



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Retail sector: position statement

This statement sets out the Retails Forum's plans to support the retail sector.

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Introduction

The Welsh Government is committed to working with business and employer representatives and trade unions in the retail sector to develop a shared vision for a successful, sustainable and resilient retail sector that offers fair, secure and rewarding work.

A Retail Forum has been established to help achieve that end and the Forum has developed and agreed this position statement to frame and communicate the Forum's ambitions for this work. This position statement clarifies where retail stands today; our collective ambitions for change; and initial thoughts on how we intend to deliver that transition for a better and brighter future.

The Forum will discuss, provide advice and engage its networks on a range of matters of mutual interest to inform the development of a strategic vision for the retail sector and consideration of how retail work can become fairer, more secure, safer and better rewarded.

The Forum will identify, promote and diffuse practices that support fair pay and conditions within the retail sector to help 'normalise' those behaviours. It will also improve shared understanding of key challenges facing the retail sector

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including skills, recruitment and retention; automation; decarbonisation and supply chain issues.

Where are we now?

The retail sector is the largest private sector employer in Wales, with 114,000 employees and accounting for 6.0% of Welsh GVA, the retail sector already has a direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of people and communities across Wales. Its value extends far beyond economic returns.

The retail sector is a lynchpin for many local communities, providing a vital social connection and the goods and services which contribute to our collective well-being. This is especially true in respect of the role of small, independent retailers and those which service rural or isolated communities. For these and other reasons, we recognise the place of retail as part of the foundational economy which meets our everyday needs.

The retail sector is delivering in an operating context marked by significant transformation, change and ongoing uncertainty. Significant drivers include the changing role of town centres, the impact of new technologies, shifts in consumer patterns and behaviours, and challenges in relation to the supply chain and workforce recruitment and retention. Overlaying this are the core strategic challenges of our time:

1. adapting to our future outside of the European Union
2. addressing the demands of climate change and the move to Net Zero
3. recovering from the ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic, and
4. the cost of living crisis and concerns about rising energy prices and the security of supply.

The retail sector requires a supportive environment to meet these challenges, including considering feasible changes to the Non-Domestic Rates (Business Rates) system to support growth in the retail sector.

In meeting the challenges of the future, the retail sector will need to call upon the

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talents, skills and experience of its workforce and value that workforce fairly. The Forum recognises the importance of employers, trade unions and others acting to increase the prevalence of fair work across the retail sector and in normalising fair, safe and secure working conditions.

Whilst the retail sector provides a broad range of jobs and careers, driving up the quality of work is essential to the future. Tackling low pay, insecure employment contracts and ensuring workers have a voice in decisions that affect them will help to secure the well-being of retail workers, as well as supporting the ability to recruit, retain and develop the retail sector's greatest asset: its workforce.

Where we want to be?

We need a plan and clear strategic vision for the future which is led by Government, but which is developed with and for the retail sector as a whole; its businesses, employers and workers.

The Forum welcomes the commitment to develop and publish such a vision in May 2022 and is committed to working with the Welsh Government on it.

The vision will be based on evidence and will be informed by dialogue and engagement with the sector over the coming weeks. It will do a number of things:

- it will set out the short, medium and longer-term challenges to support a successful, sustainable and resilient retail sector that delivers fair work and improved energy efficiency
- it will dovetail with complementary activity, such as those in relation to town centre regeneration and the future of Business Rates in Wales and provide a timetable for agreeing actions that will help realise the strategic vision
- it will embed social partnership as a way of working, including supporting the introduction of trade union green representatives and reflecting values such as those set out in the four pillars of the Welsh Government's Economic Contract.

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How will we get there?

We will work together as Welsh Government, business and employer representatives and trade unions, to ensure the vision reflects actions that are relevant, appropriate and aligned to complementary activity in wider areas of policy which affect the retail sector, its workforce and its future prospects. This will require us all to be receptive to new ideas, challenge some of our traditional views and think practically about changes that can make a difference.

For employers this will mean actions that speak to their desire to boost competitiveness so that businesses survive and thrive. For workers, this will mean actions that speak to improving working conditions in the sector. These concepts are not mutually exclusive – indeed, achieving both is the key to unlocking our ambitions for the sector. We want to see the retail sector providing individuals with a viable career path to the benefit of sector as a whole. This will require concerted action:

- Welsh Government will have a responsibility for delivering certain actions, but equally regional and Local Authority partners will also have a part to play.
- the sector will itself need to step up to the plate: there are things that employers and trade unions will be able to do for themselves to improve the prospects of the sector and those that work within it.
- there are demands we will wish to make on UK Government, in relation to reserved matters and which affect retail across the UK.

It is only by working in this way, collaboratively and across boundaries, that will we deliver the change required to support a retail sector that goes from strength to strength and works for all.

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