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Employment support for over 50s: Rapid evidence review

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June 2019

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Glossary of terms and abbreviations

ACAS	Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service
ALMP	Active Labour Market Policy
APS	Annual Population Survey
BIM	British Institute of Management
BEIS (BIS)	Department for Energy & Industrial Strategy (Department for Industry & Business)
CIPD	Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development
CLES	Centre for Local Economic Strategies
DfE	Department for Education
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
DRA	Default retirement age
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EC	European Commission
ELSA	English Longitudinal Study of Ageing
ESA	Employment Support Allowance
EU	European Union
GMCA	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
HR	Human Resources
HWC	Health and Work Conversion tool
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
JCP	Jobcentre Plus
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LEPs	Local Enterprise Partnerships
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
ND	New Deal programme
NOMIS	National Online Manpower Information Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PES	Public Employment Service
RER	Rapid Evidence Review
RTW	Return to Work
SBWA	Sector-Based Work Academy
SOPIE	Supporting Older People in Employment
SPA	State Pension Age
TTWA	Travel to Work Area
WBL	Work-Based Learning
WHERL	Wellbeing, Health, Retirement and the Life course
UK	United Kingdom

About the Centre for Ageing Better

The Centre for Ageing Better is a charity, funded by an endowment from the The National Lottery Community Fund, working to create a society where everyone enjoys a good later life. We want more people to be in fulfilling work, in good health, living in safe, accessible homes and connected communities. By focusing on those approaching later life and at risk of missing out, we will create lasting change in society. We are bold and innovative in our approach to improving later lives. We work in partnership with a diverse range of organisations. As a part of the What Works network, we are grounded in evidence.

Acknowledgements

This report was produced by Dr David Parsons and Dr Kenneth Walsh. The authors would like to thank Jemma Moulard and Dr Nayyara Tabassum from the Centre for Ageing Better for their support and contributions throughout the project. We would also like to thank Tim Willis (DWP, Pensions & Later Life Analysis Division), Lauren Potts (GMCA) and Jessica Thorley (GMCA) for their time and contributions in supporting the project and development of the final report.

Executive summary

Why does employment support for the over 50s matter?

Recent employment rates for the 50-64 age group have hit a record high^{1,2}. However, in general, people aged 50 and above continue to face greater difficulty in accessing work-related training and re-entering employment than younger age groups. While the employment rate gap between younger (25-49) and older age (50-64) groups is smaller than it was five years ago, it still remains. Losing a job after the age of 50 is also more likely to lead to long-term unemployment or inactivity compared with job loss at younger ages.

While some are not working out of choice, around 1 million people aged between 50 and state pension age are not working but would like to be³. One in four men and one in three women reaching state pension age in the UK have not worked for five years or more⁴. Analysis of the Government's now-concluded Work Programme (a welfare-to-work programme introduced in UK in June 2011) revealed that employment support was not working as well for people over the age of 50⁵.

Supporting people to be in good quality work for as long they want to is critical for their financial security now and into the future, as it enables people to better manage health conditions and wellbeing at work and is a vital opportunity to help them manage their health and improve their wellbeing. Good health helps workers aged 50 and over to stay in work for longer. Being unemployed can also have negative impacts on people's health and

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- 1 Department for Work and Pensions (2018), 'Economic labour market status of individuals aged 50 and over, trends over time: October 2018 (experimental)'. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/747715/economic-labour-market-status-of-individuals-aged-50-and-over-oct-2018.pdf
 - 2 Office for National Statistics (2019), 'A05 SA: Employment, unemployment and economic inactivity by age group (seasonally adjusted)'. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/employmentunemploymentandeconomicinactivitybyagegroupseasonallyadjusted/a05sa>
 - 3 Franklin, B., Beach, B., Bamford, S. and Creighton, H. (a) (2014), 'The Missing Million: Illuminating the employment challenges of the over 50s'. London: BITC.
 - 4 Department for Work and Pensions (2017), 'Fuller Working Lives: Evidence Base 2017'. Available at: www.assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/648979/fuller-working-lives-evidence-base-2017.pdf
 - 5 Department for Work and Pensions (2017), 'Work Programme statistical summary'. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/work-programme-statistical-summary-data-to-december-2017>

wellbeing. A supportive workplace and work culture are also conducive to workers aged 50 and over feeling well-supported at work, thereby enabling them to better manage chronic health conditions with proper support. Enabling people to enjoy good-quality work for longer will benefit individuals (in terms of living standards, wellbeing and retirement savings), the economy (in terms of skills and workforce, as well as GDP) and the state (in terms of increased tax revenues and reduced or deferred demand on public services)⁶.

Nature and scope of this review

Recognising the need for evidence-informed policy and to address poor outcomes for over 50s in employment support interventions, this rapid evidence review was commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better and was co-developed in close collaboration with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP²), Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and other partners.

The review focused in particular on recent (2010 onwards) evidence from published research, programme and policy evaluation and available data in the UK, also taking account of international evidence. It aimed to identify systematic evidence and lessons on the effectiveness of active labour market policies aimed at tackling the challenges of worklessness and involuntary economic inactivity amongst those aged 50 and over. A particular focus was on the scope for local interventions to support over 50s to return to work.

Key findings

The findings from this evidence review show that:

- A wide range of research has looked at employment support amongst people aged 50 and over, but much of it lacks high-quality data and analysis. The number of people involved in quantitative and qualitative analysis has often been insufficient to draw any generalisable conclusions.
- Much of the existing research focuses on three areas: the motivations for people to continue working, retirement perspectives, and health issues at work. There is much less evidence centred on unemployed older jobseekers or others returning to work.
- There are substantial gaps in this evidence including:
 - > The role of employment information, advice and guidance in supporting people aged 50 and over to access work
 - > The potential for people in mid/late life to become self-employed

6 Centre for Ageing Better (2018), A silver lining for the UK economy? The intergenerational case for supporting longer working lives. London. Available at: <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-02/Silver-lining-UK-economy-crucial.pdf>

- > The nature and effects of age-bias in recruitment, selection and other employment practices
- > Attitudes to skills development and upskilling amongst people aged 50 and over and amongst employers
- > How disability or ill health (and effective advisory support) impact on the opportunities people have to continue working.

The most relevant evidence comes from evaluation of UK-based government programmes and from similar international sources. However, this evidence is often limited to very specific actions or parts of programmes (e.g. facilitated job search, work placement, job subsidies) or initiatives that are open to all ages, with little or no evaluation of how effective these were for people aged 50 and over. The review also suggests that over-50 returners to work are not a homogenous group, yet the evidence rarely looked at different outcomes across regions or for different groups within the over-50 cohort.

Employment support for over 50s returning to work

In the UK and elsewhere, employment support for those out of work or seeking work is most commonly open to all adults of working age including, but not usually targeted at, older jobseekers. However, research shows that older jobseekers have some specific and often unmet support needs, reflected by their comparatively low job outcome rates on employment support programmes. The review suggests there is a mismatch between the evidence that is available, although often limited, around older jobseekers' needs, and the available support.

The challenges that people aged 50 and over face in getting back into work vary. There is a need for 50+ support to take more account of an individual's 'nearness' to the labour market and currency of skills and experience, as well as a range of issues such as their health circumstances, care responsibilities, upgrading qualifications, re-skilling, benefit and financial support needs.

More specifically, the evidence that is available from the UK and internationally, although limited, suggests that effectiveness in return-to-work support for those aged 50 and over involves:

- **Customisation and complexity of needs:** Support needs to recognise that over 50s are a diverse group. Local-level responses, with integrated and cross-agency working are vital for enabling the delivery of person-centred, flexible support.
- **Segmentation of delivery:** To enable better design and targeting of support, segmenting over 50s is valuable. This segmentation should look beyond age, to other factors such as closeness to labour market, personal circumstances (health, care) and skills.

- **Personalised advisor support:** Advisors should be equipped to deal with a range of individuals, ranging from those with managerial or professional backgrounds through to those who are long-term unemployed and furthest from the labour market. There is some evidence to suggest that a 'peer' advisor of a similar age (and perhaps gender and ethnicity) can be beneficial in helping to build trust and confidence. DWP's model for work coaches appears to recognise some of these issues and provides a good starting point for how advisor support might be developed further.
- **Motivational support and attitudinal challenge:** Motivational, asset-based support to sustain engagement along with support to develop more positive attitudes and expectations of job search and employment appears to be a strong predictor of subsequent success in employment outcomes among this age group.
- **Conducive support and engagement environment:** The environment in which support is provided must be one that older jobseekers are comfortable with and which is conducive to providing more personalised support. In the UK context, this may be outside the normal jobcentre in circumstances making it easier both to access (multiple services and make effective use of them).
- **Rapid response and early labour market engagement:** Rapid and responsive action is a common success factor in capturing those older jobseekers recently made redundant or otherwise becoming unemployed to maintain motivation. Evidence suggests that work experience and job trials (with guaranteed interviews) have proved to be relatively successful in maintaining labour market engagement.
- **Skills, training and certification:** The evidence confirms the importance of recognising the existing skills and experience of older workers with assessments of prior learning linked to certification that will have currency in the labour market. It also provides an opportunity to identify skills gaps in the jobseeker and use high-quality and targeted training support to update and extend these.
- **Mid (and later life) career review:** Evidence suggests that well-founded mid-life career reviews, which consider future prospects in the context of an individual's current situation and future ambitions, can play an important role in opening perspectives and confronting challenges and signposting to services. This is more specialised provision than might be available through conventional job coach or personal advisor support, and capacities for it would need to be built into integrated support provision – often as a front end to support services.

Conditions for effective employment support for over 50s

A pre-condition of effective employment support for over 50s is wider change in terms of both the practices and attitudes of employers. To be effective, for those aged 50 and over, return to work programmes need access to enough 'good employers', who offer not just

diverse job openings but sustainable and flexible work opportunities to retain older workers across extended working lives.

Thus, the evidence leads to the conclusion that place-based interventions need not just to improve job-search and training activity and support, but to work with employers to challenge age-bias and stereotypical attitudes towards older workers. This will undoubtedly be a substantial challenge for local interventions, but it is arguably the best place for this to be addressed using local networks, local influences, local success stories and local champions for change.

This evidence review also indicates some further conditions which makes interventions more effective:

- The joining up of established existing services and newer models of support
- Provision of both voluntary and mandatory support
- Accessible, non-institutional entry points to accessing employment and skills service (i.e. via community organisations and housing providers rather than solely via Jobcentres)
- Advisors (potentially same-age) that are trained in older jobseekers' needs and age-sensitive in their approach

Recommendations and next steps

Enabling people to enjoy good quality work for longer will benefit individuals, the economy and the state. It will benefit individuals in terms of living standards, wellbeing and retirement savings, the economy in terms of skills and workforce, as well as GDP and the state in terms of increased tax revenues and reduced or deferred demand on public services, now and into the future.

The Centre for Ageing Better is committed to building on the recommendations for greater employability support for over 50s. Based on report findings, the Centre for Ageing Better in partnership with DWP and GMCA, are seeking to pilot or trial new ways of working, implementing best practice to improve employment support for over 50s.

This pilot uses the findings of the review and builds upon the identified success factors, developing and trialling new approaches tailored to the needs of older jobseekers. It will also aim to conduct further investigation to fill some of the identified evidence gaps, including developing a better understanding of the diversity amongst older jobseekers to inform the development of new approaches.

To achieve impact, this work must also be accompanied by action to increase both the numbers of people in work and the quality of work. Employment practices must be improved to enable older workers to access work and stay in work for longer – this will

involve improved workplace health and flexible working practice, better access to training and development opportunities, overcoming age-bias in recruitment and shifting employer attitudes to older workers.

1. Introduction

1.1 The study

In September 2018, the Centre for Ageing Better (Ageing Better) asked P&A Research and Consulting (P&A) to conduct a rapid evidence review (RER) of employment support for older people. This aimed to inform Ageing Better, The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA, and other partners⁷) about the scope and possible focus for future place-based initiatives for supporting people aged 50 and over back into work in Greater Manchester (GM). A report was produced on the first phase of the work (in October 2018) setting out the initial findings from mapping what relevant evidence is available and on how best to harness it.

1.2 Background

Since the early 1990s, concern for the wider socio-economic effects of workforce ageing (Ebbinghaus, 2006) has made older workers a recurring feature of social and employment policy discussion across Europe, and much of the industrialised world. The issue has consequently long attracted researchers from numerous disciplines. The UK came to this earlier than most, and nearly 30 years ago, a watershed study from the National Economic Development Office (Parsons and Stevens, 1990) warned that:

“The demographic die is cast; a failure to recognise and adjust to the ageing work force is a ticking time bomb for society”.

This demographic imperative was seen to focus largely on better informing choices for older people in and after mid-career, along with more sensitive recruitment, skills and working practices by employers. Informed further by the broadly-based *Carnegie Inquiry into the Third Age* (Carnegie Trust, 1993), the public policy response then seems to have focussed largely on encouragement by government, and some professional bodies, for business to reform recruitment, retirement and training practices.

The last two decades have seen public policy interests widening in the UK and much of the developed world. This has been driven by concerns which are much wider than labour supply considerations, and appear to variously include:

⁷ The partners to Ageing Better for this study are: Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Job Centre Plus (JCP), Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) and Department for Education (DfE)

- Fiscally orientated measures such as raising the State Pension Age (SPA) aimed, in part, at addressing the effects of rising dependency ratios on the public purse
- Equity measures looking to reduce discrimination and other constraints to work entry or re-entry including for older people
- Labour market reforms using mainly legislative measures to remove or reduce barriers to continued employment and progression for mid-life and older people
- Welfare and health-based measures looking to optimise the recognised health benefits for individuals of remaining in productive work and careers in later life

Most recently, government in the UK has set out a strategic vision in *Fuller Working Lives* (DWP, 2017c) to tackle these and associated challenges. This drew on a raft of previous public policy measures including embedded legislation outlawing age discrimination in many employment contexts, further extension of the entitlement age for state pensions (State Pension Age, SPA), evolving changes to occupational and private pension funding and benefits, including changed treatment of 'pension pot' taxation, extension of flexible working requests, and most recently the abolition of the default retirement age (DRA). Further policy actions are being piloted and planned to build on these foundations.

At the same time, while there have been recent increases in employment of the 50+ age group, structural economic changes, organisational restructuring and the wider effects of recession continue to see many experienced workers losing jobs. Many older people are being forced to re-start or re-imagine their working lives at a time when many would have been expecting to enjoy peak earnings and secure employment. In general, many older people find difficulty in accessing work-related training (McNair, 2011) and re-entering employment (BIC, 2014: 2015) once they have exited the labour market or lost their jobs for any reason. Despite anti-age discrimination measures and specifically the Equalities Act 2010, there are also widespread perceptions of age discrimination in holding back employment opportunity (House of Commons: WESC, 2018).

Recognising the persisting challenges of worklessness and involuntary inactivity in older age, Ageing Better has conducted past studies of work motivation in later life (Marvell and Cox, 2016) and of workplace support strategies at and after mid-career (Gloster et al., 2018). DWP has also looked at the complex issues influencing worklessness and return to work challenges for older people and has sought to draw out messages for its own programmes (Moss and Arrowsmith, 2003; DWP, 2010b). This study looks to extend and build on those foundations by adding further insights drawn from a wide range of academic research, policy research and programme evaluation⁸. Its focus has been to assess the scope for innovation and more effective policies and practices to support return to work for those 50+

8 This was expected to cover evidence-based academic studies, official and non-official reports, programme evaluations and post-implementation reviews (PIRs), professional literature and other published studies and relevant sources of data. Recent past evidence syntheses from DWP were also included from 2003 and 2010.

who have fallen out of employment and are unemployed or seeking (re) employment.

1.3 Objectives and scope

To inform future innovation, this review aims to provide a state-of-the-art assessment through a rapid evidence review (RER) of what works to help older people out of work move closer to the labour market. A particular concern has been to identify evidence-based lessons for new 'place-based'⁹ initiatives seeking to provide employment and skills support for older¹⁰ people, and more specifically answer the following:

- i. What are the interventions that have been undertaken, what is their focus and constituent activities and in which contexts have they been undertaken?
- ii. How effective have past support activities and interventions been and is there evidence of effective segmentation of support for different (sub) groups of older jobseekers, and how this is delivered?
- iii. What are the influences on (and barriers to) effective delivery and outcomes of interventions and their constituent parts?
- iv. How robust is the methodological basis of the various sources for this evidence?
- v. What is the likely transferability of the evidence of effective employment support measures and interventions aimed at 50+ jobseekers to place-based actions?

There is a very considerable evidence base on which to draw, although not all with relevance to place-based employment support for those unemployed or seeking to return to paid work. As an RER, the focus of this review is drawing on and critically reviewing past recently published evidence (2010 and since) and scoping available data. The inclusion criteria and search strategy to address the objectives were agreed with Ageing Better in September 2018 with a specific focus on evidence from the United Kingdom (UK) but also taking account of suitable closely-related evidence from other countries.

1.4 RER approach and search strategy

Any RER faces the challenges of balancing the intensity needed for the review, with its ambition for scope and coverage of the available evidence. To meet these needs, this review has been conducted through two phases. These are summarised in Figure 1.1.

9 Place-based action anticipates the potential for innovation at sub-regional or locality level which adds greater potential to national level programmes and interventions by tapping distinctive local needs, networks, devolved and other resources.

10 The term 'older' people is used throughout this report for consistency with other research, and policy documentation and may also encompass those (over 50) who might be better regarded as in mid-life.

Phase 1 – identifying appropriate evidence: The primary review ‘question’ agreed with partners was: “What is the evidence on what works (and what does not) for employment and skills support activities, interventions and pathways back to work for the economically inactive or unemployed over 50s population”? Subsidiary questions centred on: what interventions were undertaken, their effectiveness (for whom, where and when), and success factors (and barriers) to indicate what works in effective delivery. The search involved academic, professional and governmental sources (evidence-based research, programme and policy evaluation) and directly related policy documentation and review with nearly 100 sources 2010+ identified, each of which is set out in the Technical report (Section B).

Figure 1.1: RER Approach

Phase 1: Evidence search & review

- Academic sources
- Governmental sources
- Professional and institutional sources
- International sources



Phase 2.1: ‘Extended’ Matrices of key evidence and practice examples

Source	Location	Target(s)	Policy/ practice and context	Evidence context	Transferability
Publication, agency, etc.	Country, region, area	jobseekers, older workers, segmented older workers, etc.	Brief description of action; labour market, institutions, economic contexts, etc.	Policy, or menu with relevant parts highlighted; scope/quality of evidence available on effectiveness	Key considerations applying the policy and evidence to place-based/ GM context



Phase 2.2: 11 Good Practice Fiches

More expansive description and themed review of:

- The more promising actions/examples (or parts of them) with operational viability
- Those with better prospects for transferability to place-based actions



DRAFT & FINAL RER REPORT

Phase 2 – evidence reduction: Phase 2 centred on an evidence reduction process and comparative review and was itself divided into two stages. The first (Phase 2.1) produced ‘extended matrices’ for all four source areas (academic, governmental, professional and institutional and international) with 45 individual sources selected for detailed review. The second, produced from these, synthesised evidence fiches of 11 of the individual sources of most significance to place-based actions, with these drawn on as evidence or practice illustration in Chapters 4 and 5 of this report¹¹.

Sources identified in Phase 1 were validated by feedback on the Phase 1 report and liaison with selected key academics. The reduction process in Phase 2 involved a much sharper focus on the relevance of the 2010+ sources, focussing¹² on sources which were most closely aligned with 50+ return to work pathways, and with enough evidence strength to be useful for informing innovation and transferability to place-based employment support.

1.5 The report

The report is set out in five chapters which, following this introduction, look at:

- The quality and reliability of the available evidence from past research and evaluation (Chapter 2)
- Evidence on the effectiveness of targeting older people in employment support initiatives, and the segmentation within support initiatives for 50+ re-entry to work (Chapter 3)
- Findings on the effectiveness of employment support activities, pathways to employment, integration of support, success factors and constraints (Chapter 4)
- Issues emerging from the evidence and lessons for place-based employment support for those 50 and over unemployed or seeking to return to work (Chapter 5)

A bibliography of sources is also provided (Annex A) and the report is preceded by a short glossary of terms and abbreviations. In addition, the report is supported by a separate technical report setting out more detail of the RER approach, search strategy, and evidence reduction methodology, sources identified, and also the extended (evidence) matrices of selected (key) sources and evidence fiches for selected evidence illustrated in this report.

11 The evidence fiches are also presented in full in the RER Technical report.

12 This reduction focus was based on the specific RER sourcing statement agreed at inception.

2. Findings – range and quality of evidence

2.1 Introduction

The review was concerned to draw its findings and conclusions from reliable and potentially transferable sources. In practice, the robustness of identified evidence was variable and the quality of evidence (including data sources) we draw on in Chapters 3 and 4 is examined here for:

- Its overall range and scope set against the review's focus on place-based return to work support for over 50s in the UK¹³
- The quality of that evidence – looking at the pedigree of the sources for their *internal validity*, strengths and weaknesses, as well as *external validity* and generalisability
- The relevance and utility of the identified data sources (national and international) for informing current and future active labour market policy (ALMP) measures towards the over-50s jobseekers
- Concluding reflections on the overall strength of the evidence and the evidence gaps, for informing future innovations.

Data sources were reviewed in Phase 1 but were not considered further in Phase 2, principally to avoid overlap of data-review activity to which attention was drawn in the Phase 1 report. They are assessed here principally for their ability to be disaggregated to a level of analysis (such as by age group and local area) to be useful for both providing context and for targeting policy.

2.2 Range and scope of evidence

The review has been successful in identifying a wide range of sources, although for the purposes of this review their scope and value is often limited. The academic sources are the more numerous but tend not to cover specific active (or passive) labour market policies

13 Selected international studies were also reviewed. It was recognised that these related to actions and evidence from different institutional and contextual circumstances, but it was felt they still provided scope for sharing relevant policy and practices. Here the meta studies covering many evaluations were expected to be of particular value in scoping out the broad shape of effective interventions.

or measures and their effectiveness in tackling 50+ return to work or broader issues of worklessness. Rather, they tend to be more focussed on meta analyses of large-scale ALMP evaluations. Where there is a policy-orientation in academic research, it is often cross-programme or relating to much broad policy themes such as the UK government *Fuller Working Lives* or *Age Positive* ambitions (WHERL, 2017).

More focussed policy-orientated research from academic sources is unusual but there are important exceptions such as recent analyses of the likely effects of pension (flexibility) reforms on work and retirement motivations (Wilkinson and Pike, 2018), or the SOPIE analyses of age effects of the Work Programme in Scotland (Brown et al., 2018). Some of the international meta-studies (e.g. Ng and Fledman, 2012; Parry and Mallet, 2014; Eichhorst and Seicl, 2016) also tend to lack policy commentary or the detail necessary for deriving effective policy ideas.

Overall, as the following chapters go on to show, the strongest relevant evidence of policy and programme origins relating to older people returning to work stems from governmental or institutional research and evaluation. However, here local or sub-regional level analyses which might be of value for scoping place-based innovations, are unusual. In the UK, governmental sources stem mostly from DWP, and tend to be focused on evaluation of specific policy measures (e.g. DWP, 2011c (Jobseeker's Allowance); DWP, 2014 (the Work Programme)) often subjected to some form of evaluation, commonly at the piloting stage.

DWP's earlier (2000-2008) review of 50+ back-to-work measures (DWP, 2010b) shows a period of strong intervention activity, including variants of the New Deal programme, with some common issues emerging across constituent evaluations. These included the need to recognise the diversity of the 50+ cohort, the important role of (re)training, and addressing conscious and unconscious ageism in the workplace. Almost a decade on from this review, these issues remain current and are reflected in more recent analyses both in the UK and in other countries (e.g. DWP, 2017b; OECD, 2018).

Another limitation in the scope of available evidence is with its apparent clustering around certain older worker issues and relative neglect of others which may be equally important to policy and practice review. A particularly common recurring theme for academic and professional sources is the attitude of employers towards older recruits and how they are perceived. This involves employers' views of their value in the workplace such as reliability and experience (CIPD, 2012; BIM 2014), countered by what are perceived to be their needs (more time off for health reasons, care, adaptability, etc.) and implications for workplace practices (CIPD, 2014 and 2016; BIM 2015; ACAS 2016). While much of this evidence has value, it tends not to be examined in the context of specific return to work policy measures or initiatives focussed on 50+ worklessness.

Another common focus for studies has been the effects of legislative changes such as the extension of SPA (e.g. Crib, Emmerson and Tetlow, 2014; Amin-Smith and Crawford, 2018),

particularly its effects on women's employment propensity and the 2006 age discrimination legislation in the UK (e.g. Wainwright et al., 2018). Similarly, statutory removal of the default retirement age has provided a focus for some (e.g. BIS, 2010) and for an early policy implementation review (BEIS, 2018).

Academic sources also often touch on the importance and role of flexible working practices in 50+ work (Vickerstaff, 2017), although usually as a component issue (e.g. Devins et al., 2011; McNair, 2012). This has also been a major focus for professional sources looking at employer attitudes to, and practices in, effective management of older workers (e.g. Age UK, 2012; BIM, 2014 and 2015; CIPD, 2014; ACAS, 2016).

Understanding the attitudes and motivations of older employees or jobseekers is also a common focus for academic and professional contributions. This includes the empirically strong work of Ng and Felman challenging stereotypes about older-age working attitudes (Ng and Felman, 2012), but also meta analyses from some of the UK's institutional sources including Ageing Better (Centre for Ageing Better, 2014) and governmental sources (e.g. DWP, 2015). However, here the focus is less on motivations for those returning to work than those in work, particularly the juxtaposition between extending working lives or legislative changes such as extending the SPA and often entrenched attitudes to later-age working.

Attitudes to transitions to retirement have been a very common focus for academic research such as the recent work of the WHERL and Uncertain Futures consortium (e.g. WHERL, 2017 and Philipson, Shepherd, Robinson and Vickerstaff, 2018) among others. Linked to this, a handful of recent sources touch on the concept of 'de-retirement' including from the Pension Policy Institute (Wilkinson and Pike, 2018).

Health and welfare have also been a recurrent and important focus for both the academic and professional literature. Some of this has looked at very specific clinical conditions or groups of conditions (e.g. Boot, 2016) but mostly more generally, with recent SOPIE analyses showing contrasts between older and younger age jobseekers with conditions limiting their ability to seek work (Brown et al., 2018). This has also been a focus recently for WHERL studies (Do Gesa et al., 2018) but also drawn attention to both in earlier CIPD research (CIPD, 2012) and subsequently the BIM 'Missing Millions' studies (BIM, 2014 and 2015) as well as Age UK work (Age UK, 2014). It has not tended to be a specific focus for governmental research, although foundation work on psychological constraints by the RAND Corporation (DHSC and DWP, 2014) has influenced current ongoing research and evaluation.

A critical gap appears to be evidence focussed on 50+ jobseekers and the lack of recent dedicated studies is compounded by the age group often being neglected in 'age' breakdowns within the overall cohort from wider evaluation studies, although with important exceptions. Where there are age group breakdowns for jobseekers, this may focus on older age groups (60+) where 'winding down' to retirement is often present and can act as a barrier to effective job search (DWP, 2012c and 2015; European Public

Employment Services (PES) Network, 2018). An important exception, and from which further analysis and publication is expected in 2019, is the very recent 50+ focus on attitudes, pre-conceptions and influences on outcomes of Work Programme jobseekers in the SOPIE study (Brown et al., 2018). Although limited to Scotland, this is a large and robust data set with substantial 50+ sub-samples and shows those jobseekers with negative expectations having significantly worse job outcomes. Similarly, the optimum way of maintaining focus on employability and job search is a common theme with the need to target older jobseekers as quickly as possible after they become unemployed (or ideally before they become unemployed, in a redundancy situation, for example) with intensive support for a quick re-entry into the labour market (e.g. Age UK, 2018; Briscese and Tan, 2018; European Commission, 2012).

2.3 Evidence quality and relevance

The quality and coverage of the research and evaluation practices underpinning the various sources of evidence are very mixed. The studies have very different ambitions in the scope, focus and (as noted above) range, and for programme evaluation mix both formative and summative approaches although with both typically considering the context and effects of different aspects of programme design and implementation. Across these, quality can be usefully viewed in terms of their internal and external validity.

Internal validity of evidence: Much of the research and some of the evaluations (or reviews) are based on largely or wholly qualitative evidence. While this has value in understanding processes and determinants, it presents validity challenges where this involves small cross-sections of interviewees (e.g. DWP, 2015; CLES 2011 and 2017) and in some case micro-samples (Parry and Mallett, 2014). It is also not clear from many of the reports how internal validity challenges such as subject, situational or rater¹⁴ bias have been handled to increase reliability. Interviews have often helpfully combined different perspectives from customers, providers and/or practitioners such as JCP staff and less commonly employers, except in those professional studies of employer practices.

Quantitative evidence has variously been sourced from programme or client databases, some of which may be very large scale (Brown et al., 2018) but otherwise not always involving sufficiently large responding samples to provide breakdowns for older workers or jobseekers. Others have drawn on external databases or cohort studies including using Labour Force Survey (LFS) (e.g. Canduela et al., 2012) and ELSA data (Di Gesa et al., 2017), although with similar breakdown constraints. Surveys of staff, employers and customers, in different combinations, are also a relatively common approach to providing quantitative data (e.g. DWP, 2010b and DWP, 2012a), conducted internally or externally depending on the

14 Rather bias refers to differential evidence collection effects from use of different interviewers or observers, and from the effectiveness of controlling measures such as common interview schedules or tools.

situation and scale of the inquiry.

The robustness of survey approaches is not always clear from reports but in some cases, they can suffer from low or very low response rates that call into question the validity of the quantified evidence or breakdowns. There is little evidence of segmentation in many of the analyses, particularly by age group within the 50+ cohort, except for a small number of studies specifically concerned with a constituent age group (e.g. DWP, 2012a; DWP, 2017a). Even here, analyses or sample limitations provide for little or no segmentation within the age group.

For the evaluation studies, typically of specific policy measures or programmes, a common limitation appears to be the relative weakness, or neglect, of causal analysis to isolate the effects of specific jobseeker or 50+ interventions from other contributory influences on outcomes. Counterfactual approaches using fully or partially experimental methods (control or comparator groups) are uncommon except in some of the European meta-studies (Eichhorst and Seidl, 2016). The use of fully experimental (randomised control trials) is limited, with the United States (US) more than Europe providing this kind of piloting. Where there is some attempt to assess causality, it appears to be more likely to be limited to *before and after* or similar (lower validity) non experimental approaches. The problems of evidence quality in causal analysis are summed up in a EuroFound research report (EuroFound, 2013) which stated that various evaluations of (mostly) programmes with wage subsidies to encourage active ageing were 'disappointing' in their causal evidence or scale.

External validity: While there are challenges in using the evidence available in terms of its demonstrated internal validity, these are more acute for external validity. This is particularly important for the purposes of this study since external validity of evidence will condition the generalisability of the findings to other parallel contexts, in this case to the potential for place-based 50+ return to work support measures.

Beyond the issue of the often-limited scale of evidence (as above) there appear to be three main constraints to the generalisability of the evidence. The first concerns the lack of evidence on geographical breakdowns even where sample sizes appear large enough to support this. The available evidence is consequently very limited indeed in providing pointers on what works in specific sub-regional circumstances or different local labour markets. There are a few exceptions such as the 2017 review of the sbwa and Work Experience Trials (DWP, 2017a) piloted in four urban areas of England. Also, the work of GMCA in monitoring and evaluating the piloting of the Working Well initiative is a rare example of locally-driven, evidence-based policy development, though this of course is not limited to the 50+ cohort.

The second constraint to external validity stems from the relative volatility of the policy and programme environment in many countries, and notably the UK. Ideally, early small-scale local interventions and RCTs would be successfully replicated in larger regional or national trials, and where effect sizes are strengthened. However, this approach to ALMP development and to harnessing evaluation evidence is unusual. Promising results from

innovations of smaller scale trials may not get the chance to be replicated at larger scales or for more sustained activity because policy or intervention priorities change. This situation is not unique to 50+ jobseekers although they appear to have been affected by a particularly volatile ALMP context in the UK. The final limitation on generalisability is that much of the research and evaluation does not focus on jobseekers but older people in work, and where there is a jobseeker focus, it tends not to centre on (or provide adequate comparative evidence of) 50+ returners to work.

Added together, these appear to be important limitations particularly in terms of credibility for understanding relevant ALMP impacts, and impact determinants (generation). This is the background against which this review has drawn evidence and suggests that impact evidence often fails to meet the high standards needed of what works evidence.

2.4 Available and prospective data

In this review, exploration of the available data on older workers and their involvement in ALMP-measures was limited to identifying possible sources, their content and potential usefulness, and accessibility issues. The focus has been on separate data sets rather than data embedded in particular reports (which are referred to, if appropriate, under the relevant source in the appended matrices) and includes national and (limited) international reference points. This would tend to suggest a potentially wide field, but in practice the various limitations on each data set means that this is not necessarily the case. In effect, four key national sources and two international sources were investigated, and their strengths and weakness are discussed below.

National sources: The review identified three main national sources which have potential value for scoping any future place-based intervention:

- NOMIS database¹⁵ – contains Annual Population Survey (APS) and Labour Force Survey (LFS) data and DWP claimants to benefit, etc. with open access and local area (e.g. local authorities, parliamentary districts, etc.); analysis is possible subject to data limitations (e.g. sample size).
- DWP/Jobcentre Plus – the DWP database *Stat Xplore* contains a wealth of data on benefit and pensions and some on the now defunct Work Programme, the analysis of which includes potentially useful breakdowns of job outcomes, etc. which can be analysed by age group, local areas, etc.
- DWP experimental data – in the publication DWP (2017) *Economic labour market status of individuals aged 50 and over, trends over time:(experimental) Data for 1950 to 2017*.

Of the three, the potentially most useful information appears to be that held on the NOMIS

15 NOMIS is a multi-source service provided by the Office for National Statistics, ONS, to give you free access to the most detailed available UK labour market statistics from a range of official sources

database which includes component 'official' national sources (e.g. APS/LFS, Census of Population, etc.). However, while much of the data can be interrogated by local area, and some age groups, it appears that the more useful and detailed analyses would be on a request basis (data conventions permitting). The potential problem encountered here is the sample size limitations with the LFS meaning that all the most useful disaggregations of the data (for example, age group and local area) may not be available.

The DWP sources include a wealth of data on the easily accessible *Stat Xplore* database but this mostly covers (extensive) data available on benefits and pensions. These have limited use for ALMP analysis. However, there is information on the Work Programme that shows what could be available on ALMP-measures, including potentially useful analyses of employment outcomes by age group, etc. At present, only the Work Programme is currently covered which ended in 2017 and currently there is no information on newer programmes such as the *Work and Health Programme*, most likely because of the newness of the programme.

The review also briefly examined the DWP experimental statistics on the 50+ cohort from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). This provides a useful exploration of the data on the labour market status of the 50+ age group over a long period (1950-2017) with breakdowns by gender and five-year age bands but only for some of the variables. In addition to the above national sources, the GMCA *Working Well* initiative has been closely monitored and regularly evaluated from the start of the pilot activity. However, segmented data by age groups within the 50+ cohort may be limited, and confidentiality issues may constrain its use.

GMCA are in the process of assembling a comprehensive data set on the 50+ group covering key indicators such as employment, economic status, skills level, type of work, etc. drawing on national and local sources such as the APS, LFS, etc. It is expected that the data will be analysed by gender, ethnicity and two age groups (50-65 and 65+). However, if the data allows, there should be a more detailed age group analysis reflecting the segmentation evident in the labour market and the policies needed to support them. The review suggests that, if successful, this could provide a model for data collection activities for informing any subsequent place-based actions in other areas.

International sources of data: There are two principal international sources considered in this review as likely to be most relevant:

- OECD Employment database – covering broad labour market indicators such as employment rate by gender and age group, labour force, unemployment, etc. for each OECD country and with a good run of years.
- EU Labour Market Policy database – which collects and publishes comparable data on LMPs and provides qualitative reports that list in detail each intervention with separate reports for each Member State.

The criteria for inclusion in the LMP database require the measure to be a publicly financed

programme and be targeted at a specific group in the labour market. This means that potentially many ALMPs are not included, especially those aimed at non-specific targets (e.g. wage subsidy for all young people). The data is of limited use being very broad (e.g. numbers in each LMP category) and with no analysis by age group (except for <25). Furthermore, some of the information is quite dated (especially for the UK which goes up to 2011 – other MS have data up to 2016). The OECD Employment database provides a good source of information on the key labour market indicators across the OECD countries, but there is no detail on, for example, ALMPs, worklessness, etc., either in total or by age group.

2.5 Reflections on evidence quality and gaps

The overall perspective is of widely varying coverage and quality across the many different sources even when focussing just on those sources published in the last eight years. In terms of coverage, there is notably more evidence available for in-work studies, including on issues such as motivation, retirement preparation and generalised work and health relationships. Beyond this, there are significant gaps in the coverage of available evidence and notably:

- A lack of robust evidence at localised levels including sub-national analyses which is a serious constraint given the different regional and labour market contexts for both supply and demand for over 50 employees in the UK
- Beyond two programme-linked studies of mid-career reviews, there is little evidence on how adult information advice and guidance (IAG) might contribute to 50+ ALMP
- Little evidence on the potential value of mid/late life self-employment or entrepreneurship and how it fits into the options or pathways
- Little robust quantified evidence of the nature and effects of age-based inequities in recruitment, selection, training and later life career pathways
- Patchy evidence of how later life disability, ill health, or other protected characteristics in legislation, impact on opportunity or how specific activities or support practices of public employment services and employers help (or hinder) in tackling this
- Evidence of later life skills development and training activity remains rather neglected in the UK. There is a cluster of evidence on attitudes to training (employers and older people) and also some work on how to keep older workers in employment by updating skills, but little on how upskilling those out of work enhances employability
- There is also little evidence on the needs of, and effects on, sub-groups in the diverse 50+ population, or on any follow-through work that would help identify the longer-term outcomes of policy such as job sustainability, job quality, earnings, skills enhancement and progression.

Although there are important exceptions, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that for

the purposes of this review on 50+ employment support for those out of work or seeking work, the available evidence too often lacks scale or depth of data gathering, or the rigor or robustness of research or evaluation methods needed to confidently guide new policy development. In part, this reflects a strong research focus on qualitative methods, or smaller scale studies which, while having some value, lacks the substance needed for generalising findings.

Where quantitative evidence is available from 'official' or other datasets, embedded evidence from monitoring or in-programme client surveys, there are often weak (or no) data breakdowns specifically for older clients. Here, many ALMPs are aimed at all jobseekers or perhaps differentiate only between youth (aged under 25) and all adults, but not specifically older jobseekers. In the few past and extant targeted measures where there is an older age group focus, the degree of segmentation for 50+ clients or individuals is typically very limited. Here, the whole 'older' age cohort is too often treated as one, without programme-level recognition of the different needs of sub-groups as they progress through the age group. There are lessons here for any evaluation of a subsequent place-based intervention aimed at 50+ returners which are returned to in Chapter 5.

A final assessment on evidence quality concerns available data sources. Overall, all have limitations for use in identifying useful information on ALMPs for the 50+ cohort. The best prospect is the LFS which has useful information on, for example, job-finders and how they found out about their job, which can be analysed by such variables as gender, age group, sector, occupations, education, etc. but this all depends on whether the sample size can tolerate the necessary levels of disaggregation. At national and regional levels this should be feasible, and it may also be possible for some of the larger city regions such as GMCA, though below this level would be unlikely. The DWP database will eventually have useful information on the Work and Health Programme. However, this will take a while to accumulate due to the newness of it, though the current information on the now defunct Work Programme gives a good idea on what is possible.

3. Findings – intervention targeting for over 50s

3.1 Introduction

The available evidence suggests considerable variation in the ways in which the over-50s jobseekers have been targeted in policy and programmes. This chapter look across that evidence and considers in particular:

- The role of 50+ targeting in ALMP-measures to aid return to work
- Whether and how employment support and related interventions have targeted this age cohort
- Evidence of effectiveness of targeting and how this contributes to intervention performance
- The extent to which segmentation has been a feature of what is a heterogeneous group

The review also looks at the targeting of 'trigger points' and in particular, factors such as access to pensions and benefits, health and the ability to work in a particular occupation, and workplace attitudes of employers and individuals to the ageing process. It all makes for a complex context for policy development and programme delivery and so it may not be surprising that examples of good practice are often not too easy to find.

3.2 Targeting of older people in active labour market measures

A recurrent feature of employment support for older people is that interventions are usually not directly targeted specifically at them. In the UK, support for those 50+ who are looking to return to work after a period of unemployment, following redundancy or other dislocation, has been predominantly through mandatory participation from welfare or related systems, or voluntarily, in all age or adult specific programmes. This is a long-standing feature of active labour market measures and was noted from previous cross-programme reviews, notably the 2003 assessment across DWP programmes in the UK (Moss and Arrowsmith, 2003) which looked at 13 employment support initiatives of which just one (New Deal 50+ introduced in April 2000) was targeted at older people and the review by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) for DWP (DWP2010a).

This lack of age-based targeting also appears to be a wider feature of employment support

for the 50+ population across Europe. In part, this may reflect the inherent difficulties in programme design and implementation in doing so. However, there are important exceptions such as the individual employment pacts of *Perspektive 50 plus* in Germany (European Commission (2012)) and other international examples of targeted support in countries such as Korea (OECD, 2018). The situation in the UK and more widely across Europe, reflects a generally all-age focus within the administration and eligibility of ALMP-measures and where any targeting of actions (e.g. on those with chronic conditions affecting work entry; those recently subject to redundancy; etc.) is not age specific. This seems to underestimate the substantial and often distinctive barriers to employment and return to work faced by older people.

There is, of course, a long legacy of past research looking at barriers to employment choices for older people, some specific to the 50+ group (e.g. Hirsch, 2003). This has variously mapped issues of age stereotyping in recruitment, active and passive age discrimination notably in recruitment, selection and in-work training, health and chronic illnesses, caring responsibilities, qualifications (lack of or currency) and/or out-dated skills, constraining self-perceptions and attitudes to work, among others. While these appear to operate both individually and often in combination to provide support challenges which are more acute or persistent as constraints in facilitating return to work, active labour market measures are not usually targeted at older people.

While this is not to suggest that all-age programmes cannot effectively support many older people in return to work; it does imply a likely, and apparently recurrent, inconsistency in policy approaches in relating to more distinctive 50+ needs. Evidence suggests that the inclusion of a personalised element in support within programmes may go some way to accommodating these needs by providing for more customisation in employment support. Recent evidence (e.g. McNair, 2011; Watt and McNair, 2015; Brown et al., 2018; DWP, 2017a; Age UK, 2018) suggests this is the case, with earlier DWP research suggesting that personal advisors who are of a similar age to their clients may be particularly well-placed to build confidence and empathy with 50+ clients (Moss and Arrowsmith, 2003). Other measures targeted at, for example, all unemployed adults with illness or disability may also disproportionately affect older people but are not dedicated to them.

3.3 Targeting of older people in interventions

Many ALMP-measures aimed at the older cohort of jobseekers are open to all ages within the 50+ group and some are open to 45s and over. This is not necessarily due to any attempt to avoid having open access to all in scope, but more a reflection of the apparent lack of recognition (or acceptance) that older jobseekers are not a homogeneous group. This appears to be a long-standing feature of interventions with earlier analyses in the UK suggesting that (DWP) customers aged 50+ have particular needs related to their age that have not always been addressed by (then) current provision (Moss and Arrowsmith, 2003; Hasluck and Green, 2007; National Audit Office, 2004).

The evidence available also suggests that there are certain trigger points where individual attitudes and abilities change. The 50-55 age group is reckoned to be the most receptive to intervention since they are likely to have the most recent employment histories, less out-of-date skills, and comparatively high motivation. Removal of the Default Retirement Age (DRA) in the UK (see Chapter 3) and deferment of SPA as a common public policy measure across much of Europe have served to emphasise this distinction since access to some (or all) pension income and other incentives for withdrawal from the labour market are further delayed or deferred.

By contrast, those aged 60+ face more difficult choices of whether to stay in employment or retire or seek transitional arrangements such as looking to reduce their hours of work towards a phased retirement. Since 2010, transitions to retirement and responses to public policy which emphasise extending working lives have been an important and recurrent focus for research, particular among academics. A substantial focus has been on organisational adaptation which research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and others suggests has largely been reactive and compliance driven (CIPD, 2015 and 2016).

Other research has centred on later life decisions at or around SPA or post-retirement return to work (Lain, 2012; Van Stolk et al., 2014) or 'de-retirement' (Wilkinson and Pike, 2018). From the perspective of this review, of greater relevance has been the limited research looking at attitudes and practices of those 50+ returning to work which shows very diverse motivations (Vickerstaff et al., 2017; WHERL, 2017). A recurrent feature for this group of older people appears to be the financial standing of the individual and their ability this gives them to make such decisions.

Wider issues of public policy can have an important bearing on 50+ attitudes to current and prospective financial standing. In the UK, the raising (and equalisation) of the SPA is likely to have the effect of increasing participation rates for many older workers and extending the need for work-based income (though some will need support for factors that may prevent them from working such as health, care responsibilities, etc.). However, this might in part be counter-balanced by the introduction of the workplace pension (which has had considerable success) and the greater pension freedoms for those with private pension provision, meaning that workers in the future might be in a better position to choose earlier withdrawal from the labour market. In all this, the UK is better-placed than many other European countries, many of which have struggled to raise the pension age sufficiently and to shake off formal early retirement schemes that in some cases can see workers leaving their jobs in their 50s.

The dangers of a lack of coordinated policy towards older workers is set out by the OECD (OECD, 2018). This identifies the over 55s as the most vulnerable group which could be forced to take early retirement from their main job (for reasons such as the nature of the work being heavy manual work, though it could be ageist or stereotypical attitudes of employers) but must seek alternative employment to avoid poverty. This could, in effect, force them to take much lower paid work where this is available. In some countries (e.g. OECD, 2018),

there is evidence that the labour market has adjusted to respond to this and other 'supply' opportunities, with employers stimulating the creation of many more short-term, low-paid and often lower-quality jobs. This has apparently been the experience of Korea which has one of the highest employment rates for the 50+ cohort and right through to the older sub-groups such as 70-74, but also has the fastest-ageing population among all the OECD countries.

In this situation, the available evidence suggests a higher employment rate for older workers may be indicative of more 50+ having little or no choice in current circumstances but to take low paid and often less secure employment. Others may be similarly and perhaps reluctantly forced into such work in seeking more flexible working conditions (Phillipson, 2018; Di Gesa, 2018; Age UK, 2018) which are more likely to be characteristic of some low paid work (e.g. retailing, hospitality and retail catering, cleaning and sub-contracted servicing). For some older people, this may be a preferred and active choice, but where it is not, the UK evidence suggests those in their early 50s (and beyond) without other opportunities risk effectively being locked into the lower end of the labour market for the rest of their working lives (Devins, 2011; House of Commons, WESC, 2017; Age UK, 2018), and with consequences for relative poverty and benefit dependency (Ray et al., 2014). Outside the UK, and in Korea, for example, this situation is reflected in remarkably high employment rates for those aged 70-74 at 33% (OECD, 2018).

Similarly, an EU Peer Review (European Commission, 2012) looking at the role of PES in extending working lives, found that the 55+ group was the most critical in terms of targeting interventions since they were between the two extremes of the older age cohort and effectively targeted policy could help keep them in the labour market. To do this, the Peer Review set out several issues for PES to consider, including:

- Staff development to offer targeted services
- Fostering individual responsibility for employability but facilitating it through appropriate measures
- Working with other stakeholders in casework for activation of older jobseekers
- Providing structured opportunities for personal and skills development
- Supporting employers (especially SMEs) with information and advice on age diversity and management.
- Involvement in strategic partnerships at national, regional and local levels to change attitudes and perceptions

There was also a suggestion from this peer review that the moniker 'senior workers/ jobseekers' should be adopted in preference to the 'older' prefix to help avoid any negative connotations.

In the international context, lowering the target age to 45+ mostly reflects the option of taking early retirement available in some countries and is an attempt to capture those in

employment early to ensure they do not drift into (longer term) unemployment in the interim period. In the UK, the piloting of encouraging increased take-up of the Sector-Based Work Academies (sbwa) and Work Experience (WE) interventions in 2015-2016 (DWP, 2017a) on the 45+ cohort meant that the 45-50 age group represented over one-third of the trial group and one-third of the non-participant control group. While the trial reported generally positive outcomes, there was no analysis by age group within the overall cohort so it was not possible to confirm the effect through the eligibility range.

The importance of an older jobseeker's employment history in responding effectively to employment support interventions is commented on (generally) in a range of studies but is looked at more specifically in an international meta-study (Eichhorst and Seidly, 2016). This found that older jobseekers should be considered for targeting with the following types of interventions:

- Fixed-term employment should be a legitimate goal for measures and is an effective screening mechanism.
- Training for work or qualifications relevant to organisational or wider labour market needs offers a good prospect for longer term work.
- Older participants taking up fixed-term jobs may have less prospect of moving to a permanent post than younger ones.
- More intensive support from employment services providers tends to improve activation significantly.

However, while there was support overall for interventions to look positively on fixed-term temporary work for 50+ return to work, there were different findings in various countries suggesting that labour market context was important in conditioning such responses. For example, in Italy, temporary jobs for older workers could improve the chances of them moving into permanent work (albeit after several repeated spells of temporary work), whereas in Germany they were valuable screening opportunities for employers and a chance for the older workers to demonstrate their value.

3.4 Evidence of effective targeting

The evidence of effective targeting of 50+ jobseekers is somewhat limited in current research and evaluation, in part reflecting the paucity of directly older age focussed interventions. Four aspects relevant to targeting emerge from the review and are considered below:

- The value of early intervention to avoid prolonged worklessness in older job seekers
- Changing attitudes in the workplace to extend recruitment opportunities
- Combining resources and responsibilities for older returners support across agencies
- Valuing older jobseeker potential and characteristics

Value of early intervention: Much of the history of return to work interventions shows that they are principally targeted at those jobseekers furthest from the labour market. This may be misguided for older workers, and various studies (e.g. DWP, 2017a; European Employment Observatory, 2012) have indicated that interventions need to catch older workers quickly and close to their last period of employment if their motivation to find work is to be captured. Some research studies (e.g. DWP, 2011a) suggest that older people out of work are especially prone to falling motivation after longer periods of unemployment or unsuccessful job search, with this often acting to re-enforce a negative expectation of their employment potential.

Recent analysis of age contrasts in outcomes in Scotland from the Work Programme (Brown et al., 2018) shows that negative expectations of work prospects are a strong predictor of weaker placement for over 50s, and this appears to intensify with age (Box 1). Rapid response is also important from the employers' perspective since they tend to react better to a candidate with a shorter period without work (fresher skills, retain the work ethic, etc.).

Box 1 SOPIE analysis of over 50 return to work in the UK Work programme

- Mainstream JSA clients (62%) were much more likely to return to work (RTW) than the 'ESA' clients (with chronic illness or health conditions) - (20%), and with a strong negative relationship between age and the predicted probability of having a job start for both JSA and ESA
- JSA clients were most likely to RTW early, especially for young clients although the age contrast showed little difference for younger and 50+ after 9 months
- Age plays an important role in influencing RTW in both groups but it also showed strong influences of other (potentially modifiable) factors including the length of unemployment, client motivation, and the management of multi-morbidity challenges in clients
- Individual's expectation of the likelihood of job start was also a strong influence on RTW and where pre-conceived barriers could act as a substantial negative influence with this effect especially marked for older clients
- The study suggests the importance in any age-specific support programmes of providing integrated interventions focusing on both a range of "biopsychosocial" factors to build and sustain motivation among older clients and to enable RTW

Source: Full details in Fiche 4 of Technical Report; Brown et al., 2018

The policy implications are clear – the need to engage with jobseekers close to the start of their jobless period (which could be before they become unemployed, perhaps facing redundancy) to provide intensive (and integrated) support in job search in filling vacancies or filling other opportunities in the workplace (such as work trials or work experience).

Changing attitudes to older entrants' potential in the workplace: Even if age per se is not a specific barrier to entry, adverse stereotypical views by recruiters to the value of older entrants to vacancies can act as an effective barrier to the competitiveness of 50+ returners in many parts of the labour market. Targeted return to work interventions which do not address such attitudes are not likely to be effective in addressing such constraints. However, substantive evidence to inform such actions is thin. While there is no lack of anecdotal reports (House of Commons: Women's and Equalities Committee, 2018a), the extent of ageism in the workplace and how much it acts as a barrier to recruitment of older jobseekers overall, and from different segments or intersectional backgrounds, is unclear. Robust evidence in this area remains challenging for research and especially since the introduction (since 2006) of, in effect, legislation to counter workplace age discrimination leading to some employers being reluctant to acknowledge non-compliant practices.

Research from professional (CIPD, 2014 and 2015) and managerial bodies (BIC 2015), among others (Age UK, 2018), confirms that responses in larger organisations are at least driven by compliance. Other research (Vickerstaff et al., 2015) suggests that the legislation has created some perverse, and adverse, consequences. This includes an apparent reluctance to provide for age-defined workplace initiatives such as mid-career planning for fear these are perceived as discriminatory (Box 2).

Box 2 Adverse effects of employer responses to age discrimination in the UK

- The multi-study WHERL research programme looked at employer adaptation to public policy goals to extend working lives and how effectively they were adjusting to provide constructive employment environments and conditions to enable this
- Adjustment was seen to put a greater emphasis than 'supply' and recruitment pressures for effectively adapting wider HR and other practices to support retention and adjust working practices to facilitate the changes
- While (some) UK employers are adjusting to specific issues such as the abolition of the default retirement; the WHERL research found few were far sighted in working through wider implications of an ageing workforce
- In particular, the multi-study research programme showed that in focussing on compliance, employer perceptions of the age discrimination legislation are having unintended and perverse consequences which constrain age-specific adaptations such as flexible working opportunities targeted at older employees or eldercare
- These rigidities are not helpful to either employers or (older) employees; the research shows this adds up to a significant adjustment gap (by employers) which needs to be addressed and is a necessary focus for a sustainable place-based 50+ employment support initiative

Source: Full details in Fiche 3 of Technical Report; Vickerstaff, 2017

Successive research has also suggested that post the 2006 legislation, age discrimination in recruitment remains a feature of the labour market although it may be hidden (as in selection processes). Robust evidence on the frequency and characteristics of age discrimination in the labour market is hard to come by; perhaps this is unsurprising since it would be seen to relate to illegal practices. However, a recent call for evidence and assessment by a House of Commons Select Committee (Women and Equalities Committee) has acknowledged these effects in the UK (House of Commons, WESC, 2017), and the consequences for constraining extending well paid and quality work in later lives.

Employer-based research has nonetheless suggested that jobseeker perceptions of discrimination in recruitment and in internal management practices may be inadvertent and driven largely by deep-seated and stereotypical perspectives of older workers' attitudes and aptitudes (CIPD, 2014). Other research has challenged these stereotypes from empirical evidence to show that most, if not all, of the tested negative attitudes about older workers (by employers or others) are invalid (Ng and Feldman, 2012). This showed evidence only for the stereotype that older workers are less willing to participate in training and career development activities. However, even here, other widely reported survey evidence has even challenged the validity of that common assumption by employers (BIC, 2015). On this evidence, stereotypical views about older workers' abilities relating to job requirements and qualities are unproven but yet they persist and appear to underpin inadvertent age discrimination where it exists.

The effects of these issues have been highlighted in *Fuller Working Lives* (DWP, 2017c). This looks at (mostly) the 50+ age group and how they are perceived in the workplace (with evidence of conscious and unconscious age discrimination) and their involvement in training/retraining and in recruitment. It recognises that government policy has been helping create the right backdrop and removing barriers to longer working lives (e.g. no default retirement age, request for flexible working, as noted in Chapter 1 above) but that this by itself will not lead to a more positive attitude towards older workers or working practices that support them. CIPD research (CIPD 2014 and 2015) has provided evidence to support what appears to be significant employer reluctance or inertia in adjusting working practices to the needs and aspirations of older workers (Box 3).

Box 3: Employer adjustments to an ageing workforce in the UK

- Cross-UK, three-study analysis by Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the UK professional body for HR personnel, reviewed organisational adjustments to an ageing workforce and internal labour market adaptations for extending working lives.
- Survey and case study evidence showed UK employers are responding ineffectively, and often only reactively to workforce aging by focussing on compliance with legislative measures and not more pro-active measures of

extending working lives such as older workforce retention, and management and development of an ageing workforce.

- There is little focus on the needs of older workers for modified and more flexible working opportunities, or of distinctive caring responsibilities for older employees.
- Organisation line and other functional managers are too often ill-equipped to promote teamwork in age-diverse teams, and widely lack the skills, training or awareness to cope with this.
- Many employers continue to demonstrate inertia and adjustment rigidities for support to existing older employees for extending working lives.

Source: Full details in Fiche 5 of Technical Report; CIPD, 2014 and CIPD 2015

On the available evidence, it seems that where age bias exists then it needs to be countered directly by policy measures if return to work interventions are to raise demand for older workers. Such measures would seem to need to go beyond rhetoric and exhortation to include more active measures such as employer championed awareness raising, and also reducing employers' perceived 'risks' perhaps by getting older jobseekers in the workplace through work trials, work experience, and work shadowing opportunities. In this way, older jobseekers will have the opportunity to prove themselves in a real work situation and working closely with employers (who may need to be incentivised to cooperate) is crucial.

Combining resources and responsibilities: The UK government's *Fuller Working Lives* goes on to offer ideas on how to target policy (Box 4 and one of the key learning points from this work is that the effective targeting, recruitment and referral (for example in voluntary schemes) of older workers is a joint responsibility of all the key players). In this vein, studies have confirmed the importance of integrated actions, often involving different support actors, in helping 50+ return to work, most recently in the age-contrasts of effectiveness of the Work Programme in Scotland (Brown et al., 2018).

Box 4: Principles for effective targeting of older workers in active-ageing policy

- Effective recruitment of older workers is a collective responsibility with all those concerned – employers, individuals, agencies (e.g. JCP, education and training providers) and government.
- Eliminating conscious and unconscious bias towards age in the workplace through changing attitudes is crucial.
- Bringing together the key players (albeit without enough coverage of SMEs) to agree a strategy is potentially effective and could work well in a local (e.g. GMCA) context.

- Actions need to be supported by effective funding which encourages, for example, real skills training/retraining for sustainable employment.

Source: Full details in Fiche 7 of Technical Report; DWP, 2017c

While there are some useful examples of this type of more extensive and often cross-agency collaboration in the UK (such as GMCA *Working Well initiative*), evidence of this holistic approach applied to the 50+ cohort of jobseekers can usefully be drawn on from outside the UK. In Germany, for example, the *Perspektive 50 Plus* (Box 5) initiative directly addresses the problems faced by many older jobseekers such as obsolete skills, decreasing employability and psychological obstacles, particularly affecting the long-term unemployed. It also recognises that employers in local areas often have negative attitudes towards older recruits even though many are facing increasing skills shortages, some of which the older jobseeker may have (perhaps with some retraining or updating). The key learning points suggest that an integrated approach to support, offering a range of services, is the most effective approach and this requires collaboration between the key players. However, more than this, it requires an easy point of entry for the jobseeker to access the customised services needed.

Box 5: A German example of cross-agency collaboration – implementation lessons from Perspektive 50 Plus

- Mobilisation of local partnerships – bringing together the key local players to work in concert for the labour market integration of older workers is essential and means that policies and approaches can be geared to local circumstances (economic, social, etc.).
- Integrated approach – the involvement of active measures needs to be supported by other measures such as those on health, care responsibilities, etc. to prevent these acting as barriers to getting back into the LM.
- Lifelong learning culture – employers, employees and jobseekers need to recognise (or be educated in this) that training and retraining is a continuous process if employability is to be maintained.
- There also needs to be infrastructure and funding to enable this integration to happen, though employers must take some of the responsibility for leading this given the direct benefits it confers on the business.

Source: Full details in Fiche 9 of Technical Report; European Commission, 2012

Importance of jobseeker characteristics: Other lessons on targeting concentrate less on age and more on the characteristics of the jobseeker. An international study (European Commission, 2012) on how PES should tackle the issue drew on the following:

- The best context for increasing participation rates of older workers was an overall high labour force participation rate, availability of part-time jobs, and low overall unemployment (e.g. Nordic countries, Netherlands).
- Older jobseekers may have out-of-date views on jobs available and how to access them.
- Older jobseekers tend to have better prospects in SMEs than in larger firms.

The international review on PES potential also showed that portfolio career options are viable for older workers. Part-time transitions have been shown by research to be valuable transition for older returners, especially for those out of the workforce for some time or de-motivated. This raises the potential of PES support in combining (different) part-time work positions to avoid any income or earning disruptions, or for combining part-time employment with self-employment. There is also an important role for social payment systems that provide an incentive for the jobseekers to seek and remain in work (making work pay) which, in the UK is embodied in the current provision of Working Tax Credits and Universal Credit which is taking its place.

The UK shares some of these labour market characteristics such as high participation rates (overall), low unemployment and a flexible labour market with often wide availability of part-time work, though not uniformly across local and occupational labour markets. Where such conditions do exist, the evidence is suggesting effective targeting will come from identifying employment opportunities and matching older jobseekers with appropriate training/retraining given and any other incentives (e.g. work trial) to bring the employer and jobseeker together.

3.5 Segmentation of over 50s in delivery

While it is generally recognised that the 50+ jobseekers are not a homogeneous group, there appears to be limited recognition of this in ALMP. The evidence suggests that in the overall 50+ cohort, there are certain watersheds associated with different needs that suggests a different policy emphasis is required for those in the early 50s, mid and late 50s and over 60. Beyond these broad age affects, multiple other factors are also likely to affect effective segmentation, and addressing this requires effective early profiling of clients to enable the development of policy responses sensitive to different needs groups within the 50+ client population. This will lead the targeting of service options to respond to heterogeneous needs so as to provide for effective delivery pathways for returning to work in older age.

Responsiveness to needs also appears to go deeper than effective segmentation and targeting of delivery. Here, a key message emerging from the (limited) evidence is that individual jobseekers within 'needs' segments or targeted groups will need customised support covering a range of matters (such as health, care responsibilities, upgrading qualifications or re-skilling, or pensions). Furthermore, the support needs to be delivered in an environment where older jobseekers feel comfortable which may not mean an

institutional environment such as the jobcentre. Older workers may become unemployed after a long period in employment, sometimes with the same employer, and efforts to ensure a conducive environment for job search support is likely to be reflected in better outcomes from interventions.

Outside the UK, there are several examples from past research and evaluation where this specialised service for older jobseekers has been created. Examples are the dedicated support centres in Germany (European Commission, 2012), Korea (OECD, 2018) and Belgium (in the Flanders Region) (European Employment Observatory, 2012) and this approach gives the opportunity to customise services to individuals which recognises the diversity of needs through the age range. The precise way in which these dedicated services are set up varies and no more so than in the funding they attract. These have some cultural contrasts so, for example, in Germany, they are well-funded mostly from the state budget, whereas in Korea they rely less on a publicly funded (official) budget and more on marshalling other resources to support actions and the centres.

Cross-national evidence emphasises the value of training/retraining as a recurrent option and an important stand-alone or component to interventions for the 50+ cohort (e.g. EuroFound, 2017). For example, a study of the 50+ training dimension (McNair, 2010) showed a mismatch between employee and employer perspectives (and experience) of training and training needs among older workers. This included views of an under-skilled, reluctant-to-train, low training engagement age group that needs to be addressed. However, the evidence suggests scope for segmenting the over 50s into training capability groups, highlighting that there are some in the cohort (the most under-skilled at the time of becoming unemployed) who are the least likely to have received training. The study also cast doubt on the efficacy of training specific interventions for 50+ unemployed jobseekers unless part of wider programme of active advisor support and other activities which included job placements.

4. Findings – effective employment support for over 50s

4.1 Introduction

Drawing on the more practically-oriented sources from this review, this chapter examines the evidence on the shape and delivery of interventions that can work in supporting 50+ return to work in particular contexts. It also reviews the likely transferability of these interventions to place-based intervention, and more specifically:

- An overview of the types of 50+ and related employment support interventions from the UK and selected international experience
- The route options and pathways that are open to older jobseekers to take with appropriate employment support
- The capacity and resourcing implications for the intervention and support options where this evidence is available¹⁶
- The nature and challenges of the integration of constituent (different) support activities (and actors) in employment support interventions

This concludes with a review of the evidence of both positive and negative moderators and mediators in delivering 50+ employment support, including for business and other stakeholder engagement. Put together, it provides a broad evidence-based picture of what works (and what does not), and also the likely transferability of these lessons to place-based intervention contexts. Here context is important, though often it means adjusting policy ideas to fit local circumstances rather than seeking similar conditions.

4.2 Overview of return to work interventions for over 50s

The DWP-commissioned overview of pre-2010 over 50s back-to-work reports (DWP,

16 There is only limited information on financing and the costs of interventions since many of the support services are subsumed into wider provision (e.g. from wider public employment

2010b) provides a useful starting point for considering the types of employment support interventions possible. Covering ten programmes or pilot programmes, including the various permutations of New Deal, it identified six types of back-to-work intervention:

- Advisory support
- Skills, training and work-based learning
- Work trials, work experience and associated work transition
- Wage supplements
- Other forms of financial support
- Health interventions

While this was not proposed as a typology of relevant ALMPs or return to work actions, it does align with earlier DWP reviews (DWP, 2003) of ALMPs in the UK, and provides a practical focus for this part of the review setting out potential actions for 50+ employment support.

Advisory support: Advisory support is embedded in some form (e.g. personal advisors, counsellors, job coaches, etc.) in most ALMPs but often different in scale, frequency of contact and focus. This is widely seen, when effective, as a crucial component part of employment support in both voluntary and mandatory programmes for return to work, notably for older people. A recent assessment of the Work Programme in Scotland (Brown et al., 2018) for example, compared age affects among client cohorts and confirmed the value of dedicated advisors for considering an individual's needs and setting these against the context of their "biopsychosocial" needs.

This recent evidence, although continuing to be explored by its authors¹⁷, suggested that advisors who worked closely with clients to raise aspirations and goals, could have a material and earlier effect on job outcomes. This appears to endorse earlier evidence (Creed, 2009) from international studies that suggested a link between jobseekers, goal-orientation and productive job-seeking behaviours. This also found that jobseekers with high goal-orientation had higher levels of job-seeking 'intensity', leading to an increased likelihood of finding employment. Earlier cross-intervention assessments by DWP also acknowledged the value of personal advisors in working with older clients who were seen to be valued as informed brokers and guides to effective pathways and as trusted supporters.

The DWP produced an in-house report on JCP and older jobseekers in 2011 (DWP, 2012b) focussing particularly on the needs of 60+ customers, especially considering the expected growth in their numbers because of the demographic trend. The report recognised that 60+ jobseekers are not a homogeneous group and anticipated they will have varied support needs, including job search assistance, addressing outdated skills or health and caring

¹⁷ At the time of writing, a series of further publications are in preparation or planned for 2019 and subsequently from the analysis of this very large database.

issues. It was also suggested that those over 60 might also need financial advice on such matters as pensions and retirement options. The authors' conclusion was that JCP advisers needed more tools to help support the older customers and more flexibility in customising services to individual circumstances. To a certain extent, these issues have been addressed by JCP, though they should be kept under review.

An EU Peer Review (European Commission, 2012) looked at the role of PES in dealing with older clients (mostly 55+) and found that while national approaches varied, there was a recognition that support needed to recognise the special circumstances of older jobseekers. For example, many older job seekers, including those made redundant from previously stable employment, may have no experience of on-line job search, a success factor recently identified by wider (all age) analysis of effective PES support for (all age) jobseekers (Briscese and Tan, 2018).

A conclusion of the EU Peer Review was that PES counsellors should have special expertise to help older clients. In some countries, this has developed into dedicated centres, often away from the main jobcentres, where older workers can feel more comfortable in a less institutional and more supportive physical environment. The German *Perspektive 50 Plus* initiative (European Commission, 2012) lays the emphasis on the integration of services with a single point of accessible delivery. However, these facilities need to be resourced properly, a lesson learned from the example of the Job Hope Centres in Korea (OECD, 2018) where a very high caseload meant that clients were not given the quality of support they needed.

Systematic advisory support for adults in the UK on employment and training pathways outside specific return to work programmes is limited, and further constrained where individuals are not eligible for these actions with advisory elements. The Mid Life Career Review (MLCR) pilots in England were an exception (Watt and McNair, 2015) targeting 45-65 year olds including those in work and seeking employment. This mainly qualitative evaluation suggested that these had been cost-effective in securing impacts. Although the evidence was limited, the evaluation suggested from client, practitioner and provider experiences that the pilots had filled a gap for adults on professional information, advice and guidance (IAG) to individuals in building more sustainable working life decisions and practice in older age.

Skills, training and work-based learning: Skills and qualifications needs for work have been rising since the early 1980s but have accelerated particularly sharply in the last decade, most notably for numerical and computer skills. This has significance for older workers, whose initial skills are more likely to erode over time as new working practices and technology are introduced and because, on average, they are the least likely to possess formal qualifications (Felstead et al., 2018). Research has consistently acknowledged the importance of return to work for older workers in helping to fill skills or qualifications gaps yet until recently, the predominate trend across Europe has been diminishing participation rates in lifelong learning for over 50s (Descy, Tchibozo and Tessaring, 2009).

Employability and specific skills training are often an embedded part of return to work support, but evidence is mixed on how effective this provision is in raising employment outcomes for older workers. Earlier DWP reviews (Moss and Arrowsmith, 2003) have suggested that a multi-faceted response may be needed which increases coordination between providers (to provide for greater work-related training responsiveness and flexibility), provides for more robust information about training pathways and (local) provision, better identifies skills gaps for individuals and builds client confidence and motivation to undertake training.

Various measures have been used to try and update the skills of jobseekers, though again the needs of the 50+ cohort are likely to be varied according to their previous level of skill, how up-to-date they are, and their willingness to train or retrain. The EU Peer Review on the role of PES (European Commission, 2012) concluded two particular training-related issues to be especially important:

- Enhancing existing skills of jobseekers through in-work and external training
- Recognising prior learning of clients and building on this with new qualifications, etc.

These measures are all about making older jobseekers employable and should be part of a package of measures delivered through the collaborative involvement of key stakeholders. However, there is also evidence that basic employability training on its own, either as a stand-alone action or perhaps as a mandated entry point into further provision works much less effectively for older returns than for younger people. Indeed, evidence (DWP, 2010b) suggests this can provide for reduced commitment and motivation for older returners to work who may sense that generic employability training does not reflect their often-substantial lived experience of work.

There is evidence of the value (to clients and employers) of accreditation of skills training which suggests that it is unlikely to be very short-term (e.g. Murray, 2017; Age UK, 2018). This is also apparent in the policies of many EU countries (Eichhorst and Seidl, 2016) and where training durations for the unemployed tend to be longer (six months or more). In the UK, training of short duration is more a characteristic of ALMP-measures. The DWP early evaluation of the sbwa for older jobseekers (DWP, 2017a) is illustrative of this, with the focus on pre-employment training (maximum 6 weeks) and rather less on in-work training, though this may have been a part of the work experience element.

Previous interventions involving elements of training have tended to demonstrate useful positive effects on employment outcomes (DWP, 2010b). For example, under the Work-Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) programme for jobseekers, there were significant employment gains for the 50+ participants who had participated in both shorter and longer periods of training. This was likely to be more successful for low to intermediate skills levels since, in general, reviews of programmes over a long period have found that those jobseekers with managerial and professional backgrounds were not well-served.

Work trials, work experience and associated work transition: Keeping older jobseekers allied to the labour market is recognised as a key aim of interventions, with a range of evidence (WHERL, 2017; Brown et al., 2018; DWP, 2010b; CIPD, 2016) suggesting the sooner the support is delivered (in relation to the timing of the unemployment period) the more likely is a favourable outcome. This is confirmed by some cross-national studies (e.g. EuroFound, 2013) which show that newly-unemployed older jobseekers (especially those with a long employment history) can lose their motivation very quickly. Furthermore, employers tend to be more receptive to job applicants with shorter spells of unemployment.

In this scenario, keeping older jobseekers in touch with the 'real' labour market, and doing so early in any period of worklessness, can bring dividends for subsequent job outcomes. This can be in the form of work experience or structured work trials, both of which have been a feature of youth and all-age UK interventions for some time. The sbwa and Work Experience trials (DWP, 2017a) aimed at older jobseekers in 2015–2016 tested this approach, with the added advantage that the trials were in four large urban areas likely to have some similar characteristics to GMCA. Box 6 shows that the results were mixed and may have been affected by the inclusion of the 45-50 age group who may have different labour market affinities than the 50+ (the review did not segment the results by age group).

Box 6: Lessons from the UK's Sector Based Work Academies and Work Experience Trials

- Participants need good pre-entry information on the programme and referrals should be appropriate to the circumstances of the participant and their wishes.
- Recruiting employers to participate in the programmes is essential and the availability of a central focus approaching employers nationally (such as the DWP national team) is crucial.
- Participants also benefited more from moving into employment areas that were new to them and so offered a real opportunity to try something different.
- Employers need to have some recruitment needs and have confidence in JCP as a recruitment channel if they are to be effective partners in the programmes.
- Participants in the sbwa option did best when all three elements (i.e. pre-employment training (which was mandatory), work experience placement, and guaranteed interview) were completed.
- Positive job outcomes following participation were more likely in the sbwa programme (partly because they were closer to the labour market than those on the WE programme) but benefited from support immediately following completion of the programme.

Source: Full details in Fiche 8 of Technical Report; DWP, 2017b

While the sbwa trials seemed to suggest that those completing all three elements (i.e. pre-employment training, work experience and guaranteed job interview) displayed some positive job outcomes, the Work Experience trials were less convincing. A key point emerging from the review is that participants appeared to benefit from trying a work area that was new to them. There was no information on whether this resulted in the participant moving into a job in that field, though this could be facilitated by appropriate training/retraining. Moreover, this route is not necessarily an option under the array of interventions available and suggests that work experience by itself (except for the low or no skilled jobs) may not be enough to allow older jobseekers to take up a new occupation.

On a wider scale, an international meta-analysis of ALMP evaluations (Eichhorst and Seidl, 2016) found that, overall, training for work or qualifications relevant to labour market needs offered a good prospect for jobseekers to find sustainable employment. However, the results were not assessed by age group, though it is reasonable to expect that acquiring skills for jobs that are in demand in the labour market should offer good employment prospects. Here the important point from these sorts of interventions is that the training is meaningful and has currency in the labour market (so accreditation and certification are important).

Wage supplements: Financial barriers to return to work, especially in the context of benefit dependency, have uncommonly focussed specifically on older workers. This is despite the likelihood that 50+ return to work jobseekers may be disproportionately concerned about the risks of moving from benefits to lower paid employment for their financial security, resulting in possibly reduced motivation in job search. DWP and others have trialed employment subsidies through, for example, Employment Credit. This was available widely but was an earlier key feature of the effectiveness of New Deal 50 Plus provision providing 'private' top-up payments on job placement. Older clients welcomed the fact these payments were not disclosed to employers as they disclosure would jeopardise the level of wages offered by employers (Atkinson et al., 2000).

The use of wage subsidies appears to be more common in continental Europe (Eichhorst and Seidl, 2016) where they have been a mainstay of (mainly all age) ALMP-measures for many years, with varying levels of success. Evidence here confirms that some employers can be persuaded to take on an unemployed person through a financial incentive, but in terms of additionality and policy effectiveness, the important point is what happens after the subsidised period ends.

A EuroFound study (EuroFound, 2013) covering the EU 28 plus Norway examined the policies towards 50+ jobseekers and found that wage subsidies (in varying forms and including public works and job guarantees) were common in 16 of the countries (with training for the unemployed the second most commonplace in 12 countries). Wage subsidies (in various forms) have been subject to much evaluation and tend to show that when targeted properly, they can contribute to positive job outcomes. The report went on

to cite some examples of what it considered to be the more effective approaches, such as:

- **Austria** – the ‘Combination Wage’ which subsidises the unemployed to take a low-paid job (round 75% of participants stayed in work) and the ‘Come Back’ programme which gives a subsidy to employers to take on a hard-to-place unemployed person.
- **Germany** – under the *Perspektive 50 Plus* initiative, there is an ‘Integration Subsidy’ which pays 50% of the wage of the 50+ recruit (for a maximum of 36 months) and the employers is obliged to keep the person on after the expiry of the subsidy for at least as long as the subsidy period.
- **France** – financial assistance is available to employers recruiting 55+ jobseekers for at least one year (equivalent to EUR 2,000) with social security exemption if the person is kept on after the subsidised year.

The three examples show the variation in financial subsidies used, with some offering substantial support (e.g. Austria and Germany) compared to the more modest support in others (e.g. France).

Taken with more broadly based (all age) evidence, the effectiveness of wage subsidies or supplements is mixed but suggests that these can be costly. On the available evidence, they also risk limited cost-effectiveness, and if not targeted well, they can also have large deadweight effects. There are plenty of examples where they target specific needs groups, or the harder-to-help jobseekers, and this may be justified if it enables employers to overcome any prejudices towards the longer-term unemployed and leads to employment beyond the subsidy period. However, their role in making the older unemployed ‘employable’ is uncertain, and risks being not the most cost-effective way of getting 50+ job seekers into sustainable jobs.

Other forms of financial support: There is rather less consideration in research of the utility of additional (non-wage) forms of financial support to older clients being supported on return to work. This may be because of problems of differentiation with additional financial support being embedded in programme arrangements. One UK exception is the travel to interview which, although not dedicated to older clients, provided for help with travel costs to attend job interviews when outside the usual travel-to-work area. This was aimed to help overcome transitional problems as clients moved from benefits to paid work and to support the effectiveness of advisor support when encouraging individuals to widen the geographical scope of their job search. DWP reported (DWP, 2003) that there is no convincing evidence to suggest this is or is not effective for older people returning to work.

Other forms of non-wage financial support such as job grants which were an earlier feature of DWP provision for younger jobseekers appear not to have been a feature of incentivising successful job search for older jobseekers in the UK. However, other financial support has included time-limited benefit ‘run-on’ arrangements, for example covering mortgage interest and also for housing benefit. While these are thought to be of some value for older returners

to the labour market, there appears to be no differentiated evidence to support this.

Health interventions: Older jobseekers are likely to be disproportionately affected by chronic and work-limiting health, illness or disability (DWP, 2015; DWP, 2017). However, with more integrated provision, usually through PES and wider relationships with voluntary bodies or public health services, there is scope for support for those affected to address these constraints to effective job search.

Despite this age propensity, there appears to be very limited return to work evidence which looks across health conditions and constraints although some which focusses on common mental health conditions (Van Stolk et al., 2014). In the UK, there have also been (all age) trials from the DWP-DHSC joint Work and Health Unit where early evaluation has shown some successes for enhanced well-being and self-efficacy although without separate evidence for age groups (Natcen, 2015).

ALMP advisory work with clients with health conditions may be front-ended by substantive personalisation of support by job coaches or personal advisors, or through more procedural support. For example, DWP has developed protocols and tools for PES advisors in working with clients to support and signpost claimants. This developed and used the *Health and Work Conversation* (HWC) tool with trained advisors delivering face-to face, supportive first conversations with new (all age) benefit claimants with reported early positive claimant feedback (Briscese, 2018).

4.3 Evidence of effective pathways to (re)employment

As noted in Chapter 4, publicly-funded programmes in the UK and elsewhere often provide for evaluations of programme reviews which provide evidence of what works in terms of actions and effective return to work pathways. Much of this evidence is stand-alone, focussing on single programmes often at a pilot stage or for specific parts of interventions and, as already noted (Chapter 2) impact evidence is often over-dependent on qualitative or non-controlled quantitative research. There is also very little comparative analysis across programmes. Exceptions are two early reviews undertaken, as already noted, for DWP in 2003 (Moss and Arrowsmith, 2003) and 2010 (DWP, 2010 b); although limited in both cases to DWP programmes, they give a cross-cutting review across programmes and a comparative picture of effective pathways for return to work for older people.

The 2003 review drew particular attention to the value of a targeted focus for delivery on the 50+ age group through New Deal 50+, especially for those entering part-time work. At the time of the review, New Deal 50+ had secured job starts for an estimated 120,000 individuals. However, the fact that the programme was multi-faceted, voluntary and also had changes to eligibility and focus in its lifetime, means that it is difficult to isolate the

targeting effect from other influences. In particular, the voluntary participation and JSA majority take up suggests that participants may have been better motivated and closer to the labour market in terms of work potential. The evidence nonetheless suggested that New Deal 50+, and especially the personal advisor component, provided for stronger motivation, better informed and more effective job search and raised confidence among clients.

The 2010 review for DWP went further although its assessment is better seen as indicative rather than robust confirmation of what works for the 50+ returners. The evidence suggested that training/retraining for the low qualified or those with out-of-date skills worked in raising the full and part-time employment outcomes of the participants. It also re-enforced wider New Deal 50+ evidence (Atkinson et al., 2000) that entry into part-time work can provide a valuable route back into the regular labour market. The 2010 review also identified several intervention components that indicated positive results for older jobseekers, including:

- New Deal 25+ the mandatory intensive Activity Period saw a significant increase in employment levels among the 50+ participants in this open age programme, sustained for two years with the effect stronger for the 50-55 group than older.
- Across the different programmes, advisory support given by an adviser close to the age of the client was considered 'an asset'.
- There were significant employment gains in the Work-Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) programme for 50+ in both shorter and longer periods of training.

The review found that in general, interventions targeted at the 50+ cohort had lower take-up than younger age cohorts and there were few participants aged over 60, partly because they were not eligible for some programmes. Furthermore, older clients from managerial and professional backgrounds were not well-served by the mainstream support on offer at JCP and needed specialist attention.

It was also evident from the pre-2010 interventions considered in the review that there did not appear to be any significant difference in employment outcomes for mandatory and voluntary participation in (parts) of programmes. More recent interventions have also had mandatory elements, including the Work Programme, though information on the effects of this on outcomes is not available.

The sbwa for the over 45s trials in 2015-2016 had a mandatory pre-employment training element and two voluntary parts, a work experience placement and guaranteed job interview. The evaluation (DWP, 2017a) found that there was some drop out after completion of the mandatory element and this affected outcomes significantly, with the best outcomes coming when all three components were completed. However, the important point about this programme is that participation in it was voluntary and promoted by the JCP work coaches, though having signed up, the pre-employment training had to be completed (and so was mandatory) before going on to the next two components. Nevertheless, the piloting of the sbwa and WE option showed

encouraging results for improved job outcomes (Box 6 in Section 6.2).

The Work Programme was the mainstay of ALMP interventions in the UK up to 2017, delivered by external contractors working on a payment-by-results system designed to encourage more intensive help for those furthest from the labour market. A recent analysis of the data in Scotland (Brown et al., 2018) examined, *inter alia*, the effects of health and age-related issues on outcomes. This initial analysis found that JSA clients were much more likely to return to work than those ESA clients classified as having an illness, health condition or disability that made it difficult to work. More specifically the analysis showed:

- A strong negative relationship between age and the predicted probability of having a job start during the 2-year engagement with the programme for both JSA and ESA.
- JSA clients were most likely to return to work early, especially for young clients although the (negative) age effects show little difference in RTW probability for younger and 50+ after 9 months.
- Health, including the number of health conditions, length of unemployment, client perception of job starts and other individual factors were associated with job start probability for both groups.
- Age plays an important role in influencing return to work in both groups; but it also showed strong influences of other (potentially modifiable) factors such as the length of unemployment and the management of multi-morbidity challenges in clients.
- A further modifiable influence was the individual's perception of the likelihood of job start where pre-conceived barriers could act as a substantial negative influence for older clients.

The broad results of this study provide some useful indications on the effects of different circumstances of clients and while the results are not surprising, they do provide robust evidence to underline the need for considering an individual's needs.

This customised approach to support has found favour in the UK and elsewhere and is embodied in the JCP work coach approach to customer support. The evaluation of the Work Programme from the participants' perspective (DWP, 2014) confirmed the shift towards a customised service, though with mixed findings in terms of:

- Providers seen as delivering a high level of 'procedural' personalisation (e.g. friendly atmosphere, standardised tools)
- Providers less good at delivering 'substantive' personalisation (e.g. customised support tailored to the needs of the individual)

These less than satisfactory findings might be a feature of the programme still bedding in

and subsequent reflections could be different.

One pathway which has attracted much less interest among researchers and evaluators is the potential for older returners to work to move into self-employment. In part this is because self-employment outcomes often do not have a distinctive profile or lack the numbers for any age-based analyses with ALMP evaluation. Unlike job seekers in the youth labour market, the potential of in the 50+ self-employment area has also attracted little interest among researchers, at least in the UK.

An exception (Box 7) has explored (limited) international evidence in the UK context (Parry and Mallet, 2014) and suggested that conventional assumptions that older people will be disinclined to consider later-life self-employment or first time entrepreneurship because of the perceived risk, fail to consider other motivations such as the greater scope for securing work flexibilities than in full- or part-time employment for an employer. The UK evidence base is slim, but this research also draws on (small-scale) case study research in the UK to suggest that although a niche pathway, later life transitions into self-employment for whatever motivation are likely to need specialised and locally-centred support policies and sharp targeting.

Box 7: Self-employment potential and support for older workers

- One of the few studies with an empirical focus (albeit small-scale) centred on older age self-employment and entrepreneurship
- It suggests that rationales for later life self-employment and (traditional) explanations of the declining likelihood of first-time entrepreneurship and self-employment as an economic activity after 45 years are misplaced when they consider this as a future orientated judgment by individuals
- It sets out a pluralised model for entrepreneurship and self-employment for those 50+ which includes different 'present' focussed motivations for (variously) accidental, reluctant and privileged first-time entrepreneurs' orientations
- It defines an important, although probably not numerically large, group called 'privileged' entrepreneurs who change from 'successful' employment to self-employment to fulfil personal goals which are largely not based on financial rewards
- Successful later life adopters of self-employment from whatever motivation need local support policies and targeting which recognise these different needs and motivations and which offer more personalised support sensitive to the different motivations and circumstances

Source: Full details in Fiche 1 of Technical Report; Parry and Mallet, 2014

4.4 Intervention capacity, resourcing and integration

It is evident from international experience that there has been a shift in the way ALMP-measures are delivered, with a growing emphasis on collaboration between service providers. This may be informal but increasingly appears to involve systematic forms of collaboration such as service and referral protocols, and with some pooling of resources, often with a local emphasis. This appears to be at its most developed in countries such as Germany and Korea. In fact, these two countries provide useful examples of the different extent of resources that can be used.

In Germany, the mobilisation of local partners in the regional employment pacts (European Commission, 2012) brings together the financial and in-kind support of a particularly wide range of agents and agencies, including:

- Public employment service (PES) jobcentres
- Employers
- Chambers and associations
- Educational institutions
- Municipalities
- Politicians
- Social partners
- Religious bodies
- Social organisations

Here, the lead organisation is the regional PES who have been responsible for most of the direct funding since the initiative was launched in 2005 but other agencies provide some direct or, more commonly, in-kind resources.

In contrast to this relatively well-resourced German initiative, in Korea (OECD, 2018) the coordination of support services for older jobseekers is less well-funded and relies more on the goodwill of the many partners involved. The local PES operates at municipality level and works in collaboration with other service providers in the public, private and voluntary/community sectors. Similarly, the *Job Hope Centres* offer a range of customised services such as re-employment, retraining and counselling, marshalling resources where possible. However, in its assessment of the approach, the OECD identified significant under-resourcing of the services, as evidenced by very high caseloads (which could be as high as 500:1 in the Job Hope Centres) which, in Europe, the evidence suggests would not be compatible with a high-quality customer service model.

Box 8: Focus of the Job Hope Centres for 40+ in Korea

- The initiative of a national SME body to give mid and later life unemployed jobseekers the opportunity to gain work experience filling in for regular employees on temporary leave of absence
- Use of local service centres (Job Hope Centres) dedicated to helping older vulnerable workers (from age 40+)
- Regular collaboration between local employment service providers (public, private, NGO and voluntary/community sector) to deliver joint actions
- An effective support programme (Employment Success Package) proven to deliver sustainable employment outcomes for older jobseekers

Source: Full details in Fiche1 of Technical Report; OECD, 2018

Cross-provider and intra-service collaboration is an important development for older jobseekers who may have more complex needs and expectations than younger clients, including for more flexible working conditions, working adjustments to accommodate sustained caring needs such as for elderly parents or relatives, or support for health and disability which may affect working potential.

The recent research-based review (Brown et al., 2018) of age contrasts in the effectiveness of the Work Programme in Scotland has suggested age-specific support programmes may be improved by providing integrated interventions recognising the potential breadth and diversity of these needs. In particular, the evidence pointed to the need for a focus on health and a range of “biopsychosocial” factors to raise aspiration and motivation including enabling more people to realise the potential health benefits of returning to work.

In addition, many older workers will most likely have limited travel-to-work perceptions (for a variety of reasons). This appears to be the case even more for those with health or disability issues. This underlines the value of localised solutions in helping the older jobseeker who is unwilling or unable to extend their job search.

Cross-agency or cross-provider collaboration raises some additional challenges for join-up and reducing front-line complexities (for clients) in programme delivery, and this has led to some countries setting up specialist centres for older jobseekers. Here, multi-provider services are delivered, often in an environment reckoned to be more conducive to meeting the needs of clients. In Belgium, for example, the PES covering the Flemish-speaking region has set up specialist centres for the over 50s (European Employment Observatory, 2012) with 25 now spread across this relatively small region. Already discussed above, in Korea, the *Job Hope Centres* target mostly vulnerable unemployed (and pre-retirement) aged 40+ and offer a range of customised services on relatively limited direct funding.

Examples such as these strongly suggest that it is unlikely that PES alone can deliver the array of services (covering health, care responsibilities, finance, etc.) that older jobseekers may need to re-enter the labour market. They may also provide for a streamlined or one-stop approach to accessing possibly diverse services including for health and welfare related issues possibly constraining access to work, and in an environment that is conducive to older returners. Issues of integration are not limited to public employment services, although the centrality of their role in delivering support services to older jobseekers was confirmed by an EU Peer Review (European Commission, 2012).

A UK illustration of the importance of integration in non-PES delivery is the government-funded programme Mid Life Career Review (MLCR) Project, delivered through multiple providers face-to-face, over the phone and online, by National Careers Service Contractors, Unionlearn and voluntary sector partners, each working with other providers and programmes to support post-review outcomes. Open on a voluntary basis to those aged 45-65 in employment or unemployed, this was a distinctive, devolved cross-agency approach and although quantitative evidence is limited, the evaluation suggested it had significant success (Watts and McNair, 2015) including:

- Significant attitudinal and behavioural client gains with positive outcomes for earlier return to work (after unemployment), into self-employment, negotiating more flexible working conditions, and finding appropriate training to improve their employability
- Other participant impacts went beyond enhancing employment choices and included higher confidence, greater awareness of options for late life employment, and better work-life balance
- Employers also reported impacts in terms of improved retraining, retention and better motivation of their staff.

Delivery of the MLCR through cross-programme (and provider) integration also had capacity-building effects for providers and communities with the programme evaluation showing enhanced IAG skill sets for advisors, confidence in supporting adults in IAG, and for widening employment/development pathways for clients. It also showed gains for new and better integrated existing delivery partnerships in local communities (Box 9).

Box 9: Practice and lessons from the mid-life career review pilots in the UK

- Mid-life career and learning reviews (MLCR Reviews) were funded as a large-scale pilot with multiple providers operating different delivery models and mixes of provision.
- The evidence from evaluation shows these can provide a crucial input to mid and later life individuals making better informed decisions in later life about employment and career options to support extended working lives.

- The trial in different settings for unemployed people, returners to work and those considering later life working needs in existing employment showed transformative outcomes for not only clients but also providers and employers.
- There is no single model for effective delivery, but the trials provide valuable and evidenced pointers to a layered and mixed mode review process which can be low cost and effective.
- A series of practice-based success factors were also proposed for setting up a stand-alone review process or one embedded in a wider 50+ employment support initiative.

Source: Full details in Fiche 2 of Technical Report; Watt and McNair, 2015

4.5 Employer engagement issues for programmes

Research and evaluation have established that the quality of engagement of employers is vital to the success of return to work interventions (Age UK, 2014; Age UK, 2018; BIC, 2014). This is especially where clients are disadvantaged in some way and for some (many) older returners to work, this is likely to combine discrimination often based on stereotypes about older employees and their potential, along with adverse perspectives on employment readiness for those who may have out-dated (or few) skills or who have been out of work for some time.

Direct and indirect discrimination based on age-related issues appears to persist in the UK, and elsewhere, despite age-discrimination and age-equity legislation (in the UK since 2006). Chapter 3 has pointed to evidence that this often results in enduring constraints to the labour market competitiveness of older people from recruitment, selection and retention practices. At the heart of this may be stereotyped views of older workers in terms of their motivation, performance, capabilities and adaptability at the workplace. Well-founded empirical research has discounted these stereotypes as almost wholly invalid (Ng and Feldman, 2012), yet they appear to persist – consciously or unconsciously – among recruiters, line and operational managers. Such stereotypes need to be actively challenged

if these restrictive employer practices and values are to be addressed leading to a more constructive recruitment climate to optimise employment outcomes for older jobseekers.

Evidence of employer age-related practices, barriers and adjustments has been a recurrent focus for both academic and professional research. Some of this adopts a specific focus such as on effects of adverse employer flexibilities on lowering pay levels, notably for older people (Hirsch, 2003; Devins et al., 2011) or on intensifying inequalities in workplace training participation for over 50s, constraining access to jobs offering training and progression (DWP, 2017). A more broadly-based and recent review of the experience of employers recruiting and retaining older workers (DWP, 2017b; DWP, 2017c) looked at the attitudes and behaviour of employers. It suggested that beyond legal compliance, many employers pay little attention to age-related issues in their workforces, paradoxically often because they feel that doing so may contravene legislation.

This research provided little evidence of targeted policies for older workers covering health, caring and training issues and no special provision for responding to requests for flexible working, etc. which was found to be generally judged on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, there was evidence from this source that equalities legislation from 2006 and 2010 (see Chapter 3) including age discrimination had resulted in employers being reluctant to consider age-focussed targeting of employment practices for fear they would be challenged as discriminating against opportunities for younger workers. There were also indications that some employers would have difficulty recruiting those with health, caring and other issues that might affect their work. Employers tended to state that older employees offered values such as loyalty and experience, but these were very difficult to demonstrate in interview. This review of employer practices and perspectives offered some interesting insights and suggested actions by HR professionals and employers more generally:

- Employers need to monitor the age of their workforce if they are to identify the benefits of a mixed-age employee base.
- Flexible working could be important to older workers, but it should be available to all age groups.
- Managers should be given training on age-related issues.
- Managers and employees should be empowered to hold discussions about work and retirement plans.
- Sectors such as care homes and cleaning were the most receptive to recruiting older workers.

The last point suggesting that certain sectors are more receptive to older recruits underlines the need for support services to identify sustainable job prospects and gear interventions (such as training) to the needs of these employers. The commitment of employers to be age-neutral in their recruitment decisions is the best environment for placing older jobseekers into work, and for encouraging conditions for sustaining that employment. This

is significant for place-based action in confirming the currency of assumptions (as in 2009) that: *'active ageing'* policies need to challenge (assumed) negative employer attitudes to training for older workers.

Conscious or visible age discrimination can be tackled through legislation and here the UK's age discrimination legislation provides a legal disincentive, though it is difficult to monitor and cannot enforce action against unconscious or invisible bias towards older recruits. Whatever the effectiveness, or limitation, of legislative approaches, combating unconscious age discrimination will be a particularly challenging task, and one which, in the UK to date, appears not to be an integral part of return to work programmes for older people. In France, the policy approach is rather different. Here, employers are required to develop action plans for the employment of older workers (European Employment Observatory, 2012) which, it is hoped, will eventually change not only practices but also attitudes. The approach (Box 10) appears to have had mixed results and so far, has been less effective on removing ageism from recruitment and entry selection than from the existing workforce. However, the possibility for a more collaborative approach in the UK to building a more constructive employer environment, perhaps with the localised support of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), Chambers of Commerce and other local agencies might be a better way forward.

**Box 10: Employer engagement policy to promote active ageing in France:
Action plans in firms**

- Persuading employers to develop action plans for the employment of older workers can help change attitudes and bring about results.
- French companies are required to do this through legislation which ensured a very high degree of compliance.
- The lack of involvement from employee representatives in formulating the plans was a mistake by the companies that was soon remedied in any revisions.
- Plans worked well in altering the attitude and practices for older workers in the companies but had little effect on recruitment practices.
- Persuading employers to have such action plans on older workers may be possible in an environment such as the UK where the approach is for businesses to engage voluntarily in such measures.

Source: Full details in Fiche 10 of Technical Report; European Employment Observatory, 2012

There is no lack of research to suggest which direction(s) age-sensitive changes in the working environment might take. The British Institute of Management (BIM) research on the Missing Millions (BIM, 2014; 2014 and 2015), provided an important evidence-based

focus for employer-based reforms. Most recently, the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) through several studies (CIPD 2014; 2015 and 2016) also looked at the scope and need for better age-sensitive recruitment and working practices among employers. Drawing on practices in the UK and several EU countries, this influential study set out eight specific proposals for enhanced employer practice:

- Age-sensitive workforce planning and systematic age diversity monitoring
- Active workplace support measures for employee health and well-being
- Creative and cohesive provision for people with care responsibilities
- More flexibility in working time
- More broadly-based training and development sensitive to different learning styles
- Active and progressive approaches to management of retirement
- Building an inclusive and age-diverse culture sustained by line managers and others
- Tailoring HR solutions to suit individual needs and training managers to support this

These principles, if adopted, would help establish the necessary age-neutral employment environment for recruitment of older workers subject, of course, to their suitability for the job. This appears to be a significant issue for place-based support strategies for older returners to work concerned to build not just access and openings to work, but also to support them in sustained work. Drawing on its evidence, the CIPD recently gave evidence to a House of Commons Select Committee Inquiry (House of Commons, WESC, 2017) that the public administration, education and health sectors were all relatively poor at retaining older workers after they had been recruited.

5. Issues and implications

5.1 Introduction

The government vision in *Fuller Working Lives* sets out the UK's challenges of an ageing workforce and the opportunities for society, the economy and individuals to respond positively and imaginatively. Currently there are more older people in work in the UK than ever before. However, at the same time, this age group has significant levels of underemployment in jobs or skill levels that fail to reflect their past work experience or aspirations. For others, unemployment and inactivity remains an enduring issue and a persistent constraint to the quality of their lives. In a changing labour market and often volatile business environment, many older people in work will also face future job changes, redundancy and other disruptions to their expected later life employment and earnings.

Against this backdrop, the partners to this study have recognised the importance of effective place-based initiatives to support employment of those 50+ and to counter older age worklessness. This intensive review has looked at the evidence which might help shape, focus and sustain such an initiative, with that evidence brought together in the proceeding chapters, and with cross-cutting findings brought together in this concluding chapter. Our starting point is the quality of the evidence on which we have been able to base this assessment.

5.2 Scope, quality and RER approach

The review involved both an extensive scope for the inquiry, and a short timeframe. It has been able to balance both of these without compromising either. The time spent with Ageing Better and partners on refining the primary and secondary search questions and criteria proved to be crucial in ensuring the scope and focus were well fitted to their particular needs and expectations. In this, and through the review, the RER team has greatly valued the active engagement and contributions made by the project steering group in accessing sometimes difficult to reach sources, especially during Phase 1 of the work.

The main challenge for the review has been its potentially very wide scope. While the RER has benefited from this wider focus looking at evidence which might inform not only the set up, but also effective conditions for supporting 50+ returners, this nonetheless generated a large evidence base. Overall, the arrangement made to keep the scale of sources to identify (in Phase 1) and to review (in Phase 2) both realistic and manageable have worked well, as has the reduction strategy. However, we draw attention to two possible constraints:

- We have restricted the identification of the very wide range of potential sources on employer management practices for older workers to those with specific evidence on the recruitment of 50+. While this reflects well the RER's 'return to work' focus, it may have constrained the lessons we have drawn on concerning what emerges as a significant feature for future place-based actions, and specifically the ability to condition demand for older recruits and to encourage workplace strategies better adapted to their retention and productive contributions – an issue we return to below.
- We have also limited our identification and review of the very extensive evidence base on retirement behaviours and practices of individuals and employer support, to those with evidence on in-work perceptions and changing expectations of retirement related to extended working lives. A more broadly-based review here would have been justified, especially if any subsequent place-based actions to support 50+ returners were to integrate, as we propose, mid- and later-life reviews and which might include retirement planning and, potentially, support for so-called 'de-retirement'.

An early decision made was to include a review of relevant practices from appropriate international sources. In the event, this generated a potentially wide evidence base but with some partner reservations about the value of a full review of this evidence, given uncertain relevance to specific place-based actions in Greater Manchester and more widely in the UK. The RER has consequently taken a sharper approach to reduction of this evidence (from Phase 1 to 2) and to streamlining the use of international case study (fiche) evidence. While this meets partners' needs for the review, we caution that it may not have taken full account of what works lessons – and their transferability – from the extensive wider European sources.

Finally, the review cannot draw on evidence that is not available, or not provided in sufficient detail or for which there is a low level of confidence in its robustness. For the purposes of this review, we have drawn attention to important evidence gaps and the fact that too often research or evaluation that could be of great value in shaping place-based actions, lacks scale or depth in terms of data gathering, or the rigor needed. There are lessons here for future research of any new initiatives, which we return to below. Overall, however, the review concludes that while the evidence is lacking to clearly direct the shape and focus of place-based 50+ return to work support, there is sufficient evidence to provide important pointers for new policy development.

5.3 Success and transferability of effective practices

The evidence drawn together in Chapters 3 and 4 identifies a range of potential success factors for helping the 50+ cohort return to work. These are drawn from a range of contexts in the UK and abroad, and we have focussed on those practices where evidence is sufficiently robust and with consistency across sources (where there are several). We have also been conscious here of the potential for transferability to place-based actions (for example to Greater Manchester) so have considered any context-specific factors that might

limit local UK application of interventions such as different national structures, legislative factors or cultural differences. However, it remains that whatever the provenance of the actions, it is unlikely that any single one is wholly transferable. More it is a question of selecting those elements of a measure(s) that have the potential to be transplanted (albeit with contextual adjustments as necessary). This may, of course, involve combining elements of different measures.

The review suggests the following as success factors likely to underpin place-based approaches to 50+ return to work support:

- Providing for customisation of support to reflect complexity of client needs
- Segmentation of delivery to better reflect client profiles and specific needs
- Provision of personalised advisor support as a focal point for support provision
- Advisor or other embedded motivational support for clients and attitudinal challenge
- Creation of a conducive support and engagement environment
- Prioritisation to support rapid response and early labour market engagement
- Embedding of integrated approaches to skills, training and certification
- Provision of mid (and later life) career review as front-end of provision
- Employer-orientated actions to inform age-sensitive workplace adjustments

Each of these is considered briefly below.

Customisation and complexity of needs: Over 50s seeking work are not a homogenous group. They have often widely different needs which vary not only with age but also with their personal situation, domestic and dependent care circumstances, distance from the labour market, aspirations and expectations, currency and opportunity relevance of their skills and qualifications, and their health, including any longer term (acute) working limitations. Older 50+ cohorts also appear to be the more difficult to support and to sustain motivation for return to work. Consequently, the evidence suggests that effective return to work initiatives for 50+ needs to place a great emphasis on personalisation and customisation of support, and this, in turn, needs an integrated and cross-agency approach to providing often diverse and layered support needs. This complexity is, arguably, best addressed by locality support which can build on a range of existing capabilities to deal with the often-complex range of issues and inter-relationships faced by some older jobseekers, including support for job search, training and skills development, health and welfare, care and financial (including pensions) advice.

Segmentation of delivery: Against this background of diverse needs, the review suggests there is value in segmenting return to work programmes aimed at older people. This needs to be based on profiling older jobseekers by age group especially at or around 55 and 60

years of age which evidence suggests are common watersheds in changing personal needs and expectations, or in the potential for securing work. Age is not the only consideration in segmentation. Effective profiling, perhaps using available administrative data and start-up discussions with clients, would take account of a multi-factor diagnosis or assessment of the individual's proximity to the labour market and their personal circumstances such as health and any chronic illness or injury, and caring responsibilities. Viewed and applied this way, segmentation would support, but not be a substitute for, personalisation of support and enable effective targeting, and earlier and enhanced outcomes.

Personalised advisor support: Personalised and advisor-mediated assistance and communication based on the jobseeker's need and preferences plays a particularly strong role in effective support of return to work for older people. In part, this reflects their very diverse needs and circumstances, but also the benefits of advisor support responding sensitively to their lived experience in providing facilitation, signposting and personalised guidance, motivational and other support. Older returners to work, perhaps from managerial or professional backgrounds, may need support for them to harness personal and professional networks as the best pathway to accessing new job opportunities. For others (probably most returners including those who are further from the labour market or otherwise disadvantaged), more direct and sustained assistance from an employment advisor can help raise job readiness, improve search and applications (for example by using online search platforms with which some 50+ returners may well not be familiar), and connect with would-be employers.

Whatever the case, the evidence shows that personalisation combined with continuity and responsiveness of the advisor relationship is central to meeting needs. A feature of this, although based mainly on international evidence, is that advisors can help clients with goal-orientation and with this linked to more productive job-seeking behaviours, and where high goal-orientation saw higher levels of job-seeking 'intensity' and the likelihood of finding employment. There is also some evidence that this may be helped by linking clients with a 'peer' advisor of a similar age (and perhaps gender and ethnicity) which can help build trust and confidence in the support relationship and support outcomes. DWP's model for work coaches appears to recognise some of these issues and provides a good starting point for how advisor support might be developed.

Motivational support and attitudinal challenge: Although the evidence base is limited, there appear to be two separate but inter-related issues for which advisor-based support would need to ensure effectiveness in 50+ return to work programmes – robust motivational support to clients and attitudinal challenge. Motivational support is needed to sustain engagement especially for the harder to support clients, including those at a greater distance from the labour market, disrupted work histories or with chronic illness or disability constraining their job search options or effectiveness. This is not a unique issue for older job seekers but is likely to be a more common and distinctive challenge for advisors, and for the substantive customisation of support services.

Separate to this, but often inter-related (emanating from the Work Programme) is advisors' ability to identify and challenge clients and especially those with low esteem or predisposed to negative expectations of job search. Holding, or successfully building, more positive expectations of job search and anticipated success appear to be a strong predictor of subsequent success in employment outcomes in this age group.

Conducive support and engagement environment: Older jobseekers would appear to benefit from delivery of support services in an environment they are comfortable with and which is conducive to providing more personalised support. In the UK context, this may be outside the normal jobcentre in circumstances making it easier both to access (multiple) services and make effective use of them. This would seem especially important where support involved a progressive arrangement or sustained engagement, including where repeat visits or on-site support such as training or advisory sessions are involved. Similar environmental considerations may affect the scale and scope of any return to work recruitment fairs, for example, set up to support older worker placements by optimising contacts with local employers.

Rapid response and early labour market engagement: For older job seekers, interventions that focus heavily on client compliance to process rather than successful outcomes, can contribute to early demotivation, as well as eroding jobseeker confidence in their relationships with their advisor(s). It may also intensify any existing negative expectations of job search success – a feature of older age jobseekers, particularly those over 55. Rapid and responsive action is consequently a common success factor in capturing those older jobseekers recently made redundant or otherwise becoming unemployed to maintain motivation. This also helps make them more marketable to employers, who are generally more disposed to job applicants with previous shorter periods of unemployment.

This is partly about 'procedural' responses (and customisation) in the support facilities, but also about introducing active measures to support early labour market engagement. Evidence suggests that work experience and job trials (with guaranteed interviews) have proved to be relatively successful in maintaining labour market engagement. They can also be effective ways of stretching older jobseekers' aspirations (or widening expectations) by introducing them to wider opportunities which they may not have otherwise considered, and at relatively low-cost. Here more conventional approaches could be supplemented by more innovative strategies such as older jobseekers filling in for permanent employees on, for example, sick leave, maternity or sabbaticals.

Skills, training and certification: The evidence available in the UK of skills needs, individual and employer behaviours and attitudes to training is fragmented and not always consistent. This is an area where stereotypical attitudes (by employers) can prevent older re-entrants and employees increasing their options and opportunities for extending their working lives. The evidence available also suggests those same stereotypes are at best misleading about many, and perhaps most, older people in or seeking work. Paradoxically, the evidence of

active measures continues to confirm the importance of recognising the existing skills and experience of older workers with assessments of prior learning linked to certification that will have currency in the labour market. It also provides an opportunity to identify skills gaps in the jobseeker and use high quality and targeted training support to update and extend skills.

At the same time, the evidence also shows that embedded skills training in employment support programmes needs to adopt an integrated and multi-faceted approach that addresses the need for increased coordination (and responsiveness) between local providers, more robust information, advice and guidance about training pathways, access and provision, and in addition to better identifying skills gaps for individuals, also builds client confidence and motivation to undertake training.

Mid (and later life) career review: Extending working lives presents older people with a need to critically (re) assess their needs and expectations of paid work. A foundation for this would appear to be opportunities for mid-career planning for older jobseekers and those in work at or close to watershed points on or around 50, 55 and 60 years. At present, access to such provision outside of costly commercial services, for adults (of any age) in the UK is weak or severely constrained and it is not clear if and how the government's Careers Strategy might address this. Yet evidence suggests that well-founded mid-life career reviews can play an important role in broadening perspectives and confronting challenges and signposting to services.

To be effective, meeting these needs will go beyond direct issues of job search and employment issues and will need to be delivered with effective use of mediated labour market information and advice, for example, on local training opportunities which is sensitive to the sustainability of job choices. This would appear to be more specialised provision than might be available through conventional job coach or personal advisor support, and capacities for it would need to be built into integrated support provision – often as a front end to support services.

The evidence suggests that encouraging age-sensitive employer adjustments may lie beyond the immediate scope of place-based actions for 50+ return to work but would seem to be essential to the success of such initiatives in the longer term. This would appear to hinge on challenging and changing negative or constraining expectations and attitudes of potential recruiters of older people. This might appear to be conditioning labour market demand; actions which may be seen to go well beyond 'supply-side' orientated local initiatives. However, wider attitudinal change among employers appears to be needed since employers may not be conscious of holding out of date stereotypical views of older workers' abilities or of how (indirectly) discriminatory they might be in their recruitment practices. In addition, the 2006 and 2010 age (and other) discrimination legislation seems to have had the perverse effect of discouraging some employers from developing working practices more sensitive to the needs of an aging workforce, and to extending working lives.

A strong case could be made that what an effective 50+ return to work programme needs to work well is access to enough 'good employers', who offer not just diverse job openings but sustainable and flexible work opportunities to retain older workers across extended working lives. The credibility and effectiveness of 50+ employment support initiatives will, in the longer term, be judged by clients, and employers, not only as new jobs start but also in terms of retention and satisfaction with new work environments and work-life balances. Looked at in this way, the evidence leads to the conclusion that place-based interventions need not just optimise job search activity but reduce and remove attitudinal or behaviourally-based rigidities that prevent the labour market working to provide older workers with more, and more fulfilling, work opportunities. This will undoubtedly be a substantial challenge for local interventions, but it is arguably the best place for this to be addressed using local networks, local influences, local success stories and local champions for change.

This overview has focussed on the role a support service could provide in supporting 50+ job seekers into paid work. It has only briefly touched on the opportunity for supporting others into self-employment, as a 'job search' strategy. Some evidence suggests this might be more than a 'niche' pathway and might benefit some of those looking to return to work and others (in employment) looking to change their circumstances as they seek to extend their working lives. This might be appropriate for those who seem to have potential and may have considerable spin-off value for a place-based action, but the evidence of what works in supporting older people into self-employment is too thin to position this as a potential success factor for the programme. We would suggest that similar to work aimed at raising aspirations for employer practices, this too has scope for at least being trialled within place-based intervention.

This commentary would not be complete without also looking at 'success factors' which have not emerged confidently from the evidence. In particular, the evidence on job subsidies or placement incentives is not consistent and, in the UK, at least implied patchy effectiveness and substantial deadweight. These may, in any event, be beyond the scope of place-based actions without (substantial) central government support but if included, would seem to need both very sharp targeting (e.g. on temporary financial support to clients moving into part-time work) and ensuring that the way they were implemented did not act to depress wage rates offered by recruiters. Similarly, while there are still plenty of examples of job creation measures (e.g. public works programmes) abroad (mainly in Europe), evaluation has tended to show them to offer poor value in terms of moving participants into the real labour market and such programmes are showing clear signs of falling from favour.

5.4 Conditions for development of place-based over 50s employment support

The evidence and examples of identified better practice also suggest some conditions which an effective place-based intervention will need to ensure are addressed if they

are to build on this analysis. How partners seek to address these issues will set a context for intervention, and this will, in turn, affect how they apply success factors learned from national measures in the UK, and the use and utility of the international evidence. If not appropriately addressed, these may act as severe constraints to the efficiency of any place-based action.

Integration of stakeholders: Any place-based action will not be put in place in a 'green field' situation; existing services will be supporting 50+ job seekers probably on an all-age basis. This will include PES pathways, notably through JCP, local government-funded activity, as well as a potentially wide variety of national and local voluntary and community services. To this will be added existing providers of potentially important services (including colleges of further education, work-based training providers, commercial providers and recruitment agencies) who may not yet be consciously active in supporting older jobseekers but have potential capability to do so. A critical and informed understanding of the scale, scope and strengths of existing local provision and capabilities will be a cornerstone of a new and coordinated approach to 50+ return to work support, and one that will require the active engagement of a wider range of local bodies, often with competing priorities and interests.

Join up of existing services and capability: Effective integration of support to meet diverse and perhaps multiple needs of often very different clients emerges as a critical success feature for local intervention, but one which is likely to place a premium on setting up an infrastructure for cooperation. This is likely to be no small challenge even for GMCA where the existing initiatives provide a forum for cross-partner actions. In this, mapping stakeholders (as above) will be a necessary start but will need to be built on by an appropriately-led and leveraged cooperation requiring, for example, client referral protocols, shared secure personal data, shared input and access to client tracking systems, a common client monitoring process and other hard-wiring for an integrated service. The interface here with PES and any distinctive focus or gateway into the place-based intervention would seem to be a crucial starting point.

Voluntary and/or mandatory access: The cornerstone review we propose of stakeholders and current and prospective delivery and referral agencies is likely to cut across those providing some support to over 50s by voluntary or mandatory participation or activities. Any coordinated place-based action will need to determine how it relates to these different delivery pathways, and providers. If its own focus is to be wholly or largely voluntary, it will also need to look closely at how it aims to motivate and provide for segmented marketing of the new arrangements and provision. Past evidence has shown that older jobseekers may have low knowledge of current provision, or lack confidence to navigate social or other networks; so voluntary provision will need effective resourcing, collaboration and targeted marketing to ensure an effective profile among potential clients. Effective marketing will obviously be important to generating demand (outside any mandated or referral-based provision) but is also set to affect outcomes in providing for early interventions for those seeking work, a key ingredient of sustaining jobseekers' motivation and perceptions of job prospects.

Gateway(s): Careful thought is also likely to need to be given to the ‘front door’ (or doors) into a new place-based service. This is likely to involve a mix of physical and online facilities and balancing this mix will be a complex issue influenced by wider arrangements for leadership, management, cooperation and resourcing. However, whichever physical ‘gateway’ options are taken up, such as co-location, stand-alone ‘one-stop’ shops, hub-and-spoke satellite or other models, these will need to consider the need for a non-institutional environment conducive to engaging older clients – as outlined above. Gateways on their own may achieve little, but an effective and accessible ‘shop window’ would appear to be an essential starting point for 50+ return to work support services, and their closer integration.

Quality advisors and advice: The personal advisors for the intervention will be the front-end of the intervention and the available evidence suggests will also be perhaps the single most important ingredient affecting return to work success. This is not the place to set out a job specification for such individuals, but we would draw attention to the evidence which points to two distinctive needs for 50+ return to work advisors. The first is the need for individuals or groups of individuals able to provide support which is wider than issues of job search and capable of responsibly providing a personalised, empathic and knowledgeable advisory and guidance service which embraces (presumably through something more than signposting) other conditioning needs of older jobseekers – from financial to health and welfare, care needs through to benefit issues. The second suggests that such individuals might best be recruited as ‘peers’ to the client groups and as such may be more successful in building and sustaining working relationships if they are mature in outlook and probably also age.

Employer engagement and support: A return to work service will rely on improvement to (existing) outcomes from the relationships built with potential recruiters and the role of employers in working with the wider service. This is set to go well beyond advisor intelligence sharing (for example on a sound CRM system) on opportunities and employer-centred job search, to build sustainable opportunities for work trials, work experience, and in-work training and ultimately sustainable employment. Place-based actions are likely to be well-positioned to build this potential directly with employers and through representative business and professional groupings but are also highly vulnerable to any neglect or mismanagement of this vital ingredient.

We have not included appropriate budgeting and resourcing as a (pre) condition to a successful intervention. This would seem self-evident to support client demand and with advisor-client caseloads and access to them, which is appropriate to responsiveness, flexibility and quality of the service offered. What is less clear is how existing resources and their effective pooling (both cash and in-kind) across stakeholders, and cutting across public, private and voluntary sector funding, might be harnessed.

This also implies that essential conditions for 50+ return to work support actions which are well-placed and joined-up will need robust and sustainable resourcing agreements and

protocols between contributory agencies. This would also be a prerequisite for effective integrated support. Focused in this way, such measures would not necessarily incur additional overall programme costs (for example on top of what resources are already harnessed or available) but would benefit considerably from better targeting.

5.5 Next steps

This review has set out a wider range of evidence and some practice-based lessons on what might work, in different combinations and circumstances, for a place-based intervention for 50+ return to work. It does not underestimate the scale of the challenge faced but provides a starting point for GMCA, or others, working with Ageing Better, DWP and other partners, to build on and extend an evidence base for shaping the focus and effectiveness of a new intervention. The research and evaluation we have been able to draw on is, nonetheless, often constrained, has gaps and some inconsistencies, and steps might be taken to address this which might involve:

- A critical review of the evidence, success factors and lessons we propose from this review either or both through selected expert fora or a multi-stakeholder grouping
- Wider discourse on the evidence perhaps through preparation of a condensed version of this review, possibly updated to include the feedback from expert fora. This could be distributed to encourage wider discourse including among voluntary sector, community and practitioner groupings
- Further investigation to better understand potential demand and the nature of the diversity in 50+ jobseekers and which might draw on, or extend, segmented data on 50+ economic activity or the older unemployed both in Greater Manchester and with appropriate comparisons to inform any subsequent demand assessment and/or targeting
- Consideration for supporting further research to fill some of the identified evidence gaps (as set out in Chapter 4). While this will not be concluded in time to inform the set of any GMCA initiative, it may contribute to the wider debate on extending working lives and to shaping future place-based interventions. We are particularly conscious of the paucity of up-to-date evidence on:
 - > The role, provision and effective use of adult-orientated information advice and guidance (IAG) in informing individual choice and pathways to extending working lives.
 - > The potential for different pathways into self-employment and small-scale entrepreneurship in improving earnings and life chances for later life workers
 - > The relative effectiveness for employment outcomes for mandatory and voluntary participation in (parts) of programmes
 - > The effects of long-term illness, acute health conditions and disability on return to work for older people, and the effectiveness of publicly-funded support and

workplace actions in supporting sustained economic activity for health or disability constrained older people

- > Later life aspirations, attitudes and experiences of work-related training and skills development and the contribution to extending working lives for the over 50s
- We also commend the value of a more extensive international review of 50+ employment support and the lessons for place-based interventions, which this RER was able to touch on but not systematically assess

None of this need delay planning and preparation for any place-based initiative. Indeed, we hope the report provides for an early opportunity to begin scoping the focus for any such response, and, crucially, to consider how it will be evaluated to provide further lessons for any other 50+ place-based actions. We would suggest this could look first towards positioning the evidence and conclusions against local circumstances, opportunities and priorities, a step which was beyond the scope of this review. In addition, while the RER has started from the stand point of a place-based return to work intervention for those 50+ years of age, the evidence raises the potential for greater ambition in its scope. In particular, it could also cover:

- Over 50s in work but at risk of job loss
- Those 50+ seeking a change of work to better accommodate personal needs or aspirations
- Others at or around 50+ who may be looking to move from employment to self-employment, or become first-time entrepreneurs
- Those over or under state pension age currently retired but looking for whatever reason to 'de-retire'

The value of widening the intervention scope may also be influenced by other localised considerations, including existing provision, specific local development goals, municipal or other social or economic priorities and the scope of devolved powers of Combined Authorities.

We would welcome any wider feedback on this report, its assessments and the scope for its wider use and dissemination.

Annex A: Bibliography

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The Centre for Ageing Better received £50 million from the The National Lottery Community Fund in January 2015 in the form of an endowment to enable it to identify what works in the ageing sector by bridging the gap between research, evidence and practice.