# The Women and Equalities Committee: Older people and employment: Is Government policy effective?

### Written Evidence submitted by Dr Maria Karanika-Murray and Nottingham Civic Exchange

## Executive summary

This written submission focusses on questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 posed by the inquiry and builds on Dr Karanika-Murray’s research experience. Our submission highlights that:

* Good management practice is good management practice and we (policy-makers et al) sometimes forget that.
* Promotion of good workplace environments by Government policy and legislation can have a positive benefit
* There are a range of best practice examples that can be employed to improve age diversity and support, yet many of these should not be viewed as age specific by rather as age neutral or age aware
* It is important to develop workplaces that can support active and sustainable working lives for all.

## About the authors

1. **Nottingham Civic Exchange** is Nottingham Trent University’s pioneering civic think tank. With a primary focus on issues relating to the city and the region, Nottingham Civic Exchange will enable discovery by creating a space where co-produced approaches are developed to tackle entrenched social issues. Nottingham Civic Exchange supports the role of NTU as an anchor institution in the city and the region. Nottingham Trent University holds engagement with communities, public institutions, civic life, business and residents at the core of its mission. You can find out more about our work at [www.ntu.ac.uk/nce](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/nce).
2. **Dr Maria Karanika-Murray** – Maria’s expertise is in workplace health and well-being, organisational interventions, older workers, and how workplaces that enable healthy and productive work can be developed. She has written more than 130 publications, including professional reports and guidance for practitioners and policy-makers, peer-reviewed journal papers, book chapters, books, and conference presentations. She is on the panel of Expert Advisers for the NICE Centre for Guidelines (and helped to develop the 2015 NICE guidance on management practices for workplace health), a member of the ESRC Peer Review College, and advisor to European funding bodies. Her research has been funded by the European Agency for Safety & Health at Work, HSE, ESRC, charities, and the European Commission. She recently competed a 3-year project for the European Commission on the retention and engagement of older workers.
3. Dr Karanika-Murray would be delighted to submit further evidence and give oral evidence if so called.

Submission

1. It is important to recognise that the Fuller Working Lives strategy is broader than the Altman Review. Whilst both focus on common sense initiatives around facilitating delayed retirement via pension reform, improving employability via for example skills training, and addressing workplace issues such as discrimination. The retain-retrain-recruit triptych mirrors the three key labour market themes identified in PwC’s Golden Age Index and should be valued. More could be done, however, to highlight the role of the workplace (e.g. to increase diversity) as the Fuller Working Lives strategy is relatively poor in this domain. Further work in this area is required to support Older Workers to remain in work longer.
2. Further to our statements above, we want to stress the importance of the workplace in reducing barriers for older workers. Our view is that we must work to facilitate more supportive work environments (the climate and culture of the workplace) that can facilitate independence/autonomy, competence, and positive relationships, and in turn lead to higher motivation and job satisfaction. There is evidence that the workplace climate may be at least as important (if not more important) than good leadership and management for workplace health and well-being.
3. Research has offered clear messages on the importance of engagement, communication and participation for developing workplaces that can support active working and delay retirement. Supporting quality of working lives is now an integral part of business strategy.
4. When considering recruitment discrimination we would stress that we should highlight knowledge, skills, and experience during the recruitment and shortlisting processing. Omitting identifiers in applications (e.g., gender, age) has a positive benefit. Employers should also be supported to ensure diversity in recruitment panels and this should if possible, enshrine good practice in law. More work is required to raise awareness of the gains from a more diverse and older workforce and we should work to develop systems to support and encourage discrimination victims to have a voice and punish discrimination.
5. When considering the potential of re-training we would highlight that evidence suggests that re-training does help people to remain active in the workforce. Alongside the personal benefit, it helps to match changing needs and priorities to the work situation. We would also stress that these benefits apply to anyone regardless of age.
6. When we have explored improving age diversity, we have seen the positive benefits of apprenticeships and/or reverse mentoring schemes, which have helped, tackle issues around age diversity in the workforce.
7. When considering older workers in relation to the Taylor Review we would highlight that “good management and strong employment relations within the organisation” are crucial for employees. Good management practices should apply for all regardless of age. ‘Age-aware’ and ‘age-neutral’ may be more appropriate where ‘age-specific’ may inadvertently exacerbate issues.
8. The role of the workplace for tackling health inequalities and as a conduit of public health cannot be underestimated (Dame Carol Black, 2008). The workplace is pivotal for supporting fuller working lives and the conditions for engaged and productive work.
9. Some but not all groups have been supported and covered by Government action. The solutions for some of these may lie in complex and often costly changes outside the workplace (e.g., childcare for gender pay). Others may be easily addressed with practical solutions at the workplace. Care and time should be set aside to consider the complex issues here.
10. The answer to supporting an older workforce is not necessarily increasing retirement age or improving physical health. Rather, it is important to be diversity-aware and develop workplaces that can support active and sustainable working lives for all.
11. Awareness of diversity and good management practices are key to supporting active working with measurable impact on retirement plans. It is possible to develop workplace interventions that offer tangible benefits for the workforce and specifically to those closer to retirement.

Recommendations

1. Our submission focusses on the workplace environment and management practices delivered by employers for all workers.

* The answer to supporting an older workforce is not necessarily increasing retirement age or investing in physical health. Rather, it is important to develop workplaces that can support active and sustainable working lives for all.
* Awareness of diversity and good management practices are key to supporting active working with measurable impact on retirement plans.
* Promotion of good management practices across sectors will noticeably improve issues for older workers.
* Within work, training/re-training has a positive benefit for workers and employers and should be further supported to help manage changing employer needs, priorities, and productivity issues. Re-training should be designed to ensure workforce regardless of age remain active.
* We would argue the Government is not doing enough to address the differing needs of women, carers etc. Costly and complex changes are required but these often fall out of scope of workplace.