

# Timeless Skills

## Unlocking the Potential of Older Workers

In collaboration with:



# Foreword



**Lee Barron MP,**  
Corby and East  
Northamptonshire

**This government is focussed on delivering for working people and has set the target of 80% employment by 2030.**

Currently 33% of the workforce are over 50, but 26% are economically inactive. Closing the older worker participation gap is crucial to this aim, and could add £109bn to the economy.

As the party of working people, Labour is committed to the fair treatment of workers. This starts with fair treatment during the hiring process, and currently the experience of our valuable over 50s workers is far from fair. The Centre for Ageing Better found 36% of over 50s feel at a disadvantage when finding jobs. Furthermore, a Totaljobs survey found that employers felt 57 was too old. Influencing perception, improving the hiring process, and ensuring good work is key to improving the employment rate in the over 50s.

The Modernising Employment All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) exists to transform the world of work. Modernising work will raise standards and be a boost for business.

Peter Cheese, the Chief Executive of the CIPD recently said “creating inclusive, age-diverse workplaces that value experience as much as innovation...embracing longer, multi-stage careers isn’t just a social imperative - it’s a business one”.

Older workers are often the ones who face significant health and/or unpaid care challenges which form a barrier to being in work. This is why the New Deal for workers is so important: it will ensure more people stay in work, that work becomes more family-friendly, and more money is put in working people’s pockets to spend, boosting economic growth, resilience and conditions for innovation.

This is why I welcome this report from the Better Hiring Institute’s Modernising Employment All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) and why I support the recommendations to fix hiring and workplaces for our over 50s who, in turn, will boost productivity and performance for businesses across the UK.

# Introductions



## Keith Rosser

Chair of the Better Hiring Institute  
& Director of Reed Screening

According to the country's first National Hiring Strategy, broken hiring costs the UK £75bn annually. This is, in part, due to inefficient recruitment processes, and hiring practice that exclude parts of the UK economy. One often under-reported aspect of this is the experience of people over 50. Whilst this group make up 33% of the UK workforce, the potential is so much larger with 26% of working-age over 50s currently inactive.

Research shows that people in their 50s are generally at their peak in terms of performance and output, yet they face significant barriers finding, and staying in, work.

On average, someone over the age of 50 in the UK will be looking for work for 8.5 months on average when between roles, compared to the national average of 5.3 months for everyone else. In fact, studies demonstrate that less than 27% of over 50s get offered jobs at all.

ProAge research shows a 1.1% increase in productivity for organisations with over 50s: organisations with multigenerational workforces. Consistently it is shown that age is an asset to organisations, yet many hiring managers have an obsession with youth. If the 50 - 65 year old group make up 33% of the workforce, is it right that standard hiring perceptions and practice works against a third of the workforce?

Job adverts notoriously exclude workers through their language and design. Failure to outline the flexible benefits of jobs often put older workers off from applying. Employer perceptions often harm the opportunity of applicants within the 50 - 65 age group. This report of the Modernising Employment All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) calls for a re-writing of UK hiring practice to boost opportunity, productivity, and national prosperity.

# Introduction: Timeless Skills

The UK Government aims to achieve an 80% employment rate for individuals aged 18-66 by 2030.

This target will be unattainable without a clear strategy to improve opportunities for older workers – a gap that represents a significant missed economic opportunity.

Increasing employment among 50-64 year-olds to 75% by 2030 could add £9 billion annually to the economy and generate an extra £1.6 billion in tax and National Insurance. Closing the participation gap for older workers could contribute £109 billion to the UK economy.

“

HR has a pivotal role in creating inclusive, age-diverse workplaces that value experience as much as innovation... embracing longer, multi-stage careers isn't just a social imperative – it's a business one.

Peter Cheese, Chief Executive of CIPD

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## SKILLS

Key Facts	Value
Economically inactive (50-64)	26.1%
Workers aged 50+ in workforce	33%
Employment rate increase (50-64)	56% → 72%
Unemployment duration (50+)	8.5 months vs 5.3 months (<35)
Cost of broken hiring	£75 billion annually

# Why multigenerational workforces matter

**As the workforce evolves, embracing multigenerational teams is no longer optional, it is essential.**

**Older workers bring unique strengths that complement younger talent, creating a dynamic blend of experience and innovation that drives organisational success.**



Recent analysis by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shows that a firm with a 10% higher share of workers aged 50 and over is 1.1% more productive.

Demographic shifts mean there is no longer a large pool of younger workers to fill gaps left by retirees. The UK population is ageing rapidly: almost 40% of people in England are now over 50, and around 20% are over 65, reflecting a sharp rise in older age groups over recent decades.

This trend is mirrored across Europe, where the average retirement age has risen, and the labour market transition to retirement now occurs around age 61.3, roughly five years later than a decade ago, underscoring the increasing proportion of older adults in the labour force.

At the same time, fewer young people are entering the workforce early, with full time work typically not reached until age 23–24, shrinking the replacement pipeline for retiring workers. [[audleyvillages.co.uk](http://audleyvillages.co.uk)] [[ec.europa.eu](http://ec.europa.eu)] [[ons.gov.uk](http://ons.gov.uk)]

**The UK population is ageing rapidly: almost 40% of people in England are now over 50.**



# Why multigenerational workforces matter

## Without change, future retirement and healthcare systems will face significant strain.

As populations age, pension systems must support a growing number of retirees for longer periods, while the working age population expands far more slowly.

For example, UK projections show 5 million more pensioners by 2070 but only 1 million more working age people, intensifying pressure on state pension funding and care services.

Across OECD countries, the expected years spent in retirement continue to rise, increasing fiscal pressures on both pension schemes and healthcare infrastructure.

Diversity and representation matter: inclusive teams foster belonging and drive performance. Crucially, many skills – such as emotional regulation and situational judgement – improve with age. Yet, ageism and internalised ageism prevent older workers from applying for roles or putting themselves forward for training. Addressing ageism in the wider population and training hiring managers in age-bias is essential.

Harnessing the power of experience, older workers enrich organisations with insight, resilience and perspective, delivering benefits such as:

- **Diverse perspectives and innovation** – older workers combine years of experience with fresh ideas, fostering creativity and helping organisations adapt to change.
- **Knowledge sharing and strategic oversight** – they act as mentors, transferring critical knowledge and providing guidance that strengthens decision-making.
- **Broader range of skill sets** – their varied career paths often equip them with unique technical and interpersonal skills that complement younger colleagues.
- **Improved customer understanding** – with life experience, older workers often relate better to diverse customer bases, enhancing service quality.
- **Organisational resilience** – their ability to navigate challenges and adapt to evolving markets makes businesses more robust during uncertainty.
- **Higher employee engagement** – age-diverse teams foster inclusion and belonging, boosting morale and productivity across the workforce.

# Why multigenerational workforces matter

## However, many older workers face ageism in the recruitment process.

Stories on LinkedIn reveal widespread age discrimination including lack of feedback, biased language in job adverts and overly complex recruitment processes. These individuals, often only about 60% of the way through a typical 37–40 year working life (most enter full time work in their early 20s and exit in the early to mid 60s), feel excluded.

## From a wider perspective, the biggest ‘problem’ or issue older workers face is ‘not knowing what job to do next’.

As we age – and whatever the trigger (boredom, wanting more flexibility, being made redundant, role consumption by AI) people will need to make changes for which they are unprepared. Organisations do not teach the skills many will need (e.g. ability to build a portfolio career). Organisations do not yet ‘get’ that if they don’t offer a job for life, the critical thing they need to do is to teach their staff the honesty of this. If organisations can’t offer a job for life, they must support workers to think about the next option.

## Building age-diverse teams isn’t just about fairness, it’s about unlocking untapped potential.

Organisations that embrace experience alongside innovation will gain resilience, creativity and a competitive edge in an ever-changing market.



# Barriers faced by older workers

## Older workers face a range of challenges that hinder their ability to stay active in the workforce.

From age bias to health and caregiving responsibilities, these barriers not only impact individuals but also limit organisational diversity and resilience.

Understanding these issues is essential for creating age-friendly workplaces that actively supports the recruitment and retention of older workers.

- 36% of workers aged 50–70 feel disadvantaged when applying for jobs – many report bias in recruitment processes, from language in adverts to lack of feedback.
- Employers consider 57 the average age candidates become ‘too old’ – this perception limits opportunities for experienced professionals despite their capability.
- Care responsibilities: 1 in 7 aged 55–64 cite caregiving as main reason for not working. Balancing work and family care remains a major challenge.
- Those who have physically demanding jobs often leave before their planned retirement date due to the strain of their jobs. This presents an opportunity to tap into their knowledge and experience to find less physically demanding roles where they can teach the next generation.
- Ageism remains one of the least discussed forms of discrimination. Cultural attitudes and stereotypes continue to create invisible barriers to employment.



# Barriers faced by older workers

Overcoming the barriers detailed throughout this document requires urgent, collaborative action from employers, policymakers, and society.

By addressing ageism, improving flexibility, and supporting health and caregiving needs, we can unlock the full potential of experienced professionals and build a stronger, more inclusive workforce.



# What employers can do

## Employers hold the key to transforming the future of work for older professionals.

By creating inclusive practices and flexible opportunities, organisations can tap into a motivated, skilled talent pool that is eager to contribute.

Employers can take proactive steps to create inclusive workplaces:

- **Flexibility** – offering remote, part-time options, and adaptable schedules helps older workers balance personal and professional responsibilities.
- **Opportunities to learn new skills** – providing training and development ensures older employees stay competitive and engaged.
- **Security (e.g., pensions, insurance)** – clear benefits and financial stability encourage retention and loyalty amongst experienced staff.
- **Health** – by proactively helping employees maintain good physical and mental health, employers can enable them to work for longer and choose when and how they retire.



Providing training and development ensures older employees stay competitive and engaged.



# What employers can do

## Recommendations for hiring:



It's time to rethink recruitment. Traditional methods are failing – CVs predict success at just 0.06% and fewer than 10% of hires come through conventional channels. Move beyond traditional methods that fail to identify talent. Eliminate age bias, prioritise skills over job titles, and make flexibility and wellbeing central to your offer. Analyse your hiring data to drive inclusion and performance. These recommendations will position your organisation for resilience and success.

- To establish hiring practices that are **age inclusive** and ensure they are covered in the upcoming [Better Hiring scheme](#) that is due to be launched in Parliament in May.
- **Make job adverts inclusive** – avoid age-biased language like ‘newly qualified’ and highlight skills over years of experience. Imagery on company websites and careers pages should be age inclusive to demonstrate an age inclusive culture.
- **Simplify recruitment processes** – move beyond CVs to skills-based assessments that better predict performance.
- **Be transparent about flexible working and carers’ leave** – communicate these options upfront to attract a wider talent pool.
- **Promote health and wellbeing benefits early** – show commitment to employee care from the start.
- **Collect and analyse hiring data** to identify gaps and trends and to improve diversity and inclusion strategies.

# What employers can do

## Recommendations for existing workforce practices:

Building an age-inclusive workplace starts with intentional policies and practices. Employers must go beyond compliance, setting the tone, to create an environment where ageism is challenged and employees of all ages feel valued and supported. From flexible working arrangements to health initiatives and intergenerational collaboration, these measures foster engagement, innovation, and resilience across the organisation.

- **Lead from the top** – Ensure leaders are visible in talking about and taking action, in creating an age-friendly workplace culture.
- **Review policies for age inclusivity** – ensure procedures support employees at all life stages.
- **Offer flexible working and health MOTs** – encourage longevity and wellbeing in the workforce.
- **Careers guidance and support**, with help to figure out and plan for next steps is what will help keep most people more employable – for longer.
- **Encourage intergenerational collaboration** – mixed-age teams drive innovation and mutual learning.
- **Launch awareness campaigns** and share success stories to promote positive narratives around age diversity.
- **Provide age bias training for recruiters** in order to equip internal teams to recognise and eliminate bias.
- **Introduce reverse mentoring programs** – pair older and younger employees to exchange skills and perspectives.

Inclusive hiring and workforce practices are not just good ethics, they're good business. By valuing experience and adaptability, employers can build stronger, more resilient organisations ready for the future.

Organisations can also use a free self assessment tool to understand where they are on their journey to becoming truly age inclusive. Find out more [here](#)

# What Government can do

**Government plays a pivotal role in shaping an age-inclusive labour market.**

**By implementing targeted policies and incentives, it can help dismantle systemic barriers and create opportunities for older workers to thrive.**

- Develop an Older Workers Strategy, similar to youth initiatives, set clear targets and accountability measures.
  - Promote the Age-Friendly Employer Pledge in order to encourage organisations to commit to inclusive practices.
- Organisations can sign up [here](#).**
- Encourage flexible working and health support – policies should enable older workers to remain active and healthy.
  - Require age-inclusive practices for organisations bidding on government contracts – make inclusion a standard for public procurement.
  - Offer incentives, for example National Insurance exemptions for apprenticeships and returners over 50 to boost hiring.
- Introduce a requirement for transparent reporting of employment data beyond age 65. Currently, the Office for National Statistics groups people aged 65+ into one category, while the retirement age is 66 and increasing. More granular data is needed on how people in their 60s are engaging with the labour market if we are to develop appropriate policies and interventions.
  - Strengthen regulations for recruitment agencies to ensure compliance with age-inclusive standards and fair practices.

**By prioritising age inclusivity, Government can unlock economic growth, reduce inequality, and ensure that experience remains a cornerstone of the UK workforce.**

# About Us



[The Better Hiring Institute \(BHI\)](#) is a not-for-profit social enterprise driving the development of a modern, agile UK labour market, accelerating economic recovery.

Working closely with all the major UK industries, The BHI is driving standardisation, best practice, and digital innovation to reduce hiring times, enable portability, and improve safeguarding. Cross industry themes include digital standardised referencing, open banking, digital right to work checks, education credentialing, and digital identity.

The BHI is already working with many of the UK's largest, household names making UK hiring the fastest globally.



[Reed Screening](#) are the leading specialists in pre-employment vetting and are at the forefront of influencing regulation and industry change.

Reed Screening are the only UK, onshore screening company who are open 24/7, they are family owned and give 20% to charity. Their business never sleeps so if you ever need them, they're available.

Their vision is to 'pioneer the future of hiring' by collaborating with government bodies and industry leaders to bring about change.



[Brave Starts](#) is a UK-based organisation dedicated to transforming how people navigate work in midlife and beyond. Founded by occupational psychologists, we bring evidence-based career development to an age group long overlooked by traditional career services. Our programmes and community help individuals experiment, learn, and redesign their careers using practical, real-world methods.

We also partner with employers, policymakers, and researchers to shift how society understands ageing and work. From tackling ageism in recruitment to promoting better career pathways for experienced talent, Brave Starts is leading a movement to ensure opportunity doesn't stop with age.

# About Us



[ProAge](#) is UK charity dedicated to age inclusion at work. We help employers unlock the value of multigenerational teams by providing practical guidance, training, and evidence-based insights.

Our work supports organisations to attract, retain, and upskill older workers, address skills shortages, and build fair, future-ready workplaces. Through research, consultancy, and employer engagement, we translate the latest thinking on longevity and workforce ageing into actionable solutions.

ProAge partners with businesses, local authorities, and policymakers to create workplaces where people of all ages can thrive.



[Aviva](#) is a leading Insurance, Wealth and Retirement business, helping customers protect what matters and plan for the future. Our purpose “with you today for a better tomorrow” guides how we serve customers, colleagues and communities.

We’re committed to sustainability with an ambition to be Net Zero by 2040. Inclusion is core to how we work: our Aviva Communities – six global employee resource groups, including Generations – help build an inclusive, diverse workplace where everyone can thrive and shape better outcomes.



[The Centre for Ageing Better](#) is tackling inequalities in ageing. We are working to make our workplaces, homes and communities inclusive of older people, as well as building an Age-friendly Movement so that society sees ageing in a more positive and realistic way.

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



[The Henley Centre for Leadership](#) is a globally recognised voice and catalyst of leadership and leadership development. Together, we empower people in organisations, academia and society to lead with purpose, adaptability and integrity in a rapidly evolving world.

Grounded in rigorous academic excellence, practical relevance and real-world insights, our values-driven research, education, and community initiatives foster inclusive, ethical, sustainable and impactful leadership repertoires. We support and sustain leadership capabilities at every level, enabling meaningful and lasting change for a sustainable future for all.