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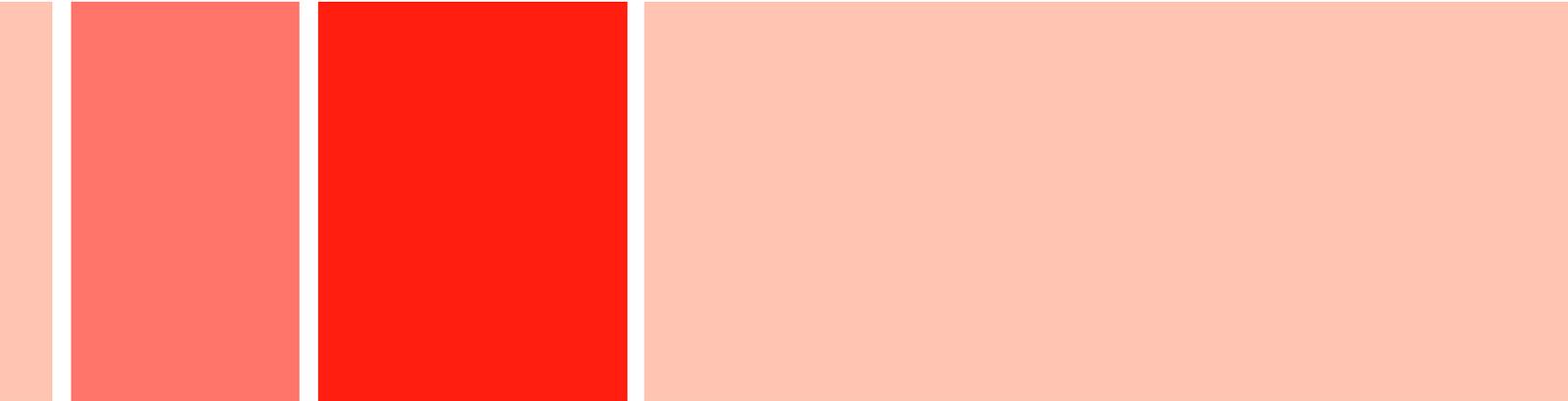
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Annex A: Evidence Review

Evaluation of the Lift Programme

Phase 1: The Logic of the Lift Model



Evaluation of the Lift Programme - Phase 1: The Logic of the Lift Model

Annex A: Evidence Review

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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Introduction

This annex presents an integrative review of theory and research that contribute to our understanding of worklessness. The chapter begins by outlining the broader literature on worklessness, how we respond to the problem, and the risk and protective factors associated with employment outcomes. Drawing on the extensive research base, including systematic reviews and experimental and quasi-experimental studies, the chapter then summarises the literature that examines the efficacy and effectiveness of employment programmes.

Key Findings

- Workless households face a diverse range of barriers to employment, including low levels of educational attainment, skills and experience, and work-limiting illnesses. Many people face a combination of barriers to work, and with each barrier the chance of finding employment decreases.
- There are a number of protective factors that can help individuals to overcome barriers to employment that can be developed through intervention. This includes factors such as self-efficacy, confidence in a person's own abilities, as well as the support networks upon which they can draw.
- There is an extensive research base exploring the efficacy and effectiveness of programmes such as Lift. This research includes a diverse range of programmes operating in a diverse range of contexts.
- Participation in employment programmes generally increases the chances of gaining employment compared to either no intervention or treatment-as-usual.
- Broadly, the evidence base supports the Lift model in providing a mixed package of support tailored to the needs of individuals.

The Political Economy of Employment Programmes

The persistence of high rates of workless households in certain neighbourhoods presents an enduring policy challenge. Our concern with unemployment generally, and its deleterious effects, has a long history. Within Wales, for example, responses to poverty and unemployment can be traced as far back as 1536 with the first codification of the Poor Laws. Within contemporary society, worklessness is never far from the collective conscience. Labour market statistics are constantly brought to our attention, providing an important and easily understood marker of our broader economic fortunes.

Over the last half-century, significant political, social and economic developments have influenced the way in which we understand and respond to worklessness in the United Kingdom (UK). During the late 1970s and early 80s, the driving force behind government policy shifted from Keynesian demand management and the ideal of full employment, towards monetary policy was influenced by *laissez faire* economic theory. The new approach privileged efficiency and price stability, and the government abandoned attempts to regulate the demand for labour.

Alongside shifts in UK economic policy, the 1970s also saw the re-emergence and re-articulation of Victorian arguments concerning the underlying causes of worklessness. Structural explanations of involuntary unemployment became less prominent within public and political discourse, in favour of individualised accounts that stressed the voluntary nature of worklessness¹. Unemployment, from these perspectives, is explained largely as the result of individual choices, levels of motivation, and personal efficiency. These arguments were used to underscore a reorientation of labour market policy away from passive policies, such as social protection and unemployment compensation, towards more active interventions that seek to address individual barriers to employment and provide incentives to work².

¹ Levitas, R. (2005) 'The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour'. Palgrave Macmillan

² Esping-Andersen, G. (1990) *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press

The 'activation turn' in public policy in the 1980s and 90s saw a proliferation of supply-side measures across the developed world. Between 1980 and 2003, the proportion invested in Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) by OECD countries nearly doubled from 0.4 to 0.7 per cent of GDP³. ALMPs themselves have very different origins and can take very different forms. They may include 'positive' activation, initiatives that focus on skills development and empowerment, and 'negative' activation, those that include sanctions and benefit reductions⁴. Employment programmes – interventions that seek to build capacity and support people into employment – emerged as a cornerstone of employment policy across many countries, including Sweden, Denmark, and the United States.

In the UK, by 1997, sustained levels of high unemployment and worklessness presented a number of challenges. Wage inequality was at its highest levels since before the Second World War. One in five working-age households contained no one in employment, and one in three children were living in relative poverty⁵. The New Labour government sought to address these issues by marrying *laissez faire* economics with a greater emphasis on social justice. The government quickly enacted a series of activation policy initiatives to tackle unemployment and worklessness, including the New Deal. The decade preceding the recession of 2008 saw overall unemployment fall across most parts of the UK. Despite these advances, some neighbourhoods continued to exhibit persistently high levels of worklessness. In many cases, these neighbourhoods were located close to areas that had seen strong employment growth⁶.

³ Bonoli (2010) *The Political Economy of Active Labour Market Policy*

⁴ Taylor-Gooby (2002) 'New Risks and Social Change' in Taylor-Gooby (Ed.) *New Risks, New Welfare?* OUP

⁵ Dickens et al. (2003) *The Labour Market Under New Labour*. Palgrave

⁶ Batty, E., Cole, I. and Green, S. (2011) *Low-income neighbourhoods in Britain: the gap between policy ideas and residents' realities*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The apparent structural shifts in production and changing patterns of work present new challenges for many people in accessing the labour market. There is evidence to suggest that transitions from either unemployment or education into employment are becoming longer, more complex, and increasingly conditional⁷. Many individuals are less likely to receive in-work training, undermining and individualising career progression⁸. Whilst many people have adapted to the demands placed upon them, many have struggled to successfully navigate a less certain and more insecure labour market.

Alongside changes to the labour market and government policy, worklessness can also be explained by trends in household structure and demographics. The growth of single-adult households has had a considerable impact on the number and rate of workless households in Wales and the UK more broadly. The majority of this cohort includes single adults with no children; however, it also includes single adults with children. Although Wales-specific data is not available, UK statistics suggest that at least two thirds of children in workless households live with a lone parent⁹.

⁷ Roberts et al. (1994) *Flexibility and Individualisation: A Comparison of Transitions into Employment in England and Germany*

⁸ Schmuecker (2014) *The Future of the UK Labour Market*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

⁹ Annual Population Survey (2014)

The recession of 2008 saw considerable increases in unemployment. Across the European Union (EU), including the UK, the number of long-term unemployed doubled between 2007 and 2014, and currently accounts for half of the total unemployed population across the EU. Long-term unemployment affects 12.1 million people, or 5 per cent of the active EU population, 61 per cent of whom have been out of work for more than two years¹⁰ (the proportion of unemployed who have been out of work for more than two years, at 16 per cent, is notably lower in the UK than across the EU)¹¹. Within Wales and England the unemployment rate had risen and then fallen during a similar period, representing cyclical unemployment as a result of a downturn in aggregate demand. Rates of economic inactivity, however, were fairly stable throughout the downturn, suggesting that worklessness is explained, at least in part, by structural issues prevalent within the labour market.

Reducing worklessness remains a key policy objective for successive governments within Wales and the UK more broadly. The policy response has been broad. It has included a number of positive activation initiatives that have sought to reduce its prevalence. These have included area-based initiatives, including Communities First in Wales, Social Inclusion Partnerships in Scotland, and the New Deal and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund in England. Since 2008, UK Government policy has come full circle, shifting focus from positive activation towards negative activation policies through sanctions and benefit reductions. This has included replacing Incapacity Benefit (IB) with Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and reducing the age of the youngest child after which lone parents are required to seek work.

¹⁰ European Commission (2015) http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-5562_en.htm

¹¹ 12-month average Jobseeker's Allowance by age and duration, www.nomisweb.co.uk

Despite government intervention, worklessness is still a prominent feature within the labour market. The policy challenge, therefore, is to design and implement locally sensitive responses that effectively support members of workless households within these deprived neighbourhoods. This necessarily requires a detailed understanding of the characteristics and dynamics of worklessness, as well as the factors that contribute to positive outcomes.

Defining and Measuring Worklessness

How we conceptualise and measure worklessness is central to our understanding of its extent and impact. There is no single agreed definition of worklessness, and there is considerable variation in the way in which it is applied across specialist usage, political discourse, and media commentary.

In labour market statistics, the Office for National Statistics describes an individual as workless if they are a working-age adult, involuntarily excluded from the labour market, and in receipt of certain benefits. This definition includes the unemployed population, consisting of people who are without a job, want a job, have actively sought work in the last four weeks, and are available to start work in the next two weeks. It also includes the economically inactive population, those without a job who have not actively sought work in the last four weeks and/or are not available to start work in the next two weeks¹².

In exploring the prevalence of worklessness, researchers often make a distinction between those who are unemployed and those who are economically inactive. Many studies and reports define worklessness as economic inactivity, whether explicitly or implicitly. Under this definition, the proximity of an individual to the labour market is considered important, and not actively seeking employment suggests that an individual is further away from finding work. This definition often also considers length of unemployment to be important in understanding worklessness.

¹² Pg. 12: DWP (2011)
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214564/rrep779.pdf

The Lift Programme incorporates a broader definition of worklessness, one that does not make the distinction between unemployed and economically inactive. The Lift Programme, instead, sets out to support individuals living within workless households who have spent more than six months out of work or training. The Programme focuses on some of the most vulnerable groups, including:

- Young single-parent households
- Households in which the adults have few or no formal qualifications
- People with weak employment records
- Individuals with disabilities

When applied to the measurement of worklessness, official definitions often draw on aggregate descriptive statistics that provide snapshots of worklessness in a time and place. This tends to portray worklessness as a static state, and does not reveal the extent to which worklessness is a dynamic process. From this perspective, worklessness is transitory, mediated by a range of variables that can influence duration and outcomes. Worklessness, under this definition, is not a static state, but rather a complex, dynamic and evolving process which people negotiate, and some more effectively than others.

The Impact of Worklessness

The continued concern with worklessness stems, in part, from the understanding that unemployment and economic inactivity are associated with a range of adverse outcomes. Long-term unemployment and economic inactivity can lead to sharp increases in material deprivation, deteriorating mental and physical well-being, the removal of integrative and supportive social support, and broader social exclusion.

Unemployment can have a considerable negative impact on individuals. Most research suggests that the long-term effects of unemployment on subjective and objective well-being are negative. Protracted periods of inactivity, for example, can contribute to higher levels of stress and depression, which can, in turn, reduce the likelihood of finding and sustaining employment¹³. Increased duration of unemployment is associated with significant increases in alcohol abuse and substance dependency, domestic violence, criminal activity generally, and convictions. Exposure to unemployment accounted for between 4.2 and 14.0 per cent of the risk of experiencing these significant negative outcomes¹⁴. Unemployment is also correlated with low levels of self-efficacy, confidence in a person's own ability to achieve certain outcomes. A lack of self-efficacy can lead to an unemployed person resigning to their situation, fostering the idea that they will never get a job.

One of the greatest challenges presented by worklessness is poverty and social exclusion. Changes in employment status or earnings are the main causes of movements into or out of poverty¹⁵. Being out of work considerably increases the chances of experiencing material deprivation. This includes fuel poverty, the inability to heat or light a home, or going without essentials such as sufficient food, adequate housing, or clothing. For many living in poverty, this also means living without access to services and social activities, exacerbating social exclusion. A lack of employment is itself viewed as a form of social exclusion, and prolonged worklessness can contribute to increased social isolation and a reduction in social support.

¹³ Crowther et al. (2000) 'Helping people with severe mental illness to obtain work: systematic review', BMJ <http://www.bmj.com/content/322/7280/204>

¹⁴ Fergusson et al. (2014) 'Unemployment and psychosocial outcomes to age 30: A fixed-effects regression analysis' in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* Vol. 40: 8: pp. 735-742

¹⁵ Pantazis (2006) *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain: The Millennium Survey*

There is a considerable body of research that explores the relationship between parental worklessness and its impact on children's outcomes, including cognitive development, educational attainment, and transitions into adulthood. Research drawing on data from the Millennium Cohort Study, for example, found that parental worklessness was significantly associated with poorer academic attainment. Children growing up in workless households, for example, spend 11 per cent more time out of work than children in employed households from leaving full-time education to the age of 23¹⁶. The intergenerational transfer of disadvantage remains contested, however. A recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation argued that there was no evidence of 'cultures of worklessness', in which values, attitudes and behaviours discouraging employment and encouraging welfare dependency were transmitted within workless households¹⁷.

¹⁶ Schoon et al. (2012) Intergenerational transmission of worklessness: Evidence from the Millennium Cohort and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England

¹⁷ JRF (2012) <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/cultures-of-worklessness>

Risk Factors Associated with Worklessness

Worklessness is underpinned and driven by the complex and dynamic interplay between individual-level factors and wider community and economic variables. At an individual level, the reasons why people are unemployed or economically inactive are many and varied. For example, an individual may lack the skills, qualifications, experience or confidence for the jobs that are available. They may have other pressing commitments, including caring for children or relatives. They may suffer from a limiting long-term illness that restricts the type of job that they are able to do. There are also structural factors that influence worklessness, such as the lack of good-quality, secure employment opportunities within easy reach.

A further source of complexity is that many people face a combination of barriers to work. Recent research from Wales suggests that with each barrier a person faces there is a significant reduction in the probability of employment, independent of the effect of other barriers. For example, only four per cent of individuals facing no barriers were unemployed, compared with 90 per cent of those who faced six barriers (i.e. disability, low qualifications, being over the age of 50, being a member of an ethnic minority group, being without a partner, and living in an area with weak labour demand)¹⁸. Furthermore, barriers can be inter-related in subtle but significant ways that amplify distance from the labour market, such as the lack of transport and mobility-limiting disabilities.

Disabling health conditions are the biggest barrier to employment, greater than the effects of gender, ethnicity or lone parenthood. Data from the Labour Force Survey exploring prevalence and incidence suggests that worklessness is considerably higher amongst people with disabilities than the population as a whole. The data also reveals that a significant proportion of unemployed people with health conditions would like to work, at just over 24 per cent¹⁹. This suggests that disabled people face a greater range of complex barriers, including discrimination, in finding and securing work.

¹⁸ Bertoud (2003) in Blackaby et al. *Identifying Barriers to Economic Activity in Wales*, University of Swansea

¹⁹ Labour Force Survey (2014)

Within Wales, poor health is the single most frequently stated barrier to work for both women and men. Health and disability is the dominant barrier for men, but for women the reasons are much more varied, and include primary care giving²⁰. There is also evidence to suggest that unemployment has a small but pervasive effect on the psychosocial and physical well-being of individuals²¹. Mental health problems are a significant risk factor amongst the workless. The association is bi-directional, as adversity experienced in younger adulthood can increase the likelihood that an individual becomes unemployed in the future²². From a clinical standpoint, employment may lead to improvements in outcomes across a range of well-being measures, including self-esteem, alleviating psychiatric symptoms and reducing dependency. Stable and meaningful employment, for example, is a strong protective factor in helping people to address pre-existing mental health conditions²³.

²⁰ JRF (2014) Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Wales 2014

²¹ Norstrom et al. (2014) 'How does unemployment affect self-assessed health? A systematic review focusing on subgroup effects' in *BMC Public Health*, Vol. 14

²² Power et al. (2015) 'The association between economic inactivity and mental health among young people: a longitudinal study of young adults who are not in employment, education or training' in *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 23:1, pp. 155-160

²³ Crowther et al. (2000) 'Helping people with severe mental illness to obtain work: systematic review', *BMJ* <http://www.bmj.com/content/322/7280/204>

Protective Factors Associated with Worklessness

There are a number of factors and variables that can mediate and moderate outcomes for those in workless households. These may reduce the duration of unemployment and its deleterious effects. They may also cut across and act independently of risk factors faced by individuals. For example, a lone parent in employment may demonstrate a greater range of protective factors than a lone parent who is unemployed²⁴.

Drawing on and adapting an ecological model, these factors are broken down into broadly individual characteristics, those that influence an individual's response to unemployment, and broader community factors that can shape people's overall experiences of finding and securing work²⁵.

Individual-level characteristics

There are a number of individual-level characteristics that may increase the likelihood of a person successfully transitioning into employment. These factors may be responsive to intervention, and could be built up through effective support offered by employment programmes such as Lift.

Self-efficacy: Self-efficacy is a person's belief that they are able to perform a task successfully. A person's sense of their own capability can influence their perception, motivation and performance towards employment-related activity. Self-efficacy influences the goals and career objectives that people set for themselves, the effort they exert in finding work, and their ability to overcome adversity or setbacks. The more confident a person is, the more likely they are to take steps towards finding employment and to be persistent in their actions.

²⁴ Cusworth (2009) The impact of parental employment and unemployment on children and young people

²⁵ Adapted from Bronfenbrenner et al. (1998) The ecology of developmental processes, in *Handbook of Child Psychology: Volume 1: Theoretical Models of Human Development* (5th ed.), pp. 993-1028. Hoboken: Wiley & Sons

Attitudes and Levels of Motivation, including an individual's outlook and approach to learning and work. This includes general feelings about participating in work environments, which can be central to achieving and maintaining successful transitions. Positive attitudes towards employment, for example, are significant predictors of job search activity and intensity. However, attitudinal and motivational factors are the least responsive to intervention and support, as they are built up over time and negative attitudes, once embedded, can be difficult to change or dislodge.

Employability Skills and Behaviours: The attributes and behaviours required to succeed in the workplace, including effective presentation, professionalism, communication, teamwork and leadership skills.

Qualifications, Education and Training: The acquisition of work-related knowledge and skills through school, college or training. This includes qualifications and attainment that help to demonstrate the relevant competencies required of a role.

Experience and Social Networks: Past work experience and social networks that enable people to demonstrate competence, build trust, and open up work opportunities. These include work experience, involvement in the community, and the social networks that are developed as a result.

Career Management Skills: The knowledge and skills required to find and secure work. These include having career direction, understanding how to search and apply for jobs, and the ability to articulate the value of their potential contribution to employers.

Community-level characteristics

There are a range of community-level factors that may also contribute to successful individual transitions into work, including local labour market characteristics and the availability of support services. Community characteristics are more difficult to foster and promote through programmes that work solely with individuals; however, they have a significant bearing on an individual's ability to gain employment. These factors may also be important for area-based initiatives such as Lift, as they may account for regional variations in outcomes. Similarly, their absence may act as a brake on positive outcomes. For example, a programme that effectively supports the development of positive self-efficacy may not be effective if the local labour market is hesitant in its approach to recruiting staff with poor health or work histories.

Social Support: The social networks to which an individual has access. These include family, friends and the wider community that can be called upon to support individuals in overcoming barriers to employment. This level of informal support can be fundamental in helping individuals to overcome adversity, including ill health.

Local Resources: The availability and effectiveness of local services that individuals can access within a particular area. These may include training and services that help people to address certain barriers to employment, such as substance dependency. This is especially important for Lift, for it may refer many participants to these services, deriving much of its effectiveness from them.

Local Labour Market Characteristics: Aggregate local employment opportunities, turnover, and the scope and quality of jobs available have a significant bearing on whether people are able to find work.

Employer Attitudes: The recruitment attitudes and practices of employers. These may be important when considering employing those who may need more support, such as those with limiting conditions or who have been out of work for some time.

An Enabling State: The broader regulatory context, including incentives to work which can shape individual and employer responses to employment.

Addressing Worklessness

Employment programmes seek to mitigate some of the risks that people face during worklessness, whilst developing some of the protective factors that may contribute to successful transitions into employment. Employment programmes themselves represent a purposive action intended to strengthen factors that may help people to overcome barriers to employment. Hopefully, it is a means to achieving positive outcomes for individuals and communities alike. Lift, as with other positive activation employability programmes, seeks to bring about meaningful and lasting change to people's lives.

Whilst employment programmes operate at an individual level and directly impact on the individuals who are the subject of the intervention, they also seek broader community benefits, including:

- Increasing the overall employment rate in the economy without adding to inflation by increasing the effective supply of labour, i.e. the pool of people who are available to fill any particular vacancy.
- Reducing skill mismatches, i.e. the co-existence of unfilled vacancies due to skills shortages and workless people who lack the relevant skills.
- Adding to the productive potential of the economy by reducing the deterioration in skills that tends to occur when people are workless and not using the skills they have.
- Mitigating the adverse social effects of worklessness on the individuals concerned, particularly tackling poverty and social exclusion.

In reaching their objectives, employment programmes are fundamentally change strategies. Programmes are built on assumptions and expectations concerning the pathways between cause and effect; for example, improving a person's self-efficacy may increase job search activity, which may, in turn, result in a positive employment outcome. Programme design encompasses a set of explicit and implicit assumptions concerning the factors that people need to make successful transitions into employment, and that isolate how

they develop through intervention. They map out processes and procedures by which to achieve positive long-term outcomes.

Theories of Change

Underscoring an employment programme's design are theories and assumptions about how a person may develop protective factors or mitigate or address particular risk factors. On an individual level, there are four major theoretical perspectives that are used to guide the design of many employment programmes²⁶. Each sets out a range of assumptions about how people grow and develop and, therefore, how programmes can effectively support people into employment. Each has slightly different sets of assumptions that may not entirely resonate with Lift delivery; however, they are included here for illustrative purposes.

Behavioural learning theory: This theory suggests that developing employability skills, including job search activities, is more effective when the desired behaviours are socially reinforced, performed by support staff or peers. In addition, timely and suitable feedback is critical in facilitating behavioural change and skills acquisition, as it helps individuals to focus on skills gaps and learn from experience. By providing a social environment that is supportive and encouraging, positive change is more likely to be observed. Guided by such principles, employment programmes can target specific job search activities that increase the likelihood of obtaining employment.

Theory of planned behaviour: This theory places attitudes and intention to perform an activity as the most proximal predictor of performance. Attitudes towards employment are reflected in an individual's cognitive or affective evaluation of the value of putting effort into finding work. For example, one individual may think that it is useless to submit a CV online, whereas another might believe that it is quite beneficial and efficient to find a job this way. Focusing on and addressing attitudes and intention when designing

²⁶ Drawn from Liu, S., Wang, M. and Huang, J. (2014) Effectiveness of Job Search Interventions: A Meta-Analytic Review in *Psychological Bulletin* 140: 4, pp. 1009, 1041

employment programmes can help to overcome potential cognitive barriers to finding employment.

Social cognitive theory: The theory explains human functioning in terms of the interaction between thought, behaviour and the environment. It places emphasis on goal setting, outcome expectancy, and self-efficacy as key mechanisms of human agency. Self-efficacy refers to people's confidence in their ability to perform specific activities, influencing how people think, feel and act. Higher self-efficacy can lead individuals to set higher goals and become more committed, subsequently motivating them and helping them to overcome setbacks. Thus, boosting self-efficacy should be an important element in employment programmes. There are four sources of a person's beliefs about whether they can perform a given action or task:

- Successfully performing the task in the past;
- Vicariously learning from observing others successfully performing it;
- Being persuaded or convinced that they can do it; and
- Reducing the negative physiological state associated with fear of negative outcomes.

Accordingly, exploring employability through observing, modelling and practising effective behaviours and approaches might lead to increased self-efficacy. Boosting self-efficacy through verbal persuasion techniques should improve motivation and an active job search.

Coping theory: This theory suggests that individuals facing demands that exceed their resources will appraise the situation as potentially harmful or challenging and choose different coping strategies aimed at resolving the stressful situation. This process has significant implications for an individual's overall well-being and employment. When redundancy or unemployment is perceived as a loss or threat, individuals' psychological well-being is likely to suffer, causing anxiety, depression, or physical symptoms. Individuals who experience lowered psychological well-being are more likely to focus on coping with the negative consequences, which can reduce motivation and persistence at tasks that can potentially resolve the problem. In addition, this

might lead individuals to choose an escape-oriented coping strategy, including avoidance strategies focused on escaping or denying the situation, e.g. alcohol dependency, contributing to factors or thoughts that may prolong unemployment.

Programmes utilising coping theory focus on developing control-oriented coping strategies that are proactive and aimed at resolving the situation. They aim to reduce maladaptive coping and manage stress, which can reduce the resources, both emotionally and in time, away from the task of finding and securing employment. Addressing sources of anxiety, whilst developing coping skills to reduce anxiety and enlisting social support, may provide critical coping resources to assist in the often devastating experience of unemployment.

The Lift Model

Lift does not draw explicitly from a particular theoretical perspective; however, it may draw implicitly from a range of theories at different points. The Lift model represents a complex psychosocial intervention which seeks to develop protective factors and remove barriers to employment amongst members of workless households. It seeks to engage participants and encourage them to access support and opportunities that build confidence and move participants closer to employment. Therefore, Lift draws much of its effectiveness from its ability to engage and sustain relationships with participants, and the quality of the support and opportunities that are on offer within a particular Cluster.

As a model, Lift is essentially a mentoring and referral service. The model is nebulous, centring on brokers engaging participants, and drawing on other services and opportunities. Lift is therefore not a single intervention, but rather a coalition of approaches that may be qualitatively and quantitatively different from opportunity to opportunity and from one delivery area to the next.

The complexity contained within the Lift model presents a number of empirical challenges. It makes it difficult to measure and attribute the impact of particular aspects of the programme at an individual level. For example, in cases where participants were able to make successful transitions into employment, the extent to which brokers or local service providers contributed to that success may be difficult to isolate. Similarly, there are challenges in understanding the research base as the Programme incorporates, both directly and indirectly, a diverse range of activities in working with individuals.

The Efficacy and Effectiveness of Employment Programmes

There is a significant body of published and unpublished research that explores the efficacy and effectiveness of positive activation employment programmes. In summarising the evidence base that may inform the development of the Lift Programme, this analysis draws heavily from two recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

The studies included in both reviews embrace a range of evaluative techniques, including randomised control trials and quasi-experimental studies. There is considerable heterogeneity in study design, especially in the construction of statistical control groups. The studies themselves explore the impact of a diverse range of employment programmes, both in their design and focus, and the context in which they operate. Such heterogeneity can limit the generalisability of the research, especially in considering the implications of the findings for the Lift Programme.

The majority of the research included focuses on the impact of a programme on an individual. Overall, studies analyse the extent to which participants entered employment. Whilst this is an important outcome, it is not necessarily the only outcome of interest. Transitions from economic inactivity into unemployment may also be relevant, as well as job retention, advancement, and in-work poverty. Individually, wider health outcomes may also be relevant, especially for those who experience health problems such as mental health and substance dependency. There may also be broader outcomes of interest, such as the impact of transitions into employment on children within a household.

The reviews do, however, represent the most rigorous and objective appraisal of the research base to date. They only include research studies that hold a high level of internal validity. This enables us to isolate the factors and approaches that are the most effective in supporting people in employment.

The Evidence Base

Liu et al. (2014) rigorously examined 47 experimental and quasi-experimental research studies exploring employment programmes²⁷. The meta-analysis found that the odds of obtaining employment were 2.67 times higher for individuals participating in employment programmes than for individuals that do not have access to such provision. The analysis also suggested that employment programmes which contained certain components, including teaching job search skills, improving self-presentation, boosting self-efficacy, encouraging proactivity, promoting goal setting and enlisting social support, were more effective than interventions that did not include such components. The analysis also found that programmes effectively promoted employment only when both skill development and motivation enhancement were included. It was also found that programmes were more effective in helping younger and older people and short-term unemployed than they were in helping middle-aged and long-term unemployed.

Meta-analysis also revealed that improvements in job search skills, self-efficacy, and increased job searches might in themselves explain some of the perceived positive effects of obtaining employment. These positive effects point to the possibility that job search skills, job search self-efficacy, and job search intensity can mediate the effect of job search intervention on participants' subsequent employment status. This highlights the importance of improved self-efficacy in finding employment.

²⁷ Liu, S., Wang, M. and Huang, J. (2014) Effectiveness of Job Search Interventions: A Meta-Analytic Review in *Psychological Bulletin* 140: 4, pp. 1009, 1041

The review also highlighted some implications for practice. The effectiveness of a programme was significantly mediated by the individual characteristics of participants entering the programme. Long-term unemployed people, for example, had significantly poorer outcomes across programmes, which suggests that general provision provided to all may not be suitable to that particular client group. This supports the need for programmes such as Lift that seek to tailor support. Identifying such groups early and providing modified or tailored support may be required to make programmes more effective in the longer term.

A second systematic review and meta-analysis completed by Filges et al. (2015) included a total of 73 studies²⁸. Within their analysis, a total of 39 studies were included in data synthesis. Conclusions from meta-regression (which differs from regression by reviewing multiple studies collectively) suggest that there is an effect of participating in an employment programme, although the impact is small. The pooled effect estimate measured as a hazard ratio was 1.09, which translates into an increase of approximately 9 per cent in the exit rate from unemployment and into employment. The pooled effect estimate measured as risk difference is an increase of 7 percentage points in the probability of being employed approximately one year post-participation. Overall, the findings suggest that participation in an employment programme will have a small but positive impact on a person's chances of gaining employment.

There are various limitations with the reviews that are important to note. Although published in 2015, Filges et al. conducted their search in 2012, potentially overlooking recent relevant research. Despite looking at similar employment programmes, there is considerable diversity in the studies included by both reviews, suggesting that neither offers a comprehensive review. Moreover, although both meta-analyses reported positive and significant effects, they differed in the extent of the overall impact, suggesting that meta-analyses are open to interpretation.

²⁸ Filges et al. (2015) Active Labour Market Programme Participation for Unemployment Insurance Recipients: A Systematic Review, Cambell Collaboration

Implications for the Lift Programme

In disaggregating the findings of the two systematic reviews and drawing on broader research, the analysis now turns to consider findings against the apparent composite elements contained within the Lift Programme.

One-to-One Support

A defining feature of the Lift Programme is the support that it offers on a one-to-one basis between brokers and participants. There is promising evidence to suggest that effectively combining job search and programme participation, either in training or other support, is effective, especially for those furthest from the labour market. A number of experimental studies have found that for participants who are not long-term unemployed, intensive one-to-one support has no discernible effect compared to less intensive approaches. These findings support the Lift approach, and its focus on particular populations.

Individual Action Planning

One aspect of the relationship between brokers and participants is action planning, identifying what barriers individuals face, and matching them with relevant support and opportunities. There is limited evidence, at least with hard-to-reach groups, of the efficacy of individual action planning and employment outcomes. A study in the US found that action planning reduced the duration of unemployment by 5 per cent. Other studies have found no effect compared to treatment-as-usual (i.e. standard provision), despite improvements in job search activity and job-seeker satisfaction.

Mixed Packages of Support

The Lift Programme seeks to leverage and coordinate a broad range of support services to address individual barriers to employment. The evidence suggests that those programmes that are able to coherently configure mixed packages of support tend to be more effective, especially for those with multiple barriers to employment. Most programmes, however, tend to focus on one type of support, such as training or job search skills, because they are straightforward to implement.

Job Search and Presentation Support

There is strong evidence to suggest that for those recently unemployed, job search and presentation training is very effective in supporting people in employment, often having an immediate short-term impact. This seems to be because some participants are already highly employable and need only a small amount of help. For those who are long-term unemployed, job search training is only effective when combined with other support that helps to address barriers to employment. There is a small body of research which suggests that working on social skills and presentation is effective, especially for young people and long-term unemployed.

Training

Lift also sets out to refer participants to classroom training opportunities. Evaluations of training programmes strongly suggest that they are more likely to have positive effects for specific target groups. In particular, training programmes appear to raise the employment rates of beneficiaries with better labour market prospects to begin with, women re-entering the labour market, and educated migrants. Training seems effective as long as it provides vocational skills that employers demand, and as long as the duration of the training is not too short.

In-work Training

In-work training is generally more effective than classroom-based training, but all provision including classroom-based training needs to be directly relevant to the needs of local employers or it will not lead to work. Involving employers directly in a programme appears to improve the probability of successful and sustainable transitions.

Work Opportunities

Lift seeks to provide short-term work opportunities with a range of public and private organisations. There is some evidence to suggest that work experience does have short-term positive outcomes for participants, including increased self-efficacy and a higher likelihood of entering employment beyond programme participation. If opportunities resemble supported employment with vulnerable groups, there is broader experimental evidence to suggest that supported employment is ineffective in sustaining employment beyond engagement. They are less likely than training programmes to show a positive impact on post-programme outcomes. There is fairly weak evidence supporting volunteering as a mechanism for encouraging transitions into work. Broader research has found that volunteering increases odds of finding employment by 27 per cent, although methodological weaknesses undermine this finding.

Drawing on broader theoretical and empirical perspectives, the efficacy of leveraging public and private sector employment opportunities is unclear. This principally revolves around the question of displacement – the extent to which providing an opportunity to a participant means that the opportunity is denied to someone else.

The Importance of Social Support

There is a significant body of research that suggests the importance of family and informal support networks in mediating successful outcomes.

Interventions that have engaged broader networks have been proven to increase the effectiveness of programmes compared to those that do not. Supporting families or significant people in a person's life, either directly or by referring them to relevant services, could strengthen the support networks around an individual. Provision that takes a holistic approach and works to strengthen support networks alongside skills development could also help to ensure that the essential components are delivered to all.

Efficacy and Effectiveness Studies

There is an apparent trend with evaluative research in which efficacy studies of small-scale pilots tend to report larger effects than those which explore programmes at scale. This may be due to a range of factors, including programmatic variables such as the time, commitment and resources invested in developing a pilot. This resourcing is often unsustainable when scaling interventions as the focus shifts towards the institutional constraints of programme diffusion. This is illustrated by the New Deal for Young People, where the pilot phase reported 42 per cent of participants gaining employment, compared to 25 per cent when the intervention was rolled out across the country.

Limitations with Evidence-Based Policy and Practice

Research that is focused on policy effectiveness is limited in the conclusions that can be drawn and the overall implications for policy and practice. It can only ever give an indication of what might work in a particular situation. Local context matters and interventions that were successful in one geographical area may not be successful in another with different labour market conditions. Similarly, implementation matters – a well-implemented non-evidence-based programme may be more effective than a poorly executed evidence-based programme. This suggests that there are broader factors at play that contribute to the success of a programme that may not be adequately reported within effectiveness research.

Another important caveat relates to the issue of the relationship between impact and costs. Very few evaluations report information that compares the costs of an intervention with the subsequent cost savings down the line. This may be an important consideration, especially in that Lift works with groups that are likely to draw heavily on other forms of support.