

Valuing older workers: Planning long and rewarding careers

Maintaining and developing skills is an essential aspect of working longer and continued adult education and learning is important for older workers.

A continuous approach to the development of staff skills, knowledge and expertise is vital to the provision of high-quality care, supporting, delivering and leading high quality research, maintaining professional registration and ensuring staff have rewarding careers. Ensuring staff have access to continuing development, supportive supervision and protected time for training is a core responsibility for all employers (NHS Long Term Workforce Plan 2023).

There is research which suggests that employees aged 50-64 years old are less likely to participate in training courses than employees in the younger age brackets. Older workers should be considered in any learning strategy and provided with the same opportunities as younger workers to continue their professional development.

Technology

The impact of technology on jobs will increasingly mean workers will need to upskill or reskill at different stages in their career. (CIPD 2022) As many older workers are choosing to work longer and during a time when both technology and working practices continue to evolve at pace, all staff should be given equality of opportunity to enhance and learn skills.

Older workers are subject to 'ageist' assumptions that they no longer have career ambitions and cannot adapt to new technology' (People Management 2024). Older workers don't feel there are good opportunities for progression and are also less likely to take part in formal off the job training.

Mid-life reviews

Employers can support staff to plan for later in life through the provision of mid-life reviews that take account of their work, finances and wellbeing. By providing mid-life support staff are able to plan to work for as long as they want to and employers are able to hold on to skills and experience offered by an age-diverse workforce.

The concept of a mid-life MOT was first mooted by Sir John Cridland in his review of the state pension age (Centre for Better Ageing 2019). He noted that from age 40, people are offered an NHS health check and that financial advice is available, though mostly to well-off savers. But health and finances are only part of the story of ageing.

He proposed a mid-life MOT including a holistic review of work, finances, lifestyle, health, home, family and retirement to “act as a useful trigger to encourage people to take stock”

Mid-life support can be made available either in-house or through commissioned services and should be tailored to meet the changing needs of individuals as they age. The process should not be a ‘one off’ event but a series of offerings accessible to staff at different life stages. It should address finances, work and career, health and later-life planning.

Beneficial tools which may be incorporated include mindfulness and cognitive behavioural therapy that build resilience and emotional wellbeing to help people feel ready and positive about later life, and better able to navigate later life transitions including the retirement transition.

Diversity and inclusion should be embedded within the support to ensure people from the global majority and those with challenging socio-economic backgrounds who may face more barriers are supported in planning and preparing for later in life.

References

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