

## What's the best age to retire?

It seems that more and more people wish to remain in work beyond the retirement age in the UK. At the moment, employers can legally insist that workers leave at the age of 65 but from Autumn 2011, workers will have the right to stay on if they wish. This is the system in some countries, including the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Others continue to have a compulsory retirement age, which varies from as low as 60 in Japan to as high as 67 in Sweden.

There will of course be some areas where employers can keep the present compulsory retirement age, for example in the police and air traffic controllers. However, for the first time, employees aged 65 and over will have full employment rights.

Many older people and campaigners are happy with the news. Having to stop work because one has reached the age of 65 is a law which is seen by many as 'ageist'. This is partly because nowadays people are living longer and staying healthier longer.

People may want to continue working for several reasons. Every year around 25,000 people in Britain retire against their wishes. Many people have not saved enough money and nowadays around 10% still have a mortgage on retirement. Some find that their pensions are simply not large enough to live on. Many older workers also want to help their children and grandchildren financially. Some simply wish to stay active.

Research suggests that older workers have a lot to offer to the workplace. They are generally reliable and hard-working, and take fewer sick days; they have experience and require little training. Some companies already allow older people to stay on. One major British building society found their customers preferred to discuss finances with older staff and has extended its retirement age to 75.

Not everyone is happy with the government decision. Some worry that it will create legal problems (individuals may wish to continue working, but their employers may think differently). Some people are also afraid that employing older employees will take jobs from younger people, at a time when unemployment is rising. In addition, employers complain that this new decision will make planning of the future workforce difficult, and will be more expensive for businesses too.

The government has made this decision to help the economy and to deal with the problem of an ageing population. At present there are four working adults for every pensioner and this will fall to two working adults for one pensioner by 2040. This clearly has a huge effect on the economy and is typical of many countries worldwide.

**1** Which of these do you think are the most important elements in life? Put them in order of priority (number 1 = most important, etc). Are there any missing?

- having a comfortable home
- being able to buy things which make you happy
- having family and / or friends around you
- having a comfortable retirement
- having a good career
- being healthy
- having a secure job
- feeling fulfilled (through work or a pastime or family)
- having financial security

**2** In pairs, discuss the points above. Try to justify your points, eg *If you don't have a secure job, then it affects your life, your relationships and your whole attitude to life.*

3 Complete the table below in pairs.

| Noun (thing) | Noun (person) | Verb     | Adjective  |
|--------------|---------------|----------|------------|
| pension      |               |          | —          |
|              | retiree (US)  |          |            |
|              |               | employ   |            |
| finance      |               |          |            |
|              |               | campaign | —          |
|              |               |          | economical |

4 Read the first paragraph. Find out what news has made some older people in the UK happy.

5 Now read the whole text and match the questions to paragraphs 2–7.

- Why are some people not so happy with the changes?
- Why might it be important for a country's economy that people work longer?
- Will this change affect every employer and industry?
- What are the benefits of employing older people?
- Why do some older people want to continue working after 65?
- How do many older people feel about the change in law and why?

6 Work in pairs to find the answers below in the text and make questions for each answer. The answers may not use the same words as those in the text.

|                                       |                      |                                   |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 65                                    | around 25,000 a year | they don't have enough money      |
| they are reliable and experienced     |                      | ageist                            |
| it will take jobs from younger people |                      | they liked talking to older staff |
| air traffic controllers and police    |                      | two adults to one pensioner       |

7 Decide whether you agree or disagree with the points below. Then discuss in your group.

- It is a positive thing for a company to have older staff.
- There are many reasons why a company might want to employ younger staff.
- There are some jobs / fields which are better suited to younger workers.
- I will want to work as long as I can.
- I think the retirement age for men and women should be the same.
- In an ideal world, the perfect age for people to retire would be ...

## Glossary

**active** (*adj*) - always doing things, often with energy and enthusiasm: *an active 87-year-old*

**ageist** (*adj*) - treating older people in an unfair way

**air traffic controller** (*n*) - someone whose job is to manage the movement of planes at an airport by giving instructions to pilots by radio

**building society** (*n*) - a financial organisation similar to a bank, which gives mortgages

**compulsory** (*adj*) - something that is compulsory must be done because of a rule or law

**insist** (*v*) - to say very firmly that something must happen or must be done: *I insist you see a doctor immediately*

**legal** (*adj*) - relating to the law or lawyers: *there is a legal problem*; allowed by the law: *it's legal to import these goods into the country*

**mortgage** (*n*) - money that you borrow from a bank to buy a house

**right** (*n*) - something you are morally or legally allowed to have: *a right to complain*

**tax** (*n*) - money that you pay the government, used to pay for public services

**workforce** (*n*) - the total number of people who work in a particular company or industry