



**REPORT OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE
SELF EMPLOYMENT FOR OLDER PEOPLE CONFERENCE
17th March 2011, Holiday Inn, Guildford**

Purpose

To enable the three team leaders of the Silver Academy programme to present their findings and experiences covering aspects of stakeholder engagement, practice and research to organisations from the private, public, volunteer, academic and community sectors. The conference participants were invited to consider ways to progress the Silver Academy programme and make key recommendations. The conference further explored how more collaboration to increase self employment for older people could be achieved. This was an opportunity to help shape future business support policies and strategies to increase self employment and business support for older people. This report and recommendations will be disseminated at the PEOPLE Silver Economy conference in Stockholm in September 2011.

The Silver Academy

The Silver Academy was presented to the meeting by the three team leaders:

Ross McNally covered background and stakeholder engagement

Background Factors highlighted at the commencement of the programme included:

- The growing population of the South East of England and its impact on ageing populations.
- The 3 million workless population amongst the over 50s.
- The danger of the old and young generations being lost to employment.
- The current public sector cuts hitting over 50s disproportionately.
- The highly qualified being made redundant resulting in jobs/qualifications imbalance.
- High levels of stress amongst the over 50s affecting recruitment.
- The changes to the retirement age and pensions provision.
- The changes to the business support landscape.

Possible solution areas being explored through the Silver Academy model include:

- Collaboration driving motivation
- Networking of peer mentoring
- Empowered self learning techniques
- Toolkit for expanding the Silver Academy approach
- Actions being evidence based
- Communities being built through the academies

The benefits for the participants include:

- New ideas generated
- Networks of solutions
- Real experiences shared
- Economic opportunities delivered
- Sharing of all practice

Len Goss covered practice and facilitation

Silver Academy is not a traditional training course. It is a facilitated programme designed to create empowered individuals, who take responsibility for their own lives and success, who work together in a community to help transform them from being unemployed people to becoming confident and successful business owners.

The Silver Academy is also a network of similar groups throughout the EU. The sharing of good practice and development of a community of Silver Academy groups is also a goal of the program. The programme has been designed so that it could be delivered to any country and population sector in the EU and from any cultural and social grouping. Key factors addressed successfully in the delivery of the programme include:

- Essential needs for the majority of the group.
- What content to be sign posted and what are the sources available.
- Encouraging the personal and group empowerment, initiative and responsibility.
- How to encourage a community feeling and peer collaboration.
- How to involve the local business and volunteering organisations.

For a successful outcome recognition is needed that participants often fall into one of the following categories:

- Those who would have succeeded in starting their own business anyway without the Silver Academy but it further empowers them.
- Those that for whatever reason don't start their own business even after going through the Silver Academy program.
- Those ranged in the middle who find that the Silver Academy provides enough of a tipping point to help them start and without which would have struggled and failed.

The Academy serves all but the priority of the programme needs to be focused on the middle group where greater impact can be achieved for the economy.

David Gray covered research and impact

The purpose is to increase knowledge and understanding in this field and to inform practice and policy. The project is small so the aim is to obtain qualitative research whereby individual case studies will play an important part.

The research will cover the business trajectories through:

- Interviewing 20 people in depth
- Identifying cultural differences between Poland and England
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention
- Capturing the data of the outcomes
- Evaluation of the project
- Scalability evidence
- Attrition and failure rate

Identified factors from research to date (much undertaken by the Leadership Academy) describes key issues facing unemployed managers particularly from middle or senior positions and the journey they are required to travel. The research findings from the current programme are in their early stages but will be disseminated once completed. It will inform some of the behaviours and experiences we have seen in facilitating the programme.

The research will serve the programme evaluation needs and it will address issues of importance to policy makers such as lowering the unemployment rate, specific replicatable case studies and driving new business start ups.

Progressing the Silver Academy Model

As a result of the presentation the participants were invited to consider ways to progress the Silver Academy programme and the key recommendations were:

How can we empower transformation from employment to self employment?

- Adapt the Silver Academy approach for other target groups.
- Carry out a mapping exercise for complementary business support.
- Enhance and progress the peer mentoring programme.
- Use publicity to inform stakeholders of the issues.
- Address new finance models for the over 50s.

How can mentoring and volunteering be better harnessed to support the group?

- A clear definition of networked mentoring in this context would be helpful.
- Strong terms of reference needed for mentors.

- The approach to volunteering services needs clarifying to ensure quality.
- Volunteer mentoring is empowering for mentors.
- A kite mark may be worthwhile considering.
- Peer mentoring is of value to both mentor and mentee.
- The mentoring services in the SE should be better mapped.
- The issue around mentoring both the business and the individual needs training.
- Charges for organising the mentoring could be considered.

What are the useful cross linkages to be made with Social Entrepreneurship?

- Social enterprises are businesses and should be run as such.
- Develops a new approach to the market with more meaningful buy-in.
- Can satisfy the entrepreneurial spirit as well as the community spirit.
- Over 50s are a good group for this business approach due to community leadership.
- Team driven business rather than individual driven.
- Good practice in social enterprise start-ups needed with more mapping.
- Social Enterprise Academy needed along lines of Silver Academy.

How should we respond to the changing landscape of business support for over 50s?

- The BL support was quite good in SE compared to many areas, now a website (mostly).
- The current support post BL needs mapping including some private provision.
- Some provision is not highly visible and distribution very patchy.
- The Silver Academy is networked facilitation adding value to content providers.
- Signposting regionally now needed since not everything is available locally.

Future Collaboration

The meeting then considered future collaboration in the light of the recommendations:

Ideas for themes around better working and shaping future partnership projects

- The keys to business start up success could be better understood and shared.
- The young and the old working together in business development and mentoring.
- Selection of the right people for self employment most important.
- Promoting success stories is of vital importance.
- Expanding strengths of the Silver academy approach to other target groups would add value.
- The links between SMEs and Academia is under exploited.
- The Work programme should be more engaged in self employment and social enterprises.
- Building a community of expertise regionally would be valuable.
- Synergies between the post BL market-driven developments are needed.
- Social networking could retain and develop links in the post RDA era.

- Ex service personnel are a good target for an Academy model.
- Policy shaping is now needed in the absence of top down drivers.
- Developing plans for working together would be valuable.
- All Chambers should be networked together, big and small.
- Mentor networks are needed.

Agreed actions

The meeting was advised that the SME Leadership Academy would be created as a social enterprise to develop the model of the Silver Academy and other themes. The group was invited to continue to work together to create in effect a 'virtual development agency' (VDA) through collaboration and joined up goal oriented activities.

Specific actions:

1. Produce a plan for future engagement of the stakeholder group
2. Produce a small and effective sub working group
3. The SME Leadership Academy will develop a Policy Academy to continue on line engagement and inform future meetings.

The conference closed at 3pm

The conference was part-funded by the EU PEOPLE Project (www.peopleproject.eu) under the INTERREG IVC programme (<http://i4c.eu/>) and was organised by the South East England Chambers of Commerce, the University of Surrey and SEEDA, in connection with the Silver Academy project (www.peopleproject.eu/silver-academy-project-8).

Ross McNally

22nd March 2011