

# Case study: JD Wetherspoon

## Workforce management

JD Wetherspoon is a pub company with more than 750 outlets throughout the UK. The company's customer base is very broad, a fact which it is keen to reflect in its workforce. Wetherspoon has taken the step of removing its retirement age, a move which ensures that it can retain valuable skills and experience and give staff the choice of working for longer.

Says Mandy Ferries, Head of Personnel and Training:

"Some people's perception of our industry is that it's a youth-oriented one, so while we were very good at employing students, we'd always struggled to attract applications from the older age bracket. Although we had a retirement age, in practice we never used it, so early in 2006 we made the decision to scrap it and have never looked back. We now receive thousands of job applications each month, from people of all different ages and often recruit trainee managers in their 50s or 60s."

The majority of frontline recruitment in the company is overseen by pub managers, and they have been trained to ensure that their recruitment practices do not discriminate on age. This includes the revision of all job specifications so that they are in line with good practice on age diversity and the re-writing of the company's interviewing skills course. Wetherspoon's job application forms do not ask for date of birth.

Wetherspoon has found it beneficial to attract diverse age ranges by offering flexible hours. This enables the employee to strike a balance between work and family or other commitments and the business to cover its core hours. For example, lunchtime is a particularly busy period for the company's outlets and it has found that some older workers - who might be looking to work for a few hours a week - are adaptable and happy to work at this time. The company reports that staff retention levels are well above the industry norms.

Older staff are welcomed at all levels of the business, from part-time bar work to managerial posts. Feedback from pubs which employ older workers suggests they are particularly stable, with low absence, a strong work ethic and a commitment to the business. Training is also available at all levels and Wetherspoon have a number of older employees who have progressed to manager level. Turnover of pub managers at Wetherspoon is half that of the industry average.

"As pub managers in a very busy trade, we also have the time and flexibility to spend with our family. Being more experienced in life certainly helps with this job and gives you the confidence to tackle all problems." Anne, 52 and Paul, 54, pub managers at JD Wetherspoon

Continues Mandy Ferries:

"Part of the success of the company is due to being innovative and progressive and this is reflected in our recruitment process. Employing a diverse workforce of men and women of all ages benefits individual pubs and the company as a whole. We actively encourage our pub managers to recruit staff primarily on personality and attitude, not making age an issue."

### **The business benefits of Wetherspoon's age diverse approach:**

- Enables the company to reflect its broad customer base.
- Helps to keep apace with demographic change.
- Flexible hours help to attract staff to cover busy periods.
- Staff retention levels are well above the industry norms.
- Frontline managers satisfied with stability and hard work offered by older workers.
- More life experience particularly beneficial to pub manager role.
- Turnover of pub managers at Wetherspoon is half that of the industry average.