Becoming an age-friendly employer

Centre for Ageing Better

September 2018

About us

The Centre for Ageing Better

The Centre for Ageing Better is a charity, funded by an endowment from the Big Lottery Fund, working to create a society where everyone enjoys a good later life. We want more people to be in fulfilling work, in good health, living in safe, accessible homes and connected communities. By focusing on those approaching later life and at risk of missing out, we will create lasting change in society. We are bold and innovative in our approach to improving later lives. We work in partnership with a diverse range of organisations. As a part of the What Works network, we are grounded in evidence.

To find out more visit:
www.ageing-better.org.uk

Business in the Community

Business in the Community exists to build healthy communities with successful businesses at their heart.

We are The Prince's Responsible Business Network – a business-led membership organisation made up of progressive businesses of all sizes who understand that the prosperity of business and society are mutually dependent.

Business in the Community is the only membership organisation representing employers who want to respond effectively to the ageing population. Through our age campaign, we give employers the tools and insight to support a growing older workforce and more effective intergenerational working. We inspire and share best practice that creates truly age-inclusive workplaces, in which employees of all ages and stages of life can thrive.

To find out more visit:
https://age.bitc.org.uk/

Acknowledgements

Foreword

The UK labour market is undergoing significant change. Almost one in three workers are over 50 – a third of your workforce. We are hearing more and more about people working into their 70s, retraining and starting new careers in mid-life, and even 'unretiring'.

This change offers big benefits. Employees being able to work for as long as they want and feel able to helps in saving money for later life, remaining active and involved and enjoying all the other benefits that good employment offers. As an employer facing growing skills shortages and a shrinking pool of talent, retaining experienced and committed employees is essential for the future of your business.

But our workplace practices are behind the curve. Currently as you get older, you are at a disadvantage. We estimate that at least a million workers aged between 50 and 64 are out of work involuntarily, with serious consequences for them and for society.

Although age is a protected characteristic, just like gender, race or sexual orientation, many employers don't treat age discrimination as seriously as these other issues. Recruitment is one area where the bias in favour of younger candidates is most obvious. In a survey by the Centre for Ageing Better, nearly half of over 50s currently employed said they felt they would be at a disadvantage in applying for a job because of their age, and over a quarter had or had considered concealing their age on an application form.

The good news is that with a few simple changes you can make the most of the opportunities of an older workforce. The option to work flexibly to manage a health condition, for example, can make the difference between staying in or leaving a job. It is not enough just to have the policies in place, employers need to make sure they translate into good practice.

This report is a great, practical summary of what you can do as an employer to become more age-friendly, covering everything from recruitment to supporting health at work and how to help staff in mid-life to plan for their future. It is based on insights from both employers and employees and includes examples and ideas from the most forward-thinking businesses.

Ultimately being age-friendly is about being a good employer. We need to create workplace cultures that are open, inclusive and positive about the benefits of age diversity if we are to reap the benefits of a maturing workforce now and into the future. I hope you find this a useful guide.

—

Andy Briggs, Chief Executive Officer of Aviva UK Insurance and Government Business Champion for Older Workers

AVIVA

Why be an age-friendly employer?

The older workforce is your workforce

In 2018 UK job vacancies and numbers in work 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 and 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.

Nearly a quarter (22%) of employers think that their organisation is unprepared for the ageing workforce. (IFF survey of 500 employers/Ageing Better October 2017)
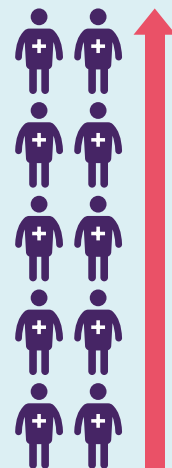
Between 2018 and 2025 there are forecast to be:

300,000

fewer workers under the age of 30 in the UK
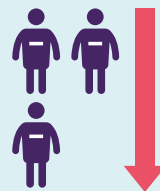
1 million

more workers over the age of 50 in the UK

(Mercer's Workforce Monitor, March 2018)

## Direct or indirect 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, our surveys and other evidence suggest that many employers and individuals don't yet approach age discrimination in the same way.

Employment tribunals on the grounds of age are still relatively rare, but with a growing and increasingly aware older workforce this is likely to change. Failure to offer open and fair access to training, recruitment, workplace adjustments, progression or flexible work to all ages leaves employers vulnerable.

Employees' awareness of protected characteristics under the Equality Act:

Disability
80%
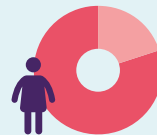
Race
79%

Gender
75%

Age
69%

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

"But we have a policy..."

Having a policy relating to age is not enough without accompanying action. Most employers have policies relating to age discrimination and policies that can support older workers, yet a sizable proportion feel their organisation is unprepared for the ageing workforce.

Two thirds (66%) of employers (and 96% of large employers) have some diversity or equal opportunity policies in relation to age discrimination.

However, nearly a quarter (22%) have faced issues with managing age diversity at work.

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

While 40% of employees over the age of 50 think their workplace has a policy related to preventing age discrimination, nearly half of these people (47%) say it has made no difference.

(YouGov/Centre for Ageing Better 2018)

Age-diversity presents huge opportunities for employers

– **Employers value a mixed-age workforce**

Employers report that older workers are loyal, reliable, committed and conscientious. They contribute valuable business experience and knowledge of their sector. Employers noted that greater life experience made older workers better placed to manage themselves and others in the workplace compared with younger colleagues. (IFF/DWP, 2017)

– **Older workers transfer vital knowledge and skills**

Knowledge-sharing is the number one benefit of an age diverse workforce, as identified by 56% of HR decision-makers surveyed by CIPD (CIPD, 2014)

– **Age-diversity can help solve complex problems by bringing together a mix of ideas, skill strengths, and experiences**

When teams mix older and younger workers, productivity goes up and complex problems find more novel solutions because the strengths and weaknesses of both groups are balanced. Older workers can draw on a lifetime of experience whilst younger workers may challenge outdated strategies and bring fresh perspective. (Wegge et al, 2012)

– **Age-diversity can better match the profile of customers and improve services**

As the population ages, workers, job applicants, consumers and service users in their 50s and 60s will increasingly be the norm.

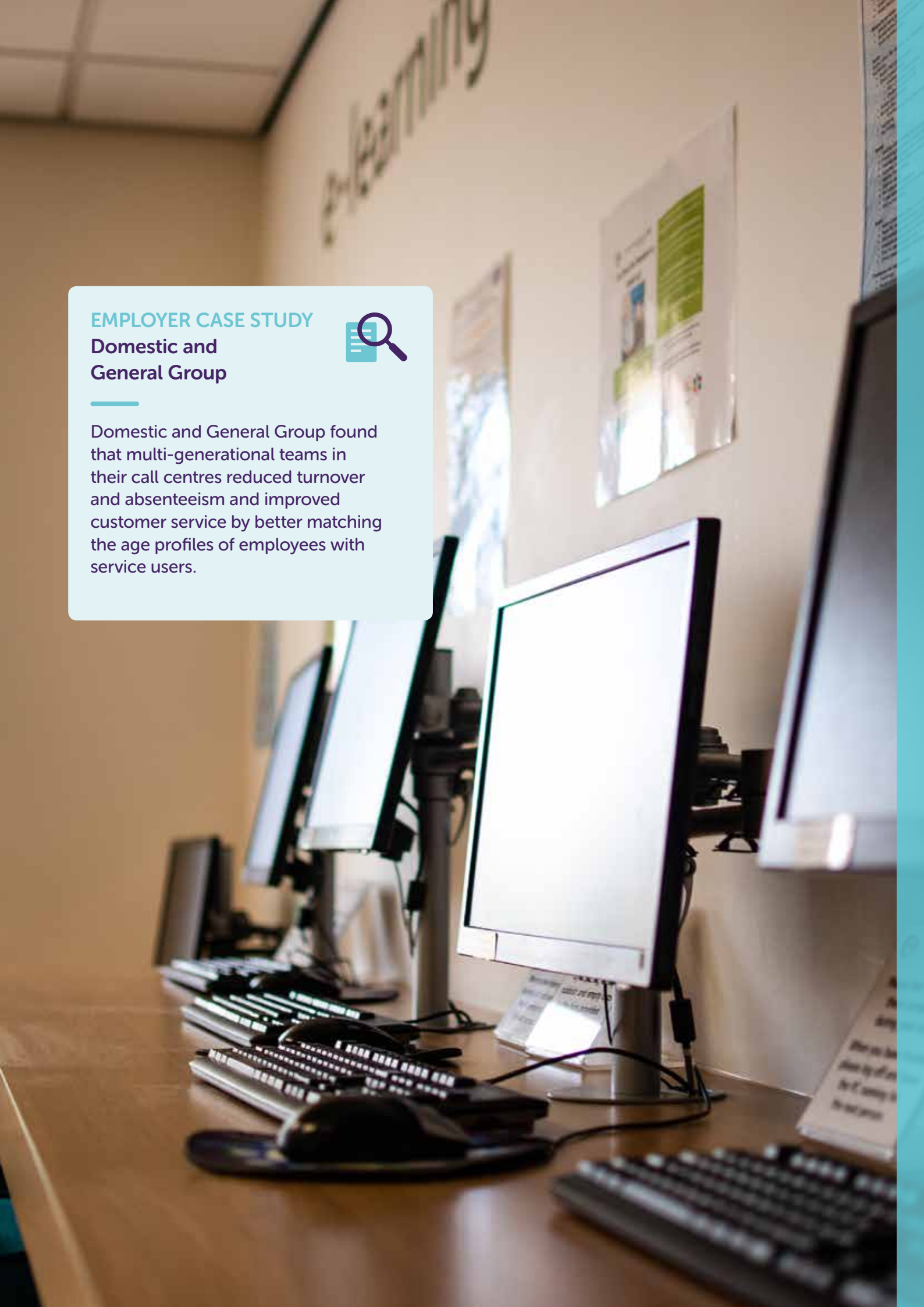**Domestic and
General Group**

Domestic and General Group found
that multi-generational teams in
their call centres reduced turnover
and absenteeism and improved
customer service by better matching
the age profiles of employees with
service users.

How to be an age-friendly employer

This guide sets out five simple actions that employers can take now to improve the way they recruit, support and retain older workers.

Five actions to be an age-friendly employer

1 Be flexible about flexible working

Offer more kinds of flexibility, manage it well and help people know their options

2 Hire age positively

Actively target candidates of all ages, and minimise age bias in recruitment processes

3 Ensure everyone has the health support they need

Early and open conversations, and early and sustained access to support for workers with health conditions

4 Encourage career development at all ages

Provide opportunities for people to develop their careers and plan for the future at mid-life and beyond

5 Create an age-positive culture

Equip HR professionals and managers to promote an age-positive culture, and support interaction across all ages

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 or personal health circumstances and enable a phased transition to retirement.

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, may assume the Right to Request relates only to parents and carers, and may not know how to enter a discussion in the workplace about changing their work patterns. Employers may share some of these misconceptions and managers may also be resistant to change.

Hire flexibly

The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2018 found only 11% of over 6 million job vacancies were advertised as suitable for flexible working, with sector variations ranging from 4% in facilities and construction to 27% of jobs advertised as flexible in medical and health services.

Timewise offer a range of guidance and training for employers on how to adapt to flexible hiring: **www.timewise.co.uk**

Flexible hiring involves making it obvious in job adverts which kinds of flexible work arrangement are available and making it easy for candidates to have a conversation about the flexibility they need, at the point of hire. To encourage more flexible hiring, you need to engage both hiring managers and candidates:

- Prompt hiring managers to think about flexibility, and about when and how to discuss flexibility with candidates

- Communicate your intentions to candidates clearly and authentically by adding a message to external branding e.g. "Happy to talk about flexible working"

11% of over 6 million job vacancies advertised as suitable for flexible working
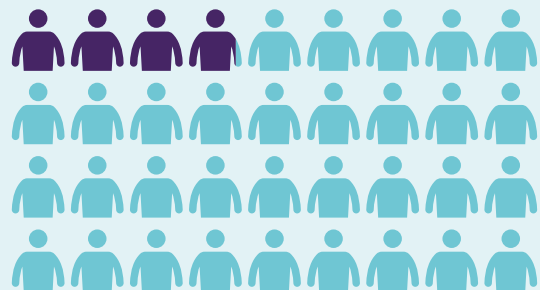
4% of facilities and construction jobs advertised as suitable for flexible working

27% of medical and health services jobs advertised as suitable for flexible working

The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2018

1

Be flexible about flexible working

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Widen the range of flexible working options available

Flexible working covers a huge variety of arrangements. Older workers' drivers and preferences for different types of flexibility can be equally wide ranging.

Leading employers manage flexible working by:

- Widening the range of formal and informal adjustments on offer in terms of hours, schedule and location

- Adopting a personalised approach to negotiating a compatible arrangement

- Being responsive to the need to change arrangements as and when circumstances change

Informal arrangements or simple adjustments to working hours or practices are sometimes all that is needed to give staff the flexibility to perform jobs successfully. For example, carers might have unpredictable demands on their time, which require them to vary their hours and at short notice. A simple adjustment can make a big difference to their effectiveness:

Breaks and periods of special leave, and one-off adjustments can be as beneficial as a contractual flexible working arrangement in particular circumstances.

Offering a 'right to reduce' working hours can help normalise flexible work adjustments and break down stigma that older workers may feel approaching managers for this kind of change in late career.

This kind of arrangement may sometimes be framed as 'phased retirement' – although bear in mind not all flexible work adjustments are sought with retirement in mind, and not all workers over 50 will identify as older workers.

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Relatively small things can make a difference. It might sound very basic but things like this support described by an employee with caring responsibilities working in a call centre:

"Well I take my mobile phone, have it on my desk, have it on silent. If I am a carer and have some situation which may arise, I'm allowed to take that call."

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Employers for Carers, Carers UK

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Help people navigate the system

People need information and support to make the most of flexible working. Ways you can help older workers engage with the options available and have a conversation about what they need include:

- Develop clear, simple, and well communicated protocols and procedures

- Publicise the procedures and examples of people working flexibly through workshops, newsletters, posters, and internal communications

- Provide targeted information to older workers about how working hours adjustments could impact financial planning and retirement

- Assign and train 'flexible working champions' to encourage and support colleagues applying, negotiating, and undertaking flexible work

- Showcase prominent people working flexibly in internal communications campaigns

Help managers manage flexibility

Managers will also benefit from focused support about flexible working processes and how to design flexibility into jobs.

- Ensure that all managers receive information about flexible working rights, entitlements, and responsibilities as part of standard management training/briefing

- Provide training or advice to hiring managers on designing jobs flexibly and having conversations about flexibility as part of hiring

- Support line managers to manage flexible working arrangements, both formal and informal, and to keep these under review as individual circumstances change

For many employers it may be most appropriate to outsource some of this training and support. Bear in mind that negotiating and designing flexible work arrangements needs to be tailored to your context – each sector and organisation will have its own constraints and opportunities for flexible working.

Peer support and coaching for managers in job design and managing team dynamics and work demands can be just as valuable as 'classroom' training and workshops.

2. Hire age positively

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

57% 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 (YouGov/Centre for Ageing Better 2018). Too many older applicants are frozen out of the job market due to inadequate 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.

> **Accessing candidates from all ages improves outcomes for everyone as well as being the right thing to do. Old-fashioned and discriminatory attitudes in recruitment make no business sense.**
>
> The Recruitment & Employment Confederation

Conduct age-positive recruitment campaigns

Leading employers actively target older as well as younger candidates and use a variety of recruitment techniques to find people.

EMPLOYER CASE STUDY
Home Instead Senior Care

Social care provider Home Instead Senior Care actively targets older workers approaching or shortly after retirement. Their "Are you a superhero?" advertising imagery challenged stereotypes around age, care work, and care workers and emphasised job quality and making a difference. Home Instead Senior Care adopted different recruitment techniques to target active and inactive jobseekers. An outreach approach took their campaign into communities. The business benefits are in terms of the quality and longevity of the appointments they can make, and their reputation as an age friendly employer.

Other organisations seek to appeal to the widest possible age range of potential candidates by challenging prevalent perceptions about suitability of types of jobs to particular age groups.

EMPLOYER CASE STUDY
Aviva

Aviva carried out PR work to persuade people that call centre work is not just for the young. They appointed a Recruitment Champion for older workers internally and incentivised their older employees to act as ambassadors to help recruit other older workers. The company adopted a media strategy to attract a wide age range. For example, they used radio stations aimed at older listeners.

Not all recruitment campaigns involve multi-channel advertising campaigns in print or online media. Exploring more community-based, outreach approaches can positively impact the quality of applicants, e.g. pop-up stands in supermarkets or giving talks at local clubs.

Forming new recruitment relationships will open doors to wider pool of talent. Think creatively and don't just do things the way you always have done. A small investment in finding out what attracts older applicants can pay huge dividends and give you a competitive edge.

2

Hire age positively

Minimise age bias in recruitment

Research has found that attributes stereotypically associated with younger candidates (e.g. being open to new ideas, learning new skills and rapid decision making) are viewed more positively in the hiring process than those of older candidates (e.g. dealing with people politely, settling arguments or carefulness). These 'older' attributes were associated with lower status job roles and recruiters were less likely to select them. (Abrams and Swift, 2016)

It is difficult to completely remove unconscious bias from decision making, but there are several things you can do to minimise the impact of age stereotypes at each stage of the recruitment process:

– Use images and language that are age-neutral and inclusive in recruitment adverts and job descriptions

– 'Blind' application and shortlisting stages

– Use structured panel interviews or assessments

The wording and imagery used in advertisements and job descriptions is fundamental in influencing who applies for a role. You will attract a wider range of applicants if you avoid buzzwords and internal jargon, use neutral language that focuses on the job to be done and the abilities needed, rather than stereotypically 'coded' language.

Asking for 'essential qualifications' that include GCSEs or other newer qualifications might put off older applicants. Focus instead on transferable skills and experience, specify that equivalent qualifications are also acceptable.

EMPLOYER CASE STUDY
Recruitment & Employment Confederation

The Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC) stresses the importance of reflecting on the terminology employers use in job advertisements and job descriptions and asking if it might put certain groups of candidates off. For example, seeking 'a bubbly or effervescent personality', 'lots of energy' or 'a fresh approach and new ways of thinking' may have inadvertent effects upon recruitment by implicitly signalling youth, even though the terms are not directly age-related.

Many recruiters now use software programs to sort applications automatically and produce long/shortlists for interview. Technology has developed to host and manage an application process that aims to diversify the candidate pool by systematically removing the potential for bias to influence selection.

Low tech methods can also be used, manually removing identifying information (such as names, ages, addresses) from applications before they are passed to assessors. Using application forms, rather than a traditional CV, can remove some of these triggers in the first place – for example by asking for relevant experience against competencies rather than chronologically.

Employers can also use assessment scoring tools or other systems to ensure that shortlisting decisions are transparent and justifiable.

Unstructured interviews have been found to be among the worst predictors of on-the-job performance and are fraught with bias and irrelevant information (Bohnet, 2016). One-to-one interviews are similarly prone to bias.

Employers should always use a structured interview format, with consistent set questions, and a diverse interview panel, to minimise the bias inherent in a traditional interview process – not just in terms of age, but also race, gender, disability and other characteristics.

Some employers are now using written tasks or work-sample tests and exercises to assess applicants, which can be scored with no identifying information about the candidate attached.

These more structured approaches to recruitment and selection all result in better and more inclusive outcomes for employers and applicants.

EMPLOYER CASE STUDY
Applied

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Applied has developed an online recruitment platform that uses work sample-based assessments to manage a candidate selection process, typically 3-5 questions that reflect the responsibilities of the job being advertised.

An algorithm is used to remove any remaining identifying information from applications, and candidates' responses to questions are compared side-by-side by multiple reviewers. There is also a reordering of the sequence of candidates' responses, which ensures that the same candidate isn't always the first or last to be assessed.

Applied's experimental findings in this area suggest that over half the successful applicants would not have been hired compared to a traditional CV-based sift. Other benefits for employers included a 300% improvement in interview conversions and a 95% reduction in administrative time.

2

Hire age positively

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Develop returner or re-entry programmes

Research suggests that 25% of people return to some form of paid work after retiring – often people with significant skills and experience (Platts et al, 2017). There are a number of ways that employers can engage with older people who may have been out of the labour market for some time (for example due to a caring responsibility).

Organisations that maintain contact with their former employees can build an alumni pool of potential recruits to meet short-term, flexible, and longer-term resource needs. Maintaining these connections can provide dividends for both employers and individuals.

Returners programmes (or 'returnships') take the concept of an internship and make it relevant to people who are looking to return to work.

Typical programmes help the individual transition back into the workplace through a structured and tailored programme. Programmes vary from eight weeks to six months or more during which time participants undertake a project or step into an available role and benefit from coaching, IT skills training, and (in many cases) a flexible working arrangement.

EMPLOYER CASE STUDY
Barclays

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Barclays Bolder Apprenticeship programme targets a pool of recruits older than traditional apprentices – including those who have retired early and faced redundancy – who join the bank alongside a group of mid-career returners. Barclays targets potential recruits by working with job centres and specialist interest groups, such as disability and mental health networks or support organisations. Barclays also take apprentices on roadshows around the country, inviting current "bolder apprentices" to marketing events to "share their stories" with potential recruits. It is making this personal connection with peer groups that Barclays attributes to the success of the programme, which helps challenge stereotypes around age and career.

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, including small, simple changes**

✓ **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 (Fuller Working Lives Background Evidence, DWP 2017).

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.

These conditions often develop slowly over time and have fewer obvious visible signs, meaning that employers and employees delay taking preventative action. While poor health is a major factor in shortening people's working life, this is often more to do with poor management than the age of the worker.

A quarter of workers with a health condition who are aged 55 and over are currently considering stopping work because of their poor health – compared to just 8% of those with a health condition aged 25-34. (Health Warning, Centre for Ageing Better, 2018)

Too often, due to fear of a negative response and a lack of clear guidance or positive messaging for employees and managers, people put off telling their employer that they have a health condition. Instead, they try to manage by themselves, often leading to significant amounts of unplanned sickness absence. By the time they do tell their employer, the situation may already have reached crisis point. This is much worse for the employee and for the business. A preventative approach to supporting workers with long term health conditions benefits both employees and employers.

There are simple steps that employers can take to support older workers with long term health conditions.

Early access to support, small adjustments to the workplace and working patterns, and managers who treat staff with empathy can make all the difference in enabling individuals to manage their health at work.

A quarter of workers with a health condition who are aged 55 and over are currently considering stopping work because of their poor health.

Compared to just 8% of those with a health condition aged 25-34.

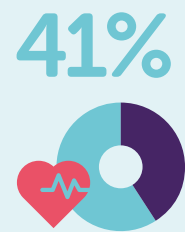(Health Warning, Centre for Ageing Better, 2018)

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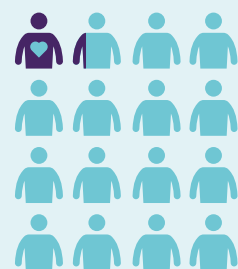
Ensure everyone has the health support they need

Create an open and supportive culture around managing health at work

Older workers are less likely to access support to manage their health condition at work.

Poor workplace culture and overly bureaucratic procedures can put people off having conversations with their employer about their health until absolutely necessary. Whatever your procedure, the approach of individual line managers can make all the difference.
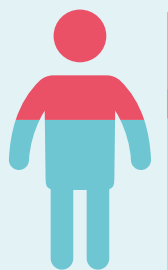
41% of people with a health condition said that greater understanding and empathy from their employer was one of the most important things that would help them to continue in their job.

41%

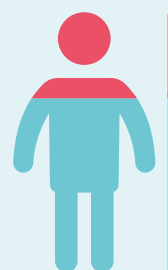(Health Warning, Centre for Ageing Better, 2018)

42% of people with a health condition aged 45 and over reported that they have received no support from their employer...

42%

...compared to 33% of younger workers with a health condition.

33%

(Health Warning, Centre for Ageing Better, 2018)

It's important to ensure that older workers aren't penalised when they do disclose a health condition – for example, by managing sickness absence as a performance issue. For one thing, this just makes people less likely to tell their employer until they have no choice. Research with older workers with health conditions found that most people were frightened of telling their employer for fear of repercussions or had been put off by previous bad experiences.

It's also illegal. Under the 2010 Equalities Act there is no difference between a disabling condition that someone is born with or acquires earlier in life, and a health condition that someone develops slowly over time as they age. Both are protected in law.

Employers can:

− Encourage early discussion of health issues with line managers, occupational health services or other sources of support

− Develop simple, supportive procedures for managing health at work

− Communicate regularly on how to raise health issues and access support

− Make it clear that all health concerns will be treated positively and supportively, and share positive examples of how people are managing their health at work

Employers also need to ensure that managers and other staff responsible for health at work know how to have positive, supportive conversations with staff about their health – which are focused on how to help people to manage their condition and continue working.

30%

30% of people with a health condition who hadn't told their employer were worried about their job security.

29%

29% felt embarrassed and uncomfortable about discussing their health at work.

(Health Warning, Centre for Ageing Better, 2018)

3

Ensure everyone has the health support they need

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Ensure full, equal and early access to support

Reasonable adjustments or occupational health support can make all the difference for workers with long term health conditions. Small, simple changes can often be enough to allow people to balance their health condition with their work. These might include physical adjustments such as a headset, adjustable desk or a fan, through to taking scheduled breaks or being able to work flexibly in terms of hours and locations. The earlier these are provided, the more difference they will make.

Where there is a need for a more significant adjustment, such as special equipment or support to carry out particular aspects of a role, funding can be accessed through the government's Access to Work Scheme. Slow-onset conditions are just as eligible for support as any other health issue.

Support and adjustments need to be tailored to the individual's needs to ensure they are appropriate. While it can be helpful to have specialist health advice – and this can be provided through the Access to Work scheme – the most important thing is to listen to the individual about what would help them continue to do their job.

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More than half of people with long-term health conditions who were given flexible hours (54%) or the ability to work from home as needed (55%) found that these workplace adjustments made a large to very large improvement in their ability to do their jobs.

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(Health Warning, Centre for Ageing Better, 2018)

54%

People with health conditions who benefited from flexible hours

55%

People with health conditions who benefited from ability to work from home

3

Ensure everyone
has the health
support they need

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Make sure support is sustained over time for workers with health conditions

Older workers are also more likely to have conditions that develop over time, and this means that their support needs may also change. It's no use making a one-off change and hoping for the best.

Employers can take action to help people manage health conditions on an ongoing basis:

— Plan adjustments for the long term, including how they will be maintained

— Develop simple and effective systems to keep a record of agreed adjustments, for both the employer and the employee

— Ensure that people have regular check-ins to make sure that agreed support is still in place and still appropriate
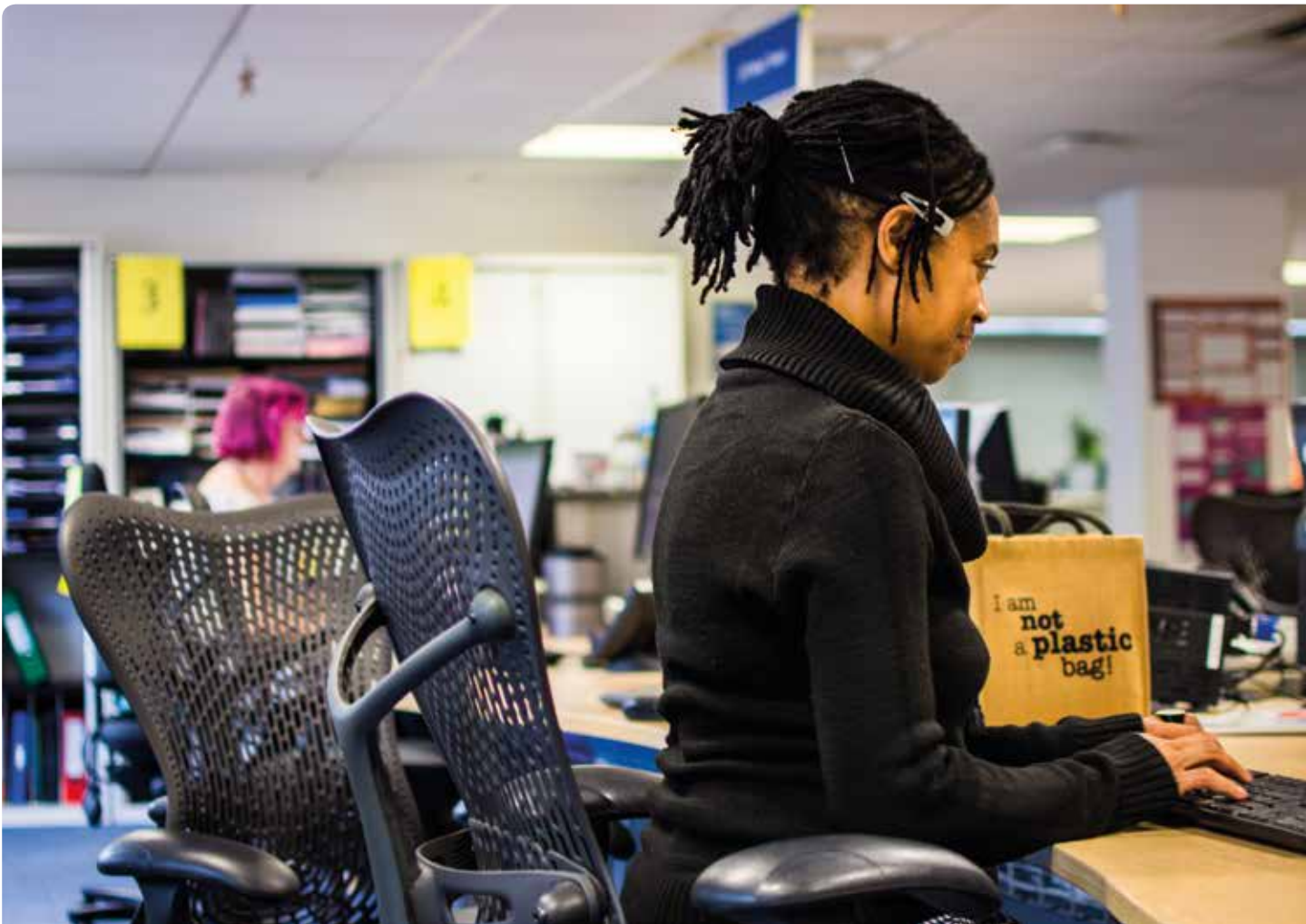
4. Encourage career development at all ages

- ✔ **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**

We 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. (Marvell and Cox 2017)

Opening up career development and support to workers in mid-life and beyond can benefit employers in a range of ways. As well as building the skills and knowledge of their whole workforce, it signals their commitment to all staff, regardless of age, boosting engagement and retention of older workers.

Ensure that development, training and progression is available equally to all ages

Too often workplace training and opportunities for development are targeted solely at younger or graduate employees.

Employers should make sure that they promote training and development opportunities equally to all staff.

Whatever the age of an employee, discussing their future aims and aspirations can help to identify their future training or development needs.

It is important to keep discussing the skills and knowledge that workers need or want to learn, as part of regular line management and development conversations, at all ages. While some older workers may feel less comfortable in 'classroom' settings, these discussions can also cover how people want to learn.

Reverse mentoring can be a useful tool for developing older workers' skills and strengthening intergenerational connections in the workplace. These approaches benefit not just individuals, but are also strategically important for businesses in ensuring that essential skillsets are in place to meet future workforce needs.

4

Encourage career development at all ages

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Provide career guidance at mid-life and beyond, including retirement plans

Good management practice should include taking time to discuss career plans with employees at any age, whether 25 or 55. As well as regular line management conversations, there is value in more structured career guidance.

Mid-career reviews, mid-career consultations, mid-life reviews and career MOTs are all terms for a facilitated process designed to enable 'mid-career' employees to take stock and reflect on their work, their future working options, how it fits within their lives, and to plan their futures.

Older workers may be wary of a review imposed by their employer, fearing pressure towards retirement. Framing these conversations as 'mid-career' or 'managing career transitions' may be more appropriate and more fruitful. While some employers have taken a 'big birthday' approach, offering reviews to all workers at age 50, it may be better to hold them on a rolling basis, for example once every five years regardless of age.

This can also be an opportunity for managers and older workers to discuss future work or retirement plans. Despite the abolition of the Default Retirement Age, equality legislation does not ban these conversations, and without them, valuable opportunities to retain staff and knowledge are lost. Understanding whether older workers have begun to think about retiring and what plans they have made, if any, can give you a clear indication both of likely organisational skills and recruitment needs in future. Importantly it can also help support an experienced member of staff to remain for longer or make a smooth transition to retirement.

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ACAS have a valuable set of guidance for how to manage and support staff of all ages without the Default Retirement Age. (ACAS, 2011)

Help people to take stock, manage transitions and plan holistically for the future

Some leading employers are now going beyond a career-focused review, to help people think more holistically about their finances, health and wellbeing, relationships and work-life balance.

There are now a number of training and support packages available, from a few hours to several days. Participants on one pilot programme reported feeling confident about the future, having more positive attitudes towards ageing, having a sense of purpose and feeling more connected to others. Supporting people with similar experiences of transitions (such as caring for family members, developing a health condition, or bereavement) can be beneficial (Centre for Ageing Better/Gulbenkian, 2017).

Often this type of support is offered as a 'pre-retirement' course for workers in their 60s. By having these kinds of conversation earlier, in mid-career, employers can begin a dialogue about individuals' longer-term aspirations and plans, as well as any health or caring issues that they may need to take account of. For some employers, sign-posting to other available resources may be a more practical option, but this can still provide a valuable launch pad and stimulus for further thinking.

EMPLOYER CASE STUDY
East Cheshire NHS Trust

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An innovative training and support package currently being tested by East Cheshire NHS Trust with mid-career employees aims to increase resilience by getting them to think about their strengths, assets and priorities and about managing change. Among other things, it aims to help people develop strategies around work, which includes thinking about flexible work arrangements. Participants felt that having the time to reflect: to think about what they wanted and how that could be achieved, left them feeling in greater control and more confident about their future. People felt more equipped to deal with change and face challenges head on. The small cohort who participated in the pilot for this programme described it as "transformational."
(Centre for Ageing Better/Gulbenkian, 2017) (Smeaton and Parry, 2018)

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, as they balance aspirations and needs at work and at home.

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

Monitor and share workforce data by age

Monitoring workforce data on age diversity is fundamental to workforce, skills and legacy planning for any organisation.

KNOW YOUR WORKFORCE

Look at the average age of your workforce, the average age of exit and then establish how many skilled staff you stand to lose and may need to replace over the next year. Now do the same exercise focusing on your most valuable and difficult to replace job role, or critical business unit. Without open and early conversations, your most experienced staff may be gone as quickly as it takes to see out a notice period.

It's also important to understand the current situation and perspectives of your older workers. For example, if you collect data on staff engagement, turnover or the gender pay gap, break this down by age groups. This may tell you where you need to focus, as well as where you may already have a good story to tell.

What gets measured gets done. If you want to embed any of the age-friendly practices in this guidance, it's important to collect and understand the data on how you're doing.

For example:

– Percentage of staff making flexible working requests, and proportion agreed by line managers

– Percentage of staff disclosing a health condition

– Proportion receiving agreed support, and sustained support

– Age profile of applicants and successful candidates

– Age profile of people receiving training or other career development support

Again, any of this data may highlight areas for improvement. It may also provide great headlines and case studies to let your staff, and the outside world, know what you're achieving as an age-friendly employer.

5

Create an age-positive culture

Support line managers to deliver and manage age-friendly practices

Line managers are at the front line of delivering policy and creating culture. Whether providing support for health at work, promoting flexible work, or managing working carers, they are a resource for building a workplace that nurtures inclusion and supports diversity. Too often they aren't supported to deliver this.

Much of this is a question of effective, good quality line management, and the good practices that are important for supporting staff of any age. There are also some age-related issues where managers may benefit from targeted support on age diversity:

– How to recognise and challenge age stereotypes and biases and encourage inclusive behaviours

– How to raise and respond to age-related individual issues and sensitivities, including health concerns

– How to manage the performance of age diverse teams

– How to design and manage flexible working arrangements

– How to design job roles around an individual

– How to minimise and manage age bias out of recruitment processes

– How to have supportive conversations about career development and future plans, including retirement

One challenge with tackling potential bias is that raising negative stereotypes can actually reinforce them. Training is most effective when it includes content about the consequences of age stereotypes and offers managers strategies to combat them (Kalinoski et al, 2013).

Age diversity training delivered to 32 supervisors in one organisation showed how age stereotypes develop and can become harmful in the workplace.

(Wegge, 2012)

It also covered the benefits of a multi-generational workforce, and strategies to combat stereotypes and manage conflict.

In an evaluation that followed-up team performance a year later, the training was found to reduce age stereotypes and team conflicts and enhance innovation.
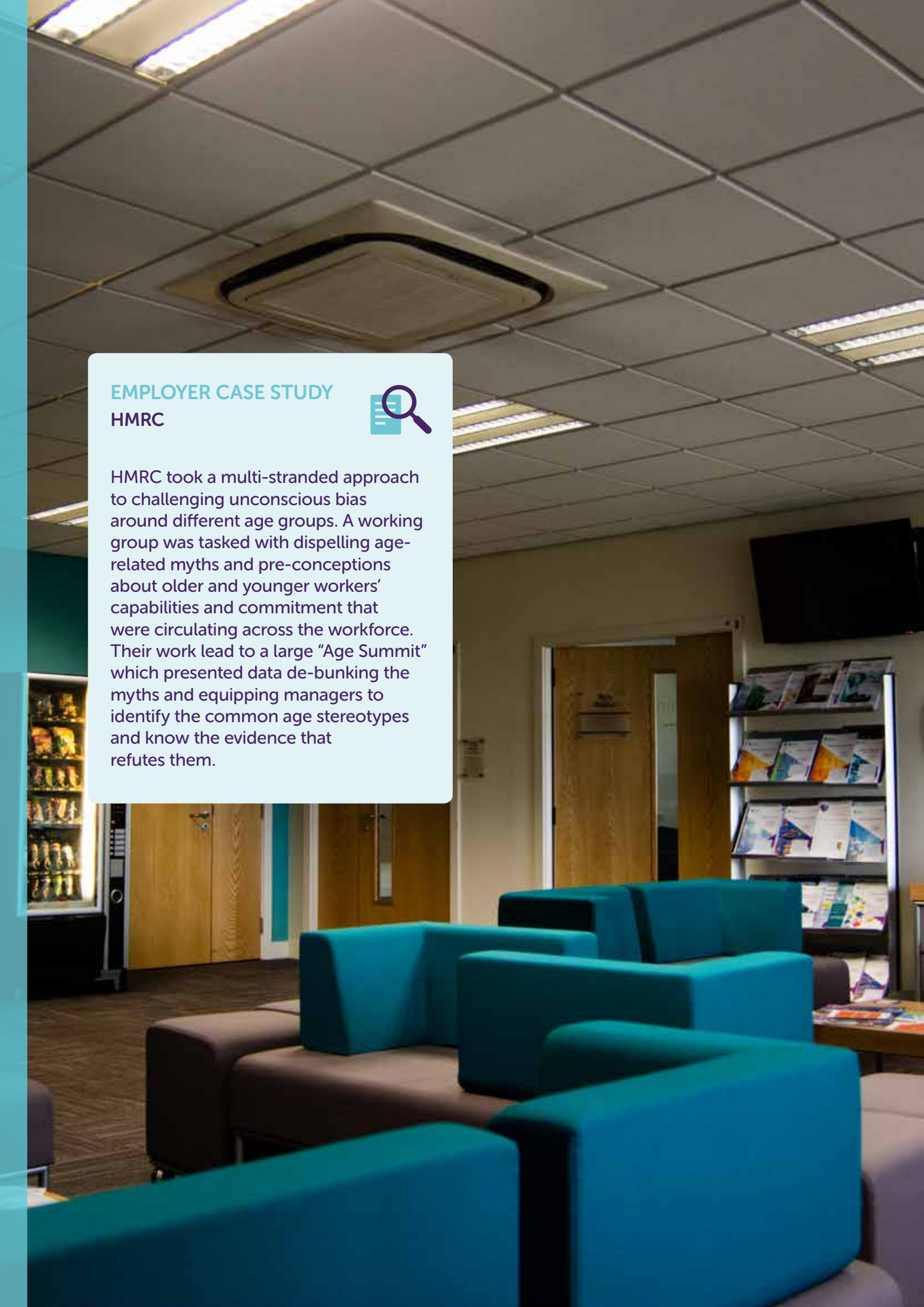
Younger managers can feel awkward managing older workers, and older workers can feel uncomfortable working for younger managers. Where there is a perceived mismatch in status in the relationship it can lead to resentment and negative emotions which can undermine productivity (Kunze and Menges, 2016).

Managers need to be able to discuss the circumstances and motivations for flexible working or other work adjustments that impact older workers, such as personal health issues and caring responsibilities.

Some aspects of age and ageing remain taboo in the workplace and are challenging and awkward for employees to raise. Age imbalance in the employee-line manager relationship can amplify sensitivities around topics that might prompt a work adjustment, such as providing end-of-life care, or the menopause.

Business in the Community and Unison have produced information and resources for employers about supporting staff through the menopause.

Some age-friendly practices involve specific skills, such as job design or managing flexible working arrangements, and these may require formal training. A positive and inclusive attitude is most important, though, and line managers may benefit just as much from peer support, coaching or other informal learning and development.

Our survey of 500 HR managers found that:

29% of large employers had encountered older workers feeling uncomfortable being managed by younger workers.
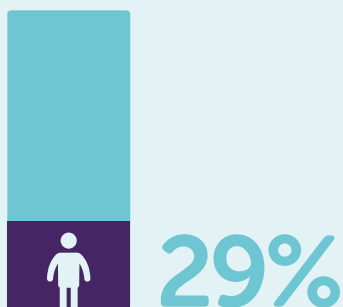
22% reported younger workers feeling awkward managing older workers.

29%

22%
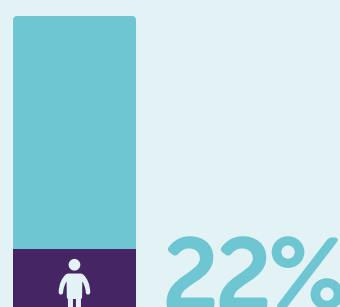
(IFF/Centre for Ageing Better, 2017)

5

Create an age-positive culture

Encourage interaction and networking among staff of all ages

Your staff also play a critical role in creating and sustaining an age-friendly culture. There are two specific areas where you can support them:

– Peer support

– Knowledge sharing and intergenerational mixing

Peer support between colleagues can help improve confidence and knowledge among people experiencing similar challenges. Consider how existing or new networks can be supported to develop and flourish – whether explicitly for older workers, or for people with health conditions, carers or other groups where older workers are likely to be heavily represented.

These networks are also an important resource for employers. You can work with employee networks to gain insight and develop strategies on the age and life-stage related issues that matter to employees.

There is also value in encouraging intergenerational sharing and networking. Both younger and older workers have much to learn from each other but mixing between age groups at work does not happen automatically.

Consider how you can encourage knowledge sharing or other opportunities for mixed age groups to come together. These could include thematic or activity-based groups, or informal learning sessions for colleagues to share their experiences on a topic of interest.

EMPLOYER CASE STUDY
Sodexo

Sodexo engaged its Generations and Employee Network Group in a creative campaign to promote deeper understanding of what causes generational differences in the workforces. Their GenMatch board game provided a unique and engaging space for discussions around differences, perspectives and needs. A multi-channel internal communications campaign launched UK wide using webinars, blogs and a social media, complemented by a one-day management training programme called the Spirit of Inclusion aimed to promote better collegial understanding. Staff feedback was positive and membership of the Network subsequently increased by a quarter. Managers reported improved team commitment to diversity and inclusion, and to flexible working.

How to be an age-friendly employer

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

2

Hire age positively

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

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, including small, simple changes
- Make sure support is sustained over time

4
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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

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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

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Survey data

YouGov survey of 4,064 adults in Great Britain aged 50+ July-Aug 2018
(commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better)

IFF survey of 500 UK employers, October 2017
(commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better)