

# 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.](#)

### **TERRY DIXON, MARRIOTT HOTELS**

Terry originally joined the Leicester Marriott in 2006 as a Concierge meeting and greeting the guests in the lobby and helping with their luggage. In 2021 he moved into the Engineering department as an Engineer, doing day to day room maintenance, painting and decorating and general facility management tasks around the hotel. "Hospitality is a great career to have", says Terry, "no two days are the same and you are learning all the time whilst working with lots of different people from different backgrounds and cultures and that's just the team. Marriott as a company has a great culture too and my colleagues and Managers make me feel valued. We also get to meet customers from around the world, sports personalities and people from the local community during our daily tasks. There are lots of opportunities for people of all ages too and working in a team that has members ranging from sixteen to sixty-two means that I get to hear about what is important to both young and older alike.

Training and support are always given, and everyone has the same opportunity to make an impact to the business. I would highly recommend a role in this industry to anyone who was thinking about it."





# 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.

### **MICK WOODWARD, SLUG AND LETTUCE, SOLIHULL, STONEGATE GROUP**

After leaving school at 16, Mick began his career in hospitality, specifically catering, and has now worked in hospitality for a total of 38 years.

He has been in his current role as Kitchen Manager in Slug and Lettuce for 13 years and has worked with his team for a number of years and so they understand how each other work; Mick adds that in essence, they become your family which is one of the things he loves most about hospitality.

“A career in hospitality changes your life, it is hard work but at the same time it is exciting as no two days are ever the same. I would say to anyone who is considering entering hospitality that experience is not the over-riding factor.

The most important thing I consider when recruiting for my team is whether the candidate has the potential and personality to do the job.”





# 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 adaptations 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.



# APPRENTICESHIP FOCUS

The myth that apprenticeships are exclusive to the younger workforce must be debunked. From the perspective of employers, investing in training is a big part of building and retaining a loyal workforce and increasingly more businesses are realising that age shouldn't be a limiting factor in this.

Jill Whittaker, Managing Director at HIT Training, discusses the value of apprenticeships for the over-50s.



"At HIT Training, we have seen a much bigger focus on promoting a diverse workforce over recent years, but one of the facets that doesn't get talked about so often is age, adding that the sector should be embracing the many benefits that older employees can bring.

Not only can they share valuable life experiences with their co-workers, but it's likely that some of the skills they've gained in their previous roles can often be harnessed in hospitality. For example, any job with a customer service element can build skills that are much needed in our field – it's just about unlocking that within the hospitality context. Plus, a lot of work in our sector is client-facing and customers will be drawn to spend time in environments where they see people like them. It's ideal to recruit a mixture of age groups, especially if you want to appeal to a broad customer base.

Both employees and employers are increasingly recognising the benefits of training at any age, especially as our working lives are getting longer. In fact, the over-50s tend to have a higher success rate in their apprenticeships than any other age group. HIT Training apprentices in the over-50s bracket have seen a 15% higher pass rate than the 16–18-year-olds and have the lowest dropout rate of all age groups. They are also less likely to take a break in their learning. Notably, over the past five years, 12% of HIT apprentices have been over 50, compared to just 8% under 19 years of age. For employees, the benefits of training hold true at any age. There are studies showing that if you keep your brain active, it gives you a happier life. And learning new skills is a big part of that. It's about lifelong learning, not just career-long development. There are huge opportunities in hospitality for anyone who's keen to get on and willing to learn – and apprenticeships are an ideal way to help them reach that potential. Working with an experienced training provider will help a company get to know what an individual of any age can learn and benefit from the most".

For more information visit: <https://hittraining.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](#). Acas also provides 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 an evolving world of work. Businesses that can adapt will reap the invaluable benefits of ensuring that their companies are diverse and accommodating to all.

### BECKY HARRIS, HR MANAGER MARRIOTT ST PIERRE HOTEL AND COUNTRY CLUB

“Having started my hospitality career in the US 36 years ago, I would not want to work anywhere else. I started as a part-time Hostess in Food and Beverage 25 years ago and with an abundance of training, support and incredible opportunities, I was able to progress to Human Resources Manager and I have been in this role for 17 years now. Hospitality affords you the opportunity to work in a variety of different fields. When I was in F&B operations, I met some fascinating individuals from around the globe and made friends for life. I was given the opportunity to enhance our guests’ visits, make their stay memorable, and make them feel special. Not everyone can say that. Moving out of operations and into HR afforded me new and exciting opportunities. Not only am I able to mentor, train, guide, and support our associates and managers but I also have the pleasure of attracting and recruiting new individuals into the hospitality industry; many into their first-ever job role and many with a wealth of experience. I feel privileged to be part of such a great industry and would recommend it to anyone looking for a career that is challenging, rewarding, interesting and fun”





## 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.

## ABOUT UKH

Prior to COVID-19 the hospitality sector employed 3.2 million people, representing 10% of all employment, 6% of businesses and 5% of GDP. UKHospitality, UKHospitality Scotland and UKHospitality Cymru are the unified voice for the sector, and seek 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 a sector hardest hit by COVID-19, safeguarding the future workforce of the sector, tackling the excessive tax burden the sector faces and ensuring that regulation on business is proportionate.

UKHospitality has a diverse membership, including pubs, restaurants, contract catering, hotels, holiday parks, coffee shops, food-to-go, leisure, wedding venues, visitor attractions, night clubs, membership clubs, industry suppliers and much more.

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