



Diversity Matters

Age

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Finding Positive Employers

Employers are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of an age-diverse workforce and are demonstrating a positive attitude towards the recruitment, training and retention of workers of all ages. 'Age neutral' application forms are common-place and employers are ensuring that their publicity and recruitment literature does not deter older or younger graduates from applying.

Public and voluntary sector employers, such as local government, teaching, health services, the civil service, charities, and the social and caring professions, have traditionally adopted a more flexible approach, assessing job applicants individually, regardless of age. The introduction of age discrimination legislation in 2006 means that all employers should now be adopting this approach.

In terms of graduate recruitment, 'age positive' employers are ensuring that they are meeting age discrimination legislation and in many cases are demonstrating best practice in the area of recruitment by, for example:

- removing terms such as 'recent graduate' or referring to specific time limits between graduation to joining the scheme;
- changing images on recruitment campaigns to reflect the diversity of graduates;
- ensuring the suitability of graduate schemes for all age graduates;
- altering traditional milk-round routes to ensure that they include universities that offer a higher proportion of part-time courses, which are traditionally favoured by mature students;
- removing from recruitment campaigns language that could be deemed ageist - phrases like 'young and enthusiastic', for example.

The Employers Forum on Age (EFA), www.efa.org.uk, is an independent network of leading employers and industry bodies who recognise the need to attract workers of all ages. With over 170 member organisations, which have over four million employees between them, the EFA is a growing entity. In order to identify age positive employers, you can:

- contact the EFA directly to ask about employers;
- use the EFA web site to identify active members;
- use the search at Age Positive Jobs, www.agepositivejobs.com;
- look for the 'Age Aware' logo on recruitment literature, company information and vacancy advertisements.

Age
Aware
Employer

Age Aware employers will not only adhere to the legislation as laid down in 2006, but will also ensure that they challenge ageist attitudes and that all staff are treated fairly, regardless of age. In addition, they will take positive steps to demonstrate best practice in all areas.

Go to contacts and resources for a list of organisations that provide job listings or links to 'age friendly' employers, and specialist recruitment agencies that focus on the recruitment of workers of specific ages.

Further examples of diversity initiatives and activities can be found by checking out industry insights (www.prospects.ac.uk/links/industries).

Marketing Yourself and Disclosure

You do not need to disclose your age on your CV and many employers no longer ask for your date of birth, age or dates of employment and education on application forms. However, employers may still ask about your age at interview, on application forms or through the inclusion of an equality monitoring form in your recruitment pack. An equality monitoring form is usually detached from the application form by Human Resources and not passed onto the recruiter or selector. If an employer does ask your age and you subsequently feel discriminated against, you could use the fact that they asked the question to take them to a tribunal.

Q: How can you market yourself effectively to potentially age-biased employers?

A: The same way as you would to any graduate recruiter - but with extra attention to some details.

Here are some ideas:

Be clear about your skills

Employers are interested in the whole package of what you have to offer, not just your work-specific skills and qualifications. Awareness and careful analysis of your skills can really set you apart from other applicants and allow you to shine.

Older graduates: you have had more time to develop and refine your personal skills. Employers regularly comment that mature applicants have valuable skills to offer but are not very good at marketing themselves. Everyday activities that you may carry out almost without thinking can provide you with excellent skills. The Open University tips for mature graduates, www.open.ac.uk/careers/tips-for-mature-graduates.php, may be useful and you could try the personal work review at 50+ Europe, www.50pluseurope.co.uk/, (you do not have to be 50+ for this to be helpful!).

Younger graduates: you have had less time to develop and refine your personal skills and so you will have to demonstrate that the experiences you have had are relevant and substantial enough to meet employers' needs. To add extra weight to your skills profile, consider voluntary work, unpaid work experience, vacation schemes or placement years.

Younger or older: Produce a skills audit of the skills you have and work out how you would evidence them to an employer. Include all the skills you have developed though your life at university, work, home, in sports and leisure activities, through travel - in short, from all of your past experiences. Start with:

- communication - writing, speaking, listening, e.g., talking to colleagues at work and university, writing letters, academic writing;
- time management - juggling and prioritising commitments, e.g., at home, in your social life, and with family, work and study;
- flexibility - handling change and mixed-age environments, e.g., previous job changes, changes in your family situation, studying or working with younger/older people;
- organisation, e.g., running a home, involvement in student societies;
- teamwork, e.g., on your course, in the community, sporting teams, at home.

Consider your CV

Think about the type of CV that will suit you best.

Older graduates

You may wish to consider compiling a skills-based CV that allows you to focus your experiences and show an employer that you have the skills for the job. Alternatively, use a chronological CV to your advantage. Group together similar experiences, create a relevant work experience section, and make sure that what an employer would find most interesting is near the top of the page. Check that you have addressed any gaps in your careers history.

Younger graduates

Make the most of the experiences you have had by really pulling out the skills you have gained from them. Include skills-based sections to highlight your abilities. Format your CV in the way that most clearly shows the link between you and the job. Tailor your CV afresh to target every role you apply for.

For advice on creating a CV, see CVs and covering letters:

www.prospects.ac.uk/links/cvwriting

Consider the advantages you may have

It is very easy to stereotype but, in some circumstances, playing to the strengths of a stereotype can be to your advantage. So with that in mind, advantages for both groups of graduate might include:

Older graduates

- You have more business awareness from previous work experience - paid or voluntary, at senior or junior level.
- You are more likely to stay with the job for a substantial period, especially if you are committed to getting into a chosen career and are settled in a particular geographical area.
- You have more experience of workplace politics, fitting in with new colleagues, handling a wide variety of situations, the ups and downs of a working day - in essence, work readiness.

Younger graduates

- You have more desire for new challenges and experiences.
- You are more likely to be open-minded and embrace change.
- You are more likely to bring a fresh perspective to the workplace and look in a different way at old problems or ways of working.
- You are more adaptable because you are not 'set in your ways'.

Your Rights

In 2006, the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations made it unlawful to discriminate against workers, employees, job seekers or trainees on the grounds of their age.

The regulations make it unlawful:

- to discriminate directly on the grounds of age, i.e., to treat you less favourably than others because of your age, unless this is objectively justified;
- to discriminate indirectly on the grounds of age, i.e., to apply any requirement or practice which disadvantages a person of your age, unless it can be objectively justified;
- to subject you to harassment on the grounds of age, i.e., unwanted conduct that offends against your dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment for you because of your age;
- to victimise you because you have made, or intend to make, a complaint or allegation of discrimination on grounds of age, or are supporting someone else in a complaint or allegation;
- to discriminate against you on the grounds of age, in certain circumstances, after the working relationship has ended.

Employers can be made responsible for the actions of their employees who discriminate against others on the grounds of age, so employers are encouraged to train staff about the regulations to ensure that this is avoided. Examples of this may be: frequently referring to an older person as an 'old fogie' or teasing them about 'not being able to teach an old dog new tricks', or saying a younger person is 'wet behind the ears' or 'straight out of the pram'.

Graduate recruitment schemes are not mentioned specifically within the legislation, but graduate recruiters are nonetheless expected to comply with it and to use acceptable business arguments within the guidelines of the legislation if they wish to apply either an upper or lower age limit to a scheme. However, promotion of the business benefits of an age-diverse workforce has been a prominent feature in the run-up to the legislation and it is hoped this will reduce the number of exemptions sought.

A leaflet produced by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS - www.acas.gov.uk) gives this advice to graduate recruiters:

If you limit your recruitment to university 'milk rounds' only, you may find that this is indirect age discrimination as this practice would severely restrict the chances of someone over, say, 25 applying for your vacancies. If challenged, you would need to objectively justify this practice. Consider enhancing any 'milk round' programme with a broader recruitment strategy, using other avenues to capture a wider pool of applicants of differing ages.

In certain circumstances, it is permissible for employers to apply an upper or lower age limit in their recruitment, but only if they can justify doing so by reference to specific business needs, such as the fact that there should be time for a reasonable period of employment after training and before retirement.

If You Think You Have Been Discriminated Against

In the recruitment process:

- Ask the employer why your application was not successful and ask for information, such as the ages of those invited for interview and the age of the applicant who was offered the position.
- Seek advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau, www.citizensadvice.org.uk.
- Complete the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 questionnaire, www.berr.gov.uk/files/file32724.pdf. It will help you decide whether you have been discriminated against, particularly if you do not have any firm evidence.
- Take the case to tribunal.

At work:

- Express your concerns to the person you feel is discriminating against or harassing you.
- If the behaviour continues, or you feel unable to speak to the person, speak to your manager or trade union representative.
- Use your company's grievance procedure.

Find out more about the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations, www.tompsons.law.co.uk/lttext/age-discrimination.htm and see Worksmart, www.worksmart.org.uk, for advice about how to exercise your rights.

Top Tips

Start early

Start your career planning early - in year one of your degree course if possible. If your circumstances dictate that you need to take specific factors into consideration, such as family responsibilities or needing to live locally, take these into account when you consider your options for the future and discuss your plans with the people who may be affected by your choices. They may be more supportive (or more resistant) to change than you had expected and may have helpful suggestions.

Make the most of your past

If you are older than the average graduate, you may not yet see the direct relevance of some of your previous experiences. Try to look at both your university study and other aspects or stages of your life in a new light. You may find they provide evidence that you have qualities that will enhance your job applications, such as:

- determination to instigate change in your life;
- ability and readiness to adapt to change;
- an interest in learning and doing new things;
- commitment to your academic work;
- a desire to achieve.

Fill in your skills gaps

If you are a younger graduate and have perhaps gone straight to university from school, you may not yet have had the chance to build a portfolio of experience. Try to look at ways to enhance your skills and knowledge by:

- doing some part-time or voluntary work;
- expanding the range of extracurricular activities you get involved in;
- researching jobs;
- talking to people who are already doing the kind of job you want;
- looking for opportunities for work shadowing.

Get advice

Make full use of the help offered by your university careers service. Some run special workshops that will give you the opportunity to explore particular issues of concern with other students and graduates.

Take advantage of other facilities, such as personal development schemes, academic career management modules, employer presentations, student union courses and activities, and the specialist organisations listed in the Contacts and Resources section.

Research employers

Research 'age friendly' employers using the links in the Contacts and Resources section.

Case Study

Maureen graduated from the University of Portsmouth in 2003 with a first class honours degree in history. She followed this with a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Research Methods and has since completed a PhD. Maureen is now employed as a university lecturer and is close to completing her first book.

I left a selective grammar school in 1977 and was one of only a handful of people to gain entry into university. A university place was a big deal and I was heading off to the University of Sussex to read history. Unfortunately, I was forced to leave due to illness after one semester. I didn't return and instead got a job in a bank, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

I've enjoyed a varied career, which often contained a managerial element. I've worked as a deputy day centre manager for Age Concern, www.AgeConcern.org.uk, and my most recent role, prior to returning to study, was as a food and beverage manager. However, my passion has always been history and I wanted to finish what I'd started. In 1999, I enrolled on an Open University, www.ou.ac.uk, degree course and, although I enjoyed this, I came to realise that it would take a long time to complete. I moved to the Portsmouth area and saw this as an opportunity to enrol in higher education. I initially wanted to go onto a Masters degree but, after discussions with tutors, decided to enter onto the BA programme as a direct entrant, which meant going straight onto level 2.

The initial experience of coming to university and being in a class with 18-year-olds was hard, but within six weeks I'd settled and formed bonds with other students on my course. I wasn't the only mature student (or the only direct entrant) and this did make the transition process easier. Nevertheless, direct entry onto a degree programme was a steep learning curve and I had to be disciplined, which is where my previous working life was helpful. I exceeded my expectations and getting a first-class honours degree was amazing.

Towards the end of my degree course, I set my sights on completing a PhD but before I could do this I had to complete a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Research. This diploma took me out of my comfort zone as it was very broad and not subject-specific. I did well, though, and achieved a distinction, which I knew I would have to do to stand a chance of being successful in applying for funding. The research funding market is extremely competitive and I was delighted to receive a two-year full-time scholarship from the Arts and Humanities Research Council in September 2005. It goes to show that research councils award funding on the strengths of the proposal, and mature students really can succeed if their research is deemed outstanding.

My PhD was an amazing experience. I spent months researching my topic in archives and libraries in Manchester and London and my dissertation subject has inspired my first book, which is a biographical study of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, a mid-Victorian feminist. The book was accepted by Manchester University Press for publication (hopefully) in 2010. Meanwhile, I've had two articles (one joint with my PhD supervisor) published in the journal *Women's History Review*.

My role at present as a part-time lecturer is something that I'm really enjoying. I feel that I'm able to relate to the students as it wasn't so long ago that I was in their position and studying the things that they're now facing – something that I feel makes me approachable as a tutor. It's tremendously rewarding and I really am in a position that I couldn't have imagined ten years ago.

Contacts and Resources

Jobs and Work

- 40 Plus Recruitment, www.40plusrecruitment.co.uk
- Age Positive Jobs, www.agepositivejobs.com
- Wise Owls, www.wiseowls.co.uk
- Wrinklies Direct, www.wrinklies.org
- Shell Livewire, www.shell-livewire.org

Study

- Mature Students Union (MSU), www.msu.org.uk
- Open University, www.ou.ac.uk

News

- 50+ Europe, www.50pluseurope.co.uk/
- Age2006, www.age2006.org/
- Agebusters, www.agebusters.co.uk
- Age Concern, www.AgeConcern.org.uk
- Age Positive Publications, dwp.gov.uk/agepositive/
- Age and Employment Network, www.taen.org.uk
- Association of Graduate Recruiters, www.agr.org.uk
- British Youth Council, www.byc.org.uk/
- Business Link, www.businesslink.gov.uk
- Campaign Against Age Discrimination in Employment, www.caade.net
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), www.cipd.co.uk
- Citizens Advice Bureau, www.citizensadvice.org.uk
- Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), www.bis.gov.uk
- Directgov, www.direct.gov.uk
- Employers Forum on Age (EFA), www.efa.org.uk
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 questionnaire, www.berr.gov.uk/files/file32724.pdf
- Worksmart, www.worksmart.org.uk

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- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations, www.thompsons.law.co.uk/ltxt/age-discrimination.htm
- Equality and diversity: Age matters, Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR), 2003
- Open University tips for mature graduates, www.open.ac.uk/careers/tips-for-mature-graduates.php