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**IDENTIFIERS** \*United Kingdom

**ABSTRACT**

This document synthesizes the findings of an invitational policy consultation at which 27 invited participants from England, Wales, and Scotland examined the special career guidance needs of third-age adults (adults age 45 or older) and strategies for meeting those needs. First, the special career- and employment-related problems faced by individuals in the third age are explained. Adjustment problems arising from transitions associated with the third age are discussed along with the following factors that may influence older clients differently: confidence levels, geographic mobility, gender differences, social class differences, and differences unique to the current generation. The following types of differences between older and younger adults are considered together with the implications of these differences for career guidance providers: job search; importance of work/role/activity; need for a richer, more personally satisfying life; and financial security. The main option areas for the following groups of third-age clients are listed: redundant individuals, retirees, employees, and unemployed individuals. Twelve key determinants of quality provision for third-age clients, including the following, are listed: close teamwork between major provider organizations and key players; development of local exemplars; and staff sensitivity to third-age issues. Concluding the document are seven recommendations and action points for consideration at the national and local levels. (MN)

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# Career Guidance for the Third Age

Report on a NICEC/CRAC invitational policy  
consultation held on 30-31 October 1996  
at the James Gracie Centre, Birmingham

and sponsored by the  
Department for Education and Employment



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Increasing numbers of people in or approaching the third age (45+) are  
having to face career and work transitions which, in complexity, can  
parallel those confronting young people at the threshold of their careers.  
But many older people do not possess the necessary career management  
skills to manage the transition period successfully. Without access to  
skilled help, they may have difficulty in finding new directions.

The invitational policy consultation was organised to consider the impli-  
cations of the increasing third-age client group for guidance providers  
working in a range of settings, to identify the particular guidance require-  
ments of older people, and to make recommendations on the way ahead.  
The consultation was designed at a strategic level, to inform and influence  
future policy in all sectors.

27 people attended from England, Wales and Scotland, including repre-  
sentatives from DfEE, Training and Enterprise Councils, employers, the  
Third Age Challenge Trust, the Carnegie Third Age Programme, careers  
and educational guidance services, adult education, and the media.

The report is written by Geoffrey Ford, Fellow, NICEC. It does not  
necessarily represent the views of the project sponsors, or of any particu-  
lar participant at the event.

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*A report entitled 'Career Guidance for the Third Age: a Mapping Exercise',  
describing good practice and identifying key issues, was prepared for  
the consultation, and is being published as a NICEC Project Report,  
with sponsorship from DfEE and the Carnegie Third Age Programme.  
It is available from Biblios Publishers' Distribution Service, Star Road,  
Partridge, Green, West Sussex RH13 8LD, price £9.95.*

▼ **Who is 'at risk'?**

In September 1996, 350,000 people aged 50+ were registered as unemployed. Agencies working with older people estimate that another 900,000 wish to work, but have written off their chances and withdrawn from the labour market.

Stereotypical images of older people are frequently inaccurate, and the traditional lines dividing generations are increasingly blurred. For example, the trend to extend education and delay families means that many more aged 45+ have young children and heavy financial commitments, and wish to continue using their skills in employment. Women in particular may plan to return to work from 45+, but encounter ageist attitudes in doing so. The feeling of being '20 years old with 30 years' experience' is far from untypical, and a direct consequence of rising living standards and health-care.

▼ **What are the consequences?**

The third-age group will soon account for one-third of the total adult population. Figures from all EC countries indicate a gradual decline in the number of younger adults who – unless there is greater economic participation by older people – will be working to support increasing numbers entering the third age.

Evidence demonstrates that large numbers of the third age wish to remain economically and socially active. Unless they are enabled to do so, a vast supply of skills and experience will continue to be lost to the UK. If properly applied, this resource would contribute substantially to national economic development and the enrichment of local communities.

▼ **To what extent do older people have special guidance needs?**

Those aged 45+ may have guidance needs which differ from younger age-groups. But not all share these needs; and some of the needs may be shared by younger people.

**Third-age transitions that can cause adjustment problems**

Starting in a new field after 45 (e.g. job search, finding training places, adjusting to work experience)

Changing from a single occupation to a portfolio of different activities

Coping with new and more flexible styles of work (e.g. portfolio work; short-term contracts; 'chunking' and 'flexing'; mixing combinations of paid and unpaid work, volunteering and citizenship activities)

Coping with risk

**Factors which (may) influence older clients differently**

Confidence levels:                    may increase (strengthening decision-making)  
   may decrease (physical changes, loss of defining job roles)

Geographical mobility:            may decrease (ties)  
   may increase (loss of ties)  
   may be enforced (ties pulling elsewhere)

Differences between men and women:    e.g. employer attitudes, different stages of career development, caring, responsibilities, full-time/part-time work, salary levels, main earner/second earner, stereotypical male/female employment

Differences between social classes:            e.g. attitudes to work, learning, types of job, finance, volunteering, hobbies and leisure, expectations that local community and peer-group hold of older people

Differences unique to current generation:    e.g. finance, expectations, ability to cope with change, career management skills, learning, expectation of job for life

**Are older people different?**

<b>Dominant motivational force</b>	<b>Some possible differences</b>
Job search	Ageist attitudes
Importance of work/role/activity	Fewer formal qualifications More on-the-job learning Attitude/confidence/motivation Physical stamina Expectations no longer accurate May have to make more applications Different learning styles
Need for richer, more personally satisfying life	Don't know what's out there Guilt about doing something for oneself Strong work ethics Greater level of panic (including consciousness of own mortality)
Financial security	Lower levels of pension provision More complexity More anxiety about credit and debt More poverty (contrary to media images)

**Implications for career guidance providers**

<b>Dominant motivational force</b>	<b>Some implications for providers</b>
Job search	Need to work with employers to address stereotypes Importance of individual advocacy Value of programmes to restore confidence, improve motivation, and provide training in CV preparation and interview skills
Importance of work/role/activity	Sensitivity to older people's continuing need to contribute positively to the community, economically and socially Importance of group work and promotion of peer-group support Front-line sensitivity to third-age guidance requirements
Need for richer, more personally satisfying life	Importance of information and expertise on learning opportunities, flexible work options (e.g. portfolio work), and voluntary work Experience available in assessment and skills analysis techniques Need for longer (and possibly repeat) visits to explore interests and options
Financial security	Availability of financial advice, including benefits (in-house or via local network) Staff awareness of financial and benefits issues

▼ **The main client groups**

The matrix below offers a tool for reviewing the availability of opportunities for the third age at both national and local level, and for reviewing the coverage of guidance provision. The client categories used in the matrix are deliberately broad, and can be sub-divided to identify key sub-groups (e.g. older redundant workers from traditional industries; older agricultural workers with transport problems; low-skilled workers from ethnic minorities with poor command of English; women returners of 45+; local concentrations of redundant middle managers and executives).

Client groups	Main option areas				
	<i>Paid Employment</i>	<i>Paid Self-Employment</i>	<i>Voluntary Work</i>	<i>Learning*</i>	<i>Others§</i>
REDUNDANT	●	●	●	●	●
RETIREES					
(a) early	●	●	●	●	●
(b) statutory age			●	●	
EMPLOYEES					
(a) leaving current employment	●	●		●	
(b) staying in current employment‡			●	●	
UNEMPLOYED					
(a) seeking work	●	●	●†	●†	●†
(b) not seeking work			●	●	●

\* Non-vocational education, vocational education, training, retraining, basic skills, ESL, etc.  
 § Could include e.g. community work schemes, work assignments, other local options.  
 ‡ Sponsored by company in preparation for career transition.  
 † Transitional.

▼ **The vision: guaranteeing quality of provision for third-age clients**

**Key determinants**

- Close teamwork between the major provider organisations and key players (including government and government-funded bodies, e.g. DfEE, Jobcentres, TECs, Benefits Agency, Health Authorities, LEAs and education providers, Careers Services).
- Development of local exemplars. Opportunities for providers to share and disseminate good practice.
- Coherent coverage of third-age clients
  - by client group;
  - geographically;
  - through accessibility;
  - by outreach.
- Access to information and advice on a full range of local opportunities applicable to the third age. Availability of skilled guidance on demand (paid/unpaid).
- Staff sensitivity to third-age issues; age-mix of staff. Staff training relevant to third-age requirements.
- Marketing through communication channels commonly used by older people (e.g. radio, TV, press, library, community centres), and in language appropriate to the client group. Use of acceptable role models.

- Appropriateness of guidance activities available (e.g. importance of advocacy for individuals and client groups) and delivery methods (e.g. value of group work, and mutual support networks).
- Preparedness of guidance providers to influence the infrastructure (e.g. through identifying and discouraging ageist practices) and to feed back identified needs to assist third-age groups to the policy-makers.
- Clearly defined standards of delivery. Efficient and operational quality-assurance arrangements.
- Opportunities for client feedback, and organising follow-up arrangements by providers.
- Scope to involve third-age clients as volunteers in enhancing guidance services.
- Preparedness to innovate.

## THE WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION POINTS

### ▼ National

- 1 National guidance strategy for the third age should be integral to the current National Strategy for Adult Guidance. Government initiatives (e.g. the national helpline), and the national standards for adult guidance provision (National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance), should take account of the needs of third-age client groups.
- 2 National strategies to assist older workers and national adult guidance strategies should be more closely related. The most appropriate review body is probably the DfEE Advisory Group on Older Workers, but it is also necessary to secure:
  - closer collaboration between the relevant government departments including DfEE, Department of Social Security, and Department of Health;
  - the active involvement of CBI, TUC, employer organisations, and trade unions.
- 3 A percentage of national funding to support adult guidance should be specifically earmarked for work with the third age.
- 4 The advantages of employing older workers require much stronger national promotion (e.g. through the development and promotion of exemplars within government departments, national marketing strategies, Employers' Forum on Age).
- 5 Time-limited pilot projects can play an important role in feeding into and enriching mainstream provision.
- 6 Research is necessary to provide more information on the reality of employment and unemployment in the third age. Immediate requirements are to:
  - pinpoint main national/local barriers to third-age participation;
  - identify and evaluate strategies and good practice which enable older people to surmount the barriers successfully;
  - evaluate the impact of the Job Seekers' Allowance on older claimants and their job prospects.

### ▼ National and local

- 7 National human resource development initiatives including Investors in People should be deliberately used to invest in older people including career development, and prepare all staff on a phased basis for key career transitions including leaving current employment. Small and medium-sized employers need special encouragement to invest in the continued development of older staff.



- 8 Training and community work initiatives should deliberately seek to involve older workers, and to utilise and develop intrinsic training and mentoring skills in work with younger age-groups.
- 9 Adult guidance strategies should embrace the needs of those who have left the labour market, but wish to continue to contribute actively to the community and maintain a full life. *At national level*, this necessitates:
  - the incorporation of the wider interpretation of economic and social activity into the National Strategy for Adult Guidance;
  - the development and maintenance of close and active network relationships between bodies including the relevant government departments and funding agencies, NACCEG, the Advice, Guidance, Counselling and Psychotherapy Lead Body, and voluntary-sector organisations.

*At local level:*

  - information and advice on a wide range of opportunities, including learning and voluntary activities, should be widely and freely available;
  - the creative linkages which can be forged locally between participation in lifelong learning and individual involvement in voluntary activities should be further developed and made more explicit.
- 10 Opportunities should be created to use the experience gained in guidance with third-age clients to inform the content of careers education and guidance for the young (e.g. career management skills, managing change, lifelong learning, planning personal finances).
- 11 Information on good practice should be more widely disseminated.

▼ **Local**

- 12 Older people share with younger adults an identical need for access to high-quality local guidance provision, tailored to meet individual requirements. Particular attention is drawn to the importance of:
  - local adult guidance networks seeking to include all third-age initiatives which provide elements of guidance, and working with all such providers to ensure high standards of delivery;
  - good working relationships between the key partners including TECs, Employment Service, Benefits Agency, education and guidance providers, library services, and the voluntary services;
  - accessible and relevant information and advice on a comprehensive range of local opportunities and activities;
  - group work, training events and resource material designed to help third-age clients acquire effective job-search and career management skills;
  - marketing and outreach activities which help older people to understand the value of guidance, and are conducted through avenues appropriate to the target groups;
  - high-quality training for all guidance staff (full-time, part-time, voluntary) to ensure sensitivity towards the needs of older clients.
- 13 Guidance providers should ensure that advocacy and feedback feature prominently in services to third-age clients, and particularly in raising the awareness of employers and learning providers to:
  - third-age vocational requirements;
  - commonly experienced barriers to economic and social participation (including ageist attitudes and stereotyping).
- 14 Guidance providers should seek opportunities to involve suitable third-age volunteers in aspects of guidance delivery to their peers (e.g. gathering and presenting information on local opportunities, mentoring and support).



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