



Active Lancashire | Trailblazer

With help from UK Research and Innovation's Healthy Ageing Challenge this project is training up a whole new workforce, to head-off age-related health problems in workplaces of all sizes.

Age-related health problems are best caught early – ideally, years before you'd present with symptoms in a doctor's surgery. Many larger employees have dedicated HR teams that can offer their employees health and wellbeing services, but employees of smaller organisations often can't access these kinds of early, preventative resources.

Charity [Active Lancashire](#) saw an acute need in its local area, but also an opportunity to upskill a new workforce, giving more employees the chance to have quality workplace health screening. Chief Executive, Adrian Leather, explained: "Lancashire has significant issues around ageing and health, with health conditions often making themselves apparent significantly earlier than in more affluent parts of the country. These health problems are estimated to cost Lancashire businesses £650 million a year in lost productivity. But we saw a way to tackle them."

The idea behind the [Healthy Ageing in the Workplace](#) initiative, supported as part of UK Research and Innovation's Healthy Ageing Challenge, is to train up a new workforce of gym and leisure centre staff, to go into workplaces and carry out health screenings. The project, entitled Business Health Matters, helps to identify early the kind of workplace strain that can ultimately lead to chronic back pain, or pick up the earliest signals of mental health challenges or diabetes before they become far harder to address. Increasing people's ability to work, or to live healthy lives as they age.

In the project, Active Lancashire has joined the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), to test and develop a workplace health screening tool that UCLAN has created. Physical and mental health assessments will be aimed especially at SMEs, low-wage areas, employees from ethnic minority groups, and sectors with transient staff, reducing the inequalities that some employees face in having access to vital workplace health screening.

Consulting with over 400 businesses, the project also involves developing health interventions that employers and employees can then make. After their assessments, employees can be provided with wellbeing plans and supported to make positive lifestyle choices.

Acting on their duty of care, by focusing on their employees' health and wellbeing, helps employers too: helping to retain and increase the productivity of their workforce, while cementing their reputations as great

employers to work for. Making this kind of business case to employers, supported by solid evidence, is another aspect of the project.

Tackling age-related problems early means reducing demand on GP services. And by upskilling the new workforce of gym and leisure centre employees, to deliver health-related services, the project helps to make up for shortages in trained health staff.

The work of testing and refining the initiative is now under way: the aim is to help many more employees stay productive while they are at work, and healthy as they get older. "The Healthy Ageing Challenge fund has been a game-changer," said Adrian Leather. "Without its support, the costs and risks of entering the market would have been too great for Healthy Ageing in the Workplace to be viable." Beginning in Lancashire, the aim ultimately is to apply the initiative nationally, through a collaboration with UK Active.

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Adrian Leather, Chief Executive of Active Lancashire