



Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru

Response from the Older People's Commissioner for Wales

to the

Welsh Government Response to the NAFW Enterprise and Business Committee Report on Employment Opportunities for People Over 50

September 2015

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About the Commissioner

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people across Wales, standing up and speaking out on their behalf. She works to ensure that those who are vulnerable and at risk are kept safe and ensures that all older people have a voice that is heard, that they have choice and control, that they don't feel isolated or discriminated against and that they receive the support and services they need. The Commissioner's work is driven by what older people say matters most to them and their voices are at the heart of all that she does. The Commissioner works to make Wales a good place to grow older - not just for some but for everyone.

The Older People's Commissioner:

- Promotes awareness of the rights and interests of older people in Wales.
- Challenges discrimination against older people in Wales.
- Encourages best practice in the treatment of older people in Wales.
- Reviews the law affecting the interests of older people in Wales.

Welsh Government Response: NAFW Employment Opportunities for People Over 50 Report

1. As the Older People's Commissioner for Wales I welcome the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government response to the Enterprise and Business Committee Report on Employment Opportunities for People Over 50¹. This response builds upon my written evidence², oral evidence in January 2015, and letter to the Committee Chair in August 2015³. I am pleased to contribute to the Committee's Inquiry once again and highlight this crucial issue.
2. Whilst there is much to welcome in the response there are areas where the Welsh Government must go further to improve employment opportunities for people over 50.

Recommendations 1, 3 and 7

3. These recommendations relate to the Welsh Government undertaking research to better understand the current situation and to identify the key barriers preventing older people from taking up employment. This is much needed as there is a dearth of evidence and, as emphasised in the report, up-to-date and accurate analysis is urgently required in order to make evidence-based policy decisions. The Deputy Minister's acceptance of these recommendations in principle is therefore welcomed.
4. As I emphasised in my letter to the Committee Chair, whilst much of my work is collaborative in approach I expect that the Welsh Government leads on this research and fully supports the work of the 'Opportunities for Learning and Employment' strand of Ageing Well in Wales, including encouraging other partners e.g. Careers Wales to participate.

¹ <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s43365/%20Government%20response%20-%20September%202015.pdf>

² <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s35635/EBC4-03-15%20p.1%20Older%20Peoples%20Commissioner%20for%20Wales.pdf>

³ <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s43306/Letter%20from%20the%20Older%20Peoples%20Commissioner%20for%20Wales%20-%202014%20August%202015.pdf>

5. With adequate support from the Welsh Government, the Centre for Ageing and Dementia Research, also a partner in Ageing Well, could undertake this research. Furthermore, using the expertise of the Opportunities for Learning and Employment Expert Advisory Group, an established platform that brings together those partners who can make a real difference in improving employment prospects for people over 50, is crucial in order to provide advice and disseminate information amongst partner networks. Through Ageing Well in Wales, I am prepared to work with the Welsh Government to develop these research proposals.

Recommendations 4 and 6

6. Regarding the recommendation on a Welsh Government-led initiative to do more to challenge age discrimination, I warmly welcome the Deputy Minister's acceptance in principle. Ageism and age discrimination are key barriers to employment for many older people, and much more needs to be done to tackle this.
7. The Deputy Minister refers to existing activity undertaken by myself via the Ageing Well in Wales Programme and the National Partnership Forum (NPF), and that there are no additional financial implications. I must emphasise that neither Ageing Well nor the NPF receive specific Government funding, and therefore further support is required to progress with the work undertaken by both the Programme and Forum.
8. Ensuring that the Welsh Government leads on work to challenge age discrimination sends a strong positive message that Wales is a nation that recognises the benefits of employing older people and promotes a culture of age-friendly employers. Welsh Government efforts should complement my 'Say No to Ageism' awareness raising campaign, to be launched in October 2015.

9. Furthermore, Welsh Government support to complement the UK Government Age Positive campaign⁴ and engage with Welsh employers, particularly SMEs, could be hugely impactful. I welcome the acceptance of this recommendation in principle and the development of a Communication Plan to engage with employers and invest in skills. Partnership working between the Welsh Government and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is crucial to coordinate efforts in promoting age-friendly workplaces and encourage employers to tackle ageism and age discrimination, and through Ageing Well in Wales and my 'Say No to Ageism' awareness raising campaign I will support the roll out of the Communication Plan and engagement with employers.

Recommendation 5

10. The Deputy Minister's rejection of this recommendation, designing a scheme similar to Jobs Growth Wales for those over 50 seeking to re-enter the labour market, is regrettable. My written evidence, and the report itself, made it clear that in an employment context, older people are largely a forgotten group and very often an after-thought when it comes to employment schemes and programmes.

11. There are four times as many people over 50 who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) as there are under 25, and yet they receive little support and attention to re-enter the labour market. Regarding the reference to the long-term trend in employment and inactivity rates for this particular age cohort, whilst economic inactivity for people aged 50-64 had decreased once again at the UK level in 2014/15 to 28.5%, in Wales the figure has increased to 33.2%⁵. This has resulted in a further 10,000 jobless older people in Wales that may be attributable to the inequitable levels of employability support available.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/age-positive>

⁵ <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Business-Economy-and-Labour-Market/People-and-Work/Economic-Inactivity/economicinactivityratesexcludingstudents-by-welshlocalarea-year>

12. With an ageing population and not enough young people leaving education (7 million) to fill the estimated 13.5 million job vacancies at the UK level in the next decade⁶, more must be done to engage with the current ‘missing million’ i.e. those over 50 who have been made ‘involuntarily workless’⁷, helping individuals and local and national economies in the process.
13. I do not agree that a complete business case for a scheme similar to Jobs Growth Wales has not been presented. There are very few schemes to help older people back into employment or to ensure that they have the right skills to remain in the labour market. Whilst I welcome the acknowledgement that older people face significantly different barriers to employment than those in other age groups, I am disappointed that the Welsh Government is not prepared to discuss and develop an appropriate and equitable programme for the large number of jobless people over 50 in Wales. Through Ageing Well in Wales I would be prepared to work with the Welsh Government to develop a cost effective but appropriate model that addresses these specific barriers, and build on the proposals submitted to the Committee in February 2015⁸.
14. Furthermore, a programme that provides work experience for people over 50 could be hugely beneficial and act as a ‘gateway’ to full or part-time employment. Work experience could provide the impetus to develop new skills, gain confidence and adapt to new working environments. Jobs Growth Wales has made a real difference in supporting young people and a similar scheme for older people could improve their employment prospects.
15. In the absence of a scheme similar to Jobs Growth Wales, the Deputy Minister refers to the Skills for Employment Wales, a new adult employability programme from April 2016. The focus of this programme will be on core Essential Skills, and I very much

⁶<https://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Manifesto%20General%20Election%202015%20Skills%20for%20Prosperity.pdf>

⁷ http://www.ilcuk.org.uk/images/uploads/publication-pdfs/The_missing_millions_web.pdf

⁸ <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s36927/EBC4-05-15%20p.14%20Older%20Peoples%20Commissioner%20-%20additional%20information.pdf>

welcome this. I have supported the idea of an Essential Skills Package for older people, including financial and digital skills, to improve their employment prospects and increase their resilience in later life. I expect that the new programme will address the particular skills needs of people over 50.

Recommendation 8

16. The Deputy Minister's decision to reject the recommendation to publish a skills strategy specifically for people over 50 is regrettable. The rationale is that this proposal, included in the Strategy for Older People 2013-23, has been superseded by the Welsh Government Policy Statement on Skills and Skills Implementation Plan. However, there are no references in these documents to the specific skillsets that people over 50 require, nor adequate consideration of the key barriers facing people over 50 to remain in or re-enter the labour market e.g. caring responsibilities, qualifications that need updating, improving confidence and the need for flexible working patterns.
17. The Deputy Minister also refers to the Welsh Government Framework for Co-investment in Skills. In my consultation response on the Framework I mentioned the importance of encouraging employers to invest in skills for people of all ages from the outset⁹. Employers in Wales must recognise the benefits of employing a diverse, multi-generational workforce and invest in skills to retain or re-engage with older workers. There is currently insufficient attention on the skills needs of people over 50 and a Welsh Government Skills Strategy for Older People, complemented by a scheme similar to Jobs Growth Wales, could make a real difference in equipping those over 50 with the right skills to get back into employment.

Recommendation 9

⁹ <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s41213/CIS%2007%20-%20Older%20Peoples%20Commissioner%20for%20Wales.pdf>

18. The rejection of the recommendation to produce specific outcomes promoting the economic activity of people over 50 as part of the Strategy for Older People in Wales is regrettable. I fully support an outcomes-focused approach and getting people over 50 back into employment can lead to a range of positive outcomes, including increased financial resilience and reduced susceptibility to poverty and social isolation, positive contributions to an individual's physical and mental health and wellbeing, and improvements in skills, confidence and ability to adapt to changes in later life. As previously mentioned, there is little evidence on the employment issues facing people over 50, and data on how many older people, particularly between 50 and State Pension age, are 'NEETs' and are looking to re-enter the labour market is scarce.
19. The Deputy Minister refers to the Skills Performance Measures, published in September 2014¹⁰. Whilst a better understanding of how these measures monitor skills policy and programmes to support jobs and growth, financial sustainability and equality and equity is welcomed, there are no specific references to the particular skills issues facing those over 50. The Measures refer to data on the equality of access to employment and skills programmes. Whilst the Welsh Government maintains that the vast majority of employment and skills programmes are age-neutral, in reality the programmes are geared towards those under 25 years old. Furthermore, in some sectors e.g. the care industry, those over 25 must fund their own training and employers are often dis-incentivised from employing or offering apprenticeships to those over 50¹¹.
20. People over 50 who are looking for employment are not experiencing a level playing field and the Welsh Government must go beyond the Skills Implementation Plan and Skills Performance Measures to support the economic activity of those aged 50 and over. For example, the Welsh Government could consider the

¹⁰ <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/140930-skills-performance-measures-en.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s41213/CIS%2007%20-%20Older%20Peoples%20Commissioner%20for%20Wales.pdf>

proposals by Niace Dysgu Cymru in their ‘Skills for Prosperity’ publication to make personal mid-career reviews available to all adults, bringing together information on education and skills to help people decide what further skills development they need, as well as doing more to ensure that those over 50 benefit from apprenticeships, an effective ‘gateway’ back into employment¹².

Recommendation 10

21. I welcome the acceptance of the recommendation to devolve DWP skills programmes to Wales in principle. The Deputy Minister’s statement that there is considerable advantage in taking over responsibility for the Work Programme is strongly supported. Such an approach means that the Welsh Government can provide tailored support to support people of all ages back into employment and address Wales-specific issues.

22. As I have previously mentioned, strong partnership working between the Welsh Government and DWP is crucial in order to coordinate efforts and minimise duplication, leading to better, more impactful interventions that supports people over 50 on the ground. The previous UK Government proposed some positive reforms to fight ageism in the workplace, including a proposal to introduce older workers champions across the UK¹³. It would be hugely beneficial if these proposals were taken forward by the current Government and an older workers champion for Wales, working closely with the Welsh Government, is one example of effective cooperation between Governments.

Recommendation 11

23. I warmly welcome the Deputy Minister’s acceptance of this recommendation. As I have previously emphasised, despite being age-neutral in rhetoric, most employment and skills programmes

¹² <http://www.niacecymru.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Final%20Manifesto%20English.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fundamental-reform-to-fight-ageism-in-the-workplace-older-workers-scheme-to-tackle-age-discrimination>

concentrate on those under 25 years old in practice. Wales has a ‘forgotten workforce’ and a wealth of knowledge and experience that is currently underutilised and underappreciated. Better support for those over 50 benefits individuals, employers and local and national economies; a recent report by the UK Business Champion for Older Workers suggests that extending working lives and retaining, retraining and recruiting older workers could add an extra £55bn to the UK GDP¹⁴.

24. It is crucial that younger people are given the best start in life and are supported into education, employment and training, however it is also crucial that those over 50, who want and need to remain in or return to employment, are given similar levels of support. Many of the 205k jobless people in the 50-64 age group in Wales would like to work¹⁵. The lack of opportunity and access to support is an equality issue that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The Deputy Minister’s acknowledgement that the Welsh Government needs to monitor the impact of prioritising youth engagement and employment on older people is welcomed, and I expect that the forthcoming Skills for Employment Wales Programme will better address the needs of those over 50, fully supported by the existing Skills Performance Measures.

Conclusions

25. I am pleased that employment opportunities for people over 50 in Wales, an issue that has received little attention for far too long, is now on the agenda. The Committee’s report is warmly welcomed with some positive recommendations that, if implemented, could do much to improve the employment prospects of those over 50 across Wales.

¹⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/411420/a-new-vision-for-older-workers.pdf

¹⁵ <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Business-Economy-and-Labour-Market/People-and-Work/Economic-Inactivity/economicinactivityratesexcludingstudents-by-welshlocalarea-year> (Economically inactive 196k, Jobseekers Allowance claimants 9k)

26. There is much to welcome in the Welsh Government's response, however the rejection of some key recommendations is regrettable and a missed opportunity in providing better support to older people who want or need to remain in or re-enter the labour market. I will discuss these issues further with the Deputy Minister in our forthcoming meeting and I look forward to updating the Committee in our 7 October meeting.