

INSTITUTE OF HOSPITALITY

WHITE PAPER

HOW CAN HOSPITALITY EMPLOYERS MAKE THEIR
WORKPLACES APPEAL TO OLDER WORKERS?

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by Katherine Price MIH



SAVOY EDUCATIONAL TRUST



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Our vibrant world of UK hospitality, welcoming smiles and bustling energy, thrives on its people; yet our overriding challenge today is to be around securing those very people.

TRACEY FAIRCLOUGH FIH | MANAGING DIRECTOR AT TAF CATERING CONSULTANCY LTD

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The challenge

Our vibrant world of UK hospitality, welcoming smiles and bustling energy, thrives on its people. But securing those very people, the lifeblood of the industry has become a daunting task in 2024.

The UK hospitality sector currently has 109,000 job vacancies (1) but with unemployment at 3.8% (2), sectors and employers are vying for a limited pool of skilled individuals. Standing out from the crowd becomes a crucial yet seemingly insurmountable hurdle when hospitality, perceived to have demanding schedules and unpredictable shifts, struggles to compete with the allure of flexibility offered by other sectors.



The background

- 3.5 million people between the ages of 50 and 64 are economically inactive (3)
- Nearly three million people over 50 in the UK would consider a job in the hospitality industry (4)
- A firm with a 10% higher share of employees aged 50 and over is 1.1% more productive (5)
- More than 165,000 workers over 50 joined the hospitality sector in the past three years (6)
- In the last quarter of 2023, people over 50 made up over a third (34%) of the hospitality sector's workforce; up 14% on February 2020 (6)

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) research has shown a significant increase in people aged 50 and over in the UK who have become 'economically inactive' (3), meaning they are not in employment and are not looking for work. Some said they wanted to stop work and have a lifestyle change, others felt they had no option due to redundancy or mental or physical ill-health.

However, data from the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS), has shown an uptick in 50 to 64-year-olds returning to the workforce or wishing to do so (7), possibly due to the cost-of-living crisis. And with increased life expectancy and declining fertility rates meaning there are now more people aged 60 and over than there are under five (8), this is a critical group for hospitality to take notice of – both to retain workers later in life and attract a valuable, skilled section of the population.

How can hospitality employers appeal to older workers?

To attract this group, the sector needs to understand their motivations and needs, which may not be financial. The five most common reasons over 50s might consider a hospitality job include keeping active or for fitness benefits (20%), for the social benefits or workplace culture (25%), to fill their free time and avoid boredom (25%) and to supplement their pension (29%). However, the top motivation is in fact to make people happy (32%) (6).

But more than a third of 50 to 69-year-olds feel they'd be at a disadvantage because of their age in applying for jobs (9). This inequity is felt at every stage of the recruitment process, from the language in job adverts to how interview panels are conducted.

More than 84% of hospitality businesses have introduced age-diverse policies and benefits to improve their proposition for this demographic, ranging from re-entry or returner programmes (49%) and age-inclusive diversity and inclusion training for all staff (23%) to flexible scheduling (21%) (6). It shows the sector is already considering the needs of older workers, but more can still be done.

Hospitality can provide the 50 to 64-year-old demographic with the opportunity to keep physically active and build social connections, with flexible roles to suit a huge variety of schedules – something we need to shout about, not just to aid in the recruitment crisis but because companies with more employees aged 50 and over are more productive as a result of lower turnover and the experience older workers can bring to their roles.

Best practice

Lewis Silkin LLP published an article in 2023 about how employers can make their workplaces appeal to older workers [\(10\)](#), considering what an 'over 50s friendly workplace' might look like.

For starters, age is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 [\(11\)](#), which means that employees must not be treated less favourably due to their age. The law firm advises employers must be careful that any benefits or policies which aim to support older workers do not unjustifiably disadvantage younger groups.

However, although employees of all ages are protected, employers are allowed to discriminate on age grounds where this can be 'objectively justified' on legitimate social policy grounds, not the private interests of the employer. According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, this could include ensuring a generational mix or facilitating the participation of older workers in the workforce.

Lewis Silkin urges employers to consider what the key issues may be for people over 50 who are considering leaving work or returning to work after a period of economic inactivity.

Solutions

WHAT DO OLDER WORKERS WANT?

“It’s putting yourself in the shoes of those that you’re trying to reach out to, thinking about what’s important to them so that you can provide it.” Mary Eniolu MIH, founder, owner and leadership coach, Can Do Academy.

When it comes to attracting older workers to your business, every individual will have their priorities. And, while monetary concerns may be part of coaxing older workers back to the workplace when it comes to choosing an employer, flexibility takes precedence over money. Among those aged 50 to 65 years old who left their job since the start of the coronavirus pandemic and would consider returning to work, the most important factor was flexible working hours (32%) (12).

The over-50s are the largest age group with caring roles, whether that’s parents, children, or grandchildren, meaning flexible and part-time work is a powerful motivator for them as they will be looking to fit a job into their routine. Hospitality is fully able to provide seasonal and flexible roles, which can be more attractive to the older working community, allowing them to take time off during quieter periods to be with their friends and family. Workers in this age range are also searching for rewarding work where they can feel a part of the community and give back, an emphasis for community engagement that many businesses would surely be delighted to embrace.

Solutions

ATTRACTING & RECRUITING

Job adverts

If employers are serious about attracting more older workers and benefitting from them, they need to ensure that their hiring processes are welcoming to older applicants and make that obvious from the start.

The Centre for Ageing Better has a toolkit to help reduce age bias in employers' recruitment, retention, and Continued Professional Development processes (13), helping businesses create more inclusive job adverts, and offering guidance on how to talk about flexible working during the recruitment process.

Actions with the best feasibility and impact for reducing age bias in the recruitment process included:

- Addressing issues that older applicants may face, removing stereotypical language, offering flexible working, and clarity on the recruitment process
- Providing all relevant information, as older applicants may not have had recent experience with recruitment to raise any reasonable adjustments they require.



Whatever demographic you're trying to hire, they should be able to look at your hotel, and your organisation, and see themselves. You need to look at your communications, not necessarily the media but the message. You can have every demographic ticked, but if your prospective audience can't see themselves as part of your team, they're not going to get past line one on your job advert.

Robert Richardson FIH MI, Institute of Hospitality CEO



The job ad is often the first point of contact with your business for an applicant, who is more likely to apply if they can see themselves working for your organisation, so build your advert around your values as a company.

The Centre for Ageing Better's toolkit includes further suggestions on how to make job ads more inclusive to older workers, such as:

Offering part-time/job share by default:

Making the option for part-time working explicitly clear.

Emphasise benefits: Highlight the benefits on offer, such as flexible working or generous workplace pension.

Solutions

Remove biased language and imagery:

Using language that appeals more broadly to older people does not deter younger applicants. Employers should avoid the use of terms such as 'innovative', 'technologically savvy' and 'recent graduate' with specific behaviours and skills required for the job. This can be supplemented with the use of positive and realistic images of older people in job adverts. The Centre for Ageing Better has an extensive range of professional images available for free.

Include flexible working options:

Despite often being considered a standard part of employment terms, these benefits are rarely highlighted by recruiters.

Signal workplace adjustments:

It is important for age-friendly employers to signal their willingness to make any reasonable adjustments throughout the recruitment process. This could entail anything from providing equipment such as a headset or adjustable desk, to supporting scheduled breaks.

Consider how flexible you can be in when and where work is done. Lewis Silkin highlights that while there is no legal obligation to consider making reasonable adjustments to a job for an older person in the same way as there is for disabled employees, there is also nothing stopping an employer from offering flexibility in how work is done, that could widen your pool of applicants and support existing employees.

Analyse your workforce data to identify areas for improvement. Are older applicants less likely to be offered an interview? Are you providing opportunities for development for people of all ages? What is the average age of exit for your employees? Work with the people in your employment in this age bracket: use their testimonials in marketing, and ask for their feedback. Ask people in your network if your job adverts would interest them.



Use people you already have. Ask what do they need, what are the benefits you should advertise to attract these people?

Katariina Reissaar MIH, front office manager at the Royal Air Force Club and Chair of the IoH Youth Council



Solutions

Engage local support

It's also important to consider where you are posting your job adverts; older workers may be less likely than their younger counterparts to be on TikTok, for instance (although not always). Strategies to target older workers could include using community websites and boards in village halls or supermarkets.

Work with relevant local partners to engage and empower locals. For example, identifying and developing local 'hidden talents' who might be older, retired or semi-retired, and are no longer in employment due to care responsibilities, but may be seeking opportunities to live a more active and socially engaged life.

Consider 'returnerships', short-term programmes designed to be a stepping stone for people looking to return to the workplace after an extended break. Make it clear in your advertising that you can support those who may lack confidence after a period away from the workplace.

Applications, screening and interviews

Recruiters need to consider that there may be some applicants who would benefit from a simplified application process. Older generations, for example, may not have had a CV and interview training, and while they may not necessarily have direct hospitality experience, if you're able to work with their transferable skills and upskill the rest, you can leverage their adaptability and eagerness to learn.

Be understanding, everyone's circumstances will be different, and some applicants may be searching for a career change to try something new or have to try something new following another career that is no longer open to them.

Jobcentre staff can work with local employers to help fill vacancies and offer support with arranging work experience, trials and recruitment, including supporting applicants with transport, clothing and flexible funding. Speak to your local Jobcentre Plus employer adviser for more information (see resources).

And think differently about recruitment. Just because an applicant may not have a long-term future with your organisation, it doesn't mean that a few years of loyal, dedicated service is worth less.

Solutions

RETENTION

Flexibility

Companies should also be thinking about how they're retaining their more experienced workers. The prevalence of shift work in the sector can really appeal to this segment. People's priorities change along with their circumstances, and jobs and expectations need to change and be flexible accordingly or risk losing this skilled segment of the workforce.

However, care must be taken as to how and when such discussions take place to avoid making assumptions about older workers which could amount to age discrimination.

Employers also need to offer flexible packages, the motivation for one team member may not be the same as another and remuneration may not have to be financial in certain cases.

Employees may wish to reduce their hours or change location, such as working remotely. Those fortunate enough to have a second home abroad, or have family living in other countries, may choose to stay in work longer if they can spend part of the year working from another location. However, the legal and practical implications of this option, in terms of tax and other issues, would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Contracts could provide a minimum commitment for part of the year (e.g. six weeks) with the option for employees to 'dial up' the amount of work if they want to or to work a few months of the year with several months off. This type of work pattern is called 'Benidorm Leave', allowing employees to spend winter in warmer climates, which may be very attractive to older employees not yet able or wishing to retire. Remember that flexibility may not only appeal to older workers but people of all ages for different reasons, and being flexible in your approach can help widen your pool of applicants and attractiveness to potential employees.

For health and safety reasons, both employer and employee will also need to be flexible in the appropriateness of certain physical duties as an employee ages, but being flexible in allowing them to pick up other tasks or move to another part of the organisation can ensure that knowledge and loyalty are retained.

Offering time off work or support for caring responsibilities may also be an attractive benefit to older workers, for example offering grandparent leave or allowing grandparents to use an onsite nursery. Employers can also offer unpaid career or sabbatical breaks.

Solutions

RETENTION

Training and development

Managers should not assume that older employees are not interested in opportunities for training and may also want to consider whether they can offer retraining opportunities. Be bespoke in your training, some individuals may need a longer induction process than others or focus on certain areas, and that doesn't just apply to older workers.



A good, solid induction will make them feel welcome and accepted and valued.

Trisha Bennett FIH, director of communications at Hospitality Assured



People over 55 are the least likely to receive workplace training with more than a third missing out in the last decade (14). Conversations must be had throughout a person's career, and a 'mid-life MOT' can start that ball rolling. Explore opportunities for reverse mentoring where more experienced team members are partnered with younger, newer recruits to support mutual skills and communication development.



We're good at championing our young and high achievers, highly ambitious people who are moving really quickly and attaining high positions really quickly. But we're not extolling the champions outside of that.

James McComas FIH, general manager at Eastwell Manor, Champneys Hotel & Spa



Create an age-friendly culture

As well as having diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) policies in place that apply to age, managers should ensure these policies are put into practice, for example calling out ageist 'jokes'. Training can support the implementation of such policies and should encourage employees to speak up and provide advice about managing older employees and menopause awareness.

Try to tackle misconceptions and biases that may exist among your teams, older people may feel excluded if it is wrongly perceived that they're less capable with technology when they are in fact the generation that has seen it advance over the years. And health problems do not necessarily affect everyone in this age bracket, while studies have found there to be no difference in productivity between older and younger workers (15).

And don't forget to champion your employees throughout their careers to ensure they continue to feel valued. Recognise the people who have been with you for years are integral to the business and are the faces your guests will come to recognise.

Healthcare benefits and well-being initiatives

Offering healthcare and well-being benefits is a good way to support all employees in the workplace, for example, health insurance and health checks, private GP appointments, support for regular vaccinations, and menopause support.

Next steps

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“For hospitality employers, this is not only about employer branding but truly recognising the knowledge, skills and experiences that an older worker could bring to the organisation, which should help to better serve the multigenerational client base.”

Dr Xuan (Lorna) Wang, co-director, Centre for Research on Ageing and Generations (CRAG), University of Surrey

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- 1)** Analyse your workforce data to identify areas for improvement
- 2)** Revise job adverts including language, imagery and signalling workplace adjustments and benefits
- 3)** Welcome flexible work including part-time or job shares
- 4)** Consider how your recruitment process could be rethought
- 5)** Sign the age-friendly employer pledge at www.agewithoutlimits.org and engage with relevant third-sector organisations
- 6)** Offer a holistic MOT to all staff
- 7)** Introduce age-diverse policies and benefits that open the door to conversations about adjustments and health management
- 8)** Create re-entry, returner or returnership programmes and reverse mentoring.

Methodology

This white paper has been produced following a round table discussion at Eastwell Manor, Champneys Hotel & Spa in Kent on 20 February 2024 and based on research by Tracey Fairclough of TAF Catering Consulting Ltd.



Round table chair

Mary Eniolu MIH, founder, owner and leadership coach, Can Do Academy



Trisha Bennett FIH, director of communications, Hospitality Assured



Paul Brice MIH, retired



Adriano Carvalho MIH, head chef, Newbury Grove



Tracey Fairclough FIH, managing director, TAF Catering Consultancy Ltd



Stuart Keown, resident experience manager (food & beverage), TLC Care



James McComas FIH, general manager, Eastwell Manor, Champneys Hotel & Spa



Zachary Millward MIH, workplace coach, Learnmore Network Limited



Katariina Reissaar MIH, front office manager, The Royal Air Force Club



Lilli Simms, personal trainer, LS Training



Kim Tosh, labour market recruitment specialist, The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP)



Robert Richardson FIH MI, chief executive, The Institute of Hospitality



Joanne Smith FIH, head of operations, The Institute of Hospitality



Sam Coulstock FIH MIEP, head of professional development, The Institute of Hospitality

Resources

Centre for Ageing Better Age-friendly Employer Pledge

Centre for Ageing Better Toolkit

People Scout's webinar with Personnel Today features a panel of HR/talent acquisition experts discussing wants and needs of older workers and how best to utilise their experience.

Lewis Silkin 'How can employers make their workplaces appeal to older workers?'
Further resources on the subject within the IoH website

White Paper – Future Proofing the Workforce

Research report – State of the Workforce 2023

ReWAGE report: Work, wages and employment in the UK hospitality sector

The industry's future skills needs – Why skills are so important to the future of the industry

IoH Mentoring programmes

Jobs Board powered by Caterer.com

References

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