

# acas Age discrimination: top ten myths

working for everyone

- Myth:** Some employers think older staff are more likely to be off work ill.
- Fact:** Research shows sickness absence rates are similar across all age groups.
- Myth:** Older people staying in work stops young people getting a job.
- Fact:** There is no evidence for this. Forecasts suggest more older staff will be needed to stay in work.
- Myth:** Talking to employees over 50 about their future work plans risks employers being accused of age discrimination.
- Fact:** An employer can ask an employee, no matter what their age, about their work plans in the short-, medium- and long-terms. But an employer must not design a different set of questions for an employee because of their age.
- Myth:** It's ok for an employer to ask a job applicant: 'Would you be able to manage a team of people older than you'.
- Fact:** This is the wrong question. Try asking: 'Tell me about your management experience'. And 'Have you had to manage any difficult situations?'
- Myth:** An employer looking to fill a demanding position can decide to interview only people between 30 and 45 to hire someone with a strong sense of responsibility.
- Fact:** No, it can't. Applicants must be selected for interview based on the skills, knowledge and experience necessary for the role.
- Myth:** Older employees are difficult to train and less able to learn new skills.
- Fact:** There is no evidence to support this. Rather, it has been found that with well-organised, planned and coherent training, employees adapt regardless of age.
- Myth:** An employer is unlikely to get investment back in training staff over 55 and under 25 as they are both likely to move on in the near future.
- Fact:** As technology moves ever faster, most skill sets need updating frequently while the shelf-life of training to get there gets less and less. So all staff, no matter what their age, and the organisation too, are likely to benefit from training.
- Myth:** The performance of employees tails off as they get older.
- Fact:** Research shows there is no deterioration in performance in most types of work at least until 70. But what does make a difference is whether older employees get the same training as younger colleagues.
- Myth:** An employee must retire once they start taking their State pension.
- Fact:** The law no longer sets a retirement age. This means most employees can decide when they will stop working, whether or not they take or defer their State pension.
- Myth:** It's ok for recruitment agencies to only send on applications from anyone under 50 because they know the employer won't interview anyone older.
- Fact:** Apart from in very limited circumstances where applicants need to be a particular age, or within a particular age range, an agency must not filter applications this way and should not pass over details on applicants' ages. If it does, both agency and employer are likely to be discriminating.

Want to learn more about these areas? Download the free Acas guide  
**Age discrimination: key points for the workplace** from:

[www.acas.org.uk/agediscrimination](http://www.acas.org.uk/agediscrimination)