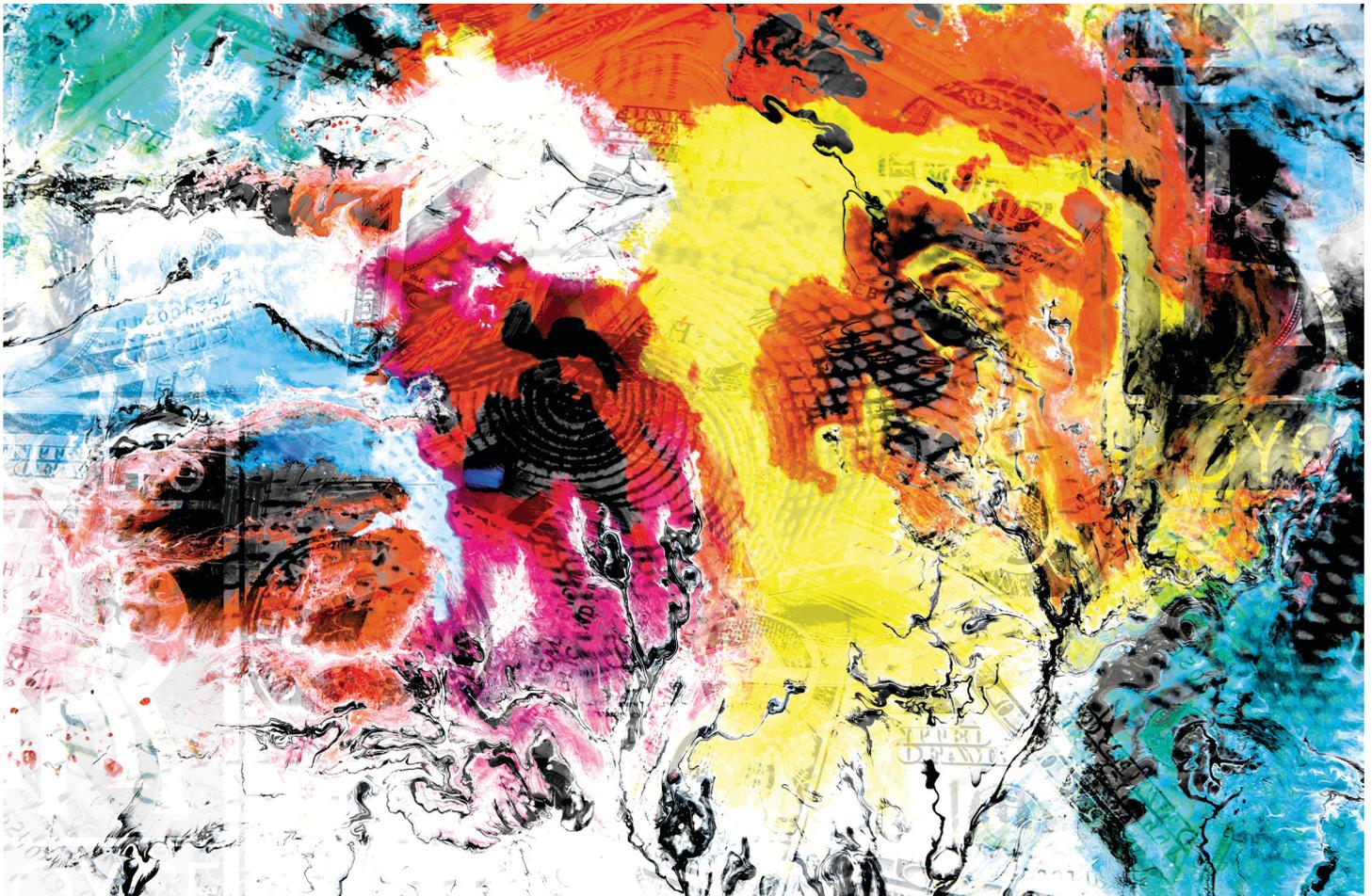


## Ageism and age discrimination



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## Introduction

Ageism can change how we view others and ourselves, perpetuate intolerance between generations, devaluing what younger and older people can contribute. It can also negatively impact our health, longevity and well-being while also having far-reaching economic consequences.

In this course you'll be learning what ageism is and why it matters, as well as what the law says on ageism and what you can do to identify and challenge ageism you may encounter across different parts of society.

While ageism affects everyone, this course will focus on ageism experienced by older people. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has reported that half the world's population is ageist against older people (2021).

This course was co-developed with the Older People's Commissioner for Wales; you'll find useful links to the Commissioner's resources throughout the course. In the video below, Rhian Bowen-Davies, the current Older People's Commissioner for Wales, outlines what you can expect from this course.

### **Video 1** Welcome to the course

Enrolling on the course and successfully completing it means you will earn an Open University digital badge. Badges are not accredited by The Open University but they're a great way to demonstrate your interest in the subject and/or commitment to continuing professional development. In addition, you can also download your own OpenLearn statement of participation when you complete the course.

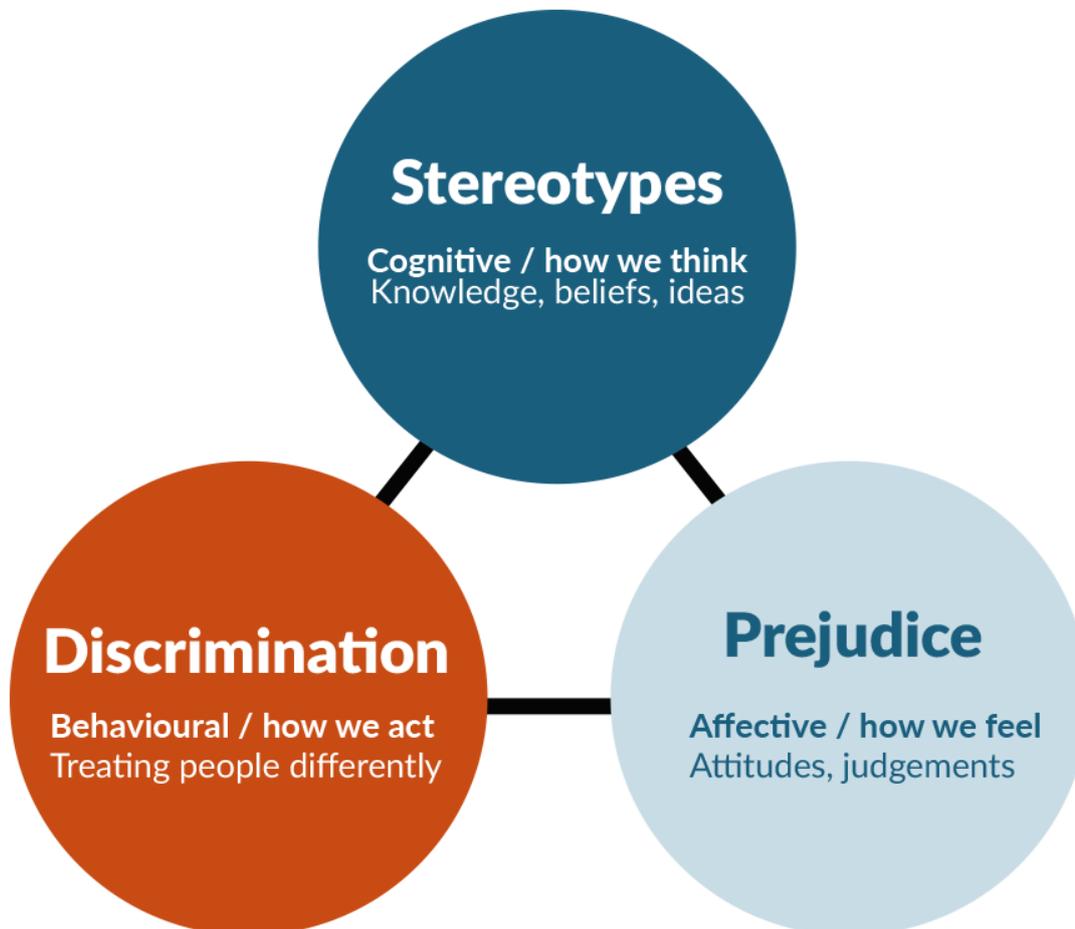
## Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand what ageism is, the impact it has on older people and why it matters
- have an awareness of the law in the UK regarding age discrimination (Equality Act 2010) with an appreciation of specific requirements and regulations in Wales
- confidently identify, challenge and act against ageism.

# 1 What is ageism and why does it matter?

Ageism refers to the **stereotypes** (how we think), **prejudice** (how we feel) and **discrimination** (how we act) directed towards people based on their age. (WHO, 2021).



**Figure 1:** How stereotypes, discrimination and prejudice are defined and can inform each other.

Ageism can be institutional, interpersonal or self-directed.

## **Institutional ageism**

Ageism within organisations and the structures and systems that exist within them, such as workplaces or the media.

## **Interpersonal ageism**

Ageism within our relationships, how we connect or relate to others.

## **Self-directed ageism**

Ageism within how we direct things at ourselves, an inward reflection, sometimes referred to as internalised ageism.

## 1.1 Stereotyping and prejudice

### Activity 1

 2 minutes

Watch the following short video about ageism and older people.

View at: [youtube:Prc9S0W24P4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Prc9S0W24P4)



**Video 2** 'Break free from ageism', HelpAge International

What are your initial thoughts having watched this video?

.....

### Discussion

We hope you found that short video thought provoking - and that it helped you to think about how prevalent ideas about older age are and how easily assumptions can be made.

Let's look at stereotypes and prejudice – how we think and how we feel.

### Stereotypes (how we think)

Stereotypes are generalised, oversimplified ideas or beliefs about a group of people.

They dehumanise individuals by grouping people together under a label: a label that is often unrelated/unrecognisable to the individuals being labelled.

They do not consider individual differences, perspectives, preferences, aspirations and needs.

They can influence how we communicate (the language, terminology and images we use). One common example is that all older people are frail and vulnerable. This is a common depiction seen in the media, an image or video of an older person with wrinkled hands on a walking stick, for example.

Stereotypes can become harmful when:

- the stereotype is so strongly held that it overrides evidence that an individual who belongs to the group does not conform to
- they start informing how we feel and influencing how we act.

### Prejudice (how we feel)

Prejudice can be defined as attitudes, feelings or judgements about members of other groups. They may be positive or negative, though are frequently negative.

Examples of negative prejudice include:

- all older people are 'stuck in their ways'
- all older people enjoy financial security at the expense of younger people
- older people can't use IT
- older people are a 'drain' on public services
- older people shouldn't be working.

### Hostile or benevolent

Stereotyping and prejudice against different groups in society does not take the same form. It can be **hostile** or **benevolent**.

A **hostile** example would be 'older people are a drain on public services'.

Examples of **benevolence** include 'all older women are like a kindly grandmother'. This is still ageist and has consequences in how we think, feel or act towards older people and ageing, it does not take account of the individual.

## 1.1.1 Language

A good example of how common or prevalent ageism against older people can be is to examine language we may have encountered in our day to day lives.

### Activity 2

 5 minutes

What do you think about the statements in the word balloons below?

Do you think these statements are benevolent or hostile?

Do you ever question them when you hear them? Have you used them yourself, even about yourself?



**Figure 2:** Examples of statements based on age

---

### Discussion

It's important to think about these common statements as they have the power to influence our thinking and by extension, our behaviour.

They reinforce subtle and easy to miss messages: that in older age, we are passed our prime and that frailty, deteriorating mental or physical capabilities and dependence are the inevitable and defining characteristics of ageing.

There is no mention of experience, wisdom, or having more confidence.

Lots of these statements are about identity, older people should behave in an 'age appropriate' manner and succession, older people have 'had their turn' and should make way for younger people ('boomers' and the idea that older people should make way in workplaces to give jobs for younger people).

There is also a gender link. For example, we have found more negative ageism against older women than older men, enhanced by phrases like 'mutton dressed as lamb'.

If your work involves communicating with the public, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales has produced a guide on avoiding ageism in professional communications.

**Download:** [How to avoid ageism in communications](#) (PDF, 631 KB)

This guide will also be available in the resources section at the end of the course.

### 1.1.2 Imagery

Like language, images influence how we think, feel and react to what we see. Images that portray older people as frail, vulnerable, in ill health or as victims can also lead to stereotyping behaviour and ignore the diversity of older people.

An everyday example of this is the UK traffic sign warning that older pedestrians may be crossing the road. It was originally designed in 1981 as the result of a children's competition. The same sign is also used for disabled pedestrians. Many older people find this sign to be ageist.

In 2020, the Centre for Ageing Better held a competition inviting designers to 'rethink the symbols and icons commonly used in public to represent older age groups.' The winning 'dancing couple' design was based on the UK traffic sign.



**Figure 3:** The UK traffic sign for older and disabled pedestrians (top left) and the 'dancing couple' winning competition design (bottom right).

The judges noted that the winning design was able to capture the diversity of older people, portraying an active and social pair while breaking out of the triangular road sign shape (Centre for Ageing Better, 2020).

### Activity 3

 5 minutes

Look at the four images below. Which images do you think have a negative influence on how we think and feel about older people? Which ones may have a more positive influence? Why?

Hint: Think about the images you would like to see of yourself or of family and friends.



**Figure 4:** Images of older people

### Discussion

**Image A** is a cartoon depicting an older woman with a walking stick (very commonly depicted) but also with a weak posture and old-fashioned clothes that make her appear child-like. This image focuses on making the older woman look frail and vulnerable with a sad or pained expression on her face.

**Image B** appears natural, with the older person smiling and looking engaged. The image also challenges stereotypical notions that older people do not engage with modern technology.

**Image C** shows a pair of older-looking hands close up. Images like this are commonly used in news articles about older people. This means we do not see the individual, something that dehumanises older people and can lead to older people being treated as a homogenous group.

**Image D** is a staged photo but challenges the typical depictions of what older people wear. The person photographed also looks to be happy, confident and energetic, again making you think beyond typical assumptions.

If your work involves using imagery, the Centre for Ageing Better has created a library of free images to help show a more realistic and diverse depiction of ageing.

Explore the [Age-positive image library](#).

Age Cymru has also developed a free stock image library, providing images that represent the diversity and experience of older people in Wales.

Explore the [This is Older stock image library](#).

Both links will also be available in the resources section at the end of the course.

### 1.1.3 Implications

Watch this short video produced by the World Health Organisation's campaign to combat ageism.

View at: [youtube:7tThSqTWS-Cs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tThSqTWS-Cs)



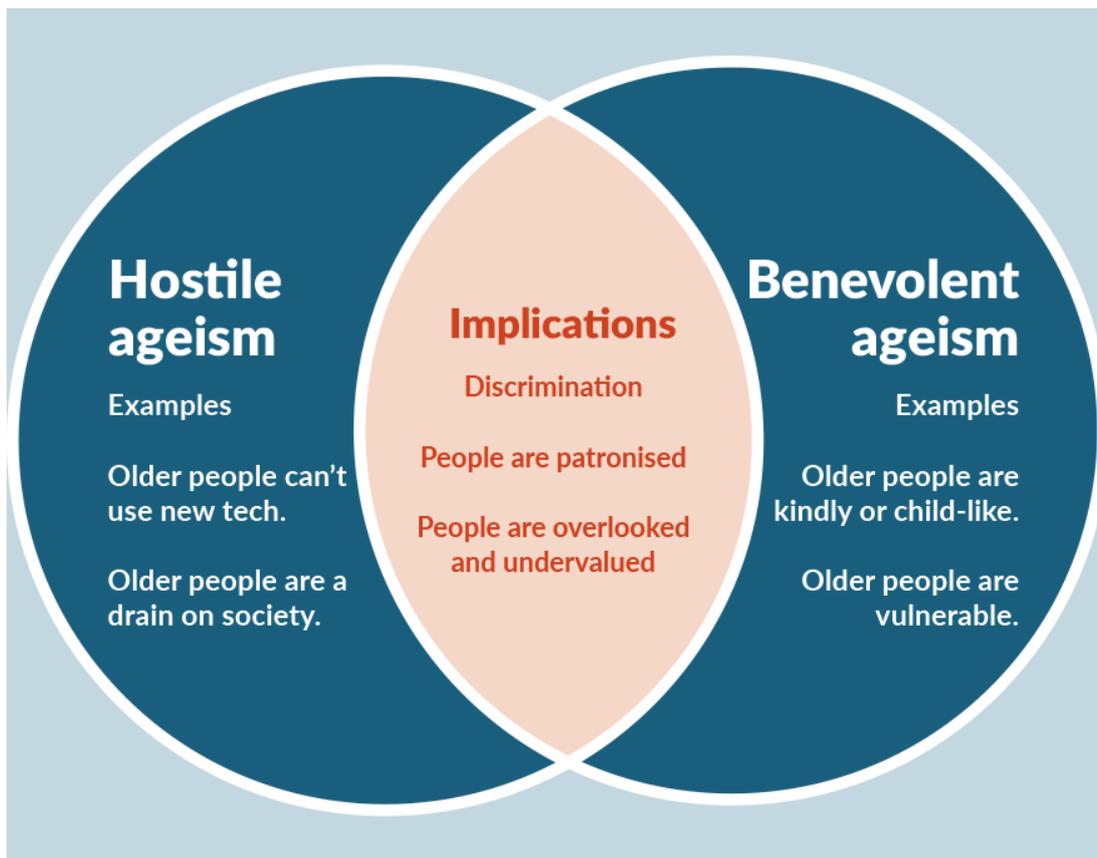
**Video 3** Global Campaign to Combat Ageism - #AWorld4AllAges, UN Decade of Healthy Ageing

The video focuses on the personal impact of stereotyping and prejudice based on age. You may have similar experiences in terms of how you have felt or how you have thought about another person.

Having considered stereotypes and prejudice and looked at some examples we can conclude that the society and culture we live in sometimes makes it easy to stereotype others without much thought on the consequences it can have.

### 1.1.4 Hostile vs benevolent ageism

Hostile and benevolent ageism are two types of prejudice that often co-exist. Hostile ageism involves open depreciation, negative stereotyping, and seeing older people as a burden. In contrast, benevolent ageism manifests as well-meaning but patronising, protective, or 'kind' behaviours that can diminish the autonomy of older people.



**Figure 5:** Shared implications of both hostile and benevolent ageism

The negative impact of hostile ageism is generally more obvious, but benevolent ageism is also damaging, perhaps more subtly so. Benevolent stereotypes and prejudices may seem harmless, perhaps even kind, but can mean older people can be seen as 'not up to the job' or 'incompetent'. They can also lead to assumptions that it is 'natural' for older people to have lower expectations, reduced choice and control with less account taken of their views.

## 1.2 Unconscious bias

How do stereotypes and prejudice have such a hold on how we think and feel about other people?

Unconscious bias is a **learned stereotype or prejudice** that is deeply ingrained, unintentional, automatic and able to influence behaviour. It is result of the natural tendency of the human brain to sift, sort, and categorise information about the world.

There are three main drivers that make humans susceptible to unconscious bias:

- **We tend to seek out patterns.** Unconscious bias occurs because of the brain's natural tendency to look for patterns and associations in the world. Social cognition, or our ability to store, process, and apply information about people in social situations, is dependent on this ability to form associations about the world.
- **We like to take shortcuts.** Like other cognitive biases, the unconscious bias is a result of the brain's tendency to try to simplify the world. Because the brain is constantly inundated with more information than it could conceivably process, mental shortcuts make it faster and easier for the brain to sort through all of this data.

- **Experiences and social conditioning.** Unconscious biases are influenced by experiences, although these attitudes may not be the result of direct personal experience. Cultural conditioning, media portrayals, and upbringing can all contribute to the implicit associations that people form about the members of other social groups.

Unconscious bias can be addressed through training and awareness. One of the benefits of being aware of the potential impact of unconscious bias is that you can take a more active role in overcoming social stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudice.

### 1.3 Age discrimination

Stereotypes and prejudice are how we think and feel. Discrimination is how we act.

**Direct age discrimination** can be defined as treating people differently based on stereotypes or prejudice.

**Indirect age discrimination** can be defined as ‘treating everyone the same’ without accounting for individual needs.

Both direct and indirect age discrimination occurs on both a personal and organisational / institutional level.

#### Activity 4

 5 minutes

Think about whether the following are examples of **direct** or **indirect** age discrimination:

A gym refusing a 76-year man membership because of his age.

- Direct age discrimination
- Indirect age discrimination

#### Answer

Direct age discrimination, he has been treated differently.

A Local Authority requires people to access important services — such as applying for Blue Badges, ordering recycling bins, or booking a computer at a library — exclusively through an online portal, with no alternative by phone or in-person.

- Direct age discrimination
- Indirect age discrimination

#### Answer

Indirect age discrimination, it puts older people at a disadvantage as they are less likely to be digitally included.

A line manager refuses a request for training because the employee is close to retirement.

- Direct age discrimination

- Indirect age discrimination

.....

**Answer**

Direct age discrimination, the employee has been treated differently due to their age.

**Stereotypes and assumptions**

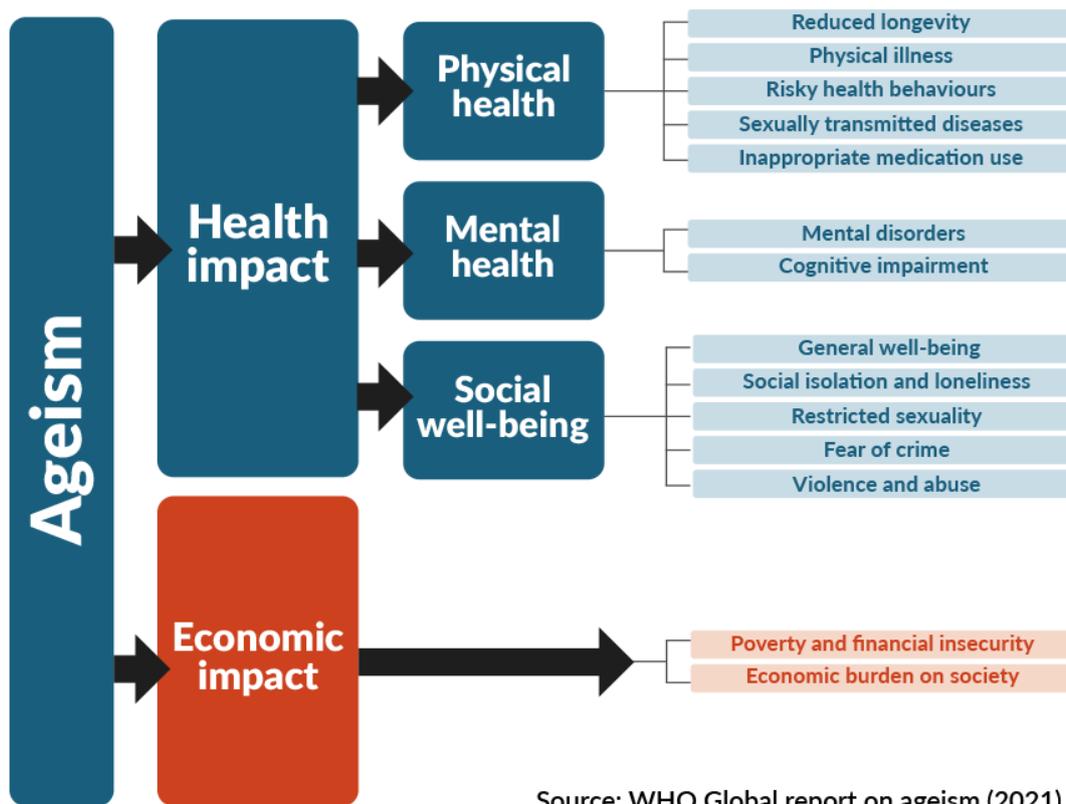
Age-based stereotypes may also result in someone drawing very different conclusions when seeing an older and a younger adult with back pain or a limp. They might well assume that the younger person's condition is temporary and treatable, perhaps the result of an accident, while the older person's condition might be assumed to be chronic and less responsive to treatment.

This assumption may have no consequence if someone makes it in the blink of an eye as someone is passing on the street, but if it is held by a health professional offering treatment or managers thinking about occupational health, it could inappropriately influence their actions and lead to age-related discrimination.

This treatment can occur as the result of ageist stereotypes and prejudice or because of a failure to see individual differences.

## 1.4 Impacts of ageism

A World Health Organisation report on ageism published in 2021 found that 1 in 2 people worldwide hold ageist views against older people (2021).



**Figure 6:** The impacts of ageism on older people (WHO, 2021)

As shown in Figure 6, the report evidenced the impact of ageism on older people's physical and mental health as well as their social well-being. The evidence reiterated the need for global action to combat ageism.

Ageism has serious and far-reaching consequences for people's health, well-being and human rights:

- For older people, ageism is associated with a shorter lifespan, poorer physical and mental health, slower recovery from disability and cognitive decline.
- Ageism reduces older people's quality of life, increases their social isolation and loneliness (both of which are associated with serious health problems), restricts their ability to express their sexuality and may increase the risk of violence and abuse against older people.
- For individuals, ageism contributes to poverty and financial insecurity in older age, and costs society billions of pounds.

Ageism can also lead to higher costs for public services and the economy. An example would be where older people experience barriers and challenges in accessing GP services, there is a risk that these barriers and challenges will push individuals towards accessing other, less appropriate unscheduled care services, adding unnecessary pressures and costs to other parts of public health services.

Older people make a significant contribution to society through working, volunteering, providing care and support and paying taxes. Ageism can lead to us all undervaluing the vital roles and contributions played by older people across society.

## 2 Age discrimination and UK law

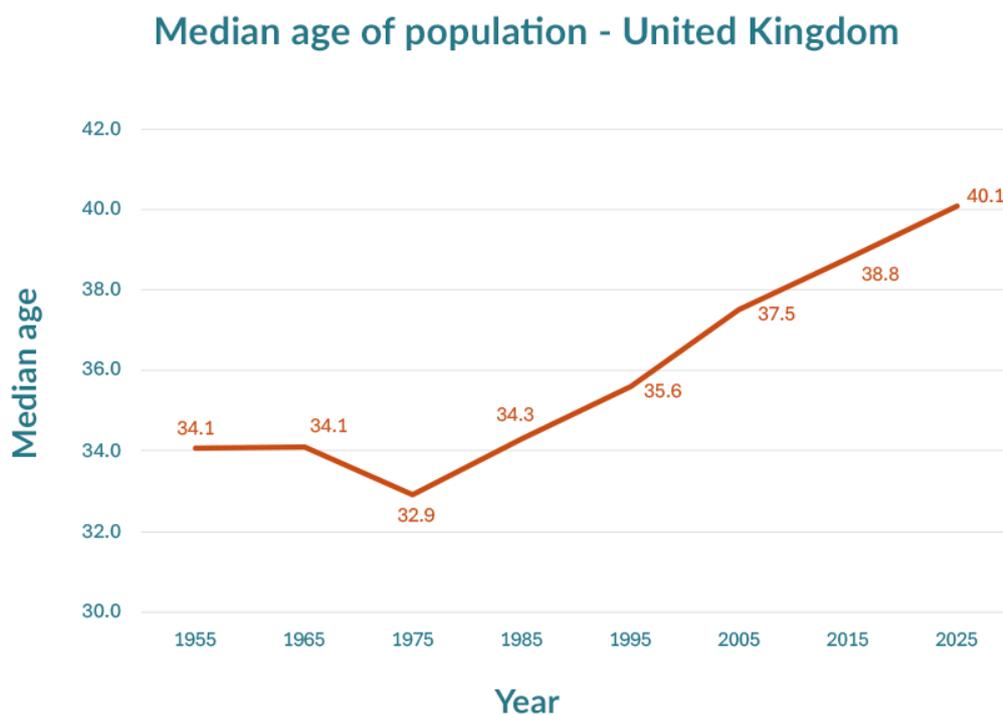
This section will look at how age discrimination is treated under UK law. You will be introduced to relevant aspects of the Equality Act 2010 and the regulations for public bodies known as the Public Sector Equality Duty.

You will also learn about the specific duties that apply in Wales and the role of an Older People's Commissioner, an office unique to Wales and Northern Ireland.

For context, it is worth noting some demographic data such as the median age of the UK's population and how it has increased since 1975.

### What is meant by 'median age'?

Imagine all the ages of all people in a country are arranged in numerical order, e.g. from 0 to 100. The age that falls in the exact middle of this sorted list is the median age. If the median age is getting higher, it means more people are living for longer.



Source: United Nations, Revision of World Population Prospects (2024)

**Figure 7:** Median age since 1955 in the UK (UN, 2024)

According to the Office for National Statistics, Scotland and Wales have the highest median ages in the UK. 898,383 people over 60 live in Wales, a number projected to rise to 993,000 by 2030 (ONS, 2024).

An ageing population has an impact on all levels of society with implications for policy decisions in health and social care, the economy, housing and infrastructure and more. The data makes it clear that older people cannot be excluded from society and need to be supported to live healthy, independent lives.

For a more detailed look at the overall picture for older people in Wales you can read [Growing older in Wales: A snapshot of older people's experiences](#) by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales. This link will also be available in the resources section at the end of the course.

## 2.1 The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 is a key piece of legislation in the UK designed to protect individuals from unfair treatment and promote a fair and more equal society. It consolidated numerous pieces of anti-discrimination legislation into a single Act, making the law easier to understand and apply. (GOV.UK, 2013)

The Act protects people based on nine protected characteristics, as seen in Figure 8 and listed below.



**Figure 8:** Equality Act 2010 nine protected characteristics

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Sexual orientation
- Religion and belief
- Sex

The Equality Act 2010 states that providers of goods and services and employers should not discriminate - or offer inferior services or treatment - on the basis of a protected characteristic.

Age is one of these protected characteristics. This means that shops, GPs, hospitals, transport services, public toilets, colleges, universities and so on cannot discriminate against somebody based on their age.

## 2.2 Protection from age discrimination

Discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 can take several forms:

**Direct age discrimination:** Treating someone less favourably because of a protected characteristic. Example: A gym refusing a 76-year man membership because of his age.

**Indirect age discrimination:** Applying a rule or policy that disadvantages people with a protected characteristic. Example: An optician allows customers to pay for their glasses by instalments but restricts eligibility to those in work. This could put older people at a disadvantage as they are less likely to be working.

**Harassment:** Unwanted behaviour related to a protected characteristic that violates someone's dignity or creates a hostile environment. Example: A person's colleagues repeatedly making jokes about their age, which the individual finds offensive or upsetting.

**Victimisation:** Treating someone unfairly because they've made or supported a complaint under the Act. Example: A workplace excluding someone from social activities or a pay rise as they are taking, or believed to be taking, action under the Equality Act.

**Discrimination by association:** Being treated unfairly because of your connection to someone with a protected characteristic. Example: A workplace changing work arrangements (e.g. working from home) without notice when the person needs to be based at home for caring duties.

**Discrimination by perception:** Being treated unfairly because someone thinks you have a protected characteristic, even if you don't. Example: A manager assuming an older colleague will not take part in certain away day activities as they believe them likely to be disabled in some way.

The Equality Act can be used to challenge all these forms of discrimination, as defined above.

It is important to note that individuals, i.e. people themselves, have these protections as **rights holders**, however, public bodies must ensure they are mindful of them as **duty holders** (meaning they are responsible for compliance with the law).

### Activity 5

 5 minutes

Reflect on a time when you or someone you know may have experienced unfair treatment.

- Was it related to any of the nine protected characteristics?
- Which type of discrimination (if any) might it have been?
- How did it make you feel?
- What could have been done differently?

## 2.3 Exceptions

A difference in services or treatment between people may be lawful if the circumstances fall under one of the exceptions that allow this:



**Age-based concessions and age-related discounts.** Businesses are allowed to offer concessions or discounts based on age – for example, cheaper access to leisure facilities for 18–25-year-olds, or lunch deals for older people over a certain age.



**Age-related holidays.** It's not unlawful for a holiday company to offer holidays for some age groups only – for example, over-50s cruises or Club 18–30 holidays. But the purpose of the holiday must be to bring together people of the same age, and the holiday must include travel and accommodation. These holidays can be sold to someone who isn't in the usual age group if they're treated the same as the other holidaymakers. For example, a 41-year-old wanting to go on a holiday for customers in their 30s might be accepted if the company agrees, but they shouldn't be charged any more for the holiday.



**Financial services.** Age can be used to assess risk, and this can be used to work out the price you pay for a financial product or service such as insurance, banking, credit, pensions etc or whether it's made available to you. They can also stage limits and offer products to people in certain age groups only.



**Other laws.** If there is another relevant law which says people can be treated differently based on their age and therefore it's not unlawful discrimination under the Equality Act. One example of this is free bus passes for people over 60 under the Transport Act 2000.



**Age verification.** Businesses selling goods like alcohol, fireworks and cigarettes can ask for proof of age if they think you're under-age. They can refuse to serve you if you can't prove how old you are. This is not unlawful age discrimination.

These specific exceptions are in addition to:

- **general exceptions already allowed by the Equality Act** (e.g. ability to contravene the Act in the interests of national security, for charitable or sporting purposes)
- **positive action measures**
- **objective justification.**

## 2.4 Objective justification

Even if something doesn't fall under one of the exceptions in the Equality Act, it can still be lawful for a trader or service provider to treat you differently – or even discriminate against you – because of your age.

Objective justification can be used for both **direct** and **indirect** age discrimination. The trader or service provider would have to show they have a **good enough reason** for discriminating against you. For example, a gym refusing membership to someone over 80 could be justified if the owner cannot obtain affordable insurance for users over that age.

However, a reason may not be good enough if the provider **could have acted in a less discriminatory way**. In the gym example, this might mean charging all members a small extra fee to cover higher insurance costs for older users. The Equality Act requires providers to show they considered the discriminatory impact of their decision and that the action was necessary. They must demonstrate that it is a **proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim**.

Here are examples of legitimate aims supported by evidence:

- **Ensuring health and safety.** For example, limiting the number of pushchairs or wheelchairs on public transport to allow quick boarding and exit.
- **Protecting welfare.** The fire service requires applicants to pass physical tests for firefighting roles. This could seem like indirect age discrimination, as older people are less likely to pass. However, the fire service can justify this because firefighting demands physical capability. The aim is to ensure firefighter safety and maintain an effective service. Physical tests are a proportionate way to achieve this.
- **Enabling people of particular groups to enjoy activities together.** For example, offering age-specific swimming sessions or women-only sessions.
- **Targeting services to those who need them most.** For example, promoting breast screening and mammograms to people over 50.

## 2.5 The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is a legal obligation under the Equality Act 2010 that requires public bodies in England, Scotland, and Wales to consider how their decisions and actions affect people with protected characteristics.

It applies to:

- Public bodies (e.g. schools, hospitals, police)
- Private or voluntary organisations carrying out public functions (e.g. a private company running a prison or a train service franchise).

Watch this video from the Equality and Human Rights Commission for an overview of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

View at: [youtube:W3nZ7iL6leM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3nZ7iL6leM)



**Video 4** What is the Public Sector Equality Duty? | Equality law: discrimination explained, Equality and Human Rights Commission

Public bodies must have 'due regard' to the need to achieve three main aims, as can be seen in Figure 9.

## The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

The **three aims** of the general duty are to make sure that public authorities have **due regard** to the need to:



**put an end to unlawful behaviour** that is banned by the Equality Act 2010, including **discrimination, harassment** and **victimisation**



**advance equal opportunities** between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not



**foster good relations** between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not

Source: Equality and Human Rights Commission

**Figure 9:** The three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty

### 2.5.1 The PSED in practice

Here are some illustrative examples of how public bodies might show due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty:

A local authority reviews data on access to adult education and finds that older Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women are less likely to attend digital skills courses. In response, it funds community-based sessions with translation support and flexible timings to meet both cultural and caregiving needs.

A city council is redesigning a public park and consults with older disabled residents and LGBTQ+ older people. Based on their feedback, it improves pathways for mobility aids, installs accessible toilets, and creates inclusive community spaces where everyone feels welcome.

Before launching a new healthcare initiative, a local health board conducts an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and identifies that older men from low-income and rural backgrounds have poorer access to mental health services. They adapt the policy by introducing local outreach clinics and transport assistance to reduce these inequalities.

**Key points to remember:**

- The PSED is about **process, not outcomes**. Public bodies must show they considered equality, even if the final decision isn't perfect for all groups.
- It must be applied proportionately. More serious impacts require more thorough consideration.
- It's a legal requirement. Failure to comply can lead to legal challenges.

## 2.5.2 Specific duties in Wales

The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 are a set of specific duties that apply to public bodies in Wales. They build upon the general Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in the Equality Act 2010, outline specific actions public bodies in Wales must take to enhance the performance of the general duty.

It seeks to do this by adding a focus on **outcomes**. Complying with the specific duties in Wales is not therefore just about processes and procedures as per the general PSED – the Wales regulations add requirements for generating positive equality outcomes.

The specific duties are interlinked and complement each other continuously to inform the listed authority as to how to better achieve better equality outcomes:



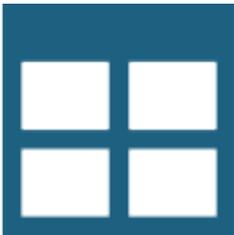
### **Equality Objectives**

Public bodies must set and publish equality objectives, which are specific, measurable goals aimed at improving equality. These must be revised and published at least once every four years.



### **Strategic Equality Plans**

Public bodies must publish a Strategic Equality Plan (SEP). These plans draw together various elements of the specific duties to detail how public bodies intend to achieve their equality objectives, including how they will measure and report progress. They can be used as a timetabled action plan for meeting the duties.



### **Transparency and accountability**

The regulations promote transparency by requiring public bodies to publish their objectives and plans, and to report on their progress. This means publishing annual reports setting out compliance with specific duties. The annual report can include specified employment information; if this is not included, it must be published separately on an annual basis.



### **Impact Assessments**

Public bodies are expected to assess the impact of their policies and practices on different groups with protected characteristics. The public body will have to consider how policies and practices affect groups with different protected characteristics. There is a requirement for assessments to engage with appropriate persons and have due regard to information that the authority holds. Such assessments are sometimes referred to as Equality Impact Assessments.



### **Engagement with appropriate persons**

For all of the aspects above, the regulations emphasise the importance of engaging with diverse communities to understand their needs and inform the development of policies and services. The Act describes what effective engagement looks like, with people who share protected characteristics and others with interest.

Effective engagement should be:

- Well-structured and focused
- Adequately resourced and accessible
- Influential and transparent
- Respectful of confidentiality
- Proportionate

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) acts as the regulator for the PSED in Wales, monitoring compliance and ensuring actions are taken to support equality.

## **2.6 Older People's Commissioner for Wales**

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales protects and promotes the rights of people aged 60 and over.

### **Role and legal Powers**

The Commissioner's role and statutory powers are defined by the Commissioner for Older People (Wales) Act 2006 and accompanying Regulations.

### **Video 5** from Rhian Bowen-Davies

The Act outlines the action that the Commissioner is able to take to ensure that the interests of older people are safeguarded and promoted when public bodies discharge their functions and the assistance the Commissioner may provide directly to older people in certain situations.

### **Commissioner's Functions**

- Promote awareness of the rights and interests of older people in Wales
- Challenge discrimination against older people in Wales
- Encourage best practice in the treatment of older people in Wales
- Review the law affecting the interests of older people in Wales

## 3 Taking action against ageism

To combat ageism, we must be aware of it. Watch the video below from the Centre for Ageing Better for an overview of how ageism factors into many different aspects of our lives and society.

View at: [youtube:3nrF50FeBZo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nrF50FeBZo)



**Video 6** 'Ageism: Explained', Centre for Ageing Better

As a minimum you should try to:

- Be alert to ageism, in all its forms: stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination.
- Play your part in ensuring your organisation is following the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
- Always be conscious of the language, terminology and any images you use.
- Reflect on your behaviour and actions – could they be ageist?
- Challenge ageism - informally or formally.

In their global report on ageism, the World Health Organisation outlined three effective strategies for combatting ageism, which you should take into account when planning your actions:

- Policy and law – (such as the Equality Act 2010) what changes do we need to see in policy – locally, regionally or nationally. Do we need changes to strengthen the law on equalities?
- Educational activities (formal and informal) – training courses, ongoing educational activities, taking a lifelong learning approach.
- Intergenerational activities – bringing different generations together to share ideas, work on projects and break down barriers, proven to be effective at reducing ageism directed towards older people.

### Activity 6

 10 minutes

Consider how you might help combat ageism in your day-to-day life and work to help address ageism.

Can you think of **three tangible actions** you can take based on what you have learnt so far?

.....

#### Discussion

In your day-to-day life, take time to reflect on your own thoughts, attitudes and opinions as well as those of others within your social circle. Three tangible actions might be:

- Seek out opportunities to interact more with people of different generations in your family, workplace and community.

- Engage with your local authority, elected representatives, petitions or other democratic activism to help make positive change.
- Comment on social media content from organisations or brands to share knowledge or resources – equally important to acknowledge or amplify content that is age positive.

At work, consider what your organisation or team can do to combat ageism through service design, recruitment and training, provision of information and in decision making. Three tangible actions might be:

- Promote or encourage training or knowledge sharing.
- Review language or images in use in documents, on websites or other materials for potentially harmful stereotypes.
- Challenge any conversational comments or jokes made by colleagues.

If you struggled to think of tangible actions, don't worry! Even though you may understand what ageism and the laws that apply in challenging it, it can be difficult to know what you are empowered to do and how best to do it. This section will look closely at how you can challenge ageism in different areas of life and society, as well as organisations that can support you.

## 3.1 Challenging ageism

You can challenge ageism you encounter **informally** or **formally**.

**Informally** - drawing attention to ageism, exposing any incorrect assumptions being made and highlighting the damaging impacts of ageism, highlight where inappropriate or stereotyping language has been used.

**Formally** - drawing attention to the ageism and using legislation designed to address discrimination and advance equality: the Equality Act 2010 / seek opportunities to contribute to a fairer society through the PSED and specific equality duties in Wales.

The following sections will look at what you can do both formally and informally when you encounter ageism in the media, in the workplace, in health and social care services and as a general consumer. While these sections are focused on what we can do as individuals to challenge ageism, they are also helpful to understand where older people you work with or support can find help and information if they feel they are being discriminated against.

We also hope these sections will help you to reflect on how policies and practice within your own organisation or area of work could be improved to ensure that older people are not discriminated against, whether directly or indirectly.

### 3.1.1 In the media

The media has a lot of power in influencing how we think about age. It is therefore important that the way older people are represented is fair and accurate.

This includes using images and language that reflect the diverse range of experiences, interests and aspirations of older people.

When listening to or reading media reports (including print, television, radio, internet and social media), the following questions may be useful in determining whether ageism is present:

- Does reporting a person's age add anything to the story?
- Does this image or story reinforce or challenge negative stereotypes?
- Does this publication or channel regularly report negative stories of older people or ageing?
- Has this publication or channel reported positive stories about older people or ageing?
- Where there are positive stories, are they patronising in nature?

If you feel ageism is present, you can make an informal challenge through contacting the editor (newspapers or magazines), broadcaster (radio or TV) or person sharing the story (social media) to highlight the ageism and request more balanced coverage that more accurately reflects the contribution and value that older people bring to society.

If this doesn't produce a satisfactory response, then contact the relevant regulatory body to escalate the complaint ([Ofcom](#) for most media coverage or the [Advertising Standards Authority](#) for advertisements).

### 3.1.2 In the workplace

Meaningful work can help people stay active, feel valued and improves health and well-being. However, ageism and discrimination within the workplace – founded on debunked myths about a lack of productivity, poorer health and an unwillingness to adapt to change – is a barrier to older people remaining in, or re-entering, paid work.

When applying for jobs or whilst in work, the following questions may be helpful in determining whether ageism is present:

- Do job advertisements give you the impression that the employer might not be interested in you as an older person (e.g. the employer asking for qualifications such as GCSEs or recruitment being targeted at graduate fairs)?
- In the workplace, are opportunities for promotion and training open to people of all ages on an equal and fair basis?
- In the workplace, are work appraisals unclouded by preconceptions about age and based on actual performance?
- If redundancy situations arise, are they carried out without assumptions about age (e.g. free from assumptions that older people will soon retire)?
- It is important to note that there may be an 'objective justification' for treating someone differently based upon age in an employment context. This could include examples such as age limits to do certain jobs or payment of the National Minimum Wage.

If you feel you are experiencing age discrimination in looking for work or in the workplace, you can:

- **Speak to your Trade Union or employee representative** in the workplace.
- Talk with the employer to **seek an informal and agreeable solution**.
- Make a **formal complaint to the employer** using their grievance procedure.
- Take a **claim to an employment tribunal** (time limits apply for making a claim – 3 months from the date of the last incident of discrimination, you should contact the ACAS early conciliation service to try and resolve the matter first).

At any of the stages above, you can get free advice and support from a specialist agency that can give you advice based upon your individual experiences and circumstances (e.g. from the [Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service](#) (ACAS)).

### 3.1.3 In health and social care

When we are unwell, we want to receive the best treatment available. However, sometimes problems are dismissed as 'old age', overlooked and not investigated or treated fully.

Anyone who works for the NHS or in the private healthcare sector (including professional medical staff such as consultants, doctors and nurses, receptionists, managers, security staff, cleaners, ambulance drivers) or anyone who works for a local authority (including social workers) has a duty not to discriminate against older people.

When using health or care services, the following questions may be helpful in determining whether ageism or discrimination is present:

- **Are you being refused a service because of your age?** (It is important to note there are some treatments for which the evidence base suggests they are not effective beyond a certain age.)
- **Are you receiving a service of worse quality or on worse terms than would normally be offered because of your age?**
- **Is the provider behaving in a way related to your age which causes you distress, offends or intimidates you?**
- **Is the provider punishing you because you complain about discrimination or helping someone else complain because of an issue related to age?**

If you experience age discrimination in health or care services, then you can make a complaint to the ward, hospital, care home or care provider.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint, you can take it further by making a complaint to the relevant health board (for health services) or local authority (for care services). If this doesn't produce a satisfactory response, then you can make a complaint to a regulatory body or watchdog.

You can also get free advice and support from a specialist who can give you advice based upon your individual experiences and circumstances (e.g. from the [Equality Advisory & Support Service](#)).

### 3.1.4 In consumer services

The Equality Act 2010 covers providers of goods and services, as well as services such as health and social care. This includes, for example, shops, hotels, and insurers. It means that, in most instances, you can't be discriminated against because of your age.

There are, however, a number of specific exemptions relating to some consumer and financial services, including:

- Age-related holidays offered for people over 50.
- Social or leisure clubs which cater for people of specific ages only.
- Insurers being able to take age into account when calculating a premium and a bank being able to refuse a financial product to a customer based on their age (however, they must make sure that they base the decision on reliable and relevant information, as opposed to just making a general assumption based on age).

If you feel that you have been treated badly as a customer on the basis of your age, you can:

- Make a complaint using the company's complaints procedure, stating that you believe you have been discriminated against on the grounds of age.
- Report a local business to trading standards (teams based in local authorities that enforce legislation to protect consumers).

Depending on who you are complaining about, you could take your complaint further to a regulatory body:

- The [Advertising Standards Authority \(ASA\)](#) about non-broadcast advertisements, sales promotions and direct marketing. You may want to complain if you've seen a press advertisement, promotion, leaflet or poster that you think is ageist and you want it changed or withdrawn. The ASA can stop misleading or offensive advertising and ensure sales promotions are run fairly. Complain about television or radio advertising through the regulator [Ofcom](#).
- Complaints about financial organisations, insurers and banks can be taken to the [Financial Ombudsman](#), which can investigate complaints that haven't been resolved through the organisation's complaints process first.
- At any of the stages above, you can also contact the [Equality Advisory and Support Service](#) for advice.

You may also wish to take your business elsewhere, and tell your friends and family to do the same. Write to the company telling them that ageism is the reason they've lost your business.

Online reviews can be a powerful way of making your views known and can sometimes get a more favourable response from the company if they fear losing more business

## 3.2 Case studies and helpful resources

### Case studies and lived experiences

- The Centre for Ageing Better has a [section on their website for stories and case studies](#) and has a [collection of stories](#) as part of their Age Without Limits campaign.
- [Age-Friendly Communities in Practice: Good Practice Examples](#), compiled by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales
- HelpAge International [#OlderNotOver campaign stories](#)
- BBC News allows you to [filter by ageism as a topic](#) and receive updates by following the topic (BBC account required).

### Resources and guidance

- If your work involves communicating with the public, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales has produced a guide on avoiding ageism in professional communications. Download: [How to avoid ageism in communications](#) (PDF, 631 KB)
- The Older People's Commissioner for Wales website also has a [library of resources](#) including reports, key statistic and information guides. This includes the [Taking Action Against Ageism](#) resource used in this course and [Growing older in Wales: A snapshot of older people's experiences](#), the report mentioned in Section 2.

- If your work involves using imagery, the Centre for Ageing Better has created a library of free images to help show a more realistic and diverse depiction of ageing. Explore the [Age-positive image library](#). Age Cymru has also developed a free stock image library, providing images that represent the diversity and experience of older people in Wales. Explore the [This is Older stock image library](#).
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission has published [useful guides to the Public Sector Equality Duty](#) for Wales, Scotland and England.
- Guidance for using the [WHO Ageism Scale](#): an extensively tested tool designed to help you evaluate the impact of interventions aimed at reducing ageism.
- Digital Communities Wales works to support organisations working with older people to embrace more digital tools. They have [several resources](#) aimed at helping to increase digital inclusion of older generations.

## Conclusion

Ageism is often hidden, but it can seriously affect our dignity, and wellbeing and opportunities to live and age well. By completing this course, you've taken an important step in understanding what ageism is, how it impacts older people, and the role we can all play in stopping it.

Now, let's make a difference:

- **Share this free course** with friends, family, and colleagues.
- **Talk about what you've learned** - start conversations that challenge ageist attitudes.
- **Take action** to make sure older people are treated with respect and fairness.

The more people understand, recognise and challenge ageism, the closer we get to ending it. Together, we can make it happen.

## References

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## Acknowledgements

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### Video

Video 1: Courtesy of HelpAge International

Video 2: Courtesy of Global Campaign to Combat Ageism

Video 3: Courtesy of Equality and Human Rights Commission

### Tables

Table 1: Adapted from of HelpAge International

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