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Over-50s account for majority of UK employment growth, says ONS

18 Jul 2019 By Annie Makoff-Clark

But experts question whether older employees are staying in work because they want to or because they have no choice



The number of over-50s in the workplace is continuing to rise and accounts for a disproportionate part of the overall increase in UK employment, according to the [latest figures from the Office for National Statistics](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/july2019) (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/july2019>) (ONS).

Individuals aged between 50 and 64 accounted for more than half the annual increase in employment – the total of which this year shifted to 76 per cent of the population compared to 75.6 per cent the previous year.

There were 198,000 more people aged between 50 and 64, as well as 120,000 more over-65s, in work in March-May 2019 compared to the same period the previous year.

Earlier this year, a report by the Centre for Ageing Better, *The State of Ageing in 2019* (<https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/state-of-ageing>), warned that employees in their 50s and 60s were [at risk of “substantial workplace inequalities”](https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/charity-urges-businesses-radically-rethink-support-ageing-workforce) (<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/charity-urges-businesses-radically-rethink-support-ageing-workforce>) and called on businesses to take “radical action” to support an ageing workforce.

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The rise in older workers has been attributed to many factors, including better health and a desire to work beyond the traditional retirement age. But Dr Emily Andrews, senior evidence manager at the Centre for Ageing Better speculated that part of the reason was financial.

Occupational pension schemes, she said, were becoming less generous over time. And the age at which workers receive a state pension has also [begun steadily increasing](https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/increase-state-pension-age-far-reaching-consequences-morale) (<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/increase-state-pension-age-far-reaching-consequences-morale>); in 2010, the state pension age for women rose from 60 to 65, which has made it necessary for many women to work for longer than they had planned.

“Britain’s population is both growing and ageing. People are remaining in work for longer than they used to and there are more women in work than previous generations,” said Andrews. “At the same time, attitudes towards working longer and what people want to do later life are shifting and there are more legal protections against age discrimination than there used to be.”

But she warned against complacency and the assumption that “all jobs are good jobs”, with older workers being less likely to receive in-work training and development opportunities.

“Employers must offer older workers training and development opportunities, provide flexible working options and eliminate age discrimination,” she added.

In a separate analysis of previous ONS data carried out earlier this year by careers site Rest Less, it was revealed there were more over-70s in full-time or part-time work than there were a decade ago. A total of 8.1 per cent of the 70+ age group – equivalent to 497,946 people – are currently in employment, in comparison to 4.5 per cent in 2009.

Stuart Lewis, founder of Rest Less, said it was “no surprise” there was a surge in employment among the over-50s, due to increasing life expectancy and the resulting changing demographic landscape.

“This is a wide ranging group of individuals, each with their own reasons for working – from those needing to top up their pension pots while they are still able to, through to growing awareness of the health, social and wellbeing benefits of staying active in the workplace,” he said.

“With the population of 20-49 year olds set to remain flat over the next 10 years while the population of over-50s booms, employers need to be thinking about how they can prepare their organisations to make the most of the benefits that longevity presents.”



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Experts say employers should embrace this by introducing programmes to attract, engage and retain older workers, but must also be aware of the wellbeing implications



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