57 is the age employers consider 'too old' as hiring ageism sees millions overlooked for job roles

1 year ago

57 is the average age at which candidates are considered 'too old' for job roles, according to new research from Totaljobs.

In England and Wales alone, this represents 4.2 million people and £138 billion in economic output, now at risk of being overlooked due to entrenched ageism in recruitment. Totaljobs' latest report, *The Age Advantage: Overcoming Age Bias to Hire Experienced Talent*, underscores the critical need to harness the economic potential of this vital segment of the workforce.

Despite the UK facing a significant skills shortage, a third (33%) of over 50s fear they won't secure another job due to age discrimination. The concern is more acute among women over 50 (37%) and Black workers over 50 (48%). Notably, one in seven (15%) candidates over 50 have been rejected from a job explicitly due to their age, illustrating that this is not merely a concern, but a reality.

This discrimination has discouraged over-50s to seek new employment, with a quarter (25%) hesitating to apply for jobs – a figure that rises to 28% among women and 42% among Black workers. This is despite a third (33%) of workers expressing a willingness to remain in the workforce beyond the state retirement age. This represents an additional 300,000 full-time workers each year from 2030 to 2035 for those who would reach retirement age by 2035 and an additional £12 billion in economic activity.

Natalie Matalon, Chief People Officer at Totaljobs (part of The Stepstone Group) said: "With the highest level of economically inactive people in over a decade, there's a real chance for employers to tap into the

wealth of knowledge and skills that older workers offer. However, our research shows unconscious biases are still preventing many businesses from fully accessing this vital talent pool.

"Our ageing population means that the workforce is naturally evolving, and those who embrace the experience and diversity of perspective of older workers will be better positioned to support younger workers in their careers and address talent shortages . While it's promising that many employers are already recognising the value of over 50s, accelerating efforts to build more inclusive recruitment practices will unlock even more growth opportunities for business and people."

Discrimination in the recruitment process

Nearly three in five (59%) HR decision-makers admit to making assumptions about candidates based on age, with 42% experiencing pressure from colleagues to prioritise and hire younger candidates. Additionally, nearly half (47%) believe that a candidate's age influences their 'cultural fit' within the organisation.

For those aged 50 and over who have changed jobs in the past three years or are currently job hunting, several key challenges emerged: 20% have faced inappropriate age-related questions, 22% were asked unsuitable questions about their health and physical capabilities, 26% were presumed to struggle with new technologies, and nearly a third (31%) felt workplace culture favoured younger applicants.

As a result of these challenges, over a fifth (22%) of over 50s have omitted their age from CVs, with half (49%) doing so to avoid being stereotyped.

Totaljobs has partnered with Professor Sarah Vickerstaff, a leading authority of Work and Employment at the University of Kent, to produce The Age Advantage: Overcoming Age Bias to Hire Experienced Talent. This report urges employers to leverage the value that over 50s bring to the workforce and offers practical guidance on overcoming age-related biases in recruitment.

Professor Sarah Vickerstaff, Professor of Work and Employment at the University of Kent, said: "Many older workers are eager to continue working, but face significant barriers including age discrimination and the perception that they are 'too old' for available roles. While governments have raised retirement ages to extend working lives and reduce welfare costs, the benefits of an age-diverse workforce go beyond the economic. Good work benefits individuals, and an inclusive, multigenerational workforce could be a win-win for society. So why isn't this potential being fully realised?

"Stereotypes around older workers not only discourage employers from hiring but also undermine the confidence of older workers when applying. Ageism manifests directly, with recruiters viewing candidates over 57 as 'too old,' and indirectly, as older jobseekers internalise these biases and refrain from applying for fear of rejection."

Natalie Matalon added: "Businesses have the tools to tackle these biases and create more inclusive hiring processes. Whether it's using AI to identify biased language in job ads, forming age-diverse hiring panels, or shifting from 'cultural fit' to 'cultural add' when assessing candidates, there are many positive and proactive steps businesses can implement to tackle this issue. The organisations that act now will not only gain access to a broader, more experienced talent pool, but also retain essential skills and experience from their existing workforce, fostering greater workplace diversity."