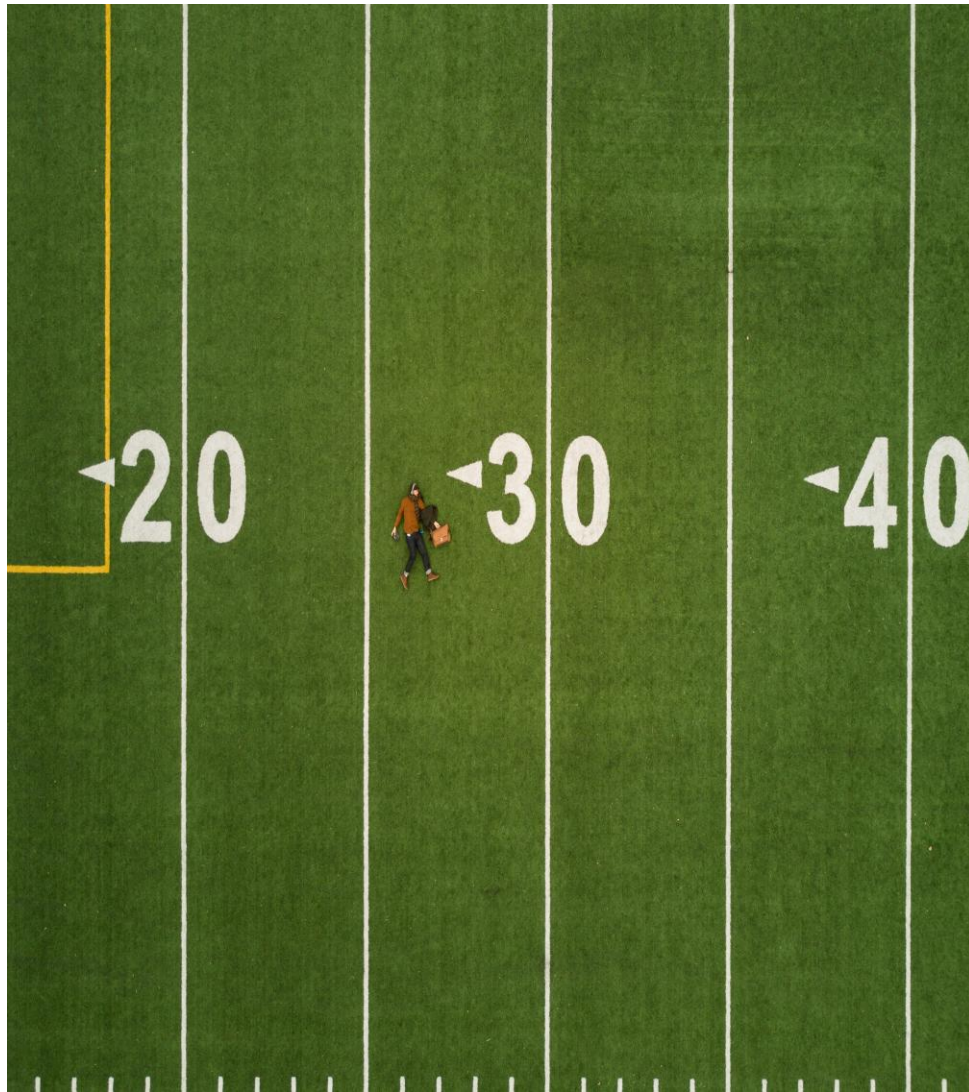


# Dignity has no use by Date: the ongoing challenge of ageism in Scottish society

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# Ageism

‘the systematic stereotyping and discrimination against individuals based on their age, particularly targeting older adults.’

**Dr. Robert N. Butler (1969)**

**Ageism is not merely a social bias; it reflects deeper philosophical notions about value, productivity, and worth.**

**Historically, Western societies have often equated worth with economic productivity, sidelining those who are retired or less active in the workforce**



Aristotle - we see the stereotype of the elderly as overly cautious, suspicious, and cynical.

**“They are cynical; that is, they always tend to put the worst construction upon everything.”**



- Ancient Sparta (c. 5th century BCE) – no military service
- Medieval allegory the Dance of Death / Danse Macabre - older figures depicted as frail and near death.
- Shakespeare- King Lear (1606) - the King descend into madness

**“Age is unnecessary.”**

**King Lear.**





**The Industrial Revolution (18th–19th century)** older workers were pushed out of the workforce in favour of younger, faster, more “productive” labourers.

**19th Century Poor Laws** - workhouses.

**Dickens** - characters like Miss Havisham  
(*Great Expectations*)

- The **Crone / Hag** (e.g. fairy tales, Macbeth's witches): aging woman as witchlike, manipulative, or grotesque
- The **Foolish or Bitter Elder** (e.g. Lear, Miss Havisham)
- **The Discarded Elder** (e.g. King Lear's banishment)
- **Idealisation of Youth** (common in romantic and modernist visual art)
- **Aging as Decline vs. Aging as Wisdom:** The former dominates in mainstream narratives; the latter appears in select moral or spiritual texts.



# Scotland's demography.

**We are an ageing population with a declining birth rate.**

- Mid-2023, over one million people in Scotland are aged 65 and over, accounting for approximately **20.3% of the total population**.
- By mid-2047, the number of individuals aged 75 and over is expected to rise by around 341,300.
- The dependency ratio - the proportion of individuals not in the workforce (under 16 and over pensionable age) compared to those of working age- is projected to increase from 60 per 100 in 2014 to 68 per 100 by 2033.

# Scotland's ageism

- ***Growing incidents of hate***, - recorded hate crimes in Scotland rose by 63% in 2024-5.

Approximately 300 of these were age-related.

- Only **7% of respondents** felt older people are **represented positively in the media**. (Age Scotland)
- More **than a third of respondents (36%)** felt they were made to feel a burden to society.

Additionally, 34% said that life was getting worse for older people in Scotland. One in five (21%) felt valued by society. (Age Scotland)

- Surveys suggest that many people either believe they have been or fear discrimination in seeking work if they are over the age of 55.

- **Commissioner for Older People in Scotland.**
- **Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.**



- 1. Redesigning communities through the lens of age inclusion.**
- 2. Education and Awareness.**
- 3. Policy Reform.**
- 4. Reimagining work and contribution.**
- 5. Community Engagement.**
- 6. Media Representation.**
- 7. Tackling digital exclusion as a rights issue.**

Dignity, has no use-by date.

It does not expire when we retire.

It does not fade with memory.

It is not conditional on mobility, nor appearance, nor the capacity to contribute to GDP.

**It is rooted in being human — and that is enough.**

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