

Making Workplaces Work for Everyone

**Employer views on
supporting older
Disabled workers
and people with
long-term health
conditions**

June 2026



About us

Centre for Ageing Better

Everyone has the right to a good life as they get older and our whole society benefits when people are able to age well. But far too many people face huge barriers, and as a result are living in bad housing, dealing with poverty and poor health and made to feel invisible in their communities and society.

Ageism, including discrimination in employment, stark inequalities in people's health and financial circumstances, chronic underinvestment in helping people to age well and a lack of political focus – are all contributing to this growing and critical problem.

At the Centre for Ageing Better we are pioneering ways to make ageing better a reality for everyone. We aim to inspire and inform those in power to tackle the inequalities faced by older people, call out and challenge ageism in all its forms and encourage the widespread take-up of brilliant ideas and approaches that help people to age better.

Get it right and more of us can experience good health, financial security and be treated fairly and with respect as we grow older.

Help us make sure everyone can age better.

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Summary

Disabled older workers and people with long-term health conditions continue to face significant barriers in the labour market. Despite legal protections under the Equality Act 2010, too many people face difficulties accessing work, staying in work, or progressing in their careers. These challenges are not caused by an individual's impairment or health condition, but by barriers in the workplace, including inflexible job design, inaccessible environments, and employment practices that fail to accommodate different needs.

This matters not only for individuals, but for employers and the wider economy. As the workforce ages and more people manage health conditions alongside longer working lives, creating workplaces that are inclusive and accessible is increasingly important. By removing barriers and enabling people to remain in good quality employment, employers can support the wellbeing and contribution of Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions, while also benefiting from a more diverse, experienced and productive workforce.

In 2025, the Centre for Ageing Better's [Supporting Disabled Older Workers \(SDOW\)](#) project set out to better understand these experiences and identify what needs to change. Delivered in collaboration with the Policy Institute at King's College London and shaped by a nine-person Experts by Experience Steering Group, the project developed a series of recommendations aimed at improving support for Disabled older workers and people with long-term health conditions ([see page 7](#)).

Moving from Supporting Disabled Older Workers co-produced recommendations to real-world action requires a deeper understanding of employer perspectives, and this follow-on research provides the evidence base to achieve this. We translated the recommendations into a series of tangible policy proposals and tested them with 1,087 HR leaders through a YouGov survey. The findings explore how employers perceive the importance and feasibility of these approaches, providing insight into where there is support for change and where barriers to implementation remain.

The findings here highlight both areas of consensus and barriers to implementation. They show where employers see opportunities to make progress, where additional support is needed, and how experiences differ across organisations of different sizes and sectors. At a time when policymakers and employers are seeking ways to support more people to stay in and return to work, these insights can help inform practical action to create workplaces that work better for everyone.

Policy context: Keep Britain Working review

The findings in this summary come at a particularly important moment. The Government is increasingly focused on tackling health-related economic inactivity and supporting people to remain in work for longer. As new employer-led approaches are developed and tested, the perspectives captured through this survey provide valuable insights into what employers believe is achievable, what additional support may be needed and how policy can be designed to ensure Disabled older workers are not left behind.

The Keep Britain Working (KBW) Review, led by Sir Charlie Mayfield, was established to better understand the factors driving rising levels of economic inactivity linked to ill health. Building on its findings, the Department for Work and Pensions has launched a ‘Vanguard’ phase, a programme to test employer-led approaches to developing healthier and more inclusive workplaces.

One of the Vanguard phase’s core objectives is to develop a framework that supports longer, healthier working lives. This presents an important opportunity to ensure that the needs of Disabled older workers and those with long-term health conditions are embedded within the design, delivery and evaluation of new workplace health initiatives from the outset. To achieve this, the Centre for Ageing Better recommends the following:

- **Test approaches specifically aimed at Disabled older workers:** Ensure at least one Vanguard employer-led sprint focuses explicitly on supporting older Disabled workers and workers with long-term health conditions in mid-later life. This would provide an opportunity to develop, test and refine workplace health approaches and interventions for a group that faces a greater risk of leaving the labour market early.
- **Embed longer working lives across all Vanguard activity:** Require all Vanguard activity to demonstrate how it will support longer, healthier working lives. This would help ensure that older workers are consistently considered across programme activity, rather than being treated as a separate or secondary issue. The [Healthy Working Lifecycle Standard](#) should also set out clearly how it will support this goal.
- **Measuring what works for Disabled older workers:** Ensure the new Workplace Health Intelligence Unit routinely analyses outcomes by age as well as health condition and disability. This will build a stronger evidence base for what works for Disabled older workers and ensures that their experiences inform the ongoing development of the Healthy Working Lifecycle Standard and future workplace health policy.

A note on language: the Social Model of Disability

Ageing Better has adopted the Social Model of Disability, which is the preferred framework of both the Centre for Ageing Better and, crucially, the Experts by Experience Steering Group who were central to the Supporting Disabled Older Workers research project. According to this model, people are Disabled not by their impairments or health conditions, but by barriers that society places in their way ([Scope, 2025](#)).

These barriers can take many forms: physical barriers such as inaccessible buildings or transport systems; attitudinal barriers stemming from stereotypes, assumptions and prejudices; and organisational barriers such as policies and practices.

The social model reframes the problem, so it is not the person who is the issue, but the environment, attitudes and systems that are disabling.

The word 'Disabled' is capitalised throughout this summary report. This emphasises disability as an identity that is not simply about a medical condition, but about belonging to a group with shared experiences of exclusion, discrimination and negative treatment. It mirrors how other identity groups are sometimes capitalised, such as Black, Deaf and Indigenous.

Supporting Disabled Older Workers Recommendations

The recommendations below, which formed the bases of the survey questions with HR leads, are drawn from the opportunities for change identified through the [Supporting Disabled Older Workers \(SDOW\)](#) research project. They outline ways government and employers can strengthen policy and practice to better support Disabled older workers. They are a starting point for further testing and collaboration, shaped through analysis by the Experts by Experience Steering Group and refined with input from policy makers, academics, employers and Ageing Better colleagues.

1. Internalised ableism can make it harder to ask for help

Employers should be supported and encouraged to:

- Actively promote access to workplace adjustments, and to address stigma related to age and disability.
- Actively promote the uptake and participation in peer-led networks for Disabled and older workers, enabling them to share experiences, challenge stigma and build confidence.

2. Disability and age discrimination is often compounded by other forms of inequality

- Employers should consider how workers with lived experience of intersecting inequalities – including age and disability – can be meaningfully involved in shaping workplace policies, practices and support.
- Managers should be supported to improve their awareness and understanding of experiences of ageing and disability, and how these intersect – including practical guidance on the menopause.

3. Stigma and low confidence hold many back from applying for jobs

Employers should be supported and encouraged to:

- Adopt name-, age-, and disability anonymised recruitment processes, and to ensure that any selection tests used are inclusive.
- Clearly explain how health information and adjustment requests will be used and handled during recruitment and onboarding, to build trust and support effective working relationship between employee and employer from the start.
- Include as much information as feasible about available adjustments in job adverts, while making clear that they are open to further conversations depending on applicants' needs.

The UK Government should:

- Ensure that accessible recruitment guidance is available for both applicants and employers, focused on supporting Disabled older workers.
- Build on existing initiatives by encouraging disability pay gap reporting for large employers, the publication of diversity data and adoption of inclusive hiring practices.

4. Jobcentre Plus currently struggles to provide the tailored support older Disabled individuals need

The UK Government should:

- Work collaboratively with users and other stakeholders to streamline the application process for Access to Work and improve its accessibility.
- Act to improve public and employer awareness of the employment support available to older Disabled people.
- Reform Jobcentre Plus and the National Careers Service, with a focus on culture, including specialist disability and age inclusive training.

5. Supportive managers and open communication shape early experiences of starting a job

Employers should be supported and encouraged to:

- Integrate disability and age inclusion into induction and onboarding processes to normalise conversation about adjustments from day one.
- Ensure that older Disabled people feel confident in communicating their workplace needs to employers, for instance by promoting the use of ‘adjustment passports’.
- Provide timely responses, with clear communication, to requests for reasonable adjustments.

6. Remote work is a double-edged sword: a crucial adjustment for many, but sometimes comes with risks

Employers should be supported and encouraged to:

- Offer remote work as a choice wherever possible and recognise remote work as a reasonable adjustment.
- Ensure that remote workers have equal access to development and progression opportunities.

7. Good managers make a difference

- Employers should be supported and encouraged to improve training on disability, age, and inclusive leadership.

Key findings

Policies are valued, but few organisations have put them into practice

Employers broadly recognise the importance of policies supporting Disabled older workers, but implementation remains limited. Across the 15 policies assessed, 65-85% of HR leads rated them as important, yet the most widely implemented policy (**ensuring remote workers have equal access to development and progression opportunities**) was only in place in 26% of organisations.

Policies focusing on transparency and communication are seen as most important

HR leaders highlighted **a transparent process for responding to requests for workplace adjustments** (85%) and **ensuring disability- and age-related policies are well communicated, understood, and upheld** (84%) as most important for their organisation. Yet only one in four organisations (25%) reported having these policies in place. More than half of respondents said introducing them would not be difficult, suggesting the main challenge is turning agreement on their importance into real action.

Policies on clear workplace guidance and manager training are seen as the easiest to implement

Policies that focus on clear guidance, effective communication and manager training are viewed as both important and relatively easy to deliver. **Ensuring disability and age-related policies are well communicated, understood and upheld within the workplace - and providing training and guidance to help managers understand the experiences of ageing and disability, and their intersections** (57%) were seen as the easiest policies to implement.

Policies related to remote working were least likely to be viewed as easy to implement

Remote working is consistently seen as harder to implement. Only 36% of respondents said that **offering remote work as a choice wherever possible and recognising it as a reasonable adjustment** would be easy to implement, while 38% said it would be difficult. **Ensuring remote workers have equal access to development and progression opportunities** was considered slightly easier (45%) but was also the most widely implemented policy (26%), suggesting that organisations able to put it in place have generally already done so.

There are discrepancies in support across both sectors and size of organisations.

Public sector organisations report higher levels of both implementation and perceived importance than private sector employers. Smaller organisations face greater challenges in adopting recommended practices, with notable variation across sectors.

Policy recommendations and the potential for targeted action

This section sets out the Supporting Disabled Older Workers project's policy recommendations, organised according to how employers rated their importance and ease of implementation. Together, these findings provide insight into where action can be taken most readily, where existing good practice could be scaled, and where more significant policy and system change may be needed.

The recommendations are grouped into four categories: amplifying existing practice; quick wins; areas of strategic influence; and longer-term challenge areas. This approach helps identify opportunities to make immediate progress while also highlighting the structural barriers that require sustained attention from employers, policymakers and other stakeholders.



Amplifying existing practice: policies with relatively high uptake

Policies in this category are:

- Explaining to candidates how their health information and adjustment requests will be handled during recruitment and onboarding
- Integrating disability and age inclusion into induction and onboarding processes
- Ensuring disability and age-related policies are well communicated, understood and upheld within the workplace
- Providing training on disability, age, and inclusive leadership for managers and staff (e.g. practical workshops, guidance, or coaching to build understanding, reduce bias, and embed inclusive practices in day-to-day management)

To build momentum in these areas, we need to focus on making existing good practice more visible and normalised.

Government and sector leaders could further support this by:

- Encouraging Vanguard to showcase effective approaches and business benefit (case studies, blogs)
- Facilitating peer learning (webinars, sector-specific communities of practice)
- Recognising and celebrating achievements (awards, endorsements, public acknowledgement)



Quick wins: policies scoring high importance and high ease

Policies in this category are:

- Including as much information as feasible about available adjustments in job adverts, while making clear that they are open to further conversations depending on applicants' needs
- Embedding the organisation's disability and age-related policies into regular communication and management processes to ensure they are understood and upheld in daily practice (e.g. including these policies in induction materials, manager briefings, and internal communications, and monitoring their application)
- Providing training and guidance to help managers understand the experiences of ageing and disability, and their intersections - including the menopause (e.g. offering practical tools and examples)
- Clear processes that enable employees to easily communicate workplace adjustment needs which might include changes to the work environment or job duties that remove barriers for employees, allowing them to perform their jobs effectively (e.g. through an 'adjustment passport' or similar record that helps maintain agreed support if their role or line management changes)

For these policies, employers already feel motivated and capable; reducing challenges and making action as simple as possible should be a priority.

Government and sector leaders could further support this by:

- Developing and promoting clear, practical guides, templates, toolkits, checklists
- Using targeted communications to reinforce ease of implementation with tangible benefits
- Further exploring perceived barriers in more depth (qualitative research) to identify and reduce barriers



Areas of strategic influence: policies with large gaps between importance and ease

Policies in this category are:

- Ensuring remote workers have equal access to development and progression opportunities (e.g. providing virtual training, mentoring, and promotion processes that are accessible to employees working remotely)
- Involving employees with lived experience of intersecting inequalities¹ in shaping workplace policies, practices, and support (e.g. contributing to organisational policies, practices and plans)
- Promoting access to workplace adjustments to employees in addition to responding to individual requests (e.g. line managers actively inform employees of the organisation's duty to remove or reduce disadvantages arising from impairments by providing suitable equipment, services, or support)
- Offering remote work as a choice wherever possible and recognising it as a reasonable adjustment
- A transparent process for responding to requests for workplace adjustments (e.g. clearly communicating expected timescales for responses and updates, so employees know what to expect, and support is provided promptly)

¹ Intersectionality relates to people who experience more than one form of disadvantage (such as those based on gender, race, disability, class, or age) which do not exist independently but instead overlap and interact to create unique forms of disadvantage, including age and disability

These policies matter to employers but are perceived as difficult to deliver. This is where reducing structural barriers and providing targeted support is key to success.

Government and sector leaders could further support this by:

- Issuing clearer national or sector specific guidance and examples to reduce uncertainty about what “good” looks like, and reduce perceived risk
- Providing targeted support for sectors or types of organisations facing the greatest barriers
- Considering incentives, funding, or regulatory levers to shift system level constraints



Longer-term challenge areas: policies perceived as difficult, but still essential

Policies in this category are:

- Using name, age and disability anonymised applications during recruitment processes
- Encouraging employee participation in peer-led networks

Whilst these policies are not seen as unimportant by employers, they are perceived as more difficult to implement. This perceived difficulty should not mean that policies are dismissed, particularly as they were co-produced with Disabled older workers, who are best placed to identify what good support looks like. These areas require sustained attention, deeper understanding and potentially long term system change. Government and sector leaders could further support this by:

- Providing more detailed guidance or implementation pathways
- Developing incentives, phased approaches or pilot programmes to help employers test and refine implementation of policies
- Ensuring that older Disabled people and those with long-term health conditions are actively engaged in the development and refinement of any incentives or policies designed to support them.

Sector specific insights

This section details how the policy recommendations are viewed across sectors. It highlights the different challenges faced and identifies opportunities for cross-sector learning.

Private sector employers: lower adoption and lower priority for inclusive policies

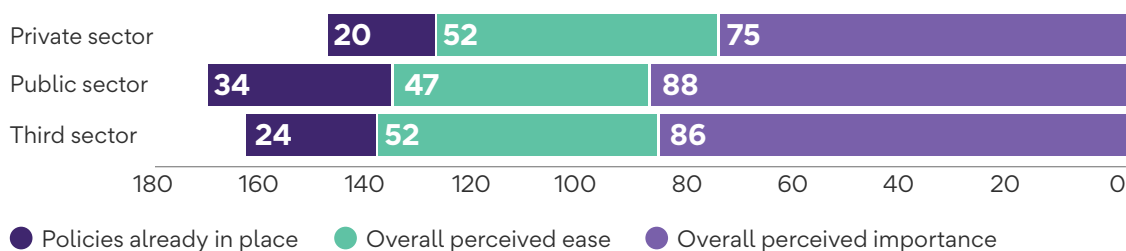
SDOW policies were less commonly in place among private sector organisations compared to those from the public or third sectors. For 14 of the 15 policies, fewer private sector respondents reported having them in place, suggesting these organisations have further to go in supporting older workers.

Private sector respondents also rated all 15 policies as less important than those from the public or third sectors.

The most important policies for private sector respondents were **a transparent process for responding to requests for workplace adjustments** (82%) and **ensuring disability- and age-related policies are well communicated, understood, and upheld** (82%).

Policies most often seen as not important included **using name, age, and disability anonymised applications during recruitment** (32%) and **offering remote work wherever possible as a reasonable adjustment** (31%).

Private sector lags behind public and third sector



Public sector employers: strongest commitment to inclusive policies

Public sector respondents were most likely to view the SDOW policies as important. Nine in ten, or more, rated eight of the 15 policies as important:

- Integrating disability and age inclusion into induction and onboarding processes (95%)
- A transparent process for responding to requests for workplace adjustments (94%)
- Promoting access to workplace adjustments to employees, in addition to responding to individual requests (93%)
- Ensuring disability and age-related policies are well communicated, understood and upheld within the workplace (93%)
- Providing training on disability, age, and inclusive leadership for managers and staff (93%)
- Providing training and guidance to help managers understand the experiences of ageing and disability, and their intersections (93%)
- Explaining to candidates how their health information and adjustment requests will be handled during recruitment and onboarding (92%)
- Clear processes that enable employees to easily communicate workplace adjustments needs (91%)

By contrast, **offering remote work wherever possible as a reasonable adjustment** (24%) was the policy most commonly seen as not important by public sector respondents.



Third sector employers: strong belief in inclusive policies

In the third sector, four policies were rated as important by nine in ten or more respondents:

- Promoting access to workplace adjustments to employees, in addition to responding to individual requests (94%)
- A transparent process for responding to requests for workplace adjustments (92%)
- Ensuring disability and age-related policies are well communicated, understood and upheld within the workplace (92%)
- Providing training on disability, age, and inclusive leadership for managers and staff (91%)

By contrast, encouraging participation in peer-led networks (19%), offering remote work wherever possible (18%), and using name, age, and disability anonymised recruitment processes (18%) were most commonly seen as not important.

Remote working policies: consistently viewed as hardest to implement across all sectors

Across private, public and third sector organisations, **offering remote work wherever possible and recognising it as a reasonable adjustment** was most often seen as difficult to implement (39%, 38% and 27% respectively).

This challenge appears more pronounced for private and public sector organisations, where there is a larger gap between this and the next most difficult policy.

- In the private sector, this was ten percentage points higher than **using name, age and disability anonymised recruitment processes** (29%). In the public sector, the gap was 18 percentage points compared to **encouraging participation in peer-led networks** (20%).

- By contrast, third sector organisations reported a smaller gap, with **remote working** only four percentage points higher than the next most difficult policies (both 23%).

This may reflect differences in organisational structure, such as a higher proportion of client-facing roles in the private and public sectors.

Industry insights

This section outlines how the policy recommendations are viewed across different industries. It identifies industry-specific challenges and highlights opportunities for coordinated, cross-industry approaches to addressing shared barriers.

Public sector dominated industries were most likely to already have SDOW policies in place

- Public administration, police and armed forces had the highest levels of policy adoption. For 12 of the 15 policies, at least 40% of respondents reported they were in place in their organisation. Even the least commonly implemented policy (**involving employees with lived experience of intersecting inequalities in shaping workplace policies and practices**) was reported by 29% of respondents.
- Respondents from education, healthcare and social work were also more likely to report that policies were in place. This likely reflects the higher concentration of public sector employers within these industries.

Transparent communication of policies and processes, and the promotion of adjustments were the policies most commonly in place in the different industries

Industry	% implemented in	Most commonly implemented policy
Public administration, police and armed forces	51%	Promoting access to workplace adjustments, alongside responding to individual requests.
Healthcare and social work	35%	Ensuring disability- and age-related policies are well communicated, understood and upheld within the workplace.
Education	32%	Explaining to candidates how health information and adjustment requests will be handled during recruitment and onboarding.
Wholesale, retail, transportation and storage	25%	
Finance and insurance	27%	
Primary utilities and manufacturing	26%	Having a transparent process for responding to requests for workplace adjustments.
Information and communication	24%	
Administrative and support services and other service activities	34%	
Business services	27%	Ensuring remote workers have equal access to development and progression opportunities was most common.
Construction	21%	
Hotels, restaurants, arts and recreation	28%	
		Integrating disability and age inclusion into induction and onboarding processes was most commonly in place.

Remote working is seen as the most difficult policy to implement across most industries

- In most industries, **offering remote work wherever possible and recognising it as a reasonable adjustment** was seen as the most difficult policy to implement. This was particularly the case in education (50%), wholesale, retail, transportation and storage (49%), primary utilities and manufacturing (47%), hotels, restaurants, arts and recreation (46%), construction (45%), healthcare and social work (42%), finance and insurance (25%) and public administration, police and armed forces (19%).
- In business services (28%) and information and communication (23%), the most difficult policy was *using name, age and disability anonymised applications during recruitment*.
- In administrative and support services and other service activities (33%), *encouraging employee participation in peer-led networks* was seen as most difficult.

What's needed next?

This report highlights a significant gap between ambition and practice. While there is broad recognition of the importance of inclusive workplaces, many older Disabled workers continue to face barriers to entering, remaining in, and progressing in employment. Failing to address these barriers has consequences for individuals, employers and the wider economy.

The challenges identified in this research vary across sectors, reflecting different workforce structures, job demands and operating environments. As a result, there is no single solution. Progress will require coordinated action from government, strategic authorities, employers and industry bodies. This includes providing clear guidance, creating the right incentives, and supporting employers to implement practical changes that improve workplace inclusion.

At its core, this is about applying the social model of disability in practice. The barriers experienced by older Disabled workers often arise from the way work is organised, managed and designed, rather than from an individual's health condition or impairment. Creating more flexible, accessible and supportive workplaces will be essential to ensuring that people can continue to contribute their skills and experience throughout longer working lives.

Examples of good practice

Agewell Partnership

Case study: Embedding wellbeing through flexible working and mental health support

Our Supporting Disabled Older Workers (SDOW) research found that inclusive recruitment practices and supportive early experiences can make a significant difference to Disabled older workers' ability to thrive at work.

Here we look at a community-based organisation that has developed a flexible and inclusive approach to wellbeing and recruitment, underpinned by a recognition that employees' lives outside work directly affect their ability to work.

Mental health days for all staff

A key development in the organisation's wellbeing approach was the introduction of mental health days for all staff several years ago. These allow employees to take time away from work when needed without going through formal sickness absence procedures.

Leaders described developing this policy following periods of significant stress within the organisation, and a desire to better support staff working in emotionally demanding roles. The policy reflects an acknowledgement that employees can experience periods where day-to-day demands feel overwhelming and difficult to sustain alongside wider life pressures.

The approach is intended to enable staff to step back temporarily when needed, without requiring formal justification or escalation through sickness processes.



Re-thinking traditional approaches to recruitment

Building on the good practice of mental health days, the organisation continued their journey of inclusive practice into recruitment practices. Rather than relying on formal, traditional recruitment processes, the organisation has introduced simplified application forms and reduced administrative barriers. In addition, informal conversations are often used in place of structured interviews, helping applicants feel more comfortable and able to present their experience without the pressure of a formal interview setting.

Alongside this, the organisation has introduced highly flexible working arrangements, with managers working with staff to understand individual availability and circumstances rather than applying rigid working patterns.

The organisation described a wider culture of trust and flexibility, where employees are supported to balance work alongside caring responsibilities and other commitments. Leaders felt this approach has helped create a more inclusive working environment, particularly for those who may not be able to commit to rigid working patterns.

The benefits

Early indications suggest embedding wellbeing through flexible working and mental health support has helped attract a more diverse workforce, including older workers returning to employment after periods of caring or retirement. Leaders reported that these changes have enabled people who may otherwise have been excluded by traditional recruitment and employment models to take up roles within the organisation.

Key takeaway for employers:

- **Build momentum over time:** Inclusion is an ongoing journey.
- **Fix the environment, not the person:** Remain reflexive to where staff face strain and work to adapt policies to provide the best working environment for staff.
- **Simplify the gateway to work:** Rethinking traditional recruitment approaches can reduce barriers to re-entering employment, for experienced older workers and carers.

PeoplePlus

Case study: Embedding wellbeing through peer networks and visible leadership

Our Supporting Disabled Older Workers (SDOW) research found that inclusive workplace cultures, reinforced by leadership, peer networks and clear communication, help workers feel confident seeking support.

Here we look at an employment support provider that has built an age-friendly and inclusive culture through organisation-wide wellbeing networks, visible leadership commitment and peer support structures.

Rather than relying on a single policy or intervention, the organisation has developed multiple formal and informal routes for employees to access support and shape workplace culture. Leaders felt this helped create an environment where conversations about health, wellbeing and support needs were normalised across the organisation.

This approach is reinforced from the top down. The CEO acts as senior sponsor for the organisation's Age-friendly Employer Pledge commitment and regularly communicates with staff about wellbeing, organisational values and the impact of their work.

Peer networks

Alongside leadership messaging, the organisation has created several peer-led and staff-led wellbeing structures, including:

- Carers support group
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) champions
- Menopause cafes and support groups
- Peer-to-peer mental health support

These groups provide opportunities for employees to share experiences, shape wellbeing activity and build informal support networks across the workforce.

Supporting line managers

The organisation also supports managers to respond confidently to employee needs through a structured management academy, covering aspiring, new and senior managers. Managers have access to specialist guidance and wellbeing resources to support conversations.

In services with larger numbers of workers aged 55 and over, many employees also have individual health support plans developed with managers to help them remain in work.

The benefits

Leaders felt the combination of senior sponsorship, peer support and manager capability had helped create a genuinely supportive culture over time.

Key takeaways for employers:

- **Lead from the top down:** Visible commitment from senior leadership helps remove the stigma around age and health, giving staff the confidence to ask for support.
- **Build multiple pathways to support:** Mixing formal management structures with informal, peer-led groups creates a trusted, inclusive culture.
- **Invest in manager capability:** Back up your cultural values with practical training and specific tools so managers can confidently support workers.

Great Places Housing Group

Case study: Proactive and inclusive line management support in social housing

Our Supporting Disabled Older Workers (SDOW) research found that early support from line managers and good induction can help to set up workers for sustainable employment.

Here we look at a social housing organisation that has developed a proactive approach to inclusive line management to support employees with changing health needs.

Rather than the onus being on employees to raise any adjustments or changing needs with their line managers, the organisation has embedded proactive support into everyday management practice. Managers hold mandatory monthly one-to-one meetings, with wellbeing built into conversations, and receive training on discussing stress, health and workplace barriers.

Leaders felt this early and regular contact helps prevent problems from escalating:

“If somebody’s been off sick for four or five months and nobody’s picked up the phone and nobody’s spoken to them, it then becomes a lot more difficult to try and deal with it.”

The organisation places a strong emphasis on openness and trust, recognising that some employees may feel reluctant to disclose health conditions or support needs.

Managers are encouraged to work flexibly with staff to identify practical adjustments based on individual circumstances. Examples include changing working hours, altering work locations, phased returns following illness, assistive software for dyslexia, and redeployment into less physically demanding roles.

Manager discretion is seen as key to making support meaningful. In some cases sick pay is extended beyond standard arrangements to

allow colleagues to fully re-cover. Examples of cases when this has been used include an employee recovering from major heart surgery to avoid an unsafe early return to work, a colleague who had experienced severe family trauma and needed additional time before returning to work and a colleague on probation who was diagnosed with cancer and needed treatment.

Leaders reported that this approach has improved staff retention and helped retain experienced employees who may otherwise have left work.

Key takeaway for employers:

- **Normalise wellbeing support:** Embedding wellbeing check-ins into existing meetings helps promote appropriate and timely support for employees.
- **Empower managers to adapt the environment:** Train and trust line managers to use their discretion to provide adjustments that can support health and wellbeing of staff.

Additional Resources

Tools for employers

Good Recruitment for Older Workers: A new toolkit - practical new tools to help reduce age bias in your recruitment process.

Challenging ageism - this guide is designed as a practical tool to support organisations in communicating about ageing and older age.

Age-friendly Employer Pledge culture toolkit - this toolkit has been created to help organisations look at their existing workplace culture and how this could become more age-friendly.

Age-positive image library - the first free library showing positive and realistic images of over 50s.

Health at work - employers can help their staff manage health conditions so people can remain working for as long as they want and are able to.

Case studies for employers

Changing the language of our recruitment helped us to find the workforce we were looking for – case study looking at the importance of language in recruitment.

Autonomy to managers - case study showing how a positive approach to an inclusive work culture supports the engagement and retention of workers in their 50s and 60s.

The how, where and when of flexible working at Phoenix - flexible working is one of the most important things older workers consider when applying for a new role and that it encourages them to stay in their current role.

Action on ageing and health – led by data and insight - case study showing how a data-led approach to employee health not only makes business sense, but can also save lives.

Research and evidence

Why the over 50s are key to solving the health and work dilemma

(Oct 2024)

Supporting Disabled Older Workers: Insights for policy and practice from lived experience (Sept 2025)

Health warning for employers: Supporting older workers with health conditions (Apr 2018)

Work | The State of Ageing 2025 - health, socioeconomic inequalities, gender and ethnicity interact with ageism to create barriers to employment for older people.

Health and wellbeing | The State of Ageing 2025 - report that focuses on the huge inequality in our health across the country with the poorest health seen in the poorest places.

Supplementary tables

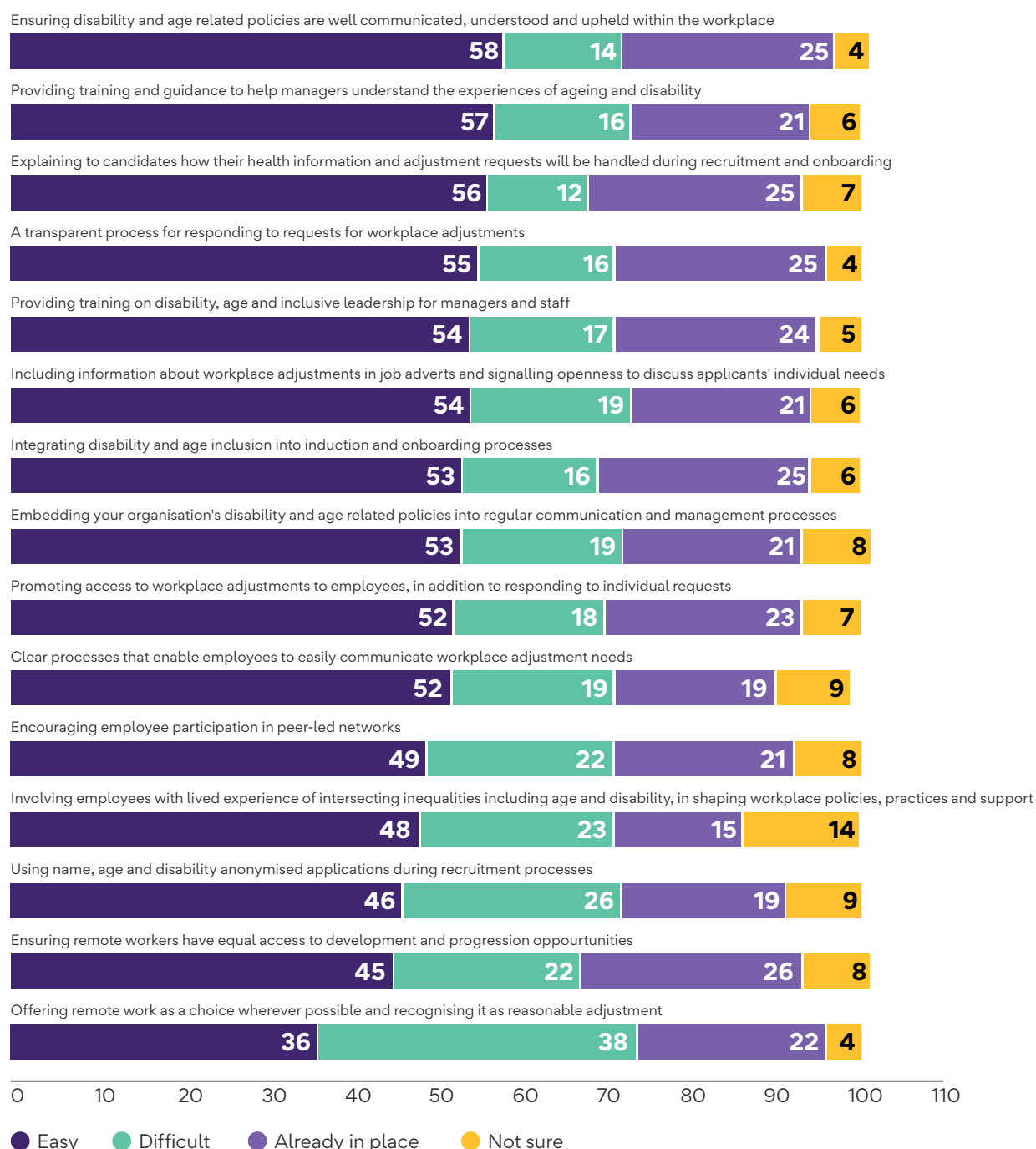
Table 1: Most and Least Implemented Policies

	Important	Implemented
Most	– A transparent process for responding to requests for workplace adjustments – Ensuring disability- and age-related policies are well communicated, understood, and upheld – Integrating disability and age inclusion into induction and onboarding processes	– Ensuring remote workers have equal access to development and progression opportunities – Transparent process for responding to requests for workplace adjustments – Ensuring disability- and age-related policies are well communicated, understood, and upheld
Least	– Offering remote work as a choice wherever possible and recognising it as a reasonable adjustment – Using name, age and disability anonymised applications during recruitment processes – Encouraging participation in peer-led networks	– Clear processes that enable employees to easily communicate workplace adjustments needs – Using name, age and disability anonymised applications during recruitment processes – Involving employees with lived experience of intersecting inequalities in shaping workplace policies and practices

Table 2: Policies Viewed As Easiest To Implement By Industry

Industry	Ease	Policy Viewed as Easiest to Implement
Business services	63%	Ensuring disability and age-related policies are well communicated, understood and upheld within the workplace
Information and communication services	61%	
Manufacturing	60%	
Administrative and support service activities and other service activities	60%	Providing training and guidance to help managers understand the experiences of ageing and disability, and their intersections
Construction	65%	
Wholesale, retail, transportation and storage	62%	
Education	59%	Integrating disability and age inclusion into induction and onboarding processes
Healthcare and social work	51%	A transparent process for responding to requests for workplace adjustments
Finance and insurance	68%	Embedding the organisation's disability and age-related policies into regular communication and management processes to ensure they are understood and upheld in daily practice
Hotels, restaurants, arts and recreation	54%	Explaining to candidates how their health information and adjustment requests will be handled during recruitment and onboarding
Public administration, police and armed forces	50%	Involving employees with lived experience of intersecting inequalities including age and disability, in shaping workplace policies, practices, and support

Table 3: Perceived Ease and Implementation of Policies





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Let's make ageing better.

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Our work focuses on creating better workplaces, homes and communities, while tackling ageism and addressing inequality in later life.