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## Press Release

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**For more information about the Society of Shoe Fitters go to their website: [www.shoefitters-uk.org](http://www.shoefitters-uk.org).**

### **FIT IS NOT JUST FOR CHILDREN!**

The majority of shops selling adult footwear complain just how difficult trade has become, but what is their USP (unique selling point)? What makes them a destination of choice for shoppers and makes them stand out as different?

Ask the Society of Shoe Fitters how many adult footwear outlets express an interest in learning how to fit professionally, and they reply 'unfortunately very few'. Those training to become professional shoe fitters are mostly employed in children's footwear outlets. Rightly so, but what about adult comfort?

Adult feet change as a person grows older; they don't stay the same size and shape. The older one gets the more knobby feet become due to rheumatism and arthritis attacking damaged joints, even pregnancy can change a foot size quite dramatically – in fact feet can go up or down a whole size. So where do those who have a problem foot or simply want to be comfortable, go to buy shoes? Many phone the SSF for free advice, but the number of SSF members selling adult footwear is limited in some parts of the country.

The adult market is a difficult one divided between fashion and function. Age plays a lesser part, but there is no doubt that those in their very senior years come off worst. They struggle to find a suitable brand instore (if indeed they can travel to a shop). Average footwear can be found everywhere and the public are either buying on price, a whim, or simply need. The common denominator is that everyone wants to feel comfortable, but the vast majority put comfort aside because their expectations are so low, or know they have to compromise for fashion. When asking consumers do they own any comfortable shoes they all say 'you are lucky to find a shoe that is comfortable and then the chances are it is ugly or old fashioned'. Those in the trade know that this is completely unfair because there are lots of beautiful, affordable shoe brands that are extremely fashionable and qualified shoe fitters despair as they can make most shoes comfortable and give best advice.

Retail has changed, but not for the better, it has been dumbed down. At one time all good retailers would offer to measure the feet of every customer, now it seems restricted to kid's shops unless you are at a specialised retailer.

The public assume they know their shoe size, but no two shoes or pairs of feet are the same, so 'a size' means very little and just the start. Most adults have not had their feet fitted for years and simply cram them into products they like, or think feel okay. They are used to self-service and being left to buy with trial and error and no advice or product information and that is why many turn to the internet. However surveys report that a vast number of internet sales are returned and online is not the golden goose many thought it would be. This insular, no responsibility approach is understandable because the public will still buy what they want regardless, but many are demanding more for their buck. Few can afford to leave shoes in the wardrobe unworn, or use diesel to find a remote Post

Office to return their disappointment, so it makes sense to go one step further and serve customers professionally. If a retail experience is unique and positive it will also be a memorable one which will be repeated and recommended.

Hardly surprising that the NHS is struggling with health issues brought about by ill fitting footwear and exacerbated by obesity, diabetes etc. The older you get the more you need professional care. The Society of Shoe Fitters suggests 'any shoe that is not fitted correctly is a dangerous one. It's all about finding the right shape shoe for the foot and then advising about its wear'. A flat ballerina pump is equally as bad for you as a high heel if it fits incorrectly. A customer buying a high heel needs the right advice, but then a customer buying a ballerina pump may need a padded insole or they can lead to painful plantar fasciitis. The SSF says 'all shoes can feel comfortable as long as they are fitted correctly with best advice', so if you are selling adult footwear why not sign up staff to their Footwear & Fitting Course, or encourage your more highly skilled colleagues to attempt the Entrance Application. Once you have a Qualified Shoe Fitter instore you have your U.S.P.!