



Age Summit at St. George's House, Windsor Castle, 4th – 5th December 2007

Background Paper for an Ideas-Building Event

I'm delighted to welcome you to this confidential event that is being sponsored by Prime Advantage, an Equal Project which is funded through Medway Council and the European Social Fund.

As you'll know from your invitation, our focus for this session will be to explore what needs to be done to ensure that **mainstream** advice, guidance, skills development and employment services meet the needs of people aged 45 years or over.

Our discussion will be informed by approaches that have proven successful, many of which have been resourced through discretionary funding, such as European Social Funding. The challenge we want to tackle is how we can draw on the experience of such projects and introduce them to mainstream services without increasing the cost of such services.

The outcomes we aim to achieve

By the end of this session, we want to have:

- Identified how we can increase the inclusivity of mainstream services for employment and skills development so that they attract and meet the needs of older workers.
- Confirmed immediate priorities to take forward our ideas, and
- Shaped a plan that will bring our propositions to the notice of Government and key regional policy makers and make them happen.

Looking at issues from different viewpoints

At the event, we want to tackle these issues by drawing on our collective expertise and experience and, most importantly, by being willing to consider propositions from different viewpoints.

I'm sure you're all familiar with events where participants act as strong persuasive advocates for a particular group, organisation or sector. That's not what Open Agenda events are about. We actively encourage participants to view issues from different angles. At this event, the viewpoints we will **all** need to consider will be those of the Government and employers, as well as that of older people, if we're going to work up some robust propositions that are likely to attract their buy in and support.

Advocates only represent one viewpoint. Their aim is to persuade others round to their way of thinking by the power of their arguments. While this is a valued role, it is not helpful for ideas-building. It can often result in people becoming locked in battles of views, where no one is prepared to shift in their thinking, or give up an inch of ground!

This is why we hope everyone joining the event will be as open minded as possible, and accept that we are engaging in areas of debate in which **no one is certain of all the answers or the best way ahead**. This can sound risky to some – and feel even riskier as we go through the process – but the great pay-off is that it really does give us the opportunity to break new ground in our thinking.

St. George's House

For those who haven't been in on an Open Agenda event before, the reason that we are holding this event at St. George's House is that the aim of the House is to create an atmosphere of trust in which well-informed people can bring fresh thinking to key issues that will have impact on our future. It is **NOT** the sort of place where delegates with badges listen to speeches. It **IS** a place where free spirits can try out new ideas without fearing the consequences.

If you are coming to an event at St. George's for the first time, we'd like to forewarn you that when you arrive, you will find that you are not offered a key to your room. This is quite intentional, and is because the Dean, Canons and Warden welcome you to the House, as their home. We hope that you'll feel that you can enter into the spirit of the place as a safe and welcoming environment, and that the experience will be both creative and enjoyable.

Agenda and Contact Numbers

Our agenda for the 2 days is outlined below and overleaf. If anyone needs to contact you urgently whilst you're attending the event, the 'phone number for St. George's House is **01753 848848** and the fax number is **01753 848849**.

Tuesday 4 th Dec	from 11.30 am	Arrival at St. George's House
	12.15 pm	Light buffet lunch in St. George's House
	1.30 pm prompt	<p>Opening Session in the Vicars' Hall</p> <p>Agree goals and ground rules.</p> <p>Begin by affirming why it is important to employers and society as a whole to ensure that older people are able to change employment and continue working for as long as they wish or need to.</p> <p>We then want to ask ourselves: <i>Taking into account the Government's investment programmes for skills and employment services over the next 3 years, will everything now be in place to help older workers who wish to upskill, reskill and/or change or find employment?</i></p> <p><i>Is the big challenge now ensuring that older workers know of the support in place? Or are there types of interventions and support still missing that are of key importance to older workers to maximise the contribution they can make to the economy?</i></p>
	3.00 pm	Short break

	3.10 pm	<p>Second Session Consider in greater depth the specific challenges we need to tackle.</p> <p>At this stage, we will want to distinguish between barriers and difficulties that are outside of our direct control, and those we can change.</p>
	4.55 pm	Tea
	5.05 pm	Sung Evensong in the Chapel for those who wish to attend
	6.05 pm prompt	<p>Evening Session During this session we want to work up in detail proposals for meeting the challenges we have identified. In particular, we want to flesh out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What are the key actions that need to be taken 'behind the scenes' by relevant Government providers, agencies and providers, as well as by 'front line' staff. → How these actions will impact on and change the way in which mainstream services are delivered. → How we could measure the impact of services in helping older workers to identify work options, develop their skills, and find employment.
	7.40 pm	Break for pre-dinner drinks in the sitting room
	8.05 pm	Dinner – we encourage people to dress as informally as they wish for dinner
	9.45 pm	Private Tour of St. George's Chapel, led by Patsy Knight, a Fellow of St. George's House
Wednesday 5 th Dec	8.00 am	Communion in the Chapel, for any who wish to attend
	8.28 am!	Breakfast in the Dining Room – timed just before 8.30am to coincide with the end of Communion
	9.15 am prompt	<p>Morning Session in the Vicars' Hall, with short breaks during the morning</p> <p>During the morning session we want to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → test out our propositions – are they robust enough to take forward and make happen? Are there any areas that need further thinking through? → agree our plan to bring our propositions to the notice of Government and key regional policy makers and make them happen.
	12.30 pm	Lunch

Our approach to this event

Important key notes of our approach to these events are informality and confidentiality. So we dispense with the usual 'round robin' of introductions and format of opening presentations.

Instead of going through the creeping death of introductions, we will just put first names on badges to make it easier to see each other's names. When you arrive, you will find your name badge on a table in the Patricia Hotung Room, on the ground floor of St. George's House. Alongside the first name badges you will also have a first name participant and contact list.

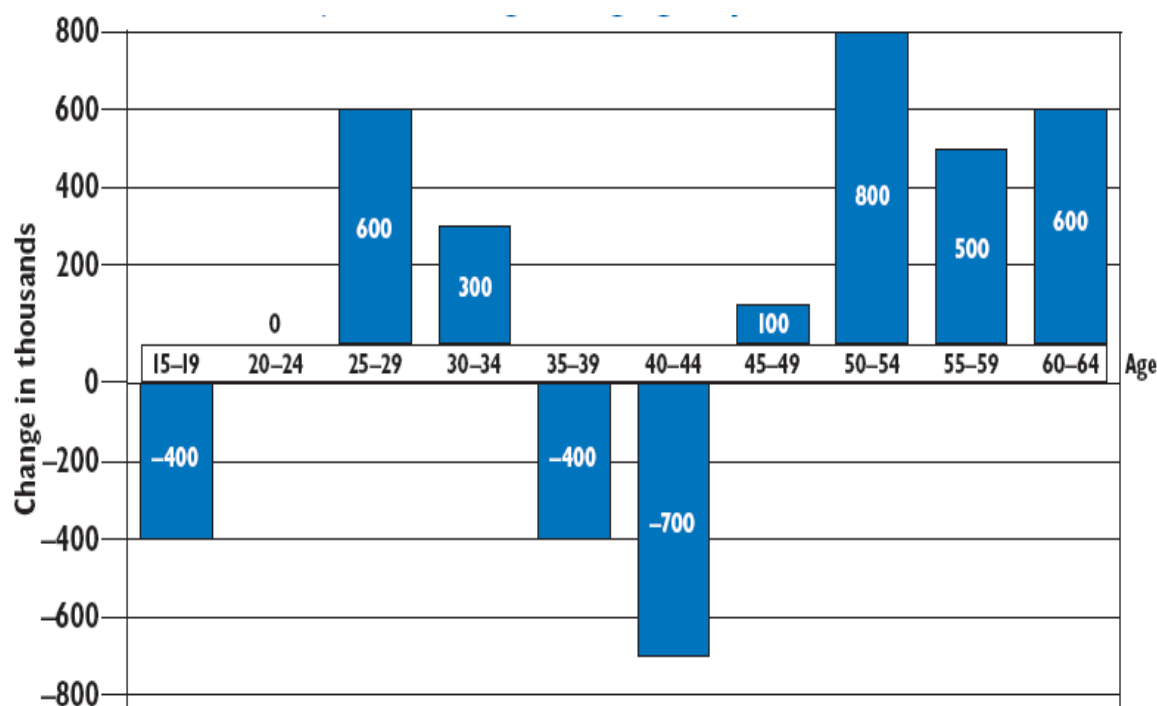
We will **not** be including any opening presentations. However good, opening speeches encourage the 'us and them' habit, with one or two people being expected to produce all the answers, and the rest of us lobbing in questions and indulging in the sport of picking holes in their arguments! We want to begin this event as we mean to continue – with a fast flowing informal discussion, in which we **all** feel that we have a responsibility to put forward ideas and, in doing so, **take risks** in breaking new ground.

So, following a brief welcome and confirmation of the ground rules for the event and how we will manage our time over the next 24 hours, we want to move straight into discussions by asking ourselves:

Why is it important to employers and society as a whole to ensure that older people are able to change employment and continue working for as long as they wish or need to?

Our starting point may be to highlight the demographic changes predicted over the next 12 years as illustrated by the chart below.

The missing middle of the workforce: change in age groups 2004-2020



Government Actuary's Department

However, we want to reveal whether there are other persuasive arguments that our economy will significantly benefit

by ensuring that employment and skills services are in place to meet the needs of people over 45 years old.

It is unlikely that our arguments will reflect the contributions that **everyone** over 45 years can make! At this stage, and throughout our discussions we will need to agree the key subgroups within this age cohort that we feel should be recognised as needing different and specific types of services and support.

Once we're clear and confident about the case for ensuring services attract and meet the needs of older workers because of the contribution that they can make, we want to consider whether the significant investment and changes underway and planned by Government are sufficient to do so.

As an aide memoire, some of the key relevant developments and changes include:

- Developing a joined up, one stop advancement service for adults to support people to identify training, develop skills, access child care support and find long term employment. This service will include entitlement to an initial Skills Health Check.
- The move towards putting in place integrated approaches to employment and training which will be taken forward by the new Commission for Employment & Skills nationally and through Skills & Employment Boards regionally and sub-regionally.
- A right to basic skills training where needed, coupled with the biggest ever investment in this area. DIUS will spend around £1.5 billion per year on first steps training - including over 3.6 million learners on 'Skills for Life' courses over the next 3 year spending review period.
- A right to free, first-time full level 2 adult training (equivalent to 5 A-C GCSEs) through the provision of over 800,000 places in 2010/11 - a 30 per cent increase on 2007/08.
- The provision of over 500,000 full level 3 adult training places (equivalent to 2 A-levels) in 2010/11 an increase of 148 per cent on 2007/08.
- A doubling of Government investment in work based skills training to boost the skills and expertise of the workforce. The budget for the 'Train to Gain' programme will rise from £440m to over £1billion in 2010-11 supporting an expected 872,000 learners that year.
- Providing learners with 'Skills Accounts' to help fund skills training which will help drive the system to meet individual needs. By 2010/11 helping them access around £500 million of adult learning, increasing to nearly £1.5 billion by 2015.
- The introduction of Pathways to Work and the new medical test regime for Incapacity Benefit

This is not a comprehensive list of all the developments and changes planned and happening, but it does give us a starting point for discussions. What we want to explore is whether this is **enough** to help older workers who wish to upskill, reskill and/or change or find employment, and the big challenge now is ensuring that older workers know of the support in place?

Or are there types of interventions and support still missing that are of key importance to older workers to maximise the contribution they can make to the economy? Or perhaps the issue is that the headline plans **could** be enough to provide the support different groups of older workers need, but it is how they are put into practice that will determine

whether they're successful or not.

After Evensong we will work up in detail proposals for meeting the challenges we have identified. In particular, we want to flesh out

- What are the **key actions** that need to be taken 'behind the scenes' by relevant Government providers, agencies and providers, as well as by 'front line' staff.
- How these actions will **impact on and change** the way in which mainstream services are delivered.
- How we could **measure the impact** of services in helping older workers to identify work options, develop their skills, and find employment.

On Wednesday morning, we will put our propositions through a rigorous reality check – so that we feel confident that our ideas are not simply aspirational but can be put into practice. Before ending the session we want to share ideas about the practical steps we can take to influence those designing and delivering services so that they are used and valued by older people.

We determine the agenda

One of the key principles of Open Agenda events is that we determine the agenda as we go, in order to get the most from our time together. This means that, at any stage of our discussions, we can change the structure of a session, if we feel that it will help us achieve stronger outputs from the event – with one important proviso.

We find that groups go away far more satisfied with what we have accomplished by the end of an event, if we start off with a commitment to achieving **as much clarity as possible** in our discussions, and really push ourselves in **breaking new ground** and **moving ideas forward**.

Working in idea-generating groups

As an important part of the ideas-building process, we will break into '**idea-generating**' groups during the event to tackle key questions raised through our discussions.

The purpose of these groups is to focus on sharpening up the issues and developing ideas that we want to pick up and run with. Please use your time in groups to sound out your ideas and do **not** be tempted into trying to develop a group view.

We use these groups because it gives everyone an opportunity to think through different points of view and have their say, when this would be impossible as one large group because of time constraints. As a result, a number of different – even opposing – ideas can emerge from small group discussions.

This is what we're after: ideas and not a group view. For those who haven't been in on a Windsor event before, it's worth saying that it really helps us to leave the groups behind, if you make a point of **not sitting with members of your group** afterwards, and agree to outlaw the phrases "we think" or "my group thought that".

"We think" makes it difficult for group members to change their minds without feeling disloyal to their group. Also, "we think" has more authority than "I think" and, completely unintentionally, can make it less easy for others to

challenge or discard ideas.

We will also break into groups for longer periods of time to '**build ideas**'. In this instance, it is more likely (but not certain!) that there will be agreement amongst members of the group. What we ask is that when you come to share your thinking with the rest of us, you **just give us the idea**. Please don't feel you need to share the journey your group has travelled in developing this idea! If we are not clear about its rationale, we can always ask questions.

Listening, going with the flow and sharing debate

We need to manage our time together carefully as one large group, if we're going to develop the momentum we need to move our discussions forward.

Developing ideas needs careful listening. Let's try and stick to the rule that when someone comes in on the discussion, they **follow on** from what the person before them has said, before moving on and starting a fresh train of thought. Please also resist the temptation of making more than one point. As soon as someone says "*I'd just like to make two or three points at this stage in our discussions*" the ideas stop flowing, as we are drawn to recap on what's gone before.

Of course, when we're together as one large group we want **as many people as possible to participate**: brainstorming is not a spectator event. So we'll try and ensure that the more confident, natural talkers amongst us don't squeeze others out.

Meeting everyone's expectations

We are bound to arrive at Windsor with very different views about priorities and needs of older workers and how they might best be met through mainstream services. This is why we should give ourselves some time early on to work through **as a group** the issues we feel are most important for us to explore during our time together.

Developing ideas is always a messy process, especially during the opening stages. It can be frustrating for those who like to focus quickly on what they feel is **the** key issue that needs to be tackled, and want to get on with sorting it out. The difficulty with this approach is that one person's key issue is another's back burner!

So, we would like to ask that we all try to be as relaxed as possible in the opening session, and let as many people as possible have their say, so that we can build up a head of steam **as a group** in identifying the issues we want to explore in greater depth.

Overleaf are the Conventions of St. George's House for consultations and ideas building events held here at Windsor Castle. At the beginning of the event, we will ask you if you are happy to adopt them as ground rules for our discussions.

We very much hope that you'll be open to giving them a go, as experience has shown that their application can make an enormous difference to both the quality of debate and the ideas that emerge.

Krysia Hudek, Open Agenda

26th November 2007

St. George's House Conventions

1. *Please be open to changing your mind*

We hope that during your time at the House you will see yourself as a “free spirit”, open to the possibility that the opinions you hold most dearly, on the topic under discussion, might actually be wrong. Once we each take that step, we find that it is much easier to persuade others to question their own assumptions, as well.

2. *Please do not attribute remarks to individuals after the event*

At all House events, we ask groups to agree at the outset that comments made in plenary or small group sessions will not be attributed to individuals afterwards. We have a firm convention that people should not be quoted without their permission, and commend this to you most strongly.

3. *Please take risks with ideas*

The most successful Consultations at the House have been those where individuals feel sufficiently relaxed, and supported by others, to be able to take risks with ideas. This requires a high degree of trust among a group, and we hope that from the outset you will seek to build that trust.

4. *Please try and avoid any false consensus*

We hope that if you find a consensus emerging in your discussions, you will check to ensure that it is soundly based. It can sometimes be very difficult for individuals to resist the pressure to agree with their peers, and we hope that healthy debate will not be stifled by a false consensus.

5. *Please use “plain English”*

At just about every event, one of the biggest struggles is with the weight of technical language that some speakers tend to use, and others leave unchallenged for fear of displaying ignorance. We ask **everyone** joining a Consultation at the House to avoid using acronyms, and to be ready to intervene in debate to ask colleagues to use “plain English”.

Andrew Carter

Warden of St. George's House