

NIHR

Health Determinants
Research Collaboration
Cumberland

Improving the Determinants of Health: Cumberland Council's Research Plan

Phase 1 Scoping Review:

Pathways to Employment

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Context

- The Health Determinant Research Collaboration is a five-year research project, funded by the National Institute for Health Research from January 2024 to December 2028. The project aims to increase the research capacity of staff within Cumberland Council and voluntary sector and to improve their use of evidence to improve health inequalities.
- In 2024 the HDRC team consulted with 107 people including Council staff, elected members, community-based organisations and academic partners in order to establish seven priority areas in need of firmer evidence.
- The seven areas are: poverty, pathways to employment, access to housing, mental health and neurodiversity, substance use, obesity and children cared for.
- In each of the seven themes the HDRC aims to uncover how serious the issues are and who experiences them, how they vary across our rural, coastal and urban areas, what barriers there are to improvements, and what might work to improve them.
- Each of the seven themes will have a scoping review to understand interventions that work, secondary data analysis to understand what is already known, new data collection across the health and social care system, and deep dives into particular issues by community co-researchers.
- This scoping review is one of seven, in the first phase of research set out above.

Data Context – The Picture In Cumberland

Key: **Cumberland** - **England**

Qualifications: Proportion %

GCSEs Qualifications in English and Maths by age 19 – **78.1%** (78.7%)

People aged 19yrs qualified to Level 2 – **84.4%** (84.3%)

People aged 19yrs qualified to Level 3 – **50.5%** (58.8%)

People aged 19yrs qualified to Level 4 – **59.4%** (65.4%)

People aged 16-64 with no qualifications – **7.1%** (6.6%)

Source: Department for Education, 2022-2024

Apprenticeships: Proportion %

Apprenticeships started by adults 16+yrs, per 100,000 – **1,358** (952)

Apprenticeships achieved by adults 16+yrs, per 100,000 – **798** (492)

People aged 16+ with an apprenticeship qualification – **7.5%** (5.3%)

Source: Department for Education - 2024, ONS - 2021

N.E.E.T: Proportion %

People aged 16-17yrs not in education, employment or training (NEET) or whose activity is not known – **3.3%** (5.2%)

People aged 19+ yrs in further education and skills participation rate per 100,000 – **5,619** (5,006)

Source: Department for Education, 2023-2024

Employment Rate: Proportion %

Employment Rate (16+yrs) - **79.6%** (74.9%)

Unemployment Rate (16+yrs) - **2.6%** (3.7%)

Not Employed & Never Worked – **22.4%** (25.6%)

Not Employed & Not Worked In Last 12 Months – **67.1%** (61.1%)

Not Employed & Worked In Last 12 Months – **10.5%** (13.2%)

Source: Office for National Statistics – 2021-2024

Economic Activity Status: Proportion %

Economically Active and In Employment – **56.1%** (57.4%)

Economically Active and Unemployed – **2.4%** (3.5%)

Economically Inactive – **41.5%** (39.1%)

Source: Office for National Statistics - 2021

What Does The Data Tell Us?

Cumberland experiences a lower standard of qualifications and a higher percentage of people who are economically inactive, compared to national figures. However, Cumberland demonstrates a higher success rate for both apprenticeships started and achieved as well as lower levels of young adult populations who are not in education, employment or training. Cumberland also has a higher proportion of the population employed, when compared to national figures.

Statutory Duties

a. Economic Development Duty – Local Government Act 2000

Local authorities have a legal duty to promote the economic, social, and environmental well-being of their area. This includes:

- Supporting local job creation.
- Promoting access to employment.
- Running or commissioning services that improve employability, especially for disadvantaged groups.

b. Tracking and Supporting Young People (16–18) – Education and Skills Act 2008

- Councils must track young people aged 16–18 to ensure they are in education, employment, or training (EET).
- They have a statutory duty to support those who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) through targeted information, advice, and guidance (IAG).

c. Equalities Duties – Equality Act 2010

All employability schemes must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty, including:

- Eliminating discrimination.
- Advancing equality of opportunity.
- Fostering good relations between different groups.

This means councils must ensure services are accessible and responsive to diverse needs.

Strategic Responsibilities

a. Local Labour Market Planning

Councils have a leadership role in understanding and responding to the needs of the local economy and labour market. This includes:

- Conducting needs assessments.
- Shaping local skills strategies in collaboration with employers, providers, and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

b. Supporting Public Health Outcomes – Health and Social Care Act 2012

Employment is a key social determinant of health. Under their public health remit, councils can:

- Commission employment support as part of mental health, substance misuse, or wellbeing programmes.
- Integrate employability support into health and social care services.

c. Safeguarding Duties

When delivering schemes to vulnerable adults or young people, councils must ensure:

- Staff are properly trained and vetted.
- Safeguarding policies are in place and followed (under the Children Act 1989 and Care Act 2014).

Method

- Core search terms agreed by reviewer team; topic search terms decided by reviewer
- Searches completed
- Titles screened for obvious exclusions (eg not completed in UK), included items moved to folder
- Folder results exported to RefWorks and MS Excel spreadsheet
- Titles and abstracts reviewed for relevance (categories: 'high', 'medium', 'not')
- Articles in 'high' & 'medium' categories - full text screened against inclusion criteria, allocated category reviewed
- All articles in 'high' category included in analysis – read in detail and common themes identified.

Limitations of this review

- Due to the wide range of literature available on pathways to employment, this review is limited to gaining employment or return to work interventions, not supporting people to stay in employment.
- The first example is a review considering links between unemployment and poor health
- Each subsequent example is of an employment programme designed to meet a particular group of people's needs – those in chronic pain, people with mental health issues, disadvantaged young people, young people with language delays, care leavers, people with autism and people from underrepresented communities.

Search Terms

Search completed March 2025

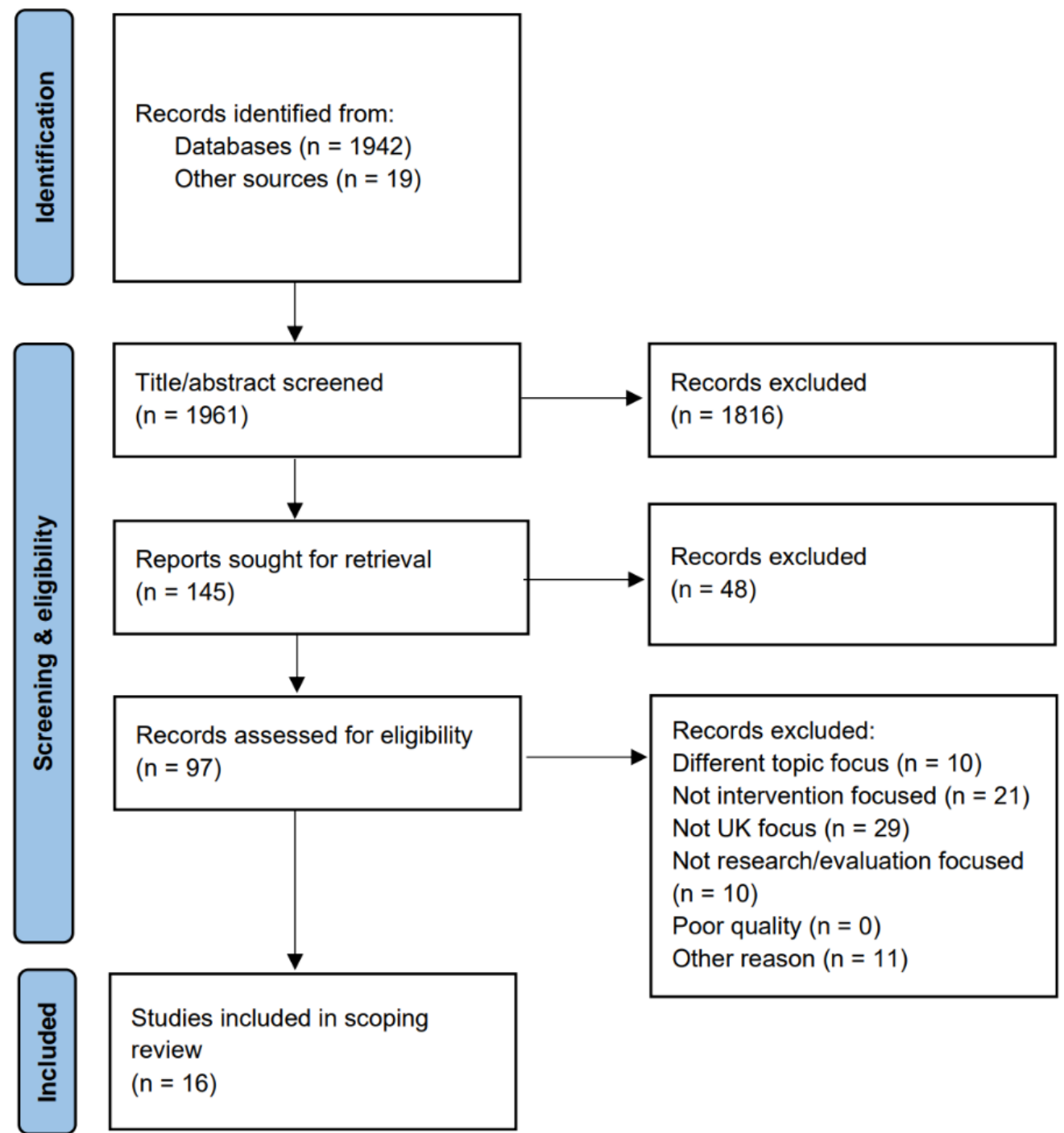
Databases (APA PsycArticles; CINAHL Ultimate; MEDLINE with Full Text):

- Advanced search (all sources)
- Limiters: Published 2014-2025; English language; Abstract available; UK location; Human; Evidence based practice; Proximity/apply related words; Search within full text; Linked full text; All ages.
- All fields included
- Core search terms (same for all scoping reviews):
 - intervent* or treat* or therap* or program*; UK or Britain or "Great Britain" or "United Kingdom"
 - Additional search – as above with 'rural', search term
- Subject specific terms (different for each review):
 - "employ*" or "unemploy*" or "return to work" or "work engagement" or "work"; community
 - Additional searches included "care leaver" or "cared for" or "NEET" as particularly vulnerable groups
- Government guidelines & reports (e.g. NICE, Public Health England, DWP, key charities) also screened.

Search Results– PRISMA

(Adapted from: Page MJ, et al. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71.

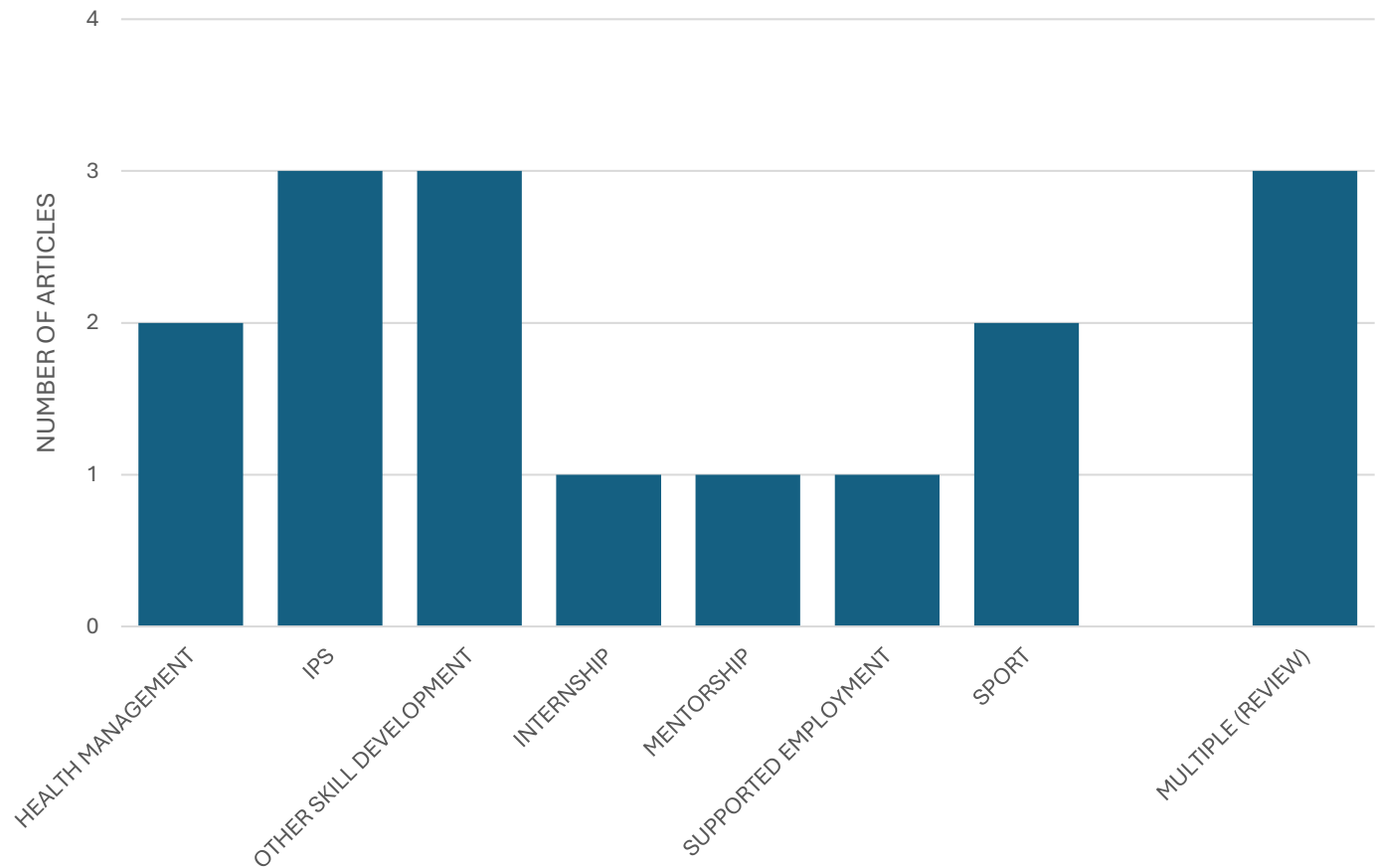
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Findings

- Most of the research in this area has been completed outside the UK
- No research found specifically targeting coastal or rural communities
- Individual placement support (IPS) is the approach used most
- Joined up working and cross agency/stakeholder collaboration needed
- Sustained employment can increase wellbeing and reduce inequality
- Lack of research considering quality of employment, majority achieve work placement or low paid work.

Types of intervention in the papers reviewed



Examples

- The following slides include examples of practices, projects and interventions that have some evidence of being effective.

Example: Health-improving interventions for obtaining employment in unemployed job seekers (Hult et al., 2021)

- Unemployment is associated with decreased health which may be a reason or a consequence of becoming unemployed. Decreased health can inhibit re-employment.
- This literature review called a 'Cochrane Review' which found very limited evidence of health improving interventions supporting employment outcomes
- The paper reviewed 15 randomised controlled trials (16 interventions) with a total of 6397 unemployed participants
- Eight of the studies evaluated therapeutic interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy, physical exercise, and health-related advice and counselling
- Seven of the studies combined interventions using therapeutic methods and job-search training
- Interventions combining therapeutic methods and job-search training were found to have a small beneficial effect in increasing employment
- Therapeutic interventions may have an effect on re-employment, but the evidence is very uncertain and were found unlikely to improve health in unemployed job seekers.

Example: Individualised Placement and Support (IPS) for Chronic Pain (Holmes et al., 2022)

- Evidence shows 20-27% of working age people in UK are unable to participate in usual activities due to chronic pain
- The IPS is a UK Government 'place and train' scheme for unemployed people with chronic pain to be supported by an Employment Support Worker (ESW) over a two year period
- The researchers found that it is easier for pressurised services to 'sign off sick' than to support people into continued employment
- Data was collected from 14 clients and ESW and three focus groups with health care professionals
- Support was found to be needed by both the individual suffering chronic pain and the employers
- The study concluded that GP practices could be a good location for IPS in addition to job centres.

Example: Enhanced IPS for Mental Health (Braverman et al 2005)

- People with severe mental illness (SMI) are often excluded from employment. Standard Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is effective in supporting around 55% of people with SMI into employment or education.
- This study was for 202 over 18 year olds with SMI with prolonged absence from work.
- The new enhanced IPS intervention was underpinned by Model of Human Occupation (Kielhofner, 2017).
- The study found 63% of participants successfully attained employment or education. Significant relationships were identified between outcomes (employment or education) and seven psychosocial variables; adapting routines to minimise difficulties, work related goals, and living in an area of lesser deprivation were found to be significant in predicting employment or education outcomes.
- The research concludes that motivational and habitual psychosocial variables are helpful in predicting who may benefit from an enhanced IPS intervention supporting people after prolonged absence from employment.

Example: Supporting young people (Newton et al., 2020)

- The Youth Futures Foundation commissioned a rapid evidence assessment to identify how to support disadvantaged young people to achieve employment outcomes.
- Effective interventions had 'hooks' or 'magnets' to attract engagement e.g. sport, arts, vouchers and worked best in settings that were significantly different to educational settings.
- Personalised assessment and support, consistent advisors, in work support and support for employers were also important factors.
- The review was limited in that most evidence was from the USA, all evidence had limited consideration of the quality of the employment outcome, and impact measurement was weak and did not consider cost benefits.

Example: Language support (Ebbels et al., 2022)

- This research project focussed on a bespoke 'work language' related Speech and Language (SLT) intervention for young people with developmental language disorder (DLD).
- 28 students attended both a specialist language school and a local college for vocational education for 9 weeks.
- The intervention targeted individualized course-specific vocabulary and language use and was supported by an online learning tool.
- Significant progress was achieved and maintained at 14 weeks post intervention.
- The paper concludes the individual intervention delivered by SLT benefitted students with DLD to maximize their ability to access the academic curriculum and their future careers.

Example: Supporting care leavers (Furey & Harris-Evans, 2021)

- This study was on a Yorkshire Local Authority initiative to support care leavers into work by developing a wide range of internships within their departments. Internships were seen as a stepping stone to apprenticeships and other employment.
- The review sought the perspectives of seven interns, 7 work-based supervisors and senior managers.
- Creating an emotionally supportive working environment where care leavers can develop resilience was a key ingredient for successful transition to independent young adulthood.
- The review also cited the importance of functioning external support networks such as housing.
- The care leavers in this study were all successful, remained in the programme and expressed a desire to continue in education or training once the programme had completed.

Example: Project ABLE (Autism: Building Links to Employment) (Lynas, 2014)

- Project ABLE used the principles of the Supported Employment Model of intervention to support people with autism into employment.
- A core principle is finding the correct level of support for all parties involved including; the individual, co-workers, management and families.
- During the engagement phase of the Supported Employment Model individuals completed: an individual induction, an assessment to establish skills, aptitudes and cognitive abilities, and a vocational profile highlighting areas of particular interest.
- An action plan was developed with achievable goals in the areas of vocational training, work experience and job searching within a timeframe that was judged realistic for the individual. This was reviewed at six month intervals.
- Over 4 years; 95% participants had gained a work experience opportunity, 72 participants were offered employment service (target 50) and 80 employers requested training prior to agreeing to taking someone with autism on placement.

Example: Supporting underrepresented communities

(Woodall et al., 2023)

- Leeds Health and Care Academy ran a programme to enhance employment within the health and care sector with 65 participants from underrepresented communities
- The academy were able to 'mobilise' and train community members to work in health & social care settings with a good degree of choice and tailored opportunities.
- Data was collected from 48 participants and showed the importance of strategic buy in to the project; getting the process and mechanisms of the programme right; and removing barriers to employment to maximise opportunities.
- The paper highlighted that meaningful employment is an important health determinant, but some communities face barriers to employment and consequently find the labour market difficult to access.

Implications

- There is a clear link between health, wellbeing and employment and overlap with many other areas covered by the scoping review project e.g. housing and poverty
- Many of the barriers to achieving sustained employment overlap creating multiple issues
- Designing a universal employment programme is challenging as the research highlights the need to be issue / person specific
- Programmes can use a non-employment specific 'hook' or 'magnet' to support engagement and retention (e.g. sport, arts, vouchers)
- There is a lack of evidence for how to achieve effective employment support a) generally, b) UK specific, c) for rural and coastal communities, d) about the quality of employment achieved.

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