

This is our tenth Future of Ageing conference, and we want to do the name justice, thinking about how we can place ageing on the agenda today, so that policymakers and businesses properly think about the future.

We are frustrated that things aren't changing fast enough but as Steve Jobs said, "If you look closely, most overnight successes took a long time."

Looking long term is key.

The new Government has come into power with good intentions.

Lots of the ideas we suggested in our route map for long lives are part of their narrative.

- Addressing occupational health and prioritising preventative health
- The plan to invest in infrastructure and housing
- The recognition of the need for action on pension adequacy

On a global scale, we aren't doing badly. We score relatively high on our Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index. Our life span, health span and income has improved. We perform well in terms of our environmental performance.

But it wouldn't be Future of Ageing without me taking some of your time to talk about trends. I've picked four this year.

Firstly, prevention has come of age

We have been talking about prevention for pretty much a decade.

We now have warm words from Ministers across the world. This is the year we need to move from words to action.

People want to look after their own health.

8 in 10 people in the US say they are willing to invest money to increase their long lives.

7 in 10 even say they would even give up fast food.

A couple of years ago big food manufacturers faced panicked board meetings. They found that households using appetite suppressing drugs were spending less on food.

The industry has responded with new lower calorie; high protein products; lower fat and sugar products.

The second trend I want to talk about is work. We have witnessed a dramatic change in work and many of us are only just noticing.

The work from home debate is important but in some ways a noisy distraction.

A generation is entering work where the jobs they will do though their career haven't yet been invented.

The cost-of-living crisis and low real increases in wages has led to a situation where almost half of Gen Z workers in the UK have a side hustle. Doing two or even three jobs is increasingly the norm for younger people. And most of the rest of us haven't noticed.

One in five of us in richer countries now work in the gig economy. We might be giving some flexibility but there is no good system for getting freelance workers into pension savings.

It's not all bad – the creator economy is allowing people a much bigger market. The circular economy is creating new opportunities for good work.

The third trend I want to reflect on is mental health

Mental health has gone from a serious problem to a global crisis.

Around half of people across 31 countries say mental health is biggest health concern

Around one in five UK employees took time off due to stress in 2023. One quarter of remote employees experience daily loneliness.

Social media and the mobile phone are often blamed. One quarter of 5 to 7 year olds own a smartphone. Gen Z individuals pick up their phone 154 times per day.

We realise it's a problem – around half of parents across five countries regret giving smartphones to their children.

Although this is probably lower than the proportion of children who regret giving smartphones to their parents.

I'm generally of the view that the amazing technology offers more good than bad. But three years after Norway's school smartphone ban, visits to mental health professionals decreased by 60% – with girls from lower-income families benefiting the most.

The nature of family is changing – Gen Beta (those born this year) are predicted to be the first generation to have more pets than children.

And they don't even have to be real animals. 4 in 10 millennials say they would consider getting a robot pet. Within five years some research suggests 80% of us will engage with smart robots every day..

There are some glimmers of hope though.

90% of young consumers in the US have discovered a small business simply by wandering their neighbourhoods. Not by social media or Google reviews.

And imperfection is the new trend. Dove ran a campaign in January against New Year's resolutions. And there are a growing number of anti "self help book" since Mark Mason published the subtle art of not giving a fuck almost a decade ago.

The third trend I want to highlight is how Generations are coming together: .

Most older people recognise that life is tough for younger people. In fact 63% of Baby Boomers across the world think growing up now is harder than when they were young.

At the same time, 4-in-5 Gen Z say youth culture is going mainstream. When you hear Women's Hour and the Today programme debate whether we have had a Brat summer you know things are changing.

Advertising has jumped on the intergenerational bandwagon. Middle aged men advertising pretty much every product using Gen Z slang was not a trend I expected.

Five years ago we had a someone from a theme park talking at Future of Ageing about intergenerational days out.

Today, it's no surprise that Airbnb are now explicitly advertising multigenerational holidays and why Premier Inn with rooms for children to stay in, are thriving.

Conclusion

Where does that leave us

The government haven't got off to the strongest start.

Government say they believe in prevention but they didn't reverse the previous government's decision to increase age of eligibility for flu vaccine from 50-65. It's no surprise that this year we have seen huge winter respiratory illness crisis for the health service. Government needs to put its money where its mouth is on prevention

But it's not just prevention where warm words haven't been matched by action.

The Government have delayed their review of pension affordability;

They have again pushed social care policy into the long grass;

They have given no indication they want to talk about the state pension age review;

They made a hash of the decision to remove winter fuel allowance from wealthier older people

And they have got themselves into a corner where increasing tax on employees and employers is their only wiggle room to raise funds.

I wanted to make two final reflections

Firstly, I wanted to talk about Michael Heseltine who has been doing the media rounds in the last couple of weeks.

On the one hand it's fantastic that a man at 92 remains so eloquent. On the other, that every article has mentioned how fantastic it is that a man at 92 remains so eloquent is part of the problem. Ageism remains endemic.

But secondly, as reflects the theme of today, the Government say they are planning for the long term and at just six months in we do need to give them time, and I remain optimistic.

Thank you for joining us today. I hope you enjoy the conference.