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The number of mature students entering college these days has increased dramatically and the decision to take a college course can be for a variety of reasons - up-skilling to make yourself more employable, bringing your existing qualifications to a higher level or perhaps just out of interest for a particular subject area.

As a mature student you may have concerns about how to position yourself as a graduate entering/re-entering the workplace. We will provide you with the support you need in identifying how your work and life experience to date can make you a stand-out candidate for graduate opportunities. You should never underestimate the value of the real-world experience you are bringing to your course of study in [TU Dublin](#) and to future employers!

As well as looking for candidates with the necessary skills and technical knowledge, organisations put huge emphasis on employees who show a high level of professionalism, maturity, enthusiasm, attitude and work ethic. Mature students typically have these attributes in abundance as well as being able to hit-the-ground-running in a job without needing much hand-holding.

Make sure to check out our Resources which will give you some great ideas about how to manage the next stage of your career.

## Common Queries

### **I am older than most graduates. Will this disadvantage me when applying for jobs?**

Firstly, equality legislation (The Employment Equality Acts) prevents discrimination in recruitment and selection on the basis of age.

Secondly, while there may be a typical profile for graduates entering your preferred employment area, this does not mean that you won't be considered for a role. The challenge for you and for all graduates is to communicate your key selling points to the potential employer, identifying what differentiates you from all the other applicants. However, an additional challenge for mature applicants is how to use your greater level of work and life experience positively in selling yourself to an employer.

For more information about this legislation and for details on how to investigate a claim, check out the Equality Authority website at <https://www.ihrec.ie/>

### **What can I do?**

- **Be positive** – Focus on your strengths and what you can offer the employer. Many mature graduates have written themselves off due to their age before they have even applied for or have been interviewed for a position. Use positive language in your CV, cover letter, application forms and interviews.
- **Know yourself** – Your broad range of work, education, personal, family and community experience can provide you with many great examples of your skills and capabilities which employers love to find in applications and interviews. Communicate clearly how the 'transferable skills' you've gained could be applied to a variety of roles.

Your life journey to date will also give you a greater insight into what you are interested in, what is important to you, and what type of work environment suits your personality. Remember, achievements such as raising a family can often say more about a person's abilities than a qualification ever can.

- **Develop and maintain your network** – as a mature jobseeker you will typically have built up a much bigger base of contacts than an inexperienced graduate. It may be time to call in a few favours and use these links you have created.

- **Build up your IT Skills** – IT skills are very important in the workplace and there can often be a perception that mature candidates have very limited IT skills. If you have the skills, let the employer know. If you have limited skills, do a bit of extra training to improve them.

### **What can I offer an employer that can make me stand out from other candidates (particularly the younger ones)?**

Stereotypes aside, consider the areas where, as a mature student, you may have a little more to offer such as:

- **Greater experience** – When applying for work highlight the benefit of having gained lots of great experience in your career to date. Many employers these days look for examples of where you have shown particular competencies or skills which may be relevant to their company or role. Your greater level of work, academic, personal and life experience should provide you with a range of these examples e.g. “my experience in dealing with customers has led to highly developed communication skills”. You can also indicate how your previous experience has enhanced your learning, e.g. “my earlier experience of supervising a team resulted in a greater understanding of the management theory I covered in my course”.
- **Confidence in interpersonal communication** – Through your past and present relationships including those with colleagues, clients and suppliers, you may tend to be more at ease dealing with social situations.
- **Self-starter** – Having more work experience will often allow you to settle into an organisation far quicker than inexperienced graduates. Timekeeping, organisational structures, dress and even office ‘politics’ tend to be more familiar to the more experienced worker which is a real bonus for employers.
- **Decision-making experience** – Mature graduates tend to have more experience of taking responsibility and making key decisions. Again, give examples of when you had to take responsibility for the outcomes of such decisions, drawing from your work, academic and personal experiences.
- **Valuing the job** – Employers often comment that graduates seem to lack enthusiasm in interviews and in their work, an attitude of “if this job doesn’t work out I’ll just find another”. As a mature employee you may tend to value a good job more. For many mature candidates this stems from their having experienced good and bad times including the highs and lows of economic cycles.

- **Salary expectations** – Employers often believe that mature graduates will seek higher salaries than younger graduates when this may not be the case. Emphasise your flexibility on this where possible.
- **Client trust** – Clients may often have greater faith in an older person when dealing with issues or queries, particularly relating to more serious concerns, given the life experience you've gained. Use this to your advantage when selling yourself to the employer.
- **Greater Focus** – Mature employees are often more focused than younger counterparts. An example of this determination to succeed is evident from your completion of degree alongside the range of other commitments in your life.
- **Flexibility and adaptability** – Employers often fear that mature students will be inflexible and won't be able to adapt. There is also a misconception that mature applicants may be stuck in their ways, and may be resistant or may take longer to change. However mature graduates have often shown great flexibility in their life/career to date overcoming significant obstacles on route. This ability to adapt includes the reorganisation of time and other commitments to allow a return to academic life. In addition, you should give recent examples of learning new things and accepting new ideas including what you have covered in your college programme.
- **Greater commitment** – You may believe that your personal circumstances (e.g. family, mortgage etc.) may mean you are less flexible than younger graduates. However most employers value commitment and loyalty in an employee. The fact that your personal life is more settled can be used as a key selling point.
- **Multi-tasking** – Mature students and graduates often have a greater experience of juggling many different tasks or events in their lives and this can be seen as a real asset by employers.
- **Problem-solving** – With a greater level of experience through a variety of life events, you will find you can often display a greater knowledge, ability and confidence when it comes to problem solving.
- **Ability to work with all age groups** – A potential concern for employers is whether you will be content working under a younger manager/supervisor. To counter any such preconceptions, you should cite examples of situations where you have experience of successfully working with or taking direction from younger colleagues: this may be in past work experience, personal experience (e.g. fitness instructor at your gym) or perhaps in the academic environment (e.g. lecturer may have been younger than you.) In addition, your involvement in group/project work with younger colleagues or classmates may provide you with further examples.

## Finding age-positive employers

(CK May 2020)

*(Adapted from targetjobs.co.uk)*

Employers are becoming more aware of the benefits of having an age-diverse workforce and they're demonstrating a positive attitude towards recruiting, training and retaining workers of all ages.

The director of talent acquisition at Enterprise Rent-A-Car says, 'Mature applicants for us represent a great opportunity for our business to become more diverse and increase the pool of knowledge and experiences that will help drive our business forward for the future.'

The UK graduate recruitment manager from CGI comments, 'We do get quite a number of applications from mature students and we're very keen to receive them from that group. We think they bring quite a number of qualities to CGI. They tend to have a better focus and a better direction as to what they want to do with their career. They have often taken a decision, fairly recently perhaps, to move from their career into studying for a new career. That means they can bring the benefits of the subjects they've studied and also, potentially, the benefits of the experience they gained before they went back to university.'

'Age neutral' application forms are now common, and employers are making sure their publicity and recruitment material doesn't put off older or younger people from applying.

### **How are employers meeting age discrimination laws?**

There are a number of ways that graduate employers can make sure they're complying with age discrimination laws and are promoting good working practice in the area. This includes:

- Removing terms such as 'recent graduate' or mentions of specific time limits between graduation and joining the scheme.
- Changing images on recruitment campaigns to reflect the diversity of graduates.
- Making sure graduate schemes are suitable for candidates of all ages.
- Changing traditional milk round routes to make sure they include universities that offer a higher proportion of part-time courses (which are traditionally favoured by mature students).

- Removing language that could be deemed ageist in recruitment campaigns, for example, phrases such as ‘young and enthusiastic’.
- Accepting equivalent qualifications so those from various age groups (who took different qualifications) aren't excluded.

## Useful Web Resources

### General:

Aontas web resource supporting adult education and learning [www.aontas.com](http://www.aontas.com)

Mature Students On-Line Forum –UK/International <http://tinyurl.com/cg79ae>

### Mature Recruitment/Enterprise;

Information Resource supporting Adult Learners –UK <http://tinyurl.com/pz79mm9>

The Third Age Employment Network is a UK not-for-profit organisation set up with the goal of removing age barriers to employment [www.taen.org.uk](http://www.taen.org.uk)

A London based recruitment agency specialising in mature office staff.

Most jobs are within Central London. [www.fortiespeople.com](http://www.fortiespeople.com)

PRIME is a UK charity which focuses on helping the over 50s get back into work through self-employment

<https://www.charityjob.co.uk/recruiter/the-prince-s-initiative-for-mature-enterprise-prime-/18818>