



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Creating opportunities and breaking down barriers

Supporting Older Claimants Good Practice Guide



March 2014

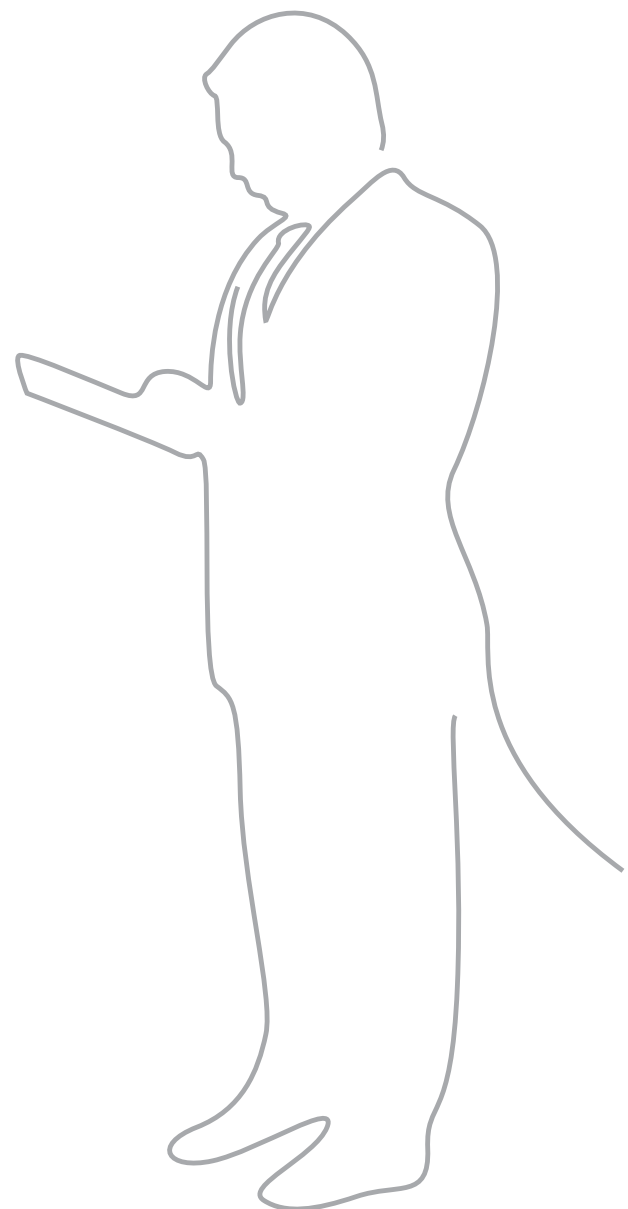


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Introduction

I am really pleased to endorse this guide. Supporting our older jobseekers is really important.

I am aware of the great work done by work coaches to support these claimants, but as always there are things we can do to improve the service we offer – this is reflected in the comments below from the research ‘How ready is DWP to help people in their 60s find work?’.

“My age is my biggest barrier to getting into work. I can get to interviews (I’ve had a few), they are all very nice and polite and about my skills and track record, but I never get a job and I know it’s because of my age.”

Claimant Interview

This and previous evaluation and research reports have shown that older claimants’ job search activity is enhanced, and off-flow rates can be improved, by certain elements of age targeted support – specifically when this support is available from day one, and delivered in a style which meets the unique challenges faced by older claimants.

Using these findings, and gathering local customer insight, some Districts have already identified innovative ways they can support older claimants locally – for example in-house IT training in South West Wales, and working with the local authority to offer wage incentives in South London.

“60 really is the magic number – it’s when claimants really do change their mind set and stop thinking about work, or at least full time work, although there are many who still want to use their skills and experiences to help others, but not necessarily in work.”

Adviser Comment – Online Survey

Feel free to use the tips in the guide to inform your own approach with older jobseekers. I want to ensure that this is the start of the story, and I look forward to building on this positive work by hearing more about what you are doing to support older claimants.

Neil Couling

Work Services Director

Background

Did you know that the Jobcentre Plus caseload is set to age?
For the first time ever there will be a significant number of older claimants looking for work.

The current figure of 2.9 million workless aged 50 to State Pension Age could be 5.4 million in 20 years time. This is due to a combination of demographic changes, the increasing State Pension Age, Pension Credit qualifying age and migration of benefits.

Did you also know that already, over 50s form 27% of the workforce? By 2020 it will be almost a third. Current employer plans suggest that we will need to fill 13.5 million job vacancies in the next ten years, but only 7 million young people will leave school and college. With older people increasingly looking to extend their working lives, they are an untapped source of labour.

Older claimants are a diverse group. By discussing “older” people we aren’t just referring to those aged 50 or 60+ - many people aged 40 and above might face similar challenges. There are multiple issues that need to be addressed:

- **Workplace retention** – most people who stop work before state pension age do not do so through choice and this group are significantly less likely to be re-employed once they are out of work.
- **People with health conditions and disabled people** – around 1.1 million people aged 50 to state pension age are not working because of a health condition or disability. Older people in lower paid or physical jobs are at a higher risk of health-related work exit.
- **Carers** – the likelihood of caring for a sick, disabled or elderly person increases significantly with age and can lead to early labour market exit.
- **Financial security and incentives** – finances are an important factor for people in deciding whether to leave the Labour Market
- **Back to work support** – lack of confidence or motivation, inadequate or out of date skills or qualifications, not knowing how to search and apply for jobs and apprehension about job interviews all impact on older workers. A focus on skills and back to work support is crucial to mitigate this;
- **External issues** – age discrimination (direct and indirect), recession and changing job market, and lack of employer flexibility.

There is also evidence from the Jobcentre Plus (JCP) Offer and the previous Flexible New Deal Regime (JRFND) to suggest that older claimants received less intensive support from Jobcentre Plus than younger people. The JRFND study identified that older claimants were submitted to fewer vacancies and had fewer agreed job goals. The study also suggested work coaches were reluctant to challenge negative perceptions and behaviours of older claimants towards employment and employers.

However, as mentioned in the introduction, we do know that off-flow rates can be improved with targeted support. Specifically when this support is available from 'day one' and delivered in a style which meets the different (age related) barriers.

Key to this is:

- Effective support from Jobcentre Plus;
- Intensive activity including work experience;
- Digital job searching skills;
- Effective employability and IT skills; and
- Assistance to convert outdated qualifications and certifications.

Freedom and flexibility within Jobcentre Plus offers the potential to raise the quality of support that older claimants receive. Districts have exploited this and tailored their services and provision to meet the needs of their older claimants. These include:

- Older claimant journey and desk aide to support work coaches;
- Older claimant Digital Fortnight – promoting digital and providing advice;
- Older jobseeker teams – work coaches and assistant work coaches working with and next to each other to support the same claimant;
- District/ Office Task & Finish Groups to identify innovative approaches to improve claimant services within budget;
- Working with partners (National Career Service, local colleges, voluntary organisations and providers) to offer age specific training – overcoming age-related barriers, motivation, IT, completing CVs and certification;
- Better use of case conferencing, and bringing in the support of the work psychologist;
- L&D route for staff – Supporting Older Claimants Workbook, facilitated event and solution focused interview techniques (all via RM);
- Older claimants Work Clubs and better use of self employment support, Work Experience or sector-based work academies;
- Older claimants Job Fairs, and employer fact sheets to support Employer Advisers when discussing recruitment; and
- Closer working with National Partnership Team, to ensure opportunities with employers for older claimants are fully exploited.

This guide provides examples of how districts have created local opportunities and broken down the age-related barriers. Further advice and information can also be found towards the end of the guide.

Top 10 tips, tools & techniques

1. Use local claimant insight

Through claimant focus groups, questionnaires, or interviews

2. Tap into staff innovation

Task & Finish Groups, innovation awards, Freedoms & Flexibilities catalogue

3. Single age group sessions

Research shows a strong preference for these among older jobseekers

4. Effective work coach support

Training including the Supporting Older Claimants Workbook, dedicated 50+ work coaches and teams, the ‘solution focused interviews’ facilitated event

5. Early and intensive interventions

Week one group information sessions, CV and application support, signposting to back to work support

6. Training and qualifications

Converting outdated qualifications and certifications, age specific targeted training

7. Digital job search skills

Help with online job searching, submitting applications, and electronic CVs

8. Employer engagement

Offer genuine opportunities to older claimants who might not have routinely be considered by employers

9. Self employment

Signposting claimants to this when they have the relevant skills and confidence

10. Engaging wider stakeholders

Working with wider agencies who may be able to support older jobseekers



1.

Use local claimant insight

Although it's good to have a wider understanding of what previous evaluation and research tells us, it is important to include local claimant insight in designing services.

This can be achieved either through discussion groups, face to face or over the phone research interviews or a survey.

In the example below, a local office used in-depth interviews and found that claimants were intimidated by the Jobcentre environment.

Others have thrown up interesting results. In Belle Vale JCP (South Liverpool) they found that none of their 50+ claimants had I.T. problems! It just goes to show that different areas have different needs, so local information is beneficial.

Analysis of the JCP Offer found that older claimants were less likely to feel that their support was tailored, or that advice and support had helped them. With publicity surrounding the Youth Contract, some Jobcentres also found that claimants felt left behind by what they perceived to be a very youth-focused service.

A common theme to emerge from interviews with older claimants was that they tended to feel uncomfortable in Jobcentre Plus offices. This was due to a number of reasons: for example feeling unwelcome at the front desk, a perceived chaotic atmosphere, and dissatisfaction at being treated in the same way as younger claimants.

Work coaches noted that this could lead to claimants limiting their contact with the Jobcentre, reducing their use of job points, and being less willing to attend voluntary provision or training.

At Aintree JCP, HEO managers conducted interviews with claimants. They found that the older claimants found the Jobcentre environment noisy and intimidating, but that this client group generally had a good work history with multiple skills.

Their main barriers were their perception that prospective employers and work coaches had certain attitudes towards older jobseekers. Many lacked formal qualifications, or those they held were outdated. Some had never written a CV, or had worked for the same employer for many years, and some had never had to apply for employment or didn't know how to.

Aintree gathered information through a range of specific questions designed to establish the key concerns and barriers for older claimants. To see the full Claimant Insight template used at Aintree JCP, please visit the **Supporting Older Jobseekers** intranet site.

2.

Tap into staff innovation

Districts have been using local staff innovation to develop a better service for older claimants.

From updating the Freedoms and Flexibilities catalogue, staff meetings to creating Task & Finish Groups, different approaches are being taken to tap into staff suggestions and gather ideas. Examples include:

- Bringing together work coaches and Work Psychologists – to improve interviewing techniques and identifying barriers.
- Better use of case conferencing amongst work coaches – staff who deal with older claimants regularly will have a better knowledge of what is effective with this group. Best practice can then be shared among work coaches, leading to more effective interventions.
- Establishing a district wide Task & Finish Group – tapping into a wide range of expertise across operations including Jobcentre staff, third party provision, performance improvement and work psychologists.
- Encourage staff to share their innovative ideas. For example, by posting initiatives on ‘Bright Ideas’ so that successful interventions can be widely viewed.

Llantrisant JCP (in South West Wales District) liaised with Sarah Dixon, the Work Psychologist, who designed a scaling questioning (diagnostic) tool to help identify real and perceived barriers. Advisors contributed to the design and attended a workshop on the appropriate use of the tool. The Work Psychologist sat in on their interviews when the tool was used, and gave feedback to advisors.

Example questions from the questionnaire:

- How would you rate your understanding of the role of your JCP Adviser in helping and supporting you back to work?
- How motivated do you feel about looking for work at the moment?
- How confident do you feel in Jobcentre Plus’ ability to help you back to work?

A team leader from Llantrisant said: “The work coaches’ feedback has been very positive from day one. With the training given on Solution Focused interview skills working hand in hand with their use of the questionnaire, it has made the way they interview all claimants change. This has set them in good stead with the introduction of Claimant Commitment, and they feel confident challenging claimants’ misconceptions.”

To see the full scaling questionnaire used at Llantrisant JCP, please visit the **Supporting Older Jobseekers** intranet site.

3.

Single age group sessions

In the report ‘How ready is Jobcentre Plus to help people in their 60s find work?’, work coaches noted that older claimants can often feel nervous or alienated from a mixed age group training session, and that grouping older claimants together for the purposes of this seemed to give better results.

Jobcentres have been conducting these under freedoms and flexibilities, and reporting improved engagement from older claimants.

Some topics discussed in these sessions have included myths surrounding older workers, transferable skills and CVs, job search in the modern age, voluntary work, and self employment. Some sites have even been helping claimants to complete application forms in group sessions.

Birmingham City JCP designed a specific 50 Plus Group Information Session, which is being delivered to all of their older claimants who are pre-Work Programme.

This dispels common myths that some people believe, and covers topics like digital job searching, the JCP Offer, and the job application process.

“Why would an Employer want me?”

You may be more employable to some potential companies than someone younger because you....

- have more experience and knowledge
- require little or no training
- are less likely to make costly mistakes
- have a network of contacts
- have a proven track record
- are more reliable and disciplined



Back to Work Session Presentation v2.00

To see the full Phoenix information session please visit the **Supporting Older Jobseekers** intranet site.

4.

Effective work coach support

Effective support is key in supporting older jobseekers. Work coaches have said they felt they need more training to deal with the specific barriers faced by older claimants.

Some also suggested they would benefit from additional training on the changes being made to State Pension Age and the impact on Pension Credit and how this was likely to affect claimants.

Another suggestion put forward was that specialist work coach roles could be created, where individuals could deal exclusively with older claimants and build a more detailed knowledge of their needs.

A range of measures are underway locally to ensure that work coaches are fully skilled and feel confident in dealing with older claimants. For example, some Jobcentres have implemented 50+ teams – where coaches and assistant coaches work with and next to each other to support the same claimants. All staff supporting older claimants completed the 2 hour workbook as a minimum, and others undertook more intensive training and attended the associated facilitated event and/or solution focused approach event – all available via RM (see the Additional Information and Guidance section for more details).

One work coach from South West Wales district stated that after going through the workbook it “has given me a better insight to what barriers or perceived barriers some 50+ claimants have that are pertinent to just that age group. This has made me better equipped to deal with some of these issues.” Another from Merseyside said that “a lot of the topics relate to most claimants, especially setbacks, and can be taken forward with all age groups.”

Leicester Charles Street JCP identified, through claimant focus groups, that older jobseekers wanted a named work coach to see them through their journey, a planned routeway from the start of their claim and specialised provision where they could interact with other jobseekers of similar age and experience.

Following this feedback a specialised ‘50+ Pod’ was set up. The Pod approach - work coaches working closely with assistant work coaches with a caseload of claimants - has been rolled out to other teams in the office and District. Claimants feel they get a more personalised service and feedback suggests they feel valued. They also have more age positive vacancies, and this has led to an increase in off-flows for this particular claimant group.

It was started in 2011, and improvements have been made to the model based on feedback from both claimants and providers. More recently this has included the addition of a dedicated 60+ POD.

5.

Early and intensive interventions

Research has shown that older jobseekers can respond well to flexible and tailored work coach support (as seen in the results of the Support for the Very Long Term Unemployed trailblazer – for further information on this, see the evaluation published on GOV.UK).

In some cases this has resulted in significantly fewer days on benefit, and an increase in work.

Effective support also includes referral to appropriate provision at the right time – including self employment help (see tip 9).

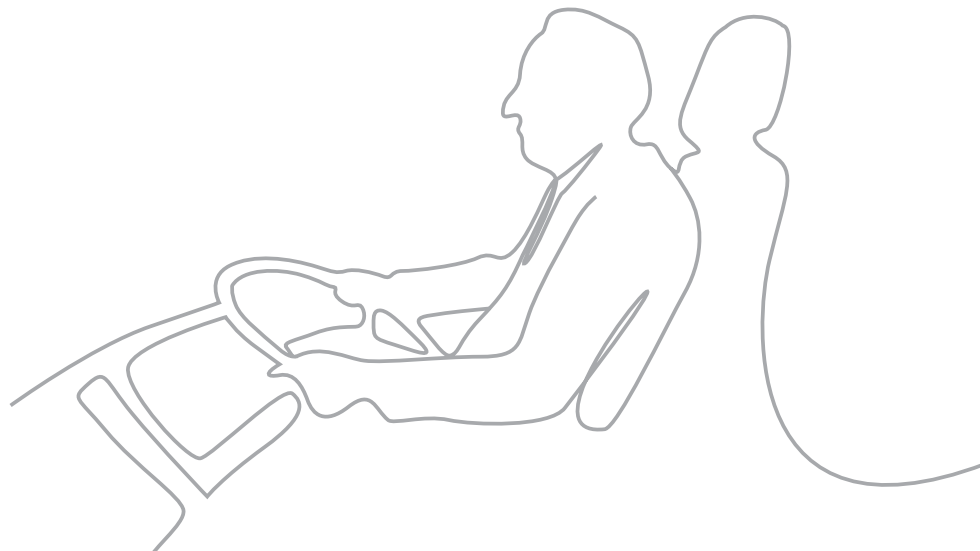
Many work coaches suggested if they had greater flexibility over their time, they could offer the option of longer interviews to the claimants they felt had the greatest needs. It was felt that older claimants would benefit from having longer and more in depth discussions with work coaches.

In Llantrisant JCP, all claimants aged 50+ were offered the services of PRIME Cymru (a charity dedicated to providing practical support to people aged 50 and over who want to become and remain economically active) from day one.

Those who did not want to engage weekly with the provider were then seen more regularly by their Work Coach. This involved varying methods of contact, face-to-face support, telephone and e-mail.

Email use was not just restricted to those proficient at using IT. The work coaches would use this method to give their claimants valuable exercises in accessing and using emails properly and regularly.

An analysis of the 50+ cohort showed that after instating these measures, claimant count had reduced from 87 to 71 within 3 months.



6.

Training and qualifications

Older jobseekers particularly need support in this area as they need help in converting (often obsolete) qualifications into certifications that have relevance for modern employers. This was considered to be a particular issue among skilled trade professions.

Where this is the case, it is important that to identify outdated qualifications early on and work with the claimant to convert these.

One approach that may be helpful for people in these circumstances is to allow claimants access to conversion courses. Currently, work coaches can use the **Flexible Support Fund (FSF)** for smaller payments to remove immediate barriers into work relating to certificates or qualifications (up to £150) or Low Value Procurement for more expensive training (where contracted or non-contracted provision is not already available).

Funding through the FSF can be used to procure activities which enable claimants to either enter sustained employment, or move closer to the labour market. Work coaches can consider using FSF to purchase training or education where the claimant's needs cannot be met through existing contracts or funding. (More information on the FSF can be found on the intranet. Click on A-Z > Operational Guidance > Flexible Support Fund).

As well as converting outdated qualifications, age-specific training has also been beneficial for supporting older jobseekers. This relates back to how older claimants feel when placed into mixed-age groups. Work coaches noted that grouping older claimants together elicited better results.

A case study from **Merseyside Task & Finish Group:**

Doreen was made redundant from a large printing firm a couple of years ago. Since then, she has had lots of temporary short term contracts, has been on and off JSA, and has combined work with caring for her elderly mother.

Doreen's role looking after her mum was intense. She would spend whole nights there, organising medication and delivering personal care. She wanted more stability from a job, and realised she could get paid for what she was doing.

I referred her to a Care sector-based work academy (sbwa). She was successfully selected, and on completion of the training was offered a permanent job.

7.

Digital job search skills

Older claimants may not have as many IT skills as younger people, and may need to learn new skills before being able to effectively search for and apply for jobs.

Skills needs in this area may be very basic – for example using a computer, or searching for jobs online.

Younger claimants in mixed-age training sessions may have more knowledge and make the older learners feel behind. Therefore grouping older claimants together for this kind of training is important.

It could be sourced through a local provider off-site, or delivered 1-2-1 in-house on Internet Access Devices (IADs) in Jobcentres. This training can include how to apply for jobs online, and raising awareness of how companies filter applicants by digital means.

As well as using computers, developing a modern CV has been cited by work coaches as something older claimants may need support with.

It was felt that early intervention in this area was key. Unless this was tackled early in the JSA claim, then many claimants become disillusioned or lose confidence in the whole job search process. Many claimants also voiced their disappointment that they could not get access to this kind of help until 6 months of their claim.

South West Wales District has started running in-house weekly computer courses for older claimants, delivered by Get IT Together in seven Jobcentres.

Get IT Together is a five week course run within the Jobcentre premises. It includes all elements of learning and improving the use of a PC and the internet. Learners are firstly supported in looking online for information on things that interest them (e.g. hobbies and sport). Once they are confident they are taught how to navigate and effectively use jobsearch sites including Universal Jobmatch.

This method has ensured that they do not perceive the internet in a negative way, they no longer feel as if they are “made to use the computers just to jobsearch”, but as they become comfortable finding information of interest online, jobsearching gets easier and more proficient.

Get IT Together use volunteers to deliver some sessions, and Ryan the co-ordinator and head tutor for Get IT Together interviewed claimants from the jobcentres on a regular basis and took these on as volunteers.

He would support them through a few of the courses he led, and when they were confident, they would begin to deliver the courses on Get IT Together’s behalf. This means that when Work Experience claimants are utilised in our IAD suites to support the learners, they are gaining valuable experience to put on their own CVs.

8.

Employer engagement

Older workers are very important to the labour market, offering experience, skills and knowledge to employers and co-workers.

The number of older people working is increasing, too. At the beginning of 2012 there were 8.3m over 50s in employment in the UK – an increase of 1.4m since 2002.

Developing links with local employers is a good way to challenge employer perceptions of older workers, and promoting the benefits of recruiting a multi-generational workforce. This can be achieved in a number of ways, including:

- **Jobs fairs:** including age specific or age positive events
- **Sector orientation days:** where needs of specific employers could be addressed, and matched to the skills sets of local claimants
- **Agency promotion days:** where agency reps are encouraged to promote older claimants
- **Good news stories about older claimants:** to encourage work coaches to maintain enthusiasm and support
- **Voluntary work:** encouraging more older claimants to take up voluntary work, to increase their skills base and show employers how pro-active they are
- **Greater engagement with SMEs:** rather than solely focusing on large employers

The National Employer Service Team (NEST) also offers access to recognised and respected employer brands and their parent companies, many with age positive recruitment policies.

By sourcing Work Experience placements or sector-based work academies with employers, older claimants may get a chance to gain skills and experience, while also showing an employer who may not otherwise have considered it what an older worker could bring to the workplace.

In West London District, Kingston Jobcentre held 50+ jobs fairs, with a number of employers including Wholefoods, Chessington World of Adventure, Kingston Chamber of Commerce and John Lewis.

Employers were impressed with the large number of claimants (nearly 300) who attended, their enthusiasm and their overall high standard of employability. The employers felt the event was a good use of their time and would like to come to another in the future.

At one of these fairs, Sainsbury's were interested in recruiting for a new store. This attracted a lot of interest, and many older claimants said they hadn't thought about moving into a new career in retail but were interested in finding out more.

Following the events, one claimant aged 59 is starting a new career in retail, having been a graphic designer for thirty years. The last time he worked in a shop was as a student, but coming to the jobs fair made him realise that retail was something new he could move into.

After attending a group interview with an employer, he said: “I was the oldest person in the room, there were lots of youngsters there. When we were asked to introduce ourselves, they all mentioned their age.

“When it came to me, I didn’t mention my age and I was really positive, I said, ‘I have 30 years experience in Graphic Design and now I am really keen to work for your company.’

“The manager phoned me at home that evening and said he was pleased to offer me a job. I am starting Induction the day after tomorrow!”



9.

Self employment

Work coaches suggested that many older claimants have a strong preference for self employment, and this route out of benefits should be strongly supported.

This is because many older jobseekers have the skills and confidence to take their proposals forward, and the attractiveness of part time and flexible hours to this age group.

Support for claimants looking to go self employed can be through the New Enterprise Allowance (part of the JCP Offer), or through the Prince's Initiative for Mature Enterprise (PRIME).

New Enterprise Allowance has proved very popular with older claimants, with 7,500 new businesses started up by people aged 50+. Evaluation has shown that many of the businesses started through the NEA are sole traders in professions such as plumbing or hairdressing. The NEA may be a useful scheme for older claimants with a business proposition to consider, as the skills and experience they have gained through employment can sometimes be carried forward in setting up in self-employment.

A case study from **Leicester Charles Street JCP**:

Work coach Mahomed was working with a claimant aged 59 who had been a psychology teacher. After recovering from mouth cancer she was unable to continue this work as a teacher, and was writing articles for psychology journals and trying to sell them.

Mahomed suggested that she could get some support from NEA provision, with mentoring and a start up loan.

The claimant's business plan was approved, and she is now taking her business forward through writing articles and getting these published, both in print and online.

10.

Engaging wider stakeholders

Work coaches felt that having an open dialogue with providers would help all claimants, and older people in particular.

This would allow the work coaches to understand the role and structure of provision in more detail, helping them decide what provision is better for individual claimants, and to allow them to track the progress of these claimants.

Generally, work coaches felt the relationship with some providers could be improved. and raised concerns that they only feedback they seemed to receive was from claimants who had negative experiences. Good liaison with providers at local level can benefit claimants and ensure a smooth transition between the Jobcentre and the employment support provision they are referred to. Regular but informal liaison at local level can help ensure our employment programmes are successful

Other stakeholders such as local councils and the voluntary sector can be invaluable in supporting older claimants – as the example below highlights. Local organisations may have support available that compliments the provision available through Jobcentre Plus and a combined approach may help achieve better outcomes for the jobseeker.

The mayor of **Lewisham in South London District** has identified certain priorities for the borough in terms of employment, including youth unemployment, supporting families, learning disabilities and older people. Older jobseekers are the fastest rising unemployment group area in the borough.

In order to inform the debate, local Jobcentres conducted surveys with older claimants. This helped identify specific courses that might meet commonly identified needs of claimants in this group. We have also looked to source more of relevant training around basic IT, ESOL, basic skills and more complex IT packages that are already available through partnership working.

Lewisham has chosen to fund 75 Wage Incentive places over a two year period in a scheme which closely mirrors the Youth Contract Wage Incentive programme, but is instead aimed incentivising employers to take on older claimants.

The 75 places will be available over an 18 month period until the end of March 2015. So far we have successfully placed 7 claimants. This includes an example where an employer chose to move from their usual zero hour contract to a 30 hour job, in order to qualify for the incentive.

Additional Information and Guidance

Supporting Older Jobseekers intranet page (DWP Intranet)

Part of the adviser hub. Information includes:

- Updates on information and stats released
- Case studies
- Work coach guidance and tools

Click on A-Z > Knowledge Hub > Adviser Hub > Supporting Older Jobseekers

Supporting Older Claimants learning

This can be found via RM

Supporting Older Customers – Workbook

Course code: JCP1604

Working with Older Customers – Skills Practice (facilitated event)

Course code: JCP1597

Solution Focused Approach (facilitated event)

Course code: JCP1710

Briefing Hub (DWP Intranet)

DWP intranet briefing page, topics include:

- Private Pensions
- State Pensions
- Ageing Society

Click on A-Z > Briefing Hub > Pensions, Ageing Society and Benefit Take Up

National Employer Service Team (DWP Intranet)

Employer information and more

Click on A-Z > National Employer Service Team

DWP's Age Positive

Bringing together research and information from employers on effectively managing an ageing workforce.

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/agepositive>

Age Action Alliance

Aiming to improve the quality of later life through partnership working between members and older people

<http://ageactionalliance.org/>

TAEN - The Age and Employment Network

Working to promote an effective labour market that serves the needs of people in mid and later life, employers and the economy.

<http://www.taen.org.uk/>

50+ Works

Sharing good practice and information about services, supporting those who work in the front line with older jobseekers. Topics include:

- Overcoming barriers
- Confidence and motivation
- Training and skills
- Case studies

<http://www.50plusworks.com/>

The Prince's Initiative for Mature Enterprise

An organisation dedicated to providing those over 50, who are unemployed or under threat of redundancy, with self-employment support.

<http://www.prime.org.uk/>

Age UK

Aiming to improve later life for everyone through information and advice, services, campaigns, products, training and research.

<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

Employers Forum on Age

An independent network of employers who recognise the need to attract and retain valuable employees, whatever their age.

<http://www.efa.org.uk/>

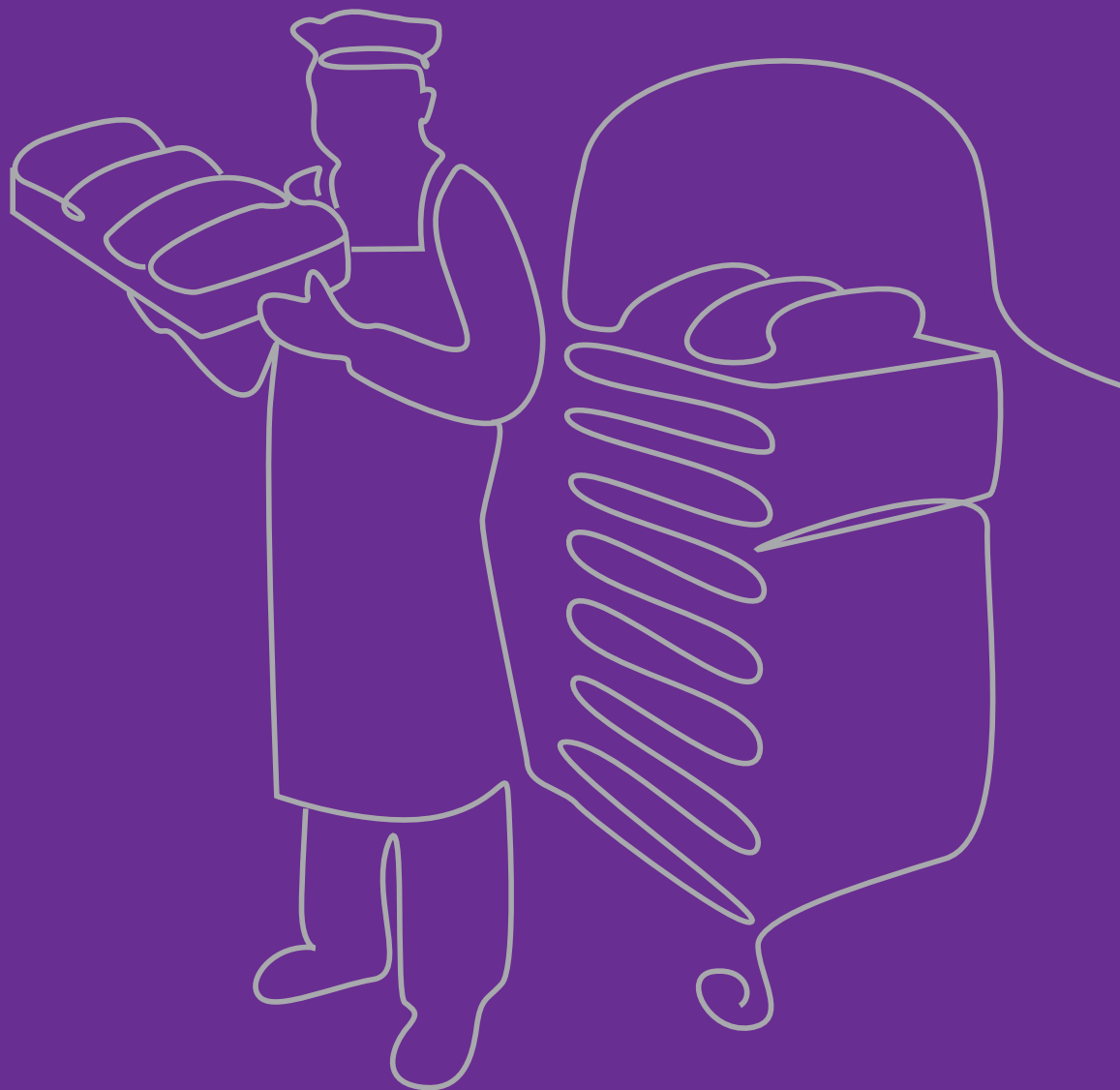
Ageing Well legacy website

Learning from the Ageing Well programme, with practical advice for councils and their partners. Includes:

- Case studies
- Written guides
- Videos
- Toolkits

<http://www.local.gov.uk/ageing-well>

Thanks to the Supporting Older Claimants Task & Finish Group for their support in putting together this guide.





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