



Reducing the risk of Age Discrimination in the Workplace

What is Age Discrimination?

Age discrimination in the workplace is described as negative treatment from one age group to another based on perceptions of age stereotypes more commonly aimed at the older workforce, although age discrimination can happen to anyone in any age group (Kunze and De Meulenaere, 2024). It is against the law to discriminate on the basis of age under The Equality Act 2010 which aims to protect individuals against discriminatory treatment of the nine characteristics, including age.

What are the risks?

Hywel Dda University Health Board (HDUHB) have an ageing workforce, approximately 50% of the workforce is over the age of 46 (HDUHB, 2025). This highlights a risk of this age group potentially encountering workplace age discrimination, although age discrimination can happen to any age group. Ageism can take place at any point through an individual's employment cycle, from recruitment to exit from the organisation, this can take place in many forms including microaggressions and unconscious bias (Bengtsson, 2025). The older workforce may also not be aware they are being



discriminated against or realise negative treatment as they have accepted stereotypes, an example of this being withdrawn from development opportunities to make room for younger leaders leaving them at a disadvantage (Rothermund, Klusmann and Zacher, 2021). There is an associated link between age discrimination and adverse health outcomes including older people experiencing depression (Jackson, Hackett and Steptoe, 2019), this could have a distinct impact on staff wellbeing and could contribute to long term sickness absences. It is therefore crucial that the risk of the workforce experiencing ageism is diminished to reduce the potential of impacted wellbeing, increased leavers and increased sickness absence, reduced workforce capacity and increased economic inactivity (Jackson, Hackett and Steptoe, 2019).

Mitigating the risks

As economic inactivity is rising across all age groups in Wales, although more common in older age groups since the pandemic, it is essential that the workforce stay in work for longer without feeling forced out of the workplace due to age discrimination either directly or indirectly (Bengtsson, 2025). To reduce this risk, it is encouraged to monitor labour market trends to successfully implement interventions, such as people in older age brackets facing challenges in the labour market could be due to outdated skill sets leading them to have a disadvantage compared to younger generations (Batinovic et al, 2023). This highlights a need for inclusive development pathways for all careers, doing so can lead to a healthy workplaces and dynamics and ensures a high level of competency for all age groups which can boost organisational performance. Managers should ensure equal opportunities for workforce development as this can stabilise economic activity and supports succession planning, although this

should be based on skill set succession planning instead of age bands to avoid the risk of ageism (Katirae et al, 2024). This also aids the older workforce to age successfully and healthily on the pathway to retirement supporting their mental and cognitive wellbeing which will keep them working for longer, whilst also supporting the succession planning process to forecast gaps in skills and give the opportunity to transfer knowledge to the younger workforce (Katirae et al, 2024).

This can be achieved through various Human Resources (HR) interventions, such as embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) into internal processes such as recruitment, leadership and workforce development (Rosa, 2025). EDI is imperative to organisational success and reducing the risk of the workforce experiencing age related discrimination and should be encouraged throughout the organisation to promote fairness, equal opportunities and an inclusive culture (CIPD, 2023). It is essential that leaders feel confident and capable to champion EDI to their delegates (CIPD, 2023), HDUHB offer training and webinars in this to develop awareness in leaders to make unbiased decisions, ensure our workforce feels safe and reduce unacceptable behaviours, these can be accessed through the intranet (HDUHB, 2026). Nelson (2019) finds that education and training in reducing ageism is more important than ever as it is estimated that there is a need for a significant increase in older health care workers as the population ages, as the rapidly expanding geriatric population will have extended health care needs and increases the potential prevalence of ageism.





Single complaints of ageism alone cannot create change to an age inclusive workforce, instead it needs systemic change across the workforce to ensure that inclusivity and EDI practices are embedded in workplaces, such as fair recruitment and hiring processes (Blackham, 2024). An example of this is remaining unbiased during the recruitment process, an important aspect of EDI, this could include declining an application based on the age of the applicant. The CIPD (2024) state that to remain inclusive in recruitment it is essential to remove biased language from job adverts, this entails the use of younger stereotypical language where older people make the assumption that they will not get selected for interview. Managers could also proactively ask applicants about reasonable adjustments prior to appointment; this ensures that the older candidates who need adjustments such as digital assistance in the interview process feel included and encouraged to apply (CIPD, 2024). Another way of ensuring inclusivity during recruitment is focusing on the skill set of the applicant rather than the years of experience as this could discourage younger age groups applying for roles that they could be suitable for (Lossbroek et al, 2020). This occurring could lead to HDUHB not benefitting from the varying skills and experience of all ages across the workforce which could have a negative impact on achieving organisational goals and increased chance of litigation, which is costly (Blackham, 2024).



The Benefits of Mitigating Risk

Mitigating risks in relation to age discrimination can have significant benefits to HDUHB and its managers including the reduced likelihood of litigation or termination if ageism has taken place which further reduces the potential of legal costs (Neumark et al, 2020). By managers communicating and embedding core EDI practices in their workplaces this will reduce the occurrence of age stereotyping, reduce the potential of claims of unfair behaviours related to stereotyping amongst the workforce and embed an inclusive culture (Henry, Coundouris and Nangle, 2024).

Increasing awareness and reducing ageism across the workforce can significantly increase employee morale, as perceptions of the older workforce change this will support the older workforce to remain in work for longer, contribute to healthy ageing whilst working and improve job and employee satisfaction which in turn reduces turnover and sickness absence rates across the organisation (Rothermund, Klusmann and Zacher, 2021).

This also contributes to improving economic activity across the nation as people will remain in their roles for longer, although as the workforce ages their workforce needs change also. As the older workforce approaches retirement, working patterns may be required to change to reflect their health and wellbeing needs, this can include reducing to part time hours, partial retirement or retire and return opportunities (Neumark et al, 2020). It is essential that managers offer reasonable adjustments to this age profile as their skills and experience are essential to transferring knowledge to the younger generation through peer mentoring, although this can work in the other direction where younger workers can transfer knowledge to the older workforce for example in the use of digital tools (Wang and Fang, 2020). This encourages age diversity in the workplace which has

numerous benefits to the organisation such as working together to achieve collective goals and objectives, boosts productivity and skill development and enhances organisational outcomes (Wang and Fang, 2020).

Call to Action

- All managers in HDUHB are responsible for ensuring fair treatment for our workforce, this includes ensuring all decisions made during recruitment, training and progression are based on skills and not age (Rosa, 2025).
- Lead by example to promote inclusive workplaces to reduce ageism or discrimination of any kind.
- Sign up to our EDI training and webinars through the intranet to expand knowledge and embed in day to day management and encourage others to sign up too.
- For guidance if a concern is raised, seek advice promptly from our HR teams to follow policy and procedures confidently and legally to prevent age discrimination. More information on Our Policy below.

Our Policy

Within HDUHB the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (2022) policy aims to embed a set of values and principles to meet the obligations of the Equality Act (2010) to protect the workforce against discrimination, this includes ageism. The policy outlines the expected behaviours of the workforce of all levels, this includes managers leading by example, dealing with discriminatory claims sensitively and proactively and ensuring that staff are appropriately trained to carry out their duties and responsibilities under the Professional Codes of Conduct (HDUHB, 2022). Claims of proven discrimination will be treated appropriately in line with HDUHBs disciplinary process.

