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## Characteristics

50+ Characteristics, Barriers and Motivation

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## 50+ Characteristics, Barriers and Motivation

### Who are the 50+ job seekers?

There are nine million people aged between 50 and state pension age in the UK. They are not a homogeneous group. Similarly, 50+ jobseekers differ from one another. Many may have held a steady job before recent redundancy. Others may have been on state benefits, experiencing short and

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longer term unemployment. Each will have different life experiences and different views and can be no more summed up in a few phrases than any other age group.

Stereotypes can be dangerous because they can influence the way you treat people. That said, if you are able to put yourself in your customers' shoes, it may help you strike the right note in the support you provide if you take on board some of the more common features of 50+ jobseekers. Other sections of this tool will tell you more about how you deal with barriers arising from them.

## **Characteristics**

If there is such a thing as a typical 50+ customer, these are some of the characteristics you might find.

### **Employment / unemployment**

50+ customers have varying histories of employment and unemployment, as do other age groups, but this list provides some typical experiences and situations.

- Normally unemployed for several months by the time they are referred to a provider
- Could be recently or soon-to-be unemployed as part of a redundancy exercise
- Likely to have had an employment track-record, perhaps going back decades with one employer or relatively few employers

Scotland

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Careers

- May be out of work for the first time or the first time in many years
- Could be unaware of the range of public, private and voluntary support available, including advice and skills training
- May have been out of work longer or be taking longer to find a job than younger adults
- May have been through the revolving door of unemployment and Jobcentre Plus programmes many times
- May have had prolonged periods of worklessness, even though they may not have been in receipt of out-of-work or ill health benefits
- May have health conditions which impact on the kind of work they can do
- May have been forced out of work or limited in the work they can do by caring responsibilities
- May be restricted in the jobs they can look for by where they live (travel issues or a lack of suitable jobs in the locality)

### Skills

The skills of a 50+ jobseeker may be considerable but the chances are they may think of them only in terms of a specific job. Identifying and applying their **transferable skills** to other jobs may be a new concept. Here are some of the more common features, although it is important to recognise that many 50+ jobseekers have the required skills and qualifications for today's job market.

- May have good organisational, communication and interpersonal skills
- May have poor IT skills

- The skills they have may no longer be relevant
- Unlikely to have had recent skills training so may need to up-skill or re-skill
- Less likely to have formal qualifications than younger adults
- Less likely to have today's qualifications
- May have the right skills, but not hold the qualifications which employers require or expect to see
- Could be well-qualified, although their qualifications gained years before may not be recognised by younger recruiters

### **Job search**

Many 50+ jobseekers are unfamiliar with modern job search and recruitment processes, which can result in 'culture shock'. They will need help to understand today's job market. This list summarises some of the issues they have.

- Less likely to have had experience of job searching and modern recruitment processes, including candidate testing
- May not realise how many jobs are advertised and need to be applied for online
- May not have access to or know how to use the internet to look and apply for jobs
- May not have any experience of putting together a CV, presenting it or adapting it for each job application
- May view lack of acknowledgement of applications as discourteous
- May be uncomfortable with the idea of networking to find a job or how to go about it
- May feel affronted by the suggestion of volunteering as a stepping stone to paid employment
- May feel frustrated by their interaction with recruitment

agencies and their unsuccessful attempts to find work

## **Impact of unemployment:**

### **1. Financial**

It's important to take into account the impact of the banking crisis and recession on older people's savings and pensions and the fact that many people aged 50+ still have mortgages and other forms of debt. Some may also have financial responsibility for parents, children and grandchildren. Some may face real financial hardship as their right to contributions-based Jobseeker's Allowance has run out or their household income and savings are too high for them to be eligible for benefit. Some may be surviving on savings or be faced with the prospect of drawing down occupational entitlements early. Many will have real concerns about financial security in later life.

### **2. State of mind**

Many 50+ jobseekers are positive and resilient but the experience of being out of work can have a profound impact on adults of any age. See this list for how it can affect some people aged 50+ in particular.

- Self esteem and self confidence are likely to be low if they have had knock-backs in looking for work
- May have started out keen and willing (possibly desperate) to get back into work but now sinking into apathy or depression
- May be confused, frustrated or embarrassed about the situation they find themselves in, particularly if they have not been out of work before
- May be very worried about the financial and personal

consequences of being out of work

- May be resentful if they have been moved from some higher value unemployment benefit (such as Incapacity Benefit) onto Jobseeker's Allowance

### **Attitudes**

Your 50+ customers may have a strong work ethic but their mindsets can act as barriers to finding a new job. See this list and **How to identify typical barriers** for details of these.

- May have unrealistic aspirations, wanting to return to the sort of job or position they had before, or to achieve the same salary even when this is no longer possible
- May have stronger opinions than younger adults and, initially at least, be less flexible
- More likely to define themselves by the job/role they held previously. This is particularly true for men
- May view their failure to find a job as evidence of age discrimination

See this case study for examples of two people with very different mindsets which influenced their work outcomes.

### **Age Concern Camden**

**Steve** exemplifies a 50+ customer who is inflexible, has unrealistic expectations and only follows advice when it suits him. As a result, he is narrowing his opportunities.

Steve has been a customer for more than two years. He was previously employed as a building manager earning

£30,000-40,000 a year. He was expecting to find a job with the same level of responsibility and salary.

His adviser says that while he is unrealistic about his employment opportunities, he is also underselling himself when applying for jobs. He is not able to match his transferable skills and previous experience to the requirements of the job. His CV and personal statement often do not meet the specifications.

He has often asked for advice but has rarely taken it, sometimes going back on decisions reached with the help of his adviser (changing the text of his CV, for example).

Initially he was reluctant to consider jobs in other areas or which require a lower level of skills, believing he could find something similar to his past roles. He then started to believe his lack of success was due to his age rather than anything else. He took an NVQ in Security, thinking it would not be too demeaning to work as a security manager or monitor CCTV. However, it proved difficult for him to find such a post in the current economic climate, particularly as he has no previous experience. He rejected the suggestion that he could start at a lower level and work his way up.

Steve's inability to lower his expectations and take things step by step is a barrier. Now he is applying for the sorts of jobs his adviser suggested originally but his employability is decreasing as is the likelihood of finding a job he would want to do.

**Matthew** (age 50+) is open minded, receptive to ideas and flexible in his approach. He has had a long journey but a successful one.

He worked in the construction industry but was made redundant in his early 50s. He wanted to do something different, not least because earnings in construction had gone down significantly in recent years.

Matthew took his redundancy as a chance to change career. As he is fit and likes physical activity and outdoors work he decided to get a qualification as a gardener. He then approached a provider for advice on how to get a gardening job. Although he recognised that looking for work was part of his condition to entitlement to benefits, it had left him feeling very stressed.

His adviser suggested he think about a stepping stone: something he could do while looking for gardening work. She asked what he had enjoyed doing when he was little and Matthew said he had liked helping in the kitchen. He subsequently got a part-time job as a catering assistant. This was a good solution in several ways: it provided some income to live on and left him time to start building up his gardening business. He was fortunate to get another small part-time job as a handyman with a charity helping older people. Through his contacts with people in both his jobs and by distributing marketing leaflets, he obtained some gardening customers. Matthew's gardening business is now growing but he has two small part-time jobs to fall back on.

## **Preferences**

Your 50+ customers

- will certainly want respect and acknowledgement
- are more likely to prefer face-to-face support



- may have a story to tell and want to be listened to.

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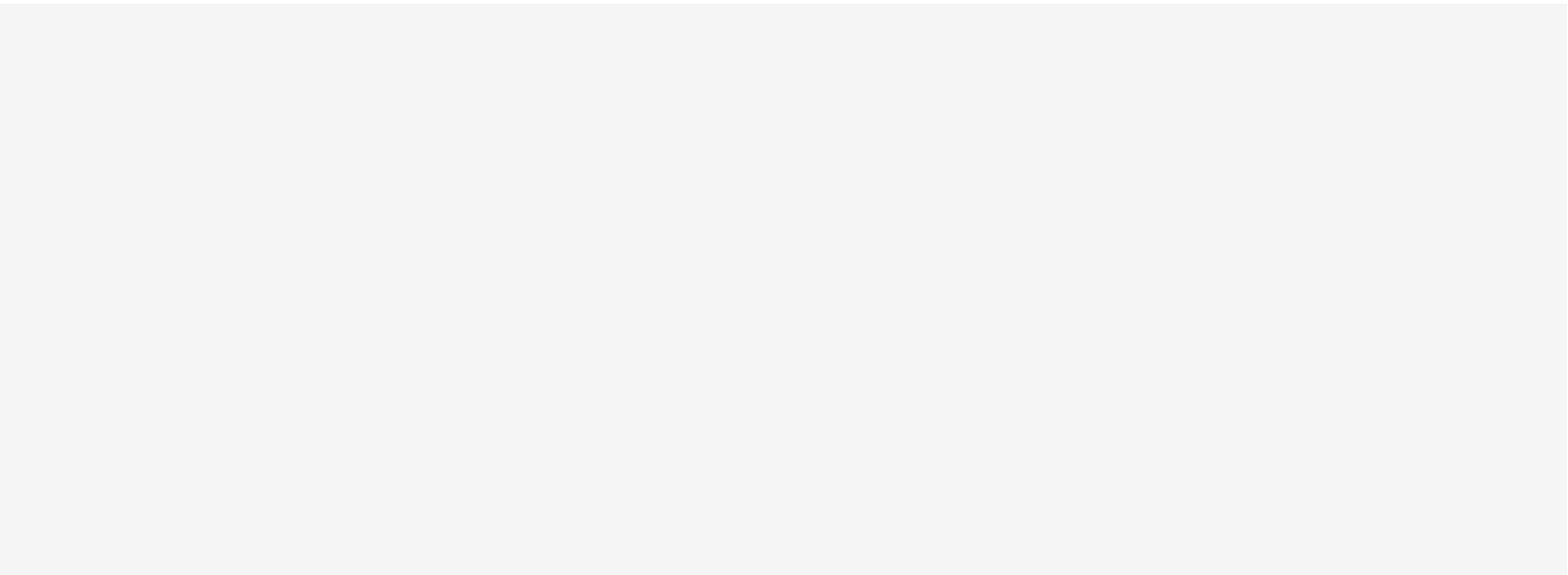
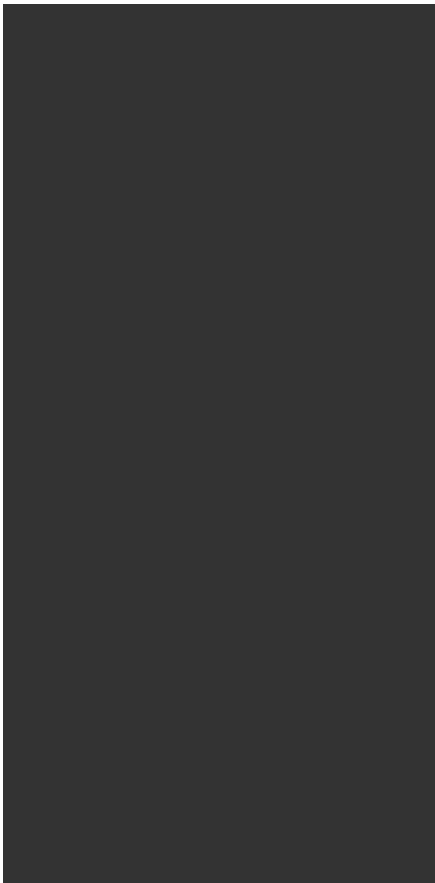
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