

Evaluation of Elevate pilot - final report

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Executive summary

This report shares findings from an evaluation of the Elevate pilot project, which was aimed at supporting older individuals at risk of and/or experiencing redundancy in the West Midlands.

Developing the pilot

The pilot design was informed by an earlier [rapid research and prototyping phase](#) led by Shift Design. This phase sought to identify ways of improving redundancy support in the West Midlands (including both take-up and effectiveness).

Research was undertaken with stakeholder organisations and individuals with experience of and/or expertise on redundancy. Analysis of existing redundancy support provision at local and national levels identified important design features for redundancy support services for those between the ages of 50 and 64.

The rapid research and prototyping phase was used to produce ten different ideas for redundancy support for older individuals. These were then tested with sector stakeholders, commissioners and older people with lived experience of redundancy. Learning gained from running the prototype courses were used to develop a pilot intervention which was run by the charity FareShare Midlands (FSM) between March and December 2023. This pilot was known as 'Elevate'.

Elevate pilot design

The Elevate pilot consisted of a group-based course delivered in two blocks over a period of three days, followed by ongoing support in the form of one-to-one sessions tailored to the needs of the individual. The course consisted of the following sessions:

1. **Relationship-building activities:** exploring participants' experiences of and feelings about being made redundant, their backgrounds, and what they wanted to do next - including whether these aspirations were likely to be realistic.
2. **Discussing strengths and skills:** including identifying transferable skills and generating the information required for CV writing.
3. **Exploration of jobseeking and training options:** including digital skills support and developing interview skills, including practice/role play.

The third workshop was held one week after the first two sessions. The intention was that there would be a maximum of ten participants in each group and one coach for every five participants. Courses started when there were sufficient numbers of participants enrolled in the group, so in some cases there was a delay between registration and starting the first workshop.

Other features of the pilot model tested included:

- **Marketing and outreach:** promoting the service to potential participants through jobs fairs and careers events; visiting Jobcentre Plus and local employers making redundancies; distributing leaflets at community centres, supermarkets and GP

practices; using social media (Facebook and LinkedIn and Google ads); and through the Elevate website.

- **Local stakeholder engagement:** unions, HR partners, the National Careers Service, local authorities/Mayoral Combined Authority and community-based organisations (including housing associations and food banks) were encouraged to make referrals to the pilot, as well as referrals being made through word of mouth.
- **Triage:** coaches had an initial conversation with potential participants to ensure they met the eligibility criteria and to check that the service was suitable for them.
- **Face-to-face onboarding:** A face-to-face registration interview which included a needs assessment to identify the type of support required, including digital, literacy and employability skills.

Key findings

Due to a range of factors (described below), the pilot recruited fewer participants than anticipated, with 16 individuals completing the course (original expected number: 125). The low numbers of completers make it difficult to reach generalisable conclusions on the impact of Elevate on participants. Additionally, as the pilot ran for less than a year, it was only possible to explore short term outcomes. Nevertheless, participants reported that participating in Elevate had helped improve their job-search, CV writing and interview skills. Other key findings include:

- Participants appreciated peer support offered by a group-based employment support programme specifically targeted at those who were at risk of redundancy or who had recently been made redundant. This allowed them to share experiences of going through the shock of redundancy and start to feel more optimistic about the future.
- Searching and applying for jobs online, as well as CV writing, were new and daunting experiences for most participants, many of whom had been in their previous job for years. The pilot boosted participants' confidence exploring new career options and applying for work.
- The initial assessment played a vital role in establishing participants' digital skills and taking action to support those who lacked the digital skills required to participate in job search activities.
- A strong emphasis on identifying transferable skills enabled participants to seek work in a wider range of sectors.

The main reasons why the pilot failed to recruit its targeted number of participants were felt to be:

- A failure to implement in full, from the start of the pilot, all the learning from the prototyping stage on the importance of establishing referral pathways from employers and trade unions, as well as through the use of social media.
- Expected high levels of redundancies following the Covid pandemic and the difficulties that employees might face in finding alternative employment failed to materialise reducing demand for redundancy support for people in their 50s and 60s.

Recommendations

The main recommendations from the research are as follows:

- Sharing information on the design of Elevate could facilitate the delivery of both redundancy specific and wider employment support programmes tailored to the needs of the over-50s. For example, the research identified the importance of helping this age group to identify transferable skills from their previous work history and develop the digital skills needed to engage in online job search. Work undertaken in the prototyping and piloting phase could be used to develop resources for organisations that offer employability courses to ensure that they better-reflect the needs of this age group.
- Greater devolution presents an opportunity for Centre for Ageing Better to influence the design of new employment support programmes as they are set up at regional and local level to ensure that they reflect the needs of older jobseekers.
- There is a need for more research on the impact of early intervention to support older workers who experience redundancy. Many older people receive limited employment support when they first become unemployed and older jobseekers are more likely to become long-term unemployed than younger age groups. Building the evidence base on the impact of early intervention would facilitate action to ensure that employment support is available to older workers at a point when it can be most effective.
- Employment support programmes targeted at the over-50s would benefit from a greater focus on group coaching and peer support, alongside tailored one-to-one provision. There would be value in starting a wider discussion about the role that group-based employment support can play in the design of effective employment support.
- The contribution that local and voluntary employment support programmes can make to employment support provision will not be realised unless there are evidence-based marketing, signposting and referral mechanisms. An open-access database which provides real-time information about such programmes could be of value to ensure those in need of employment support have access to information on programmes tailored to their specific needs.

1. Introduction

Elevate was a pilot employment support programme commissioned by Centre for Ageing Better with funding from Barclays Lifeskills. It targeted those at risk of redundancy and people made redundant within the past three months who were aged 50 years or over and lived and worked in the West Midlands.

Three factors led to the development of the programme:

1. There were concerns that jobs would be lost in the West Midlands' automotive industry and its supply chains as a result of the UK leaving the EU Single Market and Customs Union. In 2022, the automotive industry accounted for 2% of all employment in the West Midlands, with 54,000 directly employed in the manufacturing of motor vehicles and a further 226,000 people employed in supply chains (Institute of the Motor Industry, 2022).
2. Centre for Ageing Better's [evidence](#) suggests that many employment support programmes are not well-tailored to the specific needs of newly-redundant older people, particularly those who may lack digital and job-search skills or lack the confidence needed to succeed at interview (Parsons & Walsh, 2019).
3. Evidence suggests that [workers made redundant over 50 are three times less likely to return to work within three months than those under 50](#), meaning early support is vital for this group to prevent long-term unemployment

Shift Design was commissioned to develop the programme. After an evidence review, the organisation ran two prototype programmes in 2022 (see section 3). Following this, the charity FareShare Midlands (FSM) was commissioned to deliver a pilot programme in the West Midlands, building on the learning from the two prototypes. At this point the pilot was given the name 'Elevate'. The contract for delivery was managed by Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC). The pilot ran in 2023 with a target of engaging 125 people. The programme model was developed from learning from the prototypes and offered group-based coaching over a three-day period, one-to-one support and professional CV writing. The coaching and one-to-one support was delivered by two coaches from Time-2 Coaching and Training, both of whom had been involved in the prototyping.

About the evaluation

Learning and Work Institute was commissioned to evaluate Elevate in 2022, undertaking a theory-based process and impact evaluation. The evaluation aimed to:

- explore the extent to which the pilot supported participants aged 50 or more to find, or move closer to, sustained employment through employment support;
- improve the evidence base on what works to support people aged 50 or more who have recently been made redundant move closer to, or into, sustained employment.

The evaluation looked at the impact of Elevate on participants. This included exploring whether taking part in the programme changed the attitudes of participants toward job-search and whether it had a positive effect on their job-seeking skills and knowledge of

how to look for work in the short and medium term. The evaluation also sought to understand the development and delivery of the programme, including how the design of Elevate contributed to the outcomes achieved by participants. Elevate was designed as a pilot scheme to explore ways of providing employment support to the target group and so the insights provided by the evaluation will be used to inform the design of future programmes.

The methodology used to produce this report comprised:

1. A rapid evidence review to understand the operational context, the West Midlands labour market and employment support programmes for older people.
2. Attending feedback sessions from the prototype stage delivered by Shift Design.
3. Developing a Theory of Change and evaluation framework which was tested at a workshop in November 2022. The Theory of Change summarised the problems Elevate aimed to address, the activities undertaken to address these problems and the outputs, outcomes and wider impacts of Elevate on both participants and those involved in planning and delivering employment support. A copy of the Theory of Change is provided in the Appendix and was used to develop survey and interview questions.
4. Analysis of FSM's management information data, primarily information collected at registration and in a post-course feedback survey.
5. Surveys of participants prior to starting on the programme and immediately after completing the course.
6. In-depth telephone or online interviews with a sample of course participants shortly after completion of the programme.
7. In-depth interviews with staff involved in the management and delivery of Elevate.
8. In-depth interviews with local and national stakeholders including WMCA, Birmingham Voluntary Service Council, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Centre for Ageing Better.

This report

This report draws together evidence about the shorter term impact of the course on participants, as well as findings from the process evaluation. Elevate struggled to recruit participants, with just 16 people completing the course. This is partly to do with the fact that the expected redundancies in the automotive industry and its supply chains did not materialise. Moreover, unemployment fell in many parts of the West Midlands in 2023 and there remained large numbers of vacancies (Office for National Statistics, 2024). This meant that many over-50s who had been made redundant soon found new employment.

Despite the recruitment challenges, there is much valuable learning from this project for policymakers and those designing, commissioning and delivering employment support for older people. As the economy changes, it is likely that greater numbers of older people will need to change careers. Over the next three years in England, it is likely that local and combined authorities will be given more powers over employment support and all-age careers strategies, giving them greater scope to design provision that is better tailored to

the needs of the over-50s. This means there are many opportunities to influence policy and the design and delivery of employment support to make sure that it is responsive to the needs of older people. The findings from this evaluation provide important insights into how employment support provision can be improved for older people.

Section 2 explores the local context in which the pilot was implemented, describing the socio-demographic and labour market context of the West Midlands. It also provides a commentary on the existing provision of employment support services for those aged 50 or more. Section 3 explains the process of developing the Elevate pilot and sets out the key features of the final design of the pilot programme. It also describes the demographic characteristics of those who completed the course. Section 4 outlines the main outcomes from participation in Elevate, as reported by participants, coaches involved in running the workshops and staff from the delivery organisation (FSM). Section 5 considers the key elements of the Elevate pilot which contributed to positive outcomes for participants. Section 6 explores ways in which the pilot programme might have been improved. The report concludes by summarising the implications of the analysis of the Elevate pilot for the design of future programmes designed to support older workers who experience redundancy.

2. Context

To be eligible for the Elevate pilot programme, participants had to live or work in the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) area. This covers seven local authorities based in the following geographic areas: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton and has a population of 1,120,000 people aged between 50 and 65. This section summarises the local socio-demographic and labour market context as well as employment support provision as it impacts on the design and delivery of Elevate.

Employment

The employment rate in WMCA (70.3%) is below the Great Britain (GB) average (74.8%) while unemployment and economic inactivity are higher (Office for National Statistics, 2023), mainly driven by youth unemployment. Labour market participation by those aged between 50 and 64 in the WMCA area is higher than the GB average. Some 72.0% of those aged 50 to 64 are employed in WMCA, compared with 70.7% across Britain. But there are marked differences in labour market participation between those aged 50 to 59 and those aged 60 to 64, with the employment rate just 56.2% for the latter group in the West Midlands. By contrast, the employment rate for those aged 50 to 54 in the West Midlands is 83.9%. The decline in the employment rate for older age groups is also evident at the national level.

Those aged 60 to 64 are also more likely to work part-time (31% of all employees, compared with 21% of those aged 50 to 59), or be self-employed (20.7% of those in employment, compared with 16.8% of those aged 50 to 59) (West Midlands Combined Authority, 2022b). Again, similar differences in participation in part-time and self-employment by age are apparent across GB as a whole.

There is a growing literature that examines the decline in labour market participation with age, and particularly for those aged between 60 and 64. People in this age group are more likely to have work-limiting health conditions than those in younger age cohorts (Phoenix Insights, 2023). Once older workers lose their jobs they are more likely to become long-term unemployed than younger people, and they may face age-related prejudice (Learning and Work Institute, 2020). Organisations offering employment support to older people need to consider the different needs of older jobseekers and be responsive to the different experiences and needs of those under the age of 60 and those aged 60 to 64.

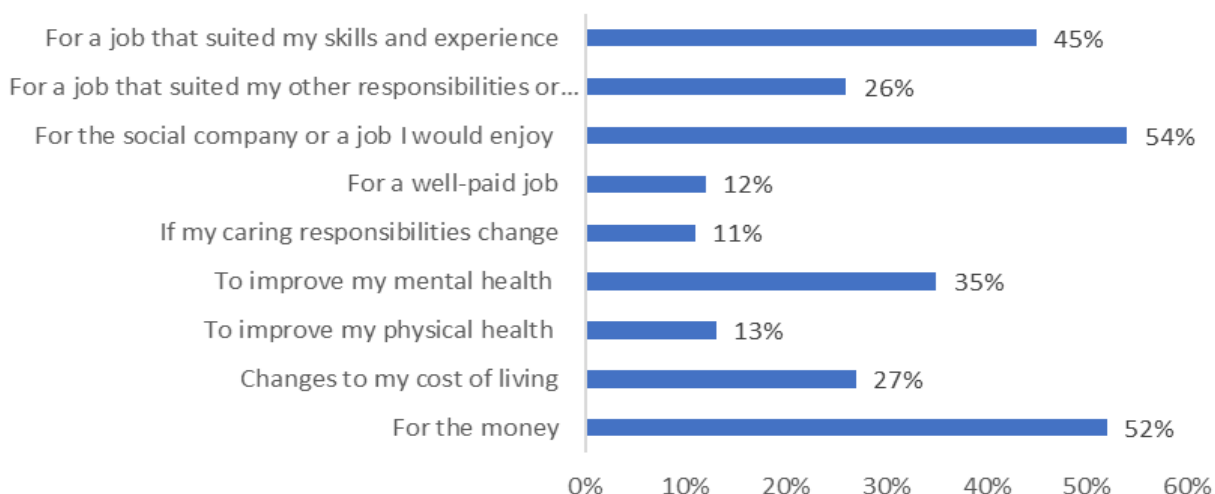
Economic inactivity

Economic inactivity among the over-50s has increased since the beginning of the pandemic across all parts of the UK, including all West Midlands local authorities. This has reversed the downward trend seen over the previous five years. The Office for National Statistics' Over 50s Lifestyle Study¹ examined the factors that have caused people aged

¹ This study included 13,803 responses from individuals who had previously taken part in the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, as well as individual in-depth interviews.

between 50 and 70 to leave, or return to, the labour market since the start of the pandemic (Office for National Statistics, 2022). It showed that 39% of those who left work or lost their job during the pandemic would consider returning to paid work in the future. Financial and social contact motivations were key drivers of the desire to return to work (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Reasons to consider returning to work, those aged 50 to 70



Base: Those aged 50 to 70 = 620

Considerations related to pensions may also affect the motivation to return to work for older people. The Over 50s Lifestyle Study showed that those in their 50s were almost twice as likely as those aged 60 or over to mention pensions as a reason to return to work (58% and 31% respectively). There were no significant differences between men and women in terms of the reasons for wishing to return to work.

Elevate was targeted at both people who were unemployed as a result of redundancy and those still in employment but at risk of redundancy.

Education and skills

The 2021 Census showed that 226,500 people aged between 50 and 64 in the West Midlands did not hold any qualifications. A further 155,779 reported that their highest level of qualification was at level 1. Older jobseekers in the West Midlands are more likely to lack basic skills and to be qualified to a lower level (levels 1 to 3) than those in younger age cohorts. This is partly a cohort effect as older generations are much less likely to have attended university than younger generations.

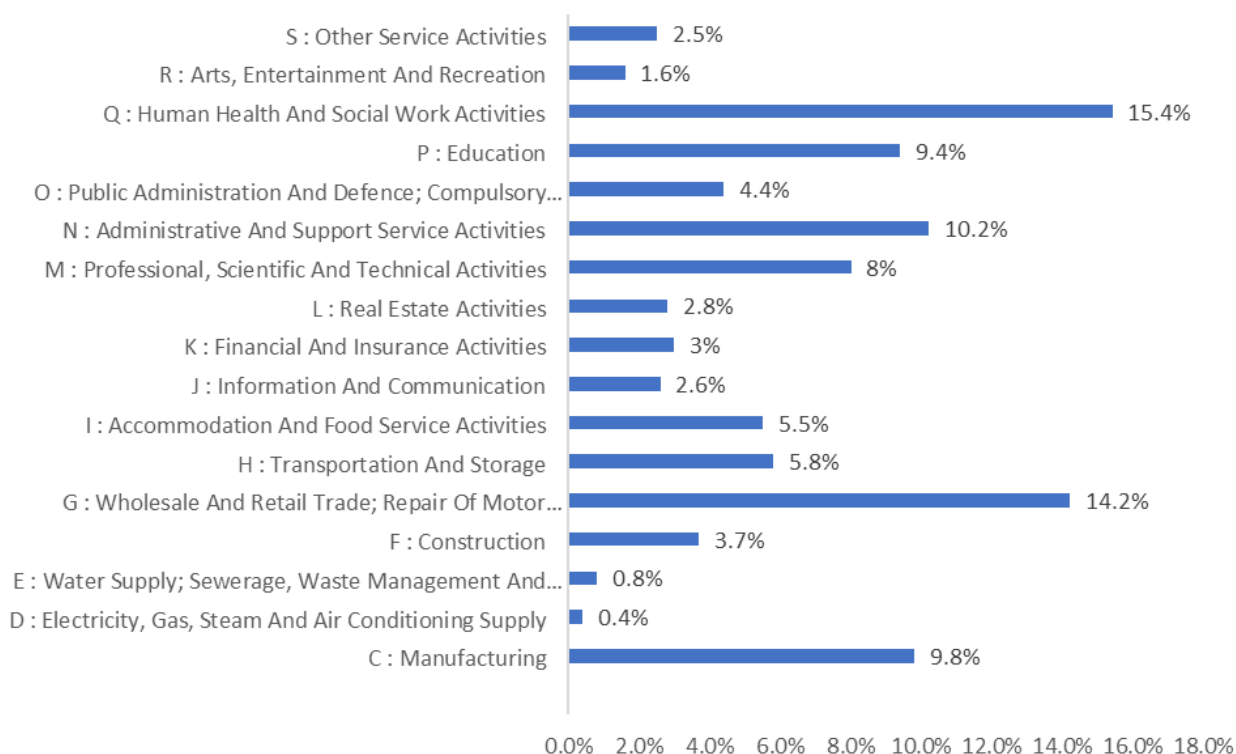
Nearly a quarter (22%) of WMCA residents are estimated to be internet 'non-users' who either do not use, or do not have access to, the internet. Another 23.3 % are 'limited internet users' (West Midlands Combined Authority, 2022a). Older people are more likely to be internet non-users or limited users compared with younger people (Ofcom, 2022). Poorer digital skills among this age group limit their choice of jobs, but also affects jobseeking behaviour, in an era when many job advertisements and applications have

moved online. This means that employment support provision for older workers needs to address any gaps in digital skills.

Jobs in the West Midlands

Although manufacturing jobs have been lost in the West Midlands in recent decades, nearly one-in-ten jobs in the WMCA area are still in the manufacturing sector (Figure 2). Elevate was initially targeted at people who had lost jobs in the automotive industry and its supply chains. One-third of all British-made cars and one-in-four UK engines are made in the West Midlands. The automotive industry accounts for 2% of all employment in the West Midlands, with 54,000 people directly employed in the manufacture of motor vehicles and a further 226,000 employed in supply chains in 2022². It is estimated that there are 430 specialist automotive industry employers in the West Midlands, whose numbers include a small number of large employers such as Jaguar Land Rover, Antolin Interiors and CAB Automotive. However, the automotive industry and its supply chain mostly comprise small and medium-sized enterprises, some of which may not have human resources staff to manage redundancy processes.

Figure 2 Employee jobs in WMCA by sector, 2022



Source: ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, 2022.

² Labour Force Survey 2021 data suggest the total number of people directly employed in manufacturing in the UK is 154,000 with 797,000 people employed in supply chains.

Over the last 30 years there have been some high-profile business closures in the West Midlands automotive industry, leading to hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of redundancies. These include the loss of over 500 jobs at GKN in 2022.³ The complexity and connectedness of supply chains means that plant closures and changes in production can have significant spillovers.

As well as closures, redundancies also occur as a result of automation, often in much smaller numbers. It is estimated that future automation could reduce the number of direct employee jobs in the UK automotive industry by up to 30%.⁴ A fall in demand for cars is another threat to the automotive industry. In addition to this, although the UK automotive industry was protected in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation agreement (the Brexit deal), the end of frictionless trade between the UK and the EU may make the UK a less-attractive place to invest in future.

The Labour Force Survey records 218 different occupations in the automotive industry, including technicians, mechanics and electricians, assemblers, body builders, coachworkers and jobs in administrative roles. The largest occupational group directly employed in the UK automotive industry is 'technicians, mechanics and electricians' (Standard Occupation Code 5231). This group accounts for 116,000 of those employed in the UK automotive sector. Typically, those employed in this particular occupation have level 3 vocational qualifications. Analysis of the 2021 Labour Force Survey suggests that 15% are over the age of 55 and less than 0.5% are female. The profile of the largest occupational groups directly employed in the automotive industry are given in

³ Elevate's two prototype courses were delivered to GKN staff.

⁴ Society of Motor Manufacturing and Traders estimate.

Table 1 below. It is evident that men are over-represented in these occupations and that the occupations vary in terms of their age profile.

Table 1 Occupational profiles of employees directly employed in UK automotive industry

Occupation	Typical qualification level	Directly employed in UK automotive industry	Age profile	Gender balance
Technicians, mechanics and electricians SOC 5231	Level 3	116,000	15% over 55	<0.5% female 99.5% male
Assemblers SOC 8132	Level 2	22,000	14% over 55	18% female 82% male
Body builders and repairers SOC 5232	Level 2-3	18,600	24% over 55	<0.5% female 99.5% male
Tyre, exhaust and windscreen fitters SOC 8135	Level 2	11,500	4% over 55	1% female 99% male
Vehicle Paint technicians SOC 5234	Level 3	10,000	6% over 55	5% female 95% male

Source: Labour Force Survey analysis cited in Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) (2022) UK Automotive Sector Baseline Report 2022.

Until 2016 staff turnover in the motor manufacturing industry was low; a typical employee worked in the same job for over ten years. Since then, occupational mobility has doubled, but nevertheless, many people working in the sector have little recent experience of searching and applying for jobs.

The automotive industry has a relatively high rate of trade union membership, estimated to be 44%.⁵ This means that engaging with trade unions during a redundancy consultation period is a potential way to recruit people onto employment support courses.

The scale of redundancies was lower than expected during the period when the Elevate pilot was running, making it necessary to widen the eligibility criteria to include other manufacturing and service industries. However, the West Midlands automotive industry is still at risk of future redundancies over the next five years. In this context it is important that there are well-designed and evidenced employment support programmes ready to be rolled-out when needed.

Employment support available to people made redundant

In the West Midlands there is a range of employment support on offer to people who have been made redundant, including that provided, or organised, by:

⁵ OECD estimate, 2005.

- employers
- Jobcentre Plus
- DWP, for example, Restart and the Work and Health Programme
- the National Careers Service (NCS)
- local councils
- social landlords, colleges, independent providers and voluntary and community organisations.

Six government departments have responsibility for different aspects of employment support and skills policy. At a local level, there is a large array of programmes and organisations offering employment support, although not all of these would be suited to the specific needs of older people. In Walsall alone, analysis in December 2022 found 84 programmes and organisations offering employment support. A complex and fragmented local employment support landscape can be difficult for local residents to navigate. It also means that organisations compete against each other for clients.

Outcomes from employment support programmes can be poor for older people compared with those who are younger (Parsons & Walsh, 2019). Employment support sometimes lacks the flexibility to meet a range of different needs, including those of older jobseekers. Models of support that focus solely on coaching may not help clients address health issues or poor digital skills (Scholz & Ingold, 2020). DWP is starting to consider ways to tailor Jobcentre Plus provision to meet the needs of older people, including taking on specialist work coaches for the over-50s. It is also rolling out Mid-Life MOTs to Jobcentre Plus clients in their 40s and 50s.

Devolution offers further opportunities to put the needs of older jobseekers on the policy agenda. The Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined authorities have secured powers under their trailblazer devolution deals to co-design employment support policies (outside of Jobcentre Plus) and develop all-age career strategies. These powers are likely to be extended to other combined authorities in England. The co-design process offers opportunities for organisations such as Centre for Ageing Better to input into the planning of new services, using learning from the Elevate evaluation to inform new provision.

3. Developing the pilot

Research and prototype stage

The project sought to design a redundancy support service, either by adapting an existing model of redundancy support or developing a new service. The approach was informed by a **rapid research phase**, led by Shift Design. The aim was to identify ways of improving redundancy support services in the West Midlands to increase take-up and effectiveness.

In the first phase of work, research was undertaken with stakeholder organisations and individuals with experience of redundancy. It also drew on analysis of existing redundancy support at local and national level. The research mapped existing provision in the area and considered the challenges facing older workers facing redundancy. This identified important design features for redundancy support services.

Following on from the research phase, Shift Design proposed ten different ideas for an employment support intervention. These included a job-brokerage service, peer mentoring, a reskilling course and taster days in new workplaces. Through further scoping with stakeholders, including people who had recently been made redundant, these ‘ten concepts’ were refined and combined into a prototype redundancy support course. At the **prototyping stage** further work was also undertaken with stakeholders and over 50s to establish which aspects of a redundancy service were likely to have the biggest impact, as well as considering the feasibility of implementing the service. This included exploring different features of redundancy support, including:

- how to ensure the messaging maximised the appeal of the service to potential participants;
- how best to reach potential participants (for example, through unions, employers, Facebook and adverts);
- how to design group coaching sessions to maximise impact; and
- important characteristics in a delivery partner.

This resulted in detailed guidance on these key elements of service design to inform the development of a pilot service.

A group-based coaching approach was felt to be most effective in developing participants’ confidence in CV writing and applying for jobs. Time-2 Coaching and Training was commissioned to run two redundancy support courses for a total of 10 participants (five in each group) at the GKN factory in Birmingham in 2022. Over 500 jobs were to be lost in this automotive engineering company in 2022. The course was delivered as four half-days sessions, with the contents as follows:

1. **Session One** focused on giving participants the opportunity to talk about their feelings on being made redundant and discuss their current situations and job aspirations.
2. **Session Two** sought to enable participants to understand their strengths and weaknesses and their transferable skills.

3. **Session Three** covered job-search skills and writing, and tailoring CVs. The NCS was involved in this session. Following this, there was a gap of one week to give participants time to develop their CV. During this time, the coaches who delivered the programme were available for one-to-one support.
4. **Session Four** brought participants together again to focus on interview techniques.

Learning from the experience of running the initial prototype courses at GKN, including the observation of sessions and feedback from participants, was used to develop a further prototype which was tested in the community. A total of around 15 participants were split across two groups, with one attended by five participants running in Sandwell and the other running in Birmingham. Each group tested a different approach to delivery, with one offering four half-day sessions over four weeks and the other delivered in two day-long sessions over two weeks. Both groups had access to a professional CV writer to create their CVs.

Once again, at the end of the second round of prototyping, Shift Design led a **review** to assess how well the courses worked. Participants felt the combination of group-based coaching and one-to-one support was effective in building their confidence, knowledge and skills. However, a number of challenges were encountered with delivery. Some participants needed help with basic digital skills. The process of writing a CV was also overwhelming for some people. Changes were made to the design of the service to reflect the findings from the prototype phase. This included having a stronger focus on diagnosing, and seeking to address, skills gaps which might be a barrier to job search and using a professional CV writing service from the second round of prototyping onwards to help participants with the presentation of their CV.

Pilot design and testing

After reviewing learning from experience of delivering the courses in the prototyping phase, a **pilot service** was developed. The pilot was targeted at those between the age of 50 and state pension age who had recently been made redundant from the manufacturing and automotive sector in the West Midlands, the service contract also set out that up to 40% of participants were able to come from any other industry. Participants had to either be at risk of redundancy or have been made redundant not more than three months before the course began. To be eligible for the pilot they had to be actively looking for work or considering looking for work.

The model service tested in the pilot phase consisted of the following features:

- **Promoting the service.** The service was promoted to potential participants in a number of ways, including:
 - staff from the delivery organisation attending jobs fairs and careers events;
 - visiting Jobcentre Plus and local employers making redundancies;
 - distributing leaflets at community centres, supermarkets and GP practices;
 - using social media (Facebook and LinkedIn and Google ads);
 - Through the FSM website for the majority of the pilot.

- Through the Elevate website, although this was not in place until November 2023.
- **Referrals** to the service were made by unions, HR partners, the NCS, local authorities, word of mouth (friends and family) and community-based organisations (including housing associations and food banks).
- **Assessment of suitability.** Coaches had an initial conversation with potential participants (either online, by telephone or face-to-face) to check that the service was suitable for them and ensure that they met the eligibility criteria.
- **Registration.** Once it was agreed that the programme was suitable for the individual, they went through a face-to-face registration interview which included a needs assessment to identify the type of support required. This would include an assessment of digital, literacy and employability skills. Participants were also told about the evaluation at this point.
- **Course.** Following the referral and registration process, pilot participants entered the main support period. Following a review of the prototype, this consisted of a three-day in-person course delivered in two blocks. The contents of each of the three workshops were as follows:
 1. Relationship-building activities, exploring feelings about being made redundant, backgrounds and what is important to participants now and moving forward, how does work meet their mixed needs to find fulfilling employment.
 2. Discussing strengths and skills, including identifying transferable skills and generating the information required for CV writing.
 3. Jobseeking and training options including digital skills support and developing interview skills, including practice/role play.

The third workshop was held one week after the first two sessions and participants were considered to have completed the programme if they attended all three workshops. The intention was that there would be a maximum of ten participants in each group and one coach for every five participants. Courses started when there were sufficient numbers of participants enrolled in the group, so there could be a delay between registration and starting the first workshop.

- **Ongoing support.** Following the course, participants were able to access ongoing support in the form of one-to-one sessions which were offered online or by telephone. These could be used to access additional support in applying for jobs and preparing for interviews and were tailored to the needs of the individual. It was not necessary for participants to make use of ongoing support for them to be considered to have completed the course. This was just an additional option available to those who had completed the course if they wished to make use of it.

Pilot Implementation

It was acknowledged at an early stage in the development of the Redundancy Support Project that, due to capacity and a need to look objectively at the pilot, Centre for Ageing Better was not best placed to manage the service provider contract. This also enabled

Ageing Better to further understand how the pilot would function independently of their input.

Based on this decision, Centre for Ageing Better went out to tender for a contract manager in July 2022. BVSC was the successful appointed bidder. BVSC was given the initial service specification drafted by Centre for Ageing Better and developed it further in conjunction with all project partners including the pilot's co-commissioner WMCA.

BVSC published the Invitation to Tender with the service specification in Autumn 2022 and after a competitive tendering process FSM was appointed as the service provider and commissioned to deliver the pilot service. FSM employed two new members of staff; an administrator and an employer engagement manager, and opted to work with the same freelance coaches through Time-2 Training, Coaching & Facilitation, who had been instrumental in developing the prototypes.

To support the mobilisation of the pilot, Ageing Better retained 6 days with the team from Shift Design to help understand the development of the service and offer guidance. The team at Shift Design also created a communications pack for the pilot. Centre for Ageing Better produced a suite of video recordings, featuring people who had participated in the prototype phase, to be used by FSM to promote, and recruit for, the project. In total four of the six days were utilised.

Ahead of the project start, in late January 2023, a kick off meeting was held in Birmingham. BVSC hosted the event with representatives from FSM, Shift Design, Learning & Work Institute (L&W), West Midlands Combined Authority and Centre for Ageing Better in attendance. This was to establish communication between partners, to ensure joint understanding of the project development and agree ways of working. Dedicated staff were brought on by FSM in February 2023 and the first referrals onto the programme were received in March 2023.

A 'One-Team' working approach was requested by Centre for Ageing Better to encourage open dialogue between project partners, Monthly contract meetings and keep in touch meetings took place between Centre for Ageing Better, L&W, FSM & BVSC. The meetings served as an opportunity to reflect on the learning and development of the project, and share information, tackling issues as they arose. BVSC hosted a project roundtable in May 2023. This was an in-person event with all partners. Given the low level of referrals onto the programme by this stage, the session was used as a trouble shooting opportunity with all present generating practical ideas for enhancing recruitment, expanding the reach of advertising and networking possibilities. Again, given the low referral numbers, Ageing Better, in consultation with BVSC, offered continuous support throughout the project sharing contacts and working with stakeholders to generate leads and referrals.

Participant characteristics

Participation in the pilot

A total of 65 participants were referred to the Elevate pilot programme between March and December 2023. Of these, 22 went through the registration process and 18 were enrolled

and started a course. FSM staff mentioned the following reasons why the number of individuals starting courses was much lower than the numbers referred:

- in some cases Jobcentre Plus work coaches referred individuals who did not want to do the course. The person referred was reluctant to tell the work coach that they did not want to participate, but did not go on to start the course
- as the pilot was course-based, those who were referred had to wait until there were sufficient numbers of potential participants before a new course could start. Demand by local employers to recruit staff being made redundant was higher than expected, so in some cases potential participants found employment or started other activities over this time-period
- competition from the NCS who attended many of the same public events as FSM staff. As the NCS offered immediate support, rather than requiring a commitment to attend a three-day course, potential participants who were anxious to enter work as soon as possible sometimes took NCS support rather than going on to start the Elevate pilot.

Sixteen participants participated in all three workshop sessions and were therefore considered to have completed the full course. As the number of participants who completed the programme was limited, the analysis which follows focuses on characteristics which are based on a cell size of three or more cases.

Personal characteristics

The 16 participants who completed the course were all within the 50 to 64 age range, with the majority concentrated between the ages of 56 and 59. More than two-thirds of completers were male (11 out of 16) and the rest were female. Three-quarters of those who completed the course (12/16) did not consider themselves to have a disability or long-term health condition. This was similar to the proportion of the age group as a whole with a disability (21.1% according to the 2021 Census). However, the vast majority of course completers did not have any caring responsibilities, when in the population of those aged between 50 and 64, 15.7% have unpaid caring responsibilities (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Three-quarters (12/16) of completers described their ethnicity as white. The remainder of participants who completed the programme were from Asian, Black or Mixed-race backgrounds.

Education level and access to employment support

Those who completed the course varied considerably in their education level on entry. Around one-third (5/16) had a college certificate, diploma or degree, but the second most common group was those who had no formal qualifications (4/16). The vast majority of completers were not engaged in education or training when they started on the programme and were not using other forms of employment support. Four-fifths (13/16) had access to a computer and the internet.

Financial resources

Participants were asked to rate how financially secure they felt at the time of registration on a scale from 1 to 10, with one being insecure and 10 being secure. Two-fifths of those who responded to this question gave a rating of 5, with a similar proportion of ratings falling either side of 5. The fact that ratings tended to be clustered in the middle of the scale with similar numbers on either side suggests that the majority of participants felt reasonably financially secure. Participants were also asked whether they had savings or investments in pension or property that they could use if needed, but only a third (5/16) of completers answered this question, making it difficult to draw any conclusions about the financial resources available to participants.

4. Impact of Elevate on participants

Introduction

This section presents findings on the impact of the Elevate course on the 16 participants who completed the programme. This includes an overview of how effective the programme has been in supporting participants to progress into sustained employment or retraining opportunities. This is drawn from analysis of MI data, the participant survey and interviews with participants and Elevate coaches to understand their perception of outcomes resulting from the course.

The MI data collected on the programme provides information on outcomes recorded as being achieved by participants. Outcomes could be achieved at any point after the participant finished the course so long as they remained in contact with FSM. The MI data presented in this section covers all 16 participants that completed the course in full.

Participants were surveyed at the time that they registered for the pilot (referred to as the pre-intervention survey) and immediately after they had completed the full course (the post-intervention survey). The post-intervention survey provides information on confidence in relation to a range of digital and job searching skills. It is structured to measure distanced travelled, by monitoring change between data collected before and after the main phase of support. The survey analysis presented in this section is based on 12 matched responses to the pre- and post-surveys for those who completed the full course.⁶

Given the small numbers of individuals completing the full programme and the limited numbers responding to both the pre- and post-intervention surveys, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of the pilot based on the quantitative data alone. All findings must be treated with a high degree of caution, as they may not be representative of those which might be seen if the number of pilot participants had been much larger. To protect the anonymity of respondents and avoid placing undue weight on characteristics or responses which were only given by one or two individuals, we only report numbers based on three or more responses.

Information from the MI and survey data sources is supplemented by findings from depth interviews conducted with seven participants between June and December 2023, following their completion of the programme. Additionally, two interviews were conducted with Elevate coaches (employed by Time-2 Coaching and Training, under contract to FSM), and three interviews were conducted with FSM staff. The subsections which follow summarise the main findings on the impact of the Elevate programme on the outcomes experienced by participants.

⁶ Four completers did not respond to either the pre-intervention or post-intervention survey.

Participant destinations following course completion

From the 12 individuals who completed the Elevate programme and responded to both the pre- and post-intervention surveys, at the time that they responded to the post-intervention survey:

- three-quarters (9/12) were actively looking for a job
- two-thirds (8/12) had applied for at least one job
- half (6/12) had taken part in at least one interview
- only one-quarter had found a job (3/12), although in all cases it was in an area of interest to them.

In the most recent extract of MI, which is likely to capture outcomes achieved after the post-intervention survey:

- half of all completers (8/16) had achieved a job outcome
- a further three course completers were still employed in their existing job
- in the remaining five cases either it had not been possible to contact the participant or they reported that they had not yet found employment.

Of the eight individuals who completed the Elevate course and entered a new job:

- most were employed in non-manufacturing sectors and in full-time positions
- three were employed as agency workers or contractors.

Only five respondents gave details of their new salary and in all cases it was between £20,000 and £29,999. The 2023 Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings found that median annual earnings for employees resident in the West Midlands were £26,435, with a median salary of £31,416 for those working full-time. This suggests that those who completed the pilot found jobs with salaries which were fairly typical for the region.

In addition to exploring progress into employment, the post-intervention survey asked course completers about participation in work-based training, volunteering or other types of employment support. Of those responding to both the pre- and post intervention surveys:

- two-fifths (5/12) were actively looking for relevant work-based learning by the time of the post-intervention survey and in some cases they were undertaking training
- on average, completers were more likely to report that they knew how to find and enrol on appropriate training courses after participation in Elevate
- around three-in-five respondents were using other types of employability support (7/12).

By contrast, it was unusual for respondents to be volunteering at the time that they completed the post-intervention survey.

Skills and knowledge outcomes

Interview skills

The Elevate course covered how to prepare for, and navigate, job interviews. This included discussion about common interview questions and how to respond to them, as well as interactive role play exercises.

When asked about the impact of the Elevate course on their skills, participants were most likely to mention that they felt it had helped them to improve their interview skills.

Participants reported that they felt more knowledgeable about how to prepare for interviews (for example, by researching the hiring organisation), and how to answer interview questions using examples to demonstrate skills and experience.

Some participants had not attended a job interview in many years, which made the prospect more daunting. One participant explained how they found mock interview exercises helped them to build their confidence.

“it's something again that I've not done for a number of years. So, you would just want to feel that you're starting from the right point and being focused on the information that you're given and what [employers] want to receive. So yes, I think practising those [interview skills] with another member of the group was useful.”

Participant B

Another participant explained that while they were generally a confident person, they became nervous before interviews. The Elevate course helped them feel more confident about subsequent interviews and gave them the skills to answer interview questions more effectively. In their words:

“The interview I had since the course [finished] was so much better.”

Participant F

The small number of course completers who responded to both the pre- and post-intervention surveys meant that caution had to be exercised when interpreting changes over time. However, the survey data also suggested that, on average, participants felt more confident about their ability to do well in job interviews after completing the Elevate course.

CV writing skills

Prior to the Elevate course, most of the participants interviewed were looking for support with their CV. Some wanted to learn how to tailor their CV for new roles, others wanted help with finding the right words to demonstrate their skills and experience. One participant had never needed a CV before.

“I've never had a CV. Of course, I know about CVs, and I've looked at them when I've been interviewing, but I've never had to create one for myself. When I saw it I thought, 'Actually, this is an opportunity for me to learn about how to create a CV for myself, and how to tweak it for different roles.’”

Participant A

The second day of the Elevate course was focused on gathering information to be sent to professional CV writers. Participants were guided through each element of a CV and encouraged to think about their transferable skills and qualifications to decide what information should be included. Participants reported that they had gained a better understanding of how to write and structure a CV to effectively demonstrate their skills and experience.

"I think the lightbulb moment, probably, for me was the understanding of writing a CV, the way it should be written properly, and to try and keep everything short so that the interviewer or the person reading your CV doesn't lose interest before he gets to the end of what you're trying to tell them."

Participant D

Other participants reflected on the process of identifying which skills and experience to highlight on a CV and learning how to adapt this for different job roles.

"A CV can only be two pages, so I realised that I can't put all of my experience, you know? I can only pull out pertinent bits of it, kind of thing. So I remember thinking to myself that when I'm going to be tweaking my CV, I'm going to add some of those other things that I didn't put down initially, yes. But in order to do so, I'd have to take some things out."

Participant A

Findings from the post-intervention survey supported the view that, on average, course completers felt more confident that they could adapt their CV to suit different types of job application after completing the Elevate course. They also felt more confident in writing covering letters to support their application. Digital skills in relation to CV writing and making online job applications also improved, with respondents being more likely to say that they knew how to use Microsoft Word to update their CV, and knew how to complete online forms, after participating in Elevate.

Knowledge of where to search for jobs

On completion of the Elevate course, some participants felt more confident that they knew how and where to search for jobs. For some it had been many years since they had applied for a job and in that time the process had moved online. One participant explained that an Elevate coach had shown them how to use online search engines to find job vacancies suited to their skills and interests.

"With the trainer's help, I was able to look at sites, so-, what was that site? I think it's the .gov website that a couple of the other people actually found jobs on, so I looked at that, I hadn't looked at that before, and I was able to do a general search for what I was looking for. So I was, like, struggling a bit, thinking, 'What do I want to do next?' and one of the things I was able to do that the trainer suggested was Google job titles. I hadn't thought of that before, you know? I hadn't Googled things, I'd gone to particular sites before, but just by Googling job titles, I was able to come up with things that I thought, 'Actually, I'd be interested in that,' so that was helpful information, yes."

Participant A

Responses to the pre- and post-intervention surveys corroborated the qualitative evidence that participants felt more confident about their ability to search for jobs effectively following course completion. Completers were more likely to feel confident that they could find a job that would suit them by the time of the post-intervention survey and they also felt better able to search for appropriate jobs at this point. Positive changes included an improvement in digital skills which might help with job search, such as knowing how to bookmark a website or how to open downloaded files.

Knowledge of transferable skills

Another key outcome of the Elevate course, for some of the participants interviewed, was a greater awareness of their own skills and how these could add value in different job roles and sectors.

"The exercises that the trainer gave us were just amazing, really good exercises for pulling out information, and making me think-, for pulling out information, in terms of skills. So, I asked myself a number of questions before the course started and I was able to answer all of those questions during those exercises so that was really helpful."

Participant A

Elevate coaches also discussed the process of helping participants to identify the skills they had to offer an employer. It takes some time, they explained, to change participants' mindsets and see themselves as more than their previous job role.

"They just come and do their job. They don't see that they're organised, that they're committed, that they're driven, their attention to detail, quality, et cetera. And you can take all of those things and look at other jobs that need those core skills and translate them."

Elevate coach

The survey data showed that, on average, the course appeared to increase participants' knowledge of job opportunities which were different to what they did previously. Respondents were also more likely to say that the skills they had gained from their previous jobs could be used in different industries and occupations after completing the Elevate course. This may be explained by the course content which helped participants to identify their transferable skills and how they would be relevant to other job roles. However, there were some signs that participants downgraded their expectations on the ease of finding a job like their most recent one in a similar organisation, with respondents to the post-intervention survey being less likely to believe that this was the case than they were prior to starting the course. This is likely to be partly due to the emphasis that the course placed on identifying job opportunities in a wider range of sectors. Also, by the time of the post-intervention survey respondents would have potentially been looking for work for longer and engaging in more effective job search than when they joined the course, with this experience moderating their expectations on how easy it would be to find work.

Social and emotional outcomes

Confidence

Most of the participants interviewed reported that the Elevate course helped to increase their confidence. Generally, this manifested as participants feeling more confident about their own skills and abilities. Some participants described coming onto the Elevate course with low self-esteem and worries about the future. For one participant, learning to recognise their transferable skills and experience helped to alleviate these concerns and boost their confidence.

"So, since I met [the coach], really, it's perked up my confidence. Because the course I went on with my trainer to build my CV, you know, when I went on the course, I was a bit low, really, because I didn't know what to do. But they gave me confidence to build a CV. They brought out my skills that I didn't know I had, transferable skills. I was saying, 'Oh, my job hasn't changed in 28 years, who's going to employ me?' You know. I don't know any other skills. And the work I was doing in security, they proved to me they were transferable skills."

Participant C

Another participant had concerns that their age would be a barrier to finding a new role – a worry they said other people in their group shared. However, through engaging with the Elevate course, they regained confidence in their skills and experience and the value they had to offer employers.

"There have been times that I've had a few wobbles and I'm thinking, 'Oh dear. Am I too old?' which I think is the question that all three of us ask ourselves, 'Is there still a role for me?' kind of thing. And the exercises and the things that the trainer told us made us realise that, yes, it's skills that people are interested in, and as long as we've got those skills and are willing to share them with other people, that will be something that will be helpful. So, I thought that was good, and it definitely boosted my confidence and how I feel about myself."

Participant A

While most participants' increased confidence was linked to their feelings about their skills and abilities, for Participant F, the Elevate course gave them the confidence to have conversations with people in their network about having been made redundant. Through one of these conversations, the participant found out about a job vacancy which they later applied for. They have since been offered the job. The participant reflected on the importance of having the confidence and courage to have these types of conversations.

"I think I've been braver and bolder and said more to different people. And just meeting that person and saying that [...] The first thing I said to her was 'I've been made redundant' [...] Would I have said that [prior to the Elevate course]? I don't think so."

Participant F

It was less evident from the survey data that the Elevate course had a positive impact on the confidence of participants. The average changes reported were small and as they

were also based on a small number of responses, no firm conclusions can be drawn from them.

Outlook and motivation

For some participants, the Elevate course had a positive impact on their general outlook. Participants described finishing the course feeling more positive about the future and finding another job. In the words of one participant: *"I came back on a high, saying, 'Okay, yes, there is something out there for me.'"* Another participant mentioned that the Elevate course had helped them to feel more motivated to search and apply for jobs.

"I just feel more motivated really, more motivated in my job searches, more motivated to have a look each day online, and if I, kind of, see anything, I've got a CV already there and I can upload it and I feel confident doing that, even if it's just off my phone".

Participant E

Linked to this was the sense, for some participants, that the Elevate course had given them the space and tools to explore their feelings and emotions.

"We did a lot of work around exploring 'Where am I now? How do I feel about what has happened? How do I feel about going forward?' So, there was a lot of exploring of feelings, which I thought was good actually, a good way to start. Because I think if I did have any residual feelings of upset or anger, then that was a way to get it out before moving forward."

Participant A

The Elevate coaches also discussed the impact of the course on participant outlook and feelings about themselves and the future. From their perspective, the course helped participants realise that they do not have to stay in the same job role forever, instead they can change direction and try new things. Moreover, discussions about age, and framing this as a positive rather than a negative, helped to shift attitudes.

"And there's something about them themselves walking away feeling a little bit, sort of, lighter and a bit stronger, I think is my sense of it. There's always been a lot of gratefulness at the end and some really nice comments, and myself and [the other coach], around where they feel they are at that point and how they might go forward."

Elevate coach

As with general confidence, there was little change across the suite of indicators capturing participants' motivation and outlook between the pre- and post-intervention surveys for those who completed the Elevate course. This is likely to be partly because potential participants were unlikely to start or complete the course if they lacked motivation, so motivation levels were already towards the upper end of the scale at the time of the pre-intervention survey. However, the case study in **Error! Reference source not found.** demonstrates that for some individuals participation in the pilot did affect how they saw their future.

Box 1 – Case study of Participant A

Participant A lives in Solihull and was made redundant after eight years in a non-manufacturing role. She was made redundant once before, and this time tried to see it as an opportunity for change rather than feeling shocked or upset.

While mostly interested in learning how to create a CV and adapt it for different job roles, Participant A also found it useful to be able to process the redundancy news with other people in the same position.

By the end of the Elevate course, Participant A had decided to explore setting up her own business and was hoping to continue working with a coach to pursue this.

"I suppose the one thing that I was looking at is how to start my own business, but they don't offer that within the course. And of course, there's only going to be a very small number of people that might be interested in that, so it's not something that you would just give to everybody, you know? But I think, in terms of me starting my own business, there's a whole heap of work that I've got to do, but at least I know where to go for that help."

For Participant A, completing the Elevate course changed her plans around retirement and gave her the motivation to continue working.

"there was a part of me that was thinking, 'Oh, maybe it's just time to retire and sit at home like so many other people I know are doing,' but I never wanted to do that, and what the Elevate course has done for me is made me realise that I don't have to do that, that I can continue working for as long as I want. I just need to-, I know it's a cliché, 'Think outside the box,' but think differently, really, about what I want, where it is, and do the work, in terms of applying for jobs that might be possible."

5. What contributed to successful outcomes for participants?

Introduction

Participants were generally positive about the Elevate course and felt it had been a valuable experience. All 12 individuals who completed the full course and responded to both the pre- and post-intervention surveys either strongly agreed or agreed that they were satisfied with the support received through the course.

In interviews participants attributed their positive experience of the course, and their achievement of outcomes, to three elements of the Elevate course in particular:

- the group dynamic and peer support;
- the Elevate coaches;
- and the interactive nature of the workshops.

The way in which each of these elements contributed to positive outcomes for participants is explored in the subsections which follow. This section also includes two case studies which highlight how the Elevate programme met the needs of participants.

Group dynamic and peer support

Central to the Elevate course was the group coaching approach. The course was designed in this way to encourage participants to learn skills and explore their feelings alongside other people facing similar challenges. **Participants found that interacting with other people of a similar age and in similar circumstances helped to create a safe and supportive environment.** Having the opportunity to talk about their personal experiences as a group, helped participants to relate to one another. One participant described how the group discussions made them feel reassured and understood.

“What I found most useful about the sessions was everybody contributing. Hearing someone else's story, hearing what they went through, or what they achieved, and you're going, 'Yes, I did that, and I felt the same way’”.

Participant G

Group sizes were smaller than initially planned, though participants were generally positive about this and felt it made it easier to ask questions and move through content at a comfortable pace.

Box 2 – Case study of Participant F

Participant F was made redundant after being in a charity sector role for three years. She found out about the Elevate course through a contact at FSM.

Participant F's motivation for joining the course was to have some space away from work to consider her situation. She liked the group dynamic which she said, "felt really secure and safe" and has kept in touch with the other participants since finishing the course.

For Participant F, the main positive outcomes she experienced as a result of the programme were improved interview skills and feeling more confident to reach out to people in her network.

While she found the Elevate course beneficial and would recommend it to others, Participant F did feel that some improvements could be made. In terms of the course content, Participant F was disappointed with the CV she received which she felt did not align with the type of job she was looking for. She suggested that it would be beneficial to have further opportunities for participants to discuss the type of job that they were looking for and prior experience they wanted to highlight so CV writers were more informed.

From a practical perspective, it was noted that the FSM building was not very accessible, with participants having to use stairs to reach the training room. There was also some confusion around course start dates.

"I think there were several points where I could have just gone "forget it" because work were being flexible because of my situation but even they were going "what do you mean it's cancelled? Oh. And it's cancelled again". So that wasn't the best start to it at all."

Skilled and supportive coaches

The Elevate workshops were delivered by two coaches who had personal experience of redundancy. Together they had previous experience of supporting those at risk of redundancy, and the medium-term unemployed.

Box 1ox 3 provides a case study which illustrates the role that the coaches played in encouraging participants to join the programme.

Interviews with participants highlighted the important role that the Elevate coaches played in bringing about positive outcomes. **This was attributed in part to the coaches' ability to tailor content to the needs of individuals.** One participant, who worked in a non-manufacturing role, explained how their reservations about whether the course would be suitable for them were quickly dispelled upon meeting the Elevate coach.

"I did have a concern that maybe Elevate was for people who were blue collar workers, rather than office workers. I don't know what made me think that. But I found that the tutor was able to dispel that by everything she said to me was tailored to what I was doing, so that was really helpful."

Participant A

The coaches were also described as being encouraging and reassuring, which helped to build participants' confidence **in their ability to explore new career options and apply for work.** In one example, a participant described how their Elevate coach encouraged them to apply for a job when they were having doubts about their suitability.

"I said to her 'I'm not sure about this' and she said, 'You meet half to three quarters of the criteria'. She said, 'It's worth putting it in, even if you don't get anywhere'. She said, 'You might be the nearest match to what they're looking for, they might have other candidates, but not as good a match as you are, even though you're not a 100% match'. Whereas I might not even bother with that if I was doing it myself. I talk myself out of it, whereas she encouraged me to go for it."

Participant E

Overall, participants reported that the coaches were able to create a relaxed atmosphere where they felt they could have fun alongside engaging with the contents of the course. Contributing to this was the pace of the workshops, which participants felt worked well. It was noted that the coaches were good at keeping the group on track, whilst not being overly strict about sticking to a schedule. One participant mentioned that they have dyslexia and could feel nervous about writing notes. However, they reported that there was no pressure from the Elevate coaches to complete tasks quickly.

Box 1 Case study of Participant C

Participant C lives in Birmingham and was made redundant after 28 years with the same manufacturing company.. He initially felt anxious about having to look for a new job and his ability to navigate online recruitment processes. He observed how much the approach to job search has changed over the years:

“In my day, we would post things and the last time I applied for a job [was] by post.”

After hearing about the Elevate course at a job fair, Participant C had some reservations about registering. Looking back, he remarked that he was glad this did not deter him from participating.

“When I first saw [the coach] and he told me about FareShare, I wasn't going to go. You know, I said, ‘Oh, this is a waste of time.’ But I thought about it. I'd got nothing to lose. ‘Just go up there. See what it's like. If I don't like it, I just won't go again.’ But after speaking to [the coach], I was convinced. And then, when I went to the actual course with [another coach], I really was convinced. I really thought to myself, ‘I'm glad that I did attend.’”

Since starting the Elevate course, Participant C has noticed an improvement in his confidence. He attributes this to the Elevate coaches helping him to identify his transferable skills.

“When I went on the course, I was a bit low, really, because I didn't know what to do. But they gave me confidence to build a CV. They brought out my skills that I didn't know I had, transferable skills. I was saying, ‘Oh, my job hasn't changed in 28 years, who's going to employ me?’ You know. ‘I don't know any other skills’. And the work I was doing in security, they proved to me they were transferable skills.”

Participant C did feel disheartened when he applied for jobs and did not heard back from employers but says the Elevate coaches helped to reassure and motivate him. This has helped him form a more positive outlook.

“I came back on a high, saying, ‘Okay, yes, there is something out there for me.’”

Interactive workshops

Workshops were designed to be interactive, full-day sessions, and the Elevate coaches integrated discussions and activities as part of the group coaching approach. Participants were largely positive about the way in which course content was delivered. Group exercises and engaging in role-play, for example, were seen as preferable to lecture-style learning.

Participants described how the group exercises encouraged them to approach tasks with a new perspective and develop skills with the support of their peers. One participant explained how a role-play exercise helped them identify their skills and experience much more easily than if they had tried to do this alone.

“We had to interview each other and then pull out the skills, which I thought was a really good way of doing it actually. Because sometimes if I just sit down with a blank piece of paper, I’m like, ‘What are my skills?’ The way we did it, we did this exercise where we had to almost interview each other about our career, what we’ve done and stuff like that. And through that, the tutor and ourselves, we were able to pull out the skills and write it all down.”

Participant A

Another participant described an exercise they found particularly effective in helping to develop listening skills.

“there was one that was particularly good that we did where we had a series of shapes on the page and the other person couldn’t see it. So, we had to describe what to do for them to translate it onto their page to encourage listening skills.”

Participant F

As well as supporting the development of skills, the interactive nature of the workshops helped participants to remain interested and engaged with the content for the duration of the three days. In the words of one participant.

“It went really quickly. It wasn’t boring and it didn’t drag or anything. It was really exciting.”

Participant C

6. What could have been done differently or better?

Challenges with referrals and signposting

During the delivery period, referrals were lower than anticipated. This meant the programme experienced significant problems meeting recruitment targets. Project and delivery partners noted the following reasons for the low numbers of recruits:

- reliance upon traditional recruitment channels rather than being able to fully-mobilise alternative pathways identified in the design and prototyping phases of the study within the time available for piloting
- a lower-than-expected volume of redundancies and a high demand for labour by other local employers
- competition from other employment support programmes or short-term support, such as that available from NCS
- A lack of information on where redundancy consultations were taking place.

Each of the factors driving the recruitment challenges encountered during the course of the Elevate pilot are considered in the following subsections.

Operational challenges

FSM reflected that most referrals were generated through Jobcentre Plus, leaflet distribution, engagement with employers, and word of mouth. While they attempted to work collaboratively with trade unions and NCS, this was not successful.

“we've had so many challenges trying to recruit participants to the programme and the normal channels weren't returning the referrals, I had to really think outside the box, and where would these people potentially be? And you know, doctor surgeries, Money Advice Bureau [...]”

FSM management staff

There was a shared feeling between project partners and the Elevate coaches that FSM had relied too heavily upon traditional recruitment methods, despite being warned against this and encouraged to explore new referral pathways.

“I think there has been an assumption about a process that would have engaged people and brought them on board which has not been responded to quickly enough when it hasn't worked and I think, despite my offer of assistance, help and to drive it forward a little bit more, we've lost a massive opportunity in terms of time and engagement with people.”

Elevate coach

Marketing the Elevate course in an effective and consistent way also proved to be a challenge. Elevate coaches suggested that the course should have had its own website and brand outside of FSM. A dedicated website was in place for November 2023, but prior to this the programme was only available on a section of the FSM website. It was also

noted that promotional videos were filmed but not used for recruitment purposes, and that social media was not used to promote the course until the final stages of pilot delivery. FSM staff noted that their social media team prioritised FSM's food distribution work and were less focused on promoting the Elevate course.

Lower than expected redundancy volumes and a tight labour market

FSM's outreach worker visited employers making redundancies to run information sessions about the Elevate course. Some staff at risk of redundancy might be under the age of 50 and therefore not eligible for the pilot, but the outreach worker reported that even in cases where 70 staff were facing redundancy, fewer than ten would attend the session. They attributed this to the availability of other job opportunities, giving the example of supermarkets Marks & Spencer and Tesco offering jobs to Wilko staff after redundancies were announced.

"Sometimes when you've been made redundant, are you thinking about those soft skills, or are you just thinking about jumping back into work? [...] There's that many jobs out there, that if you want to work, there's a job available for you."

FSM management staff

One recurrent issue was that scheduled courses were often postponed until a recruitment capacity threshold had been met; this meant that some participants had to wait a substantial amount of time between signing up and being able to access the course. For example, one participant waited 12 weeks between initial referral and course start date (9 weeks between enrolment and start date). This wait sometimes meant that people secured alternative employment or lost interest during this gap.

In the later stages of Elevate a decision was implemented to run scheduled courses regardless of numbers of participants. This decision was not taken earlier due to having to manage the delicate balance between budget and capacity for the longevity of the pilot. However, had this decision been taken earlier there may have been a smaller drop off between enrolment and the course start date.

Competition from other employment support programmes

FSM staff explained that visiting companies making redundancies and being at consultations with unions, as well as visiting Jobcentre Plus had not worked as well as expected. One reason for this was competition from the NCS who were also in attendance and were offering a one-day CV writing service. For some people, this would have been a less time-consuming, and more convenient, alternative to the Elevate course.

"When somebody's got a choice of [a one-day CV writing service] or coming on a three-day programme where they've got to go somewhere else and go through a few hoops to get registered, etcetera. They were just choosing that over us."

FSM management staff

The importance of bringing out what Elevate offered in comparison to other employment support programmes and how it might be better-suited to the needs of particular

individuals was apparent. There appeared to be some misunderstanding around the eligibility criteria for Elevate, with one stakeholder suggesting it overlapped with support offered through Restart. *“If you are made redundant anyway, then as a work coach, you can slot these people into Restart. And therefore, what's the difference? Even if you're over 50. And so, the demarcation needs to be understood. Or the niche in which it fits into needs to be understood.”*

Stakeholder

In practice, Elevate offered support at a much earlier stage than Restart, as it could be used in the first three months following redundancy, whereas Restart was not accessible until someone had been out of work for at least nine months. Ensuring that there was greater understanding of the support that Elevate could offer compared with other employment support programmes may have helped increase take-up.

Information gap

Another external factor thought to have made recruitment more difficult is a lack of information on where redundancy consultations were taking place. One stakeholder involved in the Elevate pilot reflected that redundancies could go undetected until reports appeared in local news outlets, or be missed entirely. The absence of an active redundancy taskforce has made it increasingly difficult for employment support programmes like Elevate to communicate with employers and HR teams early on in the process.

“So, the redundancy taskforce group is really good for intelligence understanding who might be at risk of going under, making redundancies or whatever, but we don't have that intelligence any longer and I think that that doesn't help matters in relation to this.”

Stakeholder

Future employment support for the over-50s

This final subsection summarises the reflections of project partners and Elevate coaches on key aspects of provision they believed would enhance future employment support for the over-50s.

Project partners stressed the importance of **building partnerships with unions and sector bodies** to be able to provide support earlier on in the redundancy process.

“we've talked a lot about potentially working more heavily with unions or sector bodies or kind of people in that space to place it at the point of redundancy, which is always what we wanted with this. We always knew that this intervention had to be pulled further upstream than the Jobcentre because it was just never going to work at that point [...] This has to be kind of linked into HR because they are the first people [involved] in redundancy and then it's probably the unions.”

Project partner

Both the Elevate coaches and project partners felt the **group coaching approach** to delivery helped to bring about positive outcomes for participants, and set Elevate apart from other employment support programmes.

“One of the magic ingredients of this project is actually how the coaching has been delivered and the style of coaching and the content of the coaching. So how do we take that particular ingredient, and how do we spread that far and wide?”

Project partner

“I’m not trying to big up coaches, but there’s the ability to connect with people, to ask those questions, to dig deeper, to really help them understand themselves that just talking to some slides with people as a trainer-, and trainers have their places because when you need to be told something, like health and safety, for example, or law, you need to be told it. But this isn’t a programme that you can be told, I don’t think. It goes deeper than that.”

Elevate coach

Related to this, there was a general sense that there was a need for employment support to do more to understand the unique challenges faced by older people and provide **tailored support**.

“What sort of training package what can we pull together that could be used to upskill people who are working with people in this arena? People who are 50 plus who have been made redundant. How can we upskill people who are interacting with those people to [...] kind of do better for this cohort?”

Project partner

However, there was an acknowledgement that providing more tailored employment support could be labour-intensive and this may limit the potential to deliver it at scale.

“I mean, if we went to the government and said, ‘Right, we think this is a brilliant course, we need to work with people,’ they can say, ‘Well, Jobcentre do that already.’ But they’re work coaches. [...] It’s, you know, just pushing people through. But they’re target driven. [...] It’s added value. What’s the added value we’ve brought to these individuals, and will they be able to be functioning in a different way after the course? Yes. How do we measure that and put that into a scalable thing would be another exercise in itself.”

Elevate coach

7. Conclusions and policy implications

Summary of key findings

It is difficult to draw conclusions about the long-term outcomes and impact of Elevate on participants, given the small numbers of participants and the fact that the interviews and surveys completed to date took place within a few weeks of course completion.

Nevertheless, participants reported that taking part in Elevate had improved their job-search, CV writing and interview skills.

Crucially, Elevate boosted participants' confidence in their ability to explore new career options and apply for work. Searching and applying for jobs online, as well as CV writing, were new and daunting experiences for most participants, many of whom had been in their previous job for years. Moreover, participants appreciated the peer support offered by a group-based employment support programme. The relational nature of Elevate boosted enthusiasm and optimism, an important consideration for those who have experienced the shock of redundancy.

Most employment support programmes are not designed with the needs of the over-50s in mind. In contrast, Elevate was tailored to suit this particular age cohort. The programme included an initial assessment of participants' digital skills. Where gaps were identified, remedial action was taken to support those who were limited internet users – something which is more common among older age groups. Greater time and emphasis was placed on job-search skills and CV writing than might be the case with other forms of employment support. Centre for Ageing Better research also suggests that some older jobseekers need support to identify transferable skills, how to sell their skills, or have confidence in navigating the system of support (Centre for Ageing Better, 2023). These factors were addressed in the design of Elevate, for example, through a workshop devoted to transferable skills.

However, Elevate failed to recruit its target number of participants, despite considerable effort by FSM's outreach worker. This was partly due to shortcomings in the outreach and marketing strategy, described in detail in Section 6. Learning and recommendations from the prototype stage were not always implemented in full. However, current labour market conditions also had a significant influence on recruitment. High numbers of job vacancies and historically low levels of unemployment have meant that many employment support programmes have not reached recruitment targets, including flagship government programmes such as Restart (National Audit Office, 2022). However, under-recruitment is a particularly acute challenge for programmes where referrals are not made by Jobcentre Plus, including programmes run by voluntary and community organisations. Elevate is not unique among employment support programmes in failing to reach the expected number of participants.

Implications for policy and future research

Despite its under-recruitment, the Elevate pilot programme made a valuable contribution to evidence on the key elements of an effective employment support programme targeted at older workers at risk of redundancy. The main implications of the research are as follows:

- 1. There is potential to draw on learning about the employment support needs of the over-50s to influence the design of local services.** Much existing employment support is not well-tailored to the needs of the over-50s. Over the next three years, more mayoral combined authorities will be given powers to co-design new employment support programmes, following the 2023 trailblazer devolution deals of the West Midlands and Greater Manchester. Greater devolution presents an opportunity for Centre for Ageing Better to influence the design of new employment support programmes as they are set up at regional and local level. This could be achieved by reaching out to combined and local authorities to make sure that the needs of older jobseekers are reflected in new programmes. For example, WMCA's 2024-2027 Employment and Skills strategy commits the combined authority to set up employment and skills hubs for adults. These will bring different employment support and skills providers together as co-located services. Programmes such as Elevate could be run out of these hubs, with participants referred to the programme by other hub partners.
- 2. There is a need for more research on the impact of early intervention to support older workers who experience redundancy.** While Jobcentre Plus is currently piloting more intensive employment support for the newly-unemployed in a limited number of locations, many older people receive limited employment support when they first become unemployed and older jobseekers are more likely to become long-term unemployed than younger age groups. The impact of early intervention is an area where more research is needed, with this evidence made available to those designing employment support and to parliamentarians engaged with active labour market policy.
- 3. Employment support programmes targeted at over-50s would benefit from a greater focus on group coaching and peer support.** Elevate offered a mix of group-based and one-to-one support and participants valued the group coaching approach as well as peer support. Group-based coaching appeared to promote optimism and motivation among participants, a finding also supported in Shift Design's prototype analysis. Yet group-based coaching rarely forms part of current employment support provision, in contrast to practice from the mid-1980s to the mid-2000s (Finn, 1988). Group-based provision involves more logistic challenges, compared to one-to-one coaching; it requires a classroom and the enrolment of a group of participants at a single point in time. Those who take part in a group-based course also need one-to-one support. Despite these delivery challenges, the evaluation of Elevate shows there is a role for group-based employment support, alongside and in a complementary role to one-to-one support. There would be value in starting a wider discussion about the role that group-based employment support can play in the design of effective

employment support provision, including programmes delivered in voluntary and community associations.

4. **Sharing information on the design of Elevate could facilitate the delivery of employment support programmes for the over-50s.** Work undertaken in the prototyping and piloting phase could be developed into a coursebook and toolkit and marketed to organisations that offer employability courses, including further education colleges and voluntary and community organisations.
5. **The contribution that smaller, local and voluntary employment support programmes can make will not be realised unless there are evidence-based marketing, signposting and referral mechanisms.** There may be value in DWP setting up an open-access database to provide real-time information about smaller programmes. Such a database could be used by Jobcentre Plus coaches to signpost jobseekers to other sources of employment support, as well as organisations working with unemployed clients and individuals looking for help.

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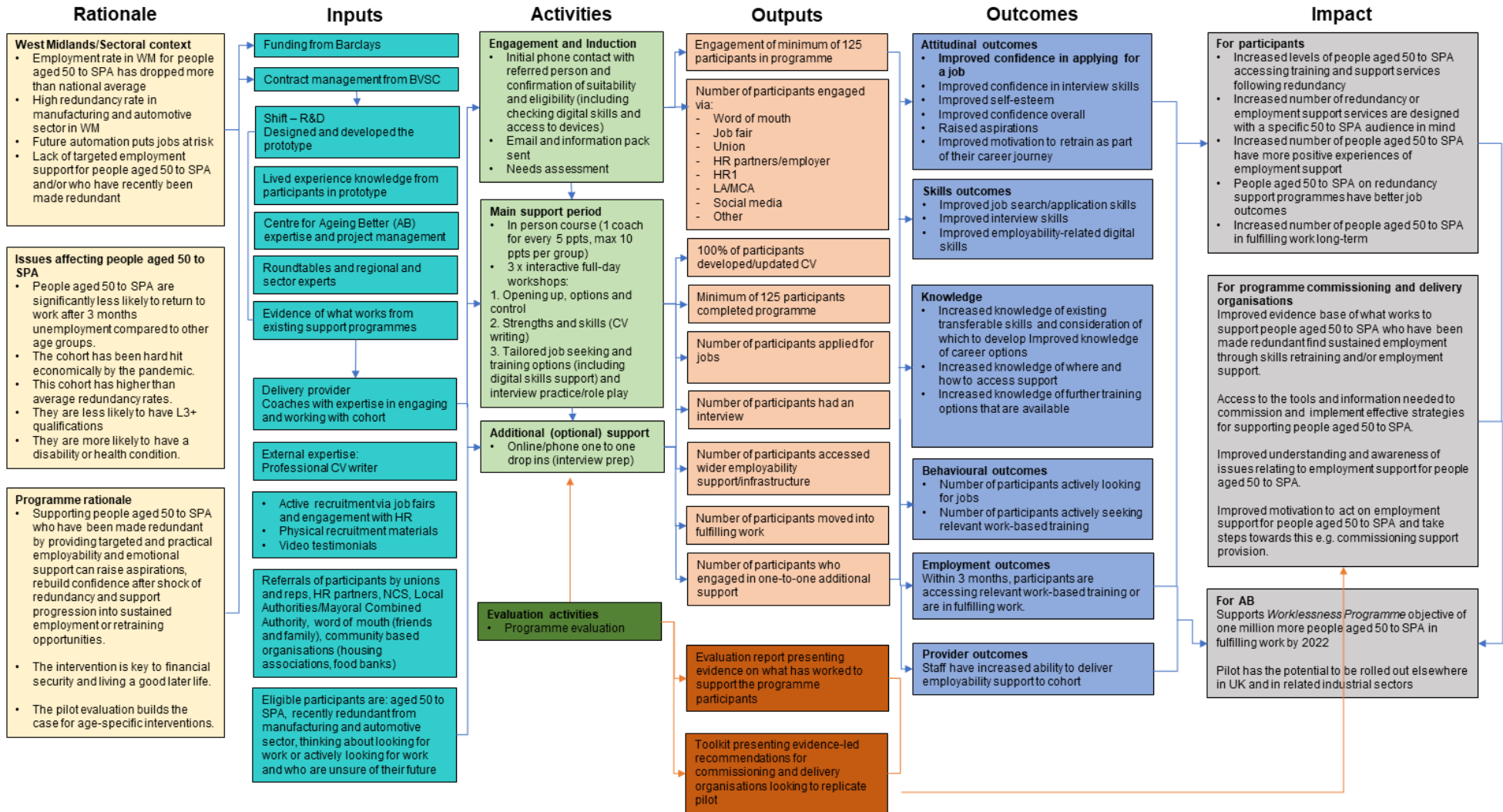
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Appendix: Theory of Change

The Theory of Change underlying the design of the Elevate pilot is set out overleaf. The assumptions behind the approach and the risks identified prior to roll-out are listed on the following page.



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Assumptions

- The programme is implemented as intended within the timeframe set.
- There is a sufficient pool of eligible people who meet programme requirements
- The programme will be able to reach and engage with recently redundant people aged 50 to SPA via referrals
- The eligibility criteria will be effective in successfully recruiting only individuals who are thinking about looking for work or actively looking for work
- Participant needs assessment will be successful in identifying support needs
- Participants will successfully engage with the support programme and course
- The development of employability and personal skills has a positive impact on employment outcomes
- There are sufficient jobs, matched to the skills of participants, available across the WM area
- Staffing will remain consistent, and delivery staff have sufficient expertise to successfully deliver programme
- Interventions are not expected to show longer term impact within the timeframe of the evaluation
- Participants have access to a device and the digital skills needed to edit a CV and search for work.

Risks

- The programme/specific interventions are not delivered as planned e.g., to time or scale
- There are insufficient referrals of recently redundant people aged 50 to SPA to meet target numbers.
- Quality of referrals is not sufficient to meet programme requirements (e.g., actively looking for work).
- Unexpected competition from other programmes reduces referral pool.
- Participants struggle to attend or engage in programme activities or withdraw from the programme.
- Coaches who are recruited don't have sufficient knowledge of the WM labour market.
- Participant needs are not accurately observed during induction/needs assessment.
- Participants' progression into employment may be limited by their lack of confidence/trauma relating to being made redundant.
- There is a high staff turnover and corresponding loss of support experience and expertise.
- Bugs and unfamiliarity with the MI system impact data collection for the evaluation. Evaluation pressures alter staff behaviour.