

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Employment opportunities for people over 50](#)

Evidence from Karen (Wrexham) – EOP 09

9 January 2015

William Graham AM
c/o The Clerk
Enterprise and Business Committee
National Assembly for Wales
CARDIFF
CF99 1NA

Dear Sir

50+ Employment opportunities

I write in response to your letter published in the Wrexham Leader dated 3 January 2015.

I am over 50 myself and deal on a daily basis with people of all ages who are studying for qualifications which they will need in any modern workplace. I do this in my capacity as a lecturer in further education and the target qualifications of my cohort are the OCR (RSA) Text Processing Business Professional Certificates and Diplomas at levels 1,2 and 3 depending on the ability of the individual. They are also aiming to achieve the European Computer Driving Licence during the course.

The programme of study is open to anyone over the age of 16 but is aimed at the more mature learner who has been made redundant or has worked in other sectors and wants to master a computer and Microsoft software packages to gain transferrable skills for use in the administration fields of any business sector. Perhaps an individual with childcare or carer responsibilities who is looking ahead to, and preparing for a time, when they can enter the workforce.

The problems our students of all ages encounter include:-

- Ambiguous rules from Government
 - If a student is in receipt of Job Seeker's Allowance he/she is not allowed to undertake education or training for 16 hours a week. It is deemed to render them unavailable for work even though the course is delivered on only 4 days for 4 hours each day. Potentially they have 8 hours after college before midnight and 3 whole days to seek paid activity outside the course.
 - College courses are identified as "full time" if they are 16 hours or more
- Under 16 hours is "part-time" and must therefore be paid for. Who on JSA can afford the £4,500+ fee that would be applicable for an International delegate?

The above is a major contributor to the obstacle of finding work. This is a vicious circle which renders the keen and motivated then resigned to have to give up in order to retain JSA and eat. Let alone the nightmare challenge of presenting oneself for an interview in the correct clothes when funds are non-existent.

In his letter of May 2014 to all Principals and Chief Executives in Further Education the Minister for Education and Skills has Tackling the Poverty Agenda as Priority 1. Perhaps this needs to be communicated to those Work Coaches making decisions on JSA at the Job Centres around Wales.

Those that attend and complete can, and do, achieve up to a level 3 qualification in 10 months.

Not all prospective students can come during the day and it is sad to see the demise of evening classes where existing staff in local authority and NHS settings cannot initiate new or upgrade their existing qualifications. Qualifications have a shelf life and need to be refreshed if they are to be valued by subsequent employers. Lifelong learning is under threat.

In recent years the learners have been encouraged to volunteer for one day a week in an administrative setting at a charity, school or sme. This gets them back to time management and interaction with customers, clients and the public. The experiences have proved valuable in terms of good CV evidence and references but most importantly some students have adopted our advice and made themselves' invaluable and this has led to permanent employment opportunities for some who have been able to share their new skills in established small business an example of this is mailmerge.

This has done wonders for the confidence of individuals who have been variously victims of redundancy, domestic abuse, eviction and debilitating health issues but for whom the door to education and self-improvement must not be closed.

- 🕒 In July 2014 a local employer contacted the college and asked for detail of a vacancy to be circulated to potential interview candidates.
- 🕒 The response from some was clouded by the consideration of their parents who would lose benefits if the offspring became employed. It took some persuasion by my colleague for an individual to apply for the three month trial leading to a recognised apprenticeship opportunity.
- 🕒 Thankfully it is happening and the abilities of the individual and qualifications gained in FE are being utilized.

There are many families now where two and three generations have been 'paid' by the system and will never know what a P60 annual tax statement is.

Yours faithfully

Karen (Wrexham)