

Ageing; an emerging market

Ageing is seemingly always viewed as a negative, but Graham Armitage, assistant director of Changing Age at Newcastle University's Campus for Ageing and Vitality, outlines the opportunities an ageing population can provide

For much of the past 200 years, longevity in the developed world has been increasing at a rate of approximately two years per decade. The reduction of infant mortality, improvements to hygiene and nutrition, improved health and safety, overcoming infection and the ability to treat and cure mid-life killers such as many types of cancer have all contributed to one of man's greatest triumphs, the extension of his allotted lifespan. This success, the product of great minds of science and enlightened social thinkers, has contributed hugely to economic growth over that period.

In the middle of the last century, the source of longevity increases began to change from preventing early death to delaying mortality in older people. This, together with falling fertility, is dramatically reshaping society. Already, in countries such as the UK, those of retirement age outnumber children, whilst the fastest growing segment of the population is the 'oldest old'. As a result, our awareness of the value of increased longevity has been lost and we are constantly bombarded with negative messages about the cost of supporting 'old people'.

Huge opportunity

However, this is misleading. Not only has increasing longevity contributed to economic growth in the past, but it continues to do so. Once we recognise the significant change that society is undergoing, then we can understand that we are presented with a huge opportunity. A society in which there is a much higher average age and in which older people represent a much higher proportion of the population requires that we think differently about the products and services we provide and who they are marketed to. New needs and new markets present themselves and those who recognise this early will reap the rewards. This is a message that Newcastle University has been actively communicating for much of the past ten years.



Now, others are beginning to echo the message; ageing is often in the news and businesses are seeking new markets. Could the unique opportunity to improve independence and choice for older people and reduce the cost of supporting those damaged by ageing as well as foster economic growth be the next emerging market?

Newcastle

Newcastle upon Tyne, in the north-east of England, is a science city, seeking economic growth from the science of its research base. Newcastle University was early to recognise the importance of ageing as a research field. As a result, its Institute for Ageing and Health is amongst the world's leading research organisations in the field, the largest in Europe, and it hosts a comprehensive range of ageing related research activity across the wider institution under the Newcastle Initiative on Changing Age. As part of this programme of activity, it is developing a unique 'Campus for Ageing and Vitality', on which academia, healthcare, business and the public come together to generate innovation relevant to the ageing society.

Seeking to improve its engagement with local businesses, the university proposed an ERDF project as part of its latest development on the campus. In a multi-use building, also housing research laboratories, a national clinical research network and innovative health facilities, the university proposed a project hotel, in which local SME businesses might co-locate with the ageing research to deliver innovation projects. In addition, a small team would be established to work with local SMEs to help them to recognise the opportunities of the ageing society, to identify



innovation projects and to access support from the university knowledge base. The project, part of a wider programme of work, under the auspices of Newcastle science city, would be a model for the future operation of the wider Campus for Ageing and Vitality and help the north-east of England to begin to gain economic benefit from its research excellence in ageing.

Changing Age for Business

Between January 2010 and December 2012, the project would provide 50 businesses with innovation support, including providing 50 members of staff from those businesses with knowledge about ageing and about how to engage with the university. From these businesses, at least 20 would be assisted to identify and take forward new projects with the university's knowledge base. From these 20 projects, the ERDF project sought to generate at least ten new jobs.

The project, which became Changing Age for Business, was contracted early in 2010 and began slowly. Small businesses which came to the university themselves were helped from existing capacity. Meanwhile, the team was recruited. A business development manager (BDM) was recruited for his experience in assembling complex solutions and for his interest in, and understanding of, the opportunities of ageing, supported by a project manager and clerical assistant. A project launch was prepared at which approximately 200 businesses were brought together to hear about ageing and demographic change, the opportunities they present and how the project could assist them in accessing the university. This process was repeated a number of times throughout the project so that some 1,000 SME businesses have heard the message.

The response to these events was overwhelming, with at least 100 businesses requesting further discussions from the first event alone. Candidate businesses came from all sorts of sectors and were interested in a variety of opportunities. Follow up meetings with the BDM confirmed the eligibility of businesses for the programme before they were introduced to a variety of university staff with a broad understanding of ageing, its opportunities and the university research agenda. A series of discussions with these individuals, and, where appropriate, with relevant academics, were used to shape the understanding of the businesses, their individual opportunities and their aspirations. For those businesses where an embryonic opportunity could be identified, subsequent meetings provided members of their management team with the knowledge they needed to develop their ideas alongside the university team, with a view to developing a mutually interesting and fundable project.

At this stage, despite receiving assistance with innovation, many businesses were unable to progress further for a variety of reasons. Others, though, continued developing their ideas to the stage where a project with the university knowledge base became a reality. These projects utilised a variety of mechanisms, but were predominantly collaborative in developing ideas and obtaining funding.

Relationships

The project has maintained relationships with the businesses it has supported in order to identify the outcome of these projects. At the time of writing this article, six months of activity has still to be reported in the projects. However, 40 of the 50 assistances with innovation have been delivered, along with 45 of the required



knowledge transfers. A total of 15 projects with the university knowledge base have started. Few of these have yet progressed to the stage where their full impact can be estimated, but already seven jobs have been delivered to the standard required by ERDF, along with many others more indirectly connected.

Thriving hub

Delivery of the building has taken much of the first two years of the project. However, it has been in place for the past six months and is already a thriving hub for business activity in ageing, occupied by projects from five businesses. These businesses are already interacting with each other and new ventures are emerging.

A mid-term review suggested that the project would produce unusually significant economic benefit. Over the remainder of the year we are confident that we will achieve the outstanding outputs and look forward to seeing what broader outcomes will also be achieved.

Some of our business successes



ADL Smartcare provide person-centred evidence-based decision support tools in the fields of health and social care which deliver cost-effective, trustworthy advice designed to support choices around independence and safety – especially for older people. The business has chosen to base its research and development team in the new building on the Campus for Ageing and Vitality, from where it is working with the university to explore new ways of delivering its services.

Peter Gore, ADL Smartcare's managing director, said: "Our systems are built on evidence, best practice and cutting edge science. It makes sense to have a research base amongst the largest group of co-located ageing experts in Europe, staying up to date with new developments. The excellent facilities on the Campus for Ageing and Vitality provide a good base for our own researchers, and an easy location to meet with the university's

network of thousands of older people willing to engage with our researchers. The added bonus is we are increasingly surrounded by like-minded businesses with whom we can build partnerships and network further."



Age Inclusive is an independent private limited company, based at the Biomedical Research building, which addresses age-related issues in the workplace. The board comprises six directors who contribute a rich variety of experience; HR, workplace wellbeing, business support and diagnostic services, executive coaching and leadership development and corporate communications. The business, which came together in response to an improved understanding of the opportunities associated with increased longevity and the potential need to work into older age, is also working with the university to evaluate the success of its pilot offerings.

Cynthia Bartley, director, said: "We aim to play a pivotal role in assisting the UK economy and society to address the issues of an ageing workforce by providing high impact, cost effective solutions. We have moved into the Biomedical Research building because it is at the heart of Newcastle University's Campus for Ageing and Vitality, where we can cluster with other businesses addressing the ageing agenda and be close to the university's unparalleled expertise in this area."



GreyMatters Healthcare is dedicated to supporting those who suffer from long-term conditions such as dementia, hypertension and heart disease. Director David Ward said: "We do this by providing innovative online health solutions that improve people's lives, promote communication and allow them to stay in their homes for longer. Moving in to the Biomedical Research building is an innovative way of stimulating applied research and

partnering to take products and services into the market. We want to be at the centre of that activity and the building is an ideal place to grow a company alongside Newcastle University's world-class research into the mechanisms of ageing. The university can help us get there by giving us access to world leading academics and thought leaders, as well as partners within the building. Partnership stimulates innovation and helps overcome barriers to market take-up. Our entry to the market will be quicker and deeper than if we stood alone."

GreyMatters, the first business to occupy space in the new building, is preparing a number of projects with the university to develop and evaluate new service offerings.



Also located within the new facility, innovative minds @ work is a company dedicated to making a difference to people facing barriers due to the negative effects of disability, ageing, mental health or economic disadvantage. It is dedicated to supporting research and development to overcome barriers through the simplest of solutions, developing innovative products and developing sustainable commerce for all ages. It is committed to innovation with an ethos of the social model of disability. Jonathan Wade, managing director, said: "I have not come across a place like this in 20 years of business. We are innovative and deliver as a team in many ways. Due to the unique environment which the BRB staff has created, within three months innovative minds @ work has spun out three companies that will make an international difference. This couldn't happen anywhere else; all the organisations are here to make a difference, work together without barriers, and we achieve positive outcomes every day with support of the BRB."



Not all of the businesses we support need or would be best placed in the facility. One such is Diagonal Alternatives, a new care business inspired by the ERDF project. Christine Savage, one of the two founders of the business,

said: "We are now aware of quite how enormous the opportunity is and how well-positioned we are to develop our business with the support of the Changing Age for Business Programme."

Of the 33 jobs so far created in the business, her business partner Bob Nelson added: "The numbers of people who need some assistance to live well and independently at home are growing significantly, and these people are our customers. We work hard to recruit and train the right employees, so that we have a professional workforce - and our customers choose their staff team, which they expect to do, as customers. We are creating satisfying jobs, and often recruiting older people looking for a second career, providing them with a professional qualification."



The organisations work together without barriers

Diagonal Alternatives made early use of one of the university facilities, VOICE North, through which they could access older people to shape their business. As Savage recalls: "The VOICE North experience was extremely useful to us, to test out our ideas and methods with real customers. The feedback has helped us shape our marketing strategy, and we intend to continue to work with VOICE North to make sure that our offer is right, and made in the right way. It was a very enjoyable and worthwhile experience for us all."



Newcastle University's Changing Age for Business project will benefit from £2.1 million (~€2.6m) of European Union investment from the ERDF Competitiveness Programme 2007-2013, managed by the UK government's Department for Communities and Local Government.



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