mentioned)
- children's centres
- community centres
- libraries

- training providers
- voluntary organisations including those which support specific health issues or conditions and addictions.

Although no-one interviewed mentioned healthcare providers or GPs, prior experience suggests that this might also be a referral route.

Contacts with referral partners are made through, for example, networking meetings of training providers, and Job Centre meetings "where all the partners come together" to share best practice. Sometimes the support providers are able to run group sessions at Job Centres, 2 or 3 times a week, to engage people that way and can also go to the Job Centre to do group registrations. This illustrates the importance of partnership working in providing employment support.

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### Tailored provision for 50+ people

Of the organisations researched only some offered specific and targeted support for people aged 50+. The following observations were made:

- The need for awareness and understanding of the specific needs of 50+ clients by advisers, for example, not all 50+ clients need a CV writing or IT course
- Some older (and younger) people prefer separate programmes but others welcome opportunities for intergenerational working. There seems to be some agreement that specific activities such as skills reviews or advice on developing a CV is best done separately, if delivered workshop style.
- Support needs to be not just tailored for the age group but also personalised to the individual and this could include mixed age group support.
- It is also important to be able to offer support for longer periods, so funding can be an issue if it is time limited. Continuity of adviser support was also seen as a particular need of this age group.

Fuller Working Lives pilot projects were offered for a short time within JCP which allowed advisers and work coaches to spend additional time or undertake additional activities with people in mid-life. These are now not available but were seen by the two relevant interviewees as successful when they were being run inside JCP. These interviewees expressed regret that the Fuller Working Lives approach was no longer available, but they felt that any lessons from this programme had been embedded in JCP work. One lesson was that CV work with 50+ is different from with younger age groups, as older people need help to distil their experience. Each job centre office which did Fuller Working Lives had the flexibility to deliver what they need for that specific office and their customers - for example, confidence building. One interviewee said that as part of Fuller Working Lives:

**"We did a course called 'What can I bring to the table?' rather than send customers on an employability course to learn how to write a CV. When people are older, they know how to write a CV."**

There are times when support providers have to deal with redundancies and at those times it is frequently found that many workers in some sectors are older. Interviewees reported that it can be a considerable shock for someone who has worked at one organisation for 30 years and they have no idea where to go from there. Older clients who are open to working in another sector or doing a different type of work tend to find new employment more quickly than those who are not prepared to consider other options.

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## **Models of support**

There are broad similarities across the support on offer to over 50s with the differences largely determined by funding, external rules, and levels of innovation permitted within these. The range is from the standard offer from Jobcentre Plus, for example, to the deep levels of support from the Connecting Communities or Returneeships projects. A key point for everyone though is the need to tailor support to the individual's needs and to ensure that older people's existing experience of work, learning and life is borne in mind.

It is perhaps inevitable that the employment support is similar in nature. Much of the 'difference' between approaches will be in the style of delivery of the provider and their staff. Inclusive and friendly approaches which do not deter clients are preferable, especially for those who are very unfamiliar with modern job search, are scared of learning, having not done well at school, or have been out of the labour market for many years. Previous research has shown the importance of person-centred and holistic (whole life) approaches to be important in building confidence and encouraging clients to progress, ensuring the appropriate levels of self-reflection, reviewing for themselves, assessing skills and skill levels (skills auditing) and enabling people to make their own action plans, which are meaningful and which they feel enabled to carry out.

The most consistent theme of the models is that working with many in this client group, and especially those furthest from the labour market, is time, including time for the review and assessment, time for training and time for in-depth support.

To illustrate the range, some of the models described in the interviews are outlined in Annex 1.

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### **What next? Onward signposting of clients and progression routes**

Once the support has been provided there is a need to determine what next and a key role is in expert onward signposting.

What happens next for the client depends of course on what has already been offered. Trained advisers within local providers should have considerable expertise in signposting and the resources needed to back them up. Good signposting is a skill developed within for example the training offered to National Careers Service advisers and should form a part of any effective employment support programme.

For clients seeking immediate employment, then job search and links with specific employers may be the next steps. However, there may be other necessary steps. Expert signposting is needed. For more comprehensive support programmes, the next step for the client will be paid work. Where education or training needs have been identified, which are not provided in the current programme then, the onward referral will be to learning providers or training positions. For clients, who need additional support, it may be that onward referral is better, perhaps to another support organisation which is more specialist and able to offer appropriate training or advice including, for example, support with health issues.

Unfortunately, no information provided by interviewees as to which of the above routes were preferred or were deemed more successful. A close reading of the interviews reveals that what is seen as best practice for those furthest from the labour market is either a route which leads to training or a relevant work experience placement, including intermediate labour market placements. However, if there are health needs it appeared to be the perception that specialist support would need to come before or alongside these next steps. However, interviewees mentioned that destinations or options could include:

- Group sessions with job seekers to focus on specific ways forward
- Referral to health services, including health services, weight loss programmes, smoking cessation or other issues identified by clients.
- Referral to Adult Education services for the IT skills, maths and English
- Approaching recruitment differently by inviting in local employers to meet the group of unemployed people - in this case aged over 50.
- Training providers are approached directly to tailor courses for clients and providers make offers about what can be provided through the adult education budget.
- A wide range of existing vocational training routes can be explored, depending on client needs (including apprenticeships).

- Intermediate labour market positions. One example from the interviews suggested that this model included one provider which gives a week's induction training for an ILM and also extra conversations with employers to make them aware of any particular issues a person might be facing so that the correct support is in place. The provider tries to carefully job-match the person and the employer, including choosing "more nurturing" employers for some.
- Specific supported employment initiatives by local authorities - an example from Sefton was that the Council provides funding for the client's wages for 6 months, and if the person is suitable then employer takes them on properly as an employee.

Our research allows the following reflections to be made on features of the support approaches for over 50s:

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### Local provision

For some providers surveyed being local was the single most important factor in providing employment support. This allows providers the opportunity to engage with those furthest from the labour market. There is recognition that to engage over 50s (and other age groups of unemployed people, or those wanting/needing to gain skills) providers have to be situated within local communities and highly visible - both personally and building location. The WMCA 'Connecting Communities' project, for example, focuses on this as a priority. Such support was described as being available at: purpose built/rented local premises; community centres; libraries; school premises; and, on a high street, 'not tucked away'.

For a new project with an innovative idea it was important also to build up relationships with stakeholders by being visible in the community and not only available 9 - 5; visiting local employers - saying they are part of community, and spreading the message that it is good to have people off benefits. One provider suggested:

**"If you're working to support local residents ... you need to embed yourself, and also become a part and be accepted within the community. People are engaged where they live, not "dragged" to a central location."**

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### Training opportunities

It is vital to have plenty of re-skilling opportunities on offer. There are some innovative examples of training (e.g. Returneeships course in WMCA) which produce positive outcomes, but these are expensive and not all older unemployed people can gain access to programmes like this. Some

vocational programmes are available in local provision as are basic skills courses. Not all adult provision is free, however, and the cost of learning continues to be an issue, which is in part why many of the providers in this research seek out a range of options for reskilling both internally and externally and make good use of networks so that they know about all the training on offer. Interviewees noted that not all participants were keen on retraining and that they would need to be convinced of its effectiveness before agreeing to take part.

Unfortunately, there is little evidence of best practice. The main issues reported about difficulties with retraining and accessing educational provision concerned access to free provision for those who need to retrain. Some providers here are running courses within their own centres. Where onward referral is needed generally the support providers in this study had good relationships with learning providers.

Some did report that higher level qualified people are often not able to access retraining, even though their previous job or qualification is now obsolete. The result is that these people end up doing jobs well below their previous level or ability which is difficult for these clients.

Some clients reportedly question whether it is worth them retraining. Services providers believe that clients need to understand the change that has happened while they have been employed and that now application and recruitment processes are different.

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### **‘Age friendly’ employers / Encouraging employers**

Collaboration with employers proves to be crucial in supporting over 50s back to work.

In addition, we can find examples of good practice from some larger employers in relation to in work support for over 50s and particularly in relation to introducing their own versions of the government’s Midlife MOT and these provide useful pointers for supporting people in midlife.

Employment support providers in this study found that collaboration with employers was vital in achieving work placements, training opportunities, ILMs, and to help people to progress into paid work. Good relationships with such employers offer the best hope of being able to place clients, gaining advance notice of vacancies and being able to match clients’ CVs. One provider carries out intense employer engagement, which involves contacting different employers about promoting the service to their staff. Some employers are really keen because if they retrain staff, they are more likely to remain and feel valued.

Some providers felt that there has been a change and that ageism is no longer an issue, at least from better employers. One interviewee stated:



**"I don't think there's much of a barrier from employers any more for people over 50. I think there was years ago - ten years ago."**

Similarly, some providers report that employers are now 'waking up to the fact that they need to be less ageist.' Local knowledge between service provider and employers is key. For example, one provider knows which employers have signed up to the Disability Confidence Team and so will be more supportive of interviewing customers from that group. Some service providers have resources to enable them to network and build relationships with local firms.

However, other service providers report contrasting experiences and that they still need to spend time getting employers to understand the benefits of employing mature person in the workplace. One adviser said:

**"I think if an employer was to meet this person face-to-face, or give them a trial, you know, work trial for a day, I'm sure they'd see the benefits, and I can honestly see that, because we've got a lot of good people out there have skills, and the experience, and the knowledge, to, you know, do a lot of different things, in a company."**

One provider reported that whether or not an employer was prepared to take older people depends on the industry, for example, a web designer would want a younger person. It is now seen as old-fashioned to be ageist but that does not mean that some companies do not still take this attitude. It is a strength of the service provider teams to do appropriate liaison with employers to overcome this attitude.

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## **Collaboration and partnership**

It is clear that partnerships are critical in providing services and in referral and destination signposting. In addition to working closely with employers as described above, the service providers showed that it was vital to work in partnership across the whole sector. In particular, relationships with other employment services and the National Careers Service was key for those who did not have these embedded in their own offer. Being able to have access to training providers is also very important; in some cases, the service provider has an active involvement in local networks to achieve this aim. Collaboration also enables effective onward progression and signposting, which can really only be achieved with high levels of local, up to date knowledge. Being able to refer to other statutory services is important for the private or voluntary sector providers. And referral to

specialist services is also very important, especially as some clients may have extensive needs around mental health or drug and alcohol issues. The providers note a wide range of other providers and organisations with which they work. These include employment agencies, voluntary organisations, housing associations, sports clubs, faith groups, community centres.

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### **Flexibility and creative responses - innovation**

Where funding permits providers have been able to develop innovative responses. In particular in our examples here is the Returneeship model described above. Releasing Potential developed the Returneeship. The manager collaborated intensively to achieve the model. The manager went into job centres for the first time in 2016 and:

**"With the support of the job centre we did talk to customers and we ran a pilot where we ran ten Returneeships across different parts of the north-east, starting in Hull and then up in Tyne and Wear, County Durham and Yorkshire. We did a lot of work with customers. I also worked with work psychologists from DWP, just to see what made this group different. What was the difference to the course we were offering to what they'd been offered in the past?"**

Dissemination of their findings has been important for this service. Trainees make a film and when it is shown JCP staff, employers, National Careers Service, mental health support organisations, and other employment agencies are invited. Participants have CVs printed to distribute. The service works with job centres afterwards to follow up any work opportunities.

However, all the providers show how they can be flexible, even within the restrictions they face. One provider reports changes in how JCP offices work with their customers. The organisation used to be 'one size fits all'. Now there is more flexibility for each office to tailor approach to needs of local population because of, for example, transport, or the location of office premises.

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### **Challenges / gaps: What barriers hinder successful development and delivery of support for over 50s?**

The barriers in general are explored in more detail in the previous chapter. Most findings refer to barriers to employment rather than access to support but there is some evidence that people aged over 50 might not be



accessing IAG or training, sometimes because they are not claiming benefits. There is some evidence from the interviews that some older people lack confidence and are often out of practice in job search.

Some of the provision outlined above has been specifically created to meet the needs of over 50s which providers had identified. However, nationally the provision is patchy and tends to rely on specific projects which might only be available locally. There is some inconsistency in how over 50s are viewed by providers, with some not clearly making a transparent offering to the age group, but then actually offering a 'hidden' bespoke service once a client is engaged.

It can be hard for older people to find out about the support on offer and some of the more successful practice relies on being able to do outreach, but this is costly and can usually only be done if there is project funding, rather than by a mainstream service. In particular people are often unaware of the National Careers Service.

Self-employment support is not very evident in the data. This can be a good option for, and is reportedly popular with, older workers, particularly those who have a good level of skill and experience and could reasonably expect to do well in running a small business. This will be an entirely new way of working and does not suit everyone. It is not usually an option for people who have low skills, are not confident or have other underlying issues to contend with.

Access to support is problematic. Locality, transport and ease of availability remain key factors for engaging older people. Locally based provision in their own communities is vital but rarely available.

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### **What next?**

Some good and effective practice has been identified in the participating organisations and projects. They show considerable levels of partnership working which strengthens the support on offer. Even more sharing of staff and expertise could achieve a wider range of successful programmes.

There is some evidence of innovative practice, which, unfortunately, does tend to be more costly and need funding above the norm. However, the level of individual guidance, opportunities for training and one to one support indicate that this is a potentially more effective route for individuals who are distanced from the labour market, resulting in increased skills and confidence, with a more likely return to work in the future. Providers should have in place initial assessment procedures that allow them to identify those who need different levels of support. Some individuals are job ready and require less support to enable a successful return to work.

Further afield, there are a range of new initiatives and research from government which can provide further support and resource for any pilot

programmes. It is worth revisiting the previous notion of ‘Retain, Retrain, Recruit’ originally proposed by the Fuller Working Lives initiative<sup>19</sup> to see what actions may be needed. In particular this report highlights a role for employers. Networks of ‘age friendly’ employers<sup>20</sup> could be encouraged. Toolkits have been developed for employers to support methods for retaining and retraining their older workforce. Employers can be encouraged consider the benefits that recruiting older workers can bring into the workforce<sup>21</sup>, for example in terms of their experience, resilience, and developed work habits.

To this end some employers have introduced midlife reviews and/or are referring employees to the government’s midlife MOT<sup>22</sup> to encourage older workers to review alongside ensuring that they are saving towards pensions. There is previous evidence that a ‘career’ review, especially if leading to training, encourages retention and potentially the take up of training<sup>23</sup>.

In terms of skills development learning providers too should consider whether or not they have appropriate provision for people over 50 who wish to retrain. For example, the Digital Skills Entitlement of the Adult Education Budget is a useful contribution to retraining in IT, as may be the National Retraining Scheme. This Scheme from DfE is currently in its pilot phase and offers opportunities to adults who wish to retrain. Currently, it is only available to adults in work, and at risk of the impact of industrial change. To prevent worklessness in older adults, there could be opportunities to take advantage of its model of retraining.

Overall, gaps remain. Support for over 50s is patchy and dependent in some cases on extra or special funding which is project-based and therefore time-limited. Lessons from existing initiatives, pilots and programmes must be captured and shared, in order to support the development of consistent and effective mainstream, permanent provision for all over 50s.

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23 Stephen McNair 2008 Strengthening the older workforce; an evaluation of the ReGrow project. <http://stephenmcnair.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ReGrow-evaluation-report-Dec-2008.pdf>

# Conclusion and Recommendations

In many ways the current labour market context is a benevolent one for the over 50s: employment is high both overall and the for the over 50s, unemployment rates are low, and rates of economic inactivity are falling. (These words are being written in the first few days of April 2020. All the above is now at risk given the Corona Virus outbreak and its likely economic consequences.) The labour markets in Bristol and the West of England Combined Authority areas are especially buoyant and while improving the labour markets in the West Midlands and London City combined authority areas perform less well than for England as a whole.

Even though the labour market situation in early 2020 is much healthier than 20 years ago which saw the launch of the New Deal 50 plus, substantial problems remain for the minority of over 50s who remain workless or face low skilled, low paid work. Labour market programmes for the over 50s still need to address complex and inter-related barriers for this group of older people. These barriers include: low confidence levels, actual and perceived age discrimination, the need to update and improve skill levels across a range of areas: job finding, basic skills, IT and vocational skills, health conditions, family caring responsibilities, especially for women, and the need for flexible working.

There is often a range of support available, but it can be sparse for some topics, and support needs to be integrated and packaged in ways that allow individuals to smoothly obtain the support they need.

Any forthcoming pilot projects trialling new approaches to employment support should try to take as long a view as possible, perhaps using skills auditing, reviews or other appropriate mechanisms as baselines and look for longer term follow up opportunities, including retraining options. Provision should be tailored to individuals, holistic and personalised and include:

- initial assessment to determine the scope and level of support an individual needs
- review including showing people how to self-review
- action planning which is 'owned' by the client, enabling them to carry out the actions
- ongoing support - IAG / career / financial
- skills and skill levels assessments

## Conclusion and Recommendations

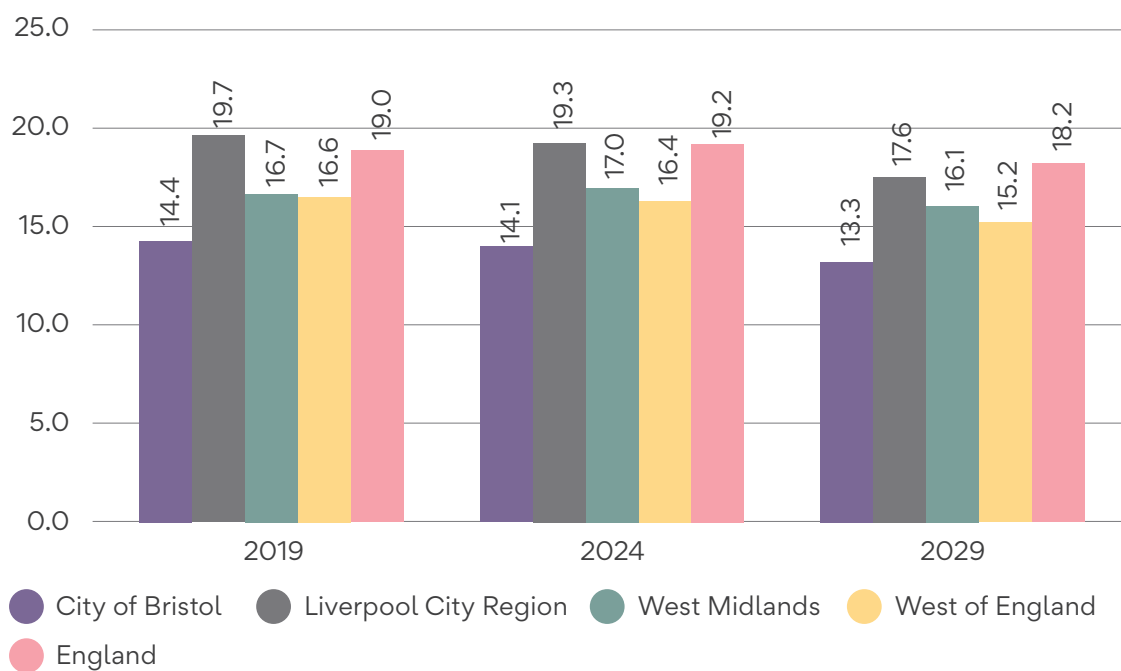
- referral to appropriate training - and funding for the training where possible
- ILM or other experience opportunities / apprenticeships
- direct links to employers and job matching
- opportunities for review and training for people in work, to avoid worklessness
- signposting to other appropriate provision

Effective mechanisms for the coordination of support will also be vital. In different localities, there can be lots of potentially available provision which needs to be packaged into coherent programmes of support for individuals. This requires effective and expert signposting, collaboration within and across organisations, and partnership working across services and agencies.

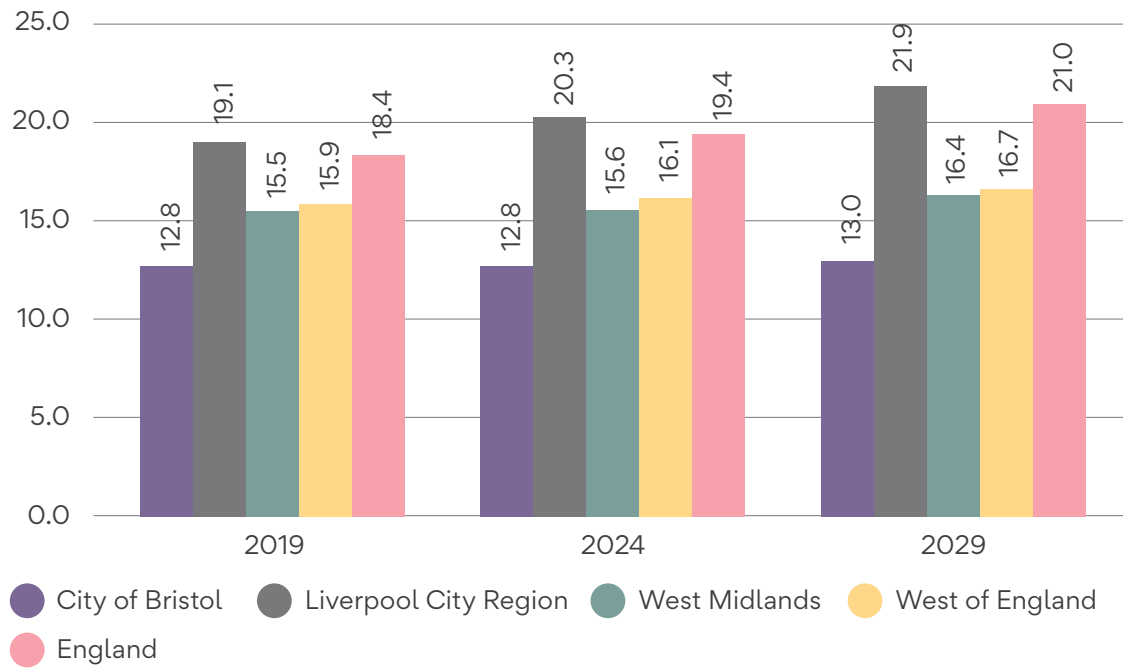
Finally, any development and trialing of new approaches must be underpinned by rigorous testing and evidence sharing. Robust evaluation practices will ensure that the success of support are clearly monitored and assessed. Evidence should be shared with key stakeholders and practitioners, ensuring all those working to improve support for over 50s can learn from others and realise any lessons made and utilise new ways of working. This, in turn, will help to test and share the effectiveness of new models of support for over 50s.

# Annex 1: Detailed Labour Market Charts

Figure A.1: Proportion of total population aged 50-64, 2019 and projected for 2024 and 2029 (ONS)



**Figure A.2: Proportion of total population aged 65+, 2019 and projected for 2024 and 2029 (ONS)**



**Figure A.3: Employment rates by age in England, 2009 to 2019 (ONS)**

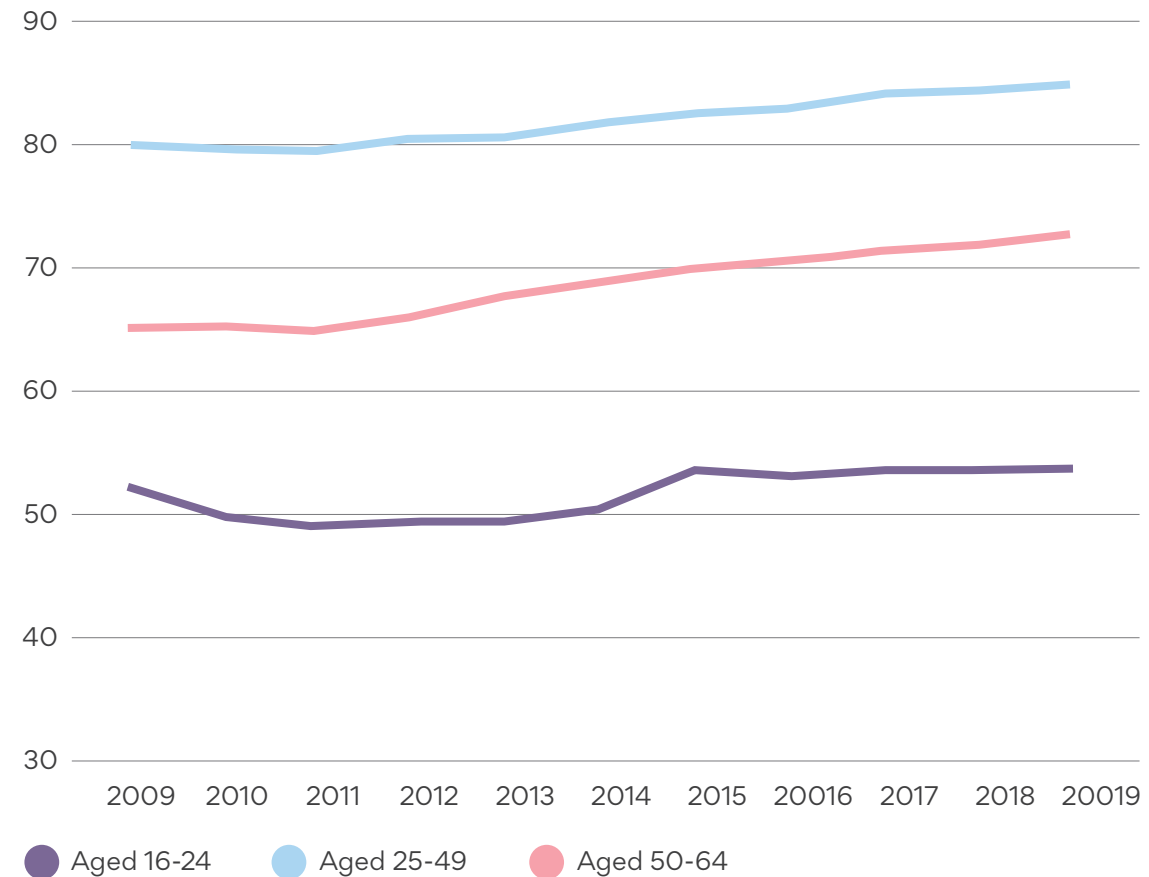
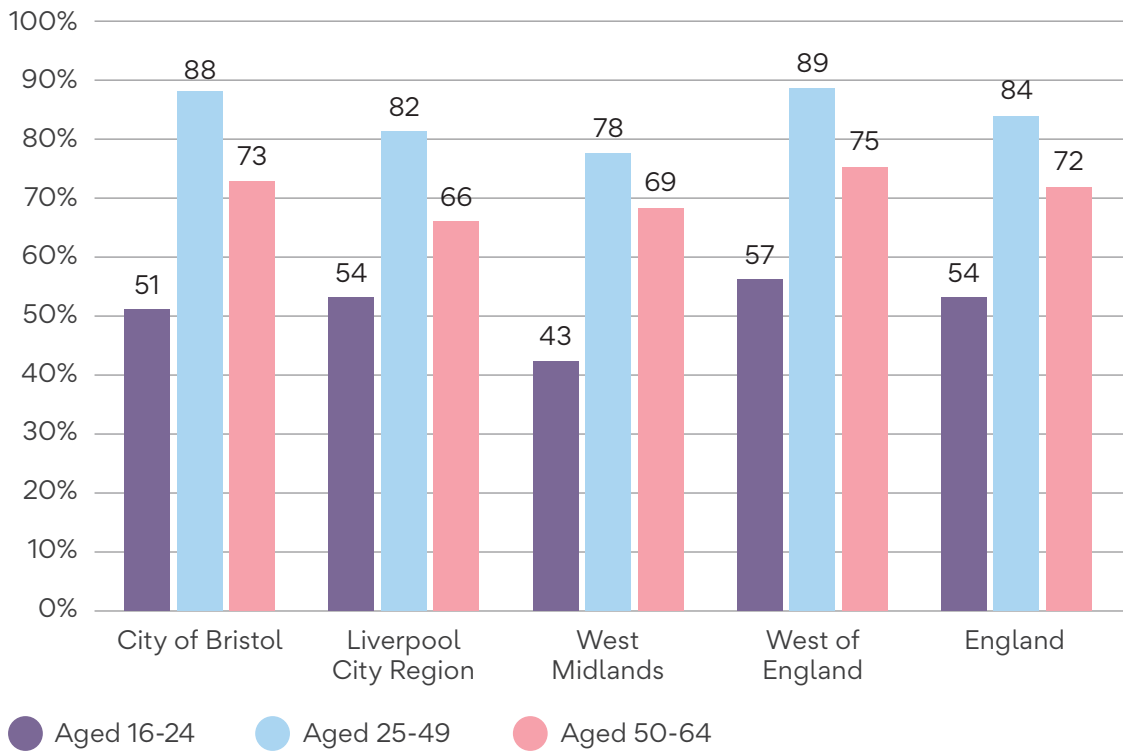
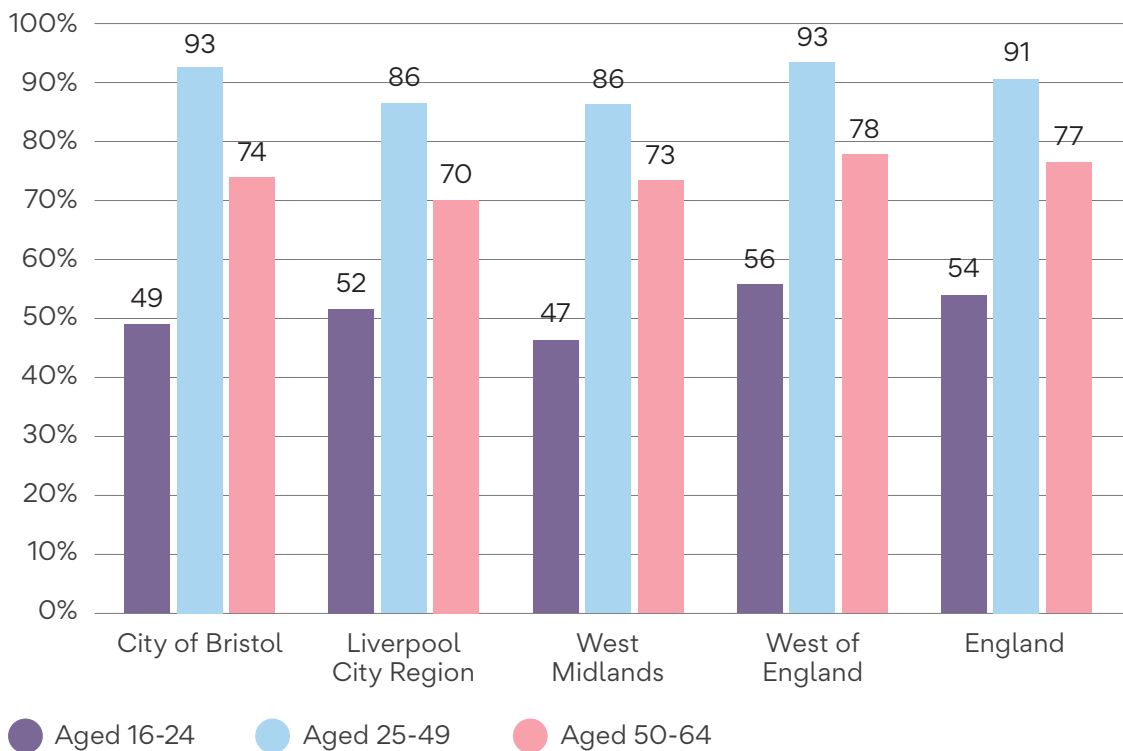


Figure A.4: Employment rates by age and area, 2018 (ONS)

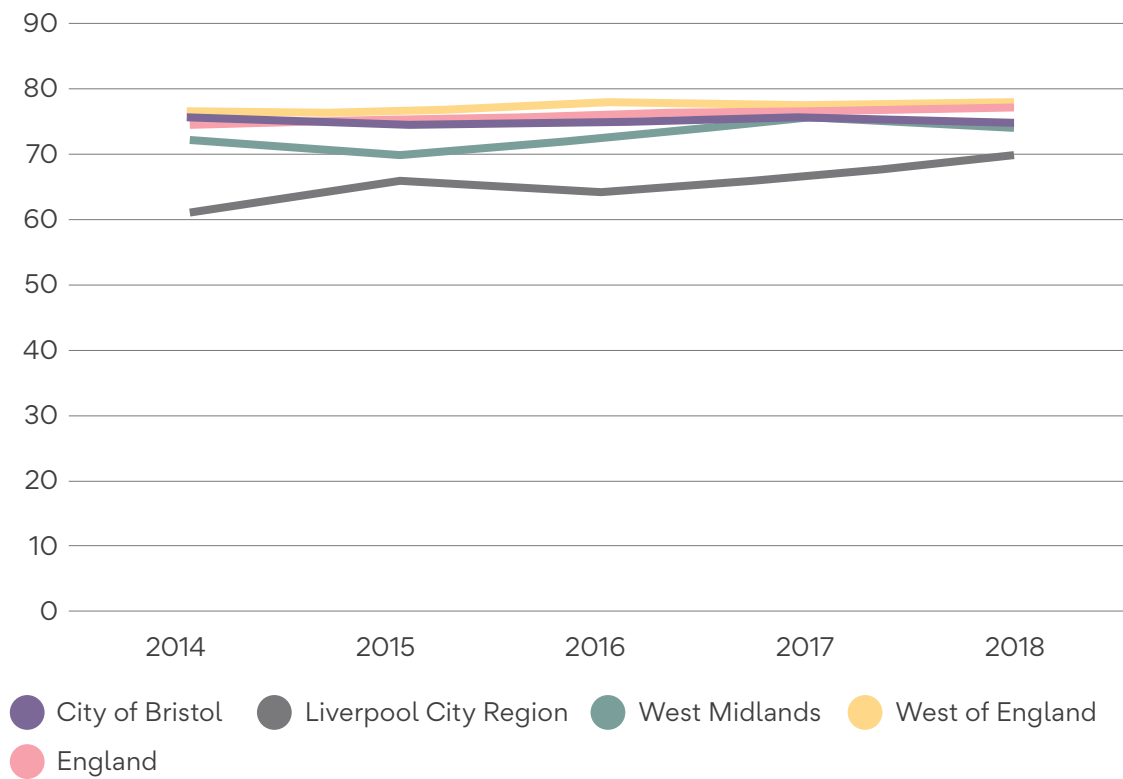


Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS

Figure A.5: Male employment rates by age and area, 2018 (ONS)



**Figure A.6: Male employment rates by age and area, trends: 2014 to 2018 (ONS)**



**Figure A.7: Female employment rates by age and area, 2018 (ONS)**

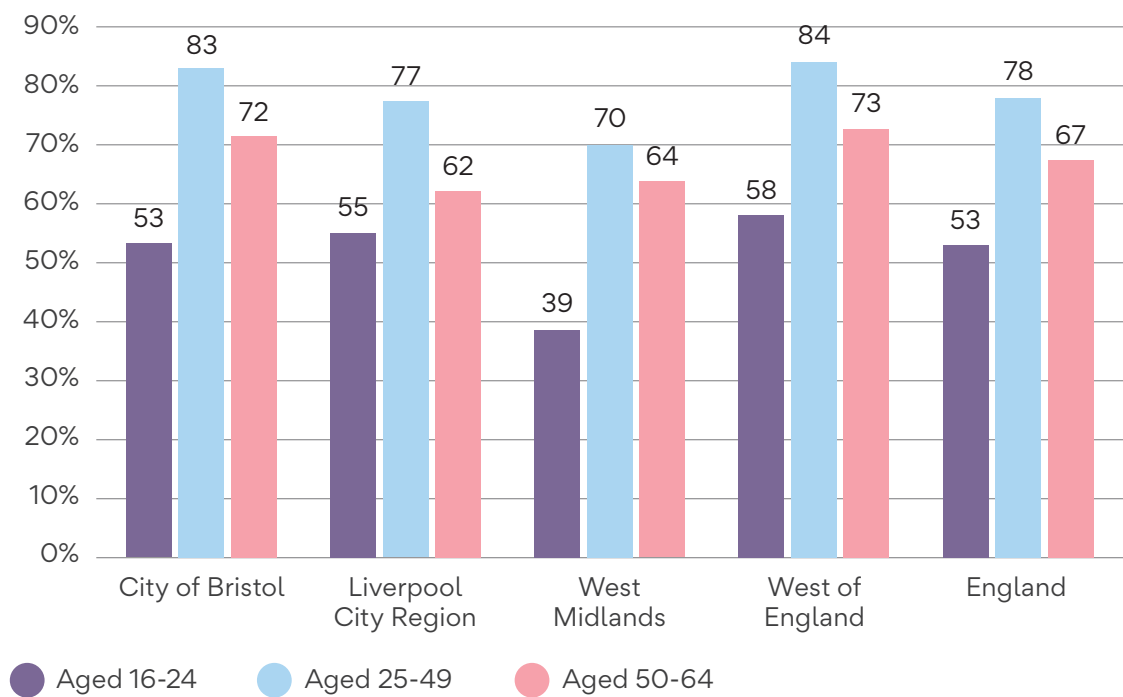




Figure A.8: Female employment rates by age and area, trends: 2014 to 2018 (ONS)

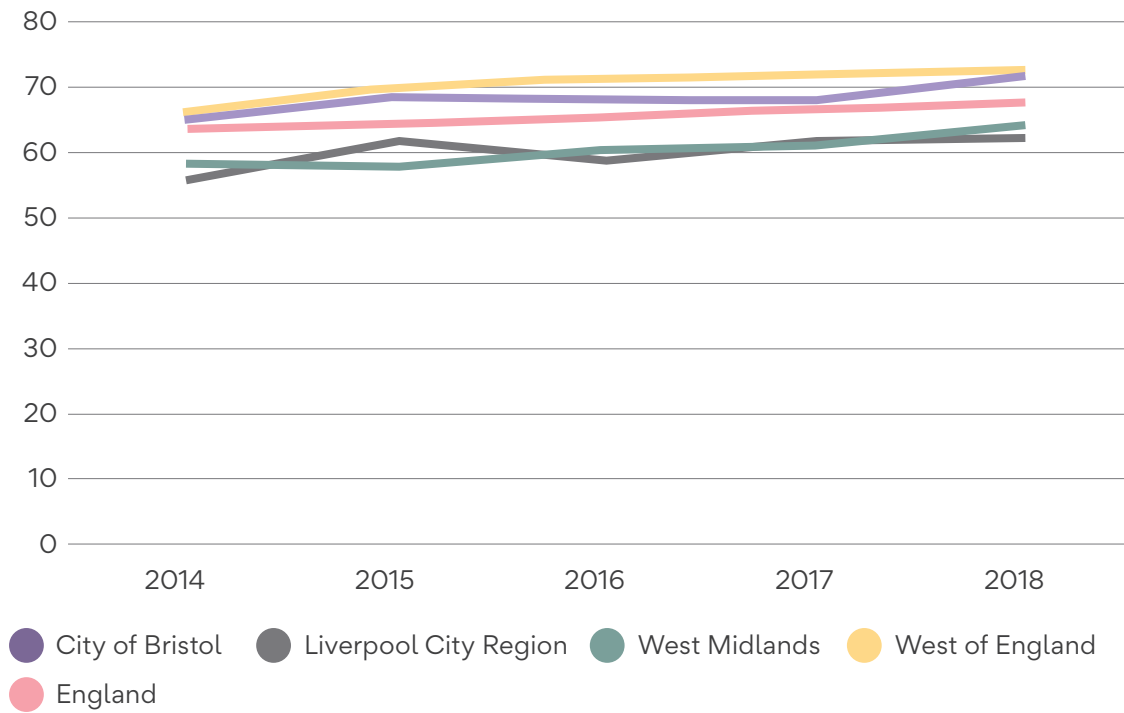
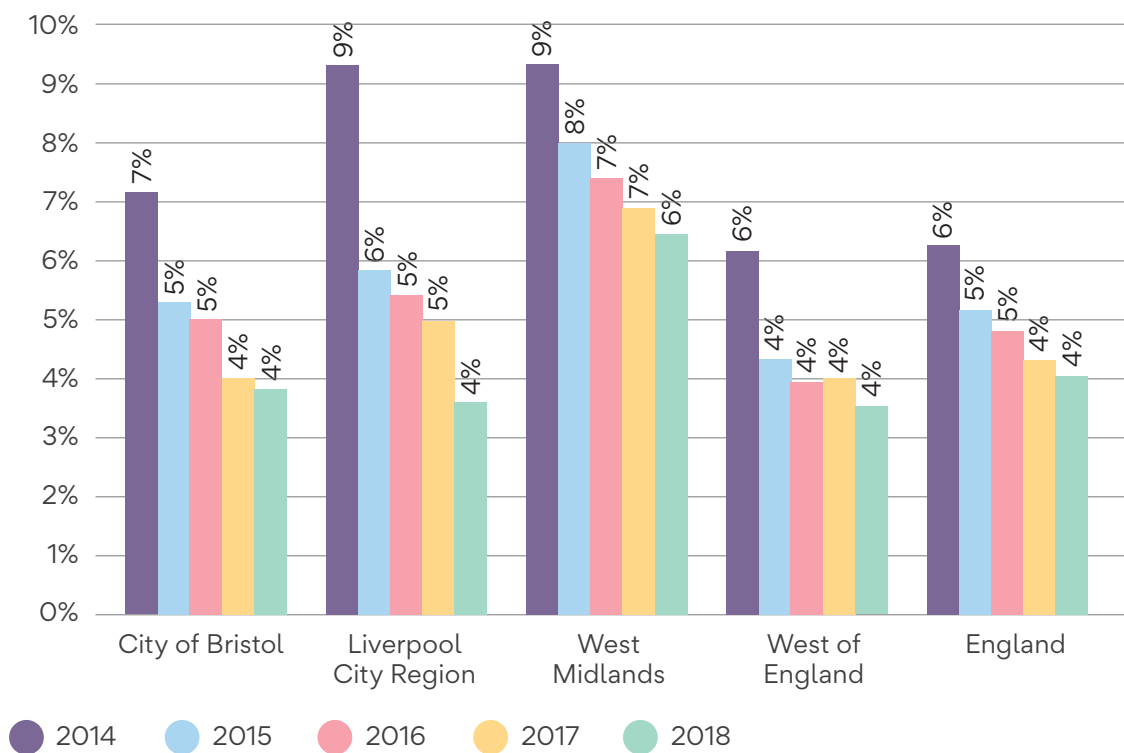
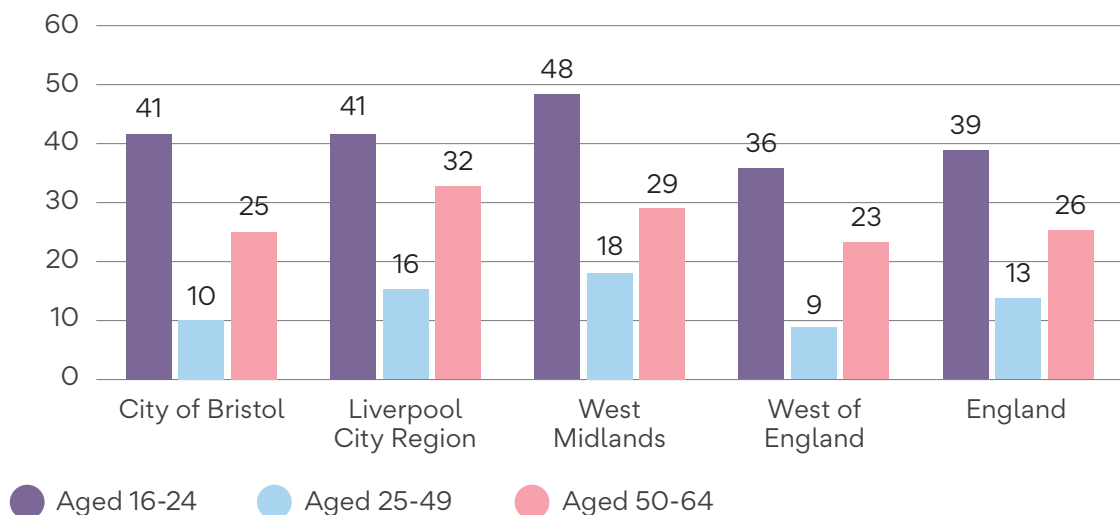


Figure A.9: Modelled unemployment rates by area, working age, trends: 2014 to 2018 (ONS)



**Figure A.10: Proportion who are economically inactive by age and area, 2018 (ONS)**



Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS

**Figure A.11: Proportion who work part time by age group and area, 2018 (ONS)**

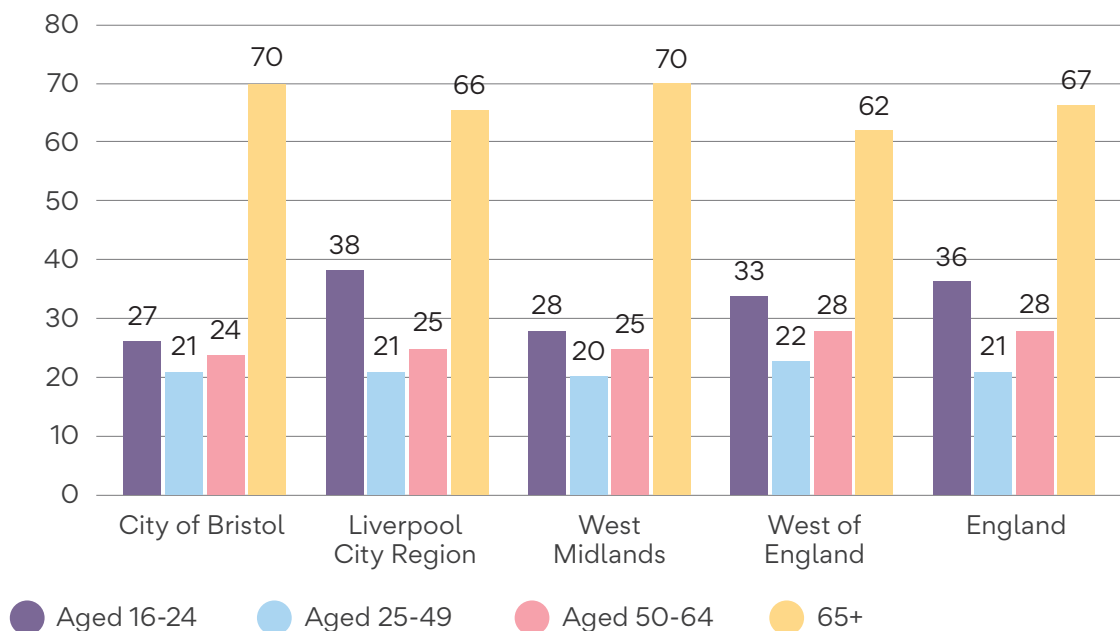


Figure A.12: Hourly pay - Gross (£) - For all age groups: United Kingdom, 2019 (ONS)

Occupation	Age Group					
	18-21	22-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
<b>ALL OCCUPATIONS</b>	8.52	11.88	14.76	15.49	14.13	12.03
<b>Managers, directors and senior officials</b>	<b>10.21</b>	<b>14.04</b>	<b>20.00</b>	<b>23.96</b>	<b>23.38</b>	<b>19.16</b>
Corporate managers and directors	9.91	15.12	21.53	25.64	24.98	20.49
Other managers and proprietors	10.75	11.98	14.18	16.18	16.70	15.06
<b>Professional occupations</b>	<b>10.83</b>	<b>16.57</b>	<b>21.49</b>	<b>23.17</b>	<b>22.74</b>	<b>21.54</b>
Science, research, engineering and technology professionals	9.83	16.33	21.48	24.61	23.25	22.33
Health professionals	12.38	16.10	19.48	20.53	21.28	19.59
Teaching and educational professionals	10.02	17.49	23.09	24.87	24.52	24.18
Business, media and public service professionals	11.05	16.46	21.13	22.67	22.28	20.39
<b>Associate professional and technical occupations</b>	<b>9.81</b>	<b>13.43</b>	<b>16.48</b>	<b>17.98</b>	<b>16.73</b>	<b>15.37</b>
Science, engineering and technology associate professionals	9.33	12.51	15.03	16.00	15.33	14.91
Health and social care associate professionals	9.56	12.52	13.20	13.75	13.62	12.84
Protective service occupations	12.42	13.43	18.70	19.31	18.76	15.71
Culture, media and sports occupations	10.00	12.55	14.80	16.06	15.11	13.73
Business and public service associate professionals	9.79	14.36	17.97	19.11	18.09	16.71
<b>Administrative and secretarial occupations</b>	<b>9.12</b>	<b>10.95</b>	<b>11.89</b>	<b>11.97</b>	<b>11.82</b>	<b>11.01</b>
Administrative occupations	9.20	11.14	12.19	12.21	12.08	11.34
Secretarial and related occupations	8.51	9.53	10.20	10.72	10.50	10.27
<b>Skilled trades occupations</b>	<b>8.50</b>	<b>11.53</b>	<b>12.86</b>	<b>13.28</b>	<b>13.51</b>	<b>12.61</b>
Skilled agricultural and related trades	8.45	9.77	10.00	10.78	10.60	10.23
Skilled metal, electrical and electronic trades	8.58	13.50	14.74	15.00	15.40	14.35
Skilled construction and building trades	8.23	12.35	13.80	13.85	14.19	13.59
Textiles, printing and other skilled trades	8.50	9.59	10.06	10.11	10.00	9.73
<b>Caring, leisure and other service occupations</b>	<b>8.60</b>	<b>9.42</b>	<b>9.88</b>	<b>10.14</b>	<b>10.18</b>	<b>9.94</b>
Caring personal service occupations	8.62	9.43	9.88	10.11	10.22	10.00
Leisure, travel and related personal service occupations	8.55	9.34	9.82	10.21	9.97	9.78
<b>Sales and customer service occupations</b>	<b>8.42</b>	<b>9.26</b>	<b>9.66</b>	<b>9.47</b>	<b>9.19</b>	<b>8.95</b>
Sales occupations	8.37	9.00	9.20	9.04	8.99	8.80
Customer service occupations	8.69	10.08	11.05	11.50	11.02	9.98
<b>Process, plant and machine operatives</b>	<b>8.56</b>	<b>10.46</b>	<b>11.27</b>	<b>11.65</b>	<b>11.34</b>	<b>10.42</b>
Process, plant and machine operatives	8.50	10.44	10.99	11.43	11.22	10.24
Transport and mobile machine drivers and operatives	9.05	10.50	11.53	11.82	11.43	10.48
<b>Elementary occupations</b>	<b>8.21</b>	<b>8.87</b>	<b>9.21</b>	<b>9.22</b>	<b>9.24</b>	<b>9.07</b>
Elementary trades and related occupations	8.50	9.50	9.79	9.76	9.96	9.84
Elementary administration and service occupations	8.21	8.76	9.13	9.18	9.18	9.02

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

Figure A.13: Hourly pay - Gross (£) - For all employees aged 50-59: United Kingdom, 2019 (ONS)

Occupation	All	Male	Female
<b>ALL OCCUPATIONS</b>	<b>14.13</b>	<b>16.43</b>	<b>12.19</b>
<b>Managers, directors and senior officials</b>	<b>23.38</b>	<b>25.35</b>	<b>19.73</b>
Corporate managers and directors	24.98	26.47	21.70
Other managers and proprietors	16.70	19.12	15.57
<b>Professional occupations</b>	<b>22.74</b>	<b>24.29</b>	<b>21.64</b>
Science, research, engineering and technology professionals	23.25	23.53	21.92
Health professionals	21.28	25.55	20.36
Teaching and educational professionals	24.52	25.94	23.78
Business, media and public service professionals	22.28	23.55	20.66
<b>Associate professional and technical occupations</b>	<b>16.73</b>	<b>18.76</b>	<b>14.88</b>
Science, engineering and technology associate professionals	15.33	16.71	12.53
Health and social care associate professionals	13.62	15.21	13.12
Protective service occupations	18.76	18.78	18.20
Culture, media and sports occupations	15.11	15.13	14.75
Business and public service associate professionals	18.09	20.92	15.85
<b>Administrative and secretarial occupations</b>	<b>11.82</b>	<b>13.65</b>	<b>11.51</b>
Administrative occupations	12.08	13.91	11.85
Secretarial and related occupations	10.50	9.79	10.53
<b>Skilled trades occupations</b>	<b>13.51</b>	<b>14.16</b>	<b>9.50</b>
Skilled agricultural and related trades	10.60	10.66	10.06
Skilled metal, electrical and electronic trades	15.40	15.41	14.01
Skilled construction and building trades	14.19	14.21	12.51
Textiles, printing and other skilled trades	10.00	10.56	9.30
<b>Caring, leisure and other service occupations</b>	<b>10.18</b>	<b>10.63</b>	<b>10.11</b>
Caring personal service occupations	10.22	10.56	10.18
Leisure, travel and related personal service occupations	9.97	10.74	9.41
<b>Sales and customer service occupations</b>	<b>9.19</b>	<b>10.02</b>	<b>9.00</b>
Sales occupations	8.99	9.59	8.80
Customer service occupations	11.02	12.71	10.63
<b>Process, plant and machine operatives</b>	<b>11.34</b>	<b>11.74</b>	<b>9.26</b>
Process, plant and machine operatives	11.22	12.19	9.21
Transport and mobile machine drivers and operatives	11.43	11.53	9.32
<b>Elementary occupations</b>	<b>9.24</b>	<b>10.35</b>	<b>8.90</b>
Elementary trades and related occupations	9.96	10.57	8.92
Elementary administration and service occupations	9.18	10.27	8.90

Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

# Annex 2: Models of Support

**A. One local authority provider** has a specialist employment team who go out and meet the person, work with them one to one to find out what type of job they are looking for, and what transferable skills they have. They also identified any barriers to employment that the individual might have, such as travel or childcare. The adviser goes through every detail with the client and arrive at a very tailored CV for the client. The adviser goes out to employers with the CV. The provider having established good relationships with employers. This is due to being part of a local authority and not charging employers for assisting them with recruitment as a recruitment agency would. This provider also carries out 'big recruitments as well, tailoring them for certain groups ... it could be factory work, security, sales assistants'. Employers are aware of the team and contact them to ask if they have someone suitable to fill vacancies. Providers actively go out to keep abreast of local trends, and to stay aware of what is happening; for example, if there are redundancies.

**B. Sefton@Work** helps people with action plans, 1:1 support; the cost of up to a month's travel when they go into work, information, advice, and support. Support can cover a range of issues that are seen as a barrier to work including around debts, health issues, and housing. Training is also available to help them move into work. This includes the option of a Sector Based Work Academy (SBWA). For example, this includes the NHS wanting to recruit clinical and non-clinical staff, with the SBWA assisting people who have not worked in the NHS previously. A training course of two weeks leads to a guaranteed interview at the end. The provider can also offer a 10-week work placement (Work Programme) (available to people of all ages). Participation in the work placement does not affect benefit entitlement and gives individuals some recent work experience for their CV and boots their confidence regarding being in a workplace. This service is free, confidential and entirely voluntary. Appointments are offered weekly, fortnightly or monthly depending on need.

The programme has a team of employer liaison officers who source jobs for clients. These officers proactively go into local community / local borough to find employers who are looking to recruit. If a local employer informs them that they have a vacancy, then a recruitment drive will be undertaken, and suitable candidates will be found. This local authority provider can also give their clients advance access to vacancies before they are made available to the general public.

**C. Sefton@Work also has a specific programme:** "Think Differently Cope Differently" for the over 50s. This had 545 participants between January 2016 and December 2019. The majority were men (56 percent). One hundred and sixty-two of these went onto employment (30%). The percentage of people with few basic skills was high at 40 percent (217). Thirty eight percent of participants (206) had a health or learning disability.

**D. Job Centre Plus (JCP) has a standard delivery model.** Advisers get to know the customer and assess their strengths and transferable skills. Realistic conversations are had around what work is available locally and what the customer needs for certain jobs (e.g. the ability to drive to work, if located some distance away). If the customer has not found employment after 13 weeks, then a conversation is had around their barriers to finding work.

As a specific offer for older people, JCP runs IT training opportunities for those who are anxious about technology. This includes the use of smartphones, getting onto social media, and how to email. A fifty percent turn up rate is typical for these sessions as much of this offering is not mandatory. Reasons for absence include anxiety or concern about being in a room full of people. Attendance provides an opportunity to network and make friends, who look out for jobs for each other. It is important not to "pigeonhole" older customers and make sure support can be tailored to individual need as much as possible.

**E. Use of Intermediate Labour Markets (ILMs).** One provider suggested that employers prefer older people in ILMs as they are more likely to 'turn up for work'. Another provider corroborated this regarding older clients who participate in ILMs: 'they're always being the ones who shine ... because they've got that level of loyalty, commitment, reliability ... punctuality [in contrast to younger clients] and the skillset, the transferable skills they can bring over'.

**F. Training providers** in the local area try and turn "negatives into positives" as older people have a wealth of experience, life skills that are transferable, commitment, and resilience. Each client is assigned an employment coach to support them to progress through to sustained employment. A bespoke service is offered to meet the needs the individual. Advisors help with CVs and confidence building. Action plans can include training as necessary. In addition to the usual IAG support this service works closely with specialist support services e.g. to address any issues around drugs, alcohol, homeless, or mental health. Providing the right preparation for employment is critical: "anyone can get a job ... what we don't want [is for] people to just get a job and then fall out of work ... it needs to be the right role" which leads to sustained employment.

### **G. High quality Review / IAG / Advice followed by training opportunities**

One provider stated that the National Careers Service used to run a specific workshop for 50-plus and believed that it closely matched their needs , especially via referrals to training / education. This specific provision is no longer available.

### **H: Returneeships**

The manager interviewed developed the Returneeships intervention specifically for people of aged 40 and over when: ‘I realised I couldn't find anything when I was searching, specifically for over 40s or over 50s or certainly older... and particularly long-term claimants. I couldn't find anything for that as well. So it was by chance I met someone [...] we started talking about it and we just thought, could we not do something that would... because people who are 50 and have been unemployed for a while, to be honest they've been on every CV writing course you can imagine and they become a little bit numb to it. They have their own idea of, I'm just going to go to a classroom with half a dozen other unemployed people and we're going to do our CV again. Or someone's going to help me do my CV again’.

Returneeships consists of a two-week classroom-based course developing a business case for a new business and two days for making a TV programme about their idea. This is an innovative approach to developing skills. Making a television programme helps to build social skills that can be lacking because of the experience of being long term unemployed. Venues are chosen where people feel comfortable e.g. at a football club and which has good transport links.

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



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