



Commissioner for Older People  
for Northern Ireland

17 April 2014

Rory Muldrew  
Economic Inactivity Strategy Branch  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Gloucester House  
57-63 Chichester Street  
Belfast  
BT1 4RA

Dear Mr Muldrew,

**RE: A Consultation on “Enabling Success” A New Strategic Framework to Tackle Economic Inactivity in Northern Ireland**

I am writing to you in relation to the consultation on the Strategic Framework to tackle economic inactivity in Northern Ireland, *Enabling Success*, on behalf of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI). The role of COPNI is to promote awareness of issues relating to older people and be an authoritative champion for them.

Through producing the *Working Longer in Northern Ireland: Valuing an Ageing Workforce* report, COPNI conducted extensive engagement with older people and employers. In the process of undertaking this work our organisation conducted extensive collaborative research about the kind of policies and practices which need to be in place in order to make the choice for older people who wish to continue to work longer a more achievable objective.

A consistent theme throughout our roundtable discussions was that older people feel that not enough is being done to promote positive language about older people in work. There is still a real stigma about the weakness of older people in the workplace, fuelled by a series of myths, which older people perceive on a daily basis, particularly unemployed older people seeking work. Many roundtable participants expressed support for pushing for a positive media campaign involving business and older people, with case studies, and champions for the case of older people in employment here in Northern Ireland.

Our *Valuing an Ageing Workforce* report also recommends that the Executive must invest considerable effort in public information campaigns that show the positive contribution older people make in employment. This would work alongside a requirement for employers to increase the level of support and guidance as well as the Executive working in tandem with business organisations and Trade Unions to deliver relevant information and support.

The proposals in this strategic framework are of particular interest to COPNI as they echo some of the proposals in *Working Longer in Northern Ireland: Valuing an Ageing Workforce* and the wishes of older people I have consulted with. I have also noted the detail in the strategic framework about age positive practice in recruitment, and would be interested to learn more detail about how these standards can be more broadly applied, and how they would integrate into an Age Positive campaign.

Countries that have better rates of economic activity of older people than Northern Ireland have made use of positive Government campaigns alongside a variety of other measures that help promote the employment of older people. There is more work that can be done in other areas that could improve the economic activity rates of older people. Through engagement and research, COPNI have made a variety of suggestions that would make it an easier choice for older people to work.

I would be enthusiastic that my policy team would be able to meet representatives from the Economic Inactivity team once this response has been submitted and contribute more detail on COPNI's thoughts about the strategic framework, and further detail on measures that could assist the employment of more older people.

If you would like to discuss any of these points in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact the Commissioner's Policy Team:

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Yours sincerely

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