

**GROWING PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF  
LATER RETIREMENT – THOUGH MOST DON'T WANT OR EXPECT IT FOR THEMSELVES**

Public attitudes have become more positive towards older workers and the idea of later retirement. However, according to the latest NatCen British Social Attitudes report, only a minority of people want to work past 65 themselves but would be encouraged to stay in employment if flexible options were offered.

Increasing life expectancy and the rising cost of funding pensions have made extended working an increasingly attractive option for the government. The public too is more positive:

- There is little support for the idea of forcing people to retire early to reduce unemployment. In 1983, 70% thought older people should be encouraged to retire early for this reason; just 13% think this now.
- The majority of people (80%) believe it is wrong to make someone retire just because they have reached a certain age, up from two thirds (68%) in 2001.
- Few think age discrimination is socially acceptable; the majority (75%) think refusing a job to an applicant because they are over 50 is just wrong. But when asked whether employers *do* refuse jobs to applicants because of their age, nearly half (47%) think it happens a lot (down from 58% in 2001).
- Britain is one of the most tolerant Europe countries in attitudes towards working after 70. A third (33%) would disapprove of a man doing this, and 28% of a woman. Only in Norway and Denmark are attitudes more tolerant; in most other European countries, these proportions exceed 50%.

Enthusiasm for older workers is not always reflected in people's views about their own future working life:

- A third of people (32%) want to work past the age of 65.
- One in ten (10%) men expects to retire in their 70s, roughly double the proportion in 2004.
- In 2004, 20% of men and 23% of women said they expected to retire from their main job in their 50s, compared with 14% of men and 15% of women now.
- Although a third (32%) say they want to work past 65, this almost doubles (to 61%) if flexible working options, such as shorter hours, were to be on offer.

Stephen McKay, author, comments:

'Growing policy enthusiasm for working longer is not shared by many people when it comes to their own circumstances and expectations for retirement.'

'The incentive that offers most promise if retirement ages are to change is the option of flexible working, as this attracts far more people to the idea of a later retirement.'

ENDS

This summarises 'Never too old: attitudes towards longer working lives' by Stephen McKay, in British Social Attitudes: the 26th Report, published by Sage for NatCen.

## Notes to Editors

- 1 **British Social Attitudes: the 26th Report** is published on Tuesday 26th January, 2010 by SAGE, price £50.00. It is edited by Alison Park, John Curtice, Katarina Thomson, Miranda Phillips, Elizabeth Clery and Sarah Butt. SAGE is at <http://www.uk.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book234304&series=Series30&>.
- 2 The report includes two additional chapters not covered by this press release. Findings from these chapters, on religion, were released earlier in the year.
- 3 British findings are from the British Social Attitudes survey, with the exception of the chapter by Andy Ross and Amanda Sacker, which also uses data from the British Household Panel Study, and the chapter by Rossy Bailey, Elizabeth Fuller and Rachel Ormston, which also uses data from the Scottish Social Attitudes survey and the Health Survey for England. Findings that compare Britain with other countries are taken from the European Social Survey ([www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org)) or the International Social Survey Programme ([www.issp.org](http://www.issp.org)).
- 4 The British Social Attitudes survey series has been conducted annually since 1983. The 2008 survey consisted of 4,486 interviews with a representative, random sample of people in Britain.
- 5 The survey is funded by charitable and government sources. The questions in the 2008 survey were funded by the following government Departments: Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (now Business, Innovation and Skills); Children, Schools and Families; Health; Transport; and Work and Pensions. Other funders came from: the Economic and Social Research Council; the Food Standards Agency; the Gatsby Charitable Foundation; the Hera Trust; the John Templeton Foundation; the Leverhulme Trust; and NORFACE.
- 6 NatCen, Britain's largest independent social research organisation, aims to promote a better-informed society through high quality social research ([www.natcen.ac.uk](http://www.natcen.ac.uk)).

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