

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Employment opportunities for older people](#)

Evidence from John Gallanders – EOP 01

The following responses are personal from John Gallanders – Chief Officer of AVOW – Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham – County Voluntary Council for Wrexham County Borough: 21st December 2014 and not endorsed by AVOW.

(The responses to the consultation have also included comments and views about the Terms of Reference – these are all in italic)

The National Assembly for Wales's [Enterprise and Business Committee](#) is undertaking an inquiry into employment opportunities for older people. We are considering the 50+ age group.

Terms of reference

- **The barriers that face older people trying to re-enter the labour market**

Institutional discrimination within UK and Welsh Governments and the Public Sector

There is a major issue with the wording of the consultation as there appears to be a presumption that the age of an older person – and thereby stereotyping a particular view is 50 which I believe many people in this age bracket would see as patronizing and somewhat insulting to those in that age range. This has been an issue since the first 'Older Peoples Strategy' was developed with very little participation from this lower age bracket in a consultation they do not acknowledge as being relevant as they do not see themselves as 'Old'.

Looking at the profile of the committee how many actually admit to being 'old' even though they are over 50. The institutional interpretation of older people being 50 + has a significant impact on the mindset of people in this age group as there are also certain expectations that 'older' people are no longer able to fulfill certain roles and there is only one journey they are going on which is a fast pathway to being a pensioner and a 'drain' on society.

The consultations continual reference to 'older people' in the questions is perpetuating the myth about 'old age'.

There is a significant mindset change that has to take place within the institutional system surrounding society to reflect the fact that this age group are now significantly more active both physically and mentally than 20/30 years ago yet the institutional establishment perpetuates a negative view of old age. It appears that the

only part of the establishment that acknowledges any change are the DWP by moving of the retirement age from 65 to reflect the longer average lifespan as well as the economic requirements of state pensions.

- **The extent of age-discrimination and its impact on the recruitment of older people**

The establishment stance is unfortunately often filtered onto the public/private sector and the attitude of employers. People who are already in employment aged 50+ are often viewed by their employer as being part of the 'furniture' and are fully accepted for the role they provide – new people entering are however often seen to be 'old' when applying for jobs due to the perpetuation of age being a measurement of someone's ability to function rather than their actual ability.

Institutional discrimination is at the heart of the issue of age discrimination – it would be worth the committee asking for data from the Welsh Government and National Assembly to identify how many people over 50 have been recruited for the first time into the Civil Service. As a percentage of the total workforce I would estimate that the figure is likely to be below 0.5% of the total recruited over the past 5 years. If the WG and NA are in this position how can they look to promote employment for this age group when they don't have work practices that encourage the principles for the over 50's.

- **Whether there are any disadvantages to older people re-entering the labour market**

Why is the consultation only asking about 'disadvantages'- where is the question about the advantages of employing older people? The Committee have established a negative perspective on their views already by having one sided questions that are not open enough to give a balanced view.

That said there are potential problems for the older 'old' person when they start heading towards retirement in their mid/late 60's and their ability to fully perform their role may become a struggle. The impact of this is that some older people may endure being dismissed due to 'capability' rather than being able to leave work as a normal retiree. This is likely to create a major psychological impact on the person who may have contributed many years to an employer as they are likely to feel they have been cast out in the scrap heap. This scenario is likely to have a significant detrimental impact on the well-being of the individual and within a business both on managers and the remaining workforce.

The traditional view of older people being grandparents looking after grandchildren could in future also see the person having at least one generation of elderly relative that needs care. It will be important that employers are actively encouraged to develop carer friendly workplace policies. If the function of family carer is no longer possible there could be significant financial impact on Social Care budgets as families with children requiring childcare and Adult Social Care with both having to expand to cope with the increasing demand for Social care.

- **The effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Strategy for Older People in Wales 2013-23 in assisting older people into work**

Unfortunately it would appear to be totally ineffective as the strategy has only ONE reference to the word businesses and that was "Number of businesses participating in Public Facilities Grant Scheme". There is NO reference in the document to engagement with businesses to encourage them to be consider potential employers from this age category.

There is a need to be more proactive with the engagement with businesses if the Strategy is to be effective in the field of encouraging employment for the over 50s.

How can a Strategy be written that is intended to promote older people back in the workplace when there is no reference- this seems to be a very grave omission.

- **The support that is most effective for older people trying to re-enter the labour market (particularly programmes and projects).**

Wales Economic Growth Fund is now CLOSED – how many over 50's took up the potential funding for a new business – probably very low due to the risk of needing personal investment. A number of the schemes are European funded and no longer seem to apply as the current round comes to an end- also no guarantee that the support is the same across both Competitive and Convergence areas.

There is no single point of information JCP do not know about all WG schemes and certainly not always linked into smaller localized schemes. There actually appears to be too many schemes available but they are not linked and can create a 'revolving door' with people moving from one support service to another. There is an urgent need for WG and UK Government to streamline the support and create a single access point.

The Committee are urged to assess how many sustainable jobs have either been created or over 50's that will remain in a job after the current European or other Public Sector subsidy comes to an end. Job creation schemes without sustainability are creating false dependency and raising expectations to a level that cannot be maintained.

As part of these terms of reference, the Committee will be considering:

- **The availability and suitability of local job opportunities**

With large scale employment opportunities such as the building of Wylfa 2 , Prison in Wrexham and Swansea Bay tidal energy provision is being made for young people to gain employment or work experience why can't this principle also operate the same for over 50's – this favoritism based on age is surly a discrimination issue.

With such a large number of Public Sector workers now being made redundant or taking voluntary early retirement many of them are in the 50+ age range there is a risk that the age bracket of people seeking employment will increase significantly.

Has WG carried out any research on the age range of people losing jobs in Local Authorities and what support they are being offered to get back into employment?

There could be a skill gap if new jobs become available which require IT skills and appropriate retraining should be available.

There seems to be a very limited range of services to support any 50+ wishing to go self-employed.

There appears to be very little engagement with employers in an area promoting the advantages of having a workforce with a range of ages and the opportunities of taking on those currently unemployed.

- **The need for relevant support and skills training**

Many FE colleges still have an image that they operate primarily for younger people to gain skills rather than targeting adults – this may be a generalization but promotion of training opportunities need improving. The work of local Adult Community Learning (ACL) Partnerships needs to be monitored with specific reference as to how they are addressing the 50 + age range at a county and regional level.

A single point of contact that covers DWP, Benefits and identification of job opportunities would avoid reviling door scenarios that current take place.

- **Transport difficulties, including availability and cost (especially in rural areas)**

Investment in community transport could create jobs and develop an access system that can assist in getting over 50's to work. It would be useful if there is any evidence that transport is a real issue or one that is perceived. Problems often do arise with buses when someone needs to travel on 2 or more buses to get to work – some of the issues are that the bus routes are old and have not taken into account the location of new jobs.

It is not effective to view transport as being an issue for over 50's as this is a none age specific issue effecting youngsters through to people who have retired. Transport for employment needs to be viewed in the round with the other needs of communities and nit as a specific.

There are opportunities to assist with transport needs by developing a national car/journey transport sharing scheme. There are significant savings potentially by bringing people together who need to travel similar routes. There is scope to bring school transport into a system that is not age specific and allow older people to use the same vehicles when there is capacity. Often school buses are seen traveling half empty so assuming costs have already been met additional people accessing service would be cost neutral.

- **Lack of confidence (for example, following redundancy)**

It should be mandatory that all employers making any staff redundant should provide a package of information to assist the employees and ideally provide at least one half days off to go to a job club or support service so that when the day comes the employee are not left in a vacuum.

Confidence building should start before the last day of a redundancy not after – the more pre redundancy preparation the better.

The more support that can be provided pre redundancy the less costly it could be compared with intensive support that could be required for an unsupported person who may turn to a very expensive Health Service for a medical solution to their failing confidence levels which could lead to depression. Investment in appropriate preventative service support is far more cost effective than funding the Health Service to try and resolve a personal mental health.

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

Who sees a disability as an ‘additional challenge’ the person with the disability, the employer or the ‘institutional system’. There may be additional support needs but these should not be seen as a barrier but one that could be addressed easily without the need for it to be seen as a challenge.

Any challenge that does exist is really due to the system of how to access support information for an employer on making any reasonable adjustments etc. or for a prospective employee knowing how to point an employer to the necessary support provision.

Why has the panel adopted what appears to be a negative perspective by seeing disability as a challenge? This really is unlikely to be the attitude of the majority of disabled people who may have a range of issues that span from a non-physical condition to mental health or learning difficulties. There is not a one size fits all so the use of generic terminology is clearly detrimental. There should not be any underestimating of the impact in a few years’ time of the generation that have been labeled ADHD /Autistic etc. that will be hitting the job market so will have a ‘label’ as well as an age issue.

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

Although you have picked out caring for elderly parents as an example this should be none age specific as someone in the 50’s age bracket could equally have a child/grandchild to care for and two elderly generations such as parent and grandparent. 5 generations within the same family will become quite normal within a relatively short period of time. The mutigenerational caring role is now becoming common place and needs research to identify how it will impact on anyone in the work place not just for the over 50’s

Employers should be encouraged to adopt family friendly practice – if they are in receipt of any Public Sector funding or rebates of any sort it should be contractual and be a recognized outcome. All Public Sector bodies should have similar conditions attached to grant schemes they administer on behalf of the Welsh Government.

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

The 50+ age group are an invaluable resource for schools, colleges and businesses in motivating young people by providing mentoring. There is scope that mentoring should occur pre-employment for young people so that the 50+ can identify particular support needs the YP may need before entering a workplace.

Groups such as Rotary offer mock interview schemes but this could be expanded into a fuller mentoring role such as the scheme run by Careers Academies which operates in a number of FE colleges bringing businesses directly in contact with students. (Scheme operates in Coleg Cambria in Wrexham as an example)

It is important that the over 50's participating in such schemes are able to talk through the ethos and ethics of the workplace as well as particular job skills. And having an empathy with young people.

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

This is a potential myth which may not have any substance. Therefore if this is seen as an assumption WG should consider research onto the impact of migrant worker and whether they are a bigger risk to YP getting a job compared to older people. The Polish migrant workforce are generally below the age of 30 thus creating a competitive market for the under 30's within Wales. This factor is probably more relevant on reducing job opportunities compared with older people working longer. This comment is not anti-migrant as it appears without many in the workplace we would actually be short of a labour force in some geographic and job sector. but is one based on observing the numbers that are setting in areas and are successful in their attempts to obtain employment – do we need to do something to assist pupils from Wales gain confidence and an improved work ethic.

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

Without falling into the trap of age discrimination against young people – support in high unemployment areas should not be age specific—people regardless of age should be supported back into employment. By being age specific there is a risk of creating resentment from those not included in the cohort- how do you determine one age group deserves more support than another?

A generic support service should operate in these areas that is run by an agency that has expertise of supporting individuals but more crucially support for business to be able to expand their workforce. Employment support provided from a community

regeneration service is likely to be less effective than one provided from within the business sector.

Identifying jobs in high unemployment areas is likely to be only one element of the support needed for the 50+ in these areas.

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

European funding appears to have been one of the largest failures we have seen in Wales with jobs that are created very often not being sustainable and come to an end once a grant ceases. The most sustainable element of European funding in Wales has been the creation and expansion of WEFO.

One of the key issue is the lack of engagement with the Business Sector who are the prime creator of jobs. Public/Third Sector schemes are often established through European programmes but very rarely are they creating and sustainable jobs. There is substantial funding going to be available in the 2015 round and WG should ensure that this is directed into job creation areas that will be sustainable for at least the next 5 years.

Impact issues not covered in the consultation:

Role of volunteering:

The consultation is lacking any specific reference to what support (if any) the Third Sector can provide – both in terms of direct support services and identifying suitable volunteering. There has been considerable research undertaken that shows that people who engage in volunteering can enhance their ability to get a job.

There are a wide range of organisations spread across voluntary categories that would benefit from over 50's and also provide the necessary support. With the growing number of Social Enterprises there are expanding opportunities for this sector to win contracts and compete with the Private Sector in the provision of job opportunities as well as skill development for volunteer roles.

Role of DWP in developing contract specifications for support that are advantageous to the 50+:

There does not seem to be any reference about the role of JCP and the support that could be provided at the direct point of 'signing on'. Is this issue being avoided as it is not within the control of WG- if this is the case then there is a real risk of not developing an all-inclusive support service to meet the needs of the client. Just because there are two Government involved in the provision of services clients who are unemployed will be looking for a single holistic approach.

Is there a separate consultation taking place on the role of JCP and the satisfaction levels from clients?

Sanctions:

A major issue for many people seeking work are the risks of sanctions and the suspension of benefits. For those over 590 there may be a variety of reasons including caring responsibilities, health appointments or being assessed as doing too much volunteering. This can have a significant impact on the way someone faces up to seeking work and can be detrimental on health and well-being. Is the committee going to look into the impact of sanctions for the 50+ group?