

Evaluation of Elevate pilot

Supporting older
individuals at risk of and/or
experiencing redundancy



Executive summary

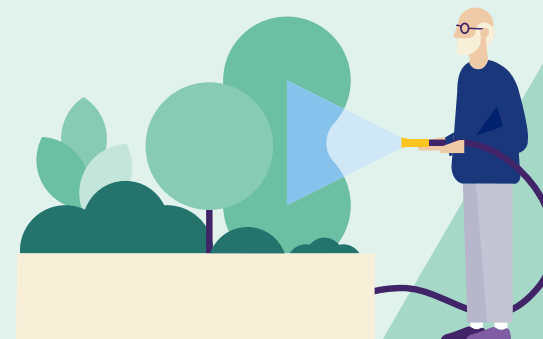
This report shares findings from an evaluation of the Elevate pilot project, which was aimed at supporting older individuals at risk of and/or experiencing redundancy in the West Midlands.

Developing the pilot

Learning gained from running prototype courses was used to develop a pilot intervention which was commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better and delivered by the charity FareShare Midlands (FSM) between March and December 2023. This pilot was known as 'Elevate'.

Elevate pilot design

Elevate 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:** identifying transferable skills and generating the information required for CV writing.
- 3 Exploration of jobseeking and training options:** 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 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, 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.



- One of the challenges 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.

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.

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.



Learning and Work Institute was commissioned to evaluate Elevate, 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, including whether participation in the course changed attitudes towards job-search and if there was a positive effect on their job-seeking skills and knowledge. The evaluation also sought to understand the development and delivery of the programme, including if co-design contributed to the outcomes for participants. The insights provided by the evaluation will be used to inform the design of future programmes.

The methodology included:

- 1** A rapid evidence review to understand the operational context and employment support programmes for older people.
- 2** Surveys of participants prior to starting on the programme and immediately after completing the course.
- 3** Depth interviews with a sample of course participants shortly after course completion.
- 4** Depth interviews with management and delivery staff of Elevate.
- 5** Depth interviews with local and national stakeholders including West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), Birmingham Voluntary Service Council, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Centre for Ageing Better.

Background

Employment support available to people made redundant

A range of employment support is available to people who have been made redundant, including that provided, or organised by:

- 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



However, not all of these would be suited to the specific needs of older people. A complex and fragmented employment support landscape can be difficult for older workers to navigate, with organisations competing against each other for clients.

To be eligible for the Elevate pilot programme, participants had to live or work in the 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.

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).



Using learning from 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.



— **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 content of each of the three workshops was 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 after a professional CV writer had written participant CVs 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.

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.

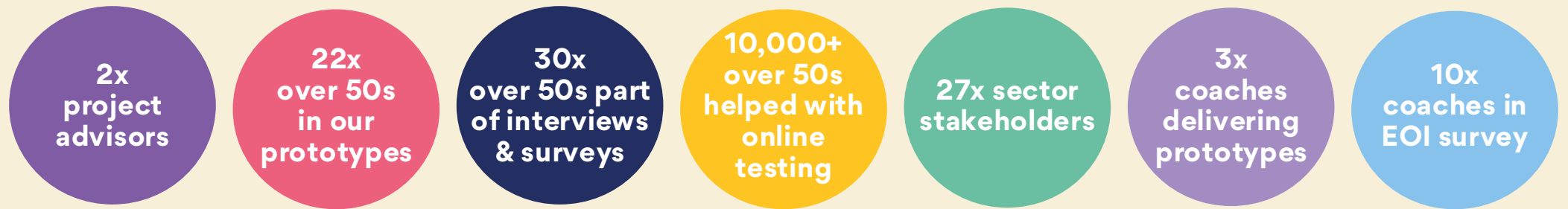
This included exploring different features of redundancy support, including:

- 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.
- 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.



We collaborated with



Suzanne and Steve
Both made redundant in their 50s from Automotive & Manufacturing in the West Midlands

Two rounds of prototyping, 4 different test groups including workers from GKN, gave feedback about their experience and shared their ideas

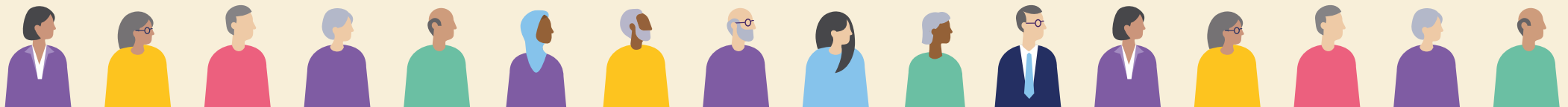
People across the West Midlands who've recently been made redundant from the Automotive & Manufacturing sector

Those who interacted with Facebook ads and Facebook groups we used to quickly test ideas along the way

Employers, Unions, Recruitment agencies, Organisations and charities who deliver employability support, Local authority

3 Coaches aged over 50 worked across the 4 prototype groups on their own and together

A job description based on key skills and attributes was circulated amongst coaching networks for feedback



How is group coaching different to what already exists?

Early intervention

Statutory employment support isn't always available straight away or before you're unemployed. People in their 50s and 60s typically don't access this support until after employment has ended and they're feeling stuck without work and can panic when they can't find a job or feel forced to take a lower salary or a zero hours contract risking falling out of the labour market.

Our group coaching service happens earlier – offering space to step back, think about the future, look at options for jobs or training and apply for work before their contract ends.

Practical skills

Recruitment practices and ways of looking for work can be unfamiliar and intimidating for people in their 50s and 60s who haven't had to job hunt for possibly decades. Like other redundancy support and employability services, group coaching has a big focus on practical elements like CVs and interviews, but we go beyond that to what's most helpful for this age group.

Explaining how recruitment works, doing job sites demonstrations on screen, showing how to filter job sites to shortlist opportunities, spending time on basic computer skills in groups and one-to-one, typing and exporting CVs together. Accounting for different levels of knowledge and capability, not rushing.

Emotional readiness

There are services available to support people to find jobs, but they mostly don't make space for people to process the loss of lifelong jobs. For people in their 50s and 60s who didn't expect to change jobs before retirement, the shock of redundancy can have a huge impact on identity, plans for the future and mindset – making it hard to engage with the support available.

Group coaching helps people feel emotionally 'ready' to consider their options and tackle the practical parts of job hunting so they can make the most of it.

Confidence focus

Confidence was one of the most consistent barriers to job hunting we heard from over 50s. That's confidence in their skills, their value as a potential new employee, and confidence in their ability to present themselves effectively in the recruitment process.

Group coaching draws out and talks about skills and strengths, and builds confidence in the value of their years of experience. It makes job hunting less intimidating by building knowledge of current recruitment practices, knowing what makes a good CV and interview, getting to work on and roleplay these in a safe and supportive space and providing tools for self-practice with family and friends.

Pilot design and testing

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



FareShare Midlands

Promote the service. Elevate was promoted through attending jobs fairs, visiting Jobcentre Plus and local employers making redundancies, distributing leaflets at community centres, supermarkets and GP practices and using social media (Facebook, LinkedIn and Google ads).

- **Referrals** 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** was determined by FSM staff, speaking with potential participants (either online, by telephone or face-to-face) to check that they met the eligibility criteria.
- **Registration** was a face-to-face interview including a needs assessment to identify the type of support required, e.g. digital literacy and employability skills.

January 2023

In January 2023, a kickoff meeting was held in Birmingham between all project partners to establish communication, ensure joint understanding of the project development and agree ways of working.



February 2023

In February 2023 FSM appointed two new dedicated members of staff; an Administrator and an Employer Engagement Manager. FSM also opted to work with the same freelance coaches through Time-2 Training, Coaching & Facilitation, who had been instrumental in developing the prototypes.



March 2023

The first referrals for Elevate were received in March 2023.

A 'One-Team' working approach was requested by Ageing Better to encourage open dialogue between project partners; monthly contract and keep in touch meetings took place between Ageing Better and project contractors to share updates and tackle issues. In May BVSC hosted an in-person roundtable.

Given the low level of referrals onto Elevate, the session was used as a trouble shooting opportunity, generating practical ideas for enhancing recruitment. Ageing Better and 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.

There were 16 people who participated in all three workshop sessions, and therefore considered to have completed the full course. As this number was limited, the analysis which follows focuses on characteristics which are based on a cell size of three or more cases.



Personal characteristics

Number of participants

16



Aged between **50 to 64**, with the majority concentrated between the ages of **56 and 59**

The vast majority of course completers did not have any caring responsibilities, compared to the population of those aged between 50 and 64, 15.7% have unpaid caring responsibilities (Office for National Statistics, 2021)

Participant gender

11 Male
5 Female



Consider themselves to have a disability or long-term health condition

4 Yes



12 No

This was similar to the proportion of the age group as a whole with a disability (21.1% according to the 2021 Census)

Ethnicity (background)

White

12

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)

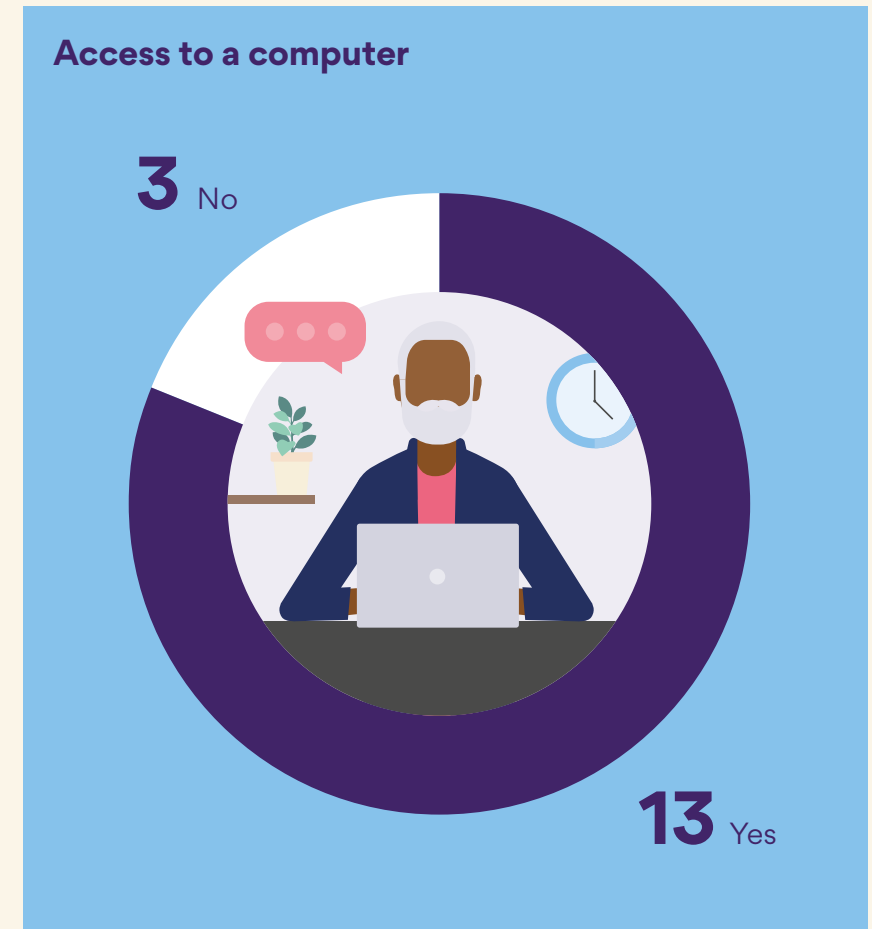
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Education level and access to employment support



Those who completed the course varied considerably in their education level on entry. Around one-third had a college certificate, diploma or degree, but the second most common group was those who had no formal qualifications (one-quarter).



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 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 one third of completers answered this question, making it difficult to draw any conclusions about the financial resources available to participants.

Impact of Elevate on participants

Participants were surveyed at the time that they registered for the pilot (pre-intervention survey) and immediately after they had completed the full course (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.

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.

The subsections which follow summarise the main findings on the impact of the Elevate programme on the outcomes experienced by participants.

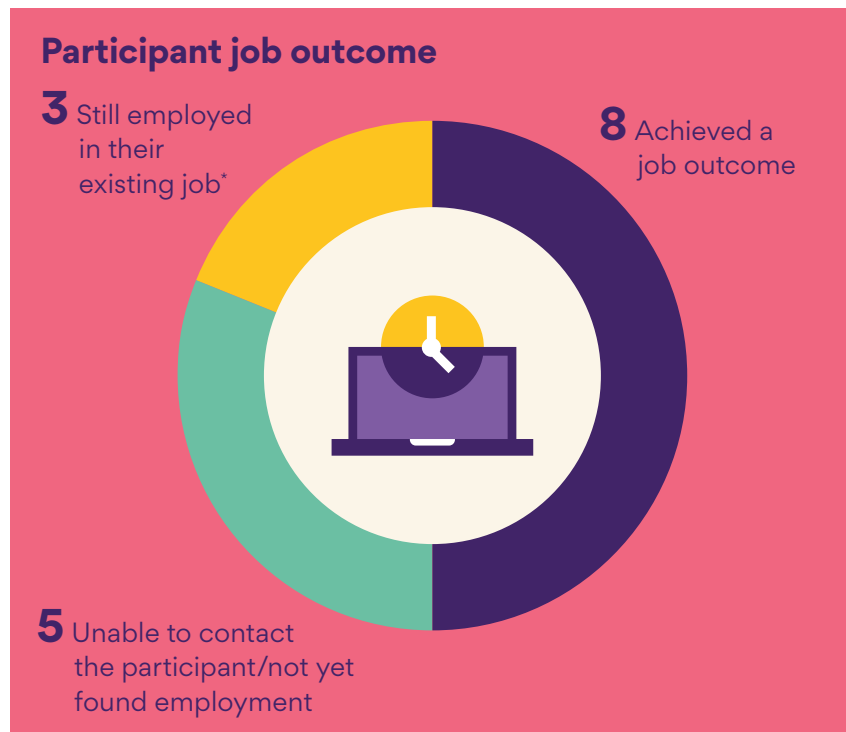
“ The survey analysis presented in this section is based on 12 matched responses to the pre- and post-surveys for those who completed the full course.

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Participant destinations following course completion

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

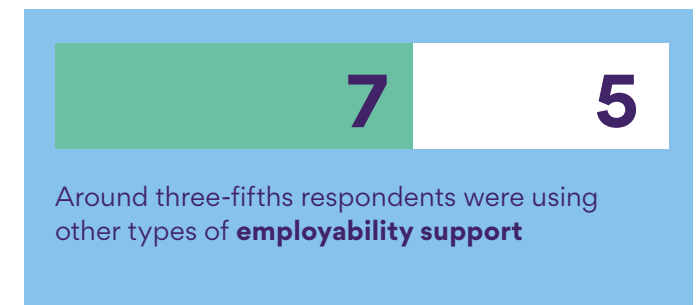
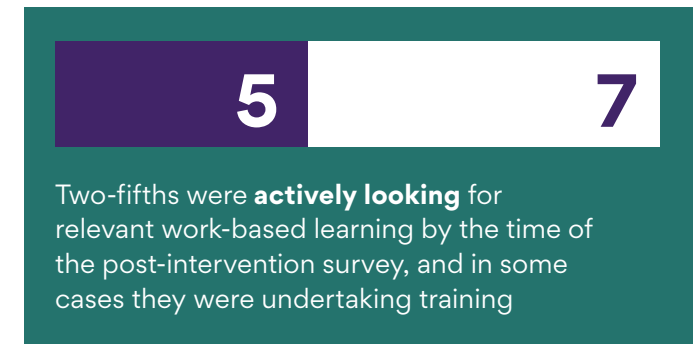


* Employees retaining their original job may have been successful at retaining a position through restructure/ redundancy halted.

Of the eight participants that achieved a job outcome



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:



On average, completers were more likely to report that they knew how to find and enrol on appropriate training courses after participation in Elevate.

*Four completers did not respond to either the pre-intervention or 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 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

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.

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.

Knowledge of where to search for jobs

Some participants felt more confident that they knew how and where to search for jobs. For some it had been many years since they'd 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, 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

“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

On average, course completers felt more confident that they could adapt their CV to suit different types of job application, they also felt more confident in writing covering letters. 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 update their CV, and how to complete online forms.



The pre- and post-intervention surveys evidenced 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 and they also felt better able to search for appropriate jobs. Positive changes included an improvement in digital skills to help with job search, such as 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 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 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.

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.



Social and emotional outcomes

Confidence

Most of the participants interviewed reported that Elevate helped to increase their confidence. This manifested as participants feeling more confident about their own skills and abilities. Some participants described coming onto the course with low self-esteem and worries about the future, 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 others in their group shared. Through engaging with the course, they regained confidence in their skills and experience and the value they had to offer employers.

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.

“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, it definitely boosted my confidence and how I feel about myself.”

Participant A

“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

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. 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.

“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

Outlook and motivation

The Elevate course had a positive impact on 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.

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.

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 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 Box 1 demonstrates that for some individuals participation in the pilot did affect how they saw their future.

Box 1 – Case study of Participant E

Participant E lives in Birmingham and had been working in a non-manufacturing role for 13 months before becoming unemployed. Upon hearing about the Elevate course at a job fair, he was initially drawn to the prospect of being in a group with other people of a similar age and in similar circumstances.

“I thought it was good as much for the social side of being there with other people looking for work, instead of sitting at home on my own. I think, particularly living on my own, you can isolate. It’s good to get out, to be part of a job searching community almost.”

Through the CV writing support offered through the Elevate course, Participant E realised he had more skills and experience to offer employers than he initially thought, which in turn boosted his confidence.

“I suppose it was realising that I have more to offer than I might’ve thought I had myself, so just kind of confidence really. Once you see it in black and white and you look at it and think ‘Oh actually I can do that, actually I have got that’.”

After receiving his new, professionally-written CV on the third day of the Elevate course, Participant E began uploading it to job sites straight away.

“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 also received support with job searching, applications and interview skills through one-to-one sessions with FareShare staff. This one-to-one support had positively impacted his motivation to look for jobs.

“I think it’s just keeping momentum going, because it can get very easy if you’re on your own at home, and you haven’t got access to IT, to just stagnate a bit and lose that momentum. Whereas if I’m seeing [the coach] every week, that encourages me to look myself...”

At the time of interview, Participant E was waiting to attend an interview. He was feeling more confident about this, having had support and guidance from FareShare Midlands staff. He was also planning to arrange a mock interview with one of the Elevate coaches.

Box 2 – 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.”



What contributed to successful outcomes for participants?

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:

- Group dynamic and peer support
- Elevate coaches
- Interactive nature of the workshops

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



Box 3 – 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. Both had previous experience of supporting those at risk of redundancy and people who were unemployed.

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.

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

Participants reported that the coaches were able to create a relaxed atmosphere where they felt they could have fun alongside engaging with the content of the course and that there was no pressure from the Elevate coaches to complete tasks quickly.

Box 4 – 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 hear 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

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. The low numbers of recruits was noted by project and delivery partners for the following reasons:

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.

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. 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.

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 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 e.g. one participant waited 12 weeks between initial referral and course start date (nine 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.

“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. 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 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

Learning for future work around redundancy and restructure

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. 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 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.

“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**. 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.

“What sort of training 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 do better for this cohort?”

Project partner

“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

Conclusions and policy implications

Summary of key findings

- 1** Elevate failed to recruit its target number of participants due to multiple challenges as outlined earlier.
- 2** Under-recruitment is a particularly acute challenge for programmes where referrals are reliant on outreach for engagement 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.
- 3** 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.
- 4** 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.

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:

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. Key stakeholders in the early

redundancy/consultation process include HR professionals and unions, it is important to work alongside these stakeholders to ensure the efficacy of early interventions.

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.

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Learning and Work Institute (L&W) was commissioned to undertake this evaluation.

L&W is an independent policy and research organisation focused on lifelong learning and better work.

The Centre for Ageing Better is pioneering ways to make ageing better a reality for everyone, including challenging ageism and building an Age-friendly Movement, creating Age-friendly Employment and Age-friendly Homes.