

Case study - working without a fixed retirement age

Grantham College

Case summary

- Project:** Early experience of removing the fixed retirement age.
- Profile:** Grantham College employs over 400 staff. The current age profile includes a small number of staff over 65 years of age. Until 2006, the college used 65 as the default retirement age. Before 2006, older staff wishing to continue working beyond 65 would ask formally to continue. Only a few staff worked beyond age 65 prior to 2006.
- Approach:** Improving strategic workforce planning and management; policy review and policy change; introducing a 'capability procedure' to the performance management process; improved communications to line managers.
- Impact:** Increased workforce flexibility; increased age diversity; retention of key workers who would otherwise have left; an increase in the number of older workers.

Removing the fixed retirement age in Grantham College

Grantham College operated a fixed retirement age until recently. However, those who requested to continue working beyond 65 were given a one-year extension to their employment contracts. This changed in 2010 when the principal and leadership team informed staff formally that the college was removing its default retirement age.

The change affected mainly those staff who were working part-time or with irregular hours. Some older staff who were working full-time reduced their hours or moved to part-time arrangements. The decision suited both staff and the organisation as the college wanted to retain the expertise it had within the workforce, and older staff wanted to stay in their jobs.

Benefits emerging from removing the retirement age

Removing the default retirement age was accompanied by improved communications with managers. They were reminded to be aware of age equality considerations by ensuring that older workers had the same opportunities as other staff.

The performance management process was changed to accommodate the shift in policy. The college now has an inbuilt 'capability procedure' that ensures that older staff are managed to the same standards as other staff and have equal opportunities for training and development. All staff have an annual appraisal as a matter of policy, followed by midyear reviews. This process is in place to ensure that performance management is consistent for all staff across the organisation.

Appraisals and reviews include elements to identify and remedy any capability issues identified. However, capability issues are not left until appraisals are due. They are dealt with when managers become aware of them throughout the year and then followed up at appraisal.

Removing the retirement age benefits both the staff member and the college. It now makes it more convenient for administrative and support staff working part-time or with irregular hours to carry on working as usual. It also helps to accommodate other staff who are looking to reduce their hours and to work flexibly around their needs and the college's requirements.