

Evaluating the Restart Scheme

How gender and age influences participants' experiences.

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Literature Review

The UK Government announced their Plan for Jobs in 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic's impact on the labour market. The Plan for Jobs aimed to create and protect jobs across the country and help people to find sustainable employment. Plan for Jobs supported both businesses and jobseekers and to fulfil jobseeker support for those who had been out of work for longer periods of time, the Department for Work and Pensions commissioned the Restart Scheme. The Restart Scheme was delivered across England and Wales in 12 contract package areas.

The Restart Scheme started to accept referrals in July 2021 aiming to address additional employment barriers preventing Universal Credit claimants finding work. The Restart Scheme is a personalised and individual approach for each participant, collaborating with local authorities and employers to provide additional support and access to vacancies. Participants engaged with the Restart Scheme for a 12-month period and support included not only finding employment but also sustaining employment with in-work support included in the offer. The Restart Scheme is delivered across 12 Contract Package Areas (CPAs) throughout England and Wales.

Whilst an evaluation of the Restart Scheme has highlighted some of the benefits and drawbacks of the provision and how it could be made more effective (Learning and Work Institute, 2024), it did not explore the impact of certain groups having more barriers to entering, and re-entering, work than others. People over-50 comprise one such group and have been specifically identified by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as a priority area. This has been evident through the implementation of new schemes like the online Midlife MOT (DWP, 2023), launched in 2023, 50 Plus Champions (DWP, 2022), launched in 2022, and demonstrable support to promoting age inclusive working practices (e.g., through committing to the Centre for Ageing Better's Age Friendly Employer Pledge). Another group of interest to the Government when it comes to entering, and re-entering work, has been women. Indeed, the DWP's 50 Plus Champions scheme includes a particular focus on women going through menopause, recognising the impact this has on many women's experiences in the workplace. In addition, the Department of Health has made huge investments in research into understanding the barriers for getting into work, with a specific focus on the health issues faced by women (HM Treasury, 2024).

Young people (18–25-year-olds) face additional barriers to entering, and re-entering work. Young people have lower participation in employment than older people and are less resilient to shocks to the labour market (ONS, 2022). Following the start of the pandemic there was a fall in youth employment levels and a rise in inactivity levels. The number of young people in employment in May to July 2024 was 206,000 fewer than pre-pandemic levels, while the number of inactive young people was 371,000 above pre-pandemic levels (House of Commons, 2024).

In line with these various employment trends and Government initiatives, and in wanting to ensure quality and effectiveness in the delivery of their services, Seetec committed to undertaking this research into the facilitators and barriers to entering work for men, women, young people, and people aged 50 and over. This was done through a dedicated exploration into how The Restart Scheme is experienced by these groups.

Research aims and questions:

The aim of this research project is to evaluate how participants experience the Restart Scheme and whether different groups with additional barriers to employment experience the Restart Scheme differently. The project hopes to identify what support helps individuals back into work. Considering this exploratory aim and considering the purpose of the Restart Scheme, this research project aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do young adults (aged 18-25) experience The Restart Scheme? What are the barriers and facilitators to their participation?
2. What needs and concerns do young adults who have been out of work for longer periods have around entering/re-entering the workforce?
3. How do people over-50 experience The Restart Scheme? What are the barriers and facilitators to their participation?
4. What needs and concerns do people over-50 who have been out of work for longer periods have in entering/re-entering the workforce?
5. How does gender impact on young adults' and people over-50's experiences of The Restart Scheme?
6. In what ways do Restart Scheme participants feel service delivery could be developed, improved, or changed to better meet people's specific age and gender-related needs?

These research questions sought the experiences and opinions of participants. This project collected these perspectives through a mixed-methods approach utilising a survey and focus groups.

Methodology

Methods and Data Collection

This research collected data in two stages utilising mixed methods. The first stage was an anonymous online survey that was open to all current and previous Restart Scheme participants within Seetec's awarded contract area, 4a – South West (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024), including those who attended the Restart Scheme at Seetec's sub-contracted delivery partners. The purpose of this survey was to gather mainly quantitative data to gain a strong representative sample of participants' experiences. This representative sample acted as a benchmark with which to compare the experiences of the key interest groups in this research project. Once survey responses were collected, it was confirmed that the sample was representative by comparing this data to wider Restart Scheme participant data, more details on the sample can be found in the sample and data collection section of this report. The survey included closed questions and Likert-scale questions with one open-ended question to give participants the opportunity to share further thoughts and comments.

The online survey was open throughout March and April 2024. The average completion time was 8 minutes, 31 seconds. The survey questions followed participants' path through the Restart Scheme, starting by gaining some demographic data, experiences of joining the scheme,

support offered during the scheme and then the impact that the scheme had had on participants’ employment and their wider lives.

The second data collection stage included focus groups with participants from the different key interest groups for this research project; young men, young women, men aged 50 and over, and women aged 50 and over. Moreover, focus groups were divided into those who had experienced the Restart Scheme directly with Seetec and those who had their Restart Scheme delivered by one of Seetec’s sub-contracted partners. The focus groups followed a semi-structured topic guide. The semi-structured approach afforded participants flexibility in guiding the discussion to share the information that they believed was relevant to the research questions.

Overall, 11 focus groups were conducted with 26 participants in June and July 2024. They took place online utilising Microsoft Teams and were facilitated by the lead researcher. The focus groups also followed participants’ journeys through the Restart Scheme from their previous work experiences, perspectives on other employment services, joining and attending the Restart Scheme and the subsequent impact that the scheme had on their lives.

Sample and Participant Recruitment

As this study included two stages of data collection with different methods, there were two target populations for the relevant samples. The first stage of data collection, the online survey, targeted all participants who had been or were still on the Restart Scheme, aiming to gather a strong representative sample. This sample included Restart Scheme participants within the contract area 4a as determined by the DWP, including those who received the Restart Scheme directly from Seetec and the subcontractors. Participants were recruited via email. There was a total of 1,061 responses, 898 of which consented to participate in the research.

Of the survey participants, 89% attended the Restart Scheme with Seetec and 11% had experience with delivery partners. There is a broad range of ages, as demonstrated by Table 1, however, the disproportionately large sample of people aged 55-64 already gives an indication that age does impact participants’ employment experiences. When considering gender, Table 2 showcases that 55% of survey respondents were male, suggesting more men participated in the Restart Scheme than women who accounted for 42%.

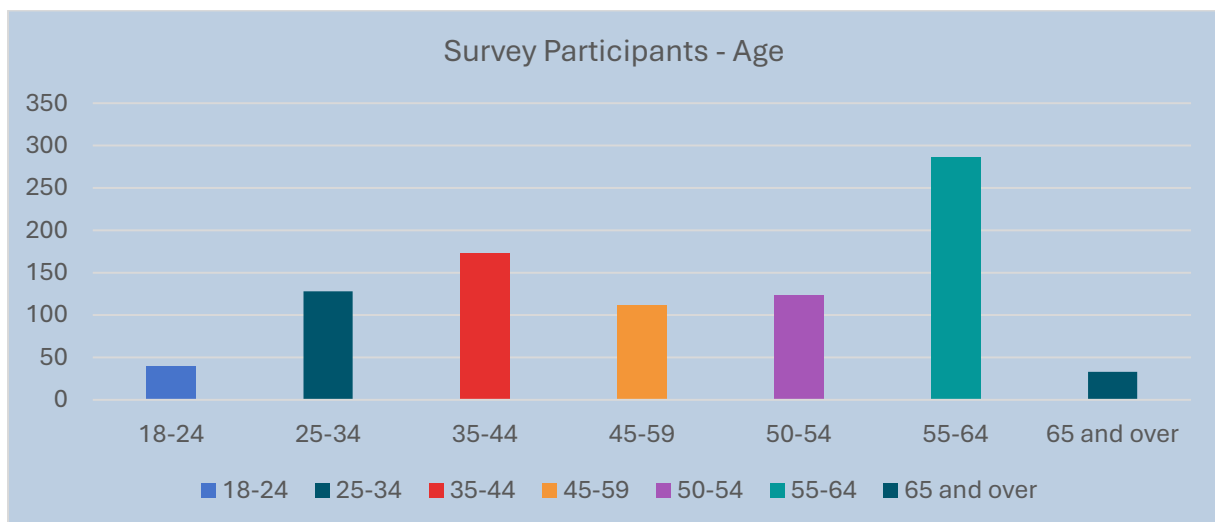


Table 1.

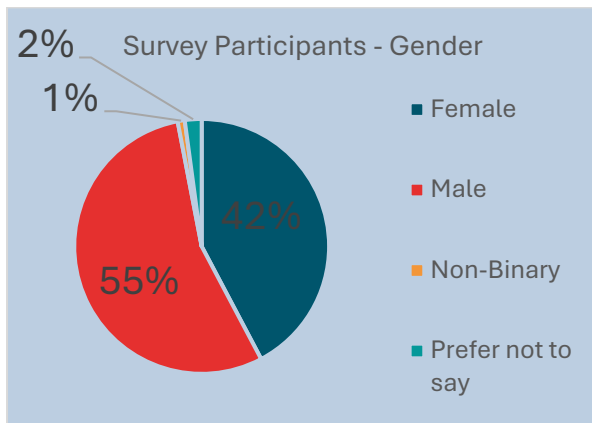


Table 2.

Survey participants also had a very broad range of qualifications and qualification level with substantial spread, shown in Table 3, indicating that people with all qualification levels are experiencing barriers to accessing the labour market.

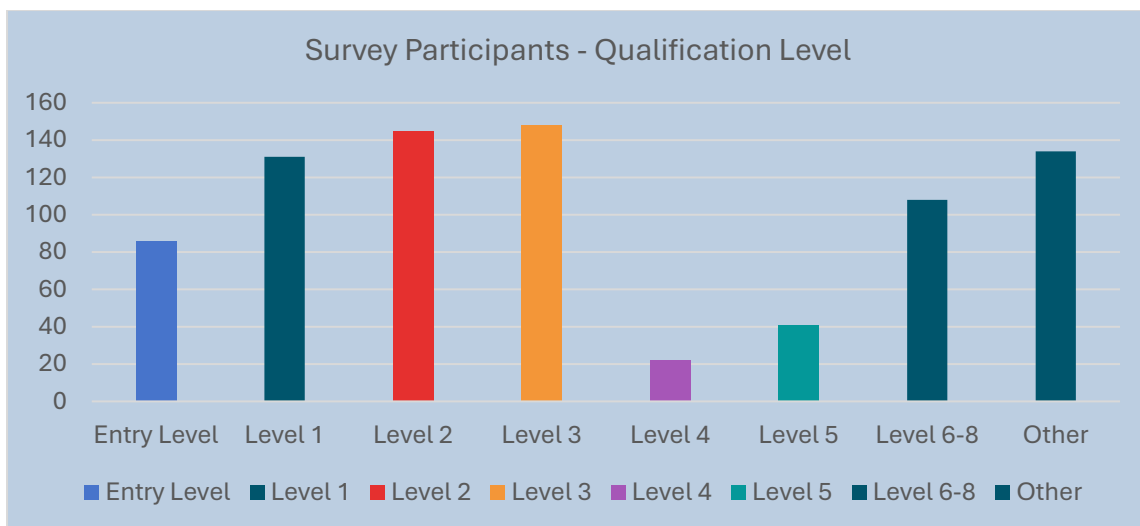


Table 3.

The survey demographic also had a good range of participants who had completed the Restart Scheme and who were still on the scheme, creating data that represents the experiences of participants throughout all stages of their journey. Moreover, there was also a broad demographic of people who had been out of work for differing lengths of time, again providing a representative sample.

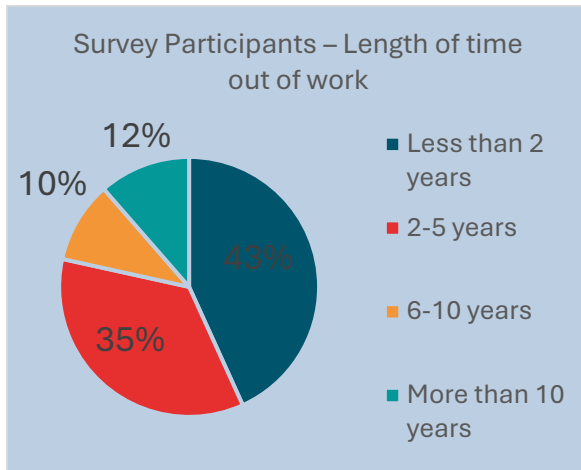


Table 4.

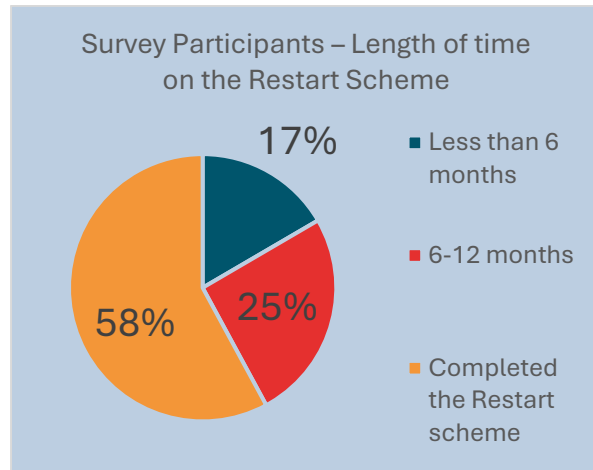


Table 5.

The second stage of data collection, the focus groups, aimed to gather data from key interest groups and therefore these key groups informed the target sample population. These groups included young people aged 25 and under as well as people aged 50 and over. The groups were further split by gender to see whether there are differences between how men and women experience the Restart Scheme. Moreover, the focus groups were split by those who did the Restart Scheme with Seetec and those who worked with delivery partners in order to gain a sample representative of all experiences in the 4a contract area. The demographics of those groups are displayed in Table 6 below alongside participants' pseudonyms. 54% of the sample were male and 54% were in the 50 and over age group, this mirrors the higher numbers of male participants and participants aged 50 and over in the survey sample.

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Delivery Partner</u>
Alice	18-25	Female	Partner
Andy	50+	Male	Seetec
Bradley	18-25	Male	Seetec
Caroline	18-25	Female	Seetec
Charlotte	18-25	Female	Partner
Delia	50+	Female	Seetec
Elizabeth	50+	Female	Seetec
Gary	50+	Male	Partner
Harry	50+	Male	Seetec
Jacob	18-25	Male	Seetec
James	18-25	Male	Seetec
Jess	50+	Female	Partner
Kate	50+	Female	Seetec
Kieran	18-25	Male	Seetec
Leo	18-25	Male	Seetec
Matt	50+	Male	Partner
Phillip	50+	Male	Seetec
Polly	18-25	Female	Seetec
Samantha	50+	Female	Seetec
Sarah	18-25	Female	Seetec
Steve	50+	Male	Partner
Stuart	50+	Male	Seetec
Tasha	18-25	Female	Seetec

Taylor	50+	Female	Seetec
Thomas	18-25	Male	Seetec
Tony	50+	Male	Partner

Table 6.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from survey responses were analysed statistically while the qualitative focus group data were analysed thematically. The process of thematic analysis started with familiarisation of the data, coding, and then grouping coded data into the relevant emerging themes. The process of coding took place over several weeks. The themes that emerged from focus group data form the structure of this report; the findings and discussion of this study are organised accordingly.

Ethics

This research followed the ethical guidelines set out in Seetec’s Research Unit’s code of ethics ([Seetec-Outsource-Code-of-Ethics.pdf](#)). Due to Seetec’s Research Unit’s position within the wider Seetec Group, this research follows the ethical guidelines established regarding insider research. All participants who were receiving or had received Seetec services were reassured that their participation was anonymous and would not impact the service they received. Both Seetec and the Research Unit are fully committed to ethical research and therefore the research findings are presented fairly and equitably without alteration.

The survey included an opening description of the purpose of the research project and how the information would be used. Here it was stated that participation was voluntary, and responses would be anonymised by not requesting the participant’s name and not collecting email addresses. Moreover, the right to withdraw was stated and the researchers’ contact details included, giving participants the tools to withdraw either from the project or to withdraw their personal details if they wished to do so. Following this, the first question of the questionnaire acted as the informed consent. By choosing ‘yes’, participants gave their consent and were able to begin the survey, however, by choosing ‘no’, participants were taken to the end of the survey.

Focus group participants were recruited via email, which included an information sheet. This provided details on the purpose of the project, the researchers undertaking the study and what taking part would involve. In addition, there was information on the right to withdraw from the project, that participation would be voluntary and that responses would be anonymised. Researchers’ contact details were included to ensure participants were able to contact the researchers before, during or after data collection. As well as being provided in advance, the information sheet was discussed in the focus groups prior to data collection initiating and time was allowed to ask any questions.

All focus group participants were also asked to provide their informed consent to participate in the study. The researcher attached this document in invite emails and then read through the document with the participants before data collection occurred, time was given for any questions to be asked. Participants were reminded of confidentiality and their obligation not to share information disclosed by others during the focus group. As focus group participants

dedicated their personal time to participate in the study, they all received a £20 VEX gift card as a 'thank you'.

Findings

Chapter 1: Unemployment, the labour market and employment services.

This chapter will detail Restart Scheme participants' experiences of searching for a job in the post-pandemic UK labour market. It will also identify some of the perceived barriers to employment that have impacted participants' ability to find sustainable employment. This chapter will explore how Restart Scheme participants experienced employment support prior to their referral to the scheme. The Restart Scheme referral process will be highlighted and the impact on first interactions that participants have with the Restart Scheme will be explored.

1.1 Unemployment and barriers to the labour market.

This section will explore what barriers to the labour market job seekers are experiencing to review how the Restart Scheme is able to support participants to overcome these barriers. The Restart Scheme was commissioned by the DWP and started supporting participants in July 2021 as a response to the predicted rise in unemployment following the Covid-19 pandemic. Focus group participants had varying opinions of whether the pandemic had impacted their job search with some stating pre-existing barriers to employment as their main challenge, however, many participants did experience increased labour market turbulence due to Covid-19.

The Covid-19 Pandemic

For Jess, a woman over 50 who had extensive international work experience, the pandemic resulted in her living at home with her elderly mother. This change in circumstances not only led to unemployment, but also mental health challenges. When asked whether the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted her experience, Jess explained:

My job didn't exist anymore basically... So, my career literally ended that day, and I was locked in with my mum for a couple of years because she was severely ill. (Jess)

The finality of Jess's experience demonstrates the impact that the pandemic had on some sectors, she states that her career ended overnight suggesting a feeling that even after the pandemic she was unable to return to her previous line of work. Similarly, another woman over 50, Elizabeth, had to change career due to the disruption of the pandemic and the precarious nature of temporary employment in her sector:

So, I've worked as a teaching assistant for 15 years until the COVID time and unfortunately, I lost my job. So, I started to rethink about my whole life, because it was really, really difficult to find a job... I always struggled to find a proper job because I had only a fixed term contract every year. Very frustrating doing this for many, many years, 15 years. (Elizabeth)

This impact was not limited only to people with significant work experience; it had a similar influence on young people like Thomas and Jacob who highlighted that people with limited work experience in the sectors strongly hit by the pandemic faced significant challenges when looking for employment:

Well, the pandemic definitely had an effect on it as I was applying to mainly retail around COVID time and naturally that was pretty difficult. (Thomas)

Sort of working in retail, hospitality and stuff, obviously, everyone with that sort of skill set had to look elsewhere and try and make their make their experience sort of stretch in other places, but obviously that's easier said than done. So yeah, I'd say it definitely had a decent impact. (Jacob)

The impact on young people was not limited to the fact that they usually had less work experience than older participants, it also included qualifications. Charlotte spoke about being unable to take her exams as they fell during the lockdown:

I left school in COVID, so I call myself a COVID baby because I left school with no GCSEs because of COVID. So, I did all my qualifications outside and in other providers. (Charlotte)

Charlotte identifying herself as a 'COVID baby' demonstrates how central she believes that the pandemic has been in changing her experiences and opportunities, having a lasting impact on her ability to access qualifications. Charlotte gained her qualifications later, delaying in her ability to look for work.

Mental Health

Following the pandemic, there has been evidence of the impact of lockdown on personal wellbeing and our wider society (WHO, 2022). Not all participants in this study attributed their mental health struggles directly to the pandemic, but they did name mental health as a barrier to finding employment. One participant, Jess, felt the pandemic was the root cause of her mental health issues. Jess became a carer for her mum during lockdown which had a detrimental impact on her mental health and ultimately led to her becoming homeless:

I did it for two years and I knew my mum was well and I literally ran away from home. A grown woman ran away from home with a suitcase and my dog because I knew if I'd stayed there, I would die. My soul had died, and I became homeless, which in my life I never thought. (Jess)

The use of such emotive words such as 'died' highlights the negative consequences. Another participant, Gary, attributes mental health as one of the main barriers to employment:

But like I say that the challenges are Age. Mental health, you know, opportunity, you know, they're just not here in Cornwall. (Gary)

Health Conditions

In addition to mental health struggles, general health was often cited as a barrier to employment for participants. 24% of survey participants stated that they did have a chronic health condition, suggesting that this barrier impacts many people. Survey participants with chronic health conditions were less likely to find employment on the Restart Scheme (28%) than those who did not have a health condition (43%), demonstrating this barrier. Participants in the 50 years old and above focus groups discussed how their health conditions had created barriers for them:

I'm 58. I used to manage a charity, and I now have some health issues that are why I'm having problems finding a job. That's why I'm on Restart [Scheme] and I've previously been on the Work and Health Programme as well. I'm one of those people that have health problems, but not enough to get paid which is a bit of a nuisance. (Delia)

I've got severe and profound hearing loss, and I've also got health conditions. So, these two things in rural areas make it very difficult. (Kate)

As Delia noted, having health conditions that are not considered eligible for additional benefits but create barriers to employment is difficult for participants to navigate. Kate highlights how these difficulties can be exacerbated by additional factors such as the local labour market.

Health barriers to work were not limited to older participants, people in the 25 years old and younger focus groups also emphasised how health impacts their experiences. Caroline explained how she faces some perceived scepticism or bias from employers:

I got very unwell, about six months ago I got the all clear and I was ready to get back to work. It's been very, very difficult. I've had a lot of interviews. It's just getting through the barrier of people not wanting someone that hasn't worked for quite a while. Very difficult to be employed when you're not employed because they look at you and think, well, you've been out of work so long, why take the chance? She's just going to go on sick again. (Caroline)

While Caroline underlines some employers' attitudes towards people who have been out of work, another young person Bradley explained how time out of work altered his worldview on work:

I was hit by a car on my way to college one morning and broke a few bones in my leg. So, after that I just decided that work wasn't really for me. And then obviously that was a few years back now, 5-6 years ago. So, I've just been on Universal Credit since trying to get my life back together since my accident. (Bradley)

Both Caroline and Bradley's experiences exhibit the importance of beliefs and attitudes when searching for work.

Each person with a health condition was in a unique situation in terms of adjustments they may require at work. Stuart highlighted how the post-pandemic trend of employees working from home could benefit him:

I'm 63, ex-rig-worker now with limited mobility, so everything I'm doing with the Restart Scheme is to try to work from home... It's just that my health, sort of couldn't continue with it. (Stuart)

The target that he was working towards on the Restart Scheme was flexible home working and he believed that this support would help him overcome his mobility barriers.

Disabilities and Neurodiversity

Whilst health conditions can create barriers for people looking for work, disabilities can cause additional complicated challenges. 28% of survey respondents stated that they had a disability or were neurodiverse, a significant number of people. Only 25% of those survey participants with a disability or neurodiversity found employment following the Restart Scheme whilst 44% were still looking for work. Jacob, a participant under the age of 25, discussed how he had become disabled and the difficulties he had changing the direction of his career.

Over the past four years, I've come into a problem being disabled so jobs are a bit different to find now, I usually would work in bars, restaurants, warehouses, etcetera. I had like managerial experience, but since I've been looking for like work from home jobs, and in the area I live, that's quite hard. (Jacob)

Jacob also recognised the potential benefits of working from home due to his mobility issues but recognised that this work may be quite different to his previous experiences. Identifying and highlighting transferable skills to new employers was a challenge for Jacob when looking to work from home.

Caring Responsibilities

The health of individuals themselves is not the only health-related barrier to employment for participants in this study. A substantial number of participants cited caring responsibilities for others as a barrier. In this study, only women discussed their caring responsibilities when asked about their barriers to employment. Charlotte, a care leaver who is under the age of 25, returned home to care for her mother and stated the difficulties she had due to not being eligible for carer's allowance:

I've just been doing my Mum full time and then obviously having a job on the side because Jobcentre Plus just wanted me to have a couple of hours here and there, every week roughly. I don't get paid for being a carer, my mom doesn't quite reach those criteria yet. So, I don't get any money for supporting her, so I still get nagged by Restart [Scheme] or Universal Credit to look for jobs. (Charlotte)

Moreover, Charlotte described how being a carer creates barriers to employment:

So, I've been her carer for four years, being her full-time carer is hard. I don't wish being a carer on anybody, I don't really have a life so... So, I have barriers, massive barriers. I'm very limited on the number of hours I can do because I can't leave my mum for long periods of time. (Charlotte)

For Charlotte, she found her caring responsibilities on top of looking for work to be overwhelming. Her feeling of being 'nagged' demonstrates that the engagement she had with employment services was not helpful. She identified her limited flexibility and capacity to work as her main barriers.

Another carer, Samantha was in employment and had to leave to take up caring responsibilities for her mother, she had since struggled to get back into employment:

I ended up leaving that partly because it didn't work out and partly because my Mum was getting older. I looked after her for a little while... So, when I needed help looking after my Mum, I lost my carers allowance, so I needed to find a job, and I'd never heard of [provider] or anything. It was great and obviously to get the unemployment benefit I needed, you needed to go and see them. (Samantha)

Being a carer not only limited participants' ability to look for work and commit to working hours but also negatively impacted their mental health, consequently leading to additional barriers. Jess's experience demonstrated these barriers and the wider impact of being a carer:

Well, basically, I was left looking after my mum. I could only leave the house once a day and I think as a creative person who thrives on stimulation and the world around you, to live the life of a pensioner, not eat what you want to, see who you want to, talk to who you want. I literally turned to an 80-year-old pensioner overnight. And had to live it in a prison for basically two years. So, it led to a breakdown. (Jess)

Jess's reflection that she turned into a pensioner exhibits the extreme changes in lifestyle and lack of social interaction that carers can experience, creating additional barriers to employment when looking to return to work such as a lack of confidence and being unfamiliar with changing employment practices.

Homelessness

This chapter has explored how mental health can create barriers to those looking for employment. Poor mental health can have severe consequences, one of which is homelessness. Jess explained how her experience prevented her from applying for work:

I was registered officially homeless, and it was a freezing winter, they put me up in a hotel and then I moved to the YMCA, which to be honest it was a godsend. That's when I first became introduced to Restart [Scheme] ... I wouldn't put YMCA, I would just put like [address], but then of course, as soon as people look at it, they see, oh, she's living in the shelter. So, you become an unhireable really, useless. (Jess)

The use of the words 'un-hireable' and 'useless' indicate unsurmountable barriers and a lack of hope as Jess believed she would face discrimination from employers when using her hostel's address.

English as an Additional Language

For participants with English as an additional language, their language skills or the perceptions of others were a barrier to finding or sustaining employment:

I am a refugee from Ukraine. I learned English because I knew absolutely zero before. In Ukraine, I worked as a bookkeeper or accountant with a lot of experience, but here another country has another law. So, I started college to learn bookkeeping here.' (Taylor)

Yeah, I think it's because of the language. So, if I apply for a job as a teacher and there are other people on the waiting list who are British people, obviously, they've got advantage because they speak fluent English compared to me, so I completely accepted my disadvantage of the language. (Elizabeth)

Taylor's experience shows how qualifications and experience are not always transferable to a refugee's host country, creating a lack of applicable work experience and potentially feelings of loss of professional identity as she retrains. Elizabeth also discusses her perceived disadvantage because of her language skills.

Many employment barriers highlighted in this section demonstrate additional needs for sustainable employment. Flexible working, previously mentioned for those with health conditions, benefits people in various circumstances, including carers and those with childcare responsibilities.

I've been told Restart [Scheme] wants me to look for work, which I've got no issue with doing, but I would be looking for hybrid working. At the end of the day, that's for me because I need to be able to be flexible. (Charlotte, carer)

I could work there or at home if I needed to. It made it easier because there were certain times when I couldn't get out of the house. (Tasha, health condition)

I've been a stay-at-home mum for eight years. It's good just to get me out there and get that confidence. But I am still currently looking for something else because it's just ridiculous when the kids are off, they come home and I've gone to work, so don't really get much family time... what I find hard is finding the hours I want. (Sarah, single mum)

Unfortunately, even the requirement for flexible, hybrid, or remote working can create a barrier as there are limited opportunities in some areas or sectors.

This section highlights the greatest employment barriers: disabilities, health conditions, poor mental health, homelessness, English as an additional language, and caregiving. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated these issues, impacting both the labour market and public health.

1.2 Employment services and Jobcentre Plus

Participants facing multiple barriers to employment also had diverse interactions with employment services prior to being referred to the Restart Scheme. Understanding these experiences provides insight into the extent to which the Restart Scheme differed from other support services and gives wider context to participants' employment journeys and therefore this section explores how Restart Scheme participants experienced other employment services. Among many, these employment services included Jobcentre Plus and Work and Health Programme.

Employment Services Environment

Many participants discussed the environment of their local Jobcentre Plus, stating that it was uninviting. For some people, such as Tony, the security guards were concerning:

Yeah, I think since Covid [Jobcentre Plus] has gone a bit cold and you know, you got to think about the security guards, more security guards than staff half the time, you know, my God, you know, what's all this about? (Tony)

His experience clearly shows that the presence of security was overwhelming and intimidating, this could create anxiety for some participants. For those with health conditions, the lack of toilet facilities also created anxiety:

There are no public toilets at Jobcentre Plus. So, disability wise, it's very, very, difficult. So, in the beginning it's just "well go across to the pub". I thought I'm not really comfortable going in the pub across there. I'd have this thing about trying to get to a toilet so that I can then go to Jobcentre Plus where there's going to be no toilet. If the appointment isn't on time or if it's an hour session... They would let me use the staff toilet once I really explained it. So then, the security guard each time was you know, yes, you can go to the toilet ... It doesn't feel good. (Kate)

For other participants, it was the atmosphere created by staff members that was uncomfortable:

Yeah, I just thought I find the majority of the members of staff that I've spoken to in my local Jobcentre Plus are rude. Judgy. So, it just puts you off. They're like, not always very good, if I'm honest. That's just my opinion. (Sarah)

In all these cases, the participants highlighted how they felt uncomfortable, whether that was interacting with staff members, the use of basic facilities or feeling intimidated by the number of security guards. The unease felt by participants had a negative impact on their engagement with the service, demonstrating the importance of a positive and welcoming environment.

Work Coach

As Sarah highlighted, the interactions with people on employment services are important for participants and the main contact for most people is their work coach. Many participants spoke of their interactions and some of the limitations of Jobcentre Plus support:

My work coach, he did his job. But that job doesn't fit what I need, and I think that's the issue, they can't get advisers in the Jobcentre Plus that can spread themselves across society because society so splintered at the moment, whether it's mental health, age, children, addictions. So many things that Jobcentre Plus just can't provide. (Gary)

Working with Jobcentre Plus, they can be very helpful. When I was with them for the first time. It feels like they do try to help, but their support does feel limited. A lot of time it's just like they can give me advice; they can give me help, but the help can only stretch so far. (Leo)

It's actually been alright, same as Leo. I've juggled with different work coaches, but I've actually managed to keep one now and she has been really helpful and mindful and like giving me information on different jobs, on different websites, and it's been really helpful so far. (Kieran)

From these experiences, that Jobcentre Plus can offer helpful advice on where to look for jobs and the application process. Yet as Gary mentioned, one drawback is not being able to offer personalised support applicable to individual circumstances, a limitation that the Restart Scheme was commissioned to support.

Other participants found the support to be more of a 'tick-box' exercise and felt as though they were being encouraged to apply for unsuitable roles:

It is a tick-box, you get 8 minutes to see your so-called job coach, they don't talk about jobs, they've got no jobs to offer you. All they talk about is what you've been doing, have you done this? Have you done that yet? (Tony)

There's a little bit of pressure from Jobcentre Plus where they expect you to apply for jobs and sometimes you think I'm not really the ideal person for that one job. But you'll apply for it just to have some numbers to show them when you sign on. And then, even if you knew you probably weren't the best person at the job, it does still hit you negatively, in your opinion of yourself, and then it can impact on the job, which might be more suitable. (Andy)

Andy's experience emphasises the negative impact that rejection can have on applicants looking for work, despite thinking that the job was not suitable for him. This shows the consequences of some of Jobcentre Plus's policies on job searching.

Participants also highlighted how working with multiple coaches had limited their ability to make progress and undermined their experiences. Many people felt as though they were not making progress:

So, the same as [participant] passed from work coach to work coach and once, I found one that would work well with me, I got moved again and it's just been... I haven't been able to connect with one person. (James)

The term 'connect' highlights the value of his work coach relationship and the importance of personal understanding. This lack of connection may also be due to how work coaches are matched to participants, a topic explored in more detail regarding the Restart Scheme.

They change your job, coach. Probably every six weeks, 8 weeks. (Tony)

James and Tony's experiences were echoed by many participants showing that this was a regular occurrence in some centres, with negative consequences.

This section has explored how participants interact with other employment services and revealed the importance of facilities, the atmosphere and a personalised approach to job searching. A lack of available or appropriate facilities was a large barrier to participation and the relationship between work coaches and participants determined the success of the support offered.

1.3 Restart Scheme Referral

Participants were referred to the Restart Scheme from their employment services. This section explores their experiences of hearing about and joining the scheme and suggests improvements for the referral process. Initially, people on Universal Credit under the Intensive Worksearch Regime were referred to the Restart Scheme but as the scheme matured and the pandemic's impact on the labour market became clearer, eligibility was extended to include Income-Based Jobseekers Allowance, benefiting more people.

The referral process is the first time that participants get exposure to the scheme and gives them a first impression of what they can expect. 58% of survey respondents had a positive experience of joining the Restart Scheme. People in this study discussed how their Jobcentre Plus work coach approached the topic of their referral:

The lady at Jobcentre Plus said after a certain amount of time with us, you have to get referred to this, so you'll be seeing them as well. I was like, well, OK, that's fine. (Caroline)

Yes, I was asked whether I wanted to do it, and it was explained, I had lots of documentation, emails from Restart [Scheme] and the website link and everything. So, I actually wasn't able to read it all because it was quite a lot. But I did understand they were going to support, all the information that came through was good. (Kate)

These participants received information about the scheme in advance, and some gained an understanding of what was being offered to them, however, not everybody had the same experience:

It was like no information previously. We just went there like normal and then got told we were all going on this scheme... I didn't know anything about it and then I basically said, well for example, I live here, and we need to go there, how am I supposed to get there if there's no buses or I've got no money? Then they said, they'll reimburse you for your bus fare, could have told me that, give me a leaflet before the appointment. It was quite abrupt. (Charlotte)

No, it felt like I was walking into a wall blind essentially. It was like two towns over. Didn't know it was a thing. They basically said that they would get me a job and yeah, that was all the information had. (Jacob)

Some individuals were apprehensive about the financial implications of their referral and the extent of their involvement. Providing comprehensive information about the scheme's offerings before their appointment mitigates their concerns and enhances their initial impression. This proactive approach prepares participants and instils expectations of additional support.

The mandatory scheme also affected participants' feelings during the referral process.

I was told you had to. Oh, pretty awful really. But your mind is thinking, OK, hopefully it'll be good. But just, you know, sceptical because it's another government scheme, isn't it? (Matt)

Being sent to Restart [Scheme] was like them just shifting me to the side. When they sent me to Restart [Scheme] it was, I had to go. If I didn't go, I wouldn't get my payment every month (Bradley)

I was informed that I had to. That's the next compulsory kind of stage and it was arranged fairly quickly. I felt I was being kind of processed. Yes, that's the best way to describe it. I felt very insignificant because very little explanation kind of was given... It was just a transfer from one organisation to the other, done in the shortest way, just to get me off that kind of plate on to somebody else's plate. (Harry)

Participants described feeling 'sceptical' and 'insignificant', the mandatory nature and the method in which the referral was communicated in some cases created feelings of a lack of agency and the impersonal approach emphasised the 'process' rather than the individual. This report recommends that greater information sharing, clarity on associated financial support, and better communication on the differences between Jobcentre Plus and the Restart Scheme would reduce participants' anxiety and improve engagement with the Scheme.

1.4 First impressions and interactions with the scheme

This section reviews what happens when the referral leads to participants attending a Restart Scheme appointment in a Restart Scheme provider office. Each participant arrives with different experiences, attitudes, beliefs and needs and therefore this section will identify what individuals' initial interactions with the scheme were, whether they were effective and what could be further improved to increase engagement.

Many people shared that they were nervous or had anxiety about their first Restart Scheme appointment, mainly due to a lack of information.

I just wasn't sure what it was. I think the first day I got there, I was that nervous, I kind of just stood at the door, waiting for someone. (Polly)

I had a couple of days of anxiety over it. Obviously, it was me suffering with such severe anxiety. The first day was horrible. I was anxious over what they think over the fact that obviously I didn't have a job. I was only at 21 at the time. I was quite worried that they were going to have this assumption of me based on what they've been told. But when they got to know me, they actually helped me out massively with mental health. (Tasha)

I was very nervous because I thought, well, it's not my fault I can't get a job, and I thought they were going to be quite harsh. I didn't want someone to be like, well, there's a job come up at Tesco's, you need to take it now and force me. That's what I was worried about. But it wasn't like that. I was so nervous, I thought I'd done something wrong, I hadn't got a job quick enough, so they were sort of punishing me, but it wasn't like that at all. (Caroline)

Terrified, it was like walking into a minefield. Every single step could go boom. But luckily the adviser I had was pretty nice. (Thomas)

Participants had high levels of anxiety. Their concerns were the perceptions of employment advisers, the approach that would be taken to job searching, and the potential outcomes of that. However, for some people, this anxiety was reduced once they met their employment adviser. One recommendation is that participants are given more information ahead of their first appointment as well as a brief introduction to their employment adviser. This will reduce participant anxiety and dispel misconceptions early on.

During the first appointment, participants noted the data gathering done by their employment advisers and how it felt to share their information. The extent of information gathered suggests limited information sharing between the referral partner and the Restart Scheme:

I just remember coming in and basically getting read like just a questionnaire. I just had to answer a load of questions to do with anything and everything about me, I found it a bit too personal. In all honesty, just like they were just wanting my data just to know everything about me. (Bradley)

It was all basically just a questionnaire that would just read off the laptop, and I just found it very robotic like trying to figure you out and trying to work you out as a person. I just felt that was not needed. If it was more of a down-to-Earth conversation one to one, if it was more just like a human interaction experience rather than them staring at their computer, typing in filling out boxes, ticking boxes, I would have appreciated that more. (Bradley)

What felt like a number on spreadsheet to be honest. I was greeted with I think it was a building that before was for people who like just came out of prison. I walked into a very open office, and I was literally touching with another person there for the same reason. I was forced to share very personal information about my mental health, my finances, family, job experience, basically everything I wouldn't want to share in some form of public setting. I was quite literally forced to because, and I quote, 'we will have to report this back to Jobcentre Plus'. So, they were basically threatening me with deductions. (Jacob)

This method of data gathering created feelings of being part of the 'process'. Participants highlighted that a more informal and personable approach would have been more appropriate. Moreover, the setting for this appointment was important, with people stating that having to share such personal information in an open office felt inappropriate. Only 56% of survey respondents felt as though their needs were considered by their adviser at the beginning of the Restart Scheme and therefore this process of data collection may not record the personal information that would be relevant or important to individuals. Additionally, only 54% of participants were shown possible vacancies at the beginning of the scheme, indicating a softer or slower approach to job applications at the beginning of the scheme.

Although there are learnings for how to improve the first appointment experience, there are also examples of good practice:

I really had no issues on the first day. We just kind of went through everything, it was very smooth. Not really a lot to say about it just because it was just done well, it was efficient. (Leo)

It was actually alright. I don't have the same advisers that I do now, but the person that helped me like set it all up and take my details and that he was really kind and really like just straightforward with everything. It's been great. The options that I've had at the Restart Scheme compared to Jobcentre has been way more open. (Robert)

Both participants had positive things to say about their adviser having a positive impact on their experience and reinforcing the points made by Bradley and Jacob who said that a more personable approach was needed. A recommendation of better information sharing, contact from advisers prior to the first meeting and a personable approach would lead to greater comfort for participants.

This first chapter has identified the barriers to employment that many individuals face namely mental health, health conditions, disabilities and caring responsibilities, as well as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on these barriers. This chapter also explored participants' experiences with employment

services and ultimately their referral to the Restart Scheme. Subsequently the recommendations of better information, communication, and individualisation have been identified.

Chapter 2 – The Restart Scheme Job Search and Employment Barriers Support

This chapter will discuss what support is offered on the Restart Scheme, both job search support and additional wraparound support that aims to address some of the additional barriers that participants have when accessing the labour market. It will also explore the role of employment advisers (EAs) and how they work with participants to ensure they receive a personalised and effective experience. Throughout the chapter, it will identify how the scheme could be further improved or personalised.

2.1 – Employment Advisers

This section will review the role of Employment Advisers and how they are matched to participants based on their needs and barriers. This section will also evaluate the impact on participants when their adviser is changed and how the scheme manages those changes.

Employment Adviser relationship

Firstly, participants recognised that the majority of their experience on the Restart Scheme relied on their employment adviser and the relationship they had with them and yet only 60% of participants stated that they had a good working relationship with their adviser. Participants described the importance of this relationship:

It was completely all her because if she couldn't be bothered to speak to me or she didn't care, I wouldn't have got the information I did. She wouldn't have given me the support, not just through what she was giving me, just talking to me. She'd always have this phrase 'It's a job finding a job', and it really is, it's so difficult. But she'd always give me a boost. It's like today, I walked in, she gave me a massive hug and said how proud she was of me and that I deserve this, and you know, it's been a long time coming, and I've done so well. You know, I couldn't have done it without her. (Caroline)

I've seen different people, and some are just better than others. Some of them are a bit pushier and a bit more motivating, which is not a bad thing, something a bit more proactive. Some of them it's a bit of a tick box exercise is what I found. I've changed with someone who's much better, and it's made the process very different. But before it used to feel like a bit you go, you turn up, what have you done this time? Fine. I'm going now. Bye. (Delia)

I think it's important the support you get. I think anything works if you've got the right people, doesn't it... It's about the people that you've got on your side, if they're in the know, if they've got good empathy and they understand the different jobs. (Phillip)

Caroline's statement that it is 'all on' her employment adviser underlines the responsibilities of EAs and the importance of the relationship between the adviser and the participant. Caroline associates 100% of her interactions with the scheme with her adviser which demonstrates the potential pressure that EAs may feel when supporting somebody searching for work. How Employment Advisers influence the Restart Scheme experience is emphasised by Delia who identifies how her different employment advisers have changed her perceptions of the scheme from a 'tick-box exercise' to a more motivational approach. 60% of survey respondents stated that they had a positive working relationship with their Employment adviser and therefore considering the strong reliance on this relationship for a positive Restart Scheme experience, it is important to consider how these relationships could be further improved.

Matching Employment Advisers and participants

As Delia has mentioned, the employment adviser that people work with changes their experience of the scheme and therefore it is beneficial to consider how participants are matched with their adviser. Some participants reflected on this:

That's the person who is with you, you know, that's the person who emails you and makes your appointments each week or two. Everything depends on that one person, the match with that one person. So maybe yes, the suggestion is in future they don't match a 50 something [year-old] global creative director with a 20-year-old who's never left where they live and live with their parents. So maybe they look a bit closer on who mentors who. (Jess)

It's potluck on what adviser you get really, you know, whether it's going to work for you or not. (Gary)

To understand how carers work, you would need to be a carer yourself. Do you understand how difficult and mentally draining it is? So, unless she's been a carer herself. She [EA] basically belittled me, basically just said oh but I work 40 hours a week and I have to do that at home. Well, I said, you don't have to care for your mother. So, she basically stated or said that I can work and do all of that after. (Charlotte)

In Gary's experience, there does not seem to be much consideration given to who supports and advises the participants, and Jess has demonstrated the potential negative outcome of this, she felt as though her match wasn't suitable and limited the support she was given. Furthermore, Charlotte believes that only an adviser with lived experience of being a carer would be able to support her. It is recommended that the Restart Scheme review which working relationships are most effective and match EAs and participants based on their demographics, needs or barriers.

Changing Employment Adviser

Some participants worked with more than one employment adviser and described their experiences of changing EA:

Yes, I want to have stayed with her. I didn't even know that she left. And basically, they didn't even tell me. I just one day I just started a new person. (Jess)

I saw like four or five different people. I remember one guy that was really nice, like he was there and then he quit. Yeah, I stopped going in the end because I just thought it was a waste of my time. (Bradley)

Both Jess and Bradley had a more negative experience, with abrupt or regular changes, for Bradley this ultimately led to disengagement. For those with additional barriers such as Delia who has a chronic health condition and Jacob who has a disability, changing employment adviser had further implications.

Trying to explain to them when you change advisers and then you have to go through the whole thing again, it's a bit of a drag is a bit of an understatement. You have to explain your problems continually to people and it's almost like they've rolled their eyes at you because you're making excuses, but this is my life and it's difficult. (Delia)

I had one more concrete adviser, but I seemed to have whoever was available sometimes. So yeah, it wasn't always the same person. Yeah, because say the first time I sat down, it was with the main adviser who wanted to know everything about everything that I had to say. And then obviously seeing another two or three people, they then wanted to know the same thing. So, it felt very much like it reset every time you went in there. (Jacob)

Repeatedly having to share personal and potentially traumatic information about their circumstances and the effect on their working life was uncomfortable for both Delia and Jacob. Jacob's use of the word 'reset' indicates the level of disruption that changing adviser causes, Furthermore, Delia's concerns that

she would be judged for her inability to find sustainable employment due to her health conditions creates added worry, a potential barrier to creating an effective working relationship with her adviser.

Unfortunately, changing employment adviser is sometimes unavoidable and is often due to circumstances beyond the control of the Restart Scheme provider. Nevertheless, approaching these changes with a more systematic handover and having better communication with participants creates more positive experiences.

I was upset that I had to change, but it wasn't too big of a change because she literally would sit. So, it was someone I'd spoken to briefly a couple times, it wasn't a case of I didn't know who she was, so it wasn't nerve wracking. She was friends with my first employment adviser. It was quite nice to know that even though they changed my employment adviser, it wasn't someone who was completely different. (Polly)

She had such a large workload, sometimes I'd have to wait ages, or I'd have to get passed on to someone else because she [EA] just couldn't see everyone in a day. It was kind of strange because me and her had that rapport, you know, she knew my situation, she knew my day-to-day life. It was nice to not have to re-explain that. (Caroline)

Both Caroline and Polly noted how their advisers had worked alongside their colleagues to introduce their participants to the other advisers in their local offices, reducing anxiety when having to work with a new person. Although neither of them was happy to change EA, they were able to build good working relationships with their new advisers, suggesting less disruption. This local cooperation and better communication to participants is a recommendation to the Restart Scheme on how to improve participants' experiences of changing EA.

This section has evidenced the importance of the relationship between job seekers and their Employment Advisers. It recommends considering how Employment Advisers and participants are matched to allow for more effective working relationships to be created, potentially having a large impact on participants' experiences of the Restart Scheme. Moreover, this section identified a recommendation that maintaining effective communication when Employment Advisers are changed can mitigate some of the negative consequences.

2.2 The Restart Scheme Support - Additional Barriers to Employment

Employment advisers work with a wide range of participants with varying needs and wants. Their support to help address barriers to employment is crucial in participants' journeys back to the labour market. This section explores the support that employment advisers are able to offer, the impact of this support and how it could be further improved. This section addresses the information, advice and guidance that applies to each additional barrier to employment that was identified in Chapter 1.

Mental Health

15% of survey participants accessed mental health support through the Restart Scheme, young people were more likely to access that support (20%) than those aged 50 and over (14%). Of those who accessed mental health support, 79% believed that the support was suitable. Unfortunately, mental health support was not offered to all participants, even though some may not have felt comfortable requesting this support, Gary, a man over 50-years-old, shared his experience.

I didn't have any no. I mean generally I find when you sit down and say how are you doing type of thing but nothing specific. I think it was just a courtesy thing, yeah. (Gary)

When asked whether mental health support would have been helpful to him, Gary responded:

Me personally, I think yeah.

Others were offered some support and commented on the environment of the Restart Scheme offices.

I was offered it in my first appointment. I said no to it and then they never offered it again because I didn't need it. But yeah, there are posters all over the walls. (Thomas)

Yeah. No, it was definitely offered to me, I don't know, I think I'm bit too far gone for support now really, I just, I tried it all out already... Yeah, there was definitely leaflets and hotlines for whatever issues you're having. (Bradley)

Both Thomas and Bradley were men aged 25 and under, they had refused mental health support for two very different reasons. Thomas recognised that he didn't have a need for that support, however, Bradley declined support despite having poor mental health. He shared how speaking to others was not a method that he found suitable for his situation and therefore it is important to consider multiple methods of providing support. Other participants, such as James, had a good experience of receiving multifaceted information:

Like I said before, I had issues with my mental health. My Restart Scheme person, he gave me a lot of information about where to go for support for my mental health, and I went and set up regular meetings to help. It's been actually really good, I've been engaging a lot with a lot more things I don't normally do and that's all like seeing more people, making new friends, and it's been actually really amazing. (James)

The information that James had received empowered him to access direct support and connect with other people in similar situations. In his experience, the benefits of a wider range of information included improved mental health and higher engagement.

The Restart Scheme doesn't only signpost participants to external support, it also organises and provides internal support for participants with mental health barriers. Delia explores her experience of attending group sessions:

I wish to stop calling them mindfulness and some of the taglines they give them. I don't think they do the courses credit, and they tend to put you off because it sounds a bit like they're trying to improve you all the time. If you've got a mental health issue or you suffer from anxiety, it's unlikely to make it go away. But talking about it actually is quite helpful. So maybe they'd be better framing it in a different way, sometimes sharing those issues can sometimes help because it airs it out and gives you a chance to talk about it with people that might understand it. (Delia)

She highlights the importance of language and it how it can change people's perceptions on the courses available. Notwithstanding her reservations, Delia shared the positives of attending the sessions including feeling a sense of understanding shared between herself and others. Support was also offered on a one-to-one basis by mental health coaches and Polly shares her interactions with a coach:

I mean, I've been waiting for a therapist nearly two years. I've been waiting so long, during Restart [Scheme] they got me one almost immediately. Obviously, since being off Restart [Scheme] and I've had a couple of problems and I'm now on a waiting list, but other than that they were really helpful. (Polly)

Polly notes how this quick access to support was the most important aspect for her due to long waitlists for other public health services. However, for other participants, knowing that mental health coaches are not qualified counsellors was slightly discouraging:

Yeah, she's some sort of support, but she's not licenced. She's employed by them just to sort of help out and have someone to talk to and she can refer you to other people should you need it. I thought they were professional mental health specialist, but you know what? She was amazing, she listened. I think maybe I just needed someone to talk to. She could also refer me to other places where I could get professional help, which was brilliant. It's a little

bit too late because I've been trying to get a hold of someone for about 8 months now, but that wasn't [EA]'s fault. She was pushing for me and people just kept leaving or weren't getting back to her. (Caroline)

Caroline was dubious when she first heard about the support that her mental health coach could offer, especially after she waited to connect with somebody, but she found the service helpful. She acknowledged how she valued the ability to be able to speak to somebody about her challenges. This was sufficient support for Caroline, however, Jacob shares how he thinks that this level of support wouldn't be helpful for him, he would prefer something more structured:

For a very short spell I interacted with the mental health coach, I don't know how I explained it, but she basically told me that she would ring me once a month, but she wasn't trained to give mental health advice. She was just basically a shoulder, if you will, and I don't think that's very productive. (Jacob)

The varying opinions on the mental health support offered are reflective of the fact that mental health struggles are very individual, and each participant may prefer a different approach to mental health support. Nevertheless, having clear communication that there is support in place, the potential benefits, and how to access sessions supports more positive mental health and has a good impact on participants.

Health-related barriers:

Health and wellbeing support is offered by the Restart Scheme and 50% of participants were offered this support, with 70% of those who accepted support finding it suitable. Kate's experience demonstrates the importance of having an adviser who understands the barriers to employment directly associated with having a chronic health condition. Kate originally stated that her relationship with her employment adviser was an issue for her on the scheme, but after interacting with another adviser she received extensive support and advice:

My main problem was that the person I was with didn't really understand my health issues... I had support from [EA] for about 10 weeks and she was very, very understanding and was supporting me with the limited capability for work assessment and the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) journey. She encouraged me to stay on track because that's a long haul and PIP has taken a year. My problem getting work really was the disabilities, being able to get to work in a rural area and having a company that could understand profound and severe hearing loss. (Kate)

The support that the employment adviser was able to provide includes guidance on benefits and additional health-based adjustments as well as encouragement and a confidence boost for somebody with concerns re-entering the workplace. This information, advice and guidance helps support people with chronic health conditions and Kate's experience further evidences the importance of her match with her adviser. In Kate's opinion, understanding her rights was important because she believes the Equality Act is limited in practice:

It just became very difficult to work on the holiday park because although we have the Equality Act, in practice, it's very difficult with some employers and with some conditions to make reasonable adjustments and encompass you in the kind of work that you're doing in that job. (Kate)

Jacob, unfortunately, did not feel the same benefits as Kate because he regularly changed employment adviser. He describes the discomfort it caused him when he had to explain his disability to new people:

I need a walking aid and a knee brace for my mobility issues, so obviously turning up every time it would be the same conversation. How did that happen? And it's like, you should know this. You should have this on my file, and I shouldn't have to explain something traumatic to you over and over again. So yeah, it didn't really seem like anytime I arrived, they really knew what was going on with myself. It's kind of a weird experience to share. (Jacob)

Jacob's frustrations of having to explain his situation repeatedly suggests that support was limited due to lack of consistency. Moreover, he shared that he was looking for remote working due to his disability but did not receive support on achieving this target. Jacob's limited mobility created barriers attending appointments, something Samantha also experienced:

I get so anxious it affects other things like I can get blurred vision and all sorts; it's a nightmare. So, the only thing I would say is having to drive to [the Restart Scheme office] because mine was a little way away sometimes was an issue, but I managed it. Do they offer team appointments? So rather than going in? (Samantha)

Samantha, and many other participants with disabilities or health conditions, would have benefited from working remotely with their adviser to mitigate their additional barriers. Remote appointments are one suggestion that could be taken to facilitate better engagement with the scheme.

Caring responsibilities barrier:

For participants with caring responsibilities, many considerations need to be made, including working hours, flexibility and wellbeing of the carer. Charlotte describes her interactions with her employment adviser and what support she thinks would have been more beneficial:

It feels like she laughs at me. She's not giving me any consideration, or just basically makes comments that can be offending to me. At the end of the day, to know a carer, you have to be a carer, to understand what you are going through mentally and emotionally. (Charlotte)

Charlotte suggests that she needed an employment adviser with greater understanding of her responsibilities and the limitations of her capability to work. In comparison, Jess's experience is much more positive because of the understanding from her employment adviser:

I think she understood my journey, my breakdown, how I ended up, you know, she understood my work background. She understood caring for my mom unexpectedly for two years, being locked in with COVID, the breakdown, she understood it all and wasn't judgmental and that was really important to me as well. (Jess)

Although understanding participants' situations is not direct support for carers, Jess's experience suggests that it aids a better working relationship between the employment adviser and the participant and therefore allows additional support to be provided. Further support that should be provided is information, advice and guidance on carer rights and support to identify and apply for flexible working roles.

Having English as an Additional Language (EAL):

Taylor, a Ukrainian refugee, outlines the benefits of having an adviser that is specialised in working with people in her situation:

I am really thankful to Restart [Scheme] to this job adviser because she's working with all Ukrainians and to understand another language, this absolutely needs a lot of patience, lots of kindness, really. I know you have some translation devices, but. I'm very thankful to that woman. (Taylor)

Taylor stated that the language support, including translation, was necessary for her effective engagement with the scheme. She also discussed some of the barriers she was facing due to her forced migration:

We understand we should, at our age, do twice work than usually you know. So, we prepared ourselves in Ukraine before war for good pension we had. At here we should start with zero line. This is in our wage. This is not very easy really. (Taylor)

Taylor's preparations for retirement had become redundant when she fled her home country, she notes that she now has to start again from zero, not only in terms of her financial preparation for later life, but also in terms of her career and job search. She received support on rebuilding her career such as attending relevant training courses that were essential for her. Overall, participants with EAL were more satisfied than those without this need, 3.88 compared to 3.18 on a scale from 1 to 5, 5 being very satisfied.

Approach to a wider group of barriers:

When participants spoke of support that was in addition to their job search support, they also highlighted the approach of their employment advisers and the holistic methods that had been helpful. Jess, a woman over 50 who was experiencing homelessness described how her employment adviser provided wraparound support:

At first, the lady I had wasn't what I expected. She basically was a bit hippie dippie in a good way but actually referred books to read about self-healing and recommended going for walks and stuff like that, which was a surprise to me. I thought, oh, but then I thought, well, do you know what? I'm leaving the shelter, so, self-healing is good. Gosh, I wouldn't have thought the government would have suggested self-healing. The first couple of months were all based around that, and that was completely nuts. Her doing that was actually really perfect timing. (Jess)

Jess shared her surprise at this approach but recognised the value in this support, it helped to address some of her more holistic needs before addressing her employment needs. It also made her feel more valued as an individual due to this personable approach. Polly also noted how having more understanding adviser helped reduce her anxiety:

She was amazing. I couldn't fault her for anything if I couldn't attend due to an anxiety breakdown or something, I'd message her and let her know if she was like, right, it is rescheduled, here's what you need to do for this week. I can't explain it. It's almost like not being punished for not attending is the way that I would be looking for it. (Polly)

Considering having a more holistic approach in Restart Scheme appointments, participants recognised how the personable approach created a more inviting and productive environment resulting in identifying more appropriate jobs to apply for:

It's been really nice to have someone to consistently talk to and he's pretty fun. It's just actually nice to feel like I'm talking with a human being who's actually listening and interested in what I have to say. There was a point where we were talking about getting different jobs, and he was like, yeah, so, a job's been listed but I think it's like 25 miles or something so don't worry about that, that's a little bit of like extreme. It just felt like nice. (Leo)

She was actually really lovely, and we had a really good relationship when we were joking, laugh with each other. We've both got serious matters as well, but it was a really good experience overall with her. (James)

It's been great. Yeah, like someone who's actually listened and is able to help based on what I've said to them. It's definitely a change and it's great. (Kieran)

Oh, he's brilliant, he's a good lad, he listens, he's got time to listen as well and he helps you out as well, gives you good advice... I was lucky there because some of them all they're interested in is like [other participants] said just throwing jobs at you and its jobs you can't do. (Stuart)

These experiences demonstrate how different approaches by Employment Advisers can have a large impact on how the Scheme is experienced and help to address some of the wider barriers to employment such as self-esteem and attitudes towards work. The personable approach of these advisers aided in creating positive feelings towards the scheme.

This section has reviewed the support that the Restart Scheme provides for each barrier and identified where there are instances of good practice. It has demonstrated that ensuring all participants have access to the support on offer, even if they have not disclosed an additional barrier, would provide better wraparound support. It has also recommended some ways in which support could be improved such as offering remote sessions.

2.3 Support for job searching

The previous section focused on support for additional barriers to employment to help participants have equal access to the labour market. Instead, this section focuses on support for job searching such as CV writing, interview skills and skill development. It will explore how this support is received by participants and whether there are any ways in which it could be further improved.

Confidence

Within some of the aforementioned holistic support offered by the Restart Scheme, self-esteem and confidence building was one of the key factors for participants. Confidence is vital for job searching both at the application and interview stage. Delia describes how her confidence decreased the longer she was out of work:

You do lose confidence the longer you're unemployed and you do lose confidence that what you've got is actually right. (Delia)

For Delia, a woman aged 50 or over, having the up-to-date insight of what employers were looking for helped her make decisions and feel more optimistic. Similarly, Samantha, another woman aged 50 or over, shared how the Restart Scheme support helped build her confidence:

It gave me more confidence when I was doing them [interview practice], I thought, I know some of this because you do worry after so many years, everything moves on so quickly. Even now it would be interesting because I haven't worked for a little while and it makes you nervous to go back because everything changes so quickly. (Samantha)

Samantha was concerned with the speed in which employment practices change, especially when she has been out of the labour market for a while, so having this insight from the Restart Scheme whether that was learning new things or reaffirming the skills she already had, helped to reduce her concerns. It is difficult to measure whether confidence has increased, as Sarah a woman under 25 noted, however, she recognised that her adviser gave her confidence to apply for some roles she wouldn't have considered:

I wouldn't say like build my confidence, I feel like it's a bit difficult, but he gave me really good insight on working life, if that makes sense. I suppose my confidence just come from like getting into work. But yeah, the confidence to apply for jobs he helps with, for sure. (Sarah)

By sharing up-to-date practices and encouraging participants to recognise their skills and how they are transferable to the local labour market, the Scheme is able to support confidence building and reduce anxiety for participants. However, only 43% of survey respondents stated that the scheme had helped them improve their confidence, suggesting that this support should be offered widely, even to those who do not identify themselves as having low self-esteem.

CV Writing

CV writing is a vital skill when job searching, and participants spoke of their experience in receiving support with their CVs. 67% of survey participants received support with their CV and 71% found this

support helpful. In the focus groups, some women aged 50 and over spoke about their confidence with CV writing:

I'm not very good at selling myself, so I felt that we always read people's CVs and jobs, and it sounds like you've got to be this amazing person and so in a sense, I was afraid if you like, that I wasn't going to live up to what this job was asking for. So that was my problem. My CV was really old, my [EA] was brilliant helping me with my CV and because I hate trying to sell myself, it's just a lack of confidence. So yeah, she was brilliant. I've still got that CV. (Samantha)

I had a Teams meeting when I first started actually about support with the CV because I hadn't had a CV in a long time then. The change of styles is quite radical and everything's online now. Luckily nobody else turned up so I had a whole hour session with my CV about how to write it. (Delia)

Both women mentioned that their CV was outdated and recognised how the changes in employment practices created difficulty. Moreover, Samantha shared how her employment adviser was able to help her recognise her skills and communicate them effectively on her CV. They both had a positive experience of support feeling more confident about their skills and their CV.

Sarah, a woman aged 25 and under, had more difficulty due to a lack of knowledge on how to write a CV:

They did my CV straight away for me and it was great because I had no idea even how to start one. Yeah, and then he emailed it over to me. And then even within the first like meeting I'd started applying for jobs because he'd helped with the CV. (Sarah)

Sarah was thankful for receiving a CV but when asked whether she would now feel confident updating her CV herself, she responded that she wouldn't:

No, I wouldn't. I still wouldn't know how to put it on paper. So, I have spoken to my coach, and I had asked him if this is something that he could help with. I've not heard back from him yet. (Sarah)

Even though 66% of survey participants felt more confident writing and updating their CVs on the Restart Scheme, advisers working on participant's CVs without guiding them through the process occurred regularly as Leo explains:

So, with my CV, the last session we had was discussing my CV and how it's faring. My employment adviser has asked me to send it over and I've sent it over to him and he's just been working on it. (Leo)

These experiences demonstrate that although having support writing their CV was helpful, a more guided process that teaches participants how to maintain that CV moving forward would be even more beneficial. An example of this working effectively is when Caroline who had some health barriers received support from her employment adviser:

We discussed that at length, she said don't put it on your CV, which I hadn't anyway, she said, take the dates off my job employment just have the year if I really want to, because it's not their business. They don't need to know that. And she said if they do ask, which they probably shouldn't anyway, you know, if you want to explain it, that's fine, but you have no obligation to, all that matters now is that you're ready to work. (Caroline)

This personalised advice and guidance on what to write on her CV and how to approach her health condition with employers was invaluable to Caroline, who also shared that she had recently become employed.

Although CV writing is important, for some participants they felt it was not necessary and 7% of survey respondents stated that CV support was not applicable to their situation. Bradley and Matt explain how they did not require this support for their employment aspirations:

I really struggle with my CV and like writing stuff down, trying to find skills about myself and what not. I would say to Restart [Scheme] that I want to work on a building site. So, at one point, I was doing my CSCS course through Restart [Scheme]. So, I wasn't really in need of a CV. (Bradley)

I actually told them that I was going down the self-employed route, so it didn't matter. But they still were insisting. So, it just felt very much like a tick box situation where they're thinking. We need to tick this box that we've done this, so it just became a waste of time. (Matt)

For these participants, CV exercises that focused more on identifying their skills and being able to apply them to the industries they were interested in, or to self-employed working would have been more appropriate. It is pertinent to remember the personalised nature of the Restart Scheme and recognise that an individualised approach must be maintained.

Interview Skills

In addition to CV support, participants also spoke of the interview advice and guidance that they accessed through the Restart Scheme. Although interview skills are equally as valuable as CV support, 44% of participants were offered interview coaching or advice, less than the 67% who were offered CV support and yet 71% of those participants found the interview guidance helpful.

Some of the benefits for participants aged 50 or over were highlighted in the confidence section of this report where people such as Kate spoke of how she had unfairly been comparing herself to others, but the interview course helped build her confidence. As Harry recognises, refreshing and building on prior knowledge is helpful:

I was encouraged to go on an interview refresh course which I went on. You know that I've done in many interviews in my life, and I also like most of us, interviewed others for positions in our departments, but it was still useful. I was thankful for that because yeah, you know, occasional refresh of the basics can't harm in my view. (Harry)

Participants aged 25 and under also spoke of how interview preparation helped them:

It's like a group session and it was like they give you pointers on what to say in interviews, but not only what to say, how to act in interviews. They always do demonstrations so that you can see set up like a fake interview. (Polly)

Yeah, I was applying for a hotel literally next door, and they had a person come in and teach me about how to interview and everything. It made me very confident. (Thomas)

As Polly shares, these were well-rounded interview sessions that gave a breadth of information and helped Thomas to build his confidence in preparation for an upcoming interview he had with an employer. Building interview confidence is important as 10% of Restart Scheme participants stated they were not confident going for an interview and 20% of people responded neutrally suggesting that they didn't have strong confidence. Consequently, interview support that builds confidence was valuable for Restart Scheme participants.

Job Search Support

Whilst on the Restart Scheme, only 50% of survey respondents stated that they felt supported whilst searching for a job and the potential reasons behind this were explored in focus groups. Through the Restart Scheme, participants had to demonstrate what jobs they had applied for on a biweekly basis, providing updates to their employment advisers, Caroline describes how she found this motivational:

No, I did find it very useful because it did feel like a chore at the start because nothing was going on in my life. I was in and out of hospital. I was looking for work, but not constantly on job sites. So, it was a bit strange. But then she started getting me to send emails over, with what jobs I'd applied to, and it was just keeping me consistent. It made me more productive, and I think it did help. (Caroline)

The consistency of the appointments helped Caroline to be productive; however, other participants noted the importance of ensuring that the appointments themselves are productive:

I don't leave the house very much due to my disability and it takes an awful lot for me to get out both physically and mentally. I sort of keep myself cooped up in my room these days. So, having to get two buses all the way over to the next town over to go and speak to someone for 10 minutes about the same thing, there was no mention of this job or that job. It was just sort of are you still looking for jobs? OK, see you next week, not very productive. (Jacob)

Jacob highlights how his employment adviser did not provide advice and guidance on available jobs that may have been suitable for him but just confirmed that he was still actively searching for employment. Limited job search support was also experienced by Charlotte:

It's literally just solely looking for a job. Nothing about how we can support you. (Charlotte)

Job searching support that was offered to some was a shared room where participants could apply for jobs on Restart Scheme equipment and receive advice from a member of staff:

I think it was like once a week, you could go in and there was like just in a room they had laptops laid out and you could look for jobs. And there were people around to ask if you needed help with anything on the laptop. (Tasha)

Tasha found this engaging and valued the advice and guidance she could receive. This type of support also raises a greater question on resources and access to digital devices which will be explored in the next section. 45% of survey participants were offered opportunities to meet local employers and 49% of people believed that the job searching support from their employment adviser was helpful, suggesting that this support needs to be applied more broadly. A recommendation is to spend time identifying vacancies that may be suitable and providing more direct guidance with job searching.

Resources for Job Searching

Many participants discussed how job searching had become an online activity making access to digital devices necessary. Some participants required equipment to be able to apply for jobs which was provided by the Restart Scheme:

Absolutely incredible according to me because they helped me with some tools for education because it is an online course, so I need to have some equipment. In Ukraine we lost everything. (Taylor)

I just wanted to say they actually gave me a laptop. I'm using it literally now. That was really nice of them, very unexpected. I just mentioned how I've only got my iPhone, and they said, oh, we can give you this laptop. (Bradley)

Actually, I asked them for a laptop, and they graciously provided it as well as a few pieces of clothing, like a coat and a pair of shoes. (Thomas)

All participants shared how having access to these resources had supported them, either apply for jobs or attending online courses to broaden their skills and knowledge. There was a shared sentiment that participants had to request this support which may lead to some not having access to the resources they require so this initiative could be more employment adviser led.

Training and Skill Development

65% of survey participants were offered a course or some form of training to improve their skills on the Restart Scheme, participants in focus groups recounted at length the different training courses available to them. For Jess and Samantha, women aged 50 and over, their employment advisers gave them access to digital skills courses:

The lady in the first few months, she showed me the website because, she said, you've been in a shelter for a year, you've been looking after your Mum for two years, you might need to update your digital skills. (Jess)

I did Word, Excel and PowerPoint as a refresher because obviously that was initially what I was going to try and get back into was office work. I think they passed my name on, and I was emailed, and it was great. So, I did that online. A bit of a challenge for me because I'm that's not what I was used to, but it was good fun in the end. (Samantha)

In addition to digital skills, other participants spoke of accessing courses that were more tailored and personalised to their career aspirations:

I did the online training about bookkeeping, business planning, financial planning, self-employment. So yeah, it's really useful for me and very, very helpful. (Elizabeth)

A while ago I wanted to be an electrician, and they offered to help me become a PAT tester. They offered to pay for the course and everything. (Thomas)

As Elizabeth had chosen to become self-employed, these courses were invaluable to her, and she had a very positive experience. Thomas was also given access to qualifications that would allow him to start working in his chosen field. In addition to this, some participants shared that their employment advisers empowered for them to identify training courses that would be suitable to their needs:

There was one that helped me sign up to some training, she said, that's funded, if you want anything, just ask which I thought was amazing. I was constantly getting bombarded with them. It was brilliant so I had access to a load of free courses where I could pick and choose. (Caroline)

The approach taken by my adviser to my course was very good. I felt because obviously my adviser did not have the understanding of my area [of work], so they let me identify a course that I wanted to do but there was discussion about its appropriateness and yeah, so that was good. (Harry)

Both Caroline and Harry appreciated the freedom of being able to identify suitable courses, especially for Harry who had a specialised profession and therefore at times the support from his employment adviser felt limited. The participant-led approach to training helped him feel empowered. The only limitations to training that was identified by focus group participants was that it occasionally was repetitive, however, as Tasha notes, this was not an issue for her employment adviser:

I realise that it's same courses that I've already been on, so like I already have that knowledge and then they'd be really understanding about it. (Tasha)

Financial Support

Another form of support offered by the Restart Scheme to job seekers was financial. Some participants spoke of how attending Restart Scheme appointments could negatively impact their finances. The Restart Scheme does offer to cover transport costs for participants and Leo spoke about how this helped him:

They've offered to help with transport getting there as long as I give them the receipt that I've paid for with my local bus app. They're fine, just give me the money on the spot to help me. It definitely takes stress off because right now with being on Universal Credit, you just get no money. I would like to spend this on food, but I kind of can't. (Leo)

But it's nice as well to know that I could get there and they'd reimburse my money that I paid so that I could still attend the appointments, which was quite nice because it didn't feel like I was having to waste my money on appointments that weren't going to get me anywhere. It made me want to come more. (Polly)

Leo's choice between attending appointments or buying food shows just how vital this support is for his wellbeing, reducing his financial stress. Moreover, Polly's feeling that she would have to 'waste' her

money if the meetings were not productive demonstrate that reducing this worry also helps to increase engagement. Other participants shared how the financial support from the Restart Scheme aided their job searching:

I mean, for me, I was using it for mainly, to be honest, for interview clothes because I was literally in jeans, and I thought I can't even afford to buy any. So, the reason I had it was so they could support me to attend an interview which worked for me. But I think people with more support needs, they're going to struggle, yeah. (Gary)

When I went for a trial at the job, I was told that if I was going to be taken on, I could be given vouchers for clothing, for uniform, and so that was produced, you know, very quickly, as soon as I had filled out the starter form. (Kate)

They also offered to help with bus fare and interview clothes. I didn't take the offer because I do budget very well. I felt bad sort of having that extra money, which is ridiculous because it was there. (Caroline)

Clothes vouchers were provided to support with pre-employment and post-employment stages including job interviews and uniform. This maintained financial aid throughout the job searching process helped to reduce stress for participants, however, as Gary noted, participants with multiple financial barriers may struggle. There were also circumstances such as Caroline's where she was offered support but 'felt bad' accepting the vouchers. The guilt or, potentially, shame associated with taking financial support was also felt by participants who were not initially offered help, such as Thomas.

I was pretty much terrified to ask [for financial support] at a fear of rejection, but luckily, I asked, and she said yeah, sure we offer it. (Thomas)

Thomas's fear is just one of the outcomes when participants were not offered financial support. Jason and Jacob were also not offered any help and shared the impact on them:

I actually wasn't offered any of that and I don't know whether it's due to my personal experiences or the advisers I was seeing or miscommunication. But yeah, I didn't know they offered clothing, training courses. So yeah, it would have been nice to have that mentioned because that would have been something I would have pursued. (Jason)

Regarding actually getting to the venue, it was two buses. They mentioned that they would happily pay for taxis and buses, which I chased and chased, never received. (Jacob)

Jacob did pursue support but never received it and this had a large impact on his experience as transport was also difficult for him due to being disabled and he felt this was a limitation on the reasonable adjustment provided on the Scheme. Moreover, Jason's experience demonstrates the importance of sharing information on what support is available to all participants to ensure that everybody is empowered to access the help they feel would support them into employment.

In the focus groups, it appeared that age also had an impact on participants' perceptions of financial support as Phillip and Tony share their perspectives:

I only receive like 300 and whatever it is pound a month, that's barely enough to feed somebody. So then, he expected me to go 10 miles... I've got to use fuel, but then I've paid for parking, they're barely giving me enough to live anyway. I understand the bigger numbers, that they can't give everyone loads of money but what I find is that, with all due respect, I've paid in for 40 years, just like the other guys here and here we are now. It feels like that, well, actually, you're no use to us anymore. (Phillip)

Last week, went for this interview with a 60-mile round trip and nothing from it. We'll help you with expenses, but they never do, and you don't like asking all the time. Well, I don't like asking all the time, you feel embarrassed you shouldn't be embarrassed. You know, I've worked, I'm 61 now. I've worked 45 years. (Tony)

Phillip highlighted how he had contributed for 40 years by paying his tax and national insurance which he believed should entitle him to receive financial support, at least in line with other participants. He noted how the lack of support made him feel as though he no longer had a place within the employment sector. In addition, Tony also highlighted his 45 years of work when sharing that he felt embarrassed to ask for help, he was used to contributing and not receiving and therefore this change in circumstances made it difficult for him to ask for help. These experiences demonstrate the importance of ensuring that all participants are offered equal support, regardless of age.

This section has identified traditional employment support such as CV writing and interview skills as well as more rounded support such as training, financial support and confidence building. Equal support for all participants to ensure that they have access to services they may need is vital. This section also demonstrated the importance of confidence in the job application process and how support such as training and interview coaching helped participants with their confidence.

This chapter has explored the Restart Scheme experience including how participants are matched with employment advisers and the impact of their relationship with their employment adviser on their Restart Scheme experience. This chapter has also identified all of the support available to participants, both when job searching and also to address some of their broader barriers to employment. It has reviewed this support, identified good practice, and made recommendations on how support can be best tailored to suit participants' needs.

Chapter 3 – How age and gender impact the Restart Scheme experience

This chapter will reflect on how different demographics, namely the key interest groups of men and women who are 25 and under and men and women who are 50 and over, experience the Restart Scheme. This chapter aims to explore the impact of age and gender on employment barriers, what support participants need, and their reflections on their experience.

3.1 – Age and the Restart Scheme

This section will focus on how age impacts participants' employment and Restart Scheme experiences. Firstly, this section will consider whether age has an impact on Restart Scheme participants' barriers to the labour market. 49% of survey participants were aged 50 and over, suggesting that a large cohort of Restart Scheme participants fall into this age-bracket. According to the survey data, there was no correlation between age and disability, however, there was a correlation between age and having a chronic health condition. Older participants were more likely to have a health condition with 25% of people aged 18-24 stating that they had a chronic health condition in comparison to 31% of people aged 50 and over.

Older participants were more likely to have been offered health and wellbeing support than younger participants. On a scale from 1-5, 5 being very suitable, older participants believed that the support offered was more suitable, 4.01, than younger participants did, 3.72. In contrast, younger participants were more likely to have been offered mental health support (20%) than their older counterparts (14%) and yet older participants still rated the mental health support as more suitable, 4.21, than young people, 3.88.

Considering more employment focused support, CV support was offered almost equally to all participant groups, yet the group of people aged 50 and over found the support more helpful and were more confident maintaining their CVs after the scheme. Coaching on interview skills was less likely to be

offered to young people (37%) in comparison to people aged 50 and over (44%) despite young people finding this more helpful, rating the support 4.07 in comparison to 3.94.

Although there was no correlation between age and outcome, 33% of young people found employment whilst being on the Scheme compared to 26% of people aged 50 and over, and yet older participants were much more likely to receive in-work support (54%) than young people (31%) possibly highlighting why some young people were unable to sustain their employment.

People aged 25 and under

In the focus groups, participants shared more insight on their Restart Scheme experience and how age impacted their job search and support received. When asked whether they thought the scheme was suitable for people in their age group, young people highlighted how important attitude is:

It's hard to explain. I've had an OK experience. People have not had an amazing experience. People have not enjoyed it at all, but it does depend on your attitude towards working, towards other people altogether. (James)

I think it's good for young people who have been out of work for a long period of time. But sometimes they don't care if they have a job or not. And I think, I'm all about giving opportunities to people that need it and obviously some employees, some companies used to say if you've got no experience in this line of work, we're not going to hire you. And sometimes that is the case. I just think they should not just have you look at a computer and job search; they should actually do what Jobcentre Plus does and asks for employers to come in. (Charlotte)

It was definitely a better experience than when I was at Jobcentre Plus because they, because of my age, would sort of like talk down to me like I was a child. And then when I went to [provider] and they actually spoke to me like I'm an actual person, an adult. It made me more comfortable to be there. (Tasha)

As James and Charlotte both discuss, experience depends a lot on participants' willingness to find employment. Despite this, Charlotte highlights how these attitudes could be challenged by encouraging young people to engage in work experience and meet employers, increasing motivation or engagement. Tasha approaches attitudes from the perspective of Employment Adviser's attitudes and beliefs towards young people who are unemployed, sharing that the personable approach on the Restart Scheme made her feel comfortable and understood as an individual.

On the theme of work experience, Polly mentioned how the Restart Scheme were very understanding of her limited experience due to her age and took this into consideration when offering employment support and identifying suitable roles:

They were understanding that I was a young age, but they were really helpful. They understood that I was young. It wasn't that easy at the time, I only had like two lots of experience in my belt, being a waitress and caring. So, they were catering towards my age and what jobs would be more appropriate for my age and the things I do outside of work. They even tried to find me music jobs because I love to sing, and they know it's one of my hobbies. (Polly)

Caroline also highlighted similar positives to Polly but also spoke about how her adviser helped with career information, advice and guidance which she felt was appropriate for her age group:

I suppose she was more understanding of younger people because especially in my situation. I was young. I worked a few jobs and then I was off sick for so long. I hadn't had a chance to sort of bounce around a few jobs and figure out what I want. So, she did take that into consideration. She was very personable and took the time to go through what I wanted in a job. And then she'd say have you looked at this career? (Caroline)

Young people had varying opinions on whether the Restart Scheme was appropriate and suitable for them. Throughout the survey, young people consistently responded less favourably than people in the 50+ category. More young people accessed mental health support than other age categories and they frequently spoke about mental health and the impact it had on their employment in the focus groups. The Restart Scheme helped to challenge some attitudes towards work and young people who are

unemployed, it also supported participants with limited work experience to identify where they could gain more experience or apply their current experience to job applications. It is recommended that the Restart Scheme applies a more personable approach to interactions with young people and considers utilising more careers information, advice, and guidance to help young participants identify potential future career pathways. Moreover, increasing opportunities to gain work experience and meet local employers would also help reduce barriers to the labour market for younger applicants.

People aged 50 and over – employment barriers

Focus group participants aged 50 and over were also asked whether the Restart Scheme was suitable for them. They identified some of the barriers that they were facing to the employment market and whether the Scheme had supported them in overcoming those barriers. Participants spoke at length about ageist attitudes they had encountered and the impact it had on their job search. Phillip and Kate both explained how they had been confronted with ageist views:

I think my main problem is my age. Went for two interviews last week and one lady said this job you could do it easy, standing on your head, don't think it's for you. What a thing to say? I drove all that way. Sixty-mile round trip. You said the job's not really for you. I don't get that. I just think they probably think I'll work another three or four years and then pack the job in then you know leave. I want a job. I want to meet people. I enjoy meeting people of all ages because I've got a wealth of experience, so have they. I can learn off their nickel and them off me. (Phillip)

Societies you know conditioning that say, me at 64, I'm not going to be able to find work. I've got disabilities. It's going to be difficult, the assumption is that I'm not going to be able to do it, whereas Restart [Scheme] talk to you as if you could and like I still have something to offer the community and society. So, it really supported me. (Kate)

Phillip's experience shows how employers have dismissed his application potentially thinking that he was over-experienced or over-qualified for the role, however, Phillip shares how disappointing this is as he feels he isn't being considered for roles that are ideal for his skill set. Moreover, he thinks that due to his age, employers assume that he will only work for a few years and therefore is a riskier hire than somebody younger. Phillip highlights the benefits he could give to employers. Kate had a similar view on the attitude from society towards her age and ability to work, however, the Restart Scheme helped her to identify the benefits she could bring to a role.

Because of some of the negative opinions or beliefs held by employers towards older job applicants, many people aged 50 and over tried to conceal their age throughout the job application process, Andy and Delia share their experiences of this:

The thing I think might be hurting my job application process is the right work documentation you've got to provide now. Because with a CV, you can tailor that. Yeah, they probably gain a slight inclination as your age from the O level as opposed to GCSE on the qualifications. But now with right work documents, you got to provide ID which has got your date of birth in, if someone is looking to be slightly ageist, then they can utilise that information. (Andy)

You know, I asked for a bit of advice because I've got 66 in the middle of my e-mail address, so my name-66. Now that's because it's the date of my year of birth and I did ask a bit of advice. They thought that actually having that in mind, the address might be putting things off because they might think I'm sixty-six. (Delia)

Delia's email address 'putting off' employers because it suggests that she is older than she really is exhibits the ageist beliefs held by many. For both Delia and Andy, they were trying to conceal their ages to remove the barrier of employers' attitudes, however, Andy talked about how changes in employment practices seemed to make this more difficult. He believes that the right to work documentation increases the chances of age discrimination.

Further to Andy's concerns, there are always developments in employment practices and older participants recognised how this sometimes creates additional barriers for them. Delia shared her experience of a changing workplace:

I'm a bit older as well and the workplace has changed a lot. The application process has changed a lot, which is why you need the CV and all these things, to give you confidence that you can actually do it because the roles in work have changed a lot. A lot of jobs that you think, oh, I'm old now I'll just go and, you know, sit in the booth and do something, not what was my career or what I wanted to do. But now actually I'm at the point I just need a job... I don't want a career anymore. I want a job so I can go and do something useful and just earn a bit of money because being unemployed is not a lifestyle... there is no lifestyle because you've never got any money. (Delia)

I think particularly, I mean young people have their own problems, but I think particularly for like the over 50s group, I know that computers are not second nature to me. (Delia)

Delia recognises that even though the workplace is changing and despite not looking to build a career at this point in her life, she did still need to work to be able to have a lifestyle meaning that she needed to find her place in this new working environment. Understanding the new application processes and updating her digital skills was important to Delia in her view to ensure she still had access to the labour market.

Difficulties in accessing the labour market or facing ageism is not limited to the application process but also occurs at the interview stage, as Phillip previously mentioned. Steve and Harry also shared their interview experience:

I think you're going to interview, and he knows you can do it. He read your CV, and I've got lots of qualifications, which is good. Maybe sometimes too many. But you customise your CV for that job and then you go there and the lady interviewing, she's about 23 years old, got no idea. (Harry)

You need to employ people, and you think, you know, you're interviewing people with experience that can even go into these companies or jobs and help younger people that are in them jobs that find it difficult. (Steve)

Harry shared his frustration sometimes with the interview process that he is often interviewed by young people who he believes have less knowledge than he does, and he finds it difficult to communicate with them. Additionally, Steve also shares this interaction with younger people who have less experience and highlights how he could support them in their roles and why age diversity should be encouraged.

Phillip demonstrates how sometimes, for older people, attending the Restart Scheme can be positive for their mental health by having regular social interactions:

When you get to a certain age, your circle of friends disappears, usually going into nearest graveyard or something like that. Yeah, you tend to look forward to going to the Restart [Scheme] appointment just to have some social interaction with somebody. Either you know is proactive enough or you know not proactive but doesn't lead anywhere, at least it gets you at the house and gets you focused to go somewhere for a certain time. (Phillip)

However, Phillip also recognises that the Restart Scheme, and job searching more broadly, sometimes has negative effects on mental health for people aged 50 and over.

You're getting pressure put on you by Jobcentre Plus to apply for these jobs. You go for these jobs now, with all due respect, some of us you know... I've made I work my way up to a managerial position, so when you get that, it's not so much just about running through a day-to-day, the job's interesting. But those jobs are not available to us anymore, so we're having to take jobs that when I when I first got to this point, I thought, oh, I'll just take any old job, and I'll just go out and do it. But the trouble is that doesn't help your mental state because the job's rubbish. You're going into jobs; you've got more experience than the people in management positions above you. (Phillip)

Phillip believes that the work he used to do is no longer 'available' to him, this has resulted in him feeling undervalued when looking at alternative employment as suggested by his employment adviser, leading to low self-esteem and poor mental health. Moreover, Samantha recognises how moving out of her comfort zone after working in one role for 30 years has been difficult, leading to a lack of confidence:

Is having enough confidence in myself because I was, you know, a lot older. As I say, I've been in my main job for 30 odd years and they're like your second family. When that structure changes it's a bit daunting. (Samantha)

People aged 50 and over – the Restart Scheme

For people aged 50 and over, they have listed ageism, a changing labour market and different employment practices as the additional barriers to employment that they face. When considering how the Restart Scheme supports them to overcome these barriers, many participants suggested that they were not matched with a suitable employment adviser and had extensive feedback on their experience of working with their advisers:

I think it's essential to find individuals who have good soft skills for the job and experience. Especially to handle the older candidates because the approach of, you know, go and find a job irrespective of your qualification because we need you to have a job, it's not going to work for the all the candidates. It might work for younger people and for people with perhaps sort of you know not with certain level of education and experience, but for people who you know are well-educated, worked throughout their life, you know, 99% of the time and have had different roles and progressed from the lowest to the highest they have sort of different expectations and different motivations. (Harry)

I think the problem is, no doubt, the person that he's dealing with, same as with me, you would expect it's probably going to be someone who's a bit older with a bit more knowledge and a bit more experience and a bit more understanding of different jobs and job market rather than someone who's a bit younger. (Matt)

If I'd had someone who actually truly understood my skill set, who understood where I'd come from and took the time to understand and actually then proactively think how it could be transferable to the local market and give suggestions and advice, then that would have been brilliant, but no. I was given a beautiful, fabulous, lovely 20 something year old. Who? Just like? Oh, your career sounds exciting. No, it was no help to me. (Jess)

Participants who had worked with younger Employment Advisers shared that they believed that older candidates should be matched with older or more experienced advisers. From their experience, younger employment advisers who had the approach of encouraging them to apply for any job didn't understand their skills and abilities or what they had to offer the labour market. Moreover, they believed that younger Employment Advisers also had limited understanding of their employment expectations and motivations as well as the jobs that they had previously done or could potentially do in the future, limiting the support they received.

Considering Employment Adviser's knowledge of specialised professions, Gary recognised how he felt that advisers are more accustomed to supporting people into lower skilled work:

Don't mean to be disrespectful, but I'll call them ladies in their 30s, who are a lot younger and with all due respect, impression you get is that they're used to dealing with people at a lower level that are doing lower skilled jobs. Once they come to someone who has specific skills and knowledge, they find it more difficult to understand. (Gary)

Nevertheless, Tony recognises that it would be difficult for advisers to have in depth knowledge of all sectors and roles, yet he believes that better support could still be provided by adjusting their approach with more mature candidates:

It's quite impossible for those individuals at [provider] to have such a broad range of knowledge in terms of skills versus roles, positions, but maybe sort of the older people, more experienced advisers are more suitable to handle individuals like us because you know, even without understanding, you know the details, nuances of roles, individual roles, or specific roles, that would use a different approach to help you guide you, motivate you. Not pushing any jobs at you because they are sort of jobs in engineering. (Tony)

Tony recognises that guiding and motivating participants would be more appropriate but also states that he believes older, or more experienced employment advisers would be best positioned to do this. Gary and Phillip also expand on these ideas, identifying a more personable approach as necessary:

We do get set in our ways that's without doubt, but we still got stuff to offer, and we just need someone to know how to deal with us, rather than have young kids that think they can just push us and pull us because, you're just an old granddad. They don't appreciate that you know what, 30 years ago, we're right where you were, but we're now where we are. We have a lot more experience and a lot wiser in the world. (Gary)

Yes, but doing it in a slightly different way, you've got to treat people as individuals rather than a tick-box situation. I think if people were treated as individuals, for their individual needs, I think that would be more successful (Phillip)

Gary's use of the word 'granddad' implies that he believes he is pushed into applying for any role because of his age, a negative outcome, but reaffirms his valuable experience. Both Gary and Phillip reiterate that a personable approach that looks at individual strengths would be more appropriate.

Finally, when discussing employment opportunities and the type of work that participants were searching for, similarly to the young people focus groups, they spoke about careers information, advice, and guidance. There were some opposing opinions on changing career:

But I think few people in their 50s on these calls will know, if you're good at something, you're good at it, you know, to start looking at something new in your 50s, it's difficult. (Stuart)

I've just turned 50, so I think in your life there is a point when you want to change something in your life, and I think this is the point for me. Now if it is not too late, I hope it's not too late. (Elizabeth)

Stuart thought that he would have many challenges if he tried to change career and suggested that learning something new at 50 would be more difficult. Elizabeth also had similar feelings stating that she hoped it was not 'too late', however she did feel as though she had another chance to do something different and learn something new at her age. These opinions demonstrate the differing attitudes, despite this there is a shared feeling that learning is more challenging for people aged 50 and over.

At times, participants did not have a choice in changing careers, their circumstances forced them to look for a new type of work and therefore Delia requested additional careers information advice and guidance tailored to those who are changing career with prior experience and qualifications in different roles.

I think it'd be good if the older people, like over 50s, this is what this group is aimed at for the older 50s, if they can have a bit of a more careers advice about changing careers because you know there's a lot of people that then can't go on and do what they were doing before, they're not physically capable of it. Also, there's a big thing about online working and home working at the moment, maybe if they could take us and if they had some courses that would prepare you for that or let you know more about it or what the requirements of the jobs are. (Delia)

Kate highlighted how this would be even more valuable for women aged 60 and above who had expected to retire at this age and therefore had not made financial or career decisions with the additional years of work in mind.

When I grew up, we thought women retired at 60. And then, of course, everything changed. And although people might say, well, this is the equality you wanted, there was no warning to have a second pension or to save. So, as I was approaching 60 and my hearing loss was getting worse and worse, it became more difficult. (Kate)

For people aged 50 and over, ageism was one of the main barriers that they experienced when applying for roles. Whether due to being overqualified, over-experienced or not having the very latest qualifications or experience to demonstrate their skills, participants felt as though their wealth of knowledge was undervalued in the labour market. Moreover, participants felt as though employers actively discriminated against hiring older applicants as they may have a shorter employment or may challenge those already in employment due to their previous experience. The recommendation to review how EAs are matched to participants would enable participants to receive better support based on their age group and previous experience. The majority of participants aged 50 and over would have prepared a

more mature or experienced adviser who could better understand their personal situation. In addition, participants recommended better support with changing career that would have benefited older candidates searching for work.

3.2 – Gender and the Restart Scheme

This section will focus on how gender impacts participant's employment barriers and their Restart Scheme experience. Considering barriers to the labour market, 30% of women declared that they have a disability or neurodiversity compared to 25% of men. Moreover, although chronic health was equally spread between men and women when looking at total respondents, women aged 50 and over were more likely to have a chronic health condition (32%) than men aged 50 and over (27%).

Notwithstanding the slightly increased barriers to employment that women face, they were much more likely to become employed following the Restart Scheme with 50% of female respondents stating that they were in employment while only 29% of men were employed. Furthermore, when looking at outcomes for participants with additional barriers to employment, disabled women were twice as likely to find employment on the Restart Scheme than disabled men (38% compared to 19%). Women with a chronic health condition were also twice as likely to find employment (40%) compared to men with a chronic health condition (19%).

Throughout the survey data, women responded slightly favourably compared to men and had a slightly better opinion of the Restart Scheme and the support that was offered to them throughout. In terms of access to support, women were more likely to be offered training courses (68% compared to 63%), more likely to be offered health and wellbeing support (54% compared to 49%), and more likely to be offered mental health support (16% compared to 14%).

Noteworthy is that throughout the focus groups when participants were asked whether the Restart Scheme was suitable for people in their age group and gender, participants always focused on how age had impacted their experience, they did not believe that gender had any impact on the Restart Scheme. Nevertheless, throughout the scheme, men were consistently offered less support than women and this had a negative impact on their experiences. For example, during the focus groups, some men shared that they were not offered support such as mental health signposting despite recognising that this support would have been helpful.

Men aged 50 and over shared many more experiences of ageism than women did and were also more critical of their match with their employment adviser. Women appeared to be more open to exploring new career pathways and diverse roles than men in focus group conversations. Another difference that was apparent was that only women cited having caring responsibilities and spoke about the barriers this had created for them.

This chapter has identified that there are differences in how the scheme is experienced based on age and gender. These demographics experienced different barriers and different levels of access to support to address those barriers. This chapter has identified recommendations on how the age-associated barriers could be addressed but the overarching recommendation is to ensure that all participants, regardless of age or gender, are offered the same access to support as some demographics have been more forthcoming in sharing their struggles and asking for help than others.

Discussion

This chapter will review the research questions established at the beginning of this report and utilise the findings detailed in the previous chapter to answer those questions.

1. How do young adults (aged 19-25) experience The Restart Scheme? What are the barriers and facilitators to their participation?

Young people faced many of the barriers that were experienced by the wider population including having a disability or neurodiversity, health conditions, and mental health struggles. In fact, mental health was cited by many young people as the main barrier to their initial participation in the scheme, sharing feelings of anxiety prior to their first appointment. Young people recommended more information and contact with an adviser prior to their first interactions.

Young people also highlighted the importance of their Employment Adviser and feeling as though somebody was taking the time to understand their wants and needs. A personable approach was key to their engagement as some young adults had previously had negative interactions with employment or training services. They often mentioned feeling like a 'tick-box' and therefore having the personable approach was key to them.

2. What needs and concerns do young adults who have been out of work for longer periods have around entering/re-entering the workforce?

Young adults emphasised how their limited work experience, due to their short working life, created barriers when looking for employment. This barrier was more evident as a consequence of the pandemic when a lot of sectors, such as retail and hospitality, were heavily impacted by government restrictions. They recommended opportunities to gain more work experience or to meet local employers as helpful support.

Some young people identified career information, advice and guidance as a need because they had limited work experience or qualifications and were unsure what type of work they wanted to look for, and also due to their school experiences being impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Support from advisers was valued by participants, the time taken to understand their wants and needs helped to build better relationships with their EAs and motivate them to search for jobs in the identified sectors.

Finally, another concern for young people who had been out of work for a while was confidence. This was two-fold with some participants stating that they did not feel confident in a workplace environment due to limited experience while others had a lack of confidence as they feared judgement from employers. Exposure to working practices, encouragement to apply for jobs that they would be interested in and advice on how to acknowledge and talk about their employment barriers, such as health conditions or flexible-working needs, all aided in building confidence and supporting young people back into work.

3. How do people over-50 experience The Restart Scheme? What are the barriers and facilitators to their participation?

This report has shown that people over 50 were more likely to have a health condition and therefore general health was one of the barriers to their participation in the Restart Scheme. Travelling to and from appointments, accessibility, and access to toilets all created concern for participants prior to attending their first meetings, suggesting that providing this information in advance would help to facilitate people with health conditions to engage with the scheme. Moreover, health conditions that had created a need to change role or industry also created a barrier for participants as their prior attitudes and beliefs about work were challenged on the scheme.

For participants who were aged 50 and over, another barrier to their engagement with the Restart Scheme was their relationship with their employment adviser. More mature participants spoke at length about how they were matched with their Employment Adviser, suggesting that they preferred advisers who were more reflective of themselves, potentially in the same age bracket or with more experience. Moreover, the advisers' understanding of their prior work experience was also a barrier for some

participants who struggled to connect with EAs who were encouraging them to apply for a broader range of roles.

4. What needs and concerns do people over-50 who have been out of work for longer periods have in entering/re-entering the workforce?

Participants aged 50 and over spoke extensively about the impact of their age on job searching because of ageist beliefs from employers. Participants believed that they no longer had access to their previous roles due to evolving qualification requirements and people with more recent experiences. Additionally, participants believed they were disadvantaged because employers were concerned that they had more experience and knowledge than those already working there or that they would leave the role quickly due to ill-health or retirement.

Some people aged 50 and over who had been out of work for a longer period recognised that a lack of confidence created additional barriers and concerns. Low confidence was created by extensive periods of time out of work and by changing employment practices. Participants spoke about how CV styles and digital skills had evolved a lot and therefore they valued support in these areas. For interviews, confidence was restored when participants realised that their extensive experience provided advantages over younger applicants.

5. How does gender impact on young adults' and people over-50's experiences of The Restart Scheme?

Although participants did not believe that their gender had an impact on their experiences, there were some differences in how men and women experienced the labour market and the Restart Scheme. One of the striking results from this study is that women are much more likely to gain employment on the Restart Scheme than men are, even when considering additional barriers such as having a disability or chronic health condition. Through discussing participant's experiences, this study suggests that the more holistic, rounded support that is on offer with the Restart Scheme to help participants with additional barriers to employment was more likely to be offered to women than men, potentially having a limiting effect on men's outcomes.

Men were more likely to note a lack of personable approach from their employment advisers and also more likely to share encounters with ageist beliefs from employers. On the other hand, women were more likely to discuss their caring responsibilities, both for ill parents and for children, as an additional barrier to finding sustainable employment. Women also explained how changes in employment practices, and women's state pension age being raised, caused female applicants to feel unprepared in the working world.

6. In what ways do Restart Scheme participants feel service delivery could be developed, improved or changed to better meet people's specific age and gender related needs?

Throughout the focus groups, participants shared their ideas and suggestions for the Restart Scheme based on their experiences and their broader needs in the labour market. Looking at the beginning of the Scheme, a referral process that provides participants with more information about what the Restart Scheme is and the benefits to jobseekers would help to create more positive expectations and reduce participants' anxiety prior to attending. Moreover, greater information sharing between the referral partner and the Restart Scheme provider would reduce the strain on participants and limit the feelings of being a 'tick-box' exercise. Having additional information about participants would empower Employment Advisers to focus on more personal information, needs and wants and ultimately build better rapport with participants.

The relationship between Employment Advisers and participants has been highlighted as one of the main driving factors behind satisfaction with the Restart Scheme. Jobseekers emphasised that their

experience of the Restart Scheme was determined by their adviser who provides all of the support on the Scheme and therefore their relationship had a large impact. The method for matching participants with Employment Advisers was questioned by many participants who believed that their adviser was not necessarily the best person to help them due to lack of experience or lack of knowledge in their sector, these concerns were particularly raised by participants aged 50 and over. The overriding recommendation from participants was to ensure that the approach to job searching is personalised. Identifying their needs and providing equal opportunities to all participants would help create more successful outcomes.

Recommendations:

More information on what the Restart Scheme entails, why participants are being referred and the benefits of engaging with the support should be shared with participants ahead of their first appointment.

Employment Advisers should contact participants prior to their first appointment.

Greater information sharing and collaboration between the referral partner and the Restart Scheme ahead of the participant's first appointment to help reduce the data gathering burden.

Data gathering should adopt a more personable and conversational approach and occur in a private and confidential setting.

The Restart Scheme should review how participants are matched to their employment adviser to maximise their working relationship.

When an employment adviser must be changed, better local coordination and communication with the participant would reduce disruption.

Offer all support for additional barriers to all participants as some people do not feel comfortable to disclose their needs.

Clearer communication on internal and external mental health support available for transparency and to encourage engagement.

To support those with a chronic illness, caring responsibility or other additional barrier to employment, more information, advice and guidance on their rights, how employers should adhere to the Equality Act, and financial benefits they may be eligible for would support their job search and confidence.

Remote appointments to be offered to those who struggle to travel to the Restart Scheme offices to facilitate better engagement.

Employment advisers to work collaboratively with participants to guide them through the CV support that teaches how to maintain a CV once participants have completed the Restart Scheme.

Employment advisers should spend more time supporting participants to identify suitable vacancies and advise on the application process.

All participants should receive interview preparation support as even participants who did not identify a need recognised improved confidence after attending.

The financial support, such as travel expenses or clothes vouchers, should be more visible to participants as those struggling financially had a lot of anxiety around asking for help or not being able to attend appointments.

More careers information, advice and guidance should be offered to participants aged 25 and under as well as those aged 50 and over. Younger participants required support planning their career when they may not have much

work experience. Alternatively, some older participants were forced to change career as their previous work was no longer suitable for them, creating difficulty.

Young people should be offered more work experience as well as opportunities to connect with local employers to help reduce barriers to employment caused by limited experience.

Men were less likely than women to find employment on the Restart Scheme and yet were consistently offered less support than women were. The Restart Scheme must ensure that men have access to mental health support and careers information, advice and guidance to support them when changing career. Men were less likely to disclose a need for help and therefore regular data gathering once a working relationship with an employment adviser has been established would help lead to further disclosures.

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