



HOSPITALITY GUIDE TO RECRUITING WORKERS AGED 50+

FOCUSING ON SUPPORTING THE INTEGRATION AND
SUSTAINMENT OF THE 50+ WORKFORCE WITHIN THE
HOSPITALITY SECTOR



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FOREWORD

The UK is undergoing a large demographic shift. However, broadly speaking, the hospitality sector is falling behind with regards to attracting and employing an older workforce.

WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH THE OVER-50S IN THE WORKFORCE?

An increase in longevity, combined with the multifaceted impacts of Covid-19 on employment, whereby many have retired from their previous jobs, has resulted in the UK sleepwalking into a retirement crisis with millions of individuals entering a long and potentially low-income retirement. All too frequently, many people find themselves taking early retirement due to factors that can be remedied by taking steps to create more accommodating working environments. The Phoenix Group reports that the employment impact of Covid-19 on the over 50s has been the longest-lasting compared to other age groups, with sectoral shifts on supply and demand.

ONS data recorded that in the April to June 2021 period, the employment rate for people aged 50 to 64 years was 71.2%, with only 15% of this figure working with distribution, hotels, and restaurants. The hospitality sector is neglecting a large pool of workers which has the potential to begin to fill the gaps of a widespread labour shortage.

Centre for Ageing Better reports that by 2025 there will be an extra one million workers over the age of 50 in the UK. This body of workforce can begin to address the vacancy rates of 10% that continue to persist within the sector, with hospitality vacancies close to around 50% higher than they were pre-pandemic (ONS).

THE BENEFITS OF THE OLDER WORKFORCE FOR THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR

In collaboration with The Phoenix Group and support from businesses within our sector, we have identified the myths attached to this age group in the workplace. Additionally, we have found solutions to the barriers which not only prevent the sector from supporting older employees throughout their everyday working life but also hamper the critical recruitment process.

Understanding generational difference is crucial, as this is often the first hurdle fallen by many employers. This guide sets out a best practice approach for businesses in our sector to capture this untapped talent pool of workers, with years of skill and experience already behind them. Overall, enabling businesses to create more diverse and harmonious teams.

WHY THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR IS A GREAT MATCH FOR OLDER EMPLOYEES

As one of the most dynamic and vibrant fields of employment, the hospitality sector has a unique ability to provide employees with a great deal of mobility, and freedom due to the flexibility and omnipresent element of the sector. In addition, the industry is incredibly social, allowing employees to meet people from incredibly diverse backgrounds.

The socially rewarding aspect of the sector is further extended by the satisfaction employees receive in helping to make someone else's day a better one. However, too many older applicants miss out on the opportunities that hospitality can offer, due to inadequate processes, age bias and a lack of engagement from employers and recruiters. This guide provides employers with practical steps to ensure age inclusivity across their business.

MYTH BUSTING

Across society, there is a widely held bias against older workers. This narrative is harmful not only to the individuals of this age group but also to the businesses that subsequently isolate them. Busting the myths and changing the narrative is the first step toward the successful integration and sustainment of the 50+ workforce within the hospitality sector.

Below we outline several of the myths most frequently heard, paired with facts to debunk such notions.

Myth: Some people believe that older workers are more likely to be absent through illness.

Fact: Older workers are half as likely to take a sick day compared to their younger counterparts. Only a quarter of over 50s took time off in 2014 due to ill-health compared to just under half of those aged 20-30.

Myth: There is no business benefit in training older workers.

Fact: Organisations that provide a higher level of training to older workers retain their staff until a much later age, thereby reducing turnover costs.

Fact: Training spend for over the 50s is 50% less than for younger workers.

Myth: For those who want to retrain, apprenticeships are only for school leavers.

Fact: Anyone aged 16 and over can be enrolled in an apprenticeship, including career changers, and people looking to develop their skills as part of their current job.

Myth: Older workers cruise along and are not really interested in their career.

Fact: 91% of older workers surveyed still wish to progress in their careers.

Myth: Older workers aren't up to date with technology.

Fact: Cisco research found no great correlation between age and confidence using technology – even less so for technology at work. The type of work people do is a much better predictor than age.

Fact: In the digital sector, 70% of start-ups founded by older workers lasted longer than three years, compared to only 28% of those created by younger entrepreneurs.

Myth: Older workers have trouble learning new things.

Fact: Older workers retain information longer and have higher training rates than younger workers, combined with higher motivation and good attention spans.

SOURCE: [AVAILABLE HERE.](#)

MAGGIE MAGEE, THE FRONT PAGE BAR

"I have worked in hospitality now for well over 30 years. I love the buzz of a busy night when we're under pressure, and it's great to feel like I'm with people enjoying the craic on their night out even when I'm at the other side of the bar.

Hospitality is a really flexible place to work. For me, I have been able to choose when and how often I work, and unlike some other careers or workplaces, if you need some time off, you can easily get it.

Anyone who may be considering a career change or retirement, I would encourage them to step into the world of hospitality because it definitely opens new doors. Through working in hospitality, I was able to go and complete a two-year NVQ course. This provided me with the opportunity to learn more about the industry, and as a result, I have been able to take on more in my role.

For someone my age, it's hard to get a new job in a different sector but with hospitality, you will be able to find a job that suits you and that enables you to step out of your comfort zone."



BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS

To best facilitate the integration of the 50+ workforce, businesses must look to remove any barriers within their recruitment strategy, many of them subconsciously implemented. Changes must then be complemented by subtle adaptations to everyday practices within the workplace. Small changes will make a big difference for workers to feel valued and supported.

The years of experience and skills older individuals have acquired can be an invaluable asset to your business. Part of ensuring that older workers feel valued can be done by allowing them to pass on this wealth of knowledge to the team members within your organisation. Not only will this allow businesses to reap benefits from a more diverse team but will simultaneously encourage teams to work more collaboratively.

THE RECRUITMENT STAGE

Debias adverts:

- Notably, younger-age stereotypical words are more commonly used in real job advertisements than older-age stereotypical words. For example, phrases such as 'technologically savvy' and 'dynamic', were found by the *Centre for Ageing Better* to have a negative impact on perceived likelihood of interview, job offer and fit.
- Avoiding potentially age-biased words and phrases may be more important for particular groups of older candidates. Using language that appeals more broadly to older candidates, does not deter younger applicants. For example, this could include, 'knowledgeable' and 'dependable'.
- Ensuring that imagery is age-diverse, by including older workers
- Emphasise employer benefits that may appeal to older workers, such as flexible working.

RECONSIDER WHERE ROLES ARE ADVERTISED:

Reports have noted that older people are less likely to visit job centres and do not tend to sign-on, which therefore makes it more challenging to access this pool of workers as they do not tend to enter the job seeking market.

This issue is further exacerbated by internalised ageism, finding older people stepping away from job searches in the belief that younger people are either better suited or more in need of employment.

Other resources can instead be tapped into by employers:

- Make use of jobs boards targeted towards older people, such as Restless and Working Wise
- Posting human interest stories on local press and radio stations
- Posting targeted job adverts on social media platforms such as Facebook
- Methods of physical advertising such as on bus stops can be implemented.

JOHANNA DEANEY, TITANIC BELFAST

“After a 35 year career teaching chemistry, I retired but knew the quiet life wasn’t for me and immediately set about getting another job.

In March 2022, I applied to join the Visitor Experience Crew at Titanic Belfast, and I now lead a walking tour through the exhibitions.

There is a lot of flexibility in my role which suits me since I have an active social life outside work. I’m surrounded by a supportive team and making someone’s day is a fantastic feeling. Ultimately, it is just a very enjoyable job that is great fun to do. My advice to anyone who is interested in this industry would be to seize the opportunity and don’t be afraid to throw yourself into something that you think you would like to do. Working here has been exactly what I was after at this stage of my life.”



ADAPTIONS WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

The suggestions listed below can ensure that employees feel valued and comfortable whilst at work.

Ensuring that the uniform and footwear are comfortable to wear

Providing employees with leaning stalls and other supportive ergonomic measures

Give employees the opportunity to take courses or an apprenticeship to advance their skills

Ensuring that workers can take regular toilet breaks

Provide older workers with opportunities to progress - development opportunities will benefit both the business and the value felt by the individual

Technology-based adaptions such as easier-to-read computer screens may help some older employees

Remove any ageism bias within businesses that may lead to exclusion or discrimination

Hospitality is already one of the most flexible industries, however, continuing to promote flexible working arrangements will ensure that employees feel supported.



Apprenticeships Focus – 50+ The Future of the Workforce and Not the Past!



Thanks to a recent move to “all age apprenticeships” in Northern Ireland (NI) funded by the Department for the Economy (DfE) there is a real opportunity to actively engage, encourage, and target age-inclusive apprenticeships in NI through the Hospitality Ulster (HU) network. The myth that apprenticeships are exclusive for the younger workforce can now be debunked and the challenge for the sector is will they see 50+ as the future of the workforce and not the past!

Damian Duffy, Deputy Chief Executive (Curriculum & Partnerships) at Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) discusses the opportunity of engaging with those 50+ to support the recruitment challenges of the hospitality sector in NI through an apprenticeship led solution.

“As a champion for skills and apprenticeships in NI working within the Centre for Skills and Apprenticeships team in BMC, the transition to the funding of all age apprenticeships can be the catalyst to opening a plethora of new talent the Hospitality sector in NI is craving. Our challenge as a training provider is to demystify apprenticeships for employers and ultimately aid them in developing age-inclusive people strategies underpinned by apprenticeships career pathways identified by the sector.”

The challenge for potential employers to tap into this new wave of talent is to show the flexibility in terms of working conditions that hospitality offers. However, this comes with a caveat that to support an apprentice, they must be employed for a minimum of 21 hours a week including off the job training. To support the recruitment of 50+ apprentices as a skills solution there is over 40% people with below a NQF Level 2 qualification that are over 50 in NI. Hence, setting the over 50's on a new career pathway with a clear progression opportunity in terms of their education and career can be a huge incentive to come back to work as an apprentice in the hospitality and tourism sector to support their lifelong learning through an apprenticeship led solution.

With a labour market that is operating in an environment of high vacancies and low employment hospitality and tourism has an opportunity by engaging with apprenticeships providers in NI to show those 50+ how the hospitality and tourism sector can tap into their skills.”

To deliver apprenticeships and training across the province, Hospitality Ulster work in partnership with the six FE Colleges and Rutledge Training, For more information contact:

**Apprenticeships@belfastmet.ac.uk
info@rutledgegroup.co.uk**

IMMEDIATE CHANGES TO MAKE WITHIN YOUR BUSINESS

- Within your recruitment process, ensure that advertisements are inclusive, eliminating any bias that may deter future employees. Additionally, explore new recruitment routes.
- Facilitate a welcoming place of work by ensuring that members of staff are not guilty of holding ageism against older workers.
- Implement the recommended adaptations, and discuss with older team members the adaptations which would support them best

The most impactful change can be made by listening to staff and customers within your business and understanding what their needs are, the age-old narrative of underestimating the capabilities of the 50 plus is severely outdated, and there is a budding workforce ready and waiting.

FURTHER SUPPORT

For further support on this topic, DWP has resources signposted online available here. The Labour Relations Agency also provide free advice for businesses and individuals on employment legislation, including advice on age and the workplace.

While older workers may have been previously overlooked by many, it is vital now more than ever that this narrative is changed for the evolving world of work.

Businesses that can adapt will reap the invaluable benefits of ensuring that their companies are diverse and accommodating to all.

PAUL TOSH, GALGORM RESORT & SPA

"Transitioning from a 26-year military career into the hospitality industry was a complete lifestyle change for me. Every day is different in every way, and that's what I love. While I served in the military, I also played the bagpipes and I had the opportunity to take part in events like the Edinburgh Tattoo, and I even had the chance to play on the Royal Yacht. These experiences prepared me for my change in career to becoming a guest experience specialist; I am used to meeting people and I'm confident in passing the time of day with them.

As a guest experience specialist, I am the first person that our customers and guests meet, and I love seeing the whole team pull together to provide the best customer experience.

I don't find it stressful; it can be demanding, but when I come home, I can switch off from my work. People my age have experience, we're streetwise, so we know how to deal with people. For anyone who is thinking of joining the hospitality industry, I would say do it. To be able to put a smile on someone's face and make a difference to their day is more fulfilling than anything. There is a role within hospitality for someone my age without a doubt."





GUIDE FRAMEWORK

This guide has been developed as part of a taskforce between UKHospitality and The Phoenix Group, established as part of the Government's over-50s Ministerial Taskforce. The overarching aim of the Taskforce is to increase the number of over-50s in the UK workforce, by exploring the issues and barriers which currently discourage the 50+ workers from securing employment within the sector. Amended for Northern Ireland by Hospitality Ulster in partnership with Tourism NI.

About Hospitality Ulster & the UKH Group

Hospitality Ulster, part of the UKH Group (UKHospitality, UKHospitality Scotland, UKHospitality Cymru and Hospitality Ulster) is the unified voice for the Hospitality Sector in Northern Ireland and seeks to unlock the industry's full potential as one of the biggest engines for growth in the economy, and to ensure that the industry's needs are effectively represented by engaging with Governments, the media, employees, and customers. Our key priorities are the revival of the sector, safeguarding the future workforce of the sector, tackling the excessive tax burden the sector faces, and ensuring that regulation on business is proportionate. Hospitality Ulster has a diverse membership, including pubs, restaurants, contract catering, hotels, coffee shops, wedding venues, visitor attractions, night clubs, industry suppliers and much more.

About Tourism NI

Tourism NI is responsible for the development of tourism in Northern Ireland, supporting the tourism industry and for marketing Northern Ireland as a tourist destination. We are a non-departmental public body of the Department for the Economy and work closely with other tourism and hospitality bodies to help develop the visitor economy here for your business.

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