

# Employment Opportunities for people over 50

A submission to the Enterprise and Business Committee

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## Introduction

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1. ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Assembly Enterprise and Business Committee's Inquiry into Employment Opportunities for People over 50. ColegauCymru represents the 15<sup>1</sup> further education (FE) colleges and FE institutions in Wales.<sup>2</sup> In 2012/13, there were 174,925 individual students attending college and 184,110 enrolments undertaking a total of 656,285 learning activities.<sup>3</sup> We are happy for our paper to be placed in the public domain.
2. Colleges are major providers of general education provision in Wales, helping to produce some of the best learner outcomes. Colleges are the predominant providers of funded vocational and technical education in Wales, providing about 85% of the total provision. Colleges and FE Institutions work with people of all ages to ensure that their needs as students and learners are addressed. They are the key providers of education and skills training for people over 50, helping people gain employment and to advance their careers.
3. ColegauCymru believes that education investment priorities should include funding for education and skills for adults, including for those over 50. Such investment reaps both social and economic benefits for our country. This is a critical time for the lifelong learning agenda in Wales as key investment decisions will be made in the coming period which will affect learning and skills opportunities for the over 50s. This, in turn, will affect the ability of this age group to take up employment opportunities.
4. Despite the effect of the UK austerity agenda on public investment levels in Wales, we would ask that the National Assembly for Wales uses its annual budget to sustain investment in education and skills opportunities for adults of all ages.

## Colleges' role in upskilling and educating people over 50

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5. Helping people over 50 access employment opportunities is a key role of colleges through the education and training they conduct with people in this age group. Further Education providers are the main deliverers in Wales of educational opportunities for this age range. Colleges and FE Institutions do this through a mix of part-time and full-time learning, through their significant Work-Based Learning operations<sup>4</sup> as well as via Welsh for Adults courses.

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<sup>1</sup> The 15 include 10 FE corporations including St David's Catholic College; the two FE institutions - WEA Cymru and YMCA Community College; and The College Merthyr Tydfil, Coleg Sir Gâr and Coleg Ceredigion which are part of university groupings.

<sup>2</sup> In this paper the terms 'FE college' and 'college' are used to cover FE colleges and FE institutions.

<sup>3</sup> [Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales Statistics 2012/13](#), Welsh Government (June 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Data has been provided to the committee by NTfW in this regard.

6. Colleges deliver these courses as part of mainstream funded provision, or through specifically funded projects (such as *Bridges into Work* involving colleges and councils in the South Wales Valleys, or the *Engagement Gateway* project run by Pembrokeshire College in conjunction with the WCVA). These projects often have a European Social Fund element to them. These successful reengagement programmes are important in ensuring that those affected by long-term unemployment can re-enter the labour market.
7. The continued availability of non-apprenticeship based education and training for this age group is important as apprenticeship provision is generally full-time (when the employment and learning element of the apprenticeship programme is taken into account). Full-time programmes may not be suitable for people over 50 who may have childcare or elder care responsibilities. Some people over 50 with disabilities may also not wish to access full-time apprenticeship programmes.
8. The courses offered to the over 50s include everything from full level 3 programmes of learning in vocational areas to important life skills such as interview techniques and CV writing techniques. They include vocational or technical courses that can help individuals start their own business in the craft, tourism or hospitality sectors. These skills are particularly important for people who may have been made redundant, or who wish to change the direction of their careers.
9. Adult learning is, however, not only instrumentally valuable in the sense of gaining employment, important though this is. Lifelong learning has clear wider benefits in terms of social and personal development, both for the individuals concerned and for their communities. The evidence suggests that better educated people whatever their age are generally happier, healthier and more socially engaged than those with fewer skills or lower levels of education.<sup>5</sup>
10. The volume of work delivered by Further Education colleges and institutions with people over 50 is highly significant. Around **27,000 learners** are enrolled in colleges, most of who study part-time. This is represented in the table below.

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<sup>5</sup> See the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills publication: 'The economic and social benefits associated with Further Education and Skills: Learning for those not in employment' [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/231006/13-1135-economic-and-social-benefits-associated-with-further-education-and-skills-learning-for-those-not-in-employment.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/231006/13-1135-economic-and-social-benefits-associated-with-further-education-and-skills-learning-for-those-not-in-employment.pdf)

**Table 1: Number of enrolled FE learners over 50 by age, sex and mode of study (2013/14)**

		Male	Female	Total
Full-time	50 - 59	140	215	355
	60 - 64	25	30	55
	65 and over	20	10	30
Part-time	50 - 59	5,925	8,765	14,690
	60 - 64	1,715	2,905	4,625
	65 and over	2,545	4,590	7,135

Source: StatsWales

11. The amount of part-time study in recent years in FE has consistently declined in recent years, mainly as a result of funding changes. Overall, part-time learning in FE has dropped by over 40% since 2005/06.

## Challenges for the Future – retaining the lifelong learning agenda

12. The lifelong learning agenda that animated much of the Welsh Government's education policy during the first decade of its life now seems to be weakened. No doubt, this relates in part to the tighter constraints on public spending that have come to pass since 2010. The perceived underperformance in some aspects of pre-16 education has also meant that funding for adult learning has not been prioritised. It would, however, be deeply regrettable if a strategic focus on improving pre-16 education meant a *de facto* end to the lifelong learning agenda that was such a strong government emphasis not so long ago.

13. Wales has a proud past (and present) track record on community learning and adult learning. Cycles of social deprivation mean that many children and young people, for a variety of reasons, are unable to make the most of the education they receive before they become adults. Educational inequalities cannot only be addressed by delivering learning for those 18 and under. Opportunities to resume education or improve skills in adult life - including beyond the age of 50 - are crucial for Wales' prosperity and social inclusion.

14. Without a properly funded infrastructure for adult learning, including in FE, there is a danger that education may become a 'once-for-all' opportunity for the young. This would have consequences for those without the means to pay for their own learning privately later in life, or for those who cannot study on a full-time basis because of caring or other commitments. Once the infrastructure surrounding adult learning is gone, it would be very difficult and expensive to re-establish.

15. Investment decisions being taken in the next few months by the Welsh Government will determine if a learning and skills infrastructure will continue to be in place for people over 50 and adults generally. We may look back and say that decisions made in 2015 had clear consequences for lifelong learning opportunities in our communities over an extended period of time.