

# Recruitment and older workers

Recruitment is expensive, in time and money. It may be more cost effective to focus on keeping your staff and considering re-training and development for existing employees.

When you are recruiting you want to get the best possible candidates for the job, whatever their age. To do that, check that your recruitment process focuses on the requirements of the job, not the age of applicants. Younger and older workers can offer real business benefits.

For younger workers, the Government fully funds Apprenticeship opportunities to help employers develop their skills and experience at the start of their working lives. Older workers often have ready skills and experience that they can offer to employers from the outset.

## Recruitment action plan

### Job advertising

- Think about where you advertise. Use a wide range of media to reach different age groups and avoid age bias.
- Avoid using terms which are simply code for particular ages, such as 'school leaver', 'first job' or 'recent graduate'.
- Think carefully before using terms that can be associated with particular ages, such as 'mature' or 'energetic'. If you can't show that these are real and necessary attributes for the post, and not related to age, then avoid using them.
- If asking for experience, describe the type of experience that is required to do the job rather than the number of years of experience.
- Qualifications have changed over time. Only ask for them if they are essential for the job. If you do have to ask for qualifications, make it clear in advertising that you will consider equivalent qualifications so you don't exclude people of different age groups.
- Focus on the competencies required to do the job.
- Few jobs have to be done full time. Think flexibly about work patterns to help attract the best range of applicants.
- Check that any statements you include in adverts about your equality policy refer to your age-neutral policies.

### Application forms

- You can ask for an applicant's date of birth to assess how effectively you are attracting candidates of all ages. It is good practice to keep this separately from the selection process to ensure you are not influenced by age.

## Interviews

- Ensure that staff who are responsible for selecting and interviewing candidates are aware of the law on age discrimination. There are only very few situations in which it is lawful to discriminate on grounds of age.
- If possible, involve managers who represent different age groups when interviewing candidates.
- Use criteria to assess candidate skills and their ability or potential to do the job. Agree questions beforehand based on the job description. This can help to ensure you don't make assumptions based on age.
- Ensure there are no assumptions about future capability or length of service: age is not generally a good indicator of potential return on investment.
- Review interview results to check that no age bias, deliberate or unintentional, has influenced selection decisions.

## Recruitment agencies

- Ensure your recruitment agencies comply with age legislation. Be clear about your commitment to an age-diverse workforce. Remember, if they discriminate you may be liable.

## Some exemptions to age discrimination

- You can set an age limit which simply reflects the position set out in other legislation that is where a job can't legally be done by a person under or over a certain age. For example, serving alcohol or driving passenger vehicles. However, think about whether the job could be adapted first. For example, supermarket checkout staff can be younger than 18, where someone older takes responsibility for alcohol sales.

There are only a limited number of other exemptions where it is legal to set an age limit for recruitment. In some circumstances an employer may specify a particular age where this is otherwise required for the job. This is called a 'genuine occupational requirement'. In practice this is unusual apart from, for example, acting in certain theatre roles.

Whether the employer is using a general or a specific exception, the employer themselves would need to be able to defend the age limit if challenged at tribunal.

"We feature employees over 50 in our recruitment advertising to send out a positive message to prospective older applicants."

**Jim Dalton, Head of Resourcing & Employee Engagement, First Group**