BUSINESS
IN THE
COMMUNITY

BECOMING AN AGE FRIENDLY EMPLOYER

November 2024

A guide to help employers start taking action on age

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WHY TAKE ACTION ON AGE?

Today there can be up to five generations in the workplace working side by side. There are people in work aged from 16 to 70 and over, including 10.9 million over 50s, equivalent to one third of the workforce total.[i] The UK population is ageing and by the mid-2030s half the adult population will be over 50.[ii] Drawing on the economic contribution of this demographic, as both employees and consumers, will be essential.

Older workers represent a resource of skills and experience which is often overlooked. Many older workers struggle to balance work and other responsibilities, such as caring, and too often do not get the support they need. Those that fall out of work as a result struggle to return, facing a lack of flexibility in the workplace, age bias in recruitment and unsuitable employment support services.[iii]

Age is an amplifier of disadvantage. The poorest people spend more time in poorer health and live shorter lives.[iv] The gender pay gap is widest for older women.[v] People from Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse backgrounds face greater employment and health inequalities.[vi] Health issues are a major driver of early exit from the labour market[vii] and around

one million women have left work as they have been unable to balance menopause symptoms with work.[viii] Caring for others threatens the work-life balance of people at key stages of their lives and drives many out of work..[ix]

Multigenerational workplaces are efficient and benefit from the combined talents of different generations. Building multigenerational teams allows businesses to retain the knowledge, talent and experience of employees across all generations at work and reflect the full diversity of their customer base. This converts into greater business success, as there is growing evidence that companies with more age diversity tend to be more innovative and achieve positive impact on the business bottom line.[x]

The priority for business is therefore to ensure that certain generations and groups are not disadvantaged over others. This guide will help you to take action to create an age-friendly workplace, with an effective multi-generational workforce, and an inclusive workplace culture where all employees can thrive.

Additional support can be provided by BITC's Inclusion and Wellbeing teams, including [Advisory Services](#). Members can speak to their Relationship Manager, and you can also visit our [website](#) for more information and details on how to [join us](#).

THE BUSINESS CASE

Age diversity and inclusion deliver business benefits by enabling businesses to:

- **Create a skilled multigenerational workforce** where older and younger workers learn skills and knowledge from each other and employees of all ages have equal opportunities to learn and develop, with positive impact on the bottom line.[xi]
- **Reduce turnover costs and plug skills gaps** by retaining staff across all generations and recruiting from across the labour market. It can cost up to £30,000 to hire and train a new employee.[xii]
- **Retain knowledge and experience** by helping more over-50s work for longer. They have developed skills, sector and organisational knowledge and have personal networks that are valuable to business.

- **Increase team productivity** through increased age diversity and inclusion. Employees at different stages of their careers have different perspectives, which can be leveraged for improved business success.
- **Improve customer service and product development** by reflecting your customer base in your workforce. You have clients, consumers and customers, as well as employees in all generations.
- **Improve your brand** as an age-inclusive, diverse and adaptable business. Successful businesses attract talent and clients from across our ageing and increasingly multigenerational population.

AGE DIVERSITY allows for the unique contributions of people across all ages and stages of life and across all backgrounds.

AGE INCLUSION is underpinned by behaviours and social norms that ensure people feel included whatever their age.

THE AGE FRIENDLY EMPLOYER FRAMEWORK

Business in the Community's (BITC)'s Age Friendly Employer Framework draws on five evidenced-based areas for action.

1. **Flexible work:** make sure all employees know what options are available and how to ask about them.
2. **Health and wellbeing:** ensure that all employees have the health support they need and know how to access it.
3. **Career development:** encourage career development at all ages in your workforce.
4. **Inclusive Recruitment:** make sure recruitment policies and procedures do not discriminate against older or younger candidates.
5. **Age inclusive culture:** support the development of an age inclusive culture across all levels in your business.

BITC is calling on employers to use this framework to take action on age and create inclusive workplace cultures. Employers should start by identifying areas which are important to them and their employees. This will guide what actions to take first. This assessment can be made using the BITC Look, Listen, Act approach (see appendix), which 'wraps around' the five areas for action.
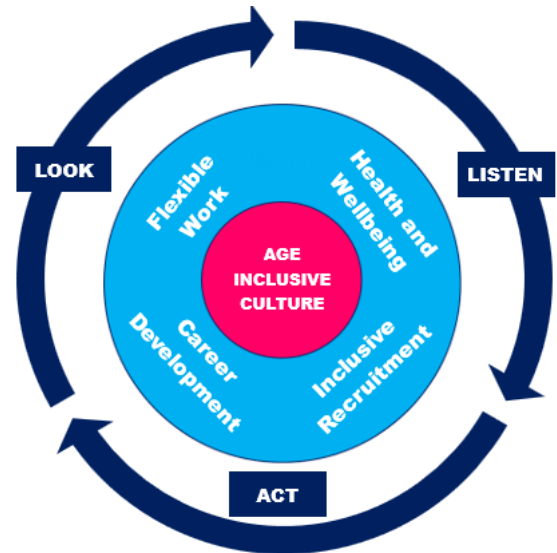
To do this you will:

- **Look at your data** – analyse the age profile of your workforce. BITC has a toolkit which can help you to do this.
- **Listen to your employees** – get staff talking about age in your business and listen to what they say. You might ask questions via a survey, focus groups or Lunch and Learns.
- **Take action on age in your business** – agree an action plan that includes acting across the five action areas of the framework, as identified by your analysis and listening process. You can take action on more than one area at once or repeat the process. Set metrics to measure your success, assess impact and shape future actions.

FIVE AREAS FOR ACTION

BITC's Age Friendly Employer framework is based on five evidenced-based areas for action.

Flexible work

Make sure all workers know what options are available and how to ask about them.

Flexible working helps employees of all ages and stages of their careers. For older workers it can provide critical support to allow them to balance work with caring, (see our toolkit and Let's Care Together programme) with personal health needs and help with the transition to retirement. There are a wide range of possible flexible working options which can help, including: job shares, remote, hybrid and part-time, flexitime, compressed, annualised and staggered hours and phased retirement.[xiii]

Employers who offer good quality, inclusive flexible working, including as part of the recruitment process, experience business benefits such as increased productivity, reduced costs and better talent retention.[xiv] Since April 2024, new legislation came into effect, giving all employees the right to request flexible working from day one in employment.[xv]

The **'Phoenix Flex'** policy at BITC member **Phoenix Group** aims to enable everyone to create a working week with the best experience and balance between work and personal lives, and looks across all aspects of flexibility including where, when and how you work. Confident that customer and business needs can be met in a number of different ways, Phoenix make flexible working a core part of their employee offering. All jobs are advertised as flexible, whatever the contract type, and flexibility can be discussed throughout the employee journey. The Phoenix flex approach continues through to retirement options, including a programme which allows employees to offer their skills and experience after leaving full-time employment.

Flexible working actions include:
- Creating a culture of inclusive flexible working – BITC's toolkit will show you how.
- Widening the range of flexible working options available, formal and informal, and considering offering flexible working to contract staff.
- Remembering that people's needs for flexible working may change over

time, e.g. as the people they care for become unwell and then recover.

- Helping employees navigate the system. Signpost to internal and external information on flexible working policies and procedures.
- Sharing stories of people working flexibly in your business. Include examples from senior management as role models.
- Helping managers manage flexibly. Provide training about flexible working at recruitment and for line managers and ensure that managers have access to up-to-date policies and procedures.

The **carers policy** at BITC member **Aviva** includes flexible working, carers leave and passports, and a carers network. They also offer information about flexible working and how it can support balancing work with caring responsibilities. Line managers are trained and receive continuing support on how to best help their caring employees.

Health and wellbeing

Ensure that all employees have the health support they need and know how to access it.

Supporting health and wellbeing is essential for employees of all ages. Health problems are the biggest driver for people leaving work before they are ready to retire.[xvi] Long-term sickness is also now

causing many of the youngest people in the workforce to drop out of work too.[xvii]

Health conditions need to be supported at work and often relatively small adjustments can make it possible for people to continue working effectively, as in the case of menopause.[xviii] Employers have a statutory duty of care to their employees, and employees with a disabling condition are protected by law.

Actions to support health and wellbeing include:

- Providing effective support for all health and wellbeing conditions. Both physical and mental health are important for the wellbeing and productivity of your employees.
- Supporting people through later-life transitions, such as caring for family members, developing a health condition or bereavement.
- Creating an open and supportive culture around managing health at work. Making sure people feel confident enough to report a health condition without fearing negative consequences for their career.
- Providing full, equal and early access to support, including small, simple changes, and making sure that support is sustained over time.
- Use the BITC [Workwell Model](#) and [Workwell Self-Assessment Tool](#) to help you support the wellbeing of your employees.

BITC member **Santander** started their **menopause journey** in 2019 when they realised that over a quarter of female colleagues, over 3,000 people, were of menopausal age. A survey showed almost half of respondents were not comfortable talking to their manager about menopause and only 1 in 3 felt supported at work. In response they developed a range of menopause support focused on four priorities: building awareness and understanding; enabling employees to speak up; leadership and management support; and guidance and practical support. You can read more about this in our menopause case study booklet.

Career development

Encourage career development at all ages in your workforce.

Employees at all ages need open and fair access to training and development opportunities. Employers need to invest in and develop the skills of employees at all ages, building engagement and retention, thus boosting the productivity of their business. Thinking ahead and planning is important for both younger and older workers.

Remember, at 50, employees may still have up to 20 years or more at work, so investing in career development and support remains essential.

Actions to support career development include:

- Ensuring that development, training and progression are available equally to employees of all ages.
- Provide career guidance at mid-life and beyond, including retirement plans, and help people take stock, manage transitions and plan holistically for the future.
- Use mid-life MOTs to help people plan and have conversations about their current job. BITC's Mid-life MOT Getting Started toolkit and Guide for HR managers will help you.
- Tackling age bias that seeps into management processes such as redundancy and performance ratings.
- Empowering and educating line managers to be age-inclusive.

BITC member **Aviva** had a 94% take-up rate for their **mid-life MOT** pilot covering wealth, work and well-being for staff aged 45 to 60. A third of participants worried that age was a barrier to their careers, but after the programme both confidence in the future and engagement increased. Following on from the success of the pilot, Aviva rolled out the programme across the business and developed a free online customer Mid-life MOT app.

- The Skills Builder framework[xix] can help you to identify and build the essential skills that employees of all ages need to develop and thrive.

Recruitment

Make sure recruitment policies and procedures do not discriminate against older or younger candidates.

Age bias can be embedded in recruitment processes, often unintentionally. In a study by Anglia Ruskin University, younger applicants were found to be up to 29% more likely than older applicants to be invited for interview. Older candidates from other underrepresented backgrounds, e.g. gender or race, were the least likely to be successful.[xx]

With more than a third of the current workforce over the age of 50 and up, to a quarter of people seeking to return to work after retiring[xxi], it is essential that employers get their recruitment processes right if they are to avoid restricting the talent pool they access.

Age inclusive recruitment actions include:
- Conducting age-positive recruitment campaigns.
- Ensuring the language and imagery in job adverts and recruitment campaigns are age diverse and inclusive.
- Minimising age bias in recruitment processes by building this into expectations with your search companies, job description and screening panels and on to interview panels and selection processes. Ensure internal recruitment processes are inclusive too.
- Removing upper age limits in graduate schemes, apprenticeships and traineeships and developing returner or re-entry programmes.
- Valuing transferrable skills and experience in the recruitment process.
- Ensuring recruitment training includes how to be age-inclusive.
- Using BITC's Opening Doors resources and factsheet on age inclusive recruitment to help you make your recruitment processes more inclusive.

BITC member **Coop** developed an **inclusive recruitment campaign** for their Funeralcare business to increase reach when they faced a shortfall in recruitment. A focus on transferable skills allowed them to target both people retired from the Forces and Police plus younger people, via targeted advertising and social media. 450 new colleagues joined the business as a result of the campaign and turnover fell from 22% to 1.4%.

Age inclusive culture

Support the development of an age inclusive culture across all levels in your business.

At BITC, our vision is to create workplaces where age does not limit an employee's success and businesses can realise the massive benefits of a multigenerational workforce, leveraging the valuable skills and talents of employees of all ages. Workplaces that are fully inclusive, in terms of gender, race and age, make better business decisions in up to nine cases out of ten.[xxii]

Promoting an age inclusive culture is now business critical to achieve an engaged and productive workforce. All employees need to feel confident that they are included, that they belong in their workplaces and that they are able to thrive.

Actions to promote an age inclusive culture include:

- Appointing age champions and/or senior sponsors in your business who are responsible for promoting age conversations and the development of an age inclusive culture.
- Encouraging interaction and networking among staff of all ages. Considering setting up a generation network. BITC's employee network factsheet can help you.
- Monitoring and sharing workforce data by age. Use BITC's toolkit on using employee data to drive action as a guide.
- Training and equipping line managers with the knowledge and skills to manage age-friendly practices and build age inclusive teams.
- BITC's report on Everyday Inclusion can help you to understand how to create an inclusive environment in your workplace.

Links and further support from BITC

BITC provides support across a wide range of D&I topics, including age, offering online resources via our website, Advisory Services and programmes, and our webinars and other events. For members, your Relationship Manager or adviser can help you find support. Non-members can visit our website to find out how to join us. You may find the following resources helpful for taking action on age:

Get Started on Age: from data to action helps you to use your employee data to accelerate action on age.

Inclusive Flexible Working Toolkit helps you to build a culture of inclusive flexible working in your workplace.

[Supporting Carers in the Workplace](#) provides guidance on supporting working carers.

[Who Cares Report](#) shows you how best to combine work with caring responsibilities.

[Let's Care Together](#) is a BITC programme in partnership with Simplyhealth providing carers, including those in work, with access to support from trained volunteer befrienders from BITC's member businesses.

[Menopause in the Workplace](#) will help you to support employees transitioning through menopause.

[Menopause at Work: best practice case studies](#) show you how other businesses have taken action on menopause at work.

[The Mid-Life MOT: helping employees navigate mid-life](#) can help with mid-life career conversations.

[Workwell Model & Tool](#) and ['Your job can be good for you' report](#) will help you to build wellbeing for employees of all ages.

[Opening Doors: Driving Inclusive Recruitment](#) supports businesses to make their recruitment processes more inclusive.

[Supporting Age Inclusive Recruitment and Retention](#) will help you drive age inclusive recruitment practices.

[Everyday Inclusion: what really works?](#) supports businesses in adopting inclusive workplace cultures.

APPENDIX
LOOK, LISTEN, ACT APPROACH

To decide how to take action on age, use BITC's Look, Listen, Act approach.

1 LOOK

Employers need to look at their data

- What is the age range and structure of your workforce?
- How age diverse are different areas of your business and different business teams?
- How many older workers apply for jobs in your business and how many are recruited?
- Your data can tell you how age diverse and inclusive you are, and whether any age bias is seeping into management and business processes and decisions.

2 LISTEN

Be sure to listen to your employees

- What are the wants and needs of your employees of different ages?
- How do perspectives vary in each generation?

- What you learn from your employees will help you understand what they are experiencing and how age-inclusive your organisation is.
- A group event is particularly effective in gathering opinions. BITC can support you in organising and reviewing focus groups.

3 ACT

Draw on what you have learnt to act

- Use the insights gained to design and implement an age diversity and inclusion strategy.
- Possible actions might include designing new policies, bias-proofing management processes, senior management endorsement and support for line managers, new line manager training, and developing new programmes for employee support.
- It is also important to start a conversation on age amongst employees and managers.
- Develop effective metrics to allow you to measure and track performance and impact.

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