

Age Alliance Wales

Response to National Assembly Committee Inquiry Employment Opportunities for Older People



Age Alliance Wales would like to make the following comments and recommendations in response to the issues raised by the Committee:

- **Availability and sustainability of local job opportunities**
Incentives for employers to take on older workers are needed such as a Jobs Growth Wales style programme.
- **Need for relevant support and skills training**
PRIME Cymru, the only Wales based charity dedicated to supporting people aged 50 and over should be supported to become and remain economically active. PRIME Cymru supports over 1000 individuals every year, and that is just the tip of the iceberg.

A particular barrier faced by older people with sight loss can be the reliance on web-based advertisement of opportunities and online recruitment processes which are often not compatible with accessibility software such as screen magnification or screen readers. As a result, they often need one to one support in assisting people to locate job opportunities and apply for them.

- **Transport difficulties, including availability and cost (especially in rural areas)**
Supplemented travel where public transport is available would enable more people in rural areas to access work. Incentives for employers could be used to enable them to either provide a pick up/drop off service, or to reimburse employees with travel costs for a time limited period.
- **Lack of confidence (for example, following redundancy)**
Tailored support is needed to help individuals to improve their confidence and self-esteem, and to understand how low self confidence affects people when looking for and finding employment.

Older people with sight loss require access to information in their preferred format (eg braille, large print); confidence and ability to travel independently using public transport; confidence and competence using computers adapted with appropriate assistive technology and software; the skills and confidence to communicate their needs and associated workplace adjustments to employers in a positive way.

- **Assisting and supporting people with additional challenges (for example, those with a disability)**

Address the challenges/barriers which are most relevant to the individual – ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL. 18% of the clients supported by PRIME Cymru have a disability or work limiting health condition, but they have requested support because they feel their age is the biggest barrier/challenge to finding and securing employment.

Employers have low awareness of how older people with sensory loss can be supported into work. Employers sometimes have a perception that older people with sensory loss will be expensive employees. Increased awareness of Access to Work particularly would help with this. This also applies to volunteering opportunities for older people with sensory loss, where Access to Work doesn't apply and so people with sensory loss are disadvantaged if they want to volunteer in their community. This can then reduce their opportunities to find employment.

Around a third of blind and partially sighted people are in employment; 27 per cent of blind and partially sighted people leave work because of the onset of sight loss or deterioration of their sight. An improvement in the support available to enable those who are blind or are partially sighted to stay in work is needed.

- **Potential barriers to older people accessing employment owing to caring responsibilities (for example, caring for elderly parents)**

People aged 50 and over are being relied upon by both parents and children to provide care, hence the term 'sandwich carers'. Although this may be seen as a potential barrier, it can also mean that older workers are more flexible about when they work such as early mornings and evenings when those with young families may be less able.

- **The role of older people in mentoring younger workers and passing on their skills and knowledge**

There are things both younger and older workers can learn from one another, younger workers can share their knowledge and experience of social media and modern technologies for example, whilst older worker can share their general life experiences and skills as well as any specialist skills they may have which can be passed on.

- **How older people re-entering the labour market can affect the number of jobs and career progression opportunities available to younger workers**

Not all older people finding employment are re-entering the labour market, there are a considerable number who have never worked, and are finding employment for the first time in their 50's and beyond. The balance needs to be re-dressed across all age groups, and opportunities should be equal for all.

- **Assisting those from areas of high unemployment**

It is important to identify whether high unemployment in a certain area is historical, and if so, is it a case of breaking the cycle. Case studies can be effective in demonstrating the positive difference being in work makes to individuals but need to feature people who can be identified with. It is also important to highlight the health benefits of being in work.

- **The impact and value-for-money of European funding**

To date there has been an inequality in the amount of money invested on older peoples programmes compared to those for the younger age group.

We would like equality of opportunity for all age groups, and it would be good if Wales took the lead on this.