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CPA WELCOMES A DEBATE ON PENSION REFORM

Pension reform can no longer be ignored following the publication of the Turner Report (30 November 2005). The Centre for Policy on Ageing looks forward to a pension system that ensures older people do not live in poverty, women and carers are not penalised and one that reflects life in the 21st century. We hope that the Report will now be used to open and encourage a policy debate that focuses on older people as citizens with rights. 'Pensioners' must not be viewed as a burden on society but as important contributors to society in the capacity of carers, volunteers, consumers and paid workers.

The Turner Report puts centre stage some of the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society today who will remain so in the future - unless government, employers and individuals work together now to reach an equitable solution. CPA supports proposals in the Report for better information, a simpler pension system, lifting people out of poverty without means testing, and achieving a fair deal for women and carers.

However, the Centre is less convinced that an increase in the State Pension Age is the right approach; rather we need to focus on increasing the labour force participation of older workers based on choice and support. Those who want to work should not be forced to retire. This requires the elimination of age discrimination in both public and private sectors. The legislation to combat discrimination at work on grounds of age by 2006 and the proposal to set up a Commission for Equality and Human Rights are steps in the right direction. We strongly support the Pension Commission recommendation that there should be no default age beyond which age discrimination does not apply.

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Gillian Crosby, CPA's Director said, 'The Pensions Commission rightly recognises that a change in culture is required before reforms can be implemented, specifically any increase in the SPA. Employers must be persuaded to engage with older workers; provide training for them to develop new skills and take on career changes; and develop flexible working practices. Government indeed should be a role model for treatment of its older workers.'

'Our thrust is that attitudes and behaviours towards older people need to be continually challenged and opportunities created. The Centre for Policy on Ageing can assist by providing access to the necessary information for those debating and formulating policy in this crucial area.'

ENDS

1. CPA holds the nation's leading data and information resource on older age. Its library and AgeInfo web-based products are key instruments in the dissemination and consideration of research and policy issues. Ultimately the Centre's purpose is to influence how the UK cares for and regards its older citizens.