

# Case study: South Wales Forgemasters

## Workforce management

South Wales Forgemasters is a medium-sized engineering company which supplies forgings to the automotive industry.

The business has a very low turnover of staff; in the last four years only two people have left. Most of the company's older workers commenced with them as young people and have seen no reason to leave. Their practical knowledge is seen to be an advantage.

### No retirement age

South Wales Forgemasters has removed its fixed retirement age and some of its workforce is now choosing to work beyond pension age. To reduce the risk of sudden loss of skills and expertise, the company examines its age profile to determine when people are likely to retire and makes the necessary contingency plans. A previous example of this was where a skilled toolmaker, due to retire, was involved in the development of a new trainee who worked with him to learn all aspects of the job.

Another previously retired individual had been asked to return to work within the CAD department to develop designs for a new project. The company was very keen to retain his services because his skills would have been virtually impossible to find elsewhere within the locality. These examples of re-employment have been of mutual benefit to both parties, enabling the company to retain valuable skills and experience and the member of staff to continue working and contributing.

### Recruitment

The nature of the business, heavy-duty metal processing - with a dirty, noisy environment - makes it somewhat less attractive as an employment opportunity than those offered by many of the other companies in the locality. South Wales Forgemasters believe that whether an applicant is 16 or 60, they have a part to play in the company.

The company factors age out of all of its recruitment and retention policies. Job application forms ask for basic personal details, including age, as well as education and work history.

Although the company includes age on the application form, it makes no reference to it when selecting individuals for interview, or during the interview process itself.

The company recently employed an electrician, Simon Herbert, who at 57 was concerned that his age might be regarded as a negative factor. However, the company was keen to reassure him that, in line with discrimination law and a positive attitude to older workers, they were only interested in recruiting the most suitable applicant.

### Training and development

All employees undergo a formal induction period, after which the company and employee agree any necessary training and draw up a training plan. The company assesses the abilities of all employees annually, matching these to the work within the plant and arranging any necessary training.

"Many of our older workers provide excellent support to many of our new workers from a practical industrial point of view as well as passing on their experiences." Paul Brabban, Managing Director, South Wales Forgemasters.

When the company found that some older workers felt reluctant to undertake training, they made the style in which it was delivered more flexible. This makes the workers feel more comfortable within a learning environment, and appreciate the benefits training can bring.

An older worker who was recently trained in basic computer literacy has continued to learn more about computers and software. He has been instrumental in helping to install some preventative maintenance software into the organisation's computer system.

### The benefits for South Wales Forgemasters of its approach to age diversity:

- Helps to recruit and retain skills in a business where it's hard to attract workers into heavy-duty metal processing.
- Very low turnover of staff.
- Older workers support to new workers from a practical and personal perspective.