

Elderly Britons forced to quit work because of ‘inflexible’ businesses, government’s new older workers tsar warns



Andy Briggs, CEO of Aviva UK and Ireland Life. He has recently been made the Government's Older Worker's Tsar

PHOTO: CHARLIE FORGHAM-BAILEY

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Elderly Britons looking after frail loved-ones are being forced out of work because firms will not let them work part-time, the government’s new older workers champion has warned.

In his first interview since taking job, Andy Briggs tells The Telegraph that the “unconscious bias” of companies means they are not supporting employees with carer responsibilities.

He fears the failures are contributing to the “missing million” of older workers who want to have a job but cannot find one.

In his interview Mr Briggs also calls on elderly people considering retirement to rethink, saying that staying in work could help keep off dementia.

He predicts working into your seventies will become “increasingly” normal as life expectancy begins to reach into the nineties.



PHOTO: DOMINIC LIPINSKI

The economy could get a £25bn boost if more older workers who cannot find a job were hired

And he predicts the economy could be handed a £25bn boost if he succeeds in bringing down the number of older people who seek but cannot find work.

The comments come after Mr Briggs, the chief executive of Aviva UK and Ireland Life, was unveiled at Tory conference this month as the new “Business Champion for Older Workers”.

Damian Green, the Work and Pensions Secretary, said during his speech that Mr Briggs would help convince chief executives to increase recruitment, adding: “As an economy and a society, we need the talents and experiences of older workers.”

Between 2012 and 2022, an estimated 12.5 million jobs will be opened up by people leaving the workforce, yet only 7 million younger people will start working to fill them.

With life expectancy increasing and the number of people aged over 65 set to almost double by 2050, ministers are determined to get more older people working in the coming years.



PHOTO: CHARLIE FORGHAM-BAILEY

Speaking in Aviva’s high-rise offices overlooking the City of London, Mr Briggs explains the problem faced by some older workers in British firms.

“Very often someone in their fifties or sixties has carer responsibilities. As a result they need to be more flexible in their working hours, maybe work from home a bit more, maybe not work full-time,” he says.

“Businesses just haven’t really thought about it or addressed it and therefore haven’t geared themselves up for it so it becomes: ‘Sorry, we don’t do that’.

“And the person says ‘well okay then, I guess I need to go then, because I’ve got to look after my elderly parents. I’ll have to stop working.’ And they want to work. That is very, very common.”

Mr Briggs fears some businesses have an “unconscious bias” against older workers and wants them to be more “flexible”, citing the business benefits that come with it.

He also believes working beyond the retirement age – which is rising to 67 for both men and women by 2028 – will become more common.



There are one million elderly people in Britain who want to work but cannot find a job

PHOTO: JOHN STILLWELL

“I think people will increasingly work to their seventies, definitely,” he says.

“You go back 30 years ago, people would work till 65 and probably have a life expectancy of 10 to 15 years at that point in time maybe,” he says.

“Now people’s life expectancy is 90-odd, 95. Why wouldn’t they work into their seventies? If you retire at 55, you’re probably going to spend more time retired than working.”

He adds that there is “quite strong evidence to link dementia and your intellectual and physical activity”, saying there are “well-being benefits” to continuing to work.

Mr Briggs wants to break the “social norms” that dictate when someone hits 65 they should leave their job – though is careful to stress that he fully supports those who chose to retire.

“If people have been diligent and saved enough that they’re clear they can afford the standard of living they like in retirement and would like to stop working, good luck to them. Go for it and really enjoy your retirement,” he says.

“For those that think that’s the norm and that’s what they ought to do and once you get to 60 or 65 you ought to retire, my really strong message to them is: ‘No, you don’t have to.’ You can work as long as you want to, that’s entirely your choice.”

Mr Briggs also wants companies to keep data on what proportion of their staff are older workers – as they do with other diversity identifiers like gender – and is considering whether that information should be made public.