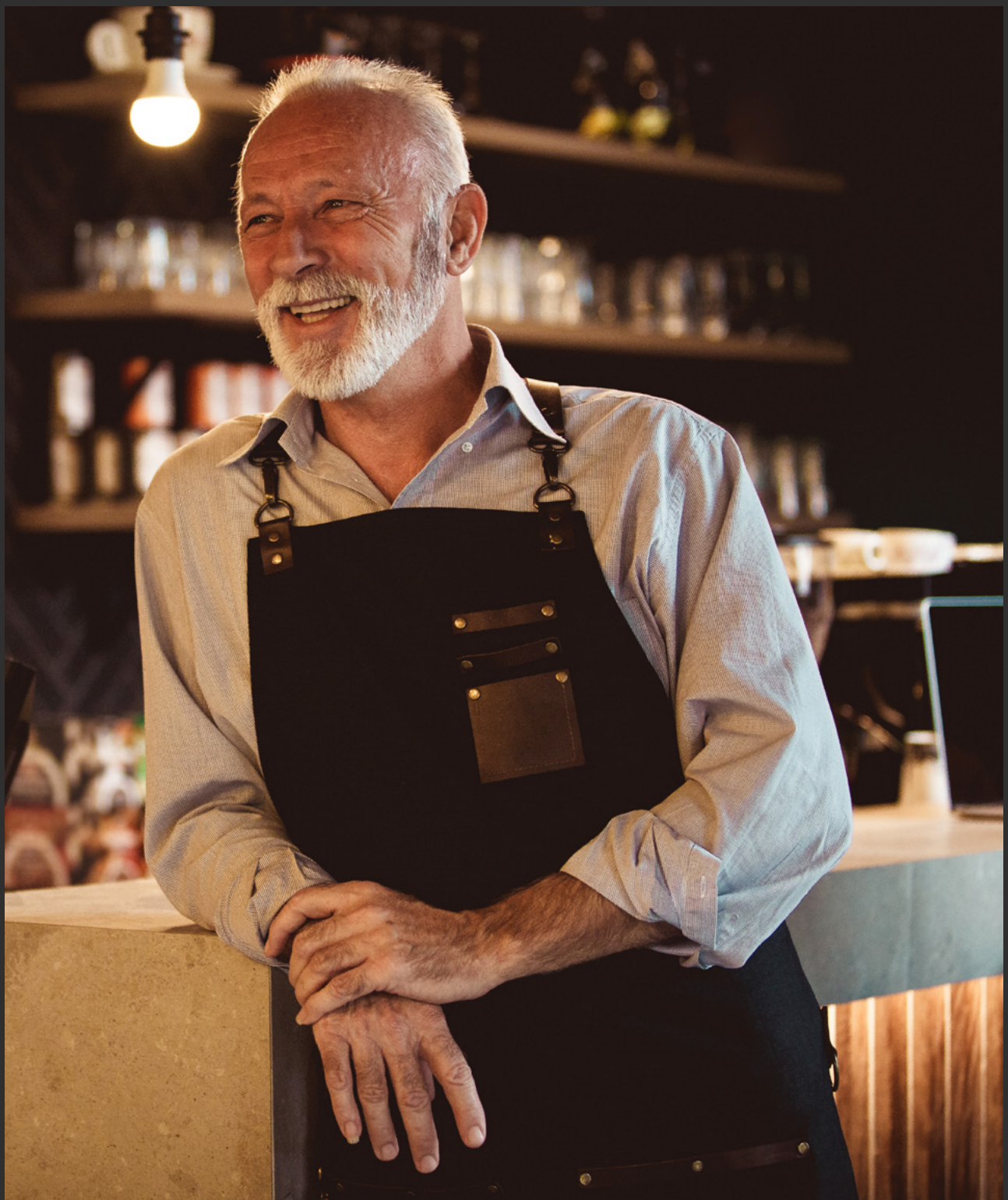


UNCOVERING HOSPITALITY TALENT

Your Guide to Overcoming Age Bias



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Introduction

As you might remember, in late 2023 we took a deep dive into the subject of age-diversity in hospitality, and we're thrilled to see how much it resonated with so many of you. In the meetings, calls and conversations we've had since, this is a topic that remains on top of the agenda.

Building on that, we've gathered fresh insights into how age bias in recruitment continues to lead some employers to miss out on the untapped potential of older workers.

Working closely with the rest of The StepStone Group, we surveyed 4,000 workers and 1,000 HR decision-makers across the UK, with a significant number of responses from within the hospitality industry*. The findings are compelling.

In this report, we'll provide the key insights that show the immense value this talent pool brings, how hospitality stacks up against other sectors in the UK, and share what you can do to maximise a talent pool that's ready to contribute for years to come.

Let's dive in and explore how your business can benefit from an age-diverse workforce.

Calvern James

Director of Hospitality,
Caterer.com



*Hospitality sample consisting of 228 workers and 224 HR decision-makers

State of play

Since the pandemic, over **165,000** workers **aged 50 and above** have entered the hospitality sector, bringing vital experience to the workforce.

With **one-third** of the UK's entire workforce now over 50, and projections showing that in 20 years' time **one in four** people will be over 65, the message is clear: businesses can't afford to overlook this group.

Surprisingly, our research shows that more than half of UK businesses (**55%**) haven't taken strategies to improve age-diversity – and the hospitality sector isn't far behind at **54%**. That's a missed opportunity for businesses, workers, and the industry as a whole.

This gap is further amplified as **1 in 4** people over 50 feel discouraged from applying for jobs because they believe they're 'too old' compared to their peers. While the figure is slightly lower in hospitality at **18%**, it's still cause for concern.

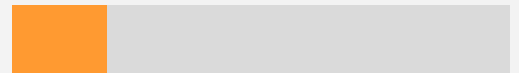


15%



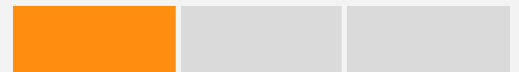
of people over 50 have been rejected from a job due to their age

19%



of hospitality workers feel unfairly treated because of their age, compared to 17% across other sectors

1 in 3



jobseekers over 50 worry their age hinders their job prospects

4 in 10



hospitality workers plan to work beyond age 66

The **benefits** of an age-diverse workforce

As the hospitality sector continues to grapple with skills shortages, older workers are proving to be an important part of the solution.

In fact, last year we found that **3 in 4 (77%)** of hospitality employers now recognise that over 50s are key to addressing the sector's skills gap, with half actively targeting them in their recruitment efforts.

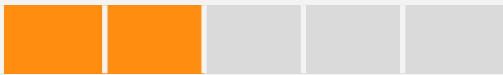
So, what exactly do businesses gain by embracing an age-diverse team?

To recap, our previous research highlighted that **older workers bring stability and valuable experience**, resulting in greater retention and improved productivity – benefits that are crucial in a sector known for high turnover.

And it's not just businesses that see the value – customers do too. They're telling us that they love seeing a mix of ages on the hospitality floor, adding to the warm, welcoming atmosphere.

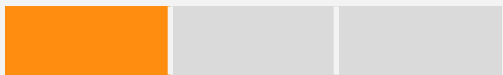


2 in 5



hospitality employers say age-diverse teams improve retention

1 in 3



hospitality employers believe age-diverse teams are more productive

3 in 10



over 50s joining the sector have previous hospitality experience

52%



of consumers prefer venues with age-diverse staff

Compared to younger colleagues, older workers are believed to excel in:

- Providing excellent customer service (**39%**)
- A strong work ethic (**37%**)
- Problem solving (**35%**)

How hospitality compares with the wider market

Unfortunately, in the UK, **a third** of all workers over 50 believe their age impacts their job prospects.

But what does this look like throughout the recruitment journey, and how does the hospitality sector compare to other industries? Here's a snapshot of how things stand:

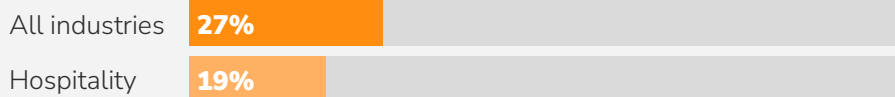
1. The job search

The job search can be daunting for older workers, with **4 in 10 (37%)** of those over 50 unlikely to apply if they felt that a job ad was targeting a specific age group.

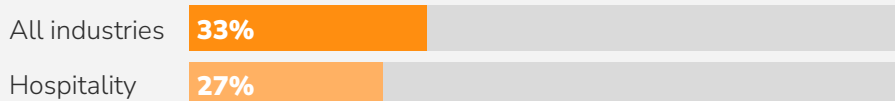
In hospitality, older workers are less likely to worry about being considered “too old” for a job and they hesitate less when applying due to age concerns. However, with **a fifth (18%)** still hesitating to apply and almost **a third (32%)** altering their CV to remove age-related information, there's still room to improve.

Here's how we compare:

“I feel ‘old’ compared to others in my industry”



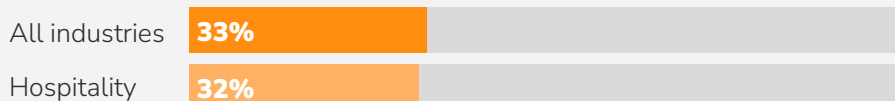
“I worry I might not find a job because I am considered ‘too old’”



“I hesitate to apply for a job because I think I am too old.”



“Have you ever adjusted or removed specific personal information (such as your birth year) from your CV or application documents?”



With **a third** of hospitality jobseekers altering their CV to hide their age, it's important to understand why. Sadly, **45%** are doing so to avoid being stereotyped (compared to **36%** of the wider workforce), and **28%** are concerned about appearing overqualified (vs. **21%**).

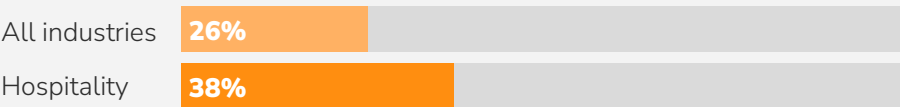
2. Shortlisting & Interview

The shortlisting and interview stages are where older candidates begin to encounter subtle or explicit biases around their age.

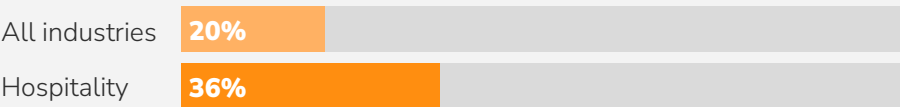
This is more common in hospitality, with almost two-thirds of recruiters and employers (63%) admitting they've judged a candidate based on age. And 6 in 10 even say older candidates' CVs get pushed aside because of concerns about tech skills.

When it comes to the perspective of candidates, here's how we compare:

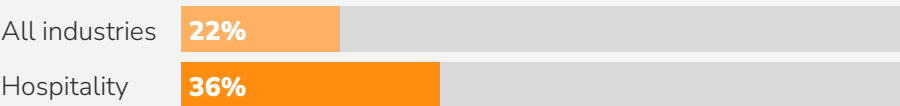
“Has it been assumed that you’d struggle with technology due to your age?”



“Have you received questions or comments about your age during an interview?”



“Have you been asked about your health and fitness during an interview?”



“The workplace culture was described in a way that implied a preference for younger employees.”



This points to lingering assumptions that can affect the recruitment process and suggests that there's a need for more training and awareness among interviewers to ensure fair treatment and focus on the candidate's abilities, rather than assumptions.

Nearly 2 in 3



hospitality employers have made assumptions about a candidate based on their age

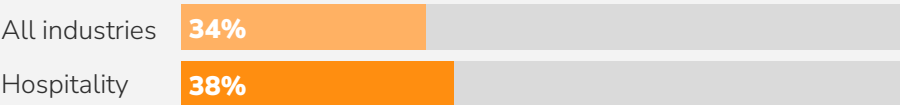
3. Receiving offers & getting the job

Even after making it through shortlisting and interviews, older candidates often face hurdles in landing that final job offer. In the hospitality sector, **43%** of recruiters revealed they feel pressured to favour younger candidates, which might explain why older candidates face more obstacles in securing a role.

Perhaps as a result, it's concerning that **15%** of workers over 50 say they have been explicitly rejected due to their age, and **23%** have been told they weren't the right fit for a role – potentially a euphemism for age-related biases.

Here's how we compare:

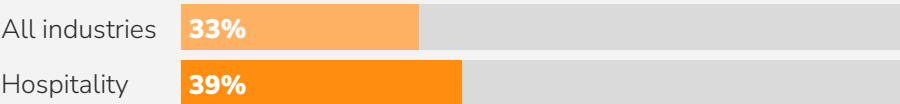
“Have you been turned down for a role because of being ‘too experienced’?”



“Do you feel you have been treated unfairly during the hiring process due to your age?”

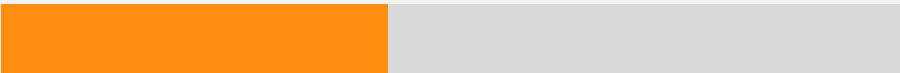


“Would you be open to working past the state retirement age of 66?”



These figures highlight a pressing need for the hospitality industry to address age bias in hiring practices. Ensuring fair treatment for all candidates not only supports diversity but also leverages the valuable experience and skills that older workers bring to the table.

43%



of hospitality recruiters feel pressured to favour young candidates

The employer's perspective

While age-diversity is certainly on the radar for hospitality employers, some challenges remain.

For example, **63%** of hospitality recruiters admit they sometimes make assumptions about a candidate based on their age, compared to **59%** across all industries.

And interestingly, while our research last year found that **77%** of companies in hospitality believe that targeting older workers could help address the skills gap, over half (**54%**) still haven't implemented or planned strategies to increase age-diversity.

This comes as **81%** of hospitality employers report receiving fewer CVs from older candidates, compared to **72%** across other industries. This shines a light on the need for recruitment strategies to attract and retain older talent, and hit the staffing levels the industry needs.

Positive signs

Thankfully, it's not all bad news – there are some bright spots in the hospitality sector, where change is already happening:

- **58%** of hospitality employers have already removed language from job ads that might imply age bias (vs. **64%** across all industries), with **31%** planning to make this change
- **46%** of hospitality employers have implemented automatic CV screening to ensure a fairer process for older candidates, with **30%** looking to do so in the future
- **58%** have created age-diverse recruitment teams, with a further **23%** planning to do so soon
- **54%** of employers are already promoting age-diversity internally, with **32%** in the process of developing these strategies
- **48%** of hospitality employers are now actively monitoring the age-diversity of candidates, with **26%** putting plans in place to do so



These efforts indicate that hospitality employers are increasingly aware of the need to create a more inclusive and diverse workplace. By continuing to focus on removing biases and improving the recruitment process, the industry can make meaningful strides toward closing its skills gap and benefiting from the experience of older workers.

The wants and needs of an ageing workforce

So, what are people over 50 looking for?

Meaningful and engaging work

For many older workers, it's not just about earning a living – it's about finding purpose and meaning in their work. In our previous research, we discovered that **96%** of workers over 60 highlight interesting job content as one of their top priorities, and **92%** seek roles that allow them to make an impact.

Flexible working

The number one priority for older workers is flexibility (**64%**). Whether it's through flexible hours or part-time opportunities, many older employees seek jobs that allow them to manage work around their lives.

Stability and job security

55% of workers over 60 are more likely to remain with their current employer rather than switch jobs if a new offer comes up. Their interest in job stability helps boost retention and builds the experience of the wider team through knowledge sharing.

A sense of belonging

Older workers want to feel a sense of belonging in the company's culture, and **35%** say they wouldn't apply for a role if the language in the job ad didn't resonate with them. Words like reliability and dependability (**64%**), warm and approachable personality (**57%**), and attention to detail (**56%**) particularly appeal to older workers.

Opportunities for continuous learning

Against common stereotypes, **86%** of over 50s want access to training and development opportunities. Offering workshops, training programmes, or mentorship can help businesses tap into their potential while addressing any potential gaps in digital or technical skills.

TOP 5

most attractive workplace benefits according to older workers (50+):

1. Flexible working hours

64%



2. Retirement savings plan

52%



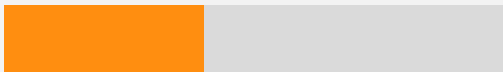
3. Performance bonuses

44%



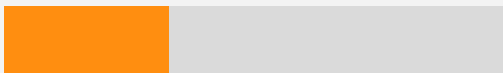
4. Health insurance

40%



5. Professional development

33%



What you can do to attract and retain an **age-diverse** workforce

Here are some ways you can address hiring biases, create age-friendly practices, and future-proof your business:

1. Rethink job ads and recruitment practices

- **Focus job ads on skills and competencies:** Older candidates prefer simple, clear job ads. Use neutral language, avoid industry-specific jargon, and provide detailed role descriptions
- **Leverage AI to craft bias-free job ads:** **83%** of hospitality candidates believe that age-diversity can be improved by removing biased language from job ads, with **68%** seeing AI as the answer. Embrace technology and use it to revisit the words you use
- **Automated CV screening:** Beyond speeding up the process, **77%** of hospitality workers also believe that technology can be used to remove biases from the shortlisting process
- **Highlight flexibility:** Promote benefits such as flexible working hours, part-time options, and phased retirement in your job ads

2. Champion age-diversity in the workplace

- **Actively champion age-diversity:** **87%** of hospitality jobseekers believe that companies who promote the benefits of age-diversity are appealing, as they are actively working towards being more equitable
- **Build an age-diverse recruiting team:** **84%** of people in the industry think that an employer with an age-diverse recruitment team will be less biased
- **Track age-diversity in recruitment:** Monitoring the age of applicants, interviewees, and successful hires can help identify where older workers may be dropping out of the process, offering insight into potential areas of improvement

3. Offer flexibility and adjust approach to retirement

In hospitality, people are **17%** more likely to want to work beyond retirement age, with **4 in 10** people open to doing so. Consider:

- **Flexible working hours and phased retirement options:** **42%** of people would require flexible hours, and **28%** are interested in flexi-retirement options like reduced hours, job sharing or shift-based work
- **Financial incentives:** Providing financial incentives, such as bonuses for working beyond retirement age, would appeal to **20%** of older workers in hospitality

4. Provide upskilling and lifelong learning opportunities

Despite common stereotypes, older workers are eager to learn and adapt to new technologies:

- **Invest in lifelong learning:** **86%** of over 50s want access to training and development opportunities. Invest in workshops, training programmes, and mentoring to help older workers reach their potential
- **Equal access to tech training:** Providing older workers with equal access to digital literacy training not only enhances their confidence but also closes potential skills gaps in the workforce

5. Train hiring managers on age bias

- **Training your hiring team on age inclusivity:** **82%** of hospitality candidates believe that training recruiters on the dangers of bias can promote fair recruitment practices and alleviate age-discrimination
- **Implement skills-based assessments:** Focusing on skills and competencies over age can help to minimise bias in hiring decisions

6. Reassess your Employer Value Proposition (EVP)

- **Shout it from the rooftops:** If you're committed to being age-diverse, let candidates know. Speak about it in your job adverts and ensure that your imagery is inclusive of all ages
- **Promote the benefits they care about:** Highlight how your business offers a supportive, collaborative environment with flexible working arrangements and meaningful work. This will appeal to over-50s when they're searching for their next role

By implementing these strategies, you will be able to better attract and retain older workers, fostering an inclusive, multi-generational workforce that benefits everyone.



Final thoughts

Age-diversity isn't just a box to tick – it's one of the smartest moves your business can make.

As we've seen, older workers bring experience, stability, and fresh perspectives that can help solve the hospitality sector's challenges. If businesses can overcome age-related biases and actively embrace this talent pool, the benefits will follow. The future of hospitality is multi-generational, and it's one that can work for everyone.

Remember, at Caterer.com, we're here to help you every step of the way. With tools, technology and the know-how to help you hire the people you need for your business.

Calvern James

Director of Hospitality,
Caterer.com



Caterer.com – the hospitality industry's hiring partner

The hospitality job market has never been more challenging. Your people have never been more important.

With Caterer.com's innovative JobTech you'll reach and engage the hospitality talent you need, efficiently and effectively. Our technology, teams and hospitality databases are unlike any other. Our unique AI quickly joins the dots between your role and candidates, giving you more relevant applications and a faster route to hiring.

- Innovative JobTech to reach & engage the right candidates to your roles, reducing cost of hiring
- Aggregator partners that drive greater reach for your roles
- Build your talent pipeline by reaching a vast hospitality-specific audience now. We partner with key industry organisations like The Institute of Hospitality, Springboard, CareerScope, HIT Scotland, Hospitality & Catering News, Choose Hospitality and Catering Scotland to deliver our jobs feed directly into their sites, ensuring your roles are seen amongst their extensive hospitality audiences
- Dedicated Account Management and Customer Success support
- We actively partner with industry bodies, charities and organisations to promote the industry as a great place to work and champion the fantastic people within it
- Gain access to additional relevant candidate audiences, at no extra cost. All jobs on Caterer.com also appear on our sister site Totaljobs, expanding your reach into new talent pools across other sectors
- Employer brand insights & support for becoming a top choice employer
- Regular sector insights & guidance through the Caterer.com Leadership Collaborative, an open community that pulls on joint forces to provide peer-to-peer support, insight and learning to help leaders navigate through challenge and drive team growth and development and business success
- Access the largest specialist hospitality talent pool. With a database of **4.7 million** profiles, each quarter an average **172k** active jobseekers make over **1.7 million** applications on Caterer.com, with over **4 million** site visits

Hiring solutions

Enhance your hiring campaigns with our portfolio of end-to-end recruitment solutions:

Employer Branding

In the race for talent, ensuring your brand stands out from the crowd is key. Working with branding experts Universum, Caterer.com can help by developing your unique brand proposition to attract and engage the right candidates, fast. Access valuable insights and build a strong employer brand as you learn how to:

- Position yourself as an employer of choice
- Shape your employer brand strategy
- Identify candidate wants and needs

Early Careers

Build a strong talent pipeline by attracting the talent of tomorrow. With talent gaps impacting productivity, it's vital to identify and appeal to young and ambitious candidates, ensuring the future success of your business. Our unique Early Careers solutions can help to:

- Define and position your employer brand story to future hires
- Target young people from apprenticeship level to undergraduates
- Build a robust talent pipeline

Equality Boost

A diverse and inclusive workforce is key to strong business performance. Engage the right people for your roles in a diverse talent pool, by widening your hiring reach and taking new approaches to candidate targeting. Equality Boost can help you:

- Deliver a tangible impact on your DE&I strategy
- Extend your candidate reach into new and diverse talent pools
- Broaden the range of skills you attract to your business

Visibility Solutions

It's crucial you reach the talent you need ahead of the competition. Reach the right candidates first and build your team by targeting and attracting relevant hires. Our innovative Visibility Solutions can help you:

- Broaden the reach of your message
- Enhance your potential to grow applications
- Increase the relevancy of applicants

Programmatic

Find who you want, faster with programmatic targeting for a more efficient use of your high-volume hiring budget. Our sophisticated technology uses rule-based algorithms to distribute jobs to the best places throughout the entire web so you can pin-point the best candidates, quickly.

- Effortless integration with your ATS
- Only pay for the number of completed applications you receive
- Track performance in real-time and gain valuable insights to enable your campaign to be optimised quickly

CV Database

Take control of your hiring and find the ideal person quickly by using our CV Database to search over 4 million profiles. Using our intuitive search and filters, you can easily find and contact the most relevant people for your jobs.

- Save your searches and receive an email as soon as matching candidates register or update their profile
- Get ahead of the competition and be the first to find candidates who may not have applied to your jobs
- Receive relevant candidates directly to your inbox

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