



Key skills communication Level 3 - Ageism in the workplace

Tuesday 10th June 2008

Source Booklet

- This booklet contains source material for the level 3 communication test, **Ageism in the workplace**
 - The test questions will be based on this material
 - You must hand in this source booklet at the end of the test, along with your question paper and answer booklet
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The level 3 communication test will assess your ability to:

- select and read material to obtain the required information
- identify accurately, and compare, the lines of reasoning and main points from the text and images
- synthesise the key information in a way that is relevant to the purpose
- select and use a format and style of writing that is appropriate to the purpose and subject matter
- organise relevant information clearly and coherently
- ensure text is legible and spelling, grammar and punctuation are accurate

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Positively aged

Government and business tackle ageism

The workforce is changing. Work patterns are changing. But are attitudes changing, or are we stuck with old stereotypes of who makes a good person to employ?

Age discrimination is one form of stereotyping that inhibits good employment practices. It is a problem that can affect anyone, at any stage of his or her career. Younger workers sometimes feel that they are bullied at work or passed over for promotion. Older workers believe employers consider them to be 'over the hill' when it comes to recruitment, training or promotion opportunities.

The UK government pledged to outlaw age discrimination in the workplace by 2006. From then on, employers trying to demonstrate they are not ageist by actively recruiting older workers might actually have risked age discrimination claims, according to employment law firm, Croner. Its advice accompanied the release of research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD), which revealed that 70% of UK employers were actively trying to recruit the over 55s.

This practice might lead to discrimination claims from employees within other age groups. Croner said that many employers already had the misconception that they would be complying with the new legislation if they boosted their quota of older workers: a study of in-depth interviews with Human Resource professionals on age discrimination revealed one respondent saying, 'The legislation won't affect us directly as we have a lot of workers over the age of 60.'

Under the new *Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006*, businesses may target a certain age group only if they are under-represented in their workforce, but they must be careful not to exclude other groups.

Richard Smith, employment services director at Croner, says: *'The CIPD research findings show that employers are thinking positively about age, but it could mislead them that recruiting from specified age groups, young or old, is always acceptable – a view which, in our experience, many employers have.'*

'While targeting and encouraging applications from under-represented age groups is allowed – and something we advise our clients to do – active recruiting of specific ages is not, and may lead to claims.

'Complying with the new legislation is a fine balance for employers who want to be positive about age and attract older or younger workers, but who need to ensure that in so doing, they don't discriminate or portray a discriminatory attitude in their recruitment methods.'

However, the government is also concerned to win the battle for hearts and minds and its *Age Positive* campaign seeks to recognise and influence the attitudes and practices of both employers and their staff. Arguably, this is a much more difficult task as it is all about changing deeply-held attitudes and embedded working practices, and the government has no illusions about the scale of the problem.

Integral to the *Age Positive* campaign is the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) voluntary Code of Practice. The Code provides guidance on how to eliminate age discrimination by addressing six phases of the employment cycle: recruitment, selection, promotion, training and development, redundancy and retirement.

A Cabinet Office report *Winning the Generation Game* (2000) highlighted the need for employers to adopt flexible working options to retain older workers. It said there needed to be a campaign to:

'promote the advantages of diversity and flexibility in working practices through a group of champion employers. In particular, such a campaign should promote good practice in enabling workers to "downshift" later in their working lives rather than facing a "cliff edge" of full-time work or full retirement.'

The concept of 'employer champions' is embedded in the *Age Positive* campaign. A growing list of companies are pledging themselves to be positive about age, and have provided statements and examples of good practices. The *Age Positive* campaign is key in changing attitudes of employers and individuals to employing people of all ages. The campaign encourages a person to be judged on his or her skills and ability and not the age he or she happens to be.

The value of a mixed-age workforce cannot be underestimated. The workplace should be made up of a diverse mix of people and offer the opportunity for workers of all ages to share their knowledge.

Source: Adapted from information on the website of Flexibility Ltd, 2006 and the website of Cambridge Network, 2006.

What were you thinking?

A survey exploring the attitudes and experiences of ageism, as seen from the perspective of young people, uncovered a surprising array of examples.

Age-related discrimination against young people in the workplace sometimes involved inappropriate behaviour by older supervisors/managers and colleagues. Bad management practices or policies could lead to younger people being deliberately or inadvertently disadvantaged.

"In everyday situations, you're patronised a bit, like 'young girl', 'sweetheart', 'good girl'. Not just by managers but from people who've been there longer than you."

"They don't like giving a salaried position out to younger people, they prefer it if you're over 21. Once you're salaried you're paid for holidays and you're basically looked after better."

School leavers, especially those with few or no qualifications, appeared most likely to experience age discrimination at work. New to the world of work, they were often less confident. They were more likely to be given the least rewarding, most menial jobs and sometimes found it hard to get training or more worthwhile experience.

In general, younger people with A-levels were less likely to be subjected to age discrimination than 16-year-old school leavers. This group had rather more employment options available to them.

Graduates and non-graduates aged between 24 and 30 tended to be more mature and confident; they were thus less vulnerable to being pushed around, teased or exploited at work. Again, many of these older respondents, having established themselves in work, were less likely to report instances of age discrimination.

Age discrimination could occur in the recruitment specifications of job advertisements. These could use well-recognised phrases such as 'bright young school leaver' or 'mature personality' to indicate employers' age requirements.

"My boss on reception looks specifically for younger people because they're cheaper."

"Quite a few employers who want a secretary or a PA might say 'I want a young thing' and that effectively means a young, attractive girl."

"I think the salary they were offering me was what they thought they could get away with because of my age and because of my situation."

Giving age as a reason for not employing someone was sometimes seen as kinder than pointing out a candidate's lack of suitability for the job on grounds of personality and maturity.

"Giving age as a reason would be an obvious choice, wouldn't it? Nobody wants to think they didn't get the job because they weren't good enough."

Examples of obvious ageism included stipulating minimum ages in job advertisements and using age as a criterion for limiting access to promotion and occupational pension schemes. However, this was seen as acceptable if justifiable or required by law.

Instances of less obvious ageism included using 'coded' phrases in job advertisements and linking promotion to length of service rather than ability to do the job. Concealed ageism could be deliberate, for example when older staff or managers knowingly treat a younger employee differently; it could also be inadvertent when older staff or managers were unaware that they were treating younger workers differently.

These forms of 'hidden' discrimination were seen to be much harder to overcome because they were a lot less obvious.

By far the most widespread form of age-related discrimination was 'petty' ageism. This often took the form of patronising remarks, observations and jokes made at younger people's expense and often reflected a lack of sensitivity to their feelings.

"You're always going to be on the back foot. You get the mickey taken out of you, lots of pranks. Some of the older blokes on the shop floor got me wrapped up in cling film so I couldn't move."

"When I was doing apprentice printing everybody was like 30 and older and I was like 16, and everybody was kind of down on top of me constantly, like 'you're not doing that, you'll do this'."

On a more positive note, younger workers observed that older colleagues were sometimes useful sources of advice and guidance. There was also a feeling that older colleagues were usually not as competitive as some of their younger counterparts. These qualities meant that older people could provide an invaluable mentoring role in the workplace.

"The people I work with, they go from 16 to late 50s which I enjoy. I like working with the older ones rather than the younger ones because there's a lot of bitchiness I find in the younger, it's very 'catty', I find."

"The older ones give you more back. They know the problems if you've worked through it, then you understand the job in its entirety. They can appreciate what you're going through."

Evidence like this shows that measures to tackle age discrimination in the workplace have the potential to be successful.

Source: Adapted from *Ageism: Attitudes and Experiences of Young People*, Department for Work and Pensions, 2001.

Ageism rife in all generations

Survey finds youth ends at 49, but old age begins at 65

The commonest form of prejudice in Britain is between the generations. The young are seen as clever but callous. The old are delightful but dodderly. Age discrimination is seen everywhere, according to the first national survey of attitudes to age.

Researchers questioned 1,843 randomly chosen UK residents and found definitions of youth and age so fluid that they confined their research to opinions about people who were under 30 and over 70. It is clear that teenagers as well as pensioners can sometimes feel put down because of their age.

“If you are a 24-year-old man, you believe that old age begins about 55, which is surprising because if you are a 62-year-old woman, you think youth doesn’t end until 57,” Dominic Abrams of the University of Kent told the British Association for the Advancement of Science yesterday. “There are massive differences in perceptions of when youth ends and old age begins, depending on their own age. That means, of course, ageism also changes depending on the age of the perceiver.”

Respondents were asked about experience of other forms of prejudice: sexual, racial, religious and so on. The survey found that ageism was the most pervasive form of prejudice in the UK. That seemed to be true across gender, ethnicity, religion and disability.

“People of all types and ages experienced ageism,” Professor Abrams said.

Older people were seen as friendlier than younger ones. Younger people were perceived as more competent than their seniors, across a wide age range.

“But that trend decreases as you get older. Older people begin to fight back, if you like,” said Professor Abrams. “So basically older people are seen as dodderly but dear, younger people perhaps as clever but unsympathetic.”

The intensity of prejudice depended on personal experience. People who had close friends over the age of 70 were less likely to believe that older people became incompetent. However, one in three respondents said they viewed the over-70s as incompetent and incapable.

On average, people felt that youth ended at 49 and old age began at 65. About 70% said they would be happy with a suitably qualified boss over the age of 70, but only 58% felt comfortable with the idea of a boss younger than 30.

47% believed that employers did not like having older people in their workforce, a perception that increased from 38% among the younger age group to 54% among those over 65: older bosses were acceptable, older workers less desirable.

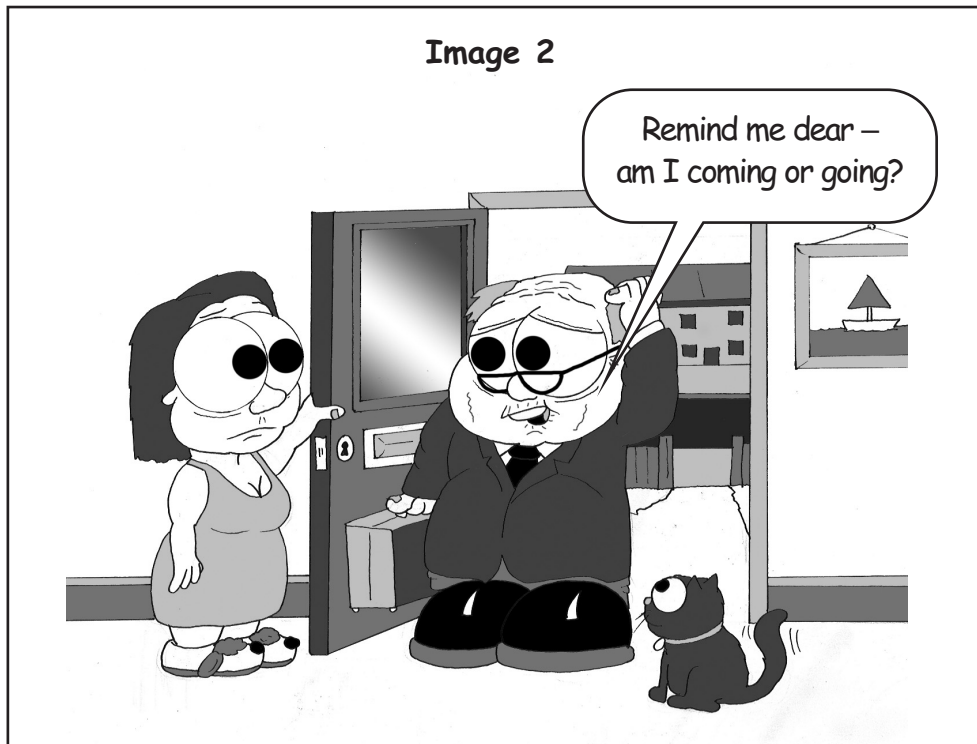
“So, age is in the eye of the beholder. But age prejudice seems to be rife in British society,” Prof. Abrams said. “By 2021, over a third of Britons would be over 60. People would have to change the way they thought about age.”

Source: Adapted from The Guardian, 7 September 2005 and *Age prejudice ‘ubiquitous’ in UK*, BBC News Online, 6 September 2005.

Image 1



Image 2



Source: Adapted from the John Lewis website, 2006 and original, 2006.

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