



HOUSE OF LORDS

Library Note

Debate on 14 December: Older People

This Library Note provides background reading in advance of the debate to be held on 14 December 2012 on:

“the place and contribution of older people in society”

This Library Note considers what is meant by the term ‘older people’ and which age groups it covers. It then presents three examples of areas in society where older people make a contribution: in the workforce, the role they play in their communities and as providers of childcare. The Note concludes by considering the suggestion that the Government should appoint a Minister for Older People.

Matthew Purvis
Russell Taylor
10 December 2012
LLN 2012/043

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1. Introduction

On 1 October each year the United Nations celebrates the [International Day of Older Persons](#). In the UK the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) marks this as 'Older Peoples Day', "a national celebration of the achievements and contributions that older people make to our society and to the economy". The DWP website states that "through this we hope to start to tackle negative attitudes and outdated stereotypes" (DWP, '[Older Peoples Day](#)', accessed 4 December 2012).

Campaigning organisations such as WRVS, an age positive charity, "believe that our society must wake up to the positive contribution that older people make. We must value, recognise, and capitalise on this contribution". One of its initiatives is the publication of the [Gold Age Power List](#) in "recognition of the people who are making extraordinary achievements and inspirational contributions in the later decades of their lives". The report "celebrates 66 people over 66 from the worlds of arts, sports and adventure, science, public service and business. It also recognises local volunteers who continue to make invaluable contributions in their local communities every day" (WRVS, '[Gold Age Power List](#)', 2011).

Among those whose achievements are celebrated by WRVS in the report are a number of Members of the House of Lords. At present the average age of a Member of the House is 69.3. Of the current membership there are: 95 Members aged between 50 and 59; 253 aged between 60 and 69; 263 aged between 70 and 79; 111 aged between 80 and 89; and 12 are 90 or over. There are 25 Members 49 or younger (as at 5 December 2012 and excluding those ineligible to sit).

A number of studies have sought to quantify the economic and social contribution of older people to society. For example, in economic terms the WRVS has estimated that in 2010 older people made a net contribution of £40 billion to the UK economy (WRVS, *Gold Age Pensioners*, March 2011, page 20). Socially, older people were described as the "social glue" of their communities and neighbourhoods (ibid, page 8). A report by ResPublica observed older people: "do more than their fair share of volunteering, charitable giving, voting and other forms of civil engagement" (Antonia Cox, *Older people, volunteering and the Big Society*, ResPublica, September 2011, page 5).

However, recent research has indicated that older people felt underappreciated and disrespected by society. For example, one survey found that 42 percent of retirees aged over 55 felt that society treated them badly, up from 34 percent in 2011. In addition, 44 percent felt badly treated by the under 18s, 32 percent felt badly treated by the 18–30s and 22 percent felt badly treated by employers (MGM Advantage, *Retirement Nation 2012*, November 2012, page 14). In 2009 76 percent of older people surveyed believed that the country failed to make good use of the skills and talents of older people (Age UK, *Later in Life in the United Kingdom*, November 2012, page 4).

This Library Note provides background information about older people and society. Section 2 considers the meaning of the term 'older people' and presents a selection of statistics. In section 3 the place and contribution of older people in three particular areas of society are highlighted: in the workforce, the role they play in their communities and as providers of childcare. In each of these areas the definition of what is meant by an 'older person' may differ, depending on the context, and this will be noted in the text. The Note concludes in section 4 by considering arguments for and against the Government appointing a Minister for Older People.

2. Older People: Statistics

There is no set definition available as to what age an individual needs to reach to be classified as an 'older person'. Conventionally an 'older person' was usually someone at or over retirement age, for example women over 60 and men over 65. Today the use of 'older people' can include those aged 50 and over. For example, the DWP does not explicitly define older people on the 'Older People's Day' pages on its website but notes that "by 2020, half the population of the UK will be aged 50 and over" (DWP, '[Older Peoples Day](#)', accessed 4 December 2012).

The following table provides a statistical overview of the current age profile of the UK:

Table 1: Number and proportion of population by age group

Age Group	Estimated Population in 2010 (thousands)	Proportion of Population
0–14	10,872	17 percent
15–24	8,222	13 percent
25–34	8,141	13 percent
35–49	13,400	22 percent
50–59	7,559	12 percent
60–64	3,764	6 percent
65–74	5,400	9 percent
75–89	4,429	7 percent
90+	476	1 percent
UK	62,263	100 percent

(Source: ONS, *Mid-2010 Population Estimates: United Kingdom*; estimated resident population by single year of age and sex, June 2011, [table 1](#))

To mark Older People's Day in 2011, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published a statistical bulletin that noted current trends and future projections in ageing:

The population of the UK is ageing. Over the last 25 years the percentage of the population aged 65 and over increased from 15 percent in 1985 to 17 percent in 2010, an increase of 1.7 million people in this age group. Over the same period, the percentage of the population aged under 16 decreased from 21 percent to 19 percent. This trend is projected to continue. By 2035, 23 percent of the population is projected to be aged 65 and over compared to 18 percent aged under 16.

(ONS, *Older People's Day 2011*, 29 September 2011, pages [1–2](#))

However, it should be noted that the term 'older people' is very much a relative one. Recent research published by the DWP found that the public's understanding of the meaning of 'older person' varied depending on who was asked. The authors found:

The mean age at which respondents thought people stopped being described as young was 40.71 years and the mean age that respondents thought that people started to be described as old was 59.21 years. Notably, the age at which respondents reported that people stop being young increased with age. Similarly, the age at which old age is estimated to start increased in relation to the age group to which the respondents belonged. This illustrates the degree of disparity

in perceptions of old age held by people from different age ranges, and hence, shows the potential for age stereotypes to be applied in very inconsistent ways.

(DWP, *Attitudes to age in Britain 2010/11*, January 2012, page [25](#))

3. Contribution of Older People

3.1 Workforce

The default retirement age was effectively abolished from October 2011 by the [Employment Equality \(Repeal of Retirement Age Provisions\) Regulations 2011 \(No 1069\)](#). In addition to predicting that the policy would increase the labour supply, the Government has stated:

Working longer is good for the economy, for society and for individuals. Evidence shows that keeping more people in work helps the economy grow. It is estimated that, if everyone worked a year longer, annual GDP could increase by £13 billion.

(Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *Phasing Out the Default Retirement Age: Government Response to Consultation*, January 2011, page [2](#))

The Government is also making changes to the state pension age. From 2010, in line with new legislation, the female state pension age is set to rise gradually to equalise with men at 65 years by November 2018. In October 2020, state pension age for men and women will be set at 66 years (House of Commons Library Note, [State Pension Age](#), SN02234, 10 May 2012).

The following sections of the Library Note give an overview of the characteristics and contributions of the older workforce, and a guide to some of the policy considerations to encourage the participation of older people in the labour market.

Profile of the older workforce

Data published by the Office for National Statistics suggested that there were 1.4 million people employed in the United Kingdom in 2011 who were over state pension age (ONS, *Older Workers in the Labour Market*, page [1](#)). This figure was almost double that of 1993, when it was 753,000 people. In 2011 this represented 12 percent of the population age. The findings also indicated that:

- around 32 percent of these workers were self-employed (as opposed to 13 percent for those under state pension age);
- 66 percent were working part-time (25 percent for those under state pension age);
- 39 percent of older workers were men, whilst 61 percent were women; and
- the percentage of older people employed varied between regions, with the North East featuring the lowest number (8.2 percent), and London and the South East the highest (14.1 percent) (ibid, pages [2–4](#)).

The following table gives details of the number of people aged above state pension age (SPA) in the labour market, per year, since 1993. As a result of the legislative changes to female state pension age, post April 2010, women aged 60–61 years will be included in the pre SPA group if they have not been flagged as having reached the SPA based on their date of birth.

Table 2: Workers over state pension age in the labour market, employment levels and rates for older workers, annual averages 1993 to 2011, United Kingdom

	Number of workers (thousands)	Employment rate ¹
1993	753	7.6
1994	760	7.7
1995	797	7.8
1996	768	7.5
1997	801	7.8
1998	782	7.6
1999	813	7.9
2000	829	8.0
2001	848	8.1
2002	887	8.5
2003	945	8.9
2004	998	9.3
2005	1,069	9.9
2006	1,165	10.7
2007	1,224	11.0
2008	1,324	11.7
2009	1,384	12.0
2010	1,450	12.4
2011	1,410	12.0

(Source: ONS, Labour Force Survey datasets, June 2012)
¹ this is the percentage of people in employment in relation to the population

Further data from the Office for National Statistics identified a trend whereby hourly rates of pay appeared to be lower for older workers (ONS, *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2012*, 22 November 2012, [Table 6.5a](#)). They found that median gross hourly earnings were highest in the 30–39 age group, with average earnings decreasing beyond this point. The median gross hourly pay was £12.08 for those in their 50s, and £10.21 for those 60 and over. The rate was £13.14 for those in their 30s.

In its September 2011 report, the UK Commission for Employment and Skills predicted that the country would continue to experience an increase in demand for older employees (those over 50) and an increase in the supply of those willing to work (Stephen McNair, '[Older People and Skills in a Changing Economy](#)', *UK Commission for Employment and Skills*, September 2011). The report suggested that the willingness of older workers to take on flexible working arrangements was often advantageous to employers in certain sectors, such as the retail sector. It also highlighted the sectoral variances in the employment of older workers:

After 65, the profile changes substantially, with a growing concentration of workers in agriculture (by far the oldest sector), wholesale and retail, professional, scientific and technical, and administration and support services. Conversely, the proportion working in public administration, financial services, health and social work, manufacturing and information and communications all fall. This suggests that sectoral factors play a significant part in exit patterns. The decline in health and social work, education and public administration after 64 probably reflects the role of public sector pensions, while in manufacturing it may reflect issues of physical capability. By contrast, the more gradual decline in construction may reflect the greater opportunities for part-time and occasional work. The growth in wholesale and retail probably reflects the opportunities for

part-time and flexible working, and the relatively low entry thresholds, which make re-entry easier than in most other sectors.

(ibid, page [11](#))

Regarding the projected increase in the supply of workers, the report continued:

It is likely that the supply of older workers will also increase. Older people's participation rates have been rising for a decade, and as older people become more visible and capable in the workplace, the idea of working longer is likely to be more widely recognised. The abolition of compulsory retirement will probably make it easier for people to continue.

Furthermore, by comparison with the generation currently retiring, older workers in future will be better qualified, and will have been much less likely to have worked in heavy manual occupations, which reduce life expectancy, and ability to work.

(ibid, page [23](#))

Contribution of older workers

WRVS, an age positive charity, estimated that in 2010 older people contributed £45 billion per annum to the UK economy through taxes (WRVS, *Gold Age Pensioners: Valuing the Socio-Economic Contribution of Older People in the UK*, March 2011, p [14](#)). The organisation believed this figure would continue to grow over the next couple of decades, potentially reaching £82 billion in 2030. It suggested that government policies, such as those relating to state pension age, and the growing propensity for people to work longer, would be the major contributors to this projected increase. WRVS predicted that the increases directly attributable to taxes upon earnings for the over 65s would see: annual income tax contributions rise from £14.7 billion in 2010 to £31.3 billion in 2030; national insurance contributions rise from £897 million to £1,002 million; and annual employers' national insurance contributions rise from £566 million to £840 million (WRVS, [Gold Age Pensioners: Valuing the Socio-Economic Contribution of Older People in the UK: Appendix 1](#), March 2011).

In addition to the economic benefits of older people in the workforce, the Department for Work and Pensions has published case studies from a number of companies discussing the positive impact of older people within the workplace. These case studies identified the benefits of the experience provided by older workers, higher staff retention rates and staffing demographics that better reflected their customer base. Many of these organisations also highlighted their use of flexible working arrangements (Department for Work and Pensions website, '[Age Positive Publications](#)', January 2011). For example, one of the organisations stated that it:

... believes that to use people's skills effectively, employment decisions should be based on competencies, qualifications, skills and potential rather than numerical age. [We] also recognise that there is little value in compulsorily retiring an employee because of their age, when many workers demonstrate the desire and the ability to continue working.

The skills, experiences and value that older workers can bring to the business have enormous advantages. It makes sense to harness these skills and experiences, which would otherwise be lost through imposing a default retirement age.

In addition to the skills retention, the scrapping of a default retirement age also had a significant impact by reducing the cost of recruiting replacement personnel.

([ibid](#))

Policies to encourage older working

In the United Kingdom in 2010, the average age at which people left the labour market was 64.6 years for men, and 62.3 years for women (ONS, '[Pension Trends, Chapter 4: The Labour Market and Retirement](#)', 16 February 2012). According to statistics provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), this puts the United Kingdom at around the OECD average for its members (OECD website, '[Average Effective Age of Retirement Versus the Official Age in 2011 in OECD Countries](#)', accessed 6 December 2012). The OECD believe that "giving older people better work incentives and choices is crucial in the context of rapid population ageing and pressures on the sustainability of public social expenditures" (OECD website, '[OECD Review of Policies to Improve Labour Market Prospects for Older Workers](#)', accessed 6 December 2012).

Building upon their 2006 document, [Live Longer, Work Longer](#), the OECD are conducting a review of policies with the aim of increasing labour market participation among older workers. The report emphasised three broad areas for policy reform: strengthening financial incentives to carry on working; tackling employment barriers on the side of employers; and improving the employability of older workers.

In 2012, the OECD published an interim review of the United Kingdom's policies following the recommendations made in the [Live Longer, Work Longer](#) report (OECD, [Thematic Follow-up Review of Policies to Improve Labour Market Prospects for Older Workers](#), 2012). Among other developments, the review highlighted changes made by the United Kingdom Government to "retirement-related benefits" and incapacity benefits, as well as the cross-governmental Health, Work and Well-being initiative. They believed that the measures taken would increase engagement with the labour market. However, the review suggested not enough had been done to help women stay in employment:

In view of the faster rise of the state pension age for women from 60 to 65, support programmes should be developed to help women remain in employment. In this respect, early intervention and prevention should be the key approach used. This will require helping younger women as well, i.e. the age group 50–60; otherwise it may be too late for intervention.

([ibid](#), page [5](#))

Published in 2008, the Black Review highlighted the potential links between work and health and well-being ([Dame Carol Black's Review of the Health of Britain's Working Age Population: Working for a Healthier Tomorrow](#), 17 March 2008). The report discussed the importance of helping people maintain their health whilst in work, and ensuring that workers with health problems receive the support they need to continue working. The report stated:

For most people, their work is a key determinant of self-worth, family esteem, identity and standing within the community, besides, of course, material progress and a means of social participation and fulfilment. A myriad of factors influence health and well-being, though many are familiar only to those who experience them. Individuals also bear their aspirations, burdens, skills and vulnerabilities to

work. So, in turn, the working environment itself can be a major influence on their well-being.

(*Dame Carol Black's Review of the Health of Britain's Working Age Population: Working for a Healthier Tomorrow*, 17 March 2008, page [4](#))

Principally focusing on the health of the working age population, the Black Review did not focus specifically on the health benefits for older workers. However, this aspect was highlighted in a note produced by the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology on the ageing workforce:

There is consensus that jobs that are safe and allow workers a degree of control in their workplace environment are good for health, while long-term unemployment has a detrimental impact on both mental and physical wellbeing. Staying in work can maintain cognitive and physical activity, provide a sense of identity and access to social support, and create intrinsic benefits of feeling productive and valued. There are also indirect economic benefits through limiting health and social care costs, most significantly for dementia.

(Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology, *An Ageing Workforce*, October 2011, page [2](#))

In addition to the supposed health benefits of staying in employment for longer, there is evidence to suggest an increasing willingness to work beyond state pension age. For example, a survey of people aged 50–75 conducted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission found that: 64 percent of women and 24 percent of men wanted to remain economically active beyond state pension age; around 60 percent would like to work part-time; and a high number of respondents expressed a desire to continue working with their current employer, with some also requesting greater flexibility of working conditions (EHRC, *Working Better*, January 2010, page [6](#)).

The survey also explored the barriers to working longer, with particular mention of the desire for flexibility, and of the significant impact that health had on premature retirement:

Poor health is one of the main causes of premature retirement. Individuals who feel unable to perform their job as well as they did when younger are significantly more likely to be planning to retire before state pension age, with possibly serious financial implications for their later years. It is significant that one third of older workers in poor health feel unable to approach their managers to discuss difficulties and request more manageable working arrangements.

(*ibid*, page [7](#))

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills highlighted poor health as the largest cause of retirement for workers in the UK, along with caring responsibilities and “the freedoms of retirement” (Stephen McNair, ‘Older People and Skills in a Changing Economy’, *UK Commission for Employment and Skills*, September 2011, page [25](#)). It suggested that economic factors became less important as people aged, with only one in seven people working after 64 declaring it as a main reason. The author also noted that “exit due to disability” was often not a permanent measure: “one quarter of the older people reporting a work related disability in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) in 2004 did not report one when surveyed again in 2006” (*ibid*, page [8](#)).

Many of the reports cited above, including those by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, mentioned the need to

address a number of common themes. These included improved access to flexible working, the need for better training provision and to support and manage the health needs of older workers.

Regarding access to flexible working conditions, Age UK believed that the “right to request” flexible working was of great benefit to older workers, and also provided a number of benefits to business:

It can encourage loyalty, increase the available talent pool in recruitment, improve workplace relationships and raise productivity. Employers should offer more flexible working options, as doing so brings benefits for staff and businesses alike.

(Age UK, *Agenda for Later Life 2012: Policy Priorities for Active Agency*, 2012, page [44](#))

The subject of flexible working was discussed in the Government’s [Consultation on Modern Workplaces](#) (May 2011). One of the areas under consideration was how changes to flexible working conditions could benefit older workers. The consultation suggested that better access to flexible working would “enable people to phase their retirement in a way they find helpful, and also help employers to manage the transition” (ibid, page [34](#)). The Government’s conclusion, published in November 2012, stated:

Through the Age Positive Sector Initiative and Ageing Well Legacy work, Government will continue to provide information for the business community on how flexible working can help employers to retain and transfer the valuable skills and experience of their older workers.

(HM Government, *Modern Workplaces Consultation—Government Response on Flexible Working*, November 2012, page [7](#))

On 13 November 2012, Nick Clegg, the Deputy Prime Minister, announced Government plans to extend the “right to request” flexible working to all employees (Cabinet Office, [‘Greater Equality for a Stronger Economy—Speech by the Deputy Prime Minister’](#), 13 November 2012).

Age UK also commented on the importance of training and learning in later years, and highlighted statistics suggesting that participation in training by the over 50s appeared to have declined in recent years (Age UK, [Agenda for Later Life 2012: Policy Priorities for Active Agency](#), 2012). The organisation questioned whether this reduction was due to funding cuts to the publicly funded learning budget and a real terms decrease in the value of the community learning budget. It called for more to be done to encourage participation in training by older workers:

Another contributing factor may be the demise of the Train to Gain scheme, which has seen the number of opportunities for older workers to engage in publicly funded formal training substantially reduced. The Government is examining the possibility of introducing a new system of loans for further education students, which could help some older workers. However, this is unlikely to go far enough, and further steps should be taken by the Government and employers to engage more 50+ workers and jobseekers in learning new skills by challenging stereotypes and persuading employers to invest more in training for 50+ employees. At the European level, Age UK has welcomed the proposed 80 per cent EU funding increase for adult learning. We are also pressing for EU

Member States to extend lifelong learning data collection and targets for lifelong learning beyond age 64.

(ibid, page [45](#))

The need to tackle “out-dated assumptions about training, health and performance” was one of the stated aims of the Government’s Age Positive Initiative (Department for Work and Pensions website, ‘[Changing Attitudes—Age Positive](#)’, 6 July 2012). As part of the initiative, the Department released a report that aimed to answer employers’ questions about older workers and included discussion of health and training needs (Department for Work and Pensions, [Answers to Employer Questions on Older workers and Retirement](#), January 2011). The document included questions about whether older workers were a health liability, whether they could physically perform the same tasks as younger workers, and whether older workers were good candidates for training. For example, addressing concerns about whether older workers represent a poor return on training investment, the document stated:

Research shows that older worker productivity does not usually decline at least up to the age of 70, where these workers have received the same level of training as younger colleagues. The risk of an employee leaving a company after training or promotion can be the same across all age groups. Age, therefore, is not generally a good indication of return on training investment. Encourage mentoring and sharing of skills within your business—draw on experienced workers to support and train new starters and other colleagues. Training can help businesses fill skills gaps, increase productivity and keep pace with change. It can support workforce motivation and retention across workers of all ages. Older workers are generally just as likely to successfully complete training.

(ibid, page [7](#))

3.2 Community Engagement

This section of the Note sets out a number of the ways older people interact with their community, whether through political engagement, local schemes or volunteering. Antonia Cox, author of a ResPublica report on older people and the Big Society, stated that “as a group, [older people] do more than their fair share of volunteering, charitable giving, voting and other forms of civil engagement, from petitioning to becoming councillors. In doing this, there is evidence from social science and gerontology that they are not just helping others but also themselves” (Antonia Cox, *Age of Opportunity*, ResPublica, September 2011, page [5](#)).

Volunteering

Data from the *Citizenship Survey 2009–10* showed that 29 percent of people aged 65–74 and 21 percent of those 75 or over participate in formal volunteering at least once a month. The average figure across all ages is 25 percent (Department for Communities and Local Government, [Citizenship Survey 2009–10](#), July 2010).

Antonia Cox stated that the apparent motivations behind volunteering also appeared to differ between age groups (Antonia Cox, *Age of Opportunity*, ResPublica, September 2011). She noted that younger age groups mentioned volunteering as a method to improve career prospects, and that, with older age groups, this appeared to be gradually

replaced by a desire to represent a certain cause or community need:

Around half of those aged 65+ formally volunteered on a regular basis because they wanted to improve things or help people, and just over a third believed that helping people was part of their philosophy of life. Having spare time may not quite fit the definition of a motivation but it is clearly a key part of the picture. Further, those who are older tend to volunteer on a more regular basis than younger people and may be more able to channel their efforts toward a particular cause.

(ibid, page [27](#))

The report also looked at the contribution of older people to the Big Society initiative. Cox stated that older people already made a “disproportionately large contribution to the Big Society” and believed that this contribution should be communicated more effectively to the rest of society as a source of potential inspiration (ibid, page [5](#)).

In addition, WRVS suggested that other characteristics, such as wealth, gender and marital status, also appeared to affect the likelihood of formal volunteering in later life (WRVS, [Impact of Volunteering on Well-being in Later Life](#), May 2012). The organisation, which analysed data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, found that increased wealth was linked to an increased likelihood of volunteering. WRVS also found links between the health of an individual and the likelihood to volunteer, with those of worse health being less likely to participate.

Regarding the benefits of volunteering in later life, ActiveAge, a collaborative research programme specialising in ageing and ICT, described them as being twofold: “i) a benefit for the community in which the older person participates; and ii) a benefit for the older person who remains active and feels valued by those he/she helps” (ActiveAge, *The Social and Economic Benefits of Older People Actively Contributing to Community Capacity and Ways in Which ICT Can Enable this to Happen*, December 2010, page [5](#)). This view was reflected by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), who stated, in recognition of the European Commission’s 2011 Year of Volunteering and the 2012 Year of Active Ageing, that “while the Year of Volunteering aims to promote voluntary involvement among all age groups, it highlights the immense contribution that older people can make in this area. This not only benefits society but helps in the goal of promoting ‘active ageing’, so that people remain healthy, productive and involved in their communities and the risk of social exclusion and isolation is reduced” (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Volunteering by Older People in the EU*, 2011, page [v](#)). The report went on to focus on the importance of protecting older people against social exclusion across Europe, and the extent to which different countries supported volunteering. Analysing the current position in the United Kingdom, the report stated that “there is a long tradition of volunteering and many formal voluntary organisations play an important role in social policy. Under the circumstances of the economic crisis, the state is currently spotlighting voluntary activities to compensate for cuts in public spending” (ibid, page [14](#)).

The belief that volunteering in later years could impact positively on healthy ageing was also shared by Antonia Cox. Cox asserted that strong support networks have a positive effect on a person’s psychological and physical wellbeing, and that there was “clear evidence from scientific studies that volunteering benefits health” (Antonia Cox, [Age of Opportunity](#), ResPublica, September 2011, page [17](#)). In addition to the suggested positive outcomes for personal wellbeing and the community, WRVS attempted to measure the potential economic contribution attributable to volunteering by the over 65s

(WRVS, *Gold Age Pensioners: Valuing the Socio-Economic Contribution of Older People in the UK*, March 2011, page [17](#)). The organisation estimated that the range of formal and informal volunteering performed by this group was worth around £10 billion a year to the national economy. Looking to 2020, it projected that this figure would be just under £15 billion.

Barriers to volunteering

The importance of policy-makers fully appreciating the different ways they can impact upon volunteering, and its distinction from “paid work”, was discussed by Jane Wheelock et al in the journal article, '[Citizenship, volunteering and active ageing](#)'. The article argued that the Government's views on volunteering “as a route to paid work, as a panacea for society and therefore needing to be more ‘work-like’” often does not fit comfortably with older people's needs or perspectives (Jane Wheelock et al, 'Citizenship, volunteering and active ageing', *Social Policy and Administration*, December 2009, Vol 43 No 7, page [702](#)) The piece concluded with consideration of a number of potential threats to volunteering:

Formal volunteering among older people is under threat from the pressure to continue in the labour market; childcare and social care gaps needing to be filled informally by older people; government promotion of volunteering as a route to paid work and the increased professionalisation, bureaucratisation and marketisation in the voluntary sector.

(ibid, page [714](#))

The issue of paid employment affecting participation rates in formal volunteering was also mentioned by Antonia Cox, who suggested that voluntary organisations may look to offset this problem by improving the flexibility of formal volunteering arrangements. Cox listed four main potential barriers that may affect volunteering participation rates: lack of skills; a feeling that it is not the responsibility of the person to volunteer for certain tasks; lack of time; and lack of opportunity (Antonia Cox, [Age of Opportunity](#), ResPublica, September 2011, page [29](#)). Among its recommendations, the report emphasised that Government should seek to provide more information on volunteering (through a variety of sources) and that voluntary organisations should be more flexible when recruiting volunteers, especially regarding the imposition of age limits (ibid, page [5](#)).

The Government's white paper on charitable donations and giving, published in 2011, made a number of recommendations to improve access to volunteering. This included a proposal to use the Social Action Fund to support proposals for training voluntary volunteer managers, including ex-civil servants. The report also highlighted some of the work done by the Department for Work and Pensions:

The Department for Work and Pensions announced in November 2010 that the Government is providing £1 million to help older people keep active and make the most of their later lives. This money is available for local community groups or organisations within 30 selected areas to bid for small grants of £250–£3,000. Each local community group within the selected areas will recruit at least one Active at 60 Community Agent, who will volunteer their time to help motivate, encourage and organise people within their own communities to become more active physically, socially and mentally.

(HM Government, *Giving White Paper*, May 2011, page [12](#))

Other forms of community engagement

On political participation the Hansard Society, in their annual audit of political engagement, suggested that older groups are often more likely to express an interest in politics (Hansard Society, [Audit of Political Engagement 9](#), 2012). Their findings included:

- 70 percent of over 55s, the highest proportion, indicated that they would be certain to vote at an imminent general election, compared to 48 percent of 45–54 year olds (the second highest group);
- 48 percent of over 55s claimed to have an interest in politics, also the highest figure; and
- over 55s were the most likely group to claim to be knowledgeable about politics or Parliament (ibid, pages [68–70](#)).

However, the findings also indicated a trend whereby older people were less likely to believe that they could make a contribution to change or decision-making in their local community. Only 45 percent of over 75s believed that their involvement could bring about local changes (the average across all ages was 56 percent), and only 22 percent of over 65s indicated a willingness to become involved in local decision-making (the average was 38 percent). There was also a lower number of over 65s indicating a willingness to become involved in decision-making on a national level, 22 percent compared to an average of 33 percent (ibid, page [71](#)).

Concerns over political disengagement were also highlighted in a report by Anchor, a private organisation that provides housing and care for older people. Published following the 2010 general election, the report expressed concerns that older people were feeling “abandoned” by politicians:

More than six in 10 (63 percent) over 65s felt overlooked by politicians with people aged over 85 feeling the most abandoned (70 percent). Men felt more let down by politicians than women: 68 percent and 60 percent respectively.

New retirees are also feeling disenfranchised with 59 percent of 65–69 year olds claiming politicians are less interested in older people’s issues than before the election. This age group were also among the most likely to claim their MP does not understand the issues affecting them (41 percent).

(Anchor, *Putting Older People’s Issues Back on the Agenda*, 2010, page [5](#))

On community involvement more generally, WRVS have provided commentary on ways in which older people participate directly in their communities ([Gold Age Pensioners: Valuing the Socio-Economic Contribution of Older People in the UK](#), March 2011). The organisation stressed that older people provided substantial benefits to communities and neighbourhoods “through their support for community-based organisations and by being active members of the places where they live” (ibid, page [21](#)). They listed a number of activities and factors they suggested reflected this, including:

- Pillars of the community—including active participation in clubs and societies
- Drive and leadership—leading local organisations, groups and societies
- Community safety—strong participation in Neighbourhood Watch and school safety schemes

- Active neighbours—the organisation notes that 65 percent of older people regularly help out older neighbours (ibid, page [21](#))

However, Age UK believed that more still needed to be done to encourage older people's involvement within the community (Age UK, [Agenda for Later Life 2012: Policy Priorities for Active Agency](#), 2012). Although recognising that the [Localism Act 2011](#) extended a number of “community rights” that may be of interest to older people, the organisation made a number of recommendations to increase participation further. This included the direct provision of advice and resources on methods of community participation, and for local activists to take stock of how the new “community rights” could support local goals.

3.3 Providing Childcare

A further area where older people play a significant role is in providing informal childcare within families. Reports in recent years have highlighted that, in spite of the expansion of formal childcare, parents have continued to use informal childcare arrangements provided by relatives and friends. In terms of regularity and hours provided, studies of these arrangements have shown that grandparents were undertaking most of this childcare.

Numbers

Estimates of the number of grandparents providing childcare vary, but clearly establish the scale of their contribution. Daycare Trust research suggested there were 4 million grandparent carers in the UK of about 14 million grandchildren (Daycare Trust, *Listening to Grandparents*, 2011, pages [5–6](#)). Another estimate said 5.8 million grandparents in the UK (47 percent) regularly provided childcare for their grandchildren (RIAS, '[£11 billion baby sitters](#)', 4 September 2012). However, analysis of the British Social Attitudes Survey found that in 2009 almost two thirds (63 percent) of grandparents, approximately 7 million, with grandchildren under 16 said they looked after their grandchildren (Grandparent plus, *Doing it all? Grandparents, childcare and employment: an analysis of British Social Attitudes Survey Data from 1998 and 2009*, December 2011, page [12](#)). On average grandparents provided 10 hours per week of childcare (Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre, *Grandparents providing child care*, November 2011, page [2](#)). Most of this was provided by older people: the mean age of grandparents providing care was 62.5 years and the median 63 years. Of those surveyed 40 percent were 55–64 and 41 percent were aged 65 years and over. 35 percent of grandparents were still working (Daycare Trust, *Listening to Grandparents*, 2011, pages [5–6](#)).

Factors

Among the reasons why parents choose grandparents as a childcare option is the lack of affordability of formal childcare (Daycare Trust, *Listening to Grandparents*, 2011, pages [5–6](#)). It has been observed that without grandparents “demands on state-funded child care would be heavier. Some parents would be unable to work at all” (Antonia Cox, *Older people, volunteering and the Big Society*, ResPublica, September 2011, page [23](#)). The Daycare Trust found that “56 percent of parents who use informal childcare use it in the working day to enable them to work” (Daycare Trust, *Listening to Grandparents*, 2011, pages [5–6](#)). In terms of the economic value of this childcare, previous estimates have suggested grandparental childcare was worth £3.9 billion per year (Age Concern, *The Economy of Older People*, 2004). A more recent estimate by RIAS, an over 50s insurance provider, said that UK grandparents save families £1,888 each year in childcare costs or an average of £11 billion each year in childcare ‘wages’ (RIAS, '[£11 billion baby sitters](#)', 4 September 2012).

Another reason why parents make this choice is that parents want their child being cared for by a “trusted relative in a home setting”. This has been found to be used by parents in four different ways: as main childcare for babies and young children; as ‘wrap-around’ and school holiday childcare; in combination with formal care and as emergency backup when regular arrangements break down (Daycare Trust, *Listening to Grandparents*, 2011, pages [5–6](#)). A review of research conducted for the Department for Education found that levels of grandparent involvement were highest for mothers who returned to work before children were six months old and in single parent families (Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre, *Grandparents providing child care*, November 2011, page [2](#)). Grandparents have been described by one commentator as a “‘reserve army’ that steps in to meet the childcare needs of their children”:

One in three working mothers receives help with childcare from the child’s grandparents. A quarter of all families rely to some degree on grandparents to provide child care. Most of this is provided by grandmothers. Mothers with fewer educational qualifications are more likely to take up this type of care, probably because they are likely to be lower earners for whom paid alternatives are unaffordable. It is children in the under-five age group—in other words those requiring the most supervision—who are most likely to be cared for by their grandparents.

(Antonia Cox, *Older people, volunteering and the Big Society*, ResPublica, September 2011, page [23](#))

Effect

The positive impact of this childcare on the wellbeing of grandparents has been recorded. Grandparents have been found to be very happy to look after their grandchildren and report that it has a positive effect on their lives (Daycare Trust, *Listening to Grandparents*, 2011, pages [5–6](#)). It is suggested that grandparents can benefit from an enhanced sense of purpose from such a role, even where it is found physically and emotionally draining. However, there are limits to this: part-time care “is generally a preferred option, and the evidence suggests that it is providing extensive amounts of care that is more likely to have a negative impact on grandparents’ own health and wellbeing” (Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre, *Grandparents providing child care*, November 2011, page [12](#)). Other studies have suggested that for some older people childcare may have a negative effect. An Equality and Human Rights Commission report in 2010 found that “working age, working class grandmothers on low incomes are most likely to be providing childcare and to have given up work or reduced their hours to care for grandchildren. This has an impact on household income and may have an effect on a grandparent’s pension rights as well as their health” (EHRC, *Protect, Support, Provide: Examining the role played by grandparents in families at risk of poverty*, March 2010, page [2](#)).

Older people as carers

There are also a number of grandparents providing full time care for their grandchildren. Approximately 25,000 family and friends carers are aged over 65, most of whom are grandparents (Grandparents plus, *Too Old to Care*, June 2011, page [2](#)). It has been estimated that it would cost £1.4 billion in care costs each year if the children grandparents were caring for full time were in independent foster care (Age UK, *Later in Life in the United Kingdom*, November 2012, page [13](#)). Older people’s care responsibilities go wider than looking after grandchildren. Based on analysis of the 2001 Census, it was estimated that around half of the UK’s approximately six million carers were aged over 50. In addition “on average, 12 percent of the population provide unpaid

care for a friend or family member, this increases to 18 percent for those aged 55–64, 16 percent for those aged 65–74 and 13 percent for those aged 75 and above” (The Princess Royal Trust for Carers, *Always on Call, Always Concerned*, 2011, page 4). Of those who had provided such unpaid care “a third of the over 50s had done so on a scale comparable to full-time working, at 35+ hours of care” (Antonia Cox, *Older people, volunteering and the Big Society*, ResPublica, September 2011, page 23). The WRVS put the value of the benefits provided by the care delivered by older people at £34 billion (WRVS, *Gold Age Pensioners*, March 2011, page 17). Information about the effect on older people of providing this care can be found in the National Centre for Social Research briefing [How informal caring affects older people](#) (March 2009).

Commentary

In its report, *Listening to Grandparents*, the Daycare Trust argued that older people’s place and contribution in childcare needed to be recognised. In particular “local and central government must acknowledge the role that grandparents play in providing informal childcare and support them to a much greater extent than at present”. This would also mean seeing “informal childcare as being complementary to formal provision in many families and greatly valued by them” (Daycare Trust, *Listening to Grandparents*, 2011, page 7). Grandparents plus have argued that the importance of this role requires consideration in the round:

There is an urgent need for policy agendas around employment, pensions, childcare and eldercare to be joined up. Changes in retirement and state pension ages need to take account of the vital role of grandparents in providing childcare, enabling parents to work. Requiring people to work through their sixties is likely to have profound implications for the supply of informal childcare, maternal employment rates and intergenerational relationships within families.

If older people remain longer in the workplace, there is a risk of a serious “care gap” emerging in provision of informal care for children and older people, unless state support for both elder care and childcare is strengthened. Employment policies on flexible working, and extension of parental leave entitlement to grandparents in some circumstances may make it easier for grandparents to combine work with childcare. If grandparents are not available to provide informal childcare, it is likely that increasing numbers of mothers of younger children will leave the workforce. The UK has some of the highest childcare costs in the world and tax credits to help with the cost of childcare for lower income working parents were cut in April 2011. Evidence from the Labour Force Survey indicates that employment rates of younger mothers are beginning to fall, after decades of increasing mothers’ participation rates. This in turn is may contribute to increasing child poverty, particularly among single parent households.

(Grandparents plus, *Doing it all? Grandparents, childcare and employment: an analysis of British Social Attitudes Survey Data from 1998 and 2009*, December 2011, page 17)

It has been observed that other European countries “recognise, and in some cases reward, grandparents for providing childcare in a variety of ways”. Examples included:

In Germany, parents can transfer parental leave to a grandparent if they are seriously ill or disabled or if they are a teenage parent, and working grandparents are entitled to up to ten days paid leave to look after a grandchild in an emergency. Hungary also has transferable allowances and leave, and in Portugal

grandparents can take up to 30 days a year and receive a financial allowance to care for a sick child when working parents are unable to do so.

(Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre, *Grandparents providing child care*, November 2011, page [7](#))

In October 2010, the Government announced that from April 2011 grandparents would be able to claim national insurance contribution credits towards their state pension for looking after their grandchildren. A DWP press release announcing a consultation on the change stated:

The credit will be added to an individual's national insurance contributions record and count towards their basic State Pension. From April 2010, thirty years of national insurance contributions are needed to qualify for the full basic State Pension.

The credits will be aimed at grandparents, and anyone who is providing care for a young relative under the age of 12.

(DWP, '[Government gives Grandparents more credit](#)', 15 October 2010)

More information about the operation of credits is available in the DWP Factsheet [Specified Adult Childcare credits](#) (accessed 5 December 2012).

4. A Minister for Older People?

On 28 June 2012 the House of Commons debated a motion by Penny Mordaunt, Conservative MP for Portsmouth North, calling for the creation of a Minister for Older People. This idea was put forward in a Backbench Business debate following a campaign led by [Grey Pride](#), an initiative by Anchor, a not-for-profit housing group. The campaign website explained the reasons it believed the post was needed:

We have found that despite making up 40 percent of the voting public, there is currently no minister dedicated to representing the views of older people. Decisions on issues that have a significant impact on older people, such as social care, pension reform, transport, housing and discrimination, are scattered across at least five government departments and are not considered in the round.

We believe that modern British society too often stereotypes and marginalises older people. We want to ensure that older people remain at the forefront of the British political agenda, and that the representation of older people in the media is updated to accurately reflect the active lives many lead.

Our ageing society now requires a Cabinet Minister with an eye on issues and policies affecting older people, able to hold the government to account and ensure their needs are understood and represented.

(Grey Pride, '[About Grey Pride](#)', accessed 5 December 2012)

An Age UK briefing sent to MPs ahead the debate noted similar issues with the machinery of government, observing that "ensuring that Government policy is sensitive to older people's needs and works well across different departments to meet them—with potential conflicts spotted early and addressed swiftly and effectively—is therefore quite

problematic at present". The idea of a dedicated Minister was therefore an attractive one:

We believe it is essential that the Government creates an overarching framework that addresses active ageing issues, not just for today's older people, but also for tomorrow's. This framework needs to cover the responsibilities and contributions of Government, local authorities, the private and voluntary sector and individuals. A Minister for Older People would be ideally placed to develop a framework of this kind.

However, Age UK said it would be important how the arrangement would work in practice:

Age UK believes that a Minister for Older People could make a significant difference but only if the post is accorded sufficient 'clout': consistent political support from the top of Government, as well as across Whitehall, would be essential. Supporting mechanisms would also be important, including access to staff and a budget, and effective means of capturing the views of older people to inform policy. However, the creation of a Minister for Older People is not a panacea and it must not be seen as absolving other departments from responsibility for thinking about the needs of older people when developing policies and implementing them. Rather, the holder of this role would be a 'champion' across Government on how it should address the issues faced by older people.

(Age UK, [*Minister for Older People – House of Commons Debate Briefing 28 June 2012*](#), June 2012)

Introducing the debate, Penny Mordaunt set out why older people needed a voice and then explained why she thought existing structures were inadequate:

There are many Ministers across Government with responsibilities that touch on some aspect of older people's lives, but with only a narrow focus on one policy area. That is why someone in government must be responsible for the interests of older people. It would be no good if it were a Minister of State from the Department for Work and Pensions... or from the Department of Health, because they would be susceptible to the silo thinking we must avoid....

At the Cabinet table, Secretaries of State are jealous of their remit, ready to explain when another policy trespasses on their departmental interest. If there was someone with responsibility for older people, the implications for them of each policy presented to Cabinet could be considered. We have had forums, tsars, taskforces and champions but we are still a long way from where we need to be. We need to try something new. An older person is likely to get a better standard of care on a hospital ward if there is one nurse on the shift with particular responsibility for that patient. Someone who has responsibility and is accountable will speak up to protect the interests of those in their care.

(HC *Hansard*, 28 June 2012, col [528](#))

Responding for the Government, Steve Webb, Minister of State at the DWP, said he had found that the views of older people were always considered in Government:

I assure the House, from my now extensive experience—two years—in government, that the idea that the views and priorities of older people are not in every room, in every discussion, is not something that I have ever encountered.

To give just one example, the Department for Work and Pensions had to make some very difficult decisions as part of the comprehensive spending review, but if we look at the areas where savings were made—at the reduction in the growth in the budget for disability living allowance for people of working age; at the local housing allowance; at the employment and support allowance; at child benefit, tax credit, and social housing; and at the benefits cap—virtually without exception, those changes apply wholly or predominantly to those of working age. The benefits of those above pension age were protected, almost exclusively. As we have heard from a number of hon. Members, crucially, the basic state pension has been enhanced through the restoration of the earnings link and the triple lock. I assure hon. Members in all parts of the House that the political priorities of pensioners and older people more broadly—as we all know, they are the people who turn out and vote—are very much in the Government’s mind at all times.

(*HC Hansard*, 28 June 2012, cols [551–552](#))

After responding to various points made in the debate, he went on to consider the suggestion that there should be a Minister for Older People. He said the Government would reflect on the idea:

Responding on behalf of the Government to this important debate, I very much welcome the terms in which the whole debate has been conducted. We are united in the view that older people need a proper voice right at the heart and right at the top of Government. We need to think very hard about how we deliver that.

I welcome the terms of the motion, which proposes that the Government should consider—we certainly should—whether that role would best be done by a Cabinet Minister with additional responsibilities. My proposition is that one response might be for the UK Advisory Forum on Ageing to have a more cross-government role. There are plenty more things we could do, but I stress that there are plenty of cross-government and co-ordinated things already being done. I hope that I have been able to give the House some reassurance on that point.

I can confirm that the Government are very happy to support the motion and look forward to further discussions, because I have a feeling that, if we do not make sure that older people have a proper voice right at the heart and at the top of Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North will not let us hear the last of it.

(*HC Hansard*, 28 June 2012, cols [555–556](#))

