

[National Assembly for Wales](#)

[Enterprise and Business Committee](#)

[Employment opportunities for people over 50](#)

Evidence from Diverse Cymru – EOP 15



## **Response to The National Assembly for Wales’s Enterprise and Business Committee: Inquiry into employment opportunities for people over 50**

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### **Organisation Background**

Diverse Cymru is an innovative organisation in the Welsh Third Sector, created in recognition of the realities faced by people experiencing inequality in Wales.

Diverse Cymru promotes equality for all. We believe that we can work together to challenge discrimination in all its forms and create an equitable future for the people of Wales.

Diverse Cymru aims to make a real difference to people's lives through delivering services that reduce inequality and increase independence; supporting people to speak for themselves and to connect with decision makers; creating opportunities for participation and development; raising awareness of equality issues; and inspiring people to take action against inequality.

Our current services include direct payment, self directed and independent living support for both adults and children, including managed banking and software framework development in Cardiff; a BME mental health befriending service in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan; Health and Social Care Advocacy for BME people with mental health issues throughout Wales; family support, welfare benefit, income maximisation, tribunal, and general advocacy for people in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

We produce information resources on a wide-range of equality issues, including for people affected by inequality across all protected characteristic groups and information for organisations and service providers; provide a conduit for service user voices to decision-makers throughout Wales through our consultation and engagement work; run citizen involvement projects for people from protected characteristic groups and for carers; and co-ordinate volunteer placements both with Diverse Cymru and supporting external organisations to recruit, involve and support volunteers from under-represented groups.

We provide consultancy services on integrating equality in organisations, diversity champions, and equality impact assessments and deliver a range of training courses on a wide-range of equality related topics, including the only accredited Personal Assistant training in Wales; accredited Challenging Extremism and Hate Crime Awareness training, and training on BME mental health; Equality legislation; disability; stress; LGBT issues and more. We facilitate forums and groups that work on various issues, from improving disability access and carrying out disability access observations to equality impact assessments.

This response focuses specifically impacts on people from protected characteristic (equality) groups. We would welcome any opportunity to assist with the development of specific work programmes and actions, and with engaging service users in future. We are happy for our response to this consultation to be published.

**Inquiry submission**

**The barriers that face people over 50 trying to re-enter the labour market (including the availability and suitability of local job opportunities and the need for relevant support and skills training)**

1. Many older people have been in the same employment for decades. In these circumstances they either have never filled in application forms for employment, as these have become more common, or their experience of applying for jobs is out of date. They are often unaware of how to find employment opportunities they can apply for and when they do find suitable jobs the application process can be a major barrier.
2. This is exacerbated for people who are digitally excluded or have limited digital literacy, especially disabled people who may find online application processes inaccessible or difficult to navigate.
3. One person told us their father “sold his business but was then looking for work after this. He found that the job centre were unhelpful with advice in his situation. He found that there was no support at all in trying to find employment. He had his own marketing business for approximately 25 years and is a member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing yet was never even offered an interview with all the roles he applied for. He was not made aware of any particular programmes or projects to assist him.  
There was a lack of suitable roles that he could apply for. He did find applying for roles at his level very time consuming due to the process of evidencing things on the application form. This is something that I tried to assist with as he had never had to fill in these previously. He was not offered any support with training on application forms or interview skills.”
4. These barriers require tailored training and support programmes in understanding the current labour market in Wales; finding appropriate job opportunities matching an individual’s level of experience; filling in application forms and demonstrating experience; IT skills and qualifications; and digital inclusion training.
5. Many older people are presumed to be available to care for family. This can lead to people not feeling able to stay in employment, due to a lack of flexible working provision, not feeling they can ask for part-time hours, and a lack of understanding from their employer. This is exacerbated for LGB people who are assumed by some families to be available to care or unattached and for disabled people who are caring for others whilst also managing the impact of their own health condition or impairment.
6. However having left previous employment these same barriers can then prevent older people from finding future suitable employment.

7. The financial implications of caring have been shown to lead to debt and struggling to cover costs, even for those eligible for Carers Allowance, leading to an inability to save for retirement. Being forced into early retirement due to a lack of suitable, flexible opportunities can often lead to inability to save for a pension and the short timescale to save can leave older carers in life-long poverty.
8. As health conditions become more prevalent as people age there are also barriers to both remaining in employment and entering new employment due to the impact of health conditions.
9. Many individuals who develop health conditions which affect their daily lives or who become disabled are unaware of reasonable adjustments, their rights, or support available. In these circumstances many people leave employment as they can no longer carry out their role to the same extent without support or adjustments.
10. In these circumstances individuals often assume they cannot re-enter the labour market in a similar role.
11. Additionally individuals are often aware of transferable skills they may have, especially if they have little experience of applying for jobs or have always been in the same career, which means they face additional barriers to finding suitable employment.
12. Barriers are often specific to each individual and many of the issues cited above, in addition to general barriers to employment, often combine and are specific to each individual. This requires tailored individual support.
13. The additional barriers faced by older people to employment, in combination with the lack of experience and fears about future poverty, often lead to a loss of confidence and self-esteem and can lead to mental ill health.
- 14. In order to address all these barriers we recommend:**
  - a. Flexible working practices should be implemented in all organisations whenever possible**
  - b. Wide-spread public campaigns raising awareness of reasonable adjustments, flexible working, and part-time working should be implemented across Wales**
  - c. Tailored and targeted in-work support and advice programmes for people who may be considering leaving employment or facing barriers at work are required**
  - d. Tailored support programmes for older people who are seeking employment be implemented in all areas of Wales and promoted**

- e. **Training to overcome digital exclusion and to pursue IT qualifications are required to support older people to re-enter the labour market**
- f. **Training for older people in finding and applying for jobs, interview skills, recognising transferable skills, and understanding the labour market are required.**
- g. **Life and work coaching should be provided as a standard service to tailor for individual circumstances and barriers.**
- h. **Mindfulness training and mental health support should be available to address the impacts on mental health.**

### **The extent of age-discrimination and its impact on the recruitment of people over 50**

- 15. There is a perception of age discrimination in recruitment, which has been exacerbated by programmes of support focusing on younger people.
- 16. Apprenticeships and other programmes of support to enter employment for young people are vital, however this limits job opportunities for older people.
- 17. Employers can take advantage of financial incentives to employ young people, which are not available in relation to other under-represented and disadvantaged groups.
- 18. Where there would be a need for on-job training for a job many employers are reluctant to invest in training an older person who may retire soon, due to the return on the investment.
- 19. For older people from other protected characteristic groups (women; lesbian, gay and bisexual people; people of different religions and faiths; transgender people; Black and Minority Ethnic people; and disabled people) discrimination combines. This results in further difficulties in finding and entering employment as all these minority groups are under-represented in employment and many who are in employment receive lower wages or little prospect of career progression.
- 20. **To address these issues we recommend:**
  - a. **Targeted financial support to employers to cover the costs of training employees from disadvantaged groups**
  - b. **Targeted employment support and programmes to address the under-employment of older people, especially older people from other protected characteristic groups**
  - c. **A public awareness campaign to promote the business benefits of employing older, disabled, BME, LGBT people, women and people of different religions and faiths**

**d. Training, information and advice for employers on inclusive practices and policies and supporting employees from protected characteristic groups**

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

21. When older people wish to establish their own business and become self-employed there is support available to overcome barriers such as a lack of experience running a business, managing finances and accounts, and marketing. These programmes are particularly valued, as they are tailored to the individual and their business idea.
22. One individual told us: “When I was made redundant at the age of 53 I fully expected difficulties in accessing the labour market and gaining a further job. With that in mind I decided to set up my own training and consultancy business which has been running now for 2 years. At the outset, through a friend, I was made aware of the Business in Focus initiative to help start-up businesses. I took advantage of the basic courses they provided which I found very useful. I also had access to an adviser who helped with writing a business plan etc... I would not say that I suffered any direct discrimination as a gay man from the staff at Business in Focus or other participants on the training sessions however notably their equal opportunity questionnaire did not ask questions on sexual orientation or gender identity, which I did point out.  
Soon after I set up my own company I was approached by a client with a suggestion that I applied for a part-time role with them as a trainer. I applied and was successful at interview and worked part-time (3 days a week) for this third sector organisation. Unfortunately with more cuts in funding filtering through, this organisation has now made me redundant at the age of 55. My hope is that my business will now be in a position to pay me a regular salary as I move ahead.”
23. This individual was made aware of available support to set up their own businesses through a friend. This support was invaluable to successfully setting up their business.
- 24. Programmes and initiatives that support individuals to set up their own business, develop skills, or enter employment should be widely promoted to ensure everyone can benefit from support.**