

# Training and development for an older workforce

Training can help businesses fill skills gaps, increase productivity and keep pace with change. It supports workforce motivation and retention across workers of all ages.

In most jobs these days, where older workers receive the same level of training as younger workers, older worker productivity does not usually decline until at least age 70.

Some employers are much less likely to provide training to older workers if they are assumed to be within two to three years of possible retirement. This could be unlawful age discrimination, and it doesn't make good business sense. The risk of an employee leaving the company after receiving training is the same across all age groups.

Research shows that younger workers have a higher staff turnover rate than older workers. Most training returns an investment within a year, so age is not generally a good indicator of return on training investment.

With an age diverse workforce, you can make the most of the range of skills and experience brought by people of different ages. Many employers draw on the skills of their more experienced workers, to help bring on other staff. For example, the Land Registry in Swansea does this by teaming new staff with more experienced staff for mentoring and knowledge sharing.

## How to make training and promotion accessible to all age groups

- Don't use minimum or maximum age restrictions for training or for offering promotion unless you are sure those restrictions can be justified. You may be asked to justify these restrictions in an employment tribunal.
- Make sure all employees, including older employees, know that training and development is relevant to them and encourage all workers to take up opportunities. Older workers are not always aware of the opportunities that are open to them or assume they are for younger workers.
- Use regular discussions to talk to people about their training and promotion options. This will help you and your staff to plan ahead and meet your needs.
- Monitor take-up of training by employee age to make sure all staff are benefiting from available opportunities. Talk to people who don't attend or refuse training to find out why.
- Monitor outcomes from promotion exercises to ensure age bias has not occurred. Remember it is unlawful to rule someone out for promotions on the grounds of age unless it can be objectively justified.

- Don't assume older workers will not take up training or a new post. Age is not generally a good indicator of return on investment and employers need to maximise the productive contribution of all their workers, regardless of age.
- Encourage mentoring and sharing of skills within your business. Experienced workers, including older workers, can support and train new recruits and less-experienced employees.

Not providing training to older workers could be unlawful age discrimination and it doesn't make good business sense.

"We have found that older workers who receive job-related training reach the same skill standards as younger workers. A 61-year-old team leader trained to operate a forklift, taking a four-day induction course and passing a practical and written exam - exactly the same as everyone else in the company."

**Linda Lloyd, HR Director, Beacon Foods.**

"Experienced workers, including older workers, pass on vital skills and give practical support to new employees. This has helped us improve training by involving experienced workers in the company's apprenticeship scheme. The training process for new staff has improved significantly by involving experienced workers who are given formal 'trainer training'. The company annually assesses the abilities of all employees, matching these to the work within the plant and arranging any necessary training."

"We have no retirement age. There are no concerns about reduced progression opportunities and the process of training new staff has been improved greatly by involving experienced, skilled workers as trainers on the company's apprenticeship scheme."

**Paul Brabban, Managing Director, South Wales Forgemasters**

"We hold onto our workforce well into their later years and retrain them. This allows us to keep and use their skills, and it gives us a tremendous bank of knowledge and experience."

**Stanair Industrial Door Services**