

Employer-facing support for jobseekers in their 50s and 60s

A guide for
Employer
Engagement and
In Work Support
staff working with
older jobseekers

July 2023



What we have learnt and what works well

Purpose

This resource is for employment support workers who have an employer-facing role. It highlights some of the barriers that have prevented older jobseekers from securing good opportunities in the past, and which persist today. Support workers are uniquely placed to develop productive relationships and collaborate with local employers, whilst often also providing individual support. The resource suggests positive steps that can be taken to develop a three-way relationship between jobseeker, support worker and employer, with links to a range of helpful tools and resources.

Context

Age is one of the protected characteristics within the 2010 Equality Act, yet age discrimination continues to have a negative effect on people, the economy and society as a whole. Being aware of this and reframing conversations and methods of engagement can help make positive changes for all involved. Whilst we accept that [societal attitudes to ageism](#) will not improve immediately, there are often small changes that can make a significant difference in enhancing recruitment and employment practices for older workers.

Age diversity within the workforce brings huge opportunities for employers. Older workers can offer vital knowledge and skills, but often they do not get as far as interview, being eliminated at the shortlist stage.

Employers who do not recruit inclusively risk failing to draw on the experience and abilities of a significant talent pool.

A [report published in 2021](#) found that 36% of people aged 50 – 69 said that their age was a disadvantage when applying for jobs. Today many [employers do not feel adequately prepared to support older workers](#) or may be working in a way that is not conducive to employing or retaining older employees. Many older workers [face barriers to staying in work](#), and people in their 50s and 60s who fall out of work struggle with ageism in the recruitment process.

A comprehensive and bespoke package of support for jobseekers in their 50s and 60s gives them the best chance of success in searching for a good job which is both fulfilling and realistic. The Centre for Ageing Better’s resource [‘Supporting the 50+ workforce back into employment’](#) details some of the elements which can positively impact this process.



1 in 3

One in three workers are aged over 50 and the supply of younger labour is decreasing - the older workforce is the workforce

Employer engagement is a key aspect of provision and the three-way relationship between jobseeker, support worker and employer is crucial to ensuring good and sustainable outcomes. We need to focus on activities that ensure customers are well prepared for recruitment processes and that employers are engaging in age friendly behaviours. This may require more flexibility in approach, but it will open opportunities to many more on your caseloads.

Half of employers (particularly large businesses and public sector organisations) have Diversity & Inclusion policies

where age discrimination is highlighted. However, only 1 in 6 are 'very likely' to develop age-friendly policies in the next 12 months. You may find that employers feel overwhelmed by perceived requirements or that they are operating in ways that might actively discourage older jobseekers from applying for jobs or sustaining employment.

As a frontline worker, you have an important role to play in raising awareness of potential barriers and supporting employers to ensure that pathways into work for the over 50s are as clear as possible.





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The impact of employer engagement

Employment support programmes in Germany and Switzerland have shown positive results from working with employers before and beyond the commencement of a contract.

As part of '[Perspektive 50 plus](#)', a scheme which ran in Germany from 2005 – 2015, employers were given tailored advice about how to integrate individual older jobseekers into the workforce. Employers were also offered intensive counselling around age-friendly employment practices, including encouraging them to invest in making changes in the workplace. The Jobcentre acted as mediator between the jobseeker and the employer which helped with a smooth transition back into the workplace. SMEs (without HR functions) in particular benefited from the Jobcentre

support. This was not limited to identifying candidates but included other aspects such as writing job descriptions. From the jobseekers' perspective, they benefited from a holistic and personalised approach, taking account of both life experience and socio-economic circumstances. This meant that good social and professional profiling was possible enabling an effective match with a suitable employer.

The programme led to increased employment of older workers. Of 200,000 people who were part of the programme in 2011/12, over 70,000 entered employment. It highlighted the need to maintain a lifelong learning culture which is important in increasing awareness about the benefits of retaining and recruiting older workers ([Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs](#)).

The '[Supported employment for over 50s](#)' programme in Switzerland (2021 – 2024) requires the job coach to engage fully with both the jobseeker and the employer. Participation is voluntary for the jobseeker. They receive weekly sessions with a job coach, working on action planning, job searching and support with the application process.

Employment needs to be found within the first 6 months and then the support continues beyond the commencement of employment with participants obliged to work with their coach once they have started work. This programme offers financial allowances and/or training measures to employers to ensure longevity of employment ([State Secretariat for Economic Affairs](#)).



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Why do we need age friendly employment?

We know that:

- Multi-generational workforces drive productivity and innovation
- Three quarters of employers in England agree that older workers' experience is crucial to the success of the organisation
- 40% of employers think ageism is a problem in their industry, but only 20% think it's a problem in their organisation
- Rejection during the recruitment process can diminish confidence, reducing the drive to apply for work
- Older workers feel at a disadvantage at every stage of the recruitment process as a result of the language in job adverts, the application process and interview experiences

1 in 3



Nearly one in three workers in the UK are aged 50 or over

1.1%



A firm with a 10% higher share of workers aged 50 and over is 1.1% more productive

36%



36% of 50-69 year-olds feel they are at a disadvantage in applying for jobs because of their age

1 in 4



A quarter of people in their 50s and 60s are carers



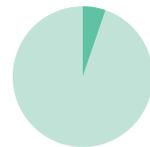
Things that we know work well

Positive communication is key:

- Use of age-inclusive language in job adverts and job descriptions so that people aren't put off applying. Language that appeals to older candidates does not deter younger applicants, so by changing the language these ads are more open to all candidates
- Advertising in places – including digital platforms – where older jobseekers would look. Sites such as [Rest Less](#) and [Working Wise](#) have job boards that are targeted at over 50s
- Using images in recruitment materials which include workers of all ages. Age-positive images are available via our free [Image Library](#)

- Highlighting flexible working arrangements and other employee benefits relevant to older workers such as workplace pensions and flexible working
- Supporting individuals through the process. Work on identifying and addressing internalised ageism so that people have confidence in their own abilities and employability. Ensure that people are prepared for the realities of the recruitment process and their return to work to better support sustainable employment. Think about practical interview advice, confidence building techniques, scenario planning etc so that people know what to expect and how to react.

5.5%



The phrase 'flexible working' only appears in around 1 in 20 job adverts.

This table shows the effects of age-stereotypical words and phrases, and CV features in job adverts, on older applicants

Word, phrase, or feature	Candidate's likelihood of applying	Candidate's perceived likelihood of getting an interview	Candidate's perceived likelihood of getting an offer	Candidate's perceived fit	Candidate's judgement of employer's perception of fit
 Short diversity statement					
 Generous pension contributions					
 Flexible working opportunities					
 Adaptable					
 Innovative					
 Technologically savvy					
 Recent graduate					

Symbols  and  show words and phrases that had a statistically significant positive  or negative  effect on the behaviour or motivation listed.



Things that don't work so well

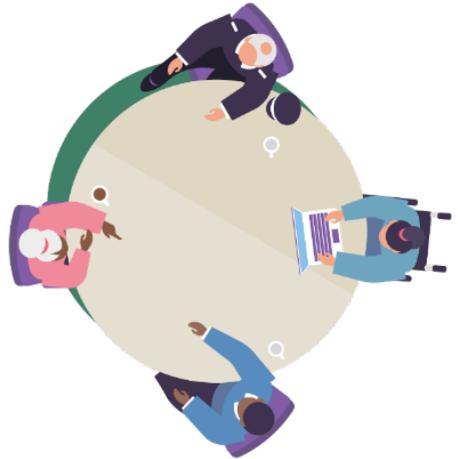
Loss of motivation can be caused by:

- The use of words in adverts or job descriptions such as 'innovative', 'technologically savvy' and 'recent graduate', or the link to specific skills required for the job, such as 'programming skills'. This can make older workers feel that a job or employer isn't for them
 - Application processes that require a 'full work history' or a CV. Bespoke application forms which ask just for relevant experience to be highlighted do not give an immediate indication of age
 - Jobs that specify the requirement for specific more recent formal qualifications
- Shortlisting that is biased, making assumptions about older workers based on stereotypes
 - Poor interview practice that lacks diversity in terms of panel members, does not have predefined questions, and does not have a clear scoring mechanism in place. People's assumptions and stereotypes can play a role here
 - Dismissive responses demonstrated (intentionally or not) through negative body language, facial expression, tone of voice and the attitude of interviewers

What you can do

You are best placed to support both the individuals and employers you work with. You will need to equip people with the skills to navigate their return to work and the challenges this may present. Building strong relationships with local employers is also crucial to enabling older workers on your caseload to take up realistic and sustainable job offers. Even small changes in recruitment and employment practices can have a positive impact and improve the chances of recruitment for older workers.

You are ideally placed to signpost employers towards a range of resources designed to support the recruitment and retention of older workers. You can also highlight any information or processes that could discourage over 50s from applying for their vacancies.



Five actions to be an age-friendly employer



1 Create an age-positive culture

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



2 Hire age positively

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



3 Be flexible about flexible working

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



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 Ensure everyone has the health support they need

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

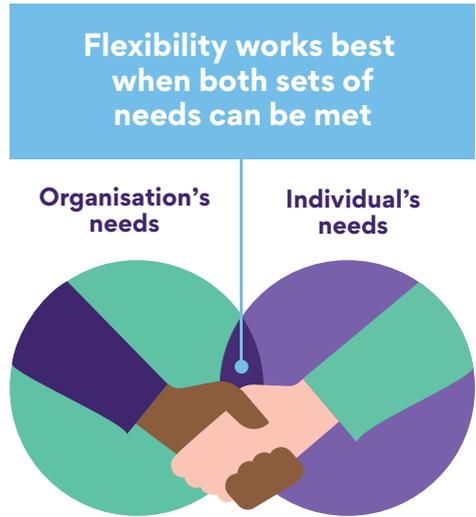
Support the individual:

- Direct people to websites aimed at supporting older jobseekers: [Rest Less](#) has information on vacancies, career advice as well as a section on searching for age diverse employers including list of those who are currently hiring
 - Provide people with resources to guide them through the recruitment and return to work process. Alongside general support, search for guides and advice targeted at people in their 50s and 60s. Examples include, [Careers Can Change](#) and [Rest Less](#)
 - Provide details of local age-friendly employers. This should give jobseekers more confidence about places being the right fit. Ageing Better's website includes the logos of those signed up to the [Age-Friendly Pledge](#)
- Personalise your approach – not all people over 50 need the same support. Think about what each person needs and responds to and frame the support in an age-inclusive way. This may mean normalising conversations around additional challenges, enabling them to speak confidently about the experience they bring and signposting to relevant support organisations or peer groups
 - Acknowledging age is not about making people feel old, or about pitting different age groups against one another. You can help people feel ready for work by highlighting what they have to offer to employers, and demonstrating the benefits of good work to their personal circumstance

Support the employer:

- Arrange age-friendly recruitment events demonstrating the range of skills and experience to local employers
- Champion the benefits of the contribution that workers in their 50s and 60s make to the workforce
- Offer a unique perspective to employers, challenging their recruitment and employment practices to ensure that they are age inclusive
- Encourage employers to implement ideas from the '[Good Recruitment for Older Workers](#)' (GROW) guide produced by the Centre for Ageing Better in collaboration with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC). This offers advice on practical ways to make recruitment processes age-inclusive
- Offer local employers practical support with adverts and job descriptions. Giving up time to help employers rethink their marketing and how they advertise roles can encourage them to work with you and ensure they are open to candidates of all ages
- Encourage employers to consult '[Flexible working for over 50s – A toolkit for employers](#)' produced by Ageing Better together with Timewise. This gives information on making flexible working available to all ages
- Discuss any reasonable adjustments that might be needed and drill down into any barriers presented, for example: cost; access difficulties; space issues; safety issues. Consider whether any of these can be addressed and overcome

- Consider an employer event or roundtable. Provide local employers with insights and support on being age-friendly and allow them to share good practice
- Ageing Better’s [‘Age-friendly Employer Pledge’](#) could be used as a conversation starter about the skills and experience of this group. Use it to encourage employers to commit to working better with over 50s and give the employer a chance to demonstrate their commitment to all ages. Once an employer has signed up to the pledge, you can use this as a chance to follow up with them and develop the relationship. Use our promotional materials as a method for engaging employers.



What is the pledge?

Age-friendly
Employer
Pledge

The Age-friendly Employer Pledge is a nationwide programme for employers who:

- ✓ **recognise** the importance and value of older workers
- ✓ are **committed** to improving work for people in their 50s and 60s (and beyond)
- ✓ are prepared to **take action** to help them flourish in a multigenerational workforce



How might employers start?

Becoming an Age-friendly Employer is a journey:

By signing the pledge, you are not committing to changing your whole organisation overnight. You are committing to take one action – big or small – every year, to improve the recruitment and retention of older workers.

-  Create an age-friendly culture
-  Hire age-positively
-  Be flexible about flexible working
-  Encourage career development at all ages
-  Ensure everyone has the health support they need
-  Start a 50+ staff network
-  Ask candidates for only their most relevant experience
-  Have reason-neutral policies – and communicate them
-  Provide a mid-life MOT
-  Line manager training, in access and adjustments

- Promote existing good practice. Using case studies of employers in your area doing good work with over 50s can help encourage others to do the same. Think about promotion in newsletters, online, at recruitment events and in local press. Encourage employers to promote their age-friendly practices online and onsite
 - Develop your own version of an age-friendly employer toolkit by adapting Ageing Better's ['Becoming an age-friendly employer'](#). You can include examples of local employers and services to make it relatable for those you want to engage
- 'Age' is not a fixed concept. Whether working with jobseekers, engaging employers or delivering in-work support, consider what age you are targeting the service to and what format is most applicable and effective. There is no 'one-size fits all' but there are simple changes to how we support individuals and employers that can lead to more positive outcomes.

The five key actions for age-friendly recruitment



Further reading and resources

Centre for Ageing Better (2018) Becoming an age-friendly employer. Available at: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/resources/becoming-age-friendly-employer>

Centre for Ageing Better (2020) Flexible working for over 50s – A toolkit for employers. Available at: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/resources/flexible-working-over-50s>

Centre for Ageing Better (2021) Good Recruitment for Older Workers: A guide for employers (GROW). Available at: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/resources/good-recruitment-for-older-workers-a-guide-for-employers>

Centre for Ageing Better (2021) Too much experience: Older workers' perceptions of ageism in the recruitment process. Available at: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/resources/too-much-experience-older-workers-perceptions-ageism-recruitment-process>

Centre for Ageing Better (2022) Employer attitudes: Evidence cards. Available at: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/resources/employer-attitudes-evidence-cards>

Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Age-friendly Employer Pledge. Available at: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/age-friendly-employer-pledge>

Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Age-friendly-Employer-Pledge-info-pack-Apr23.pdf. Available at: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/Age-friendly-Employer-Pledge-info-pack-Apr23.pdf>

Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Ageism: What's the harm?
Available at: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/resources/ageism-whats-harm>

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (n.d.) Germany – Perspective 50 plus – Employment Pacts for Older People in the Regions.
Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/PDFServlet?mode=mlpPractice&practiceld=27>

Rest Less (2023) Search age diverse employers. Available at: <https://restless.co.uk/jobs/>

State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (n.d.) Supported employment for over 50s. Available at: <https://www.arbeit.swiss/secoalv/en/home/menue/stellensuchende/arbeitslos-was-tun-/arbeitsmarktliche-massnahmen/supported-employment.html>

Timewise Jobs (2023) Part Time & Flexible Roles. Available at: <https://www.timewisejobs.co.uk/>

Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.

The Centre for Ageing Better creates change in policy and practice informed by evidence and works with partners across England to improve employment, housing, and to combat ageism. Ageing Better is a charitable foundation, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.

