

In-House Research

**Not just another website:
Review of “50 Plus Works”
good-practice guide and toolkit**

by Tim Willis

Department for Work and Pensions

In-House Research No 8

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Tim Willis

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First Published 2012

ISBN 978-1-84947-988-2

Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Work and Pensions or any other Government Department.

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank DWP Redefining Retirement Division staff who volunteered to act as a field force for this research project: Christine Ashdown, Liz Vickers and Andrea Kirkpatrick. Sara Dewson, Associate Director, Institute for Employment Studies provided useful advice on the design of the research tools and useful comments on this report. Thanks are due to Hana Konopásková, ESF Project Officer and “50 Plus Works” Project Manager at TAEN for her help and assistance in providing materials to enable the review to take place. Thanks also go to the staff of provider organisations, the users of the “50 Plus Works” website, who agreed to give up their time to be interviewed for this review.

Web link to 50+ Works

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

Abbreviations used in the text

AELP	Association of Employment & Learning Providers
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DRA	Default Retirement Age
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ERSA	Employment Related Services Association
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
ESF	European Social Fund
IB	Incapacity Benefit
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
SDA	Severe Disablement Allowance
SPA	State Pension Age
TAEN	The Age and Employment Network

Summary

Introduction

“50 Plus Works” (www.50plusworks.com) is a free to use website designed to assist staff in provider organisations who are helping older jobseekers to return to work. The good practice guide and toolkit was developed and operated by The Age and Employment Network (TAEN). The development of “50 Plus Works” was co-financed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and European Social Fund (ESF) Technical Assistance. “50 Plus Works” was launched at the Welfare to Work Convention in June 2010.

TAEN is an independent charity part funded by Age UK with a mission to promote policies to ensure that the labour market serves the needs of older people, employers and the economy.

“50 Plus Works” was developed as part of the recognition that older people may need a different type of support to recover from the economic downturn. DWP started this process in the knowledge that there were strong examples of good practice among provider organisations, but this wasn’t universal and that some provider organisations require support to know what has worked in helping this age group. TAEN were contracted to work closely with provider organisations in developing and promoting a good-practice guide. Critically, this guide was designed as a vehicle for sharing good practice between provider organisations (to help them achieve better outcomes for people aged 50+ and to engage stakeholders in 50+ employment issues) rather than Government or a third party prescribing a specific approach to providers.

Aims of the research:

- To critically assess **how useful “50 Plus Works” is** to staff in DWP provider organisations helping older jobseekers return to work in terms of; ease of use, accessibility and the quality of the content.

- To assess the extent to which “50 Plus Works” has met its original intention of becoming **the good-practice guide of choice** for providers on the needs and barriers faced by older jobseekers.

Method of approach

This report presents the findings of a review carried out by social research staff in DWP Redefining Retirement Division. The review used mainly qualitative research methods to assess the views and experiences of users of “50 Plus Works”. 28 depth interviews with staff in provider organisations who have used the website were conducted by telephone during June-August 2011, one year after the launch of “50 Plus Works”. Face-to-face interviews were carried out with DWP policy staff and with the “50 Plus Works” Project Manager at TAEN. The author attended one of a series of training events held by TAEN in Spring 2011 to promote the take up of “50 Plus Works” among the target audience. Metrics relating to the usage of the website over time were also examined via Google Analytics.

Key Findings

- “50 Plus Works” is seen by users of the website as a good quality trusted source of information, as a simple tool to use that benefits from being regularly updated, it is clearly written and well edited and easy to navigate around.
- “50 Plus Works” is seen by users of the website as a comprehensive and convenient tool for advisers working with older jobseekers - having everything needed in one place, saving time and effort.
- “50 Plus Works” is appreciated by users of the website as a completely free resource. Other advisory and skills based web-tools typically offer limited features for free and attempt to sell additional services for a fee.
- This website has been well received by its target audience and is seen as the reference tool of choice by providers working with older jobseekers.

www.50plusworks.com by Google Analytics

suggests that the website has an average of nearly 500 users per week.

- The good practice guide was developed and launched on schedule and within budget.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of “50 Plus Works” - to provide good quality information and practical help and tactics for those helping a hard to help group return to work – has been met. “50 Plus Works” is seen as *‘not just another website’* but a highly regarded and well-used repository of trusted information. Crucially the information is provided by those with expertise in employment issues for older works and the site was developed in consultation with end users. The website is of help to both experienced advisers, who have previously had to rely on paper based information which was out of date and not comprehensive, and to newer advisers who may be younger, by providing information about how to empathise with older jobseekers.

The website is welcomed for being different to a Government website: albeit with links to Government sites. It is important that not only is the website entirely free but that, unlike other websites, it doesn’t attempt to sell more advanced features. Staff who received training on how to use the website were able to get the most benefit from the site.

The research has found that with an appropriate budget and the involvement of experts it is possible to develop good quality cost-effective web-based good-practice guides and toolkits for staff in provider organisations working with jobseekers.

Implications for policy

The key recommendations coming from the research for both DWP and providers are:

- Policy and operational staff in DWP should explore what additional efforts are required to promote awareness and use of “50 Plus Works” amongst advisory staff in Jobcentre Plus and provider organisations in order to fully realise the benefits of the public investment made in developing the web-tool.
- In-house training sessions in provider organisation should be undertaken to promote the use of the “50 Plus Works” website and consideration given to the establishment of “50 Plus Works” Champions in provider organisations.
- The development of further bespoke good quality web-tools similar to “50 Plus Works” for providers working with other specific client groups, such as claimants with a disability or a health condition should be considered. A key question is whether there is sufficient appetite among the provider community to take on responsibility for developing these tools themselves; or whether a third party organisation is required to facilitate and if this needs to involve government.
- DWP and its partner organisations should also consider investing in the development of good quality, regularly updated online jobsearch toolkits designed for claimants themselves to use.
- Prior to investing further in these approaches though, it would be useful to know:
 - the extent to which “50 Plus Works” raised awareness and understanding among advisers about the needs and barriers of older jobseekers
 - whether “50 Plus Works” improved the effectiveness of support for older jobseekers and the spread of good practice between provider organisations

Both of these questions are longer term intentions for this guide but beyond the scope of this research.

1 Context

1.1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of a review into the design and early operation of the “50 Plus Works” good-practice guide and toolkit, created for use by staff in welfare-to-work provider organisations¹ helping older jobseekers to return to work. The research was carried out by research staff and policy colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Qualitative in-depth telephone interviews with users of the “50 Plus Works” website (www.50plusworks.com) were carried out between June and August 2011, one year after the launch of the website.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the research

The research aims to:

- Critically assess **how useful “50 Plus Works” is** to staff in DWP provider organisations helping older jobseekers return to work in terms of; ease of use, accessibility and the quality of the content.
- Assess the extent to which “50 Plus Works” has met its original intention of becoming **the good-practice guide of choice** for providers on the needs and barriers faced by older jobseekers.

1.3 The Wider Policy Context

In coming years DWP and its providers can expect to see an increase in the numbers of older people seeking help to find work, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of all unemployed people. As the population ages, retirement

¹ Welfare to Work provider organisations are contracted to the Department for Work and Pensions to provide a range of job search and training services which can be targeted to specific groups of jobseekers.

and pension ages are set to increase and correspondingly, the age profile of those who constitute the working-age population will also rise.

Demographic change as a result of increased life expectancy has prompted Government to consider the amount of time individuals spend in retirement and the financial sustainability of people living for longer. As a result a number of key legislative changes have been introduced such as: the phasing out of the Default Retirement Age in 2011; the equalisation of men's and women's State Pension Age; and the acceleration of plans to increase the age at which people can claim the State Pension. A key part of the broader policy response has been to inform and encourage people to consider working beyond the traditional retirement age of 60 or 65.

These changes to pension and retirement ages are being made at the same time as welfare-to-work policy is being reformed through the introduction of a single Work Programme for the long-term unemployed introduced in 2011, to be followed by major reform of the benefits system through the introduction of Universal Credit², planned to be phased in from 2013.

Prior to the introduction of Universal Credit it is expected that growing numbers of people will move from Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). A large proportion of claimants who are likely to move to a more active benefit regime with a greater degree of conditionality and more incentives to seek and find employment, will be older jobseekers. Currently, just under half of ESA/IB/SDA claimants are aged over 50.³ As well as welfare and benefit reforms, increased pension ages are likely to see an increase in the numbers of people aged 60+ claiming initially JSA (and then Universal Credit) as eligibility for Pension Credit is withdrawn in line with the increase to the State Pension Age.

² DWP (2010) Universal Credit: welfare that works CM 7957

³ As of February 2011, for Great Britain (not including Northern Ireland) of those claiming Incapacity Benefit (IB), Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA), 45.6% are aged 50 or over. *Older Workers Statistical Information Booklet*, DWP Redefining Retirement Division, Quarter 2 (2011).

1.4 Older Jobseeker Characteristics

Although, acknowledged as a heterogeneous group with a wide range of needs, skills and characteristics, previous research into the experiences of older jobseekers has shown the prevalence of some common features. Once out of work, older people tend to take longer to leave benefits and are more prone than younger age groups to experience sustained periods of long-term unemployment.

In line with all jobseekers, older people share common barriers to employment such as lack of qualifications and lack of confidence, however, there are certain issues specific to age that can be a hindrance to re-entering the workplace. Typical issues for older jobseekers are perceptions of employer age discrimination, the possession of out of date and uncertified skills as well as a higher incidence, than younger people, of health conditions or disabilities that can restrict jobsearch. Older people can also have 'pivotal' caring responsibilities for both younger and older relatives simultaneously. Older people are also likely to have higher levels of financial commitments, including mortgages which can increase reservation wages and act as a barrier to leaving benefit and moving into work. Older jobseekers seeking a phased retirement may have a greater interest in requesting part-time work and flexible working patterns.⁴

Forthcoming research⁵ with older JSA claimants has shown that jobseekers aged 50+ can typically have a number of weaknesses in their search for employment that, ironically stem from the successes many older people have achieved through sustained work histories – in particular a lack of recent interview experience and no practice at CV writing. Jobseekers aged 50+ who have not applied for employment for a long time may lack familiarity with modern labour market techniques such as competency based job application

⁴ Vegeris, S., Smeaton, D. and Sahin-Dikmen, M. (2010) *50+ Back to Work Evidence Review and Indicative Guide for Secondary Data Analysis*. DWP Research Report 615.

⁵ DWP research report (forthcoming 2012) "How ready is Jobcentre Plus to meet the needs of 60 Plus Jobseekers."

forms and interviews, additionally older people may be disadvantaged through the use by employers of web-based application procedures.

Research has shown that benefit claimants aged over 50 typically have a distinctive emotional journey when faced with unemployment. In the early stages of unemployment early optimism about return to work with numerous applications being made, can be followed weeks or months later by disillusionment and depression if numerous job applications do not result in interviews or job offers.⁶

It is clear that the professionals in DWP Operations (Jobcentre Plus) and its provider organisations tasked with helping older jobseekers face the challenges of jobsearch and unemployment, require an appropriate level of understanding of the specific issues faced by older jobseekers as well as the possession of an appropriate skill-set and the tools to hand, to effectively assist older jobseekers. An awareness of the issues faced by older jobseekers is required to ensure that support interventions are appropriate and are well-timed to help claimants maintain and sustain their engagement in the processes of jobsearch.

⁶ Thomas, A. & Pemberton, A. (2011) *Qualitative Research into Enhanced Jobseeker's Allowance Provision for the 50+*. DWP Research Report 766.

1.5 Methodological approach to the review of “50 Plus Works”

To review the design and early operation of the “50 Plus Works” web-tool, analysis has been carried out on transcripts of 28 qualitative depth interviews conducted by DWP Redefining Retirement Division with staff in provider organisations who have used the website when working with older jobseekers. The semi-structured interviews were conducted via telephone using a Topic Guide (annexed). The achieved sample was derived from contact lists supplied by The Age and Employment Network (TAEN). Over 200 potential respondents were contacted by DWP via a letter explaining the aims of the research and offering potential respondents the chance to opt-out if they preferred not to be contacted further. The interviews were conducted in Summer 2011.

The achieved sample included a range of front-line and management staff of current and former DWP prime contractors and sub-contractors who have worked with older jobseekers as part of the DWP/Jobcentre Plus Jobseekers Regime Flexible New Deal and under the Work Programme.

Of the 28 interviews in the achieved sample; 13 were with representatives of current DWP specialist sub-contractors, five were with representatives of current DWP prime contractors, three of the respondents were representatives of both DWP prime and sub-contractors in different UK regions. The sample included two representatives of former DWP prime contractors and one representative of a former DWP sub-contractor. Two of the respondents in the sample were contracted to provide help and advice to clients via organisations other than those funded by the DWP and two of the respondents in the achieved sample were Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers working with the 50+ claimant group.

The types of services offered by the providers interviewed typically included training and advice delivered through one-to-one and group sessions with

older claimants covering jobsearch, CVs, job applications, interview techniques as well as motivational work and confidence building.

As well as qualitative interviews with staff in provider organisations, face-to-face interviews were carried out with DWP policy staff responsible for the development of the project and with the TAEN “50 Plus Works” Project Manager. Project materials were analysed relating to the development of “50 Plus Works” and the author attended a training event to promote the take up of “50 Plus Works” among the target audience held by TAEN in Spring 2011. Metrics relating to the usage of the website over time were also examined via Google Analytics.

An independent research consultant with expertise in employment policy and welfare to work research and evaluation was contracted via the DWP Social Research Framework. The consultant provided quality assurance advice regarding the proposed research methodology, the development of the research instruments to be used and provided comments on the findings presented in the draft research report.

2 The development of “50 Plus Works”

The introduction of the Work Programme in 2011 saw the development of a more individualised, flexible approach to employment provision. Benefit claimants are referred to specialist providers offering expertise in back to work assistance. To help staff in provider organisations improve their understanding of the challenges and barriers that older jobseekers may face, DWP Redefining Retirement Division in partnership with the European Social Fund (ESF) commissioned TAEN to develop a bespoke good practice guide and toolkit to assist in the delivery of the Work Programme. The project budget was £200,000.

The Age and Employment Network (TAEN) is an independent charity part funded by Age UK with a mission to promote policies to ensure that the labour market serves the needs of older people, employers and the economy.

“50 Plus Works” was developed as part of the recognition that older jobseekers may need help to recover from the economic downturn. DWP started this process in the knowledge that there were strong examples of good practice among provider organisations, but this wasn’t universal and that some provider organisations require support to know what has worked in helping this group. TAEN were contracted to work closely with provider organisations in developing and promoting a good-practice guide. Critically, this guide was designed as a vehicle for sharing good practice between provider organisations (to help them achieve better outcomes for people aged 50+ and to engage stakeholders in 50+ employment issues) rather than Government or a third party prescribing a specific approach to providers.

The brief issued by DWP in February 2010 was to work with providers to create by June 2010 a high quality good-practice guide in a suitable format to assist staff in organisations helping older people back to work to have a good knowledge and understanding of issues older people may experience when searching for work.

Development work for “50 Plus Works” included the examination of existing good practice material and the engagement of researchers to carry out face-to-face and telephone interviews with experienced welfare to work professionals and to run focus groups with potential users of the guide. Focus groups explored the issues that the target audience of providers felt should be covered by a guide. The development work sought to ascertain the specific issues affecting jobseekers aged over 50 and to gain an understanding of the main issues experienced by advisers charged with helping claimants aged 50+ find work. The development research asked potential users, including staff in DWP contracted Framework provider organisations, about their preferred format for the guide, giving them a range of options including paper-based and web-based guides as well as seeking views on potential brand names.

The key findings from the development feedback included the notion that a useful good-practice guide would need to be constantly up to date as events and developments in the law, the labour market and policies move quickly and advisers dislike using out of date information sources. Feedback suggested that the guide should be a practical toolkit that was easy to use with little theory and that the language used in the guide should be clear and in an appropriate style for advisers.

In April 2010 initial ideas were tested with focus groups to develop the shape and content of the guide and to outline its structure and architecture. The development research findings suggested that a web-based good practice guide would be the best fit to meet the requirements of potential users. A web designer was engaged and content was commissioned from a range of experts including academics, lawyers and professionals in a range of provider organisations. In order to bring coherence to this wide range of contributions covering topics such as jobseeker characteristics, age and the law, the modern labour market, work clubs, and training and skills, an editor was appointed to work with the web designer and ensure that the finished guide had clear readability and the editorial feel of a single author. This step

ensured that the text presented in all sections of the guide was easily digestible and information in the guide could be understood quickly.

A plus sign feature⁷ was added to introductory text in each section in order to avoid the default presentation of long sections and ensure that users were not faced with scrolling through masses of text. These design principles were intended to keep the structure clean and clear with the facility for users to reveal 'hidden' content if they required more information on a specific topic.

After the design of the content had been finalised a prototype of the site was created and tested with DWP, providers and TAEN colleagues in order to generate user feedback and to quality assure the development of the product. The prototype was also tested with staff in over 30 provider organisations who had not previously been involved in the development stages of the guide in order to gain fresh insight and feedback from the potential audience to facilitate adjustments to the finished product before it was launched. A number of focus groups were convened to look at the overall site and to focus in detail on particular sections.

The aim in the design of the site had been to strike a balance between ensuring that "50 Plus Works" was comprehensive enough to help staff in provider organisations deliver a good quality service to older claimants, while at the same time be easy to navigate. The design aimed to ensure that the guide was both accessible to advisers who are new to the field of welfare to work provision at a time of much change in the industry, as well as being a new format for information, advice and guidance that is useful to more experienced advisers, who may have worked in the advisory field for a number of years. The guide was designed to be a generic good practice guide for all advisers in provider organisations as well as being designed to address the specific needs of 50+ jobseekers and assist those helping claimants aged 50+ return to work.

⁷ Clicking on the plus sign provided users of the website with more text and information on a given topic.

Some focus group feedback suggested that greater interactivity in the guide and toolkit would be desirable through the inclusion of videos and photographs as well as an online forum or comments board. However, the inclusion of video and photographs was considered prohibitive as extra costs would be incurred through the commissioning of video content, scriptwriting, filming, taking photographs and editing. An online forum function would require dedicated staff time to actively moderate the facility, which again was considered prohibitive in terms of cost.

Research feedback from users in this review suggests that the decision to have a mainly text based web-tool was justified. There have been positive responses to the ease of use of the guide and users have commented that speed of access to information is one of the defining features of the tool. Advisers have praised the simplicity and clarity of “50 Plus Works” and described irritation with other online products that slow down the work of advisers and interaction with claimants if there is a need to wait for information as pictures or videos take time to download.

3 Launch and promoting awareness of “50 Plus Works”.

The guide was finalised and launched by DWP and TAEN at the Welfare to Work Convention in the summer of 2010. An advertising and press campaign was originally planned to publicise the launch of “50 Plus Works”, however the introduction of new government communications guidelines in 2010 limited the amount of publicity and media activity for all government initiatives. Cost-neutral promotion was undertaken including securing the coverage of the launch and operation of “50 Plus Works” in industry newsletters and updates provided by organisations such as The Age and Employment Network (TAEN), Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) and Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP).

Other cost-neutral promotional activity included awareness-raising through the use of contacts in the welfare to work industry. TAEN operated a series of awareness raising training events to invited guests at locations throughout the country in the spring and summer of 2011. These events were hands-on interactive sessions with participants taking a guided tour through the “50 Plus Works” website, the aim being that increased awareness of the features of the site and a tour through the best way to navigate “50 Plus Works” would encourage dissemination by attendees at their place of work. Attendees were contacted after the event via email with an attachment of the presentation used on the day as well as being sent seven links to key parts of the website.

However, where contacting and disseminating awareness messages to Chief Executives and Senior Managers of provider organisations was relatively straightforward, it was more difficult to ensure that awareness of “50 Plus Works” has been embedded throughout the whole of these organisations. Those with responsibility for promoting the website reported that it can be difficult to maintain up to date contact details for all front-line staff in provider organisations in an industry which has seen much recent change and where staff frequently change jobs. Potential provider organisations in the UK also differ in the extent to which they are prepared to engage and are geared up to carry out meaningful engagement with expert stakeholders, such as TAEN, before knowing whether they have been successful in the tendering process. Differences in engagement can arise at management and front-line adviser levels and in nationwide organisations in different geographical locations. Embedding awareness of the “50 Plus Works” website to all front-line advisory and managerial staff in the provider organisations engaged in activities to help the 50+ to return to work, was and remains a challenge.

TAEN subscribers receive a regular email newsletter *50+ Works bulletin*, covering developments in 50+ employment issues. The newsletter is used to promote “50 Plus Works” and to draw awareness to updates and developments that have been added to the guide and toolkit.

4 Content of “50 Plus Works”

The home page of “50 Plus Works” has links to eleven key sections:

- Jobseeker Characteristics
- Overcoming Barriers
- Confidence and Motivation
- Training and Skills
- Finding Work
- Customer Journey
- Networking and Referrals
- Adviser/Trainer Skills
- Engaging with Employers
- Finance
- Age and the Law

There is some basic text on 50+ issues to help adviser staff to understand the general area. A series of case studies are included and practical examples of good practice. The case studies are drawn from real world examples supplied by frontline advisers and provider organisations and are designed to highlight specific issues, information and approaches for advisers to use with 50+ jobseekers. They include, for example: presentation in interviews, a check-list for use when first meeting a potential employer and examples of how to practically discuss aspirations for jobseekers seeking professional roles.

The site also contains fact-sheets for advisers on specific topics such as ‘alcohol’ and ‘retirement’. “50 Plus Works” also includes sign-post information to other tools and products and some links to research publications. The emphasis of the site is on practical tools and information. There is also a news section with up to date information on employment policy and legislative developments affecting older workers.

The most frequently mentioned sections of “50 Plus Works” that research respondents could recall using were ‘Overcoming Barriers’, ‘Finding Work’, ‘Networking and Referrals’ and ‘Age and the Law’. One respondent who represented a prime contractor for the Work Programme stated that they had noticed that the section of the site most used by customers themselves was the Age and the Law section – customers appreciated the clearly expressed information on age legislation and made use of it with potential employers to challenge them if the customer felt that they were being discriminated against. Information on preparing CVs and making the best use of transferable skills were frequently mentioned as useful parts of “50 Plus Works” by respondents.

Only a few respondents suggested areas for improvement or recognised any gaps. One respondent suggested that there should be a link to the DWP better off calculator to promote the take up of Working Tax Credits⁸. Another noted that there could be more information on self employment options⁹ for older customers and information on which benefits older people could claim would be useful as this was often a cause of confusion. One respondent suggested that the site should have more examples of Northern case-studies, as customers in their area were unlikely to identify with examples from the South of England and would react in a negative manner if the adviser attempted to make even a generic point through the use of an example or a success story from the South.

Respondents generally found the site to be a comprehensive and convenient tool for advisers working with older jobseekers - having everything needed in one place which saved advisers time and ensured that they returned to use the site when helping an older jobseeker.

⁸ A link is available to the tax credit site via www.50plusworks.com/support-programmes (under Finance)

⁹ There is a section on self-employment: www.50plusworks.com/selfemployment/

5 Perceptions of the toolkit by providers working with older jobseekers

Respondents stated that since finding out about “50 Plus Works” it has become their reference tool of choice when working with the 50+ client group. There was a commonly held perception that the site is attractive, friendly and welcoming and ‘not like a government directive’. The site is seen as jargon-free, easy to use, up to date and comprehensive. Respondents repeatedly noted that “50 Plus Works” saves advisers time by having everything needed for working with older customers in one place where previously advisers would have to trawl the web for scattered information.

There was a sense from the respondents that “50 Plus Works” is fulfilling a service and providing high quality information, advice and guidance for professionals working with 50+ jobseekers, where previously there had been a gap in the market. Several respondents reported that they thought that there was nothing else like “50 Plus Works” available and that they were pleasantly surprised when they took the time to investigate “50 Plus Works”. A typical comment was: –

‘I thought it would be just another sign-posting website – I’ve been doing this job for a long time and I was really impressed with “50 Plus Works”, it’s updated all the time and it’s useful for lots of things.’

Respondents generally felt that welfare to work policy and the welfare to work industry has an overt focus on younger jobseekers to the detriment of facilities for older jobseekers. Respondents also frequently expressed the view that “50 Plus Works” helps the younger aged advisers to understand the specific issues that can be faced by older jobseekers.

Commonly repeated comments from users of the site were that “50 Plus Works” gives useful tips and strategies on how advisers can help older customers with their jobsearch. Examples cited were practical tips for

advisers if clients dig their heels in when they are offered jobsearch help, arguing that they are unemployable because of their age, too old to learn new skills or too old to look for work. Respondents noted that the site helps advisers to give older people an insight into the real experiences of others of a similar age and in similar circumstances. One respondent from a Work Programme prime contractor noted that using the case studies with customers:

'... shows a customer what's possible and that its not just me that is saying these things to them. It backs up what I want to get across to the customer...it gives [older] people an insight and lets them know that they are not a forgotten group – it gives the customer some belief.'

Advisers generally felt that the site gives weight to their arguments when attempting to help older jobseekers engage with jobsearch activity. Several noted that the site helps them to illustrate that 50+ jobseekers have not been written off and that there are a range of organisations and bodies out there including employers and DWP who value the contribution of older people, and who work to promote the position of older people in society and in the workplace.

Respondents tended to value the practical tips provided over the reference material. Several noted that they relied on the regular TAEN 50+ *Works Bulletin* email to bring important research or developments to their attention and that the practical elements of the “50 Plus Works” site were the most useful parts of the site.

A number of respondents noted that in the near future it is likely that greater volumes of older clients, and clients with health issues, are likely to be referred to Work Programme providers - some of whom will have been out of work for ten years or more and that all providers will need to make use of the kind of support that “50 Plus Works” gives them.

Several respondents noted that the launch of “50 Plus Works” was low key and they were surprised not to see stalls promoting “50 Plus Works” at job-fairs and industry events: several thought there was scope to promote the website further. A typical comment was that:

‘there are people in the industry who don’t know about “50 Plus Works” that need to know that it’s there. Without raising awareness, people won’t try it.’

A respondent from a Work Programme sub-contractor noted that information on “50 Plus Works” has been cascaded to all staff in their nationwide organisation and that managers are requested to issue regular reminders to front line staff to use the site and to look at developments and new information as it is added. “50 Plus Works” was used by that organisation in training advisers in the barriers faced by older jobseekers. Some respondents mentioned that “50 Plus Works” would be useful for use in the training of adviser staff in provider organisations, but that currently the site is not used in staff training in their own organisation. Others reported that “50 Plus Works” was used by their organisation in training and that it had been useful in opening the eyes of younger staff and staff who themselves are aged over 50, helping them to understand some of the issues that can be faced by older jobseekers.

One respondent who had attended the training events in 2011 said they had been fired up by the session and had forwarded the follow-up email from TAEN to colleagues. However, they stated that in all likelihood, their colleagues would tend to see contact from another colleague as just another email and would be highly likely to delete it without making it to the links provided and without spending time getting to know for themselves the benefits of the “50 Plus Works” website.

The “50 Plus Works” training sessions were well received by those respondents who had attended, however some made the point that although they could now get the full benefit from “50 Plus Works” after attending, they were only one member of staff in a large organisation. The point was

repeatedly made that TAEN should be invited into the workplaces of provider organisations by their management in order to carry out in-house training and take the time to illustrate to front-line staff how to get the best out of “50 Plus Works”. Where several respondents suggested TAEN should promote “50 Plus Works” in provider offices via in-house training, one respondent suggested that a network of “50 Plus Works” Champions should be established in provider offices to be a central point of contact in the promotion of the web-tool and that “50 Plus Works” Champions would be best placed to collect user feedback and be a direct link back to TAEN and the site administrators.

Respondents appreciated that “50 Plus Works” is entirely free. Other sites were mentioned that offer some initial free elements and then attempt to sell more advanced features. That “50 Plus Works” is a free to use service was seen as refreshing and promoted greater trust in the site itself and the information it contains which was seen as a useful spur to use the guide by advisers and their customers. One respondent from Jobcentre Plus reported how the comprehensive nature of the site and the clarity of the language used was a bonus in helping them to get their advisory work done:

‘Its pretty much a one stop shop. There is nothing else as good out there. It has no selling and no jargon – it’s just the facts – which is important for when I show clients where to find the site – I don’t want them ringing up and asking what things mean – its clear and they can get on and read it.’

6 Ease of use, navigation and accessibility of “50 Plus Works”

Respondents appreciated the design of the site, the colours, and the drop-down menu, and the lack of photographs meant that it was possible to access information speedily. The layout was said to be easy to read and the plus

sign¹⁰ to additional information was seen as a useful element of the site. “50 Plus Works” was seen as easier to operate than other websites.

Several respondents noted that at first they found the site a little daunting and difficult to use, but after attending the training sessions held by TAEN they were confident that they could get the most out of the site. Most were confident that they could navigate around the site effectively once they had become familiar with its architecture and features. The training sessions were a useful means of getting adviser ‘buy-in’ to the site and encouraging advisers to make practical use of the range of features on “50 Plus Works”. Once respondents were familiar with the site they were generally surprised at the amount of information contained that was relevant to older jobseekers.

One respondent from a Work Programme sub-contractor who had attended one of the training sessions noted:

‘I found the amount of information startling. When we started the walk through there was page after page of really useful information and links. I didn’t think that we would get through it all, but it’s user friendly and straightforward to navigate.’

“50 Plus Works” was used in a number of ways by respondents. Some used the site as a reference tool to prepare for meetings with customers, others used the site during a meeting with a customer, showing relevant screens to customers. Others encouraged customers to make a note of the web address and to use the site themselves. Others printed out sections for their own reference and gave print-outs to customers to take away and digest.¹¹ Other respondents did not value printing sections of “50 Plus Works” out, considering that customers would throw paper print-outs away. Some respondents suggested that advisers should be issued with high quality glossy leaflets or flyer advertisements on “50 Plus Works” that older

¹⁰ Clicking on the plus sign provided users of the website with more text and information on a given topic.

¹¹ It is possible to print the main contents of each page as a PDF.

customers would be more likely to value – promoting the use of the site by customers.

7 Views of web-based information, advice and guidance for older jobseekers

The majority of respondents stated that they preferred web-based jobseeker information, advice and guidance on 50+ issues. The ability to access up to date information was seen as a bonus in web based guides over paper based sources of information. However, many respondents pointed out that older and particularly male jobseekers are unfamiliar with IT and do not use the web. It was suggested that good quality leaflets or booklets containing elements of the 50+ Works information would be useful to give to those customers who do not use the internet.

8 Conclusion, policy implications and challenges for “50 Plus Works”

This review has used qualitative research methods with users of the “50 Plus Works” website and guide to assess the extent to which “50 Plus Works” has met its original intention of becoming **the good-practice guide of choice** for providers and to assess **how useful “50 Plus Works” is** to staff in DWP provider organisations helping older jobseekers return to work.

Research evidence suggests that the organisation selected to develop the “50 Plus Works” website, TAEN, has been successful in engaging and securing buy-in from the target audience. “50 Plus Works” is seen as ‘not just another website’ but a highly regarded and well-used repository of trusted information and a source of good practice tips and suggestions for use when helping older jobseekers return to work. “50 Plus Works” has been cited as the good-practice guide of choice by numerous respondents in this research. Google analytics find that www.50plusworks.com has received 37,867 visits and is now averaging nearly 500 visits per week. There was a gradual build up of

use following the launch in the summer of 2010 up to a peak of 1000 visits per week at the end of January 2011. There are also peaks in usage in June, August and November 2011 which are aligned with the timing of the 50+ Works bulletins which provided updates about the site. (see separate Appendix file for more detail).

The DWP/ESF development budget for the project allowed the engagement of experts including those with expertise in 50+ employment issues, as well as expert research specialists to carry out exploratory development work with potential users and to scope and fully test a prototype web guide and to make necessary refinements. The budget enabled the engagement of web design expertise as well as relevant experts in law and employment and welfare to work issues for the 50+ in order to ensure that the contributions to the content of the guide were of a high standard. The appointment of an editor brought a high quality authorial voice to the whole of the product overseen by the TAEN Project Manager.

In terms of advertising, promotion and awareness raising, the launch of the site can be seen to have been hampered by the introduction of new government communications guidelines restricting publicity and communications relating to government funded services introduced in 2010. There is therefore, the potential for investment in a “50 Plus Works” promotional campaign, if the full benefits of the public investment already made in the design, creation, development and operation of the guide is to be fully realised. Cost-neutral initiatives have been undertaken through the creative use of contacts, however directly contacting and raising awareness of the site with all advisory staff in provider organisations without a substantial awareness campaign remains a challenge.

Those that know about the site are very enthusiastic, but question whether the website is well known enough to be widely used. Some respondents suggested that TAEN or the DWP should carry out in-house training in the use of “50 Plus Works” for staff in provider organisations. Consideration should also be given to the establishment of “50 Plus Works” Champions to

act as agents within provider organisations to promote the use of the site and to feedback suggestions for improvement to TAEN.

There is also an argument that, following initial set-up funding from DWP and ESF that provider organisations or an organisation representing providers could take on the role of further developing and promoting a guide that is clearly of use to provider staff and could enhance their ability to support customers into work and therefore generate greater incomes from government contracts. DWP officials will be exploring the scope for this with relevant organisations over the coming months.

DWP and Jobcentre Plus are already promoting this guide among Jobcentre Plus advisers.

The website is of help to experienced advisers who have previously had to draw on a range of paper based information sources – that quickly dated and were not comprehensive. “50 Plus Works” has also been useful to new advisers – who tend to be younger than their client base and may require information to help them empathise with the needs of older jobseekers and to better understand the challenges and issues that can be faced by clients who may not have applied for (new) jobs for a number of years or decades.

Research suggests that the tool is comprehensive, up to date, well received, and widely used and that “50 Plus Works” has clearly filled a gap in the market for a high quality, online, free at the point of use guide and tool kit for those helping the 50+ return to work. The aim of “50 Plus Works” - to provide good quality information and practical help and tactics for those helping a hard to help group return to work - has been met.

9 Appendices

Appendix A - Topic Guide

Appendix B - Respondent Consent Letter

Appendix C - Google Analytics Dashboard for

www.50plusworks.com June 2010 – Dec 2011

Appendix D - Keywords

Appendix A Topic Guide

Topic guide for semi-structured interviews with Provider staff who have used the '50+ Works' website

[Please refer to interviewer briefing notes prior to the interview]

INTRODUCTION: (Introduce yourself). Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. The Department for Work and Pensions is carrying out a review of the '50+ Works' website operated by TAEN (The Age and Employment Network), since July 2010.

We are interested in your views and experiences of using '50+ Works' to help people aged over 50 to return to work.

Background and purpose of this research by DWP

Aims of the '50+ Works' research:

- to assess **how useful '50+ Works'** is to staff in DWP provider organisations, in terms of; ease of use, accessibility and the quality of the content
- to see how far '50+ Works' is **the good-practice guide of choice** for providers helping older jobseekers return to work

Nature of the interview

- The interview will take about 30 minutes.
- No individuals or organisations will be identified in any research reports based on the findings
- The interview is voluntary and can be ended by you at any time
- DWP intends to publish a research report 'Review of 50+ Works' based on the research findings later this year

[For face-to-face interviews] Is it OK to record the interview? This is to accurately capture your views. The recording of the interview will be used to type up a transcript for analysis by DWP researchers, it will then be destroyed.

BEGIN TAPE RECORDING NOW: This is interview number ____

Interviewer: Read out the code that has been assigned to this respondent and location in the coding sheet.

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Could you please briefly describe your job role?

(Probe: how long in the role, their background, front-line customer contact? Customer types?)

1.2 Could you tell me about the types of service that your organisation provides?

(Probe for background on the organisation: Is the organisation a DWP prime contractor, sub contractor? Number of staff in organisation? How many staff/what proportion within the organisation work with older customers? Examples of interventions and courses to help people find work, for example in-work support, work trials, CV service, help with job application advice, confidence building, interview techniques).

1.4 Which of these services, that you have just described, are delivered in-house and which are delivered by any subcontractors?

(Probe for whether the provider has direct contact with customers. Are sub-contractors divided geographically or thematically?)

1.5 I understand that you have recently used the '50+ Works' website?

{if yes – move on to the question set over the page, from Q. 2 onwards}

If not, please ask:

1.6 Have you heard of '50+ Works'?

1.7 What sources of guidance and advice *do you use* when helping older people to prepare to return to work?

(Probe for paper based, web, local knowledge – names of resources.)

{Thank respondent for their time - interview ends}

2 INTRODUCTION of '50+ Works' website

2.1 Could you tell me how you first became aware of '50+ Works'?

(Please record – TAEN event – where?, when? – DWP event, Welfare to Work Convention 2010?, 50+ Matters e-bulletin, other web site – which one? referred by employer, colleague, friend, other.)

2.2 Overall, what are your views on the **launch** and introduction of '50+ Works'?

(Probe: was it timely? necessary? appropriate to labour market conditions at that time?)

2.3 Were you/your organisation consulted about your requirements for this new good-practice guide for older jobseekers, before the launch of '50+ Works'?

(Probe: via focus groups?, prototype trials? Early 2010.)

2.4 Have you (or your organisation) provided any feedback to TAEN on '50+ Works' since its launch in July 2010?

(Probe, if yes what was the outcome? If no, why not – not asked? nothing to say?)

2.5 What were your expectations of '50+ Works'? What did you want it to provide?

2.6 If you had to sum up what '50+ Works' does (or provides), how would you describe it?

2.7 Before the launch of '50+ Works', what sources of information, advice and guidance did you use to help older jobseekers return to work?

(Probe for names e.g. TAEN, Age UK, Direct Gov and types of format).

2.8 To what extent would you say that '50+ Works' is your **primary** source of information, advice and guidance on older jobseekers?

2.9 Have you made '50+ Works' one of your web 'Favourites'?

2.10 What other sources of information do you still use for this customer group?

(Probe for names e.g. TAEN, Age UK, Direct Gov and types of format).

2.11 Is '50+ Works' used or mentioned in training that your staff receive?

(Probe If so, how is it used in training? mentioned to new staff, is site used in training sessions? If not, how do staff within your organisation find out about '50+ Work's?)

2.12 Do you know whether your colleagues use '50+ Works'?

3 Ease of use, navigation and accessibility of '50+ Works'

3.1 When did you first access the '50+ Works' website?

3.2 When did you last access the '50+ Work's website?

3.2 How regularly would you say that you use the '50+ Works' website?

3.3 What were your first impressions of the site?

3.4 Once in the site, did you find it accessible and easy to navigate around?

(Probe – for reasons if yes what was good?, if not what was the problem?)

3.5 How do you use '50+ Works'? Is it during a meeting with a customer? Before a meeting with a customer? After a meeting with a customer?

3.6 Do you print out sections of the site for your own use? Or to give to customers?

4 Content of '50+ Works'

4.1 How useful do you find the content of the site?

(Probe for views on how up to date the information is, what the site is used for, how it compares to other websites.)

4.2 How have you found the content of the site, in terms of the balance between **information** and **practical tips** for helping older jobseekers?

4.3 Can you remember the topics or areas that you have looked at on '50+ Works'?

(Prompt if required read out list of section headings)

- Jobseeker characteristics
- Overcoming Barriers
- Confidence and Motivation
- Training and Skills
- Finding Work
- Customer Journey
- Networking and Referrals
- Adviser/Trainer Skills
- Engaging with Employers
- Finance
- Age and the Law

4.4 Do you look at the case studies and good practice examples? If so, do you find them helpful?

(Probe If yes why?, If not, why not?)

4.5 Which parts of the website have you found the most useful?

(Probe for specifics – bespoke to client group, free, up to date usefulness of web links?)

4.6 Can you recall any parts of the website that you did not find useful? How could these areas of the site be improved?

4.7 Does '50+ Works' help you/your organisation to address the issues and barriers that older customers present?

(Probe – if so, can you give me any examples?)

4.7 What do you think could be done to promote '50+ Works' and increase the use of the site by people working with older jobseekers?

4.8 Are you aware that new content continues to be added to '50+ Works'?

5 Views of web-based jobseeker guidance for older workers

5.1 What format do you prefer to access information, advice and guidance on 50+ issues?

(Probe for paper based, web, local knowledge – names of resources.)

5.2 What do you think are the benefits of web based sources of information, advice and guidance for people in your job?

5.3 Are there any disadvantages to web based sources of information, advice and guidance?

5.4 Would you recommend the 50+ Works website to anyone else?

5.5 Do you feel that 50+ Works provides a service that is not available elsewhere?

5.6 Is there anything missing from 50+ Works that it would be useful to have?

5.7 How could the site be improved?

(Probe for: ease of use, accessibility, quality of the content.)

5.8 Would it be useful to link 50+ Works to other sources of information, advice and guidance for 50+ jobseekers? What other sources?

(Probe for how this might be achieved)

5.9 Would something similar to '50+ Works' be useful for other age groups who are seeking work?

(Probe: if so how? Which other age groups could benefit?)

5.10 50+ Works has been developed for staff in provider organisations - do you think that a site for older jobseekers themselves would be useful?

(Probe: aware of older jobseekers accessing 50+ Works, if so, was it after respondent recommended the site to the customer? Did customer know of the site already? What problems might be encountered? Would the site need more development before this happened?)

6 Close and Thanks

Is there anything else about your experience of using the 50+ Works website not covered today that you would like to add?

Thank you.

Sometimes it is helpful to re-contact people to find out more about their views and experiences or to explore their responses in more depth. Would it be acceptable to contact you again to discuss topics similar to those we've covered today?

Yes

No

Interview ends.

Make a record of:

- Your name, date and duration of interview
- Your immediate impressions of:
 - i) the respondent's level of knowledge of the 50+ Works website
 - ii) their awareness of the issues faced by older jobseekers
 - iii) your impression of the ways the respondent uses strategies to help older jobseekers return to work

Appendix B Respondent Consent Letter

20 May 2011

Review of the '50+ Works' Website - DWP Research

Dear Colleague,

The *50+ Works* website was set up in 2010 with the aim of being the preferred source of detailed guidance for providers helping people aged over 50 return to work.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) wishes to conduct research with the target audience for the website - staff in provider organisations supporting people aged over 50 to return to work. We are interested in the opinions of users regarding the content of the 50+Works website, its ease of use and added value. We are writing to ask if you would be willing to take part in the research. Your contribution as a professional is important and will help to improve the service provided for jobseekers aged over 50.

Taking part is entirely voluntary. Your name would not be used in any reports and any views you express would remain completely confidential. No identifiable information will be passed to any part of DWP outside of the research team or to any other third party. All personal information including contact details will be destroyed when the research is complete.

If you are happy to take part in the research, you need take no further action. During the next few weeks, you **may** receive an email or telephone call from a DWP Researcher who will ask if you would like to take part in an interview by telephone or face-to-face at your place of work. If you agree, we will arrange a suitable date and time with you. If you don't hear from us, don't worry. We have written to more people than we need to interview.

If you do not want to take part - please use the contact details below to inform the research project manager, please state your name and organisation and that you do not wish to be interviewed as part of the DWP review of the 50+ Works website. We will not contact you again.

If you would like to talk to someone about the research, please telephone the research project manager xxxxxxxx on xxxxxxxxxx or email him at xxxxxxxxxx. Alternately please contact the DWP policy lead for 50+ Works xxxxxxxx on or email xxxxxxxxx.

We hope that you decide to take part in the review of 50+ Works.

Yours sincerely

xxxxxxx

Senior Research Officer, DWP Redefining Retirement Division

Appendix C

Google Analytics Dashboard for 50+ Works June 2010 – Dec 2011

Google analytics find that www.50plusworks.com has received 37,867 visits and is now averaging nearly 500 visits per week. There was a gradual build up of use following the launch in the summer of 2010 up to a peak of 1000 visits per week at the end of January 2011. There are also peaks in usage in June, August and November 2011 which are aligned with the timing of the 50+ Works bulletins which provided updates about the site. (see separate file for more detail).

Appendix D Keywords

Older jobseekers, customers, claimants, clients, good-practice, guide, toolkit, web, website, internet, 50+, fifty plus, welfare to work, adviser, claimant, provider, employer, JSA, ESA, IB, Work Programme, DWP, TAEN, ESF, Age UK.

50 Plus Works (www.50plusworks.com) is a free to use website designed to assist staff in provider organisations who are helping older jobseekers to return to work. This good practice guide and toolkit was developed and operated by The Age and Employment Network (TAEN). The development of “50 Plus Works” was co-financed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and European Social Fund (ESF) Technical Assistance. It was developed as part of the recognition that older people may need a different type of support to recover from the economic downturn. TAEN were contracted to work closely with provider organisations in developing and promoting the good-practice guide and will be maintaining the website.

DWP staff and provider organisations can expect to see increased numbers of older customers both in overall numbers and as a proportion of the total population as a result of: retirement and pension age increases (alongside an ageing population) and increases in numbers of claimants undertaking a more active benefit regime following current benefit changes.

This in-house qualitative study included interviews with front-line advisory staff from DWP provider organisations as well as staff working in Jobcentre Plus offices. The research assesses how useful the 50+ Works good-practice guide and toolkit (www.50plusworks.com) is to staff in DWP provider organisations in helping older jobseekers return to work and whether it is the good-practice website of choice for providers. Metrics relating to the usage of the website over time were also examined via Google Analytics.

If you would like to know more about DWP research, please contact:

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<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

DWP Department for
Work and Pensions

Published by the
Department for Work and
Pensions
March 2012
www.dwp.gov.uk
In-House Research no. 8
ISBN 978-1-84947-988-2