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New ageism laws let older bankers sue for millions

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Article by Sean Banville

Ideas and Activities by David Robinson

THE ARTICLE

New employment laws have been introduced in the European Union that will help middle-aged and older workers. The Employment Equality Age Regulations became law on October 1 as part of an EU-wide initiative to stop ageism in the workplace. Legislators decided discrimination against older workers and older job seekers was on a par with sex discrimination and that against ethnic minorities. The new laws mean staff can claim significant levels of compensation from employers found guilty of firing staff for being "too old". Sam Mercer, chief executive of the Employers' Forum on Age told *The Guardian* newspaper: "Ageism is still seen as not that bad like speeding. While racism and sexism are viewed like drunk driving - totally unacceptable." However, not everyone is happy with the new laws. *The Guardian* reports a recent study which revealed 70% of 16-24-year-olds believed older workers should not receive higher pay because of their age or experience.

Those likely to most benefit from the new laws are middle-aged bankers, who are often "let go" by their employers for being less dynamic than their younger and more ambitious counterparts. In effect, this means the law will give greater protection to white middle-aged men - called "pale, stale males" by human resource departments. *The Guardian* reports that one bank allowed staff to call traders in their 40s "dinosaurs" and their desks as "Jurassic Park", according to a leading employment law solicitor. Before the new law was passed, these workers had a very hard time reconstructing their lives after being wrongly fired by companies. Compensation for unfair dismissal claims was capped at around \$110,000, which is a fraction of the income for many bankers in their 40s. This often meant financial ruin for many middle-aged bankers. The new laws change that. Companies now need to be extremely careful when "releasing" older workers, or risk multi-million-dollar payouts to disgruntled staff.

START

1. DICTATION: The teacher will read to you slowly and clearly the first half of the first paragraph, repeating passages where necessary. Students will write down the speech. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again.

Self correct your work. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total no of errors. 10 are acceptable. Any more is room for improvement!

2. READING: Get students to read the passage aloud. Swap readers every paragraph.

3. VOCABULARY: Students circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

4. AGEIST LAWS: Walk around the class and talk to as many students as you can. Find out their opinions on ageism. Share your finding with new partners.

The teacher can select some students to find out your results.

5. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words from the article are most interesting and which are most boring.

laws / European Union / The Guardian / bankers / human resource departments / multi-million-dollar payouts / pale, stale males / Jurassic Park / Ageism / dinosaurs / solicitor / sexism / too old

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

7. BRAINSTORMING: Write down (or brainstorm) three types of ageism you have read about (in your town/city). Talk about them with your partner(s). Will the new laws help to change this? Are these typical examples?

8. OPINIONS: With your partner(s), talk about the following opinions on ageism. Change partners and share your findings.

- a. It is a good idea for a company to ask for a photograph to go with a C.V.
- b. Attractive young women employees are better for business than older female employees.
- c. People should have the right to retire when they want.
- d. Being 'over the hill' at 40 means you are on the job scrap heap.
- e. People over 60 should retire tomorrow.
- f. Human resource departments should retrain their staff to accommodate the new laws.
- g. Mick Jagger should retire as he is over 60.
- h. Working after the age of 60 is bad for your health.

New ageism laws let older bankers sue for millions (October 4, 2006)

9. ONE MINUTE: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with ageism. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

10. FIVE MINUTES: Choose three of these words. Write a sentence using each word. Try to associate them with ageism. Discuss with your partner. Spend five minutes on this exercise.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Traders in their 40's in one bank are known as "dinosaurs" T / F
- b. Everyone is happy with the new laws. T / F
- c. Employment Equality Age regulations became law on September 1 T / F
- d. The Times newspaper said, "Ageism is still seen as not that bad..." T / F
- e. Sam Mercer is the chief executive of the Employers' Forum T / F
- f. "Pale, stale males" are white middle-aged men T / F
- g. New employment laws in the EU will make it harder for older people to get a job T / F
- h. Many middle-aged bankers when fired often suffer financial ruin. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| a. speeding | limit |
| b. unacceptable | organizations |
| c. workers | hands-on |
| d. income | fed up |
| e. capped | bombing |
| f. disgruntled | inexcusable |
| g. males | sacked |
| h. companies | females |
| i. fired | employees |
| j. experience | earnings |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---|---|
| a. Compensation for unfair dismissal claims | not bad like speeding |
| b. Racism and sexism are viewed | many middle-aged bankers |
| c. Ageism is seen as | Age Regulations |
| d. Financial ruin for | is happy with the new laws |
| e. The new laws mean staff can | should not receive higher pay |
| f. The Employment Equality | was capped at around \$110,000 |
| g. However not everyone | like drunk driving - totally unacceptable |
| h. 16-24-year-olds believed older workers | have been introduced in the EU |
| i. New employment laws | call traders in their 40s "dinosaurs" |
| j. One bank allowed staff to | claim significant levels of compensation |

READING GAP FILL:

Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

New ageism laws let older bankers sue for millions

New _____ laws have been introduced in the European Union that will help middle-aged and older workers. The Employment _____ Age Regulations became law on October 1 as part of an EU-wide initiative to stop _____ in the workplace. Legislators decided discrimination against older workers and older job seekers was on a par with sex _____ and that against ethnic minorities. The new laws mean staff can claim significant levels of _____ from employers found guilty of firing staff for being "too old". Sam Mercer, chief executive of the Employers' Forum on Age told The Guardian newspaper: "Ageism is still seen as not that bad like speeding. While _____ and _____ are viewed like drunk driving - totally unacceptable." However, not everyone is happy with the new laws. The Guardian reports a recent study which revealed 70% of 16-24-year-olds believed older _____ should not receive higher pay because of their age or experience.

compensation
equality
racism
ageism
discrimination
employment
sexism
workers

Those likely to most benefit from the new laws are middle-aged _____, who are often "let go" by their _____ for being less dynamic than their younger and more ambitious counterparts. In effect, this means the law will give greater protection to white middle-aged men - called "pale, stale males" by _____ resource departments. The Guardian reports that one bank allowed staff to call traders in their 40s "dinosaurs" and their desks as "_____ Park", according to a leading employment law solicitor. Before the new law was passed, these workers had a very hard time reconstructing their lives after being wrongly fired by companies. Compensation for _____ dismissal claims was capped at around \$110,000, which is a fraction of the income for many bankers in their 40s. This often meant _____ ruin for many middle-aged bankers. The new laws change that. Companies now need to be extremely careful when "releasing" older workers, or _____ multi-million-dollar payouts to _____ staff.

human
unfair
risk
bankers
Jurassic
disgruntled
financial
employers

LISTENING GAP FILL

Listen and fill in the spaces.

New ageism laws let older bankers sue for millions

New employment _____ have been introduced in the European Union that will help _____ older workers. The Employment Equality Age Regulations became law on October 1 as part of an EU-wide initiative to stop _____ in the workplace. Legislators decided discrimination against older workers and older job seekers was on a par with _____ and that against ethnic minorities. The new laws mean staff can claim significant levels of _____ employers found guilty of firing staff for being "too old". Sam Mercer, chief executive of the Employers' Forum on Age told The Guardian newspaper: "Ageism is still seen as not that bad like speeding. While racism and sexism are viewed like drunk driving - totally unacceptable." However, not everyone _____ the new laws. The Guardian reports a recent study which revealed 70% of 16-24-year-olds believed older workers should not receive higher pay because of _____ or experience.

Those likely to most _____ the new laws are middle-aged bankers, who are often "let go" by their employers for being less dynamic than their _____ more ambitious counterparts. In effect, this means the law will give greater protection to white middle-aged men - called "pale, _____" by human resource departments. The _____ reports that one bank allowed staff to call traders in their 40s "_____ " and their desks as "Jurassic Park", according to a leading employment law solicitor. Before the new law was passed, these workers had a very hard time reconstructing their lives after being wrongly fired by companies. _____ unfair dismissal claims was capped at around \$110,000, which is a fraction of the income for many bankers in their 40s. This often meant financial ruin for many middle-aged bankers. The new laws change that. Companies now need to be extremely careful when " _____ " older workers, or risk multi-million-dollar payouts to _____ staff.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words '**middle-aged**' and '**employment**'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "AGEISM" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about ageism in the workplace.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- dinosaurs
- The Guardian
- pale, stale males
- bankers
- 16-24-year olds
- legislators
- millions
- par
- guilty
- racism
- dynamic
- age

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think of ageism?
- c. Do you know anyone who has been affected by ageism? If so describe it.
- d. Do you think the European Union is right to have introduced these new employment laws?
- e. How do you see employers reacting to this new law?
- f. Will employers try to get around it?
- g. Will company pensions be affected by these new laws?
- h. Do you think it's a good idea for companies to push workers out because of their age?
- i. Do you think the new laws will act as a lever to help more older workers to stay in employment, thus reducing the burden of paying pensions on both the state and private pension schemes?
- j. Why do some companies ask for a photograph to go with a C.V.

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Is there ageism in your country?
- d. Could the new age discrimination laws endanger the minimum wage system?
- e. Were you aware of the of new ageism laws before this lesson?
- f. Describe your feelings on age discrimination being abolished in recruitment, employment and training.
- g. What are your thoughts on the enforced retirement age before 65 being abolished for most?
- h. Are you in favour of the new age discrimination laws?
- i. Did you like this discussion?
- j. Why is that many large companies hire young women to work in the reception area rather than older women who have a lifetime of experience.

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING : ROLE PLAY

AGEISM: EXERCISE A

Split the class into groups of 3.

Student A is the employer of one of the big high street banks. You have selected one of the following people for the job of receptionist (i.e. no 1, 2, or 3)

Student B is a judge in a court

Student C is one of the following not selected by student A:

1 A very attractive young woman. You have just finished school/university and are looking for a job.

2 A 45 year old woman looking for a job as a receptionist. You have 20 years experience as a receptionist in your previous company. You were made redundant.

3 A 60 year old woman / man receptionist hoping to stay on in their job rather than forcibly retire At 60.

ROLE PLAY: You are in court.

Student C has taken the employer (student A) to court as they feel they should have got the job.

Student C should argue their case. The employer should defend theirs.

The judge (student B) has to listen to both sides. Student B has to decide whether student C will win their case or not of not of getting the job(or staying on). What compensation if any will you give? Ultimately decide who is right.

The teacher may select your group for in front of class role play. Good luck!

SPEAKING : ROLE PLAY

AGEISM: EXERCISE B

Split the class into groups of 3.

Student A is the boss of a department in one of the big high street banks. You have fired student C from their job.

Student B is a judge in a court

Student C is a 48 year old man / woman who worked as a manager in one of the big high street banks. You have been sacked for being: (or use all 3 examples)

- 1** too old for the job at '48'
- 2** too expensive. You earn too much. Your employer can hire someone younger and cheaper.
- 3** a threat to your new younger boss who wants staff to be generally under 35 - (but won't admit this). Hiring new younger staff will save the new boss money. Less years experience is immaterial as the new replacement for this particular job will mean less of a threat.

ROLE PLAY: You are in court.

Student C has taken the employer (student A) to court as they feel they should not have been sacked – unfair dismissal.

Student C should argue their case. The employer should defend theirs.

The judge (student B) has to listen to both sides. Student B has to decide whether student C will win their case (or not) or not of losing their job. What compensation if any will you give? Decide.

The teacher may select your group for in front of class role play. Good luck!

SPEAKING : QUESTIONNAIRE

EXERCISE C

Each student in the class writes down one example of ageism. Fill in the table below with as many details as you can.

Students: Go round the class comparing examples. Find three other examples of ageism. Discuss each one. Note your findings below.

Discuss with each other:

- A** The strengths
- B** The weaknesses
- C** The treats
- D** The opportunities
- E** The new ageism law and how it will affect other cases like this one in the future.

The teacher will select students to discuss their findings. Decide which is the best example.

Your example	
Example 1	
Example 2	
Example 3	

HOMEWORK

- 1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.
- 2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find information about laws regarding age in your country. Talk about what you discover with your partner(s) in the next lesson.
- 3. NEWS REPORT:** Write a newspaper report on ageism in your town/country. (Minimum 100 words) Read your report to your classmates in the next lesson. Which report was best and why?
- 4. LETTER:** Write a letter to the Guardian newspaper. Tell them what you think of the new employment laws in the European Union. Ask three questions. Show your letter to your classmates in the next lesson. Your classmates will write a reply.

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. F d. F e. T f. T g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| a. speeding | bombing |
| b. unacceptable | inexcusable |
| c. workers | employees |
| d. income | earnings |
| e. capped | limit |
| f. disgruntled | fed up |
| g. males | females |
| h. companies | organisations |
| i. fired | sacked |
| j. experience | hands-on |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|---|---|
| a. Compensation for unfair dismissal claims | was capped at around \$110,000 |
| b. Racism and sexism are viewed | like drunk driving - totally unacceptable |
| c. Ageism is seen as | not bad like speeding |
| d. Financial ruin for | many middle-aged bankers |
| e. The new laws mean staff can | claim significant levels of compensation |
| f. The Employment Equality | Age Regulations |
| g. However not everyone | is happy with the new laws |
| h. 16-24-year-olds believed older workers | should not receive higher pay |
| i. New employment laws | have been introduced in the EU |
| j. One bank allowed staff to | call traders in their 40s "dinosaurs" |

READING GAP FILL:

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