



Generations  
Working  
Together

## The multi-generational workforce in Scotland in 2024



Investigating age diversity and age-awareness in Scottish workplaces, and the challenges and benefits of an **intergenerational workforce** for employers and workers



## Foreword

**Generations Working Together** (GWT) is delighted to publish this research study, undertaken on our behalf by **Asymina Aza**, Postgraduate Research Student, in 2024. Mina came to us courtesy of the University of Glasgow's Find A Solution Internship Programme.

We (GWT) have developed several training options, based on the latest academic research in **intergenerational practice**. Aimed at employers and employees to support them in moving from a multi-generational to an intergenerational workforce, this has been piloted with organisations and businesses in Scotland and England.

In recent years, companies came to GWT, having identified challenges due to their age-diverse workforce (or not). They told us about the issues prompting them to seek our intergenerational workplace training, including ageism felt in the office banter, a majority of their workforce nearing retirement, an inability to retain younger staff or attract older staff, and difficulties in developing leadership amongst younger staff.

We knew - from wider evidence and our own experience – that a **multi-generational workforce** describes *what* you have ie the demographic make-up comprising the age ranges of your employees, whereas an **intergenerational workforce** refers to *how* those multiple generations interact, in ways that together create something greater than the sum of the individual parts (Source: Gentelligence: <https://www.gentelligence.org/>)

We also knew that workplace problems resulting from an increasingly multi-generational workforce can be grouped around people and culture eg stereotypes and assumptions made about colleagues or other people from different generations (which may or may not be in line with others' reality), language and communication, teamwork, knowledge- and skill-sharing, job satisfaction, progression opportunities, succession-planning, retention and organisational reputation.

Successfully creating an intergenerational workforce is an intentional strategy - it does not happen by accident. To be better able to use our expertise in helping to address this current-day challenge, we wanted to better understand the specifics of the Scottish context. Mina has served us well in her research, and with the report which follows here, exploring the **nature and extent of age diversity and age-awareness in Scottish workplaces**, going on to investigate the implications ie the **challenges and benefits of an intergenerational workforce** for both Scotland's employers and workers.

I was pleased to present Mina's key findings at our recent webinar, **Let's Develop Intergenerational Workplaces**, during [Global Intergenerational Week 2025 - #GIW25](#) – recording available [here](#).

We are grateful to Mina for her contribution to our work. It has informed our ongoing thinking.

### [Lorraine George](#)

Learning & Development Officer  
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[Generations Working Together](#) is **Scotland's internationally-recognised Centre of Excellence** for the development and integration of intergenerational practice. Set up in 2007 as a membership and capacity-building organisation, we deliver training, produce resources on intergenerational best practice, organise learning events, facilitate networks (geographical and thematic) - all to enable quality intergenerational activity on the ground. We run pilots supporting intergenerational work in new contexts, influence policy, participate in research, work with partners - local, national and international. We host [Excellence Awards](#) each year and lead on the annual global awareness campaign, **Global Intergenerational Week** involving 17 countries in 2025.

We offer multiple **sponsorship opportunities** – contact [Elizabeth](#) to find out how to support GWT's work.

## Acknowledgements

Generations Working Together would like to thank –

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- The University of Glasgow (UoG) for its funding to GWT via its [Find A Solution Internship programme](#)  
Find A Solution programme funds and facilitates internships with third sector organisations, enabling UofG students to work on short-term projects, focused on, but not limited to, overcoming challenges or barriers organisations face and supporting their civic/community engagement goals -
- All the research participants who shared their time and insights with Mina.

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## Introduction

The demographic of today's workplaces looks markedly different from those of the past. There has been an extension of working lives in Western societies due to various factors, such as the increasing pensionable age, aging populations, as well as the negative impact of the global economic crisis on pension funds.<sup>1</sup> As a result, more generations are working together than ever before.<sup>2</sup>

The existence of a multi-generational workforce creates new challenges for workforce management and raises questions of how employers are to effectively respond to these challenges.<sup>3</sup> Age-related challenges generally are largely influenced by the society in which they take place. Therefore, any investigation of generational challenges in the workplace must consider cultural, geographic and socio-economic differences.<sup>4</sup>

To investigate the multi-generational workforce in the context of Scottish society, Generations Working Together (GWT) undertook a research project, exploring the extent of age-awareness in Scottish workplaces, with a view to investigating the challenges *and* benefits of an intergenerational workforce for Scotland's employers and workers.<sup>5</sup>

GWT is a registered charity in Scotland and the national centre of excellence for intergenerational work. We focus on supporting the development and implementation of intergenerational training and practices across Scotland. In addition, we offer intergenerational training for workplaces. Intergenerational training is designed to support organisations whose workforce is age-diverse and who want to improve cohesion between colleagues.

While providing training to various companies, we found that the needs of each organisation was different and that a 'one size fits all' approach did not always work. The intergenerational challenges experienced by each company were distinct.

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Buttigieg, 'The Business Case for an Age-Diverse Workforce' in Emma Parry and Shaun Tyson (eds.), *Managing an Age-Diverse Workforce* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011); Kelly Harris et al. 'Ageism and the Older Worker: A Scoping Review' (2018) 58 *The Gerontologist* 1.

<sup>2</sup> OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), *Promoting Better Career Choices for Longer Working Lives* (OECD, Paris 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Samantha Pitout and Muhammad Hoque, 'Exploring Challenges Faced by Managers Dealing with Multi-Generational Workforce' (2022) 25 *The Eurasia Proceedings of Educational and Social Sciences* 202.

<sup>4</sup> John Benson et al., 'The Generational "Exchange" Rate: How Generations Convert Career Development Satisfaction into Organisational Commitment or Neglect of Work' (2018) 28 *Human Resources Management Journal* 524, 525.

<sup>5</sup> In this report, the term worker is used, rather than employee, as it includes those who might not legally be classified as employees if they engage in casual or irregular work. Under UK employment legislation, employees are entitled to more employment specific rights, such as statutory sick pay, parental leave and protection from unfair dismissal, whereas workers are entitled to fewer employment related rights (Employment Rights Act 1996, s230).

Therefore, to better understand the challenges and benefits of an intergenerational workforce for Scotland, GWT conducted interviews with senior staff from a range of Scottish employers to gain an insight into how companies manage an intergenerational workforce. The report aims to provide guidance on how to better manage an intergenerational workforce and foster intergenerational collaboration between workers.

This report outlines the findings of GWT's investigation in three sections: **Part One** describes the general challenges and benefits of an intergenerational workforce outlined by existing literature, **Part Two** outlines the results of GWT's qualitative research - the findings of the interviews, and **Part Three** concludes with a summary of findings.

We are grateful to the *Find a Solution Programme* from the University of Glasgow for funding this project, the team at Generations Working Together for their support in undertaking this research project, as well as all of our research participants, without whom this report would not have been possible.

# 1. Challenges and Benefits of an Intergenerational Workforce

An intergenerational workforce is made up of people from different generations. A generation can be defined as ‘an identifiable group that shares birth years, age, location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages’.<sup>6</sup> In terms of time, GWT understands a generation to be around 20–30 years, during which children are ‘born and grow up, become adults, and begin to have children’.<sup>7</sup>

Increased longevity combined with an aging population, alongside economic pressures and changing work-life patterns has resulted in a more age-diverse workforce.<sup>8</sup> A progressively age-diverse workforce presents both challenges and opportunities for employers and their workers.

The next section discusses the challenges and opportunities of an age-diverse workforce.

## A. *Challenges of an Intergenerational Workforce*

Age-related challenges faced by workers and employers alike, emerge in relation to two main areas:

- (i) The recruitment and retention of older workers
- (ii) Intergenerational conflict in the workplace.<sup>9</sup>

### *(i) The Recruitment and Retention of Older Workers*

Existing literature reveals that recruitment and retention are issues specific to older workers. For older workers navigating an age-diverse labour market can oftentimes present more challenges than benefits. Specifically, older workers – those over the

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<sup>6</sup> Anick Tolbize, *Generational differences in the workplace*, Research and Training Center on Community Living, (University of Minnesota 2008)

<sup>7</sup> AMA, ‘Generational Insights and the Speed of Change’ (American Marketing Association, 30 June 2022) < <https://www.ama.org/marketing-news/generational-insights-and-the-speed-of-change/#:~:text=A%20generation%20is%20defined%20as,The%20term%20generation%20is%20also> > Accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>8</sup> OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), *Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce* (OECD, Paris, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> The findings in this section refer to general age-related challenges in the workplace. However, points made specifically to Scotland will be explicitly specified.

age of 50<sup>10</sup> – face difficulties in finding secure forms of employment.<sup>11</sup> Age discrimination is identified as the main obstacle for older workers to obtaining and maintaining decent work and has been identified as the most prevalent form of discrimination in the UK.<sup>12</sup>

However, ageism is not restricted to older workers. The World Health Organisation reports that in Europe, younger people report more perceived ageism than other age groups. Nevertheless, age-discrimination on a global scale is directed primary towards older people. Globally, 1 in 2 people are ageist against older people.<sup>13</sup> Age-based bias is found in Scottish workplaces too, a study undertaken by the University of Edinburgh indicated that recruiting older workers was not Scottish employers' first choice, but rather a result of labour market shortages.<sup>14</sup>

Workers over 50 are at risk of experiencing longer periods of unemployment and, as a result, are more likely to take on precarious, lower paying, low-skill work.<sup>15</sup> Due to perceived ageism in the labour market, older workers believe that employers are reluctant to recruit them, therefore when re-entering the job market these individuals are more likely to accept a lower salary for positions that they would

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<sup>10</sup> No consensus has been reached amongst authors regarding the age at which workers are considered 'older workers'. The term 'older worker' has been used to refer to those from the age of 40 to 65. However, the majority of literature refers to 'older workers' as those aged over 50. See, Ronald Loeppke et al., 'Advancing Workplace Health Protection and Promotion for an Aging Workforce' (2013) 55 *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 500 (referring to the lack of consensus); Francis Cheung and Anise M. S. Wu, 'An investigation of predictors of successful aging in the workplace among Hong Kong Chinese older workers' (2012) 24 *International Psychogeriatrics* 449 (referring to 'older workers' as those over 40); Lora E. Flemming et al., 'The Health Behaviors of the Older US Worker (2007) 50 *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 427 (referring to 'older workers' as those over 65).

See, those referring to older workers as aged over 50: C Zwerling et al., 'Risk Factors for Occupational Injuries Among Older Workers: An Analysis of the Health and Retirement Study' (1996) 86 *American Journal of Public Health* 1201; A. De Lange et al., 'Age As a Factor in the Relation Between Work and Mental Health: Results From the Longitudinal TAS Survey' (2006) 1 *Occupational Health Psychology: European Perspectives on Research, Education and Practice* 21; Melanie K. Jones et al., 'Work-Related Health Risks in Europe: Are Older Workers More Vulnerable?' (2013) 88 *Social Science and Medicine* 18.

<sup>11</sup> OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), *The Midcareer Opportunity: Meeting the Challenges of an Ageing Workforce* (OECD, Paris 2023)

<sup>12</sup> Keith Anderson, 'Inclusion or Exclusion? Exploring Barriers to Employment for Low-Income Older Adults' (2013) 56 *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* 318; Centre for Ageing Better, 'Challenging Ageism: A Guide to Talking about Ageing and Older Age' (Centre for Ageing Better, 2021) < <https://ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-01/Challenging-ageism-guide-talking-ageing-older-age.pdf> > Accessed 13 August 2024.

<sup>13</sup> WHO (World Health Organisation), *Progress report on the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing: 2021-2023* (WHO, Geneva 2023)

<sup>14</sup> Wendy Loretto and Phil White, 'Employers' Attitudes, Practices and Policies Towards Older Workers' (2006) 16 *Human Resource Management Journal* 313.

<sup>15</sup> S Briggs 'Precarious Ageing Versus the Policy of Indifference: International Trends and the G20', (2014) 33 *Australian Journal of Ageing* 226.

otherwise not have accepted,<sup>16</sup> despite the fact that studies have shown that there is a weak correlation between age and job performance.<sup>17</sup>

Age-related employment disparities are further influenced by factors such as gender and education levels. A study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),<sup>18</sup> revealed that whilst on average across OECD countries men maintain higher employment rates than women and tend to work longer, disparities emerge in every age bracket and not simply the final phase in the work lifecycle.

For instance, after the age of 25, higher-educated workers are more likely to be employed at all ages than those with lower levels of education. This imbalance becomes apparent for workers over the age of 55. Women over the age of 55 with the lowest levels of education had the lowest rate of employment of any group (40 percent). In contrast, nearly 80 percent of highly educated men over the age of 55 are employed.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to factors such as education level and gender, organisational practices and sectoral differences also influence the existence and extent of age-related barriers in the workplace.<sup>20</sup> Studies have shown in Scotland that views in relation to hiring older workers are variable depending on industry. For instance, attitudes towards recruiting older workers tend to be more positive in the finance and education sectors, as the experience of older workers is seen as beneficial.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, especially in Scotland's financial sectors, rehiring recently retired older workers is desirable to firms as these workers bring their clients and experience with them. However, the contrary has been observed for manual jobs.<sup>22</sup>

A study conducted by the University of Edinburgh on behalf of the Scottish Government found that in Scotland the majority of older Scottish workers do not want to stop working, but rather are looking to switch to part-time and flexible working arrangements, this is especially true for those with caring responsibilities.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, the desire of those aged over 60 to extend their working lives was

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<sup>16</sup> Laura Airey, Wendy Loretto and Emily Yarrow, *Older People and Employment in Scotland*, (Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2017).

<sup>17</sup> B. J. Avolio and D. A. Waldman 'Variations in Cognitive, Perceptual and Psychomotor Abilities Across the Working Lifespan: Examining the Effects of Race, Sex, Experience, Education and Occupational Type' (1994) 9 *Psychology and Ageing* 430; Thomas W. H. Ng and Daniel C. Feldman, 'The Relationship of Age to Ten Dimensions of Job Performance' (2008) 93 *Journal of Applied Psychology* 392.

<sup>18</sup> OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), *The Midcareer Opportunity: Meeting the Challenges of an Ageing Workforce* (OECD, Paris 2023). See Appendix B for OECD figures.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> K Harris et al., 'Ageism and the Older Worker: A Scoping Review' (2018) 58 *The Gerontologist* 1.

<sup>21</sup> Wendy Loretto and Phil White, 'Employers' Attitudes, Practices and Policies Towards Older Workers' (2006) 16 *Human Resource Management Journal* 313.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Laura Airey, Wendy Loretto and Emily Yarrow, *Older People and Employment in Scotland*, (Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2017).

mainly driven by two factors: the first is increasing their income due to insufficient pension funds and the second is a desire to maintaining a structure to the week.<sup>24</sup>

Whilst regulations exist in the UK which prohibit age-based discrimination,<sup>25</sup> studies have shown that organisational culture plays a larger shaping role for age-based work practices rather than formal policy.<sup>26</sup> The Scottish Government report found that there was a distinct lack of training opportunities for older workers in low-skill jobs,<sup>27</sup> which coincided with these workers' lack of interest for further career development.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Scottish workers educated to a degree level and employed in professional occupations between the ages of 50-55, expressed higher enthusiasm for further career development and were presented with more opportunity to do so.<sup>29</sup>

Workplace practices such as offering flexible working arrangements and further opportunities for career advancement to older workers, results in better retention rates of older workers.<sup>30</sup> Thus, opportunities for career advancement and training opportunities, as well as education and job-skill level, impacts retention rates of older workers. Nevertheless, age-related disparities in the workplace in relation to employment and the obtention of decent work are greatly influenced by factors such as age, gender and education levels.<sup>31</sup>

Challenges faced by Scottish employers in relation to the recruitment and retention of older workers looks different to those faced by their workers. Scottish employers see older workers as costlier to retain. Whilst older workers are identified as more dependable and less likely to take short absences, they are likely to take longer absences due to health reasons.<sup>32</sup> Scottish employers identified longer absences as more costly to address in comparison to more frequent short absences that younger workers take.<sup>33</sup> In addition, there are competing priorities for older workers' time –

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Section 5 of the Equality Act 2010 lists age as a protected characteristic. Discrimination is prohibited against protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010.

<sup>26</sup> K Harris et al., 'Ageism and the Older Worker: A Scoping Review' (2018) 58 *The Gerontologist* 1.

<sup>27</sup> Low-skill jobs are those which require little or no education or advanced training, such as janitorial work, housekeeping, cashier/ retail work, hospitality service work, agricultural work and so on.

<sup>28</sup> Laura Airey, Wendy Loretto and Emily Yarrow, *Older People and Employment in Scotland*, (Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2017).

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> J James et al., 'Exploring the Workplace Impact of Intentional/ Unintentional Age Discrimination' (2013) 28 *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 907; Laura Airey, Wendy Loretto and Emily Yarrow, *Older People and Employment in Scotland*, (Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2017); OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), *Retaining Talent at All Ages*, (OECD, Paris 2023).

<sup>31</sup> 'Decent work' is a term originally coined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and refers to 'not just the creation of jobs, but also the creation of jobs of acceptable quality'. See Report of the Director General, *Decent Work* (87th Session International Labour Conference, Geneva 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Laura Airey, Wendy Loretto and Emily Yarrow, *Older People and Employment in Scotland*, (Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2017).

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

primarily women – such as unpaid caring responsibilities for elderly relatives or grandchildren.<sup>34</sup> Finally, older workers are perceived by Scottish employers to be unfamiliar with new technology, making them costlier to train.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Scottish employers identified a mismatch between the skillsets they want to retain in employment and the qualifications of older workers who continue to work. This is for several reasons: firstly, the abolition of the default retirement age has made workforce planning difficult for employers, as the recruitment and retention cycle now looks very different and is more variable. Workers tend to move between jobs more frequently, and no longer tend to stay at one job for the entirety of their working life.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, highly skilled workers are more likely to retire earlier as they have the financial means to do so, which leaves a skills gap between older and younger workers, where organisations have not implemented means to allow for the transfer of these skills (e.g. through mentoring schemes).<sup>37</sup>

Lastly, many Scottish organisations lack age-based policies, such as specific recruitment, retention, training and knowledge transfer policies and programmes, as they believe that implementing age-specific policies would be perceived as ageist rather than the contrary.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, the recruitment and retention of older workers poses challenges for both employers and workers. Better practices can help to mitigate these challenges and allow for organisations to reap the benefits of an intergenerational and age-diverse workforce.

The following section outlines intergeneration conflict in the workplace and outlines the areas where the most tensions arise.

### *(ii) Intergenerational Conflict in the Workplace*

Generational stereotypes greatly influence how companies organise work in relation to age.<sup>39</sup> Studies have found that these perceived (rather than actual) differences

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid*; Scotland's career census shows that over 60% of unpaid carers are female, see Scottish Government, *Carers Census, Scotland, 2021-22* (Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2022).

<sup>35</sup> Laura Airey, Wendy Loretto and Emily Yarrow, *Older People and Employment in Scotland*, (Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2017).

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> Wendy Loretto and Phil White, 'Employers' Attitudes, Practices and Policies Towards Older Workers' (2006) 16 *Human Resource Management Journal* 313; K Harris et al., 'Ageism and the Older Worker: A Scoping Review' (2018) 58 *The Gerontologist* 1.

lead to intergenerational conflict due to contrasting approaches to work and changing work cultures.<sup>40</sup>

On the one hand, younger workers are often perceived to lack self-direction and a commitment to work, but are also seen to be more energetic, productive, creative, flexible to change, ambitious and able to better cope with job stressors.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, older workers are perceived as more dependable, loyal and having better interpersonal skills, but to be less flexible, resistant to change, less trainable and as lacking the necessary technological proficiency and physical capabilities.<sup>42</sup>

Stereotypes and perceptions such as these influence how work is organised and how colleagues perceive each other in the workspace, often leading to intergenerational conflict, resulting in damaging effects on workplace productivity, employee engagement and retention.<sup>43</sup> Intergenerational workplace conflicts have been found to emerge most in the following four areas:

- (1) Communication style
- (2) Use of technology at work
- (3) Expectations around work and work/life balance
- (4) Social values:<sup>44</sup>.

#### (1) Communication Style

A significant point of intergenerational workplace tension is centred around communication styles, perceived communication skills and preferred communication method (e.g. face to face or online). Older workers have been reported to perceive younger colleagues to have ineffective face-to-face communication skills due to their reliance on technology, whilst younger workers have been reported to perceive older colleagues unable to communicate effectively via technology.<sup>45</sup>

Other issues around communication are tensions around the differences in how older and younger colleagues present themselves in professional settings. Younger

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<sup>40</sup> Jasmine Patel, Anthea Tinker and Laurie Corna, 'Younger Workers' Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Older Colleagues' (2018) 22 *Working with Older People* 129; Ronald J. Burke, 'Managing an Ageing and Multi-Generational Workforce: Challenges and Opportunities' in Burke R. J., Cooper C and Antoniou AS (Eds.), *The Multigenerational and Ageing Workforce*, (Edward Elgar 2015).

<sup>41</sup> E Perry, A Hanvongse and D Casoinic, 'Making a Case for the Existence of Generational Stereotypes: A Literature Review and Exploratory Study', in Field J, Burke R and Cooper C (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Aging, Work and Society*, (Sage 2013); M Gerhardt, J NACHEMSON-EK WALL and B FOGEL, *Gentelligence: The Revolutionary Approach to Leading an Intergenerational Workforce*, (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Maryland, United States 2021).

<sup>42</sup> K Harris et al., 'Ageism and the Older Worker: A Scoping Review' (2018) 58 *The Gerontologist* 1.

<sup>43</sup> Jacquelyn Boone James et al., 'Exploring the Workplace Impact of Intentional/ Unintentional Age Discrimination' (2013) 28 *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 907.

<sup>44</sup> Michael J. Urlick et al., 'Understanding and Managing Intergenerational Conflict: An Examination of Influences and Strategies' (2017) 3 *Work, Aging and Retirement* 166.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*; Steven H. Appelbaum et al., 'A Study of Generational Conflicts in the Workplace' (2022) 7 *European Journal of Business and Management Research* 7.

colleagues are perceived to feel uncomfortable in face-to-face dialogues and struggle to articulate ideas. These perceptions result in workplace challenges such as inefficiencies, conflicts, unclear communication and a lack of transmission of information.<sup>46</sup>

The result of communication-based intergenerational tensions is oftentimes a complete breakdown in communication, leading colleagues to assume an inability to communicate effectively amongst themselves. This can create challenges for intergenerational workplace interactions, especially concerning tasks which require cross-generational involvement to meet workplace objectives.<sup>47</sup>

## (2) Use of Technology

The way each generation uses technology at work has been identified as another significant point of tension.<sup>48</sup> Younger workers have been reported to express frustration because they perceive older workers to be reluctant to integrate technology into their work practices. Contrarily, it has been reported that older workers perceive younger colleagues to undermine traditional means of completing workplace tasks because they are more reliant on technology.<sup>49</sup> These attitudes can lead to tensions around the completion of work tasks and create friction in instances which require intergenerational collaboration.

## (3) Expectations Around Work

Expectations around work and work/life balance emerge as a third primary point of intergenerational conflict.<sup>50</sup> Reports suggest that younger generations are perceived to have a short-term career orientation, making them more likely to switch employers as a means of career progression. In addition, younger generations are seen to prioritise 'life' in the work/life balance, preferring to focus on non-work activities such as, hobbies, community, family and social life.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Bea Bourne, 'Phenomenological Study of Generational Response to Organizational Change' (2015) 27 *Journal of Managerial Issues* 141.

<sup>47</sup> Ian C Woodward and Pisitta Vongswasdi, 'More That Unites Than Divides: Intergenerational Communication Preferences in the Workplace' (2017) 3 *Communication Research and Practice* 358.

<sup>48</sup> N Moore et al., 'An Examination of the Dynamics of Intergenerational Tensions and Technological Change in the Context of Post-Pandemic Recovery' (2022) *Production Planning and Control* 1.

<sup>49</sup> Michael J. Urick et al., 'Understanding and Managing Intergenerational Conflict: An Examination of Influences and Strategies' (2017) 3 *Work, Aging and Retirement* 166.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*; Jean M. Twenge et al., 'Generational Differences in Work Values: Leisure and Extrinsic Values Increasing, Social and Intrinsic Values Decreasing' (2010) 36 *Journal of Management* 1117; Donald R Hillman, 'Understanding Multigenerational Work-Value Conflict Resolution' (2014) 29 *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health* 240.

<sup>51</sup> Anick Tolbize, *Generational differences in the workplace*, Research and Training Center on Community Living (University of Minnesota, 2008).

In contrast, older generations are perceived to be more vested in work and are seen to be more stable and loyal employees, as they are seen to have a lower likelihood of switching jobs.<sup>52</sup> These expectation-based differences can lead to conflicts between intergenerational colleagues around how they prioritise work. For instance, workers may have varying attitudes towards flexible working arrangements or expectations around career progression.

#### (4) Social Values

The final major point of workplace tension resulting from intergenerational conflict arise around social values.<sup>53</sup> Younger generations are perceived as progressive, whilst older generations are seen to be more traditional.<sup>54</sup> These overarching perceptions result in assumptions that older generations have a greater desire to maintain existing status quos and are resistant to change, whilst the opposite is assumed by younger workers.<sup>55</sup> Oftentimes, these values-based tensions result in conflicts around differing attitudes towards compliance with formal procedures, traditional workplace hierarchies and adherence to rigid workplace structures.

## Conclusion

Intergenerational conflict in the workplace can be especially damaging for organisational productivity, as it has been shown to negatively affect employees' work engagement, work satisfaction and overall job performance.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, in order to reap the benefits of an intergenerational workforce, it is essential that employers understand these points of tension and create strategies to effectively mitigate them. The next section explores the benefits of an intergenerational workforce and describes the strengths that an intergenerational team brings to organisations.

### *B. Benefits of an Intergenerational Workforce*

Intergenerational workforces, when provided with the right environment, are beneficial to workers and the organisations they work for. The World Economic

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Michael J. Urick et al., 'Understanding and Managing Intergenerational Conflict: An Examination of Influences and Strategies' (2017) 3 *Work, Aging and Retirement* 166.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Steven H. Appelbaum et al., 'A Study of Generational Conflicts in the Workplace' (2022) 7 *European Journal of Business and Management Research* 7.

<sup>56</sup> Yongyue Zhu, Hua Yang and Guanglin Bai, 'Effect of Superior–Subordinate Intergenerational Conflict on Job Performance of New Generation Employees' (2016) 44 *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal* 1499.

Forum reports that age-diverse leadership teams are best equipped to enable sustainable business model innovation, because they can combine knowledge from past experiences with novel ideas.<sup>57</sup> In the context of the UK's economy, knowledge retention in organisations is increasingly important.

Over the past few decades in the shift to a knowledge-economy, the UK has seen a significant increase in knowledge-intensive industries – for example education, consulting, information technology and finance, to name a few.<sup>58</sup> The existence of a knowledge-economy is contingent on a workforce with higher skill levels.<sup>59</sup> A big part of maintaining such an economy is ensuring that skills are transferred and retained between existing and future generations in the workforce. Doing so, allows organisations to combine the work experience of older generations with the skills and abilities of younger generations.<sup>60</sup>

On an organisational level, other benefits of an intergenerational workforce include the generation of more diverse ideas within teams, creative problem solving, better decision-making and a greater ability to connect with a wider customer base.<sup>61</sup> In addition, an age-diverse workforce has been shown to have positive effects on organisational productivity, as it allows firms to tap into new markets by being able to respond to the needs of a diverse customer base and allows the firm to retain a wider pool of potential talent.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, studies have shown that age-inclusive management styles boost employee productivity, which leads to an overall increase in business profitability.<sup>63</sup> For example, car manufacturer BMW in Germany restructured their manufacturing processes through participative decision-making, a process where they incorporated older workers' input into workplace design restructuring.

Here, the company redesigned its factory by trialling and implementing simple alterations to lessen physical strains on workers, changes included things such as

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<sup>57</sup> Andre Hoffmann, Nolita Thina Mvunelo and Felix Rüdiger, 'Intergenerational Decision-Making Can Help Build a Regenerative Economy. Here's Why' (*World Economic Forum*, 10 July 2024) < <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/07/intergenerational-leadership-for-a-regenerative-economy/> > Accessed 12 August 2024.

<sup>58</sup> R Heyler and D Lee, 'The Twenty-First Century Multiple Generation Workforce: Overlaps and Differences but Also Challenges and Benefits' (2012) 54 *Education and Training* 565.

<sup>59</sup> Jonathan Wright Ian Brinkley Naomi Clayton, *Employability and Skills in the UK: Redefining the Debate*, (The Work Foundation 2010)

<sup>60</sup> R Heyler and D Lee, 'The Twenty-First Century Multiple Generation Workforce: Overlaps and Differences but Also Challenges and Benefits' (2012) 54 *Education and Training* 565.

<sup>61</sup> Ronald J. Burke, 'Managing an Ageing and Multi-Generational Workforce: Challenges and Opportunities' in Burke R.J., Cooper C and Antoniou A.S. (Eds.), *The Multigenerational and Ageing Workforce* (Edward Elgar 2015)

<sup>62</sup> Kathleen Riach, 'Situating Age (In)equality Within the Paradigm and Practices of Diversity Management' in Parry E and Tyson S (Eds.), *Managing an Age Diverse Workforce*, (Edward Elgar 2011).

<sup>63</sup> Mo Wang and Fang Yanran, 'Age Diversity in the Workplace: Facilitating Opportunities with Organisational Practices' (2020) 30 *Public Policy and Ageing* 119.

introducing the use of special chairs and magnifying glasses at certain workstations, as well as allowing for more frequent job rotations.<sup>64</sup> These changes resulted in a 7% increase in overall assembly line productivity.<sup>65</sup> Thus, strengthening integrational dialogue can improve work methodologies, which has an overall beneficial impact on organisational performance and profits.<sup>66</sup>

In the context of Scotland, the Scottish Government report found that Scottish employers had positive experiences with an age-diverse workforce. Firstly, it found that age-diversity is beneficial in sector specific industries where training is needed. In the context of these jobs, older workers who had experience in a certain field needed less training and were able to pass on their skills to younger employees.

For example, in manufacturing industries, older, more experienced workers were seen as greatly beneficial as they retained a specialist understanding of manufacturing techniques.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, employers found older workers to generally have better 'life-skills', such as empathy and interpersonal skills. Secondly, across all industries, Scottish employers found that an age-diverse workforce helped for their organisations to retain a 'corporate memory'.<sup>68</sup>

In conclusion, for intergenerational workplaces to reach their full potential, investment in training and resources to facilitate greater communication and knowledge transfer between workers is needed. Moreover, companies must reflect on their perceptions around age and how these perceptions influence the way they structure work. Multigenerational workforces bring immense benefits to organisations, but these can only be realised with the right tools.

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<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Ana Matarranz and Enrique Arce, *El Factor Edad (The Age Factor)*, (LID Publishers 2024).

<sup>67</sup> Laura Airey, Wendy Loretto and Emily Yarrow, *Older People and Employment in Scotland*, (Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2017).

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

## 2. Intergenerational Workforces in Scotland

To investigate the specific challenges that organisations in Scotland face in actualising the full potential of their intergenerational workforces, GWT conducted interviews with senior staff from a range of Scottish employers in various industries – including hospitality, fast food, financial and business services, biotechnology, food and beverage and certification industries. This section outlines the findings of those interviews, with a view of providing an insight into how Scottish employers experience managing an intergenerational workforce.

The primary finding is that the nature and extent of age-based challenges are specific to industries and their affiliated organisation. No two organisations experience managing an age-diverse workforce in the same way (even those within the same sector), and all experience distinct challenges and benefits arising from their age-diverse workforce. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed common points of intergenerational tension and common advantages experienced by most Scottish workplaces.

The interviews divulged that experiences of managing an intergenerational workforce are primarily influenced by factors such as an organisation's location (for instance, whether they are rurally or urban-based), size, the types of roles offered, and the skill-levels needed to work in those roles. Moreover, all participants noted that organisational culture significantly shapes how age-related challenges and benefits take form.<sup>69</sup>

This section of the report first discusses the influence of organisational culture on how age is approached at work. Following this is a discussion of the common and distinct, sector-specific age-related challenges and benefits experienced by Scottish employers. Finally, a discussion of general age-related trends observed across Scottish workplaces.

### *A. The Influence of Organisational Culture on Age-Based Perceptions*

The interviews revealed that organisational culture influence workplace policies and practices, as well as age-based perceptions within an organisation. Whilst the majority of organisations do not have many formal age-related policies in place – such as formal workplace policies on retention, succession planning or cross-age

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<sup>69</sup> Organisational culture refers to an organisation's 'values, norms and ... beliefs'.

See Penny Williams, 'Organisational Culture: Definitions, Distinctions and Functions' in Newton C and Knight R (eds), *Handbook of Research Methods for Organisational Culture* (Edward Elgar 2022).

mentorship etc. – they did however have these things on an informal level.<sup>70</sup> Many workplaces implemented elements of intergenerational practice into workplace practices without having a specific policy for doing so.

In addition, organisational culture plays a significant role in relation to how companies value employees and specifically what type of employee characteristics or attributes they value. For instance, participants explained that in the financial and business services industry, organisational culture plays a large role influencing which employee attributes are valued, noting that especially for male employees, 'long service is valued more than experience'. Therefore, for this organisation, age implicitly became a factor for an employee's perceived value to the company, regardless of skill set and suitability for the role.

In contrast, in the biotechnology sector – a competitive industry which requires highly skilled workers - there is a large organisational emphasis on training and upskilling employees with a view to retention, regardless of age. The interviewee emphasised their company's focus on giving their workers the opportunity to be in control of their own career progression through informal, regular opportunities to take on extra development. In this company we can see how age is removed as a determining factor for promotions. Employees are expected to take on voluntary development opportunities as a means of career progression rather than simply rely on length of service.

Organisational culture is also seen to play a defining role in how age is approached in leadership structures. For instance, a participant working for a family business observed that, whilst in their organisation there are no formal succession planning policies or age-diversity policies, the nature of the family business allows for an age-diverse leadership team and an informal succession plan. Younger family members are incorporated into leadership structures and informally 'learn the ropes' by working alongside older family members leading the business. This way, succession planning and intergenerational knowledge transfer in their organisation naturally takes place in the absence of any formal structures.

Thus, whilst formal policies are not necessarily needed to incorporate intergenerational practice into the workplace, the existence of formal policy nevertheless bolsters the promotion of age-diversity in the workplace and creates an internal culture receptive to intergenerational practice. For instance, interviewees working for organisations which have formal proactive age-based policies in place noted the positive impact of these policies. A good example of these policies in practice is the following: one participant organisation implements a hiring policy in which a candidate's skill set and suitability for a job are prioritised rather than their age. The results of this policy were that positive attitudes to age-diversity generally

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<sup>70</sup> Informality in this context refers to the lack of official policy or regulation around workplace policies and practices.

were developed and encouraged within the organisation, which could then be seen to influence other areas of work, such as facilitating more intergenerational collaboration in teams.

In addition, participants emphasised that organisational culture plays a large role in how organisations view and accommodate for flexible working arrangements. Flexible working arrangements are seen as essential for age-diverse workforces, as they allow employees at different stages of life with varying responsibilities to work. For example, older women are statistically more likely to take on care responsibilities both for older and younger relatives, and thus may only be able to work part time.<sup>71</sup> This was confirmed by the findings of our interviews, for instance, one employer in the hospitality sector found that offering term-time contracts helped to attract older workers, as it allowed for working parents to adjust their working hours to school times.

To sum up, the interviews revealed that the age-diversity of a workplace and an organisation's success in structuring work, is greatly influenced by policies or attitudes, which at first glance, may seem unrelated to age. These are to a large extent influenced by organisational culture, which shapes an organisation's approach towards training and development, flexible working and the perceived importance of certain worker attributes (e.g. the prioritisation of length of service over skill set or vice versa). How these elements are structured and approached by employers significantly shapes the extent to which age-related challenges and benefits arise.

The next section discusses the challenges and benefits of a multi-generational workforce.

## *B. Age-Related Challenges Experienced by Scottish Employers*

The common points of intergenerational tension in Scottish workplaces are:

- (1) Communication
- (2) Resistance to change and varying approaches in completing work tasks
- (3) Leadership styles
- (4) Expectations around career progression.

In addition, work-based intergenerational challenges are influenced by various factors, such as location, income level, requisite skill set for a job, workplace demographics, industry, gender, education level and so on.

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<sup>71</sup> Laura Airey, Wendy Loretto and Emily Yarrow, *Older People and Employment in Scotland*, (Scottish Government, Edinburgh 2017); OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), *The Midcareer Opportunity: Meeting the Challenges of an Ageing Workforce* (OECD, Paris 2023).

For instance, an example which incorporates both location and industry trends is as follows. A rurally based employer in the hospitality industry noted that location affects the age diversity of their workforce, as there is a smaller pool of labour to draw from, the hospitality industry's workforce is more age diverse. In comparison, an urban-based employer in the hospitality industry noted that most of their staff in operational roles, such as front of house or wait staff, are young. However, both age-diverse and age-homogenous workforces come with distinct challenges.

#### (1) Communication

Interviewees reported that communication and conflict management were the biggest points of intergenerational tension. Communication was an issue across all age-groups but presented a particular issue for those with younger workers. In particular, one interviewee who has a predominantly young workforce noted that their younger workers, especially those under the age of 18, have less developed interpersonal skills. Therefore, workplace conflicts arose more frequently for them.

*'Younger people have less developed interpersonal skills, so workplace conflicts arise in a different way. We have more intercollegiate frictions, so we find that a disproportionate amount of time is spent on resolving "schoolground tiffs", which interferes with work.'* (Hospitality Sector)

Moreover, having a majority age-group in any given workplace has been reported to create a 'behavioural echo-chamber', in the sense that behaviour is reinforced and mirrored amongst workers, regardless of age. In addition, participants noted that having a majority age-group impacts the type of intergenerational workplace training needed.

For instance, employers with a majority of younger workers have noted that training around communication with older colleagues has had to focus on generational norms around what is acceptable and not acceptable to say. For example, something that might be considered funny or 'banter' for one age group can be seen as offensive by another. However, other participants held the view that communication tensions in the workplace are inevitable, regardless of age, noting that tensions around communication are just a natural part of work.

*'There's always a bit of tension around communication, but I think this is more down to personality rather than age.'* (Certification Services)

#### (2) Resistance to Change

In workplaces where there is a high degree of age-diversity amongst workers, participants reported intergenerational tensions around varying approaches in completing work tasks and resistance to change, whether it be in the implementation of new work systems or changes to work methodologies. However, employers noted that resistance to change is *not* always age-related and oftentimes is more

associated with the length of service. For example, participants reported that usually workers that were most resistant to change were not necessarily older workers, but those who had been with the company for longer periods of time.

### (3) Leadership Styles

Participants reported frequent instances of intergenerational tension around assumed leadership styles and perceptions of management. Interviewees reported that older generations were perceived by senior leadership to have more of a wall between themselves and management, especially in industries that were previously heavily unionised, whereas younger workers were not perceived in the same way.

*'The world of work and the world of management has changed in the past twenty years... Older generations still have an "us vs them" view [between management and workers]. Younger workers don't have as much of that.'* (Hospitality Sector)

In addition, interviewees noted that perceived generational leadership styles differed, which often led to intergenerational tensions. For instance, younger generations were perceived to have a more involved and communications-based leadership style, while older generations were perceived to have a more autocratic leadership style. These differences were reported to create intergenerational tensions between age-diverse leadership teams, especially in relation to differing workforce management styles.

### (4) Career Progression Expectations

The final point of intergenerational tension reported by interviewees was expectations around career progression. Participants perceived younger generations to feel more entitled to promotions. Interviewees also expressed varying expectations for workers to undertake further development and training outside of working hours, which some saw as a normal part of career progression, whilst others did not.

*'Another big challenge for us is that younger generations are more expecting of promotions without wanting to work for them'* (Biotechnology)

These differing expectations were reported to often generate intergenerational tensions between management staff and workers in relation to promotion timeframes and salary increases. However, the interviews revealed that the existence of these tensions is more shaped by an organisation's culture around career progression, rather than specific generational cohorts' expectations around career progression.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the main age-related challenges experienced by Scottish employers across industries were intergenerational tensions around communication, resistance to change, leadership styles and expectations around career progression.

Nevertheless, the forms in which these challenges emerge are significantly influenced by an organisation's culture and management style, as well as by factors such as an organisation's location (for instance, whether they are rurally or urban-based), size, the types of roles offered, and the skill-levels needed to work in those roles.

The next section discusses the main age-related benefits experienced by Scottish employers with multigenerational workforces.

### *C. Age-Related Benefits Experienced by Scottish Employers*

Employers identified the greatest benefits of an intergenerational workforce to be:

- (1) Increased innovation
- (2) Skill development
- (3) Flexibility.

Most Scottish workplaces are aware of age as an important factor in organising work and make accommodations for it, for example, by providing flexible and part-time working arrangements. However, those which were most age-aware reaped the most benefits organisationally and had the most innovation through intergenerational collaboration.

#### (1) Increased Innovation

Participants working in industries which require a highly skilled workforce, such as those in the financial and business services, biotechnology, and certifications industry, reported that the greatest benefits of an age diverse workforce were the increased innovation. For instance, one interviewee highlighted the advantages of an age-diverse workforce for developing new people management tools and policies. They developed a workplace menopause policy drawing from the various experiences of female colleagues in different stages of menopause. In addition, another interviewee emphasised that having an age-diverse leadership team allowed their team to develop new leadership approaches. For instance, by incorporating more worker input into decision-making processes, relations between senior management and workers were strengthened.

#### (2) Skill Development

Interviewees emphasised the multiple benefits resulting from cross-generational mentorship schemes. These were reported to have made workers overall more adaptable to new ways of working, open to changes, helped workers to develop better interpersonal and communication skills, as well as strengthening relationships

between colleagues. Moreover, these benefits were observed in industries which had informal intergenerational mentorship opportunities. For instance, in the hospitality industry older workers are seen to be essential in creating good guest experiences, as their increased life experience affords them better interpersonal skills. Interviewees reported that in age-diverse teams, younger workers were seen to develop better interpersonal skills when working with older colleagues.

### (3) Increased Flexibility

Interviewees emphasised the increased flexibility that came with an age-diverse workforce, especially in industries which do not require highly skilled workers. These industries tend to have more flexible shift patterns - such as the hospitality, fast food and food and beverage industry. In these industries, having an age diverse workforce allows for increased flexibility in the organisation of shift patterns, as different age groups tend to be at different life stages and thus have different responsibilities. For example, interviewees reported that working students are often able to pick up more shifts during term holidays, while working parents tend to pick up more shifts during term time but less during holidays. Therefore, employers in these industries reported that an age-diverse workforce allowed them to flexibly organise work and 'fill the gaps' for periods of lower labour supply during certain time periods.

Moreover, having an awareness of the different generational needs around flexible work arrangements proved useful in the recruitment and retention of workers. For instance, a participant who worked in the rural hospitality industry gave an interesting example of this. Their organisation struggled to recruit working mothers in a rural town during term time. However, they eventually realised that this was because the shift patterns they offered did not align with the local bus schedule, which these women were reliant on when dropping off and picking up their children from school. Once the organisation advertised new shift patterns which aligned with the bus schedule, they received far more applications from working mothers.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, the main age-related benefits experienced by Scottish employers with multigenerational workforces were in increased innovation, worker skill development, and flexibility. Nevertheless, the existence of these benefits was very much dependent on how each organisation approached age as a factor in organising work. Those which incorporated age as a consideration in structuring teams, or in the provision of flexible work arrangements, and accounted for the different needs of various age groups, reaped the most benefits of an age-diverse workforce.

The next and final section discusses general age-related trends observed in Scottish workplaces.

## *D. Age-Related Trends in Scottish Workplaces*

The interviews revealed work- and age-related trends specific to Scotland due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. They revealed changes in worker prioritisation of their work/life balance and changes in recruitment, as well as general trends resulting from work and training related government funding structures, such as apprenticeship funding schemes.

While much of the existing literature argues that younger generations tend to prioritise life over work in their work/life balances, most Scottish employers note that this shift is not age-related. The majority of interviewees noted that following the COVID-19 Pandemic, regardless of age, workers are prioritising life over work. This trend was observed across all workplaces, both in low and high skill jobs, and across all industries.

*'Post-Covid, people value not wanting to work as many hours...For example, employees when coming back to work did not want to earn as much.'* (Fast Food)

Moreover, following the COVID-19 Pandemic, employers reported trends of workers changing career paths and stepping down from previously high-powered roles. In addition, hospitality employers have reported trends of older workers, especially those over the age of 60, returning to work after having been previously retired, to work in positions such as concierge or front of house. This was reported in part, to be due to rising costs of living, however, most post-retirement individuals returning to work did so based on wanting to feel integrated in their local community and to cultivate a personal sense of purpose.

*'COVID has helped people relearn a lot of things, so now they're less resistant to change, because everyone feels that they need to adapt to new ways of work... It made people take a step back and rethink what they wanted out of their careers, we've seen lots of people coming back to work, or take a step down from high-powered positions... COVID changed our organisational culture, there's now a bigger emphasis on employee fulfilment.'* (Hospitality/ Business and Financial Services)

Finally, interviewees reported a lack of available training for older workers, because of government funding policies. One interviewee noted that training and development opportunities in Scotland generally are skewed towards those aged under 25. They emphasised that apprenticeship funding in Scotland favours younger individuals, as the level of contribution depends on the age of the apprentice.<sup>72</sup> While funding opportunities are available for those over 25, employers are disincentivised to take on older apprenticeships as they receive less monetary resources to train them. Therefore, older individuals in Scotland are seen to have

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<sup>72</sup> Skills Development Scotland, 'Apprenticeship Funding', (Skills Development Scotland) <<https://www.apprenticeships.scot/for-employers/funding/>> Accessed 27 August 2024.

less opportunity for further training and development within government-funded schemes. This limitation on funding, they argued, negatively impacted the ability of those over 25 with limited financial means to learn new skills and integrate themselves into new ways of work. The negative effects of this have been reported to be especially profound following the COVID-19 Pandemic, which has changed existing ways of working and has generated a demand for new skills, resulting in many older workers feeling 'left behind'.

In summary, three main work-related trends were observed in the Scottish context following the COVID-19 Pandemic. First, across all industries and roles, there has been a shift in how workers prioritise their work/life balances. Most workers now are seen to prioritise life over work. Second, there have been reports of individuals coming back to work after retirement. Thirdly, the lack of publicly funded opportunities for older individuals to engage in new skills training and development, has been reported to make many older workers feel 'left behind'.

## 3. Summary of Findings

The report examines the complexities and benefits of managing a multi-generational workforce in Scottish workplaces, focusing on how different generations work together and the unique challenges and opportunities this presents.

The report introduces the growing phenomenon of a multi-generational workforce, driven by an aging population, increasing retirement age, and economic factors. The study, conducted by GWT, explores the extent of age-awareness in Scottish workplaces and how employers manage intergenerational dynamics.

### 1. Challenges of an Intergenerational Workforce

Key challenges identified include:

- **Recruitment and Retention of Older Workers:** Older workers face significant challenges in the job market, such as age discrimination, which can lead to prolonged unemployment or the acceptance of lower-skilled jobs. Scottish employers find older workers more costly to retain due to longer absences and perceived unfamiliarity with technology.
- **Intergenerational Conflict:** Conflicts often arise due to differing communication styles, resistance to change, contrasting expectations about work-life balance, and divergent social values. These conflicts can affect productivity, employee engagement, and job satisfaction.

### 2. Benefits of an Intergenerational Workforce

The report highlights several benefits, such as:

- **Innovation and Creativity:** Age-diverse teams bring together different perspectives, enhancing decision-making, problem-solving, and creativity.
- **Knowledge Retention and Skills Transfer:** Older workers help maintain organizational knowledge and mentor younger colleagues, fostering a learning environment.
- **Improved Flexibility:** Age diversity supports flexible work arrangements, benefiting both employers and employees.

### 3. Intergenerational Workforces in Scotland

The findings from interviews with Scottish employers reveal that the impact of an age-diverse workforce varies across industries and is heavily influenced by organizational culture. Factors such as company size, location, and job types also shape how age-related challenges and benefits manifest.

#### **4. Influence of Organizational Culture**

The report emphasizes that organizational culture significantly affects age-based perceptions and practices. Companies with proactive age-inclusive policies are better able to manage intergenerational dynamics and leverage the benefits of a diverse workforce.

#### **5. Age-Related Trends in Scottish Workplaces**

Most age-related trends were impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Trends include a shift towards prioritizing work-life balance, increased flexibility, and older workers returning to work. There is also a noted lack of training opportunities for older workers due to funding policies, which impacts their ability to adapt to new skills and roles.

#### **6. Conclusion**

The report concludes that a multi-generational workforce offers substantial benefits but also presents unique challenges that require careful management. Organizations should invest in training, flexible working arrangements, and age-inclusive practices to harness the full potential of an age-diverse workforce.

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## 5. Appendix A

### Methodology

This report written using a mixed-methods approach, incorporating secondary and qualitative research. The first section of the report is based on secondary research. It comprises of a literature review of the general findings on the challenges and benefits of an age-diverse workforce for employers and workers, as well as a review of literature specific to Scotland on these themes. Literature reviewed draws from a range of areas, including intergenerational theory, management theory, psychology, gerontology, business management, human resources theory and industrial relations.

The second section of the report is based on qualitative research. We arranged interviews with senior staff working for a range of Scottish employers in the following industries: hospitality, fast food, financial and business services, biotechnology, food and beverage and certification industries. The total sample size number was six participants. In part, this was due to the time constraints around the project and the availability of participants. The project was arranged to be completed within an eight-week period throughout July and August, as many potential participants took annual leave during this time and were unavailable for interview. Moreover, the strict time constraints around the project's completion meant that a limited number of interviews could take place.

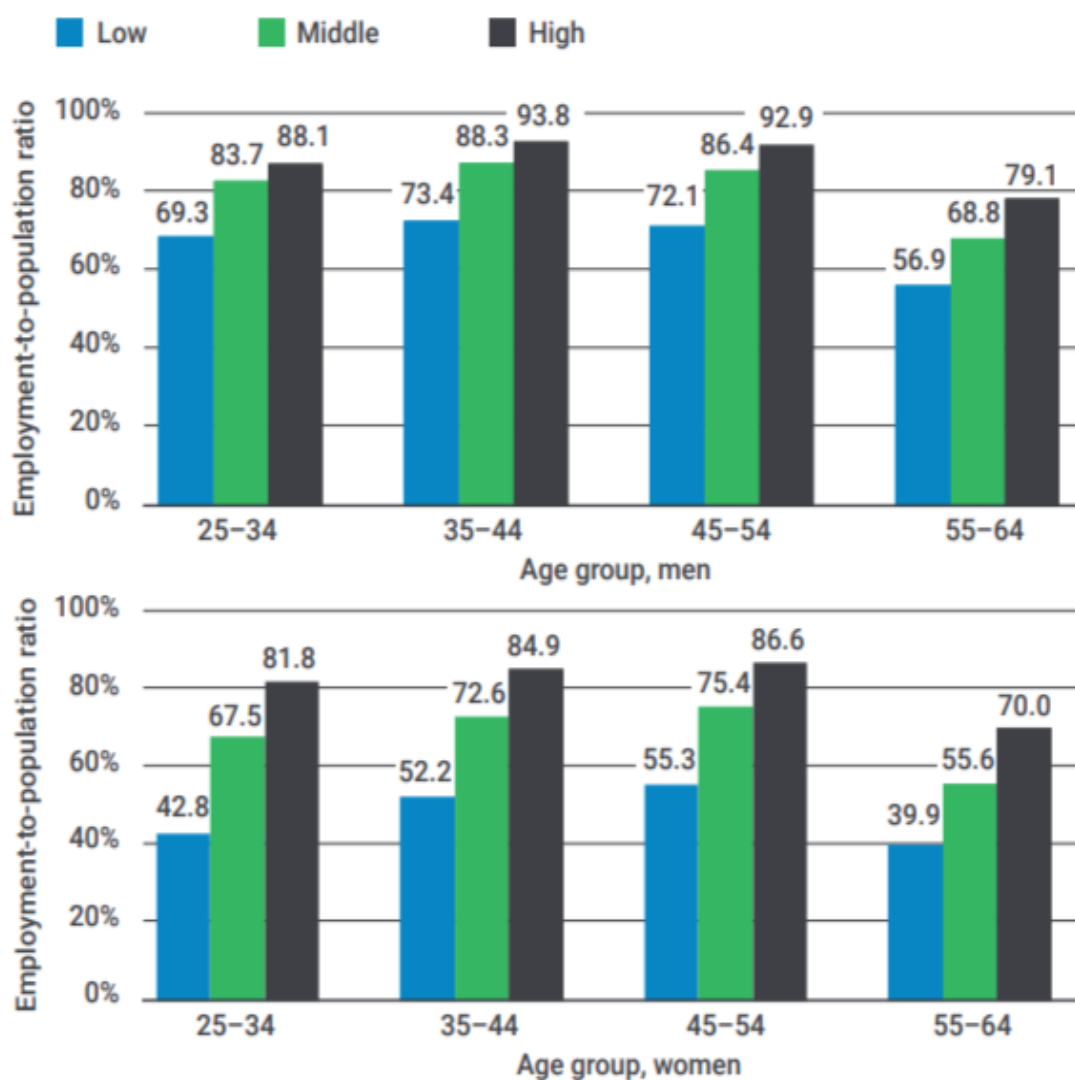
The findings of the report combine data from secondary research and qualitative research to analyse the extent of age-awareness in Scottish workplaces. We found a mixed-methods approach was most suitable to the nature of the project and would best allow us to investigate the challenges and benefits of an intergenerational workforce in the Scottish context.

## 6. Appendix B

### Employment to Population Ratio by Age Group and Education Attainment

**Figure 5: For both men and women, lower education correlates with lower employment at any age after 25**

OECD employment-to-population ratio by age group and level of educational attainment, 2022



**Note:** Data based on ISCED 2011 classification. Low education: below upper secondary education (levels 0-2), Middle education: upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4), High education: tertiary education (levels 5-8).  
**Source:** OECD dataset: Educational attainment and labour-force status (<http://stats.oecd.org//Index.aspx?QueryId=93189>).

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