

Age is no barrier to a new career

By **Nic Paton**

Older workers are restarting their careers from scratch in an effort to beat age discrimination later on in life. Despite new laws coming into force this October banning age discrimination in the workplace, many employees still fear being thrown on the job scrapheap as they get older.

As people live longer, working lives are stretching and more employees are being forced to carry on to fund their retirement, so a second or even third career is becoming increasingly common.

Though more big-name companies, such as B&Q, Asda and Barclays, have mixed-age workforce policies, there is a lot of evidence that older workers can end up with a raw deal if they fail to take control of their careers.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development says half of workers believe they were overlooked for a new job because of their age.

Many big firms are witnessing older workers applying to join management programmes that are the traditional preserve of new graduates, says Tom Crawford, director at London recruitment consultancy Bernard Hodes. 'If you are going to work until 70, you can peak in one career in your forties and still have time to start afresh and reach the management heights the second time around in your sixties,' he says.

And it is not only older workers who are switching career because they fear being thrown on the scrapheap when they are regarded as too old.

Charlie Rumens is only 32, but he has turned his back on a 15-year career in retail to retrain as a plumber. He was most recently a pharmacy buyer for

Sainsbury's, but believes the long-term prospects in plumbing are better, particularly if he starts his own business.

Charlie, from Harringay, north London, says: 'The hours are long in retail and you often work weekends. It really is a younger person's game. I needed something that would give me a skill I could use for the rest of my working life.'

Charlie took voluntary redundancy last

year and is now close to completing a plumbing course through New Career Skills, a training provider that usually specialises in helping older workers to retrain for the construction sector.

He says: 'You could earn pots of cash in retail if you work all hours, but for me it's all about quality of life and knowing I'll be able to do something where I'll be my own boss for the rest of my life.'



Picture: DARREN JACK

Switching early: Even at 32, Charlie Rumens wanted a change and became a plumber