

Fiftysomethings must look to future

Oliver Moody Science Correspondent

With hefty veterinary bills, worries at work and boomerang children who cannot be persuaded to move out, most people in their sixth decade may feel they have enough to fret about without reinventing themselves.

Yet fiftysomethings should already be "training" for retirement, according to an EU report urging the middle-aged to think about how they can be useful to society in the future.

The study raises the prospect of state-sponsored virtual "academies" for workers over the age of 50 leading to online "warehouses of opportunity" where they can pick up new skills.

The guidelines, which will form the basis for an EU-funded campaign with

online advertising and a book, call on people in the later stages of their professional lives to go through the same soul-searching as young adults fresh out of school or university.

"Around their middle age or in their fifties, people once again need to ask themselves this question: What do I want to be and what do I want to do in the latter part of life?" the report states.

"It is common that individuals in their fifties are bored or tired of their work duties, and/or without further promotion possibilities. People of this age should examine their situation and decide how they want life to go on."

Drawn up by researchers who have been working on pilot studies involving 50 to 70-year-olds in Spain, Iceland and Poland, the Erasmus+ Be Active

Through Lifelong Learning (BALL) project says that the current crop of baby boomers need to be recognised as a "valuable human resource".

At present there are 11.6 million people over the age of 65 in the UK and by 2040 the over-65s will account for almost a quarter of the population.

Victor Pinta, vice-head of the Permanent University scheme at the University of Alicante in eastern Spain, encouraged over-50s to look at work such as teaching or volunteering, or hobbies like computing, learning languages or studying the history of art.

"The idea is to provide material for people to remain active," he said. "People retire and can live in quite good condition for 25 years. We want to make sure these people enjoy that period."