

# Findings from Ipsos MORI and Centre for Ageing Better deliberative workshops

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Topic: I am in work

## About the workshops

In January and February 2016, Ipsos MORI and the Centre for Ageing Better conducted two day-long deliberative workshops with people aged 45 and over, one in London and one in Birmingham.

The workshops were the final phase of a programme of work conducted by Ipsos MORI for the Centre for Ageing Better, looking at how different groups of people in England are currently experiencing and thinking about later life. The report and related materials from the earlier phases of this research can be found [here](#). Part of this work involved analysing data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing to develop six segments of the population aged 50 and over who are experiencing later life in markedly different ways, in terms of issues such as their health, financial security, social connections and overall wellbeing.

These segments were:

- Thriving boomers
- Downbeat boomers
- Can do and connected
- Squeezed middle aged
- Worried and disconnected
- Struggling and alone

More information on the segments is available [here](#). The workshops brought together people from all six of these segments to spend time discussing and reflecting on a set of topics that the Centre for Ageing Better has identified as priority areas in achieving a good later life.

The topics were:

- I live in a home and neighbourhood suited to me
- I am in work
- I feel confident to manage major life changes
- I am making a valued contribution to my community
- I keep physically and mentally healthy and active

Participants explored what each topic meant to them, and then developed and debated their own ideas for what actions or changes could help more people enjoy this aspect of a good later life.

The data generated from the discussions were analysed using a thematic approach, where the individual ideas and suggestions made within each of the topic areas discussed were categorised into similar themes.

This short briefing summarises the main findings from the workshops on the topic 'I am in work'. Further briefings will be published on each of the topics.

# What does the topic 'I am in work' mean to people, and why does it matter?

Participants typically assumed that the statement 'I am in work' referred to paid employment rather than volunteering or informal caring. Regardless of their age or segment, participants were positive about the benefits of staying in work stating that employment provided them with a **structure, routine and sense of purpose**. They believed that, once out of work, it was easy to 'fall into a rut' with some noting that they now spent longer on routine household tasks simple to help fill their time.

Participants also felt **proud** of the work they did and valued that employment ensured that they could be **financially independent**, and also feel like a respected member of the community with useful skills. Indeed, mindful of all they had learnt from a lifetime in work, some – particularly those in skilled roles – were keen to pass on their experience to other more junior members of the workforce.

“Feel- good factor – there’s that pride that you can do something, you can earn your crust.”

Struggling and Alone/Worried and Disconnected, Birmingham

The **social benefits** of working were also recognised and valued. Participants, particularly those who lacked other opportunities for socializing such as those in the Struggling and Alone or the Worried and Disconnected segments, welcomed that employment provided them with a ready-made social network, and opportunities for interacting both in and out of the workplace.

That said, while all recognised the benefits of working in later life in principle, **not all were keen to stay in employment longer than was financially necessary**. Indeed, some of those still working were concerned that their retirement might be further off than they might ideally like; many mentioned the increasing state pension age and stated that this contributed to a sense that the goalposts had been shifted – they were working to an agreed date of retirement only for it to shift as it approached nearer.

Compounding this sense of unfairness, participants were also concerned about the **physical toll** of staying in work later in life. This was particularly true of those working in both physically demanding and mentally taxing roles who were worried about their ability to stay in such employment but, equally, did not think that they were qualified to do any other type of work.

“My friend has to work until she’s 67 to get the pension, she works a heavy job, she’ll pop her clogs if she carries on that long”

Struggling and Alone/Worried and Disconnected, London

A reluctance to work later in life also stemmed from people's positive views on retirement, particularly by those from more financially secure segments like the Thriving Boomers. These participants were looking forward to the **flexibility offered by retirement** – the chance to choose how to spend their time – and, further, felt that after many years of work this was their right.

Indeed, these views were reinforced by those who had already retired and who, on the whole, welcomed this new phase in their life and were enjoying the **opportunities** that it brought them. This included spending more time with family, participating in hobbies, or taking on voluntary or informal work. Some participants were also grateful to have more time to relax.

**“I love retirement, I used to have to be up at the crack of dawn and then do the tea, get the children up, and I was so tired.”**

Struggling and Alone/Worried and Disconnected

A reluctance to work later in life was also built on moral objections. Participants argued that by their staying in work – even if they might not need to financially – they would be **taking jobs away from younger people**.

**“The only negative thing is that if we work to our 70s are we stopping a young person getting a job, a young couple might need that money more than we do?”**

Struggling and Alone/Worried and Disconnected, Birmingham

Therefore, what mattered overall to participants in later life was keeping active, being fulfilled and having structure. While work was identified as one means of achieving this, many participants felt other options – like caring, or travelling, or spending more time with friends – would achieve the same ends.

**“Having a reason to get dressed, a reason to get out the house.”**

Can do and Connected, London

# What could support more people to stay in work longer as they get older?

## Flexible working conditions

Participants assumed that declining health could be more of an issue for them in later life, and that this could affect both the hours they were able to work and the kind of work they were able to do. In light of this flexibility was at the core of most of the suggestions made around enabling people to stay in work for longer. Further, while participants across all segments that discussed this topic made suggestions around flexibility it was apparent that the need for this was more acute among those currently suffering with ill health, such as those in the Struggling and Alone segment.



**I don't want to give up work, I'm not looking forward to not being in work but it's going to get harder so reduced hours would help"**

Struggling and Alone/Worried and Disconnected, Birmingham

Some of the other suggestions for flexible working conditions that were made by participants are highlighted in the boxes below:

"Flexible hours" – including flexible start and finish times, and opportunities to work reduced hours.

"Part time/job share opportunities" – to allow people to reduce their hours.

"Adapt job for age" – especially relevant for physically demanding roles - to utilise the changing strengths of employees as they get older.

"Working from home" – some or all of the time, to reduce the physical demands on employees as they get older.

"To train/teach others, share skills" – giving older people the opportunity to share their skills and experiences, for example through job sharing.

Exploring these in more detail, those in more physically demanding roles, such as builders and fire service personnel, suggested that employers could facilitate a change of roles for their employees so that they could work in a position more suitable for their physical health; for instance, swapping front line work for a more administrative post. However, it was accepted that this kind of policy would not be possible for all employers, and it would hinge on business need.

Implementing flexible hours was also a popular suggestion that was made by all segments in both workshops. Further, it was considered to be a high impact solution; flexibility in terms of hours worked was thought to be beneficial for lots of different people not just those approaching later life. This recommendation is also reflected in other related research; in work conducted by Ipsos MORI for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation over half (56%) of the general public supported an automatic right for employees over 60 to demand flexible hours while a similar proportion (54%) supported an automatic right for employees of 60 to demand part-time work<sup>1</sup>.

While some participants initially suggested that working hours could be automatically reduced as people approached retirement, it was pointed out that a blanket approach might not be appropriate given some are happy and capable to continue working full time for longer and so should be given the option to do so. Further, participants were concerned that if flexible hours were something that became available only at a particular point in life this could become open to abuse, as employers may try to push people to reduce their hours before they are ready to do so. Therefore it was proposed that it should be made easier to work flexible or reduced hours for all ages, as then it would be possible for people – including those who are younger – to utilise this opportunity when the time was right for them. Participants believed that employers would need to be the driving force to implement this change, though legislative backing may be necessary to ensure that they have a reason to do so.

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**“ We need to put things in place earlier in life so people don’t burn themselves out. Flexible hours in Switzerland – leaving early or late as long as you work the right amount of hours.”**

Struggling and Alone/Worried and Disconnected, London

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As a means of enabling people to work more flexibly, job shares were also suggested. In particular, participants spoke of pairing up younger and older people as they believed that this would not only allow people to work fewer hours, but would also provide a valuable opportunity for the older person to be able to pass on some of their skills and expertise.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/preparing-later-life-working-longer-and-saving-more>

## Social component of working

Some participants, especially those who were older – such as those in the Can Do and Connected and Worried and Disconnected segments - felt that work-based socializing was often targeted towards younger people and that they had been sidelined as a result. Some believed this to be a result of pubs and social clubs – where work events often take place – being increasingly more orientated towards younger people more generally whereas previously they had catered for a range of age groups. Given the importance of the social aspect of work, however, participants suggested that people would be encouraged to stay in employment for longer if the associated social activities were more inclusive and accessible.

Involving a range of employees in the organization of such activities was considered a helpful means of achieving this – perhaps by establishing a work-based social committee. Some also raised the idea that, even after retirement, former employees be invited to their work social events so they can maintain the networks they had built through employment.

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**After work social clubs should be accessible to everyone. After you finish work you should become a member automatically”**

Struggling and Alone/Worried and Disconnected, Birmingham

## Easing the transition from work to retirement

Many of the participants who had moved from full-time work straight into retirement commented on how they had struggled to manage this transition. They noted that the pace of life had slowed considerably and, without an alternative routine in place, they often found it difficult to fill all the time they suddenly had at their disposal.

**"I never prepared for retirement. What I was doing was great, then I was forced to retire and I didn't know what to do with myself so you end up just sitting down and watch [sic] the telly. There's a lot of hours in a day to fill."**

Struggling and Alone/Worried and Disconnected, Birmingham

It was generally agreed that phasing down working hours could be a useful bridging step to full retirement. It was thought that this would allow people to make more gradual changes to their routine, building up what they do outside of work.

**"They have an 'ease you into retirement' course at my work to help because it's so different."**

Squeezed Middle, London

Participants also suggested that employers provide courses to help people manage the transition from work to retirement. Indeed, some noted that their employers already did this and that this was well received.

Some participants' suggestions for easing the transition from work into retirement are shown in the boxes below:

"Shorter working hours" – as a staggered approach to retirement.

"Talking therapies in the workplace earlier in life" – to equip people with the tools they need to deal with life changes such as retirement.

"Employers hosting life transition courses" – to help people prepare for retirement.



## Pursuing alternative forms of employment and activity

When considering working into later life, some participants spoke about other activities they were keen to pursue. In some cases these activities were other forms of employment, including turning what once was just a hobby (like making garden furniture) into a business, while others mentioned unpaid volunteering.

However participants did not always know what their options might be. As such, participants suggested that a presentation, analogous to the way that school and university leavers attend careers fairs, outlining the full range of options open to them in retirement be given to them as they approach retirement. Employers were considered the best vehicle for such information, perhaps delivered as part of a broader programme of help and support as they transitioned into retirement.

Some of participants' suggestions for how people can become better prepared for pursuing alternative forms of employment and activity are shown in the boxes to the right.

"Professional and personal development to access training" – to equip people with the skills to pursue alternative forms of employment.

"Employers putting you in touch with volunteering organisations" – to help facilitate a move from paid work into volunteering.

Building on this, it was noted that opportunities for voluntary and informal work are not always well advertised and therefore difficult to come by especially for those who are less well connected.

**"A lot of this comes from word of mouth, if you don't have a network then you don't know about it"**

Can-do and Connected, London

Increased awareness of these roles, for instance through advertising by the local authority, and in public places such as libraries, local noticeboards and GP surgeries were all recommended.

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## Next steps

The Centre for Ageing Better is extremely grateful to the workshop participants for their time and energy taking part in the workshops. We are using the insights and ideas that people generated to feed into our work programmes.

This deliberative workshop supports other evidence that we have gathered that show the relationship between health, financial security, social connections and work in later life. We know that there are significant barriers to people aged 50 and over returning to work and that it is important to have age-friendly workplaces to support people to stay in work.

That is why we are taking a dual approach:

- We are developing and drawing together the evidence about the most effective ways to enable people aged 50 and over to get back into work.
- We are working with employers to draw together and share evidence about age-friendly workplaces. We are partnering with Business in the Community to make the case for age-friendly workplaces, learn from what leading employers are doing, and spread what works.

We will be engaging individuals, employers, representative groups and other organisations to work with us to create age-friendly workplaces.

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