

## Frequently asked questions

- Don't older workers block opportunities for younger workers?
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- Don't older workers block opportunities for younger workers?

There is no evidence of older workers blocking opportunities for younger workers over the longer term.

Removing older workers to 'make way' for younger people can be damaging to productivity, as it can fail to maximise existing skills. It can increase staff turnover and also increase the costs of training and recruiting new workers. Instead, retaining experienced workers can maximise productivity help mentor and train up new recruits.

- Without fixed retirement ages won't older workers have to resign to finally leave?

Older workers can still plan to retire. As they are coming up to the point when they plan to retire, they would have to let their employer have notice that they intend to retire.

Many older workers will want to consider their options for working on or retiring as they approach pension age.

- What do I do about poor performing older workers?

Many find that managing employee performance without fixed retirement ages is not a problem: they use fair dismissal procedures and performance discussions for all their workers.

Leaving someone to perform poorly in the years running up towards retirement and then letting them finally retire can be costly to the business. Line managers and supervisors need to be able to assess employees of all ages on their performance and ability, and take appropriate action.

If performance can't be improved, use the same fair dismissal procedures as for workers of any age. Ignoring shortfalls in performance because it is assumed that an employee is near retirement may be discriminatory, particularly if the performance of younger workers is handled differently.

Generally employees know when they are no longer able to carry on and self-select to leave or 'retire'

- I have an older member of staff who needs a change; I don't want to lose them

If a worker is no longer able to do their current job, or an alternative job, then a change in their hours or responsibilities might help them to cope better and enable you to retain valuable skills and experience.

- I have a member of staff who has developed a disability, what do I need to do?

Where an employee develops a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010, you may need to make reasonable adjustments to help them to continue to do their job.

- Rather than manage performance issues, isn't retiring someone more dignified than using performance management?

There's nothing dignified about letting someone continue under-performing, leaving them to think they're doing a good job. That's true of workers at any age. You can successfully manage the performance of employees of all ages, through their formal or informal performance management discussions.

Where workers expect to be treated equally regardless of their age, the issue of 'loss of dignity' doesn't tend to arise.

- What has flexible working got to do with older workers?

Part-time or flexible working can be an important way of enabling employees of all ages to stay in work, or return to work, while meeting their wider personal needs. For many older employees, flexible working is a popular option as it allows them to make a gradual transition between full-time work and retirement. 60 per cent of over 50s would like to continue working past State Pension age, but on a part-time basis. Half of people who recently retired would have considered working longer if they could have accessed flexible work.

- Won't offering flexible working make life harder for me as an employer?

Flexible working options can help employers to retain skilled and experienced staff. It can also help you to manage the flow of work, whether on a day to day basis or over the longer-term. Benefits can include less downtime for machinery when 24 hour shifts can be covered, extending the hours that customers can access the business, or covering peak business periods.

Consider which flexible working options best suit the business, and ensure your managers and supervisors know how to consider requests fairly and as positively as possible.

- So, should I wait for my employee to talk to me?

Talk to your workers. Employees can often be wary about asking what options for flexible or part-time working may be possible. Evidence indicates that many older employees don't know how to raise the issue with their manager or discuss alternative options. As a result they may leave work altogether or take their skills and experience to a different employer.

- Aren't older workers a health liability and more likely to have accidents at work?

Evidence shows you can benefit from the commitment and good attendance shown by their older workers. Older workers tend to have fewer accidents and lower levels

of short-term sickness.

- Can older people do physical work as well as younger people?

Strength is an individual matter; some older workers can be more physically able than their younger colleagues. Age is not generally an indication of capability and does not tend to determine an employee's physical ability to do a job. Poor workplace design and inflexible working practices are more likely to prevent staff from being fully effective.

The physical demands of work can sometimes be minimised through adaptations in work design or the use of appropriate equipment.

- Don't older workers offer a poor return on training investment?

Research shows that older worker productivity does not usually decline at least up to the age of 70, where these workers have received the same level of training as younger colleagues.

The risk of an employee leaving a company after training or promotion can be the same across all age groups. Age, therefore, is not generally a good indication of return on training investment.

- I heard older workers don't want to take-up training

Older workers are not always aware of the opportunities that are open to them or assume they are for less experienced workers. Encourage workers of all ages to take up relevant training opportunities and ensure they understand the importance to your business and their own development. Older workers often do take-up training when it is made clear that the training is relevant to them and they are encouraged to take it up.