

Experience of older workers vital to Welsh children's retailer

Headquartered in Newport, JoJo is a multi-channel retailer offering maternity and children's wear and gifts and toys. From the 800 plus employees at JoJo, 117 are over the age of 50, and 32 are 60-plus. They work in all aspects of the business, from head office and management to retail, and the company supports flexible and part-time working to accommodate its older employees.

New data shows that the number of workers in Wales aged over 50 has risen by almost a quarter – 24.8% – between 2006 and 2016, while the number of younger workers has fallen – 16-24-year-olds by 10.1%, and 25-49-year-olds by 3% – over the same period. By 2022, one in three people of working age will be over fifty. Therefore, investing in skills throughout an employee's working life has never been more important.

Christine Presley, 63, has been working at JoJo for 15 years. Originally from North London, Christine worked in a variety of accounting and customer service roles before joining JoJo in 2002. Working in the company's HR department, Christine uses skills and experience gained over a lifetime to inform her role.

Christine said:

"After leaving education I worked in a variety of accounting roles in London and South Wales. In 1994, when I was in my 40s, I fancied a change and took on my first customer service role with One 2 One (now T-Mobile) where I worked for eight years.

"When our boys had grown up, my husband and I decided to move to Wales to be closer to family. In 2002, we bought a house in Cwmbran and my years of customer service experience helped me to get a job at JoJo. Over the 15 years I've been here I've seen the company grow from one shop to over 80 and have moved from customer services into the human resources department.

"I draw on experience from all my previous roles in my work at JoJo, but I think the most important skill to have in HR is the ability to listen, which is something I mostly learned from my customer service positions. I think that being older helps with that as well, I'm more patient now than I was when I was younger. I sometimes think about cutting back my hours and I might do in the next couple of years, JoJo's flexible working policy means it will be easy for me to cut down when I choose to. As for giving up work completely – I don't have any plans to do that just yet."

The 'People Don't Have A 'Best Before' Date' campaign points out the critical importance of older workers to businesses. It is the latest initiative under

the Welsh Government's Age of Investment drive to ensure Wales has the skills it needs to compete in the global marketplace, both now and in the future.

The Welsh Government has teamed up with Business in the Community (BiTC) Cymru, Learning and Work Institute, the Older People's Commissioner, Chwarae Teg and Federation for Small Businesses (FSB) for the campaign, which seeks to challenge stereotypes of older workers and demonstrate their value in the workplace.

Amy Bailey, HR Manager at JoJo Maman Bébé, said:

"We have a large number of employees who are over the age of 50. They work in all aspects and levels of the business, from part-time retail positions to management and roles in head office and are vital to ensuring the smooth running of the company. We're always open to offering flexible and part-time hours, with our older employees working anything from six hours a week to full-time, and we've noticed a trend towards employees like Christine choosing this option over retirement.

"We've definitely seen an increase in the number of older people we employ – in 2016 we took on 16 employees who are over the age of 50 and this year we employed a further 21. When we recruit for a position we're simply looking for the best person for the job, and the skills and experience of older workers are incredibly valuable to us in all areas of the business."

Commenting on the campaign, and why it's more important than ever for businesses to support and value their older workers, Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning, Eluned Morgan, said:

"By 2022, around one in three people of working age in Wales will be aged over fifty and the number of young people entering the labour market may not be enough to fill all of the vacancies.

"The valuable skills and experience older workers possess, which are often gained over a lifetime in employment, are not always easy to replace. This campaign is designed to highlight to all businesses in Wales, but especially SMEs where skills gaps can have more of an impact, that older workers are vital to business growth and success, and consequently to the Welsh economy as a whole.

"We hope it will raise awareness of the issue to employers in Wales, and offer advice and guidance on how they can support an all-age workforce and invest in the growth and development of their employees throughout their working lives."

For employers looking for more information on how they can invest in the skills of their older workers, the Welsh Government's [Skills Gateway for](#)

[Business](#) (external link) has a range of advice and guidance.