Centre for Ageing Better

Becoming an age-friendly employer

ageing-better.org.uk

Why be an age-friendly employer?

The older workforce is your workforce.

In recent years, UK job vacancies and numbers in work have both hit record highs, adding to the pressure on employers to find and retain skilled staff. Growing skills and workforce shortages mean that businesses are competing for a shrinking pool of talent.

Nearly one in three workers in the UK are aged 50 and over, and with the average employee in the UK in their 40s, this is set to grow over the next decade.

With many more people working into their 60s and beyond, people aged 50 may have another 20 years of working life ahead of them.

As the workforce gets older, the competition is now on for the best and most experienced staff. There are fewer school leavers, and the expectation is that it will become harder to fill vacancies with workers from outside the UK.

The older workforce is already a reality. Employers need to act now to attract and retain older workers, or they will fall behind their competitors.

Employees' awareness of protected characteristics under the Equality Act:

Disability	Race	Gender	Age
80%	**79%**	**75%**	**69%**

(YouGov/Centre for Ageing Better, 2018 base 4,064 individuals)

Age discrimination leaves employers open to legal action

Compared to gender, race or disability, age is often neglected as a diversity issue. Under the Equality Act, employers have the same responsibilities and legal obligations in relation to age as to any other protected characteristics.

However, evidence shows that many employers don't approach age discrimination in the same way.

Age-diversity presents huge opportunities for employers

Employers report that older workers are loyal, reliable, committed and conscientious. They transfer vital knowledge and skills and help solve complex problems by bringing together a mix of ideas and experiences.

Age-diversity can also better match the profile of customers and improve services.

How to be an age-friendly employer

Five actions to be an age-friendly employer

1 Be flexible about flexible working

2 Hire age positively

3 Ensure everyone has the health support they need

4 Encourage career development at all ages

5 Create an age-positive culture

1.

Be flexible about flexible working

- ✓ **Hire flexibly**
- ✓ **Widen the range of flexible working options available – formal and informal**
- ✓ **Help people navigate the system**
- ✓ **Help managers manage flexibility**

Flexible working is important for workers of all ages. It can help older workers balance caring responsibilities, health conditions or simply to scale up or down to support their changing needs.

Employers who offer good quality flexible working arrangements benefit from more engaged staff who are likely to stay for longer. There is also a statutory requirement on businesses to discuss flexible working requests from any employee with at least six months' service.

However, older workers are not always able to benefit from flexible working. They may lack knowledge about their flexible working options or may not know how to enter a discussion in the workplace about changing their work patterns.

2.
Hire age positively

- ✓ **Conduct age-positive recruitment campaigns**
- ✓ **Minimise age bias in recruitment processes**
- ✓ **Develop returner or re-entry programmes**

More than half of people who have looked but not applied for a new job since turning 50 feel they would be at a disadvantage in applying for a job because of their age.

Too many older applicants are frozen out of the job market due to hiring processes, age bias and a lack of engagement from employers and recruiters.

This ultimately disadvantages employers who fail to draw on the experience and abilities of a significant talent pool.

3.

Ensure everyone has the health support they need

- ✓ **Create an open and supportive culture around managing health at work**
- ✓ **Ensure full, equal and early access to support and reasonable adjustments**
- ✓ **Make sure support is sustained over time for workers with health conditions**

Health is the biggest single driver leading to people leaving work before they are ready to retire. More than one in five people aged 50 to state pension age who are out of work left their last job due to a health condition.

While health conditions are not inevitable with age, the likelihood of having one or more long-term condition does increase.

Some conditions do become more common with age, such as musculoskeletal conditions, circulatory problems and Type 2 diabetes.

4.

Encourage career development at all ages

- ✓ **Ensure that development, training and progression is available equally to all ages**
- ✓ **Provide career guidance at mid-life and beyond, including retirement plans**
- ✓ **Help people to take stock, manage transitions and plan holistically for the future**

Employers are used to investing in career development and support for younger staff. With 20 or more years of work still to come, thinking ahead is just as important for workers aged 50 and above.

Older workers still want to be stretched, and they want to have open and fair access to career development, training and progression.

Opening up career development and support to workers in mid-life signals a commitment to all staff, regardless of age, boosting engagement and retention of older workers.

5.

Create an age-positive culture

- ✓ **Monitor and share workforce data by age**
- ✓ **Equip line managers with the knowledge and skills to manage age-friendly practices**
- ✓ **Encourage interaction and networking among staff of all ages**

With many more people working for longer and different models of career progression, age and seniority are no longer synonymous. People enter, leave and progress at work at different stages of life.

Leadership in age-friendly workplaces comes from the very top, with a clear declaration of intent and modelling of good practice from the executive team.

Real change will only be achieved if this is matched by the attitude and actions of HR professionals, line managers and colleagues.

We need new ways of understanding, speaking about and managing age at all levels of the workplace.

22%

Nearly a quarter of employers think that their organisation is unprepared for the ageing workforce.

(IFF survey of 500 employers/Ageing Better October 2017)

Centre for Ageing Better

This guide is an abridged version of our **'Becoming an age-friendly employer'** report. To read the full report, visit **ageing-better.org.uk**

Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.

The Centre for Ageing Better creates change in policy and practice informed by evidence and works with partners across England to improve employment, housing, health and communities. Ageing Better is a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.

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