



House of Commons  
Women and Equalities  
Committee

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**Older people and  
employment:  
Government and  
Equality and Human  
Rights Commission  
Responses to the  
Committee's Fourth  
Report of Session  
2017–19**

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**Sixth Special Report of Session  
2017–19**

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## Women and Equalities Committee

The Women and Equalities Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Equalities Office (GEO).

### Current membership

[Mrs Maria Miller MP](#) (*Conservative, Basingstoke*) (Chair)

[Tonia Antoniazzi MP](#) (*Labour, Gower*)

[Sarah Champion MP](#) (*Labour, Rotherham*)

[Angela Crawley MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Lanark and Hamilton East*)

[Philip Davies MP](#) (*Conservative, Shipley*)

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[Kirstene Hair MP](#) (*Conservative, Angus*)

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[Jess Phillips MP](#) (*Labour, Birmingham, Yardley*)

[Mr Gavin Shuker MP](#) (*Labour (Co-op), Luton South*)

[Tulip Siddiq MP](#) (*Labour, Hampstead and Kilburn*)

[Rosie Duffield MP](#) (*Labour, Canterbury*)

[Jared O'Mara MP](#) (*Labour, Sheffield, Hallam*)

[Teresa Pearce MP](#) (*Labour, Erith and Thamesmead*) were members of the Committee during this inquiry.

### Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/womenandequalities](http://www.parliament.uk/womenandequalities) and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Judith Boyce (Clerk), Luanne Middleton (Second Clerk), Holly Dustin, Tansy Hutchinson, and Shai Jacobs (Committee Specialists), Axell Kaubo (Inquiry Manager), Alexandra Hunter-Wainwright (Senior Committee Assistant), Mandy Sullivan (Committee Assistant), and Liz Parratt and Simon Horswell (Media Officers).

### Contacts

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# Special Report

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The Women and Equalities Committee published its Fourth Report of Session 2017–19, *Older people and employment*, as HC 359 on 17 July 2019. Responses were received from Government on 12 September 2018 and the Equality and Human Rights Commission on 10 October 2018; they are appended to this report.

## Appendix 1: Response from the Government

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1. The Government welcomes the Women and Equalities Select Committee's fourth report of the Session 2017–19, produced following its inquiry into older people and employment.
2. The Committee published its report on 17 July 2018.
3. The labour market remains strong and resilient. Headline employment and participation rates are at or near record levels with real progress for some historically under-represented groups, including older workers. There are currently 10.2 million (42.0%) people age 50 years and above in employment and there are 4.3 million (67.3%) women aged 50–64 in employment, this is an increase from 4.2 million (66.5%) in the last year. The employment rate for this 50–64 cohort however remains stubbornly below those of younger people aged 35–49 which is 10.8 million (85.2%).<sup>1</sup>
4. Successful cross-Government working has ensured that Fuller Working Lives policy is influencing the direction of policy development in a range of cross-cutting issues for example the Industrial Strategy, with specific reference to the work of the Business Champion for Older Workers and the Grand Challenge on Ageing. Retaining flexibility is important and building on the Industrial Strategy, the Careers Strategy and the response to the Taylor Review, Government is taking action to achieve improved outcomes where its intervention can make a positive difference. More detail is set out in our response.
5. As part of our drive to improve understanding and to open up a wider appreciation of the task in hand, Government now routinely publish headline measures each autumn. These are outlined below.

Average Age of Exit:<sup>2</sup> Average Age of Exit, Males: 65.1 years;  
Average Age of Exit, Females: 63.6 years

- i) 50+ Employment Rates: 50–64 Employment Rate, All: 71.2 per cent; 65+ Employment Rate, All: 10.0 per cent
- ii) Employment Rate Gap: In 2017, the employment rate gap between 50–64 and 35–49 year olds was 13.3 percentage points

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1 Source: ONS, August - Employment, unemployment and economic inactivity by age group, data: Apr-Jun 2018

2 Economic labour market status of individuals aged 50 and over, trends over time: September 2017

6. Government recognises that it cannot deliver sustained progress in isolation. The work of the Committee provides an invaluable insight into a number of challenges that Government needs to consider further during the development of the Fuller Working Lives policy narrative.

7. This document sets out more detail of the work that is taking place across Government to support older people in employment. It also provides Government's response to the recommendations made by the Committee.

## Committee Recommendations

### *Recommendation 1*

**The Equality and Human Rights Commission is right to be concerned by the low numbers of age discrimination claims being brought to it, but given its ambition to become a 'muscular regulator' we are surprised that it is not taking more action to remedy this. We recommend that the Commission develop a clear plan to tackle age discrimination in employment. This plan should include:**

- a) **Action to tackle discrimination in recruitment and the recruitment industry, using the evidence of age discrimination in job advertising that it holds as a result of its enforcement work in this area to identify the sectors with the worst record;**
- b) **An agreement with the Equality Advisory Support Service to identify and refer claims of age discrimination in employment as a priority for legal support by the Commission; and**
- c) **Action to examine whether the public sector is complying with its duty to have due regard to the need to eliminate age discrimination under the Public Sector Equality Duty. (Paragraph 29)**

8. Government is committed to ensuring that older workers are able to enjoy the benefits derived from employment and is clear that discrimination based age should not take place and prevent an individual from fulfilling their full potential. Government has engaged with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and have agreed that they will be providing a separate response to this recommendation as the EHRC is an independent public body set up to promote equality and human rights. Decisions about the priorities set and emerging work streams are for the Commission and its Board to determine and agree. The Equality Act 2006 (Schedule 1, Part 4, 42 (3)) affords the Commission a level of independence and it cannot be directed by Government to undertake work. It would therefore be inappropriate for Government to direct the Commission to undertake enforcement action.

### **Recommendation 2**

**The failure of the Government to include action to improve compliance with the Equality Act 2010 in its Fuller Working Lives strategy is a significant omission. We recommend that it engage with the Equality and Human Rights Commission with a view to agreeing enforcement actions that can be included as specific commitments in the strategy. (Paragraph 30)**

9. Government is committed to ensuring that older workers are able to enjoy the benefits derived from employment and is clear that discrimination based on age should not bar an individual from fulfilling their full potential. Government will continue to work closely with the EHRC and ensure the Committee's recommendation is kept under regular review as part of the ongoing refresh and development of the Fuller Working Lives strategy. The EHRC will be providing a separate response to the Committee.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The decision not to commence section 14 of the Equality Act 2010 means that the true nature of the discrimination facing older women, older disabled people and older people from black and minority ethnic communities may not be being brought to light in case law. We recommend that the Government commission research into the extent of this problem as part of its evidence base for Fuller Working Lives. (Paragraph 36)**

10. Government welcomes the Committee's focus on evidence which it believes is important for the balance between the rights of individuals and the needs of businesses and service providers, by ensuring that regulations do not place a costly burden on business. In addition, since 2010 Section 14 has been considered unnecessary as the Equality Act 2010 provides robust protection across a range of protected characteristics and an employee or service user may bring a claim under more than one ground. The courts already have the discretion to allow people to bring multiple claims on different grounds where it is justifiable to do so. However, in line with our ongoing commitment to an evidenced based approach to policy making, Government are open to considering the viability of research into whether dual or multiple discrimination constitutes a significant issue in employment practices.

### **Recommendation 4**

**The Government should work with representatives of the recruitment industry to develop a plan of action to ensure that outdated stereotypes do not cause illegal age discrimination in recruitment. This should include the collection and publication of data on the age profiles of job seekers and those finding work. The EHRC should submit to us a clear plan of action including specific timeframes to investigate, intervene and enforce the law which prohibits discrimination based on age. (Paragraph 40)**

11. Government agrees with the Committee that recruitment practices have a key role to play in increasing social mobility and helping people from under-represented groups to progress. To support this important agenda the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has a partnership agreement with The Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) who are the professional body for the UK's recruitment industry.

The Agreement was originally established in 2012 and grew out of a memorandum of understanding between the REC and Jobcentre Plus since 2008. It was renewed in April 2018 by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Esther Mc Vey MP.

12. The agreement reflects the common goal that DWP and REC share in getting people into work. It outlines practical ways to share knowledge and expertise between the public and private sectors to benefit UK employers and jobseekers, and to stamp out discrimination and unfair employment policies. Under the partnership agreement, Government and REC work together to achieve shared objectives including acting as champions for diversity and inclusive hiring, and work together to challenge discrimination and promote good recruitment.

13. REC also run an Inclusive Recruitment Forum for their members and good recruitment campaign signatories. This forum provides an opportunity to discuss Government initiatives and regulations, hear from diversity experts and share good practice.

14. Government acknowledges that more needs to be done to support older people into employment and will continue to work with REC to improve this including looking into how the collection and publication of data on the age profiles of job seekers and those finding work might operate in practice, and keep this option under constant review.

15. EHRC will be providing a separate response to the second part of this recommendation.

### **Recommendation 5**

**We recommend that the Government introduce mandatory regulations to require all public-sector employers, and private and voluntary sector employers with more than 250 staff, to publish the age profile of their workforce. (Paragraph 47)**

16. The Government sees the value in companies being transparent about the age make up of their workforce. The Civil Service already does this, as do many leading employers. The Business Champion for Older Workers launched a commit and publish campaign in 2017 calling on employers to monitor the age profile of its workforce as part of a range of good practice to support older workers and many employers such as ATOS, Barclays, Mercer and Steelite International have already done so. In terms of introducing mandatory regulation, Government would need more evidence about the efficiency and impact of such a measure to see whether it could justify placing an additional burden on employers. By way of comparison, the introduction of mandatory gender pay gap reporting was estimated to have a net annual cost to business of £3.8m (at 2014 prices).

### **Recommendation 6**

**In response to gender pay gap figures published in October 2017, the Prime Minister called for companies to make flexible working a reality for all employees by advertising all jobs as flexible from day one, unless there are solid business reasons not to. The review of this policy is some time away from being completed. We recommend that the Government seek to legislate now to ensure that all new jobs are advertised as flexible from day one, unless the employer can demonstrate an immediate and continuing business case against doing so. (Paragraph 61)**

17. The Government is working to make flexible working a reality for all employees, unless there are solid reasons not to.

18. There is a great deal of consensus across Government and industry that the greater adoption of more flexible working practices across the economy offers at least part of the solution to many of the challenges faced by Government, employers and employees. For businesses these involve the key issues of recruitment and retention, developing a skilled work force and productivity. For Government, flexible working can play an important part in the delivery of wider social and economic objectives—such as closing the gender pay gap as well as helping to enable particular groups to join or stay in the labour market, such as older workers, carers or those with mental health conditions or disabilities. It can also support fathers and partners who wish to play a more active role in childcare

19. Given this broad level of consensus, and the fact that not all forms of flexible working can realistically be available to everyone in every job, the Government has decided to pursue a voluntary approach in advance of the evaluation of the right to request flexible working which is due in 2019.

20. The Government has established a Flexible Working Taskforce, co-chaired by the Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. The taskforce has a broad membership comprising: the Trades Union Congress; groups representing employers and managers (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, Confederation of British Industry, Federation of Small Businesses, Chartered Management Institute); representative and interest groups (Working Families, Age UK, Carers UK and Timewise) and a range of Government Departments (BEIS, DWP, The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) and Government Equalities Office (GEO)).

21. Rather than focus on specific groups, and to reinforce the message that the objective is to promote flexible working as the default, the taskforce is organising its work around key points in the employment lifecycle. It will look at: job design and recruitment; retention; progression; returning to work following a career break; and exiting the workplace. The taskforce will develop an iterative action plan to tackle the barriers and challenges around each stage of the employment lifecycle and will seek to stimulate 3 key outcomes:

- Greater acknowledgement among employers of the benefits of greater flexible working and hiring, leading to changes in practice;
- More insight into good practice; and
- Better access to expert advice and support.

22. The taskforce held its first meeting on 29 March, and is due to provide an interim report to the Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility in the summer, and plans to have worked through the employment lifecycle by early 2019. This work will feed into the evaluation of the right to request flexible working.

### **Recommendation 7**

**We recommend that the Civil Service and public services immediately introduce a right to flexible working from day one for both new and existing roles, except where an immediate and continuing business case against doing so can be demonstrated. (Paragraph 62)**

23. It is standard practice to advertise all Civil Service posts as available for flexible working unless there is a strong business case for a different approach. The Government is represented on the Flexible Working Task Force as an employer and are working with Task Force members to consider how best to explain the availability of flexible working to prospective applicants.

24. The Government fully recognise the benefits of flexible working in improving employees' work-life balance and wellbeing, helping to attract and retain a diverse workforce, particularly those with caring responsibilities, increasing productivity and reducing costs.

25. Flexible working is widespread in the Civil Service. Working patterns are agreed subject to business need and arrangements can be contractual or informal depending on circumstances. Working patterns include part-time working, compressed hours, job shares, flexi-time and homeworking. As of December 2017, there were 99,560 Civil Servants working part-time, representing 23% of all civil servants.<sup>3</sup>

### **Recommendation 8**

**We recommend that the Government put unpaid leave for working carers on a par with that for parents, and introduce a statutory right to four weeks of unpaid carer's leave per year. The effectiveness of unpaid carer's leave should be monitored by collecting data on take-up and the reasons for take-up. (Paragraph 71)**

26. The Government is committed to explore the case for statutory carer's leave.

27. The Carers Action Plan was published on Tuesday 5 June.<sup>4</sup> It set out the cross-Government programme of work to support carers over the next two years, alongside other measures to help and support carers that looked at their employment and financial well-being.

28. In the Action Plan the Government made a commitment to consider dedicated employment rights for carers alongside existing employment rights (such as the right to request flexible working and the right to time off for family and dependants).

29. We have set up an official level working group (BEIS, DWP, DHSC, HMT) to work on this. This includes considering the practical questions that arise around introducing dedicated employment rights with the support of analysts so that any emerging carer's leave proposal is most effective.

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3 Public sector Personnel: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel>

4 Carers Action Plan 2018: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/carers-action-plan-2018-to-2020>

### **Recommendation 9**

**We recommend that the Government introduce an additional five days of paid carer's leave, available to all working carers regardless of employment type. (Paragraph 72)**

30. Please refer to Recommendation 8.

### **Recommendation 10**

**We recommend that the Government review the services provided by the Fit for Work scheme to ensure that it is meeting the needs of small and medium employers who may not otherwise have access to professional occupational health services. (Paragraph 78)**

31. The Government announced next steps for the Fit for Work service across England, Wales and Scotland in November 2017. This retained the Fit for Work advice helpline, website and web chats services until November 2019, and ended the contracts for the provision of the assessment service both in England/Wales and Scotland. This was due to take-up of the Fit for Work assessment service being significantly lower than expected.

32. The Government is committed to finding ways to help employers, especially SMEs, support their employees to return to work promptly from sickness absence and that is why this year it appointed an Occupational Health Expert Group, to champion, shape and drive a programme of work to take an in-depth look at the provision of Occupational Health support.

33. As set out in the Improving Lives Command Paper published in 2017 Government will be setting out a clear direction and strategy on the reform of occupational health by 2019/2020, taking into account the needs of all employers.

### **Recommendation 11**

**We recommend that the Government work with Andy Briggs, the Business Champion for Older Workers, and Business in the Community to establish and promote a mentoring scheme for employers, supporting those who may otherwise lack the expertise or capacity to create age-friendly workplaces. This should prioritise support for small and medium employers, using the good practice and resources of larger employers, and facilitate access to Government support. (Paragraph 83)**

34. The Business In The Community's Age at Work Leadership team is conducting a review of information and evidence on whether mentoring schemes similar to those suggested in the recommendation are successful.

35. With 5.7 million SMEs in the UK accounting for more than 99% of all businesses and representing 60% of employment, engaging with SMEs is clearly a known challenge.

36. In recognition of this, the Business Champion and DWP are already working in partnership with employer and HR organisations, such as the British Chambers of Commerce, the Confederation of British Industry, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and Acas.

37. This work has produced a video and toolkit to help promote the benefits of retaining, retraining and recruiting older workers, with a series of events across the UK planned over the coming 18 months to explain the agenda to employers.

38. The Government provides support to SMEs through the GOV.UK website, which is a single point of information and guidance on starting and running a business. This includes details of statutory rights and obligations, and the ability to search for support using the business finance and support finder which allows businesses to search for Government-backed support and finance, including information on employing people, money and tax and business and self-employment. Support is also available from The National Business Support Helpline, Growth Hubs and The Start-Up Loans Company.

### **Recommendation 12**

**We recommend that the Government require departments to incorporate a set of age-friendly employment standards, including rights to flexible working from day one, carer's leave and a mid-life career review, into all new policies and contracts affecting the terms and conditions of employment for public sector workers. (Paragraph 85)**

39. The Government recognises the importance of providing a supportive workplace for the people it employs. HR policies support employees with caring responsibilities include flexible working, paid and unpaid leave, and career breaks. Our aim is to enable the individuals concerned to undertake their personal responsibilities while at the same time feeling engaged and productive in the work they do.

40. To enhance its approach, the Civil Service has launched a model Carers' Charter for adoption by individual Departments. This brings together in one place the information and support available in that department for employees with caring responsibilities and their managers. All eighteen main Whitehall Departments have committed to adopting the charter. Government have also launched a Civil Service-wide carer's passport. This is a simple communication tool that enables a carer and their manager to discuss and document the flexibilities needed to combine caring and work.

41. Government continues to promote the benefits of a carers' policy with employers, and shares best practice of those employers who already provide support for example special and compassionate leave. Government is looking at the question of employment rights for carers alongside existing employment rights and will set out its plans in due course.

42. Within DWP our policies aim to enable business needs to be met whilst being as family friendly and flexible as practicable to support and encourage staff in balancing their lives. Our Carer Toolkit links to the guidance, policies and procedures covering a range of circumstances to support staff who have caring responsibilities. It also includes links to other organisations who can offer help and support.

43. DWP has also appointed an Age and Carers Champion at board level, who after consultation, set a priority in 2018/19 to review the support provided for our carer community. This included confirmation that the DWP would adopt the Civil Service wide Carers' Charter and Passport so there was an up to date comprehensive package of support provided to those with caring responsibilities and their line managers. These were both adopted during Carers' Week 2018.

44. DWP is exploring options for a career review with a pilot to run this autumn and the findings and recommendations shared with other Government Departments later in the year.

### **Recommendation 13**

**Mid-life career reviews can act as an effective tool in financial and career planning, both of which are important to preventing people falling out of the workforce, or finding themselves trapped in unfulfilling employment. Promoting access to such reviews should form an important part of the mentoring scheme for employers that we have recommended. (Paragraph 89)**

45. Government agrees with the Committee, acknowledging the importance of providing people with impartial information and guidance well ahead of retirement and is aware of the challenges this poses to individuals.

46. Government funded mid-life career review pilot, which was administered by the Learning and Work Institute. This found that giving access to impartial careers information and guidance at mid-life enables individuals to take stock of their situation, think about their options for later life, whether that is retraining, changing careers, or reducing their hours rather than feeling the only option is retirement.

47. The pilot aimed to test ways of engaging people in mid-life and preventing early labour market exit. It did this by encouraging a consideration of work and retirement, as well as helping people take a life course approach and plan activities accordingly.

48. In recognition that older workers generally have fewer opportunities in terms of retraining, DWP is working in partnership with Local Enterprise Partnerships and the National Careers Service so that the latter can deliver mid-life career reviews to older workers via their employers. This initiative runs until the end of September. Subsequent evaluation will feed into policy development on the mid-life MOT which was a recommendation in John Cridland's review of State Pension age.

49. Cridland's recommendation envisages wider provision than the mid-life career review. Development of the MOT as an all-inclusive package requires Government to work with a range of users, employers and stakeholders. Government is currently exploring the level of demand and potential delivery options. Findings from that work will help inform future policy development. A final decision on how to progress the recommendation will require further discussion with other Government Departments.

50. As policy is developed Government would welcome the thoughts of the Committee, happy to share progress and seek their input on progress and overall direction of travel, including the scope to align with a mentoring scheme.

### **Recommendation 14**

**Through the introduction of Older Claimant Champions the Government has recognised the need for Jobcentre Plus to develop the awareness and skills to provide specialised support to older jobseekers. But this is not translating into widespread good practice on the ground. We recommend that the Government undertake a review of the specialist support available to older people through the Jobcentre Plus network, including the role of the Older Claimant Champions, and develop an action plan to improve both the content and availability of such support. (Paragraph 95)**

51. DWP carries out periodic assessments of support available for claimants. Evaluations of Jobcentre Plus support for older and younger claimants have shown similar claimant satisfaction levels. Government continues to develop the support provided to older claimers.

52. There are Older Claimant Champions in each of the 34 Jobcentre districts. The role of the Older Claimant Champion is an internal one rather than a claimant-facing one, with the intention of up-skilling Work Coaches. Regular network meetings ensures they have the opportunity to benefit from sharing good practice and improving their knowledge of the issues faced by older claimants. The Department is currently reviewing the products developed for older claimants to ensure they remain relevant and fit for purpose. This has involved gathering feedback from older claimants to capture their views and inform any changes which may need to be made.

### **Recommendation 15**

**The Government has recognised the need for a more strategic approach to skills development in the UK, and emerging initiatives are welcome. However, these fall short of a national skills strategy and lack specific, explicit attention to the needs of older workers and the barriers they face. We recommend that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy develop a national skills strategy, with a focus on life-long learning, as part of taking forward the Industrial Strategy. This must include specific consideration of the needs of older workers, explicitly challenging assumptions that certain forms of training are only for young people, and must look at ways to make access to training and skills development a truly life-long opportunity. (Paragraph 103)**

53. As automation and digitalisation change the nature of jobs and the skills required to do them, and as working lives become longer, it is vital our education system allows people to learn and train throughout their lives. That is why Government is committed to building the best programme of learning and training for people in work.

54. Government announced a National Retraining Scheme at Autumn Budget 2017, which will be driven by a key partnership between business, workers, and Government that will set the strategic direction of the Scheme and oversee its implementation. The Scheme includes a phased series of impactful interventions, starting in 2018, which will build as the partnership sets its priorities and we test the evidence base on what works, and will be in place by the end of this Parliament.

55. Apprenticeships offer a great route into skilled employment for people of all ages and backgrounds. Our reforms are making apprenticeships longer, better, with more off-the-job training and proper assessment at the end, making sure that workers of all ages have the skills they need to progress in their careers.

56. Government will harness the power of innovation to meet the needs of an ageing society. This is why the Prime Minister announced the first Ageing Society Grand Challenge mission: “We want to ensure that people can enjoy at least five extra healthy, independent years of life by 2035, whilst narrowing the gap between the experience of the richest and poorest.”

### **Recommendation 16**

**We recommend that the Government revisit its own actions in the Fuller Working Lives strategy to ensure that all the individual initiatives are connected to the overall strategy, and to other significant policy areas such as the Industrial Strategy. The strategy should also be updated to specifically address those areas that are best led by the Government rather than employers—including age discrimination—and that it refreshes its action planning under Fuller Working Lives to incorporate the recommendations of this report. (Paragraph 116)**

57. The stated ambition in the Fuller Working Lives Strategy remains “To support individuals aged 50 years and over to remain in and return to the labour market and tackle the barriers to doing so”. Its publication in February 2017 signalled a new approach towards achieving that goal and set out Government’s commitment to starting fresh dialogue and opening new conversations with employers, influential stakeholders and other Government Departments, to develop policy accordingly. One of the aims was to develop a more open dialogue that drove action. For example, employers said that business to business conversations are more successful at driving change than Government advice, so that was taken on board.

### **Employers**

58. Through the lens of retention, retraining and recruitment, this has raised the profile of older workers and ageing workforce issues among the business community through a number of successful roundtables, social media and press articles, workshops and conferences about subjects such as skills shortages, productivity challenges, carers, retraining, transitions, digital skills, age discrimination and older apprenticeships.

59. Government is continually looking for and developing new partnerships with employer organisations and influential stakeholders to build on the work already undertaken. Through this partnership work and by providing a platform for employers to share learning, Government is helping business to innovate and adapt their offer to older employees.

### **Cross-Government Working**

60. The Fuller Working Lives policy approach has led on shaping content on new policy areas with other Government Departments. For example:

#### **Industrial Strategy**

61. As part of the Industrial Strategy’s Ageing Grand Challenge, Government is working to galvanise further action to support carers in the workforce. This includes working with businesses to encourage more flexible practices to support carers, for example, putting in place caring plans, agreements and return to work policies and selecting ‘caring champions’. There are good examples of companies already seeking to support carers within their workforces and Government wants to work with employers to scale this up.

### **Flexible Working Taskforce**

62. Flexible working is a priority for Government and would like it to be an option for employees, whatever their personal circumstances. That is why the Flexible Working Taskforce has been established. The members all have active agendas on flexible working, and bring with them a commitment to do more to promote it. The intention is to draw efforts together and develop a consolidated and co-ordinated action plan to promote more flexible work places.

### **Carers Leave**

63. Government is committed to exploring the case for statutory carer's leave and has published The Carers' Action Plan on Tuesday 5 June.<sup>4</sup>

### **Retraining**

64. It is becoming increasingly important that people both up-skill and reskill throughout their working lives. This is why the Government announced a National Retraining Scheme which is an ambitious, far-reaching programme to drive adult learning and retraining. The National Retraining Scheme will give individuals the skills they need to progress in work, redirect their careers and secure the high-paid, high-skilled jobs of the future, focusing on those individuals and places who need it most.

### **Jobcentre Plus**

65. Government continually reviews the service offered to older people through the Jobcentre Plus network to ensure it meets their specific needs, optimizing the prospects of an early return to employment through a comprehensive menu of help which includes skills provision and job search support. Local Jobcentre Plus Managers are provided with freedoms and flexibilities to develop their own local support to meet specific gaps in provision to meet local needs using Flexible Support Fund and by referring customers to other partners for support.

### **Fuller working Lives Action Plan**

66. Although progress has been made over the past 18 months, there is still more that can be done. Government will ensure that the helpful recommendations put forward by the Committee are considered as part of the ongoing review of Fuller Working Lives policy development.

## Appendix 2: Response from the Equality and Human Rights Commission

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1. The Commission welcomes the Women and Equalities Select Committee's report into older people and employment and we share the Committee's concerns regarding age discrimination in employment and recruitment.
2. The Select Committee recommended that the Commission should 'develop a clear plan to tackle age discrimination in employment', including taking enforcement action in this area and working with the government to improve compliance with the Equality Act 2010 (EA 2010) through its Fuller Working Lives Strategy.
3. The Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into enforcement of the EA 2010 and the Commission has submitted evidence to the Committee on its role and how it uses its enforcement powers. To summarise, the Commission is determined to take robust action to tackle discrimination within the boundaries of our powers and resources. We have already significantly stepped up our enforcement activities and our key performance indicators commit us to an increase in enforcement activity in this financial year.
4. We use our strategic planning process to identify and consult on the issues the Commission intends to tackle. We base our selection of the issues on evidence from our triennial *Is Britain Fairer?* report as well as evidence from stakeholders, including outcomes of select committee inquiries. We are committed to taking a coordinated and strategic approach to determining our priorities across the range of protected characteristics and human rights and we integrate the use of our enforcement powers with our other activities.
5. Our next *IBF* report is published later this month, followed by a draft strategic plan. We would warmly welcome the Committee's response to the Plan during the consultation period. At this stage in our planning cycle, we are not in a position to develop particular enforcement projects targeting specific protected characteristics, but we will of course take into account the views of the Committee and evidence from stakeholders about those areas which we should prioritise.
6. We would welcome collaboration with the government in its Fuller Working Lives strategy and we will take forward the Committee's recommendation with government.