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## HR Update November 2013

### The Ageing Workforce

In October 2011 the default retirement age was removed. This allowed British workers the ability to work until they choose to stop, instead of being forced to retire at a certain time. As well as this in 2011 it was decided by the Pension Commission that the age at which people receive their state pension should be pushed back. This has resulted in many employees staying in work much longer than they have done in the past because they either want to stay in employment or because they cannot afford to retire until they reach their state pension age.

### The Possible Problems

An ageing workforce may present problems for an employer. As a person's body ages they may become less fit and healthy than they once were. There are many illnesses or ailments associated with age such as high bloody pressure, diabetes, arthritis and many more. These illnesses, along with a possible deterioration in health, could result in more health and safety risks for an employee. As well as physical illnesses there is also a common belief that as people age their minds may become less "sharp" meaning that they cannot deal with as much information as they may have previously. This may result in ageing employees not being "on top of their game" or as capable in their job as they used to be.

A common problem that has been reported to the CIPD is the resentment between younger and older employees. There is a common

belief that because there are employees working longer and staying in their jobs, there are fewer opportunities for younger employees to develop. Whilst this is actually incorrect – there are enough jobs for both the young and the old – this misconception can often cause a rift between age groups and create a hostile working environment.

According to the CIPD it is also a common belief of employers that younger employees, often fresh out of education, are easier to train and develop than older employees who may be “stuck in their ways” and possibly fearful of change. This is also incorrect, studies by the CIPD have shown older employees are just as appreciative for training as younger employees, but this common misconception could possibly lead to employers not providing older employees with training and therefore discriminating against them.

## The Possible Solutions

Whilst you cannot predict the health of your employees you are required to conduct regular risk assessments with the aim of eliminating and reducing hazards and risks. In doing so, consideration should be given to factors associated with an ageing workforce. To quash any resentment which may exist between age ranges you should strive to create a culture that is built around team work. Make your workplace one that has a positive atmosphere where there are opportunities for everyone, and every employee feels as valued as the next. A good idea would be to implement a mentoring scheme which enables your older employees to share their skills and knowledge with younger employees. Training and development opportunities should be made available to any employee who shows an interest in wanting to develop, whether they are young or old, so you should ensure opportunities are communicated to all employees.

As an employer it can be hard to know what to do when an ageing employee seems no longer capable to perform their role. Do you manage them out of the company with a capability dismissal or offer them retirement? The truth is a mixture of the two. Best practice would suggest you sensitively manage the capability issue whilst maintaining dignity and respect, with retirement being a mutually agreed alternative to a capability dismissal.

One of the best ways in which you can manage an ageing workforce is to train your Line Managers in managing diversity within the workplace. By providing Line Managers with appropriate training they will be better prepared to handle situations related to age, or any other ‘protected characteristic’ (Equality Act 2010). For some employees’ retirement may be a normal and eagerly awaited stage of their employment and with the right training, it can be approached and discussed in an open, honest, and respectful manner.

## How Can We Help?

We can provide you with professional advice and guidance to support you in managing a diverse workforce which will help reduce the risk of falling foul of anti-discrimination legislation.

If you have any queries relating to any of the subjects raised within this newsletter then please don't hesitate to contact us at [hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk](mailto:hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk).

For clarification of any of the above updates or for advice and guidance on any HR and/or Health and Safety Concerns contact us by emailing [hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk](mailto:hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk) or by calling 02476 664092.

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