

## **Paper to the Enterprise and Business Committee: a follow-up to the Welsh Government's Written Response to the Committee's report on Employment Opportunities for People Over 50**

The Welsh Government's written response to the Enterprise and Business Committee Report on Employment Opportunities for People Over 50 has now been issued. I hope that Committee members have had the opportunity to consider the points which were raised within that response, including the rationale for why certain recommendations were not accepted at this point in time.

In advance of my attendance at Committee on the 7 October I would like to take the opportunity to summarise the points I have raised previously and to comment on what I see as the underpinning themes which appear to be central to the 11 recommendations put forward by the Committee.

### **Developing the evidence base and assessing impact**

A number of the recommendations focused on developing an evidence base to look specifically at those individuals over 50. I fully recognise the benefit of conducting such work. As noted within the Welsh Government written response, there is a commitment to progress a number of the activities proposed subject to resource and acknowledging the research and statistical information already at our disposal.

Following the publication of the Policy Statement on Skills in January 2014 we have made a number of policy and programme changes aimed at ensuring that we are able to meet the long-term ambition of a sustainable and competitive skills system for Wales. I am committed to ensuring that the actions being taken can be appropriately assessed in terms of their impact on the Welsh economy, employers and individuals. For this reason we published Skills Performance Measures in September 2014 and these are continuing to be refined and integrated within Welsh Government policy and programme delivery.

The Skills Performance Measure for *Equality and Equity* will provide greater scrutiny of support for those groups with protected characteristics, including older workers. This will provide a strong evidence base for measuring the impact of policies and allow us to redirect resources, where appropriate.

### **Communication and engagement**

The Committee have highlighted a number of areas where engagement should take place between the Welsh Government and other stakeholders. I am also aware of the proposal from the Older People's Commissioner which suggests a designated ministerial lead should be put in place linked to the Older People's Strategy. I am due to meet with the Older People's Commissioner shortly and I should therefore be better placed to comment on this proposal when I attend Committee in October.

## **Employment support**

As noted within the Welsh Government's written response to Committee, devolution of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) employment programmes has been a key consideration over recent months following the publication of the St. David's Day command paper in late February. I hope Committee members will appreciate that these considerations are both complex and potentially lengthy. However I would also like to reassure members that discussions with the DWP are ongoing and I am committed to ensuring that, whatever the outcome, we gain a consistent and responsive employment offer for Wales which is of direct benefit to individuals of all ages.

As the discussions with the UK Government progress we are continuing to make a range of programmes available to employers and individuals which will be of direct benefit to those people aged over 50. I provided a breakdown of these within my earlier paper to Committee, including the support from successful programmes such as ReAct. I appreciate that Committee, supported by the input received from stakeholders, would wish the Welsh Government to progress a Jobs Growth Wales scheme for the over 50s. However, as noted within the Welsh Government's response, the rationale for Jobs Growth Wales is to support young people to gain the valuable work experience needed to advance in the labour market and to mitigate the long-term economic 'scarring' impacts of youth unemployment. This remains a priority for the Welsh Government.

## **Ongoing skills policy and strategy**

I have previously highlighted that the focus of recent policy and programme changes have been to respond to the challenges noted within the Policy Statement on Skills and the need to develop a sustainable and competitive skills system for Wales. To date we have progressed work in a range of areas including a consultation and extensive policy work on apprenticeships, the publication of the Framework for Co-investment in Skills, the focus on impact supported by the Skills Performance Measures, support for regional skills policy underpinned by the work of the three Regional Skills Partnerships and the ongoing engagement with DWP on the future of employment support in Wales.

At this point, and given the change programme already underway to address the social and economic challenges facing the Welsh economy, I cannot commit to producing additional policy or strategies focusing specifically on older people in Wales. However I have accepted a number of the Committee's recommendations focused on developing an evidence base to look specifically at those individuals over 50 and will consider this evidence base carefully as we drive forward our change programme.

I look forward to discussing the above points with Committee members when I attend the scrutiny session on the 7 October.

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