Good Recruitment for Older Workers (GROW)

A toolkit for employers

Updated September 2023

Age-friendly Employer Pledge

About us

Centre for Ageing Better

The Centre for Ageing Better is pioneering ways to make ageing better a reality for everyone, including challenging ageism and building an Age-friendly Movement, creating Age-friendly Employment and Age-friendly Homes.

They are a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, and part of the government's What Works Network.

The CIPD, the professional body for HR and people development

The CIPD has been championing better work and working lives for over 100 years. It helps organisations thrive by focusing on their people, supporting our economies and societies. It's the professional body for HR, L&D, OD and all people professionals – experts in people, work and change. With over 160,000 members globally – and a growing community using its research, insights and learning – it gives trusted advice and offers independent thought leadership. It's a leading voice in the call for good work that creates value for everyone.

Recruitment & Employment Confederation

The REC is the voice of the recruitment industry, speaking up for great recruiters. The REC drives standards and empowers UK recruitment businesses to build better futures for their candidates and themselves. It provides legal advice, business support and training to help recruiters, and celebrate the individuals involved in this industry. The REC champions an industry which is fundamental to the strength of the UK economy.

Contents

Introduction

This toolkit is a new edition to the initial guide produced in October 2021.

This edition will build on the overall principles to introduce 3 new tools to minimise age bias in the recruitment process. These tools were designed and tested by a working group of HR and ED&I (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) professionals during the second phase of the GROW project.

These tools are linked on the **Ageing Better site** where you can view examples and download a template.

The 3 new tools are:

1.
Creating an inclusive job advert

Page 22

2.
Producing an interview invitation and scheduling form

Page 24

3.
Guidance to talking about flexible working during the recruitment process

Page 18

Page 23

Page 25

About this guide

This toolkit is based on Ageing Better's Good Recruitment for Older Workers (GROW) project findings. It is designed to help organisations recognise the negative role that age-related discrimination plays in recruitment processes and provide practical suggestions for you as an employer to become more age-inclusive.

This toolkit sets out five key actions, with checklists designed to help your organisation to become a more age-inclusive employer.

This toolkit also introduces 3 new tools to minimise age bias during the recruitment process. These are highlighted in the toolkit:

1. **Creating an inclusive job advert**

2. **Producing an interview invitation and scheduling form**

3. **Guidance for talking about flexible working during the recruitment process**

The current recruitment environment

The current recruitment environment is not as age-inclusive as it could be. More than a third (36%)[1] of 50-70 year olds say they feel at a disadvantage when applying for jobs due to their age. They felt this at every stage of the recruitment process, from the language in job adverts to interview panels.

Ageing Better's previous research[2] found that age is the least scrutinised and most widely accepted form of discrimination in the UK.

Despite this, recent research[3] by YouGov for the Centre for Ageing Better shows that the majority (51%) of employers in England are unlikely to introduce or develop policies relating to age in the next 12 months.

With many of us working for longer, and rising job losses[4] due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever for employers to be committed and proactive in building age-inclusive workforces. Otherwise, they will risk missing out on all the advantages a multigenerational workforce has to offer.

Why be age-inclusive?

Recruiting inclusively to build a multigenerational workforce is a 'win-win' for everyone.

Older workers are good for business

Recent analysis by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)[5] shows that a firm with a 10% higher share of workers aged 50 and over is 1.1% more productive. These productivity gains come from lower job turnover and the greater management and general work experience of older workers.

Being age-inclusive benefits younger workers as well

According to a recent study by YouGov,[6] eight in ten employers (79%) in England state that older workers could help in knowledge and skill sharing. Far from being in competition with each another, different age groups working together can help businesses thrive and individuals learn.

79%

of employers in England state that older workers could help in knowledge and skill sharing.

01
Put age into ED&I

02
Know your numbers

03
Debias your job adverts

04
Check your process

05
Build awareness and confidence

Being age-inclusive helps people who want to stay in work for longer

Being in good quality, fulfilling work for as long as people want is critical for individuals' financial security now and in the future. Older workers value[7] the same things in work as younger workers, including social connections developed in the workplace and having a sense of purpose.

Age-inclusivity boosts the economy

Research[8] shows that a 1% increase in the number of people aged 50-64 in work could increase GDP by around £5.7 billion per year and have a positive impact on income tax and National Insurance Contributions by around £800 million per year.

In Ageing Better's latest employer survey,[9] 76% of employers in England agreed that older workers' experience is crucial to the success of the organisation. This guide is designed to help make sure positive attitudes towards older workers are reflected in your organisation's recruitment processes and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) policies.

£

£5.7bn

1% increase in the number of people aged 50-64 in work could increase GDP by around £5.7 billion per year.

01.

Put age into Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Checklist:

✓ Include a short diversity statement in job adverts emphasising age-inclusivity.

✓ Consider the cumulative effect of how age interacts with other characteristics such as sex, ethnicity or disability and consult with staff on how to reduce any negative impacts.

✓ If using cultural 'fit' criteria in your assessment, ensure that the criteria against which the 'fit' will be assessed is transparent, applied consistently across candidates and clearly communicated during recruitment.

As age is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, your organisation could be subject to a legal challenge of discrimination if you do not take account of age in recruitment and in all aspects of staffing policy and practice.

Include a short diversity statement in job adverts emphasising age-inclusivity.

Ageing Better's GROW project[10] findings show that the inclusion of a short diversity statement can increase both older applicants' likelihood of applying and their understanding of how well they will fit in.

For example:[11] 'We're actively building diverse teams and welcome applications from everyone including people of different ages.'

It's also important to signal in job adverts that you're willing to make any reasonable adjustments throughout the recruitment process as an employer. This could be anything from providing equipment such as a headset or adjustable desk to supporting scheduled breaks, all of which will enable people to manage health conditions or caring responsibilities, which are more common as people get older.

If older workers are under-represented or not supported in your workforce, the law allows you to take Positive Action[12] to help with this.

Consider the cumulative impact of how age interacts with other protected characteristics such as sex, ethnicity or disability in your ED&I strategy and consult with staff on how to reduce any negative impacts.

Research suggests that people from multiple disadvantaged groups experience heightened levels of discrimination.
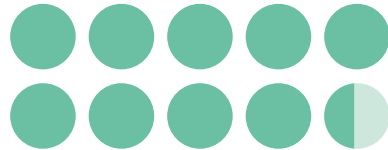
For instance, one study[13] found that older Black-British applicants were 9.4 times less likely to be invited to an interview compared to an older White-British applicant.

Being aware of these intersections at every stage of the recruitment process is crucial. This could also be a problem for existing employees, so consult and implement any further measures you can to reduce bias across protected characteristics.

If using cultural 'fit' criteria in your assessment, ensure that the criteria against which the 'fit' will be assessed is transparent, applied consistently across candidates and clearly communicated during recruitment.

No candidates should be judged on ambiguous and informal criteria, and as such ageist views can masquerade as 'poor cultural fit'.

For example,[14] an interviewee reported that their organisation looks for someone who is 'dynamic and ambitious' or 'sociable and outgoing', characteristics that are often associated with younger people. Instead, consider: Any 'fit' should be narrowly focused on a limited set of values and employers should challenge values that 'cover up' any non-inclusive recruitment decisions.

9.4 x

Older Black-British applicants were 9.4 times less likely to be invited to an interview compared to an older White-British applicant.

02.
Know your numbers

Checklist

✓ Regularly collect and scrutinise age data from the recruitment process.

✓ Collect and analyse the age profile of the current workforce as well as job applicants to evaluate whether job ads are attracting candidates of all ages.

✓ Monitor applicants' working pattern preferences but do not share these with decision-makers.

✓ Have a senior responsible sponsor/advocate within your organisation who can act on any identified under-representation.

Monitoring workforce data on age diversity is fundamental to workforce retention, skills planning and forecasting how your workforce profile will change over time.

Ageing Better's research[15] shows that while most employers believe their organisation is age-inclusive, these opinions were often based on subjective judgements rather than the gathering of age-specific data. Without collecting and comparing data on potential and current employees it's impossible to know how your organisation is doing on age-inclusivity.

Regularly collect and scrutinise age data from the recruitment process.

Collecting age data can help identify specific diversity issues within your organisation soyou can find solutions to them. Always ensure your collection, storage and use of data is GDPR compliant.

Data you may want to analyse could include: age of applicants, age of people being shortlisted, age of interviewers, age of successful applicants, age of different role types and age of people who successfully complete probation – as well as examining how age interacts with other characteristics such as gender, ethnicity or disability.

Collect and analyse the age profile of the current workforce as well as job applicants to evaluate whether job adverts are attracting candidates of all ages.

This can help pinpoint issues in your recruitment process. For instance, the OECD's gathering of age-specific data[16] revealed that the hiring rates for older workers across OECD countries is half that of younger workers, with fewer than one in ten employees in the 55-64 age group being new hires.

Monitor applicants' working pattern preferences but do not share these with decision-makers.

In addition to age data, ask candidates about their working pattern preferences in the equal opportunities monitoring section of the application form. At a minimum, you should collect preferences for full-time versus part-time working preferences but also consider other types of flexible working pattern preferences, such as job shares' or even collect how many days those who want part-time work wish to work (e.g. 1/2/3/4/5 days).

Ensure that this information is not factored into the recruitment decision or shared with the line manager. Track this aggregate data along with recruitment outcomes to see if you are missing out on diverse candidates due to narrow working pattern criteria.

For more guidance on 'how to talk about flexible working with candidates during recruitment' read here.

Have a senior responsible sponsor/advocate within your organisation who can act on any identified under-representation.

If the data highlights areas for development, making senior leadership and decision makers aware is the first step to improving issues of under-representation. This knowledge is key to workforce risk registers and to be able to make any changes needed.

03.
Reduce bias in your job advertisments

Checklist

✓ Emphasise employer benefits that might appeal to older workers, such as flexible working.

✓ Frame and word job adverts with care, ensuring that they aren't age-biased.

✓ Circulate job adverts as widely as possible, using multiple digital platforms.

How you create and communicate job descriptions, employee benefits and flexible working arrangements is fundamental to building an inclusive reputation and brand for your organisation.

Emphasise employer benefits that might appeal to older workers.

Flexible working (working more or fewer hours, or in a different pattern) is the number one workplace[17] factor that people aged 50 and over themselves say would help them to work for longer. But despite often being considered a standard part of employment terms, these benefits are rarely highlighted by recruiters, with flexible working appearing in just 5.5%[18] of job adverts.

Employers should:

✓ Make sure that the benefits your organisation offers, such as flexible working or generous workplace pensions, are highlighted in job adverts.

✓ Read Ageing Better's toolkit with Timewise[19] for more information on making flexible working available to all ages.

Frame and word job adverts with care, ensuring that they aren't age-biased.

It's important to consider that using language that appeals more broadly to older people does not deter[20] young applicants.

Simply using more age-inclusive language and emphasising employer benefits in job adverts is likely to both increase the size and age range of a candidate pool, as well as ensuring that every applicant feels that they have the best chance of success. When writing job adverts, you should focus on:

– Avoiding the use of age-biased language, by replacing terms such as 'innovative', 'technologically savvy' and 'recent graduate' with specific behaviours and skills required for the job, such as 'programming skills'.

– Including positive and realistic images of older people in job adverts, for example from Ageing Better's free 'Age-positive Image library'.

Table 1: Effects of age-stereotypical words and phrases, and CV features, on older applicants

Word, phrase, or feature	Candidate's likelihood of applying	Candidate's perceived likelihood of getting an interview	Candidate's perceived likelihood of getting an offer	Candidate's perceived fit	Candidate's judgement of employer's perception of fit
Short diversity statement				➕	➕
Generous pension contributions	➕				
Flexible working opportunities	➕				
Adaptable			➖		
Innovative		➖			➖
Technologically savvy		➖	➖	➖	➖
Recent graduate	➖	➖	➖	➖	➖

Symbols ➕ and ➖ show words and phrases that had a statistically significant positive ➕ or negative ➖ effect on the behaviour or motivation listed.

Use our tool to create an inclusive job advert

JOB

Use this tool to create a new job advert or improve your current job advert. This template helps make your job advert more inclusive and describing how to implement them with examples and template text.

Circulate job adverts as widely as possible, across all platforms.

Research[21] found that word-of-mouth and personal recommendation were the most popular recruitment methods in 2019, with 71% using this approach.

However, these are arguably the least effective methods[22] for increasing diversity in an organisation, as individuals often unintentionally surround themselves with people like themselves.

Focus on:

– Sharing job adverts widely and across multiple digital platforms, making it more likely for them to reach people from a wider range of backgrounds, increasing the number of applications.

– Use age-positive recruitment campaigns to reach out and attract the widest pool of talent. However, in interviewing and shortlisting age should not be used as a factor in decision-making.

5.5%
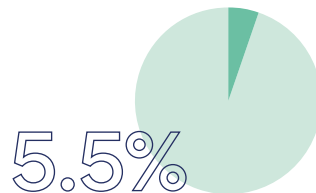
The phrase 'flexible working' appears in around 1 in 20 job adverts.

04.

Check your process

Checklist

✓ Use application processes that reduce explicit and implicit age cues.

✓ Provide clear information about the interview in advance and make requesting interview adjustments easier for candidates.

✓ Structure your interview process using multiple decision-makers, predefined questions and scoring mechanisms.

✓ Wait to ask candidates' about working pattern preferences until after you make an offer.

✓ Create an interview invite and scheduling form using our tool.

✓ Use our 'How to talk about flexible working with candidates during **recruitment' guidance**.

We know that age-related discrimination can impact all stages of the recruitment process, and different ages are affected in different ways. Reviewing your recruitment tools and processes as they relate to older applicants will help.

Use application processes that reduce explicit and implicit age cues.

Make sure that tools used within the application process are accessible for all workers. For instance, standardised application forms that ask for details like full working history can disadvantage[23] older workers. They can be very time-consuming to fill in and often will give an indication of someone's age without any age being given. Employers should instead consider implementing a blind application process (removing any and all identification details from your candidates' resumes and applications).

Provide clear information about the interview in advance and make requesting interview adjustments easier for candidates.

Our research shows that older workers report limited recent interview experience and especially wanted to know about logistical and practical details of interviews.[24,25] In addition, older people are more likely to be disabled and therefore may need adjustments during the recruitment process.[26]

You can use **this interview** invite template and scheduling form tool to provide candidates with more clarity about the interview.

Structure your interview process using multiple decision-makers, predefined questions and scoring mechanisms.

Unstructured interviews have been found[27] to be among the worst predictors of on-the-job performance and are fraught with bias.

Additionally, Ageing Better's GROW project[28] showed that having an age-diverse interview panel can reduce the chance of candidates of different ages feeling out of place and at a disadvantage. Employers should:

– Commit to using predefined questions and scoring mechanisms in interviews.

– Ensure that your interview panels have multiple people and are as diverse and inclusive as possible.

Wait to ask about working pattern preferences until after you make an offer.

– Older workers, women and disabled candidates are more likely to seek flexible working patterns, but this may inadvertently increase the likelihood of discrimination. To reduce discrimination, wait until you have decided which candidates will receive an offer before asking about working pattern preferences. Ensure that candidates can meet the minimum hours by advertising these in your job advert and confirming that the minimum hours can be met in the application form.

For more guidance on 'how to talk about flexible working with candidates during recruitment' read here.

For instance:

– Removing any non-essential details on application forms that might indicate someone's age. For example, ask for 'relevant work history' as opposed to an entire working history.

Allowing the applicant to list their previous roles in terms of the number of years of experience rather than the dates of that experience on a CV. (Recent research[29] has shown that doing this increased positive callbacks by 14.6%)

– Removing newer types of qualifications/experience that have only existed recently from any essential criteria.

There's no way I could go back and find the dates of everything I've done for 43 years. I said [to the employer] if you had somebody else come here, younger, they wouldn't have to fill out a 43-year long work history. I felt that was discriminatory to be honest. Older candidate interviewed in GROW research.

14.6%
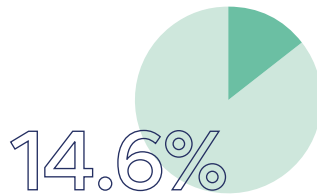
Allowing applicants to list previous roles in terms of years of experience increased positive callbacks by 14.6%.

05.
Build awareness and confidence

Checklist

✓ Ensure that staff are aware of how best to reduce bias and avoid discrimination in the interview process.

✓ Avoid making assumptions about older workers on the basis of stereotypes.

✓ Recognise the importance of age-inclusivity and build a workplace culture that acknowledges the contribution of people of all ages.

Everyone involved in the recruitment process should have the awareness and confidence to be age-inclusive. Ensuring that your staff can be accommodating to all candidates, regardless of age, is critical to building a fair recruitment process.

Ensure that staff have the necessary skills to reduce bias and avoid discrimination in the interview process.

As line managers are at the front line of delivering policy and creating culture, they need to be supported to deliver and manage age-friendly practices. One challenge with tackling potential bias is that acknowledging negative stereotypes can reinforce them.

Instead consider that:

– Training is <u>most effective</u>[30] when it includes content about the consequences of age stereotypes and offers managers strategies to combat them.

Avoid making assumptions about older workers on the basis of stereotypes.

Whilst it's impossible to completely remove unconscious bias from decision-making, you can minimise the impact of age stereotypes. Focus on:

– Incorporating 'blind' application and shortlisting stages (removing any and all identification details from your candidates' resumes and applications).

Recognise the importance of age-inclusivity and build a workplace culture that acknowledges the contribution of people of all ages.

Being committed to recognising and changing ageist attitudes is crucial to making the recruitment process more age-inclusive. Workplaces need to have good practice demonstrated across the business, from the executive team through to HR professionals, managers and colleagues, as well as ensuring that the induction process for new employees is inclusive and supportive.

A final note

Most employers say they are committed to the principles of diversity and inclusion in their recruitment processes, but this broad commitment does not always consider age.

By taking these steps to build a more age-inclusive recruitment process, you can take advantage of all the benefits a multigenerational workforce has to offer: increase productivity and knowledge-sharing, boost your reputation as an age-inclusive workplace, mitigate the discrimination felt by older and younger jobseekers alike and ensure your organisation is prepared for an ageing workforce.

Age-inclusive recruitment guide summary checklist

01. Put age into ED&I. Age is a legally protected characteristic; make age a part of your Equality, Diversity & Inclusion strategy.

✓ Include a short diversity statement in job adverts emphasising age-inclusivity.

✓ Consider the cumulative effect of how age interacts with other characteristics such as sex, ethnicity or disability and consult with staff on how to reduce any negative impacts.

✓ If using cultural 'fit' criteria in your assessment, ensure that the criteria against which the 'fit' will be assessed is transparent, applied consistently across candidates and clearly communicated during recruitment.

02. Know your numbers: collect and analyse age data to spot problems and find solutions.

✓ Regularly collect and scrutinise age data from the recruitment process.

✓ Collect and analyse the age profile of the current workforce as well as job applicants to evaluate whether job ads are attracting candidates of all ages.

✓ Monitor applicants' working pattern preferences.

✓ Have a senior responsible sponsor/advocate within your organisation who can act on any identified under- representation.

03. Advertise without age bias: redesign your job adverts and organisational branding to attract and include workers of all ages.

✓ Emphasise employer benefits that may appeal to older workers, such as **flexible working**.

✓ Frame and word job adverts with care, ensuring that they aren't age-biased.

✓ Use **our tool** to create an inclusive job advert.

✓ Circulate job adverts as widely as possible, using multiple digital and non-digital platforms.

04. Check your process: review your recruitment tools and processes as they relate to older applicants.

✓ Use application processes that reduce explicit and implicit age cues.

✓ Provide clear information about the **interview** in advance and make requesting interview adjustments easier for candidates.

✓ Structure **your interview process** using multiple decision-makers, predefined questions and scoring mechanisms.

✓ Wait to ask about working pattern preferences until after you make an offer.

05. Build awareness and confidence: everyone involved in the recruitment process should have the awareness and confidence to be age-inclusive.

✓ Ensure that staff are aware of how best to reduce bias and avoid discrimination in the interview process.

✓ Avoid making assumptions about older workers on the basis of stereotypes.

✓ Recognise the importance of age-inclusivity and build a workplace culture that acknowledges the contribution of people of all ages.

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Let's make ageing better.

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