To: William Graham AM, Chair, Enterprise and Business Committee
CC: Dr Siân Phipps, Clerk, Enterprise and Business Committee,
Rachel Jones, Deputy Clerk, Enterprise and Business Committee

Re: Committee Inquiry on Employment opportunities for people over 50

18th February 2015

Dear Chair,

Thank you for the invitation to provide oral evidence to the Committee's Inquiry on 29 January. This was an important opportunity for my office to contribute to your Inquiry and highlight the importance of retaining people over 50 years old in the workforce and ensure that they have access to appropriate skills and training opportunities to re-enter the labour market.

As my Director of Wellbeing and Empowerment, Daisy Cole, mentioned in the evidence session, I will be launching a campaign in the autumn to address discrimination, prejudice and 'ageism' against older people. The campaign will address discrimination in the workplace, and highlight the positive contribution of older people to the labour market. Your inquiry is therefore very timely and I will keep you informed on developments regarding the campaign in due course.

Following your invitation to send suggestions as to how an employment scheme for people over 50 could be structured and funded, please refer to Appendix A.

Best wishes

Sarah Rochira
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Appendix A

Suggestions on how a scheme (similar to the current Jobs Growth Wales programme) for people over 50 could be structured and funded

Structure

The structure could be focused on three main strands:

- Employment: ensuring that those over 50 have the appropriate skillsets, are supported with job applications, are signposted towards relevant training and skills opportunities
- Self-employment: highlight this route back into employment to suit the needs and circumstances of the individual e.g. take into account caring responsibilities, encourage business start-ups and entrepreneurship and promote financial support e.g. grants, loans
- Volunteering: raise awareness of the importance of volunteering as a gateway to employment, highlight opportunities to volunteer in local areas, make individuals aware of training and skills opportunities

The Ageing Well in Wales Opportunities for Learning and Employment (OLE) Expert Advisory Group includes experts in employment opportunities for those over 50 e.g. Prime Cymru's role in self-employment, the Wales Council for Voluntary Action's role in providing accredited volunteering roles. Provided with sufficient resources, this group is well placed to help design and structure an effective scheme.

Funding

With funding resources scarce, the scheme would need to deliver maximum impact with limited resources. As the Older People's Commissioner has emphasised with community services, ensuring that those over 50 can return to employment is cost-effective in the long term[1]. Employment can significantly improve the individual's physical and mental health and wellbeing, helping to reduce statutory packages of health and social care. Short-term funding for such a scheme can significantly alleviate the pressures on health and social care budgets in the long run.

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[1] http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/Publications/pub-story/14-02-25/The_Importance_and_Impact_of_Community_Services_within_Wales.aspx

Using the same reporting and delivery structures as Jobs Growth Wales would be helpful in terms of replicating a cost-efficient, 'tried and trusted' model[2]. Additional funding could be derived from EU funding, particularly the emphasis on tackling poverty through sustainable employment and skills for growth in the European Social Fund for Wales' regions in the 2014-2020 programming period[3].

Building on the expertise and resources of organisations active in this field would also help reduce costs, for example using Prime Cymru's volunteer mentoring scheme would be helpful in the self-employment strand, and using the Wales Co-operative Centre's experience in delivering the successor programme to Communities 2.0 in order to ensure that those over 50 are supported with online job searches and applications, and receive specific IT training tailored to their needs[45]. Any scheme would also benefit from the input of the new 'older worker champion' for Wales, in line with the UK Government's older workers scheme in April 2015[6].

Marketing

Promoting the scheme and raising awareness needs to be done differently. The majority of people over 50 who are economically inactive and want or need to return to employment have no contact with Jobcentres or Careers Wales. TV/Radio and outdoor advertisements, newspaper adverts in local/regional/national media and use of social media e.g. Twitter, Facebook could all be useful. Furthermore, any scheme could link up with the re-launch of the UK Government's Age Positive initiative, encouraging employers to effectively manage an age-diverse workforce[7].

At the local government level, the Strategy for Older People coordinators, Older People's Champions and 50+ Forums could play a crucial role in highlighting the scheme amongst local communities. Promoting the scheme and identifying particular employment needs amongst this age group could be useful via the next phase of Communities First, ensuring

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[2] http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/skillsandtraining/jobsgrowthwales/?lang=en
[3] http://wefo.wales.gov.uk/applyingforfunding/funding2014-2020/programmeimplementation/?lang=en
[4] http://www.primecymru.co.uk/self-employment/
[5] http://www.communities2point0.org.uk/technology
[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fundamental-reform-to-fight-ageism-in-the-workplace-older-workers-scheme-to-tackle-age-discrimination
[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/age-positive

that the 52 clusters across Wales address employment as a way to increase community cohesion and lift people out of poverty in some of Wales' most deprived communities[8].

Piloting

A pilot(s) could be useful to determine whether such a scheme has improved the employment prospects for people over 50 on the ground. Similar to the Older People's Commissioner proposal to the Welsh Government on increasing financial entitlements take-up amongst older people in 2014, two pilots could be funded, taking into account an appropriate geographical and socio-economic balance e.g. one each in North/South Wales, one each in an urban/rural area, one each in a Communities First/non-Communities First area. Should these pilots prove successful, then this would strengthen the case to roll-out the scheme across Wales with additional funding and resources.

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[8] http://wales.gov.uk/topics/people-and-communities/communities/communitiesfirst/?lang=en