

Prime Cymru welcomes the opportunity to give evidence to the Equality of Opportunity Committee's enquiry into discrimination against older people in employment.

We would contend that older people face barriers in health, education, training, employment and self employment. The Welsh Assembly Government has powers and responsibilities that impact upon the economic activity rates of older people.

Many of the barriers have been created and sustained through traditional thinking, myths and stereotypes. There is little work being done in Wales to dispel these myths and challenge the stereotypes. Older people have not received a fair share of the resource allocation to enable them to fully participate in the field of work.

The Welsh Assembly Government has led the way with the development of the Older People's Strategy, the National Partnership Forum and the appointment of the Older People's Commissioner. However, whilst the Strategy for Older People in Wales has correctly identified the employment needs to 'develop policies to increase the capacity of the over 50s to continue to work, learn, volunteer and care, making an active contribution for as long as they wish, and ensure that older people do not live in poverty.' Resources and policies have not followed to enable the aim to be reached.

Employment –

In Wales there are currently 154,000 people between fifty and state pension age (SPA) who are economically inactive (over one third of the age cohort). Only 22% of these are economically inactive by choice and comfortably off. ⁽¹⁾

European funding – a cursory glance at the WEFO website will show a plethora of approved projects to help young people into employment. Whilst we welcome the support given through WEFO to young people, women, people with impairments, the BME community and other groups, we are very concerned that there are no initiatives to specifically support older people. Older people are one of the identified priority groups yet little appears to be proposed to help them through European projects.

The recession is disproportionately affecting older workers. In the final quarter of 2008 over 25% of redundancy notices were issued to men over 50. ⁽³⁾ Older workers are more likely to lose their jobs and less likely to find new jobs in this recession.

The One Wales document has a target of 80% employment rate for Wales. The current figure for people between 50 and statutory pension age is 64.6%. ⁽⁴⁾ In 2006, the % of the workforce that was between 50 and SPA was 26.85. This is forecast to grow to over 33% by 2021.⁽⁷⁾ Unless serious measures and levels of support are introduced to engage with this group to find work and remain employed, the target of 80% is unrealistic.

81% of people over 50 cited ageist attitudes of employers as the greatest barrier to getting a job. There is an enormous task to ensure that public and private sector bodies value the contribution of older workers. ⁽⁵⁾

76% of baby boomers (aged 49–63) think they will face discrimination in employment as they get older. ⁽⁶⁾

We have case studies of older people leaving Wales to find employment and many examples of well qualified older people sending dozens of job applications without the courtesy of a reply, never mind an interview.

The Welsh Assembly Government appears to have done little to stimulate the demand side for older workers. Whilst encouraging the participation of other groups, little seems to have been done to monitor and evaluate the recruitment of older workers. WAG should be an exemplar employer but there seems to be little evidence of this.

The recent Smallwood report ⁽¹⁾ indicated that approximately 50,000 economically inactive people in Wales could be assisted back into employment with relatively low levels of support.

Digital Exclusion –

Over twice as many people between 16 & 34 regularly use the internet at home as people over 55. With many local authorities, NHS trusts and other larger employers only accepting online applications, the new technologies exclude some older jobseekers.

Self employment– is seen as an alternative route by many older people to employment as discrimination by potential employers can be avoided.

63% of potential older entrepreneurs cited the lack of specialist support in Wales as their main obstacle to starting a business. ⁽⁵⁾

Health –

66% of people aged between 50 & 69 are either obese or overweight. This is by far the highest % of any age group and for many it creates a barrier to remain in work or to find employment. ⁽²⁾

39% of people aged between 55 & 64 have a physical or mental disability that limits their activities. ⁽²⁾ Greater levels of support need to be provided to enable and support this group towards employment.

There are over 90,000 people between 50 and SPA in Wales who are in receipt of incapacity benefit with the majority claiming for over five years. ⁽⁸⁾

Education –

10% of young people (18–24) have no qualifications

22% of people in their 50's have no qualifications, despite having many more years to acquire them. This figure rises to 35% in Caerphilly, 34% Blaenau Gwent, 31% RCT. ⁽²⁾

There are many times more people not in employment, education or training (NEET's) between the ages of 50 & 65 than there are under the age of 30. ⁽²⁾

To enable older people to find and retain work, they need appropriate education.

Older people appear to be discriminated against due to the lack of schemes, projects and initiatives available to them compared to other groups.

Training–

In 2007, less than 5% of work-based learners were over 50. Only 3% of modern apprenticeships were held by people over 50. ⁽²⁾

Work based learning and modern apprenticeships are open to all ages but are not necessarily marketed towards older people. Historically employers have also reduced training opportunities for older workers, even though age discrimination legislation makes it illegal.

Education and training are essential for many older people when considering their future. The advice needs to be bespoke and appropriate. Many older job seekers are not looking for lengthy courses but for ones that can convert their skills and relevant experience into qualifications that employers find valuable. It is vital that advisors are honest and realistic regarding the usefulness of qualifications and the job opportunities they may produce.

Volunteering–

Older people provide £469 million of support to environmental and community projects. Prime Cymru has developed projects to encourage and support older people into volunteering as a stepping stone back to economic activity. This has proved very successful with a considerable number returning to education, training, employment or self employment. The Millennium Volunteers is a successful project that has helped younger people into volunteering but older volunteers do not receive the same level of support and encouragement.

Equality of Opportunity

The scale of discrimination against older people in employment is hard to quantify but the perception and reality of 154,000 of them not in employment is real.

Older people appear to be discriminated against through the budget allocations at all levels of government. Only through age profiling and age proofing policies can older people receive fair and equitable funding. Age impact assessments need to be undertaken before policies are implemented and monitoring and evaluation is essential. Policy and funding decisions need to be based upon evidence not emotion. Older people need urgent action to address the inequalities and discrimination they suffer. The effects of policies in health, education, training, volunteering and enterprise all have significant impact upon the employment opportunities and lives of older people.

Terry Mills – Chief Executive – Prime Cymru

References

- 1 – Improving Employment Prospects for the over 50's –Smallwood*
- 2 – A statistical focus on Age in Wales – 2009 edition – Welsh Assembly Government*
- 3 – ONS – Labour Force Survey –Sep–Nov 08*
- 4) – One Wales*
- 5) – GfK survey 2009*
- 6) – EHRC survey May09*
- 7) – Statistical Directorate – WAG*
- 8) – Incapacity Benefit in Wales – Alliance Wales*

