



The Prince's  
Responsible  
Business Network



Toolkit

# AGE-INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

Untapping the talent  
of over 50s



# TOOLKIT

## AGE-INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT: UNTAPPING THE TALENT OF OVER 50s

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an increase in unemployment, particularly impacting younger and older workers<sup>1</sup>. As we recover, these segments represent an untapped reserve, and this toolkit will challenge and champion those over 50 and enable their access to work. Ensuring that recruitment processes do not have inbuilt age bias will enable the engagement and appreciation of this talent and experience. This toolkit provides advice on age-inclusive recruitment, including 10 top tips for CEOs, from business experts from Business in the Community's Age Taskforce.

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### Introduction

In September 2021, Business in the Community (BITC) published its response to the COVID-19 pandemic [Time to Fix Up](#). In this report, BITC challenged business to build back responsibly from the pandemic. A key area was to tackle inequality in education, employment, and communities, targeting those most disadvantaged in the face of rising unemployment. It is also suggested that businesses should make jobs and apprenticeships more accessible when recruiting by removing barriers which deter those from disadvantaged groups from applying.

As the UK economy starts to emerge from lockdown, now is the time to put this challenge into practice. For CEOs, ensuring people understand your commitment to inclusion and diversity, and to including older workers in recruitment and employment, has never been more important than at this time of recovery. This toolkit provides you with **10 top tips to do this** (see Page 3) and also looks at the issues faced by older workers as a result of the pandemic and how good recruitment



practices can address these and help older job seekers to get back to work.

### A U-shaped employment crisis

The impact of COVID-19 on employment in terms of age has been U-shaped, with the greatest impact of job losses on the youngest and oldest in the workforce.<sup>2</sup> There is a similar impact in terms of furlough, and fears that workers who have been on long-term furlough, especially those over 50, may be at risk of redundancy when furlough ends.

In May 2021, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) found that 1.3 million of those on furlough are over 50, representing over a quarter of the total, and that 3 in 10 older workers on furlough think that there is a 50% chance or higher that they will lose their job when the scheme ends.<sup>3</sup> Further research points to concern that the end of furlough is likely to be tough for older workers, particularly given evidence that pre-pandemic, older workers were less likely to return to work after spells of unemployment than younger workers.<sup>4</sup>

But as the economy emerges from lockdown, labour and skills shortages are already being identified, which older workers could fill.<sup>5</sup> Recruitment routes to bring unemployed people, and those made redundant back into work will meet these shortfalls. There is the potential to identify transferable, essential skills<sup>6</sup> in the recruitment process, to allow people of any age to move into sectors with vacancies, based on relevant skills and experience developed in another sector.

### Benefits of an age-diverse workforce

Older workers represent a valuable resource in terms of labour and skills, bringing knowledge and experience accumulated through their careers. By increasing the number of older workers in your business you can create skilled multi-generational high performing teams, with older and younger workers supporting and learning from each other.

Evidence has found that companies with more age-diverse workforces are more innovative<sup>7</sup> with positive impacts on performance,<sup>8</sup> and with the additional benefit of reflecting the full diversity of the customer base. It has been found that teams which are fully inclusive in terms of age, gender and race make better business decisions in up to 9 cases out of 10.<sup>9</sup> You can read more about the benefits of age diversity in BITC's toolkit [Becoming an Age Friendly Employer](#).

### Recruitment bias and older candidates

Age bias can often be embedded in recruitment processes, intentionally or unintentionally. In a study by Anglia Ruskin University of age bias in recruitment application processes, younger applicants were found to be up to four and a half times more likely to be invited to interview.<sup>10</sup>

Research in the context of the pandemic by the Centre for Ageing Better and Institute for Employment Studies has taken a slightly wider perspective and found that age bias can enter recruitment processes from the beginning, from branding and advertising, through creating a positive candidate experience, to how new technologies are applied.<sup>11</sup> Yet the research found that employers do not consider age diversity to be a problem in their organisations. Few employers have organisational strategies aimed at making the recruitment process more diverse and inclusive, especially in the context of age and, if age is considered, it is more likely to be focused on issues relating to recruiting younger workers.



### 10 Top Tips for CEOs for age-inclusive recruitment

The following insights are provided by Jayne Haines, SVP Talent, Learning and Organisational Development at GSK and member of the BITC Age Taskforce.

- 1. This is about your leadership shadow as CEO, ensuring people understand your commitment to inclusion and diversity.** Including older workers has never been more important than at this time of recovery.
- 2. Educate your team.** This means your leadership team, the HR team and all hiring managers. Training and awareness-raising should not just focus on unconscious bias but include measures to increase age inclusion. BITC's toolkit [Becoming an Age Friendly Employer](#) will help you develop approaches to become more age friendly.
- 3. Monitor your organisation's age profile and set multigenerational aspirations.** Measure and monitor your data – 'what gets measured gets done'. BITC's toolkit [Getting Started on Age: from data to action](#) can help you to do this.
- 4. Building diversity in recruitment will need budget.** Be prepared to invest, and then you will reap the benefits of a more inclusive recruitment process, and a more inclusive workplace, both now and in the longer term.
- 5. Check that your recruitment processes have age inclusion locked in all the way through.** This should apply from job description to screening panels and on to interview panel and at selection. Conduct age-positive recruitment campaigns and ensure language and imagery is age diverse and inclusive.
- 6. Set expectations of age inclusion with your search companies.** Build age inclusion into contracts and requirements for every search, longlist, and short listing.
- 7. Work with organisations that support older workers.** [Business in the Community](#) supports employers to create a skilled, inclusive workforce today and for the future, and can link you to our member businesses and other sources of support.
- 8. Challenge your suppliers to be age-inclusive employers.** Share the approach you take to inclusive recruitment with your value chain. BITC's toolkit [Developing and embedding your purpose](#) helps you think about how you can share your values with your stakeholders.
- 9. Share your good news stories.** This will allow you to showcase the actions you are taking to build age diversity. Consider this sort of awareness-raising both internally, with your own staff, with your value chains, and in the wider business context. This can help you to build your brand as an employer of choice and help other businesses to take action too.
- 10. Make age inclusive recruitment a priority throughout your business.** Engagement, training, and awareness needs to be embedded in all areas and at all levels. Remove upper age limits in graduate schemes, apprenticeships, and traineeships, develop returner or re-entry programmes and offer alternative career pathways.

### Digital recruitment and older jobseekers

When using digital recruitment methods, employers should be aware that there are certain issues which may impact on the success of older jobseekers.

Algorithms may build age bias into applicant tracking systems, for example, perhaps by not taking into account differently named older qualifications. As a result, older candidates may be unintentionally filtered out of electronic short-listing processes.

Evidence has shown that machine learning principles in artificial intelligence (AI) may give preference to candidates of a more similar type to those that have been successful before, and potentially work against measures to widen the candidate pool.<sup>12</sup>

When engaging with candidates, consider a range of digital platforms and perhaps whether additional non-digital approaches might be appropriate. Talented older jobseekers from more excluded groups, such as those experiencing multiple barriers, may have less access to opportunities only available via digital platforms. BITC has evidenced this in our employability work with more excluded groups of older jobseekers.

### How BITC can help you build age-inclusive recruitment in your business

Further insights on responsible recruitment can be found in BITC's factsheet [COVID-19: Rapid responsible recruitment](#), which highlights how removing barriers in recruitment processes can open doors to large pools of diverse talent.

Wider advice on age-inclusive approaches, including in recruitment, can be found in BITC's toolkit [Becoming an Age Friendly Employer](#).

Employers can engage with BITC's nationwide employability programmes for over 50s jobseekers to access talent and provide support through behind the scenes visits and placements. Details are on our [age pages](#) or via [contact us](#).

Support is also available to BITC members via your Relationship Manager (RM) and BITC's Advisory Services. Contact your RM or visit our [website](#) to find out about how to join us and work with BITC to build age inclusion in your business.



## How to be more age inclusive in recruitment: employer case studies

### CASE STUDY: AVIVA

Aviva, a member of BITC's Age Taskforce, aimed to attract and retain more people over 50 in its workforce, in order to win talent and better reflect the age range of its customer base. To recruit more older workers, the Company launched a recruitment campaign that appealed to all ages.

- Aviva used age-neutral language in job adverts and its wider recruitment campaign.
- Straplines included 'Believe in being free to be me' and 'Believe the sky's the limit'.
- People in advertisement images were shown from behind, leaving their age ambiguous.
- They appealed to people's values rather than their technical skills.
- Aviva vacancies in the UK are advertised as being open to flexible working.

As a result of the campaign, the number of over-50s hires at Aviva jumped by 33% and the attrition rate among over-50s fell to 12.3% compared to a UK private sector norm of 25.7%.

### CASE STUDY: CO-OP

Facing a shortfall in recruitment, BITC member Co-op developed an inclusive recruitment campaign for its Funeralcare business to increase its candidate reach.

A focus on transferable skills allowed Co-op Funeralcare to target both people retired from the forces and police, and younger people, using targeted advertising and social media.

As a result of the inclusive recruitment campaign, four-hundred-and-fifty new colleagues joined the Funeralcare business. Both the selection process and employee induction were carried out online.

Taking these actions has paid dividends as Co-op Funeralcare succeeded, over just a couple of years, in reducing its staff turnover rate from 22% to 1.4%. This has helped the business to build and sustain relationships and to be at the heart of the communities it serves. While always critical, this has been found to be even more essential during the current COVID-19 pandemic.



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- [learn more about our advisory services](#)
- [join us for one of our upcoming events](#)



Talk to one of our expert team [today](#) to learn how membership of BITC can help you take your responsible business journey further and drive lasting global change.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>2</sup> Resolution Foundation (2021) 'A U-shaped crisis: The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on older workers' <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/a-u-shaped-crisis/>

<sup>3</sup> ONS (2021) 'Living longer: older workers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic' <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ageing/articles/livinglonger/olderworkersduringthecovid19pandemic>

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Ageing Better and Institute for Fiscal Studies (2021) 'Changing patterns of work at older ages' <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/news/end-furlough-likely-be-particularly-tough-older-workers>

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<sup>6</sup> BITC Essential Skills <https://www.bitc.org.uk/essential-skills/>

<sup>7</sup> Hammermann, A, Niendorf, M and Schmidt, J, (2019) 'Age Diversity and Innovation: Do mixed teams of 'old and experienced' and 'young and restless' employees foster companies' innovativeness?' <http://doku.iab.de/discussionpapers/2019/dp0419.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> SHRM Foundation 'Leveraging the value of an age-diverse workforce' <https://www.shrm.org/foundation/ourwork/initiatives/the-aging-workforce/Documents/Age-Diverse%20Workforce%20Executive%20Briefing.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Forbes (2017) 'New Research: Diversity + Inclusion = Better Decision Making at Work' <https://www.forbes.com/sites/eriklarson/2017/09/21/new-research-diversity-inclusion-better-decision-making-at-work/#1a8d4e9b4cbf>

<sup>10</sup> Drydakis, N et al (2017) 'Inclusive Recruitment? Hiring Discrimination against Older Workers' available at <ftp.iza.org>

<sup>11</sup> Centre for Ageing Better (2021) 'Shut Out: How employers and recruiters are overlooking the talents of over 50s workers' <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/publications/shut-out-employers-overlooking-over-50s-workers>

<sup>12</sup> Reuters (2018) 'Amazon scraps secret AI recruiting tool that showed bias against women' [online] accessed here: