



Developing the Network to Deliver Excellence in Vocational Skills
Datblygu'r Rhwydwaith i Gyflawni Rhagoriaeth mewn Sgiliau Galwedigaethol

**Submission to the Enterprise and Business Committee's
Inquiry into Employment Opportunities for People over 50**

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Introduction

1. The National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) is a membership organisation of over one hundred organisations involved in the delivery of learning in the workplace. It is a Wales wide representative body for all those organisations or individuals involved in the training industry. Members range from small specialist training providers to national and international organisations, as well as local authorities, further education institutions and third sector organisations.
2. The NTfW represents the interests of learners, employers and learning providers across Wales and aims to inform them about all aspects of the education and training agenda.
3. Members work across Wales in rural, urban, bilingual and Welsh medium settings, and have strong links with over 35,000 employers across Wales ranging from small enterprises through medium sized companies to large multi-nationals and public sector organisations.
4. The NTfW maintains close working relationships with Welsh Government Ministers, Welsh Assembly Members, the Department for Education and Skills, Careers Wales, Jobcentre Plus and Sector Skills Councils.

Aim

5. The aim of this Submission Paper is to provide evidence to the Enterprise and Business Committee ahead of a planned meeting which will take place at the Sennedd on Wednesday 25 February 2015.

Background

6. All providers who are commissioned by the Welsh Government to deliver work-based learning programmes in Wales are Members of the NTfW. Within the context of this submission the term 'work-based learning' covers the Welsh Government's Work Ready and Apprenticeships Programmes.
7. All elements of the work-based learning provision in Wales are part funded by the European Social Fund, through the Welsh Government.

Work-based learning Programmes in Wales

8. It is worth noting that during 2012/13 some 4,310 individuals aged 50 and over undertook a work-based learning programme (representing 7% of the overall figure) in Wales. Of these learners, some 3,570 (83%) undertook an Apprenticeship programme. The remainder of the provision centres on Welsh Government's 'adult provision' most notably the Steps to Employment Programme. It is widely recognised the work-based learning offers an excellent return on investment for all involved, and this is supported by the fact that over the same period, 72% of leavers went into new or continued current employment.

9. There are two main work-based learning programmes delivered in Wales, within which many individuals aged 50 and over have access, these being:

Work Ready

10. Work Ready is to support individuals' progress from non-employment into employment. The provision consists of two elements (i.e. Learning for Work and Routeways). Entry to the most appropriate programme to meet each learner's need(s) will be determined through the Provider's own assessment process. For the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 an additional element of the Learning for Work strand will operate to focus on Essential Skills delivery for learners who are mandated into provision through a formal Jobcentre Plus assessment and referral process. This will be referred to as Learning for Work (Skills Conditionality). Individuals who are 18 years of age or over, have left full time education and are ordinarily resident in Wales, are eligible for entry into this programmes (subject to additional eligibility criteria).

Apprenticeships

11. Foundation Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship are employment based learning programmes for employed learners at QCF levels 2 and 3 which follow a framework developed by the relevant industry Sector Skills Council. Each framework specifies the learning activities including qualifications covering occupational competencies and the relevant technical knowledge, Essential Skills Wales and Employment Rights and Responsibilities (ERR).

12. Higher Apprenticeship is an employment based programme for employed learners, at QCF level 4 - 6, and follows a framework developed by the relevant Sector Skills Council. Each framework specifies learning activities, including qualifications covering occupational competencies and the relevant technical knowledge, Essential Skills Wales and Employment Rights and Responsibilities (ERR).

- The age profile of individuals aged 50 and over undertaking an Apprenticeship programme in 2012/13 was:

	Foundation Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship	Higher Apprenticeship	Totals
50-59	1,765 (90%)	1,190 (93%)	305 (94%)	3,260 (91%)
60-64	170 (9%)	85 (6%)	20 (6%)	275 (8%)
65+	25 (1%)	10 (1%)	-	35 (1%)
Total	1,960 (55%)	1,285 (36%)	325 (9%)	3,570

- The gender profile of individuals aged 50 and over undertaking an Apprenticeship programme in 2012/13 was:

	Foundation Apprenticeship	Apprenticeship	Higher Apprenticeship	Totals
Female	1,295 (66%)	980 (76%)	240 (74%)	2,515 (70%)
Male	665 (34%)	305 (24%)	85 (25%)	1,055 (30%)
Total	1,960 (55%)	1,285 (36%)	325 (9%)	3,570

* Adjusted for rounding

13. The tables above shows that of those individuals aged 50 and over undertaking an Apprenticeship, 70% are female, who are, in the main, following a level 2 or level 3 Apprenticeship. Although we are unable to produce evidence at this stage, it is highly likely that these individuals are employed within the Health and Social Care sector, where there are a greater proportion of older females working within the workforce.

14. However, it is a stark fact that as we move forward within an era of continued budgetary restraint, and as Welsh Government attempts to focus its limited budget towards young (16-24) people to tackle the important issue of youth unemployment, individuals that fall outside of this priority area will find it increasingly difficult to access funding to develop their skills, especially at levels 2 and 3.

The barriers that face people over 50 trying to re-enter the labour market

15. The main barriers faced by people 50 and over trying to (re-) enter the labour market are lack of confidence and relevant employability skills, including digital literacy, lack of employment opportunities, and a relatively complex system for them to navigate to identify the most appropriate route to employment.

Whether there are any disadvantages to people over 50 re-entering the labour market

16. NTfW does not see any disadvantages with people 50 or over (re-) entering the labour market.

The effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Strategy for Older People in Wales 2013-23 in assisting people over 50 into work

17. One of the key outcomes in the Welsh Government's Strategy is that "*older people who want to work are able to do so and can access help with re-skilling and re-training*" It is intended that this outcome is achieved by providing "*access to appropriate job and skills (re-) training*", and "*appropriate support programmes to help people over 50 into work or to find new roles*" However, due to current budgetary constraints, work-based learning Programmes in Wales focus the vast majority of funding towards those in the 16-24 year old age bracket.

18. The Welsh Government's Strategy for Older people in Wales states that "*workers aged 50-65 make up over a quarter of the workforce*" However, as the figures above indicate, only 7% of people accessing work-based learning programmes in Wales are aged 50 or over.

19. Furthermore, the NTfW welcomes the commitment made as part of the Ageing Well in Wales Programme whereby the theme of increasing employment opportunities for people aged 50 or over recognises that "*providing people who*

are 50+ with the same chances as anyone else to gain employment and retrain will be vital is Wales is to remain competitive. By adopting more widespread practices for positive healthy ageing, people will have better prospects for remaining in work, giving employers a competitive advantage.”

The support that is most effective for people over 50 trying to re-enter the labour market (particularly programmes and projects).

20. The latest set of verified statistics on work-based learning programmes in Wales (2012/13) indicates that on a learner basis (taking only the final programme of the year) 72% of leavers who were aged 50 or over went into new or continued current employment.

21. NTfW believes that the key to the continued success of work-based learning programmes in Wales is that they are designed and delivered in a complimentary way that allows an individual ‘a ladder of progression’ through to, and on from, a ‘gold standard’ Apprenticeship.

22. NTfW is concerned about the issue of duplication between ‘backbone programmes’ such as the Welsh Government’s Work Ready and Apprenticeships Programmes, and the range of programmes commissioned and delivered by DWP (predominately developed by UK Government) which only serve to offer a layer of duplication.

23. NTfW strongly feels that having one coherent ‘skills offer’ for any individual looking to enter the workforce, regardless of point of entry and identified need, would go a long way to assisting people aged 50 and over into work. We would urge the Committee to make further investigations into this area, with a view to making a recommendation to the Welsh Government that they should call for the continued devolution of DWP ‘skills’ programmes to Wales.

24. Alongside Jobcentre Plus, NTfW would see an increased role for CareersWales, through the recently launched Skills Gateway for Adults, in becoming a significant key player in offering information, advice and guidance to those individuals aged 50 or over looking to (re-) enter the workforce.

The availability and suitability of local job opportunities

25. NTfW is unable to access specific information to quantify the issue of the availability of local job opportunities, and the success of individuals aged 50 and over accessing them. There is a perception amongst providers that these individuals find it difficult in accessing the workforce, unless there is local demand for specific skills sets.

The need for relevant support and skills training

26. Based on all the evidence provided so far, NTfW feels that there is the need for relevant (to the 50 and over age group) support and skills training. The

Work-based Learning sector in Wales is adept at providing skills based training to individuals of all ages, and with its approach to 'learning on the job' and meaningful 'in work support' this type of learning can be a little less daunting to those lacking confidence than other traditional forms of learning.

27. The Welsh Government already has a range of programmes aimed at supporting individuals into work, which provide all of the following:

- Short sharp support on confidence building and motivation
- Delivery of essential skills (inc. digital literacy) contextualised to the workplace
- Work experience and/or volunteering opportunities
- Ongoing and regular workplace support from mentors

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

28. It is recognised that for some, lack of financial resource does have a direct impact on an individual's ability to secure work when there are significant distances to cover.

Lack of confidence (for example, following redundancy)

29. As outlined previously, we do recognise that a lack of confidence (either following redundancy or long periods of unemployment) does impact on an individual's ability to secure employment. However, through work-based learning there are plenty of opportunities for this to be overcome, either through direct intervention or through periods of work placements or volunteering opportunities.

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

30. It is not felt that discrimination is an issue within work-based learning, however, it is recognised that more could be done to encourage the take up of work-based learning programmes amongst groups with 'protected characteristics' NTfW (and its Members) will be looking to work hard with and in support of Welsh Government officials and other stakeholders to ensure that work-based learning in Wales is seen as a viable and inclusive offer.

The role of people over 50 in mentoring younger workers and passing on their skills and knowledge

31. NTfW recognises that people aged 50 and over who are still in the workforce offer a significant amount towards developing the Welsh economy as they assist in the coaching and mentoring of the 'the next generation.' The role of people aged 50 and over in mentoring younger workers is invaluable.

Summary

32. Due to our scope and remit, NTfW feels suitably placed to offer evidence in regards to how best to assist people aged 50 and over into work. During 2012/13, NTfW Members delivered work-based learning programmes (inc. Work Ready and Apprenticeships) to some 4,310 distinct individuals aged 50 and over. The latest set of verified statistics on work-based learning programmes in Wales (2012/13) indicates that on a learner basis (taking only the final programme of the year) 72% of leavers aged 50 and over went into new or continued current employment.

33. In an era of restricted budgets within the post-16 education and training sector, and the increased (and important) focus on tackling youth unemployment, it is difficult to see what more the work-based learning sector could do to assist people aged 50 and over into work if we continue to operate in Wales as we are currently. However, the Welsh Government has already got a range of programmes that they could use (inc. Jobs Growth Wales) should they wish to address the growing issue of unemployment for individuals aged 50 and over.

34. Taken as a whole, and with the above data in mind, NTfW believes that work-based learning programmes are (and could continue to be) a very effective way of assisting people aged 50 and over into work.