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Older workers want to keep jobs beyond retirement age

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The equalities watchdog has called for an end to forced retirement at 65 as new research reveals that as many as 64% of people plan to work beyond the age of state retirement.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission says that preventing employers from retiring people at the

age of 65 would open up more work opportunities for older Britons and address the challenges of an ageing workforce. It also calls for the right to request flexible working hours to be offered to everyone, not just **parents with children under the age of six**.

A survey carried out by the Commission found that 24% of men and 64% of women plan to keep working beyond the state pension age – currently 65 for men and 60 for women. Most older Britons do not want to slow down, many want job promotions and others wish to work well beyond the state pension age.

However, its research also found that employers are offering lower level, part-time work to people over 50-year-olds, despite the fact that twice as many older workers want a job promotion compared to those that want to down-shift.

"This is about developing a way of working that is based on the demographics of today's populations and moving away from systems established when people died not long after reaching state pension age and women were supported by their husbands," say Baroness Margaret Prosser, deputy chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

She adds: "Keeping older Britons healthy and in the workforce also benefits the economy more broadly by decreasing welfare costs and increasing the spending power of older Britons."

The proposals follow claims made by the minister for women and equality, Harriet Harman, that forced retirement at 65 costs the UK economy £31 billion a year.

The government is currently reviewing the default age in 2010 to see if it is still needed. It is due to conclude this consultation next week.

However, there are concerns that scrapping the default retirement age could put pressure on people to work until they drop.

"By removing the right to a decent period of retirement for ordinary working people, we are accepting the myth that increased longevity necessarily enables people to work longer, whether they want to or not, and that an individual's only worth is measured through their ability to be economically productive," says Dot Gibson, general secretary of the National Pensioners Convention.

While it is often argued that scrapping the default retirement age would help reflect increased longevity, Gibson says the consequences have not been thought through.

For example, allowing people to remain in the jobs for longer could penalise younger people looking to move up the career ladder. There could also be a negative impact on wider society if pensioner volunteers undertaking unpaid caring and charitable work were otherwise in paid employment.

"We should ask whether the demand for this change is coming from workers on the minimum wage who really have no choice but to keep working or well paid professionals that would be the real beneficiaries of this suggestion?" Gibson adds.

"Real choice and equality in retirement can only come about when individuals have sufficient income that they can decide – without pressure – whether or not they wish to continue working."

Some suggest that raising the state retirement age could be the answer.

Edward Wanabwa, partner and employment specialist at law firm CM Murray, explains: "For reasons including the current economic climate and possible impact on younger workers, it remains far more likely that the default retirement age will be increased – to perhaps 68 – rather than scrapped altogether."

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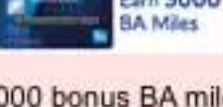
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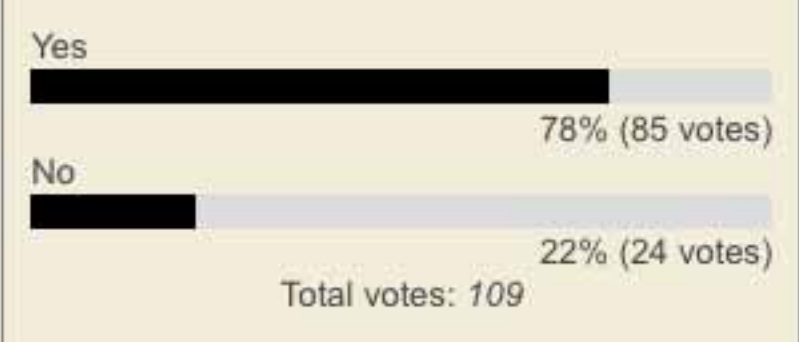
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