



Generations Working Together

Commissioner for Older People – Proposed Bill (Colin Smyth MSP)

Generations Working Together submitted a response to Labour MSP, Colin Smyth's proposed bill to establish a Commissioner for Older People in Scotland, which closed in October 2023. GWT has only answered the Questions within the bill that it feels it has the knowledge and expertise to contribute to.

1. Which of the following best expresses your view of the proposed Bill? Please note that this question is compulsory. *

Please explain the reasons for your response.

Generations Working Together are encouraged by this bill proposal, recognising the value and benefit that having an independent champion can bring to the older people of Scotland. This is particularly crucial now, at a time of significant demographic change, climate uncertainty, pandemic rebuilding and the ongoing cost of living crisis; all major socioeconomic and environmental forces that have potential to impact our older population. GWT believed that, in order to contribute to this consultation properly, it was essential to include the views of GWT members. Survey data referenced throughout thus refers to a survey of 84 members who responded to our call for views on the consultation.

Before exploring this, offered below is a definition of intergenerational practice: *Intergenerational practice brings people of different ages or generations together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities that promote greater understanding and respect. Such interactions and relationships contribute to stronger, better-connected communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building on the positive resources that younger and older people have to offer each other and those around them (Beth Johnson Foundation & GWT, 2009).*

When asked how important intergenerational (IG) practice is for promoting positive outcomes for older people, a resounding 86% of respondents believed it to be extremely important, with an additional 14% stating that it is somewhat important. These statistics underscore the critical role that intergenerational practice plays in enhancing the lives of older individuals. Additionally, when asked whether the 'Commissioner for Older People (Scotland) Bill' role should have a specific focus on promoting intergenerational practice, an overwhelming 85% of respondents expressed their support for this focus. It is therefore important that GWT represent these interests, and offers key solutions and suggestions, to

Generations Working Together is a Scottish charitable organisation incorporated SCO45851

ensure that support for intergenerational practice is recognised within the Commissioners remit.

Drawing on this survey data and empirical evidence on the positive impact of intergenerational practice, the below answers outline essential factors that the proposed role ought to consider, with a particular emphasis on the social value of promoting, developing and improving intergenerational practice across Scotland.

The below answers address the following key points.

1. **Functions of the Commissioner:** GWT supports the proposed functions of the Commissioner, emphasising the importance of addressing ageism as a growing social issue. It is recommended that the commissioner adopts strategies from the World Health Organization (WHO) for overcoming ageism, particularly regarding intergenerational contact. GWT highlights the value of intergenerational practice in reducing ageism and discrimination.
2. **Age Range:** GWT agrees with the proposed age range for the Commissioner's remit, covering all those in Scotland aged 60 and over. However, it is also stressed that involving younger generations in decision-making processes is important to build a comprehensive understanding of the ageing process and its concerns.
3. **Powers of Investigation:** GWT supports the idea of the Commissioner holding powers of investigation, especially in ensuring public bodies and service providers uphold the rights of older people. It is argued that the Commissioner should also evaluate and actively promote the use of intergenerational practice in services that cater to older people.
4. **Independence from Government:** GWT strongly believes that the Commissioner should be independent from the government to best represent the needs and interests of older people, particularly arguing the importance of holding the government accountable in its commitments to promoting intergenerational practice.
5. **Financial Impact:** While there will be initial costs associated with the Commissioner's establishment (e.g., salaries, administrative expenses), GWT believes that the potential benefits, particularly in reducing social isolation and loneliness, can significantly outweigh these costs.
6. **Impact on Society:** GWT envisions that the Commissioner's role, by promoting intergenerational connections and reducing ageism, will help create a stronger, healthier, and more just society for all generations.

3. Which of the following best expresses your view on whether there is a need for a specific, dedicated Commissioner focusing solely on older people's rights and interests?

Please explain the reasons for your response, including your views on the list of proposed functions set out between pages 29 and 32 of the consultation document, and any additional functions you think the Commissioner should have.

We are largely in agreement with all of the proposed functions of the commissioner. Protecting and enforcing the rights of older people is increasingly important, as previously alluded to. GWT however, think it is important, that a dedication to support the development and implementation of intergenerational practice is embedded into the Commissioner's remit. Some suggestions for where intergenerational practice can be embedded are offered below.

One proposed function of the Commissioner is to '*Promote the provision of opportunities for, and the elimination of discrimination against, older people in Scotland*'. Ageism is a growing social problem for older people and addressing it ought to be a key priority for the proposed commissioner. A recent report from the WHO (2023) advises three key strategies for overcoming ageism: 1. Policy and Law, 2. Educational Interventions and 3.

Intergenerational Contact. Tackling ageism is a necessary step to eliminating discrimination, and intergenerational contact is a recognised, evidence-based force in achieving this. Several respondents to our survey noted the value and importance of intergenerational practice in overcoming ageism/discrimination, with one stating:

"Intergenerational practice is key to ending ageism. Ageism is a root cause of discrimination for older adults."

Such thinking is echoed and reinforced by the WHO, who write:

"Interventions for intergenerational contact are among the most effective for reducing ageism against older people..." (WHO, 2023).

If the commissioner is serious about tackling ageism and age discrimination, it is imperative that they adopt and adhere to these WHO strategies, listen to the thoughts of our survey participants, and encourage and promote intergenerational contact in care homes and all older people's groups. This would also require that they advocate for policy that will see the development of intergenerational practice across a variety of social policy domains.

A second function is to 'Consult organisations working with and for older people on the work to be undertaken by the Commissioner.' We would like to make sure that this extends to organisations, like GWT, who don't directly work with older people, nor exclusively in their interests, but still actively represent their interests. Consulting with GWT and similar organisations will help to facilitate effective use of resources to avoid doubling up on effort. Crucially, we would ask that the Commissioner be willing and readily available to visit a number of intergenerational projects, to experience first-hand, the benefits and lifestyle improvements of the older adults involved in these projects. One survey participant highlights the Methilhaven care home/nursery shared site, to learn about what works best and how. All Methilhaven staff have been trained by GWT and thus this would be an ideal place to start for any newly appointed Commissioner.

Regarding the digital divide, several intergenerational projects have been hugely successful in narrowing this and improving digital literacy among older participants. GWT awarded Johnson based project, 'ROAR Do Digital' an Excellence Award at their conference this year for outstanding intergenerational work. The project saw pupils in a local school support local care home residents in IT skills such as online banking, social media, communication, entertainment and more. Whilst projects like this are pivotal in addressing the digital literacy gap, both sets of participants also gain invaluable intergenerational contact, resulting in relationship building, shared learning and the breaking down of age-related barriers. As one survey participant notes, *"We are all moving towards old age at some point. Intergenerational projects are a fertile ground for knowledge exchange. Younger people can advise older people of the benefits of tech while older people can show how they managed without tech and impart pearls of wisdom learned over a lifetime."*

We therefore ask that:

- 1. the proposed commissioner's remit specifically lays out how it plans to tackle age discrimination by embedding the WHO strategies, and ensures that intergenerational contact is explicitly recognised as an essential means to achieving this.*
- 2. The proposed commissioner expresses a commitment to engage with a variety of different groups and organisations.*
- 3. intergenerational IT and digital literacy projects are advocated for and promoted by the commissioner.*

4. Which of the following best expresses your view on the age range of the proposed Commissioner's remit covering all those in Scotland aged 60 and over?

We agree that 60 and over is an appropriate age range for the commissioner's remit. We do however, believe that consultation with other generations is also important in informing decisions that impact older people. It is important to consider the views of people who aren't yet 60, but who ought to have a say in decisions that will affect them once they reach that age. By incorporating the views of all generations, we can build a greater sense of what is important to people in the ageing process and how best to deal with concerns around an ageing population. We asked our survey participants: *Do you believe that the Commissioner for Older People should actively involve different age groups, including younger generations, in its decision-making processes?* The answers were overwhelmingly in favour of this approach. Below are some responses.

Yes, I do. It really does not matter your age, we all have a contribution to make, society / humanity. We owe it to future generations to make the world a better place for all. we should all be allowed to voice our options (as we all have them, young and old). Collectively we can do it. Communication is the answer to making the world a better and safer place.

Should definitely take the views of YP and work with the YP Commissioner to promote intergenerational community.

Yes, it will also prevent the siloing of different age groups.

Yes, to hear their voice is very important as they are our future. They need to be involved to develop respect and care and appreciation for all ages in society.

Yes, I believe it is important to involve younger generations in its decision-making processes. It is sensible and logical to design a future life, living into old age which is ahead of us all.

Definitely, decisions made now will have long reaching consequences so people should be encouraged to consider what resources and policies they would like in place when they eventually need them.

A variety of opinions and view points can lead to richer, more effective policy.

Yes, every interaction should be about co-designing and co-producing services so that they work for everyone.

Yes. This will increase a peer learner approach and changing the dynamics of how people learn and work together.

To achieve strategic and effective dialogue that supports the rights and wellbeing of older people, we believe that it is important that the proposed commissioner works closely with other commissioners who can bring value to the role and benefit to older people – notably the Commissioner for Children and Young People, as noted in one participants comments above. A strong working relationship with the Commissioner for Children and Young People will allow intergenerational opportunities to grow. Joint working between generations creates solidarity and cohesion, rather than further generational divide, which will improve understanding between generations and challenge generational stereotypes.

Wales have established a Cross-Party Group for Intergenerational Solidarity, that the Commissioner for Older People, Children's Commissioner and Future Generations Commissioner are all members of. The Welsh Older People's Commissioner also worked together with the Children's Commissioner to develop an 'Intergenerational resource:

<https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/resources-2/intergenerational-resource/>

These working relationships give different commissioners, with distinct but intersecting interests, the opportunity to work closely and effectively, to ensure that the rights of different groups across Scotland are upheld and represented as best as possible. Regular meetings and discussions will also be crucial in avoiding duplication of work.

We argue that this sort of working relationship is necessary to improving the lives of older people and are encouraged to see this sort of work being successfully conducted in Wales. We are hopeful that similar relationships can be replicated in Scottish Government and Parliament.

We propose that the commissioner initiates the development of a CPG for Intergenerational Solidarity, composed of a range of commissioners with intersecting interests. This will establish an opportunity for key research to be presented, ideas to be shared and resources to be published, with the aim of developing and growing intergenerational work across Scotland.

5. Which of the following best expresses your view on whether the proposed Commissioner should hold powers of investigation?

We would welcome powers to investigate, in order to ensure public bodies and service providers are upholding the rights of older people. This will be particularly important when the new human rights bill comes into play and public bodies are under a legislative duty to uphold rights. The commissioner can play a leading role in enforcing rights for older people. We also suggest that, given the intrinsic value of intergenerational practice in improving health, wellbeing and social satisfaction, the commissioner considers whether older people's services are doing enough/can be doing more to embed intergenerational practice into their service. Older people have a right to a life void of ageism and discrimination, and since intergenerational contact is a necessary means to achieving this, the commissioner should be doing all they can to ensure that, where ageism is prevalent, intergenerational opportunities are utilised to combat it.

One key method for which to achieve this, is to advise care home staff and practitioners to complete GWT intergenerational training, where intergenerational practice is absent. Training is a small but vital step to delivering good quality intergenerational practice. Improvements in the mental and physical wellbeing of older adults, reduced ageism and improved quality of life, as a result of intergenerational training and subsequent practice, far outweigh any initial costs of training.

7. Which of the following best expresses your view on whether the proposed Commissioner should be independent of Government?

GWT agrees that the commissioner ought to be independent from government, so as to best represent the needs and interests of older people and groups, and to hold government to account on older people's issues. This is particularly important, given the recent decision to remove 'older people' from equalities ministerial title.

The Scottish government has committed to supporting and promoting intergenerational practice, particularly in regard to overcoming social isolation and loneliness, recognising its value within strategic plan, 'A Connected Scotland: Recovering our Connections 2023-2026'. As an independent representative, we would like to see the new Commissioner hold government to account on these commitments, to ensure intergenerational practice is prioritised as a means to tackling social isolation and loneliness, in all ages, and promoting healthy ageing.

8. Any new law can have a financial impact which would affect individuals, businesses, the public sector, or others. What financial impact do you think this proposal could have if it became law?

Please explain the reasons for your response, including who you would expect to feel the financial impact of the proposal, and if there are any ways you think the proposal could be delivered more cost-effectively.

It is likely that the implementation of a new Commissioner for older people will incur quite significant costs in the early stages (salaries, admin costs, evaluation, knock-on costs of any recommended changes/proposals and more).

That said, the value that it has potential to bring, should outweigh this. A consistent line of argument from GWT is that intergenerational projects are extremely cost-effective, and furthermore, uniquely benefit two groups. When we consider that loneliness heavily impacts mental and emotional health and has been associated with depression, lower well-being, anxiety, suicidal ideation and, in older adults, susceptibility to elder abuse (Hawkley & Capitano, 2015) tackling this ought to be a priority for anyone representing the interests of older people. This in turn places substantial financial costs on health services. Intergenerational practice is proven to be effective in combatting social isolation and loneliness, with older adults who participate in intergenerational programs experiencing a 20% decrease in loneliness (Bucurescu and Hilgeman, 2018). This could be in the form of projects between different generational groups, or through social prescription, allowing social connections across generations to grow and thrive (Bild and Pachana, 2022). There's therefore a clear financial incentive to invest in these sorts of projects and if the Commissioner makes intergenerational practice a priority, the financial return will be significant, helping to outweigh any incurred costs of the new role.

10. Any new law can impact on work to protect and enhance the environment, achieve a sustainable economy, and create a strong, healthy, and just society for future generations.

Do you think the proposal could impact in any of these areas? (If you do not have a view then skip to next question)

Please explain the reasons for your response, including what you think the impact of the proposal could be, and if there are any ways you think the proposal could avoid negative impacts?

As previously noted, we envision a Scotland whereby all people are connected and have opportunities to connect with others, from all generations. We firmly believe there is intrinsic social value in establishing this sort of society and that the benefits of this will, unquestionably, improve the lives of people of all ages. Building cohesive and age-connected communities is in the interests of existing and future generations, supporting shared learning, improved educational outcomes, reduced social isolation and loneliness and more. By embedding intergenerational principles into a range of policy areas and thereby making it as widely accessible as possible, we actively establish a culture of connection, cohesion and intergenerational solidarity for future generations. This benefits everyone, young and older alike.