

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

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[Employment opportunities for older people](#)

Evidence from Wrexham County Borough Council – EOP 06

National Assembly for Wales – Employment Opportunities for Older People

An event was held in late December 2014 in Wrexham town centre to capture responses from people with an interest in the topic area. The event was attended by representatives from Wrexham County Borough Council's Adult Social Care, Community Development and Communities First teams, AVOW (local County Voluntary Council), Over 50s Forum, Job Centre Plus, Careers Wales, Caia Park Partnership (local social enterprise supporting employment) and Age Connects. The views of older job-seekers were also noted on the day. Due to constraints of time was not possible to consider all aspects of the Inquiry equally but the main responses are provided below against the topic area identified in the briefing document.

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

1. Numerous barriers were identified; access to appropriate transport was the most common issue raised along with lack of appropriate skills (i.e. IT). There was also significant focus on the emotional, mental and physical health needs of the other population and caring responsibilities (for both older and younger relatives) and how access and availability to support services have been affected by cuts. Modern recruitment practice was identified as a barrier along with the interface with benefits and sanctions to those benefits.

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

2. The very fact that 50 yrs of age is considered as old was cited as an immediate problem and is reinforced by the kind of stock images used in documents like the Strategy for Older People. Employers still ask for age on applications leading to potential for assumptions to be made about health. Incentives for younger age groups make employing older people more costly and this is perhaps reflected in agency work opportunities.

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

3. Poor health was the most common response followed by lack of skills requiring re-training and therefore incurring costs.

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

4. There was little knowledge of the Strategy amongst those in attendance and when provided with a copy most discussion focused on the language and images within, which it was felt reinforced certain stereotypes. There was agreement that there was an effort to break down barriers but work needed to be more collaborative and there was a workforce development issue in terms of those people working to support older job-seekers.

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

5. Mentoring was seen as a key level of support to negotiate attitudes and maximise life skills, experience and work ethics held by older job-seekers. The availability of good quality information was also seen as important particularly around issues such as caring and benefits and their implications. General employability support (interview skills, CVs, application forms, etc.) was seen as important but it needs to be delivered by people in tune with the needs of older job-seekers.

The availability and suitability of local job opportunities

6. Local job opportunities were perceived to target younger audiences, with apprenticeships and incentivised schemes such as Jobs Growth Wales skewing employers towards younger job-seekers.

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

7. Past and future cuts or removal of subsidies was a concern particularly in Wrexham, which has fairly centralised centres of employment servicing diverse and dispersed communities. Free / reduced travel schemes start at 60yrs but we are talking about older job-seekers being 50+ so there is little support for people travelling to seek / secure / maintain work.

Lack of confidence (for example, following redundancy)

8. Previous experience of redundancy, which for some might be more than on occasion. The employment history of Wrexham is very industrial / manufacturing so older generations cannot adapt to changing markets and are discouraged. Support was seen to be limited and perceptions about age and how it would be received often prevented progress (rather than direct discrimination)

Other points raised

9. There was perceived to be a lack of understanding about the complexities of caring responsibilities, which could be for older or younger relatives, or indeed both. Layering in issues around health and disabilities and the impact on benefits caused more concern and a feeling that this lack of understanding affected the availability to good quality support.

10. The audience did not consider there to be direct competition between older and younger job-seekers for the same jobs but that the market itself was possibly not offering appropriate opportunities.
11. The audience did not feel that older people affected the availability of jobs / progression for younger workers as much as the migrant workforce might be doing.
12. Areas of high unemployment are based on Job Seekers Allowance Claimants. For older people ESA and other measures may be more appropriate to identify a focus. It is noted that as times change people need to work beyond ages at which JSA is not applicable.
13. European Funding was seen to be focused on younger people and possibly missing a trick in providing more support to employers to harness the skills, experience and work ethic of older job-seekers.