

# Women Deserve Better

a better deal for women aged  
50 and over in employment

A Labour Research Department report for UNISON

March 2014

**WORTH***it*  
Valuing public services and the people  
who provide them

UNISON  
*the public service union*

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*The quotes used in this report are comments made by survey respondents.*

# Introduction

UNISON the UK's largest public sector union – with over 1 million women members – is calling for a Better Deal for Women aged over 50 in employment.

UNISON members working in the public and private sectors provide a diverse range of services delivered every day to millions of households and families across Britain.

Women, in the main, are the backbone of Britain's public services. They make up over two-thirds of the public sector workforce. From childcare to caring, from schools to social services, from nurseries to nursing, women are the main providers of these services. Women are also the main users of public services and rely more heavily on the provision of public services.

For decades, the public sector has been a beacon and exemplar of providing decent jobs, pay and pension rights for women workers. This is changing rapidly. The pace of privatisation, outsourcing of public services and commissioning is having an adverse impact on their position in the labour market. Since 2010, the position has been made worse with the expansion of Zero Hours Contracts (ZHC) – which represents a major threat to women's future employment – with huge changes in women's employment status and implications for maternity, national insurance, redundancy and pension rights. UNISON is leading the campaign against the abuse of Zero Hour Contracts.

The Coalition Government's austerity policies are having a huge impact on women's job security in the public sector. Stable, secure and sustainable permanent

jobs are being undermined. Austerity measures have put women's future security of employment at risk. Precarious forms of work are increasing – more involuntary part-time working, agency and casual work. Women are working longer for less pay and poorer pensions. UNISON drove the campaign to secure the National Minimum Wage and we are at the forefront in driving the campaign for a Living Wage.

A literature review commissioned by UNISON in 2013 (the "Overview") provided evidence that, while there has been a large expansion of women aged 50 and over in the workforce, they still face many barriers to obtaining decent, good-quality employment which can be properly balanced with their outside work responsibilities.

It showed that the gender pay gap is even wider than it is among younger workers, and that their employment is even more segregated into a narrow range of jobs – usually at the lower-paid end of the spectrum.

It also showed that women of this age very often have caring responsibilities – both for their own, perhaps teenage, children, but also for dependent adults and sometimes for grandchildren. This raised the question of whether these caring responsibilities are given due attention by employers and public policy.

The report also found that, while many women feel able to work for many years passed the age of 50, for others the physical and psychological demands of working long hours are unbearable. This creates a further

## UNISON – the UK's largest public service union

UNISON's more than 1.3 million members work in the public services, for private contractors providing public services and in the essential utilities. They include frontline staff and managers, working full or part time in local authorities, the NHS, the police service, colleges and schools, the electricity, gas and water industries, transport and the voluntary sector. 74% of our members are women; many are low paid or work part time.

need for more flexible employment options at this time of their lives.

This reports presents the first comprehensive survey of its kind – on the position of Women in the Workplace aged 50 and over. It builds on the survey of UNISON women at the 2013 UNISON Women’s conference and our submission to the Labour Party Commission on Older Women in 2013. We commissioned this large-scale survey to examine the emerging patterns and trends in discrimination being experienced by older women in the workplace.

These findings support the trend that women are working longer hours than was the case a decade ago. There has been a rapid rise in women staying at work longer and the rise in the state pension age is likely to exacerbate this trend. In addition, women over 50 have fewer opportunities for promotion or moving to a higher grade job and many have to remain in full-time employment beyond the age of 64 – at a time when they should be winding down and looking forward to retirement. Almost one in three has primary caring responsibility for an adult dependent, with few options for flexible working or work life balance.

We believe this is a timely report that will contribute enormously to the work of the Labour Party Commission on Older Women established in 2013. UNISON supports the work of the Commission and Gloria Mills, National Secretary Equalities, is a member of the Commission. We hope that the findings will make a huge contribution in halting the trends towards a race to the bottom for women over 50; tackling the scourge of low pay and beginning to close the average 20% pay gap and the 30% pensions’ gap for women relative to men. Moreover, we hope it will give new impetus in the pursuit of gender equality and to lift this and future generations of women out of poverty.

The findings of the UNISON Survey of women members aged 50 and over demonstrates that women in general, and women over 50 in particular, have had a torrid time in bearing a disproportionate share of the fall-out from the banking, economic and financial crisis.

This is unfair and it is unjust. Rich bankers have returned to the boom days on pay and bonus. Directors’ pay has increased by over 30% in the last year alone – yet women working in the public sector in particular have seen a real drop in pay and have had to endure a public sector pay freeze whilst the gender pay gap continues to widen.

The findings support the view that women over 50 continue to bear the brunt of austerity and public sector pay cuts. We believe public sector workers are Worth It. The UNISON Worth It campaign is a defining campaign for a better deal for public sector workers. Austerity policies are based on political and ideological choices. We believe there are alternatives to austerity.

We have to stop this race to the bottom in driving down pay, terms and conditions and pensions in the public sector. Austerity policies and practices are eroding the provision of good quality public services and years of progress on equality; driving down pay, pensions and employment rights for workers; and increasing inequalities for women in the labour market and in society. UNISON believes Women over 50 are Worth It and Deserve a Better Deal.

#### **UNISON would like to thank the Labour Research Department for this report**

#### **UNISON is campaigning for:**

- Implementation of the Equality Act 2010 provision on dual discrimination which would provide protection for older women
- Implementation of the provisions in the Equality Act 2010 on pay transparency
- An end to the abuse of Zero Hours Contracts
- Better training and promotion opportunities for older women
- Action to close the gender pay gap

# Executive summary

A report produced for UNISON last year on older women in the workplace (the "Overview") highlighted the increase in employment rates for women aged 50-plus over the past 20 years, and in particular the rapid rise in the last few years while the state pension age has been rising.

This large-scale survey shows that, among UNISON's members, the picture is not one of older women continuing to work on a part-time basis leading up to retirement. On the contrary, **61% of women workers aged 50+ are actually working full time** (defined here as 35 or more paid hours a week). **Another 20% are working 25-34 hours**, meaning that fewer than one in five work 16 hours or less a week.

Even among **women workers in the 60-64 age group** – those who a few years ago might have expected to be retired by now – **over half are working full time**. And almost **one third of those aged 65 and over are also still working full time**.

There are clearly many women who are having to work relatively long hours, well beyond the age they would have dreamt of when they first set out to work – and this trend looks set to increase.

There is also **another significant group of women workers aged 50+ who are stuck in part-time jobs that provide them with insufficient paid hours**.

One in four who work part time say they do so because that is all that is available in their job. And only a little over a quarter say they work part time because they "can manage financially".

Among all women in the survey, one in 12 has more than one paid job.

**One third of part timers say if they had the choice they would increase their paid hours. For those in "elementary" jobs (generally the lowest grade occupations), the figure is almost half.**

Allied to this is the number of women who, despite their age, want a higher grade job. **More than a third in the survey would like to move to a higher grade/job. However, virtually none of the respondents – fewer than 6% – feel that they have good promotion opportunities at this stage of their life.**

**Fewer than half of all respondents feel they have good training opportunities at this stage of their lives** – a negative view most pronounced among those in elementary jobs and customer services work.

However, there is also a problem for many women workers in not being able to reduce their hours – even where they would accept forgoing some of the income associated with full-time work. They have to work full time, or more hours than they would choose, in order to stay in employment. **They simply don't have the option to cut their hours down.**

**Two in five of the survey women working full time said they would work fewer hours if they could choose to in their job, despite the loss of income.** Some part timers would also cut their hours down, given the opportunity.

Their primary reasons for wanting to cut their hours are obvious enough: they want to wind down as they approach retirement, they want to accommodate other interests outside work, they have health issues that make long hours difficult and many need to care for dependents (adults and children) and to look after the household. (The priorities vary by age band within the overall 50+ group.)

And where some might manage to accommodate these outside work roles if they had access to more flexible working, the survey finds that, despite the right to request it, the availability of flexible working is inadequate.

**Of those who have asked at some point for a new working pattern, fewer than half had been able to do so to their satisfaction.**

The survey suggests that it is harder to get flexible working to care for grandchildren than one's own children. **In particular there is woeful lack of access to flexible work patterns for those needing to care for dependent adults.**

## **Policy points for further consideration**

The final section of this reports sets out a number of conclusions and policy points for further consideration by UNISON. Below is a summary of the policy points.

### **Approaching retirement**

- Look to extend the availability of phased/ flexible retirement options to more employers
- Consider mechanisms to widen access to partial pension take-up by older staff working reduced hours

### **Health**

- Consider how to develop the idea/ practice of allowing older female (and male) workers to change job roles for health/physical reasons
- Consider how to widen good management practices on supporting women workers facing difficulties going through the menopause
- Consider how to widen access to shorter hours or flexible working patterns for older female (and male) workers for health/physical reasons

### **Caring for dependents**

- Continue to push for the strongest possible statutory right of access to flexible working for all workers

- Ensure employers are aware that requests for flexible working/time off to deal with emergencies are as important to care for adults as for children;
- Ensure employers are aware that older workers may need these provisions to care for grandchildren who live with them
- Consider mechanisms to ensure that flexible working and emergency time off is understood and accessible in all sectors organised by UNISON and for workers in all grades/job types

### **Need for more paid hours**

- What mechanisms might there be to give part timers more opportunities to increase their paid hours?
- What mechanisms might there be to ensure part timers aged 50+ are given opportunities to train for and have access to higher grade jobs? (See also "career progression" below.)
- Consider whether the tax and benefits system is distorting hours offered and worked

### **Career progression**

- Ensure that the training agenda within the union and in employers recognises the aspirations of women aged 50+
- Work to ensure that employers' grading structures and recruitment and promotion mechanisms recognise the aspirations and experience of women aged 50+
- Consider pressing for equal opportunities policies and managers' equality training to specifically address older women workers' aspirations
- Campaign for implementation of the Equality Act 2010 provision on dual discrimination which would provide protection for older women

*"I am exhausted working full time and running the home and extended family. I cannot reduce my hours as it will affect my pension."*

# The survey

This report presents the key findings of a large-scale survey of UNISON's older women members examining aspects of their employment experience, the extent to which they feel discriminated against and the difficulties they face in getting the right balance of work and other responsibilities in their lives.

It constitutes the second part of a project being carried out for UNISON aimed at gaining an understanding of the needs of its older women members. The first, presented in August 2013, comprised an overview<sup>1</sup> of available statistical information and research literature on the position of older women workers in the labour market.

The survey used an online questionnaire which was emailed to a random sample of 20,000 working women UNISON members aged 50 or more. It was carried out between the end of November 2013 and the beginning of January 2014.

The number of valid responses by the close of the survey was 5,578. Taking account of "bounced emails" and some minor inaccuracies in the membership data, this represented a valid response rate of at least 30%.

This is a healthy response rate for this kind of survey. However, for reasons explained in an appendix to the report, it is considered that women in the higher salary bands (over £14,000-£17,000) are slightly over-represented among the respondents.

The number of responses meant that it was possible to carry out analysis not just of the overall sample of respondents but also broken down by a number of factors pertaining to the women, such as their type of job/grade, their sector of work and a range of personal characteristics such as age group (within the overall parameter of age 50 and over). This allows for a more finely tuned understanding of the issues facing older women workers.

As well as informing UNISON about its members, this very comprehensive survey of women workers should be of interest elsewhere: it is hoped that it will also provide a contribution to the Labour Party's Commission on Older Women, whose aim is to end discrimination against women over the age of 50.

1 *Older women in the workplace: an overview*, Labour Research Department report for UNISON August 2013

# A profile of the respondents, their work situation and their caring responsibilities

Overall, 5,578 working women members of UNISON aged 50 or over took part in the survey.

Of these, 83.0% were below age 60 and 17.0% aged 60 and over.

## Respondents by age

under 50	0 (0.0%)
50-54	2,530 (45.7%)
55-59	2,063 (37.3%)
60-64	806 (14.6%)
65 and over	132 (2.4%)

In broad terms, 93.8% were white, 3.1% were Black or Black British, 1.9% were Asian or Asian British, 0.8% were mixed race and 0.3% were from other ethnic groups.

## Respondents by ethnic origin

<b>Asian or Asian British</b>	
Indian	52 (0.9%)
Pakistani	10 (0.2%)
Bangladeshi	0 (0%)
Chinese	11 (0.2%)
Any other Asian background	33 (0.6%)
<b>Black or Black British</b>	
Caribbean	107 (1.9%)
African	51 (0.9%)
Any other Black background	14 (0.3%)
<b>Mixed race</b>	
White and Black Caribbean	10 (0.2%)
White and Black African	7 (0.1%)
White and Asian	6 (0.1%)
Any other mixed background	22 (0.4%)
<b>White</b>	
British, English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish	5,013 (89.9%)
Irish	91 (1.6%)
Any other white background	128 (2.3%)
<b>Other ethnic group</b>	
Arab	1 (0%)
Any other ethnic group	15 (0.3%)
No reply	43 (0.8%)

More than one in 10 respondents (11.6%) considered they have a disability.

Women living in all regions of England and in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland responded, with the largest single group (13.5%) living in the South East of England.

## Their work situation

### Hours and type of contract

Overall 60.9% of respondents work full time, assuming that working 35 hours a week or more constitutes "full time". Part timers are split fairly evenly between those working 25-34 paid hours a week and those working fewer than that.

### Hours per week worked\*

35 or more	3,398 (60.9%)
25-34	1,127 (20.2%)
17-24	763 (13.7%)
8-16	236 (4.2%)
less than 8	42 (0.8%)

\*normal paid hours, excluding overtime

However, the proportion working full time varies considerably by age group, decreasing significantly from the age of 60 (see table at top of page 7).

The vast majority (96.1%) are on a permanent contract, with 2.9% on a temporary contract, while 0.7% did not know.

1.2% were on a zero-hours contract, although 7.7% did not know whether they were or not, and 13.7% were on a term-time only contract.

It is likely that the respondents who are on short-hours, temporary and zero-hours contracts are under-represented in this survey, in so far as they are on the lowest salaries. We have evidence that women



## % women working full time and less than 16 hours

Hours/week	All	50-54	55-59	60-64	65 and over
35 or more	60.9%	62.7%	63.3%	54.6%	29.5%
16 or less	5.0%	3.4%	5.3%	6.3%	22.0%

UNISON members age 50+ who are on the lowest salary bands are under-represented among respondents (see Appendix).

One in 12 respondents had other paid jobs beside their main one: 7.4% had one other job; 1.0% had two other jobs; and 0.2% had three or more other jobs.

Just under half (44.9%) had a flexitime system (flexible start and finish times within set limits) in their job.

### Work sector

Respondents were asked to select the sector that most closely describes where they work, with the numbers set out in the table on the right. However, it should be noted that only two thirds of respondents answered this question.

### Economic sector

Overall, 86.7% worked in the public sector, 7.5% in the private sector and 3.3% in the community or voluntary sector, with 1.9% saying they did not know.

### Respondents by sector

Health	1,071 (19.2%)
Local government - other	825 (14.8%)
Schools	696 (12.5%)
Social work and social care	532 (9.5%)
Higher education	177 (3.2%)
Police, probation, justice	129 (2.3%)
Further education and sixth-form colleges	110 (2.0%)
Housing	101 (1.8%)
Environment	45 (0.8%)
Electricity, gas, water	40 (0.7%)
Transport	17 (0.3%)
Fire and rescue	11 (0.2%)
No reply	1,824 (32.7%)

(The numbers of responses from the transport and fire and rescue sectors are too small for more detailed analysis.)

### Type of job/grade

Respondents were asked to select the type of job that most closely describes their main job, with the numbers set out in the table below. Most (98.7%) answered this question.

### Respondents by type of job

<b>Senior management</b> (eg chief executive, senior manager)	223 (4.0%)
<b>Professional</b> (eg nursing professional, physiotherapist, accountant, social worker, environmental health officer)	1,274 (22.8%)
<b>Associate professional or technical</b> (eg medical technician, paramedic, youth worker, housing officer, careers advisor)	597 (10.7%)
<b>Administrative/secretarial</b> (eg accounts clerk, library assistant, personnel administrator, office manager)	1,858 (33.3%)
<b>Skilled trade</b> (eg carpenter, cook, site supervisor)	71 (1.3%)
<b>Caring, leisure or other services</b> (eg childminder, teaching assistant, nursing auxiliary, care worker, leisure attendant, cleaning supervisor)	1,137 (20.4%)
<b>Customer service</b>	248 (4.4%)
<b>Machine operative</b> (eg mini-bus driver, PSV driver)	3 (0.1%)
<b>Elementary</b> (eg cleaner, parking enforcement officer, lunchtime supervisor, school crossing patrol)	94 (1.7%)

(The number identifying as "machine operative" is too small for detailed analysis.)

## ***Their caring responsibilities***

The women in the survey were asked about a range of caring responsibilities they might have, and their responses were as in the table:

### **Caring responsibilities**

Own (or foster) children under 11	65 (1.2%)
Own (or foster) children 11-18	705 (12.6%)
Grandchildren living with you under 11	118 (2.1%)
Grandchildren living with you 11-18	33 (0.6%)
Adult dependent living with you	579 (10.4%)
Adult dependent not living with you	1,297 (23.3%)
Help with grandchildren to allow parents to work	955 (17.1%)
"Sandwich women" (see below)	313 (5.6%)

This shows a complex variety of caring responsibilities, which is rather different from the general view of women workers with young children.

For example, only 1.2% of women in the survey may have their own young children (under the age of 11) to look after, but almost twice that proportion (2.1%) had young grandchildren living with them.

This is distinct from the *part-time* care provided by many respondents to grandchildren to allow the children's parents to go to work. One in six of all respondents (17.1%) provided such care.

Not surprisingly, due to the age group of the respondents, most of those still with

their own dependent children had older children (11-18), and this might have implications for how they see their work-life balance. For example, later on we will see that a large group of women part-time workers give as a reason for working part time that it is to "look after the household" as distinct from "caring for children".

Meanwhile much larger numbers of this age group have caring responsibilities for adults. More than one in 10 has an adult dependent actually living with them, while a huge number – 23.3% – have primary care for an adult dependent living elsewhere. This makes a total of one third (33%) who have primary responsibility for caring for an adult dependent.

### **"Sandwich generation"**

There has been much talk of women in this age group being in the "sandwich generation" – of caring for both their children and their parents. In this survey only a small proportion (313, or 5.6%) of the respondents fitted something like this description: these are the women who have either children or grandchildren living with them AND have primary care responsibility for an adult, whether or not they are living with them.

However, the women in this survey were all in work at the time of the survey, and the point has been made (see "Overview") that many sandwich generation women are forced to drop out of the labour market as they are unable to balance work with their other responsibilities.

*"I have grandchildren who don't live with me but I help out with their care. At the moment I can't do this as much as I would like as the employer only refers to children residing with an employee. I also have a parent with mobility issues and am concerned that she may require more care in the near future."*

# Working hours and patterns

## Why part timers work part time

Part-time workers (those normally paid for less than 35 hours a week) were asked to indicate the reasons (as many as applied) why they worked part time rather than full time. The most common reason was that part-time work was all that was available in their current job. Well over a quarter (27.3%) of all part timers gave this as a reason.

### % part timers citing each reason\*

that is all that is available in the job I do	27.3%
I can manage financially	26.4%
I am moving towards retirement	21.8%
looking after the household	18.9%
health reasons (my own)	16.7%
caring for child(ren)	15.8%
It's what I am used to doing	15.4%
caring for adult(s)	14.5%
Other reasons	13.3%

\*choosing as many as applied

For the 50-54 age group, while this was still the most commonly mentioned reason (29.7% citing it), there were other reasons mentioned much more often by this group than by other age groups. These were: to look after the household, more than one quarter of this age group citing this (25.9%); to care for children (21.7%); and to care for adults (16.0%).

There was also a wide variation in how likely respondents in different grades/jobs were to say that part time work was all that was available to them in their current job. Women working in skilled trades, in elementary roles and in caring, leisure and other services were much more likely to say it was all that was available.

In terms of sector, part timers in schools (44.5%) and further education (43.5%) were much more likely than average to say that part-time work was all that was available.

### % part timers in each grade saying part time was all that was available\*

Senior management	12.5%
Professional	15.1%
Associate professional or technical	24.5%
Administrative/secretarial	23.1%
Skilled trade	54.8%
Caring, leisure or other services	38.0%
Customer service	14.6%
Elementary	46.6%
All	27.3%

\* numbers of machine operatives too small for analysis

And those in the community and voluntary sector (43.5%) were more likely than those in either the public sector (26.8%) or private sector (23.1%) to say it was all that was available.

## Some part timers would like more paid hours

Part-time workers were asked if they would increase their paid hours if that choice were available. Again, although more than half thought this unlikely, one third (33.2%) said this was very or quite likely.

Of those aged 50-54, two in five (39.3%) said they would be very or quite likely to increase their paid hours if they could, and even among those aged 65+ more than a quarter (26.8%) said they would.

*"I try to work more hours for more money to cope with the cost of living as we have not had a pay rise for seven years"*

High proportions of part timers in elementary jobs (47.5%), caring, leisure and other services (40.0%) and skilled trades (39.3%) said they would be quite or very likely to increase their paid hours if they could.

Sectors with particularly high proportions of part timers wishing to increase their paid

hours were further education (48.6%) and schools (44.0%).

And those in the community/voluntary sector were more likely to want more paid hours than those in the public and private sectors.

### **Some respondents would like fewer paid hours**

All respondents (full and part time) were asked if they would choose to do fewer paid hours if they could in their current job. While almost half said this was unlikely, more than one third (34.7%) said they would be quite or very likely to do this.

Looking just at full timers (those on 35 or more hours a week), more than two in five (40.6%) would reduce their paid hours if they could choose to in their current job.

There was a different desire to reduce paid hours from women working in different grades of job. Those working in senior management (38.6%), professional (39.8%) and customer service roles (38.0%) were significantly more likely to say they would choose fewer paid hours than those in skilled trades (21.1%) and "elementary" jobs (19.1%).

#### **% of respondents in each grade who would be quite or very likely to choose fewer paid hours\***

Senior management	38.6%
Professional	39.8%
Associate professional or technical	32.8%
Administrative/secretarial	33.3%
Skilled trade	21.1%
Caring, leisure or other services	33.6%
Customer service	38.0%
Elementary	19.1%
All	34.7%

\*numbers of machine operatives too small for analysis

Particularly high proportions of women in certain sectors said they would choose shorter hours if they could. These sectors were: electricity, gas and water; fire and rescue; police, probation and justice and transport.

Overall the most commonly cited reason for respondents wanting fewer hours were that they were moving towards retirement, with 46.1% citing this. This was followed by wanting to accommodate other interests outside work and health reasons. However, 18.7% said it would be to care for adults and 11.3% said to care for children.

#### **% of those wanting fewer hours citing each reason\***

I am moving towards retirement	46.1%
to accommodate other interests outside work	34.3%
health reasons (my own)	31.8%
caring for adult(s)	18.7%
looking after the household	17.0%
other reasons	13.9%
I might as well as I could manage financially	12.6%
caring for child(ren)	11.3%

\*choosing as many as applied

There are significant differences between different age groups on this: moving towards retirement was mentioned by only 20.4% of respondents aged 50-54: their most common reason for wanting fewer hours was to accommodate other interests outside work (38.9%). They were also significantly more likely than older age groups to say it was to care for children (15.5%) or for adults (21.9%).

There was also some variation in emphasis between workers in different grades. Those in skilled trades and in elementary jobs were much more likely than average to cite their health as a reason to want fewer paid hours. Meanwhile senior managers and associate professional/technical staff were more likely than others to say they wanted to accommodate interests outside work.

## Changing working patterns to help with caring

### Requests to change work pattern

Around 600 of the survey respondents (10.6%) had at some point asked their current employer for a new work pattern to help with caring responsibilities – for children or adults or both. Of these, the most common reason was to care for an adult, but more than one in three wanted it to care for their own (or foster) children, and one fifth to care for a grandchild. (Some indicated more than one type of caring responsibility.)

#### % requesting changed work pattern requested for caring for...

own child (or foster child) under age 18	35.0%
grandchild under age 18	20.7%
another child under age 18	0.2%
an adult (anyone over age 18)	52.5%

Fewer than half (46%) of all those who had asked for a new working pattern had been able to do so fully to their satisfaction, although another 26% had done so partially. This left 27% who could not change their working pattern to their satisfaction at all.

A breakdown of who was able to change their work pattern by whom it was to care for suggests that those caring for grandchildren were less able to get a satisfactory change than those caring for their own children. But those caring for adults had the least success of all.

#### % of those asking for changed work pattern

Was it changed to your satisfaction?	Total	own (or foster) child under age 18	grandchild under age 18	an adult
yes, fully	52.3%	62.0%	49.6%	47.4%
yes, partially	27.6%	25.0%	31.7%	28.2%
No	19.4%	13.0%	17.9%	23.4%

Base: 594

Figures add up to more than 100% as some respondents had multiple caring roles

All women in the survey were asked if they had ever felt they would have to leave their current job because of the need to look after a child or adult. Almost one in five of all survey respondents (18.3%) said they had.

Of this group only 11.3% were able to change their working arrangements, while more than half just squeezed the caring issue around their work. But one in 10 of them still feel they will have to leave their job.

### Emergency time off

Respondents were asked if it was easy in their workplace to get short-term time off to care for young children in an emergency. Almost half of respondents (49.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to get such time off, and only 13.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed. (The rest were neutral or not sure.)

*“When my father was dying, my line manager at that time was neither supportive, sympathetic nor happy for me to work from my parents’ home. Emergency time off, whether it is to care for a child or adult, should not be discretionary.”*

There was slightly less agreement that it was easy to get time off to care for an adult in an emergency, with 43.4% agreeing/strongly agreeing and 18.6% disagreeing/strongly disagreeing.

## Flexible working

But respondents were much less convinced that it was easy in their workplace to get agreement for flexible working to care for children or adults.

While more respondents agreed it was easy to get flexible working if you care for young children than disagreed, this positive view was not overwhelming: 30.1% agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy compared with 23.4% who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

And views were much more negative when asked in relation to caring for adults. Only 18.3% agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to get flexible working if you care for an adult, and almost half (46.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

This suggests that the need for workers to accommodate the needs of young children, while not overwhelmingly taken on board by employers, is more accepted at present than the need to accommodate caring responsibilities for adults.

## "Adjustment leave"

There is growing call for government and employers to introduce a scheme of "adjustment leave" – effectively a longer period of compassionate leave, possibly of six weeks to three months - to allow time to make arrangements for, for example, a sudden and life changing incident in a family member's health.

There were also big differences in views on how easy it was to get emergency time off and flexible working among staff in different grades/jobs, and between those working in different sectors, suggesting these arrangements are much less accessible to some than others.

# Career development

## Promotion

Only a quarter of respondents (25.6%) had seen a move up the career ladder in the last five years, while just under a quarter had never had a promotion or moved into a job on a higher grade.

Asian and Asian British women as a group were less likely than those with other ethnic backgrounds to have been promoted or moved into a higher-grade job in the last five years.

Overall there appears to be a mis-match between 50+ women's career aspirations and their opportunities to move to a higher-level job.

*"I am 52 – with very few prospects for promotion. I don't want to be stuck in this job when I'm 67."*

Overall just over a third (36%) of respondents are still interested in promotion or getting a higher-grade job at this point in their life.

However, hardly any of the respondents thought they currently have good promotion opportunities – just 5.5% did so compared with a massive 68.6% who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

This leaves a large (30.8 percentage point) gap between the proportion who are interested in promotion and the proportion who think there are good promotion opportunities.

This gap is even greater when looking at the youngest age group covered in the survey – the 50-54s. While 44.2% of this group are interested in getting a higher-graded job, only 6.2% of them agree or strongly agree

that they have good promotion opportunities (a gap of 38.0 percentage points).

The respondents from each of the non-white ethnic groups are more interested in promotion than the white respondents, though this may be partly a function of age as they are also more likely to be in the 50-54 age group. The white respondents are more likely to be negative about their promotion prospects.

In terms of type of job/grade, those with higher than average interest in promotion are senior managers, associated professional/technical staff and, to a lesser extent, elementary workers. While no group sees their promotion prospects as good, the senior managers are most likely to think they are. Elementary workers are the least likely group to agree or strongly agree that they have good promotion opportunities, despite being more likely on average to want them.

### I have good opportunities for promotion (by grade)

	Agree/ Strongly agree	Disagree/ Strongly disagree
Senior management	13.0%	57.4%
Professional	7.6%	65.3%
Associate professional or technical	5.0%	73.2%
Administrative/secretarial	3.5%	73.6%
Skilled trade	5.6%	57.7%
Caring, leisure or other services	4.7%	66.8%
Customer service	8.1%	64.5%
Elementary	3.2%	67.0%
All	5.5%	78.6%

Percentages total less than 100% as "neutral/not sure" answers are omitted from table

### Promotion – interest in and opportunities for (all respondents)

	Agree/strongly agree	Neutral/not sure	Disagree/strongly disagree
I am interested in getting a higher-grade job	36.3%	26.0%	35.9%
I currently have good promotion opportunities	5.5%	18.7%	68.6%

In terms of industrial sectors, the worst ones in terms of perceived promotion opportunities, as compared with desire for promotion, are environment and further education.

## Training

Whether or not they are actually seeking a higher grade job, most of the women in the survey are still interested in developing in their career.

Seventy per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are interested in getting training at this point in their life. Among 50-54s, the figure was 76.6%.

Respondents' experience of training was rather better than experience of promotion, with 57.4% of respondents having attended training lasting more than half a day in the past year. Almost nine in 10 had received such training in the last five years.

However, there were big differences in training experience between women in different job grades: while almost *all* senior managers had received training of more than half a day in the last five years, for example, this only applied to just over half of those in elementary jobs.

This divide between the grades is also shown by the extent to which respondents agree or strongly agree that they currently have good training opportunities: while 61.4% of senior managers do so, this applies to just 34.3% of those in customer service jobs and 27.7% in elementary work. Overall under half (47.1%) feel they currently have good training opportunities.

### % having received training\* and saying they have good training opportunities

	Received in last 5 years	Good Opportunities**
Senior management	97.8%	61.4%
Professional	95.5%	57.8%
Associate professional or technical	91.9%	49.4%
Administrative/secretarial	81.5%	39.1%
Skilled trade	85.9%	40.8%
Caring, leisure or other services	90.6%	48.8%
Customer service	86.3%	34.3%
Elementary	53.2%	27.7%
All	88.2%	47.1%

\*lasting more than half a day. \*\*Agree or strongly agree

## Perceptions of employer attitudes

Despite the apparent lack of opportunities for promotion and training, only a minority of respondents overall thought their employers had negative attitudes towards them because of their age.

Just over half (51.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that their employer valued their experience in the job. This does not vary much by age group, but it does by grade: the proportion ranges from 70.0% of senior managers to 42.5% of elementary workers and 41.6% of those in customer services.

### % in each grade saying\* their employer values their experience

All	51.8%
Senior management	70.0%
Professional	55.9%
Associate professional or technical	57.2%
Administrative/secretarial	47.4%
Skilled trade	50.7%
Caring, leisure or other services	50.8%
Customer service	41.6%
Elementary	42.5%

\*agreeing or strongly agreeing

The proportion agreeing or strongly agreeing that their employer values their experience is considerably lower than average among respondents in certain sectors – including the health sector (46.5%) and in police, probation and justice (39.6%).



Overall, only one fifth of respondents (20.8%) feel their employer sees them as too old for promotion, as against 37.1% who do not. (However, there was a high proportion of "neutral/not sure" responses to this question.)

The proportion agreeing or strongly agreeing that their employer sees them as too old for promotion does rise with increasing age group, from just 15.3% among those aged 50-54 to 38.5% of those aged 65 and over.

Overall fewer than one in 10 respondents (9.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that their employer thinks they are too old for training, as opposed to 61.8% who did not. Again these proportions rise with increasing age group.

# Conclusions and policy considerations

The Overview produced for UNISON last year on older women in the workplace strongly indicated that the issues facing working (or would-be working) women age 50+ would be complex, and there would not be a single solution to their difficulties in securing satisfactory work that balances well with other aspects of their lives, while allowing for sufficient income.

This has been absolutely borne out by this survey of over 5,500 members of UNISON who fit that profile. Some have caring responsibilities; some want to accommodate interests outside work. Some seek career advancement; others are ready to wind down to retirement. And some want to reduce their paid working hours while others very much want to increase them.

Those seeking policy solutions to the barriers facing older women seeking to get the best out of their remaining five, 10 or 25 years of work will have to be flexible and avoid too many assumptions about what this cohort of women want.

This section of the report sets out brief conclusions from the survey and also some possible policy “considerations” for the union to develop further, either by lobbying politicians or pursuing through union policy and collective bargaining. Others reading the results of the survey may have further policy ideas.

## Working hours and working patterns

### Some women would like to cut their working hours

It is clear that a substantial proportion of women aged 50+ would like to spend fewer hours at work. Two in five full time workers in the survey (and also some part timers) would cut their paid hours if they could choose to in their job. This does not

even include those who would like to but could not afford to.

There are a range of reasons given for wanting fewer hours, each of which might be accommodated in different ways.

### Approaching retirement

The most common reason women gave for working part time or wanting to cut their hours was because they are “moving towards retirement”. A number of employers (see “Overview”) have introduced flexible retirement policies allowing workers to gradually cut hours, or adjust their roles, as they approach retirement.

In addition some pension schemes allow members to take part of their pensions while continuing to work.

### Policy considerations:

- *Look to extend the availability of phased/flexible retirement options to more employers*
- *Consider mechanisms to widen access to partial pension take-up by older staff working reduced hours*

### Health

While health issues were not examined in detail in this survey, substantial proportions of women said they currently work part time or would like to cut their hours for health reasons. And just under a quarter had actually asked employers for a new work pattern for health reasons. Women in skilled trades and elementary jobs were particularly likely to cite health reasons for wanting part-time work.

*“I don’t think I will be able to work until I am 66 as my job is very physical.”*

Some employers provide opportunities for staff to change job roles if the current one becomes too physically or otherwise demanding.

In addition, some unions are pressing employers to take a progressive approach on an issue affecting many older women – uncomfortable symptoms associated with the menopause.

### **Policy considerations:**

- *Consider how to develop the idea/practice of allowing older female (and male) workers to change job roles for health/physical reasons*
- *Consider how to widen good management practices on supporting women workers facing difficulties going through the menopause*
- *Consider how to widen access to shorter hours or flexible working patterns for older female (and male) workers for health/physical reasons (see “flexible working” below)*

## **Caring for dependents and looking after the household**

Substantial proportions of women said they work part time – or would like to cut their hours – to care for adults and/or children and/or for “looking after the household”.

The survey confirms that UNISON women aged 50+ have a complex variety of caring responsibilities, which require a more sophisticated response to family-friendly policies than the model of mothers of young children. Indeed only 1% of women in the survey have their own young children (under the age of 11) to look after, though almost twice as many have young grandchildren living with them.

Many, of course, have older children (11-18) living with them, who might not need “childcare”, but who will still present demands on parents’ time. (This may contribute to the fact that a considerable number of part-time workers in the survey cite “looking after the household” as a reason for working part time.)

Meanwhile much larger numbers of women aged 50+ have caring responsibilities for dependent *adults*. More than one in 10 has an adult dependent actually living with them, and on top of this almost a quarter of all the women in the survey have primary care for an adult dependent living elsewhere. Altogether one in three has primary care responsibility for a dependent adult.

There has been much talk of women in this age group being of the “sandwich generation” – those caring for both their children and their parents. In this survey only a small proportion (313, or 5.6%) of the respondents fitted something like this description: those who have either children or grandchildren living with them AND have primary care responsibility for an adult, whether or not they are living with them.

However, the women in this survey were all in work at the time of the survey, and the point has been made (see Overview) that many sandwich generation women are forced to drop out of the labour market as they are unable to balance work with their other responsibilities.

As well as being prime carers, many women in this age group help take care of grandchildren to allow the children’s parents to go to work. One in six of all respondents (17.1%) provided such care.

One obvious solution to the needs of women with such caring roles is the widespread acceptance of a range of flexible working options. This has already been acknowledged by government to a certain extent with the imminent extension of the statutory right to request flexible working to all workers. However, the survey provides clear evidence – if any were still needed – that flexible working arrangements are not always available in practice.

Of the women in the survey who had asked at some point for a new working pattern, fewer than half had been able to do so fully to their satisfaction, although another quarter had done so “partially”. This left more than a quarter who could not change

their working pattern to their satisfaction at all.

Those caring for grandchildren were less able to get a satisfactory change than those caring for their own children. And those caring for adults had the least success of all.

This apparent difference in success for adult and child care was also evident when women were asked if it was easy to get flexible working in their workplace for caring reasons. Only a minority agreed that it was easy in both circumstances, it was clearly seen as much more difficult for caring for adults.

There were also big differences in views on how easy it was to get emergency time off and flexible working among staff in different grades/jobs, and between those working in different sectors, suggesting that these arrangements are much less accessible to some than others.

#### **Policy considerations:**

- *Continue to push for the strongest possible statutory right of access to flexible working for all workers*
- *Ensure employers are aware that requests for flexible working/time off to deal with emergencies are as important to care for adults as for children;*
- *Ensure employers are aware that older workers may need these provisions to care for grandchildren who live with them*
- *Consider mechanisms to ensure that flexible working and emergency time off is understood and accessible in all sectors organised by UNISON and for workers in all grades/job types*
- *Encourage government and employers to introduce a scheme of "adjustment leave" – effectively a longer period of compassionate leave, possibly of six weeks to three months - to allow time to make arrangements for, for example, a sudden and life changing incident in a family member's health.*

#### **Many part timers would like to increase their paid hours**

Although many women have chosen to work part time, or at least are content to, a significant proportion feel stuck in part-time work.

Well over a quarter say that is all that is available in the job that they do. And this reason is most often singled out as the *main* reason for working part time.

Indeed one third of part timers say if they had the choice in their current job they would be very or quite likely to increase their paid hours. For workers in the lowest grade ("elementary") occupations, the figure wanting to increase their paid hours is almost half.

An indication of the need or desire for some to work more hours than they have in their main job is provided by the fact that one in 12 respondents had other paid jobs beside their main one.

#### **Policy considerations:**

- *What mechanisms might there be to give part timers more opportunities to increase their paid hours?*
- *What mechanisms might there be to ensure part timers aged 50+ are given opportunities to train for and have access to higher grade jobs? (See also "career progression" below.)*
- *Consider whether the tax and benefits system is distorting hours offered and worked*

## Career progression

### Promotion

A very important finding from the survey is that, although a chunk of women are winding down towards retirement, an equal number are still ambitious. More than one third of all women aged 50+ want to move to a higher-graded job, rising to almost half of those aged 50-54.

This ambition applies across the grade range – from senior managers to those in elementary jobs. It is particularly strong among women from ethnic minorities (partly because they are more likely to be in the younger age groups).

However, there is a big problem here as UNISON women aged 50+ are facing a distinct lack of opportunity for career progression.

Only tiny numbers (5.5% overall) feel they have good promotion opportunities at this stage of their life. While those in the lowest grade (elementary) jobs feel this the worst, the pessimism goes right across the spectrum.

### Training

Whether or not they are actually seeking a higher-grade job, most of the women in the survey are interested in developing in their career, with seven in 10 still interested in getting training.

However, fewer than half of all the respondents feel they currently have good training opportunities. This view is much more marked among women in certain types of job/grade, with those in elementary and customer service jobs being the least happy with their training opportunities.

It is not clear from the survey why there was such pessimism over promotion and training prospects: when asked if their employer thought them too old for promotion or training, most respondents did not have a strong impression that they did.

What is clear, however, is that there is a huge mismatch between aspiration and opportunity among the women of this age.

### *Policy considerations:*

- *Ensure that the training agenda within the union and in employers recognises the aspirations of women aged 50+*
- *Work to ensure that employers' grading structures and recruitment and promotion mechanisms recognise the aspirations and experience of women aged 50+*
- *Consider pressing for equal opportunities policies and managers' equality training to specifically address older women workers' aspirations*
- *Campaign for implementation of the Equality Act 2010 provision on dual discrimination which would provide protection for older women*

# Appendix: Bias in survey response towards higher paid members

Prior to the survey being carried out, the researchers conducted a pilot survey of 100 members selected according to the same criteria as the main survey.

This suggested that there may be certain biases in the response to the survey. In particular there was a lack of response from women in lower-grade jobs, and there were no responses from women on temporary or zero-hours contracts.

This is difficult to avoid in an internet-based survey which depends on a respondent receiving an email and being in a position to complete a questionnaire online on a computer.

In the main survey, the researchers took the precaution of conducting an approximate check on this by referencing the UNISON subscriptions band paid of those invited to participate in the survey and those responding.

UNISON subscriptions are based on salaries of members, but there are a number of caveats to using this as a measure of the grade of job they are in. One is that the salary is generally as declared by the employer at a certain point in time (for check-off purposes) and may not be up to date, and the other is that a member may be on a low salary because

she is part time, so it does not necessarily reflect what grade of job she is in.

Nevertheless the subs do give an approximate guide to the bias in the response to the survey. The table shows that, roughly speaking, members in the higher subs bands had higher response rates than those in the lower bands. At its most extreme, it shows that just 18.7% of those earning between £2,001 and £5,000 responded, compared to 34.7% of those earning more than £35,000.

This suggests there is something of a bias among respondents towards those in the higher salary bands (over £14,000-£17,000) compared with their proportion among working women members aged 50 and over in UNISON membership as a whole.

Band	Response rates	Salary band
A	20.7%	Up to £2,000
B	18.7%	£2,001-£5,000
C	25.8%	£5,001-£8,000
D	23.2%	£8,001-£11,000
E	23.6%	£11,001-£14,000
F	25.8%	£14,001-£17,000
G	28.6%	£17,001-£20,000
H	32.3%	£20,001-£25,000
I	33.5%	£25,001-£30,000
J	34.7%	£30,001-£35,000
K	34.7%	over £35,000

*"I feel like a squeezed lemon at the end of every day. I am at my most productive and most experienced stage of my life and I want to be valued more. I am asked to accommodate more and more work, yet my pay has stayed the same for the last six to seven years."*

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