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Paul Davies MS  
Chair, Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee  
Senedd Cymru  
Cardiff Bay  
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1 September 2021

Dear Chair,

**Re: Priorities for Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. The Committee's remit is broad, and all issues affect older people across Wales, however, there are several issues that I would like the Committee to consider as strategic priorities over the next 6 months and for the Committee's longer-term priorities.

The fact that we are living longer is something to be celebrated but the ageing of our population has implications across society, and this includes the economy. The changing demographic, not just in Wales but across the world, presents huge opportunities. People aged 65+ contribute over £2.19bn to the Welsh economy every year, while people over 50 make up over a third of the workforce in Wales.<sup>1 2</sup> It is vital that older people are recognised as being key participants in Wales' economic growth.

**Priorities for the next 6 months**

- **Ensure the Welsh Government is providing dedicated support for older workers**

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought with it a great deal of economic uncertainty and has exacerbated the financial insecurities faced by many older people in Wales. We know from previous recessions that the greatest financial impact is felt by those at the younger and older ends of the workforce. Following the financial crash of 2008, for example, unemployment amongst older workers almost doubled, and fell more slowly compared to other age groups.<sup>3</sup> Older workers are also more likely to be made redundant, and often find it more difficult to find work following a job loss or redundancy, particularly as the support available to help find work is often not suitable to meet older workers specific needs.<sup>4</sup>

Without the right employment support for older people, there is a risk that an entire generation of people in their 50s and 60s, who may never find another job before reaching State Pension Age, will be written off, something that will result in a significant loss of knowledge and

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

experience. It will be crucial to invest in older workers and ensure older workers can remain part of the workforce as Wales seeks to rebuild its economy and increase its productivity following the pandemic.

A dedicated support programme should be developed by Welsh Government to ensure that older people can easily access tailored support and have opportunities to retrain and learn new skills, either when facing redundancy or when looking for work. The Committee should consider how effective Welsh Government support and investment has been for older people across Wales in response to the impact of the pandemic. This kind of investment could bring significant returns: increasing the level of employment amongst 50-64 year olds (currently 68.7% in Wales; the third lowest of all the nations and regions of the UK) to match that of other age groups (currently around 75%) could be worth nearly £4bn a year to the Welsh economy.<sup>5</sup>

### **Priorities for the Committee during the sixth term of the Senedd**

- **Investment and support for innovation for an ageing society**

There is a growing global market for products and services that help older people to live well and to stay independent. Some, but not all, of these will use new and emerging technologies. The Committee should consider,

- How Wales can be at the forefront of this? How can businesses be encouraged and supported to develop and invest in this area?
- The over 50s are an important consumer market, but many companies do not target or market to people over 50. How can this be changed?

Growing and supporting companies in Wales to develop Made-in-Wales products and services to support an ageing population and give greater recognition to the needs of our ageing society, in Wales and across the world, could place Wales as a global leader in innovation of new products and services for ageing well.

- **Longitudinal study on ageing in Wales**

To support and inform investment in innovation for an ageing society outlined above, the Committee may want to consider, perhaps working collaboratively with other Senedd Committees, the need for a longitudinal study of ageing in Wales. A study could bring huge benefits in terms of providing invaluable data and knowledge for research and development across a wide range of areas.

The United Nations [Decade of Healthy Ageing](#), launched in 2021 is a global collaboration, aligned with the last ten years of the Sustainable Development Goals, that brings together governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, academia, the media, and the private sector to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live. Populations around the world are ageing at a faster pace than in the past and this demographic transition will have an impact on almost all aspects of society. One of the collaborative areas identified by the UN, to support the decade of healthy ageing bring about transformative change, is the need to strengthen research, data, and innovation. In Wales, for example, the Life Sciences Hub Wales intends to address the challenge of healthy ageing with innovation in service delivery and technology adoption. I believe a longitudinal study could further support this type of innovation and help put Wales at the forefront of this international work.

Both [England](#)<sup>6</sup> and [Scotland](#)<sup>7</sup> have longitudinal studies on ageing, helping to understand all aspects of ageing, the studies are providing invaluable insight in terms of knowledge which can inform the design and investment in research and development for an ageing society and bring invaluable benefits to the Welsh economy and society.

- **Long-term commitment to support older workers and learners**

Ageism and age discrimination are all too prevalent in our workplaces. I would like to see a greater commitment to eliminating age discrimination in the workplace and the establishment of a programme of work to support employers to adopt flexible working and carer friendly policies to support older workers.

Many older people contact me about access to learning and the barriers that older people face because of ageism. I would like to see a right to lifelong learning established in Wales, to enable people of all ages to access education and training opportunities.

I hope the issues outlined in the paper provide the Committee with useful information. I look forward to working with the Committee on these issues over the coming months and years. Should you require any further information then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Heléna Herklots CBE  
**Older People's Commissioner for Wales**

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<sup>1</sup> Edwards, R. T et al. (2018) Living well for longer: The economic argument for investing in the health and wellbeing of older people in Wales. Accessed on 4 August 2020. Available at: <https://cheme.bangor.ac.uk/documents/livingwell2018.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government. (2020). Coronavirus and employment: analysis of protected characteristics. Accessed on 4 August 2020. Available at: <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-and-employment-analysis-protected-characteristics>

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, T et al. (2020). Getting back to work: Dealing with the labour market impacts of the Covid-19 recession. Institute for Employment Studies. Accessed on 4 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/541.1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> ibid

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, R. T et al. (2018) Living well for longer: The economic argument for investing in the health and wellbeing of older people in Wales. Accessed on 4 August 2020. Available at: <https://cheme.bangor.ac.uk/documents/livingwell2018.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing <https://www.elsa-project.ac.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> Healthy Ageing in Scotland (HAGIS) <https://www.hagis.scot/>