

IEP JOURNAL JANUARY 2025



ISSUE 13

SEE YOU AT THE SUMMIT

EMPLOYABILITY IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Headline Sponsor:

City &  Guilds

IEP
SUMMIT
2025

12 June
116 Pall Mall
London

WELCOME TO ISSUE 13

CONTENTS

PAGE

INTRODUCTION

FROM OUR GUEST EDITOR:
LYNSEY SWEENEY FIEP, MANAGING DIRECTOR
OF COMMUNITIES THAT WORK

01



Welcome to the 13th edition of the IEP Journal. It's a privilege to guest-edit this edition as we enter a new year in which the policy landscape in social housing and employment support services has changed almost entirely from a year ago.

DWP published the 'Get Britain Working' white paper in late November. We welcome much of what we see in it, and the 'devolution by default' mantra from England's Devolution white paper (announced in December) perhaps jointly set the tone for the future of this parliament concerning housing, employment and government.

Get Britain Working builds in part upon the findings of the Commission on the future of employment support, whose 'Working for the Future' paper was launched by the IES soon after the general election. *Some IEP colleagues will know Tony Wilson, the lead author of that report and a Fellow of the IEP himself, no less!*

The Social Housing sector - led by Communities that Work - was well represented at the Commission's evidence stages and supported a range of interventions to bring housing, health and employment services together better and more locally. We also ensured that local people's and tenants' employment support experiences were fed into this work.

Get Britain Working focuses on refreshed job and career support for all, job and training guarantees for young people and localised 'Get Britain Working' plans at the trailblazer stage.

There is a lot to celebrate in the foundations of the policy, and the housing and employment sectors can work together to build from these.

Local delivery of services works for social housing. Though not without challenges of scale and commissioning, local neighbourhoods make sense to the social housing sector, and we are experienced in supporting working-age adults through a lifetime of engagement with people, families, and whole communities.

The challenge and the opportunity are for social housing and the employment-related services sectors to work together more collaboratively and for the long term; supporting neighbourhoods experiencing multiple deprivation, poverty, and high economic inactivity rates. Commissioning can drive behaviour, and I see a changing, devolving commissioning landscape that adds local nuance, demands close attention to local communities, and operates best through strong, established local connections.

Social housing is at the heart of many local communities, and our new JobsPlus pilots are a chance to test and learn from a new type of neighbourhood support. The sites are summarised in this edition, and we hear from the leads in two JobsPlus sites in the Journal too.

LYNSEY SWEENEY FIEP
Managing Director of Communities
that Work (CtW)

 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lynsey-sweeney-a1672ab/>

 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/communitiesthatwork/>

→ Lynsey is the Managing Director of Communities that Work (CtW), the national body in England that links housing, employment and government.

Communities that Work advocated for the establishment of JobsPlus pilots in England for many years and realised this ambition with the Learning and Work Institute and the DWP in summer 2024.

Before CtW, Lynsey was an adviser on employment, skills and apprenticeships at the National Housing Federation, drawing on her experience in the London FE sector and via KPMG's World Class Skills programme. Before housing, employment and skills in the UK, Lynsey worked on health, education and skills programmes for VSO in China, Ethiopia and London.

Social housing can flex its premises and resources muscle to best fit local needs, and I'm proud to highlight a new report from Unity Housing and CaCHE in this edition that profiles a range of employment support and business start-up advice that has helped support over 150 new business and 700 new jobs in the local neighbourhood.

Communities that Work hopes to bring social housing's community investment and employment services to the fore with the support of the IEP. We look forward to the IEP Summit this year, where we hope to see housing more deeply represented and build upon great work already done here through IEP links with Clarion Futures.

The new year is a chance for reflection, resolution, and renewed action in terms of how we work, who we work with, and what we aim to achieve together. I hope this edition #13 of the IEP Journal is a lucky one, which brings opportunities to connect our sectors and sets a positive direction of travel to link housing, employment and government together.



FROM ACROSS THE POND: CAPITALIZING ON “PLACE” IN THE JOBSPLUS INITIATIVE FOR SOCIAL HOUSING COMMUNITIES

02



JAMES (JIM) RICCIO PHD
Principal Research Fellow
MDRC, New York

 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/mdrc/>

 https://x.com/MDRC_News

SUMMARY

This paper summarizes the origins and evolution of JobsPlus in the US and highlights the special opportunities it has as a place-based intervention to engage social housing residents in efforts to improve their employment outcomes. It also points to some of the challenges that operating this ambitious model entails. The paper suggests the potential value of a Transatlantic learning exchange to continue to strengthen the model and its implementation in Britain and in the US.

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-1990s through early 2000s, six US public housing developments (publicly owned housing estates for families with low incomes) located in communities of concentrated poverty, set out to help their residents achieve better employment outcomes through an innovative and distinctively place-based initiative called JobsPlus. In those estates, many residents did not work or worked inconsistently, typically at low-wage jobs, and many relied heavily on various social welfare benefits.

JobsPlus was designed and tested as part of a research demonstration project funded by the US Department and Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Rockefeller Foundation, and other private philanthropies.

MDRC (a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization) provided technical assistance to help guide local implementation of the model and evaluated the model's operation and impacts. At the local level, the model called for leadership not just by the local housing agencies, which had little expertise in delivering employment services, but also by local government workforce and welfare agencies and various nonprofit organizations that, through their own programmes, served many of the same residents living those housing developments. Resident leaders, whose voices and support for the new intervention were deemed essential to it become embraced by their community, were critical leadership partners.

As described in a separate article in this volume by Stephen Evans (page 26), JobsPlus takes a comprehensive approach: it combines on-site employment-related assistance within the housing estate with financial rewards tied to employment outcomes, along with neighbor-to-neighbor and other social network support. As a “saturation” intervention, it offers assistance to all residents in the designated community.

MDRC's initial evaluation of JobsPlus in six sites showed that, where fully implemented, the programme increased the earnings of residents living in the targeted housing estates relative to the earnings of families living in similar estates that served as a comparison group.

→ Over his long career at MDRC, a not-for-profit, nonpartisan social policy research organization based in New York City, James Riccio has led a wide range of studies, including the evaluation of the original JobsPlus Community Revitalization Initiative in Public Housing in the US. He is an advisor to the Learning and Work Institute team leading the UK JobsPlus pilot.

From 2003-2011, he directed a transatlantic MDRC-UK research consortium to design and test a large-scale randomized trial focused on employment progression called the UK Employment Retention and Advancement Demonstration (UK ERA), funded by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

He is a member of DWP's Methods Advisory Group; a research advisory group for the UK's Independent Commission on Neighborhoods recently formed by Local Trust; and several advisory groups for other housing and social policy organizations in the US.

Those results persisted over many years and led to efforts to replicate JobsPlus in other communities. HUD now selects a small group of housing agencies across the US each year to receive time-limited federal grants to implement the programme, and New York City uses local funds to support ongoing JobPlus programmes in various parts of the city.

A rich body of research has accompanied and inspired these replication efforts. The findings provide evidence that this model can be adapted to many different local settings. They also show the challenges of operating model well and boosting employment outcomes, underscoring the importance of continuous improvement efforts and further evaluation. The decision to pilot JobPlus in the UK can further these aims and is a welcome step.



TAKING FULL ADVANTAGE OF “PLACE”

Any effort to replicate JobsPlus should fully capitalize on the distinctive place-based nature of the model. The fact that JobsPlus offers services to all adults who live in (and, in the UK version, live adjacent to) designated social housing estates gives the programme certain advantages not available to more typical employment models. These include:

- **More accessible job counseling and service receipt**

Because the programme office is located within or very near to the housing estate, JobsPlus makes it easy for residents to access its employment services. For most, assistance is an easy walk away. It is also easy for job coaches to find their way to residents—to meet them in their homes, or elsewhere on the estate. Staff may even use informal encounters walking through the estate or at community social events to engage in meaningful discussions about residents’ employment and related needs and progress. Delivering job coaching in the office, by appointment, is not the only or even the most important option. Indeed, not finding ways to engage with residents in more informal settings, out of the office (and also outside normal business hours) would miss one of the special opportunities for making JobsPlus a truly place-based intervention.

- **Transcending service silos**

Locating JobsPlus within a housing estate—such as in a community centre or special office space—offers an opportunity to build a “service hub” where representatives from at least some other agencies (such as schools, vocational training providers, childcare agencies, mental health providers, Jobcentre Plus) can conveniently meet with residents. This approach of “bringing services to the residents” can greatly facilitate residents’ use of those services.

But if staff from those agencies merely co-locate while continuing to operate within their own narrow agency silos, and if they do not confer with each other on individual cases, they may miss important opportunities for synergy in the support and guidance they offer to residents.

- **More informed job guidance**

Beyond more convenient access for staff and residents, locating JobsPlus staff onsite can help them develop a fuller, more nuanced understanding of residents’ circumstances than might otherwise be possible. For example, it can help coaches better appreciate residents’ family dynamics, how they spend their time, interpersonal relationships and networks within the community, and the advantages or obstacles that living in their particular neighbourhoods may present, all of which may affect residents’ employment entry, retention, and progression.

- **Tapping and expanding social networks**

The JobsPlus “community support for work” component means that support is not intended to come solely from the programme’s professional staff. Residents have an important role to play among themselves—for example, as informal sources of information about employment, education, training, and other opportunities; as sources of mutual aid, such as informal help with child-minding, transportation, and other needs; and as sources of encouragement and ideas in the pursuit of employment goals. Resident liaisons or “community champions” working with the JobsPlus programme have a vital role to play in this regard. For example, they can vouch for the credibility and trustworthiness of the programme among their neighbours, provide an important communication channel between residents and staff, and help the programme build on the social capital that already exists within the community. In addition, tapping the ties that residents have with the housing office staff, maintenance personnel, and even business and social organizations in the surrounding area offer other opportunities for building or strengthening social capital to support work.

Many factors make putting these ideas into practice difficult, and the time, effort, resources, and creativity required should not be underestimated. There is no simple script for “dropping” a programme into a housing estate and getting residents to quickly beat a path to its door. Many JobsPlus sites have struggled to get a large proportion of residents to engage with the programme. Some have struggled to take full advantage of the unique opportunities that a place-based intervention offers.

Or they have been challenged navigating the social dynamics or culture of the place, including conflicts among certain groups of residents, or in offering services that residents want. Truly integrating a programme like JobsPlus into a community, where residents become familiar with it, see value in what it offers, and come to trust it, and where the programme becomes part of the fabric of community life is an ambitious and complex undertaking that can take years before its full potential is realized. It also requires collaborating with residents in meaningful ways to adapt the design of the model to local circumstances, to troubleshoot problems and work toward solutions, and to build a sense of resident ownership over this important intervention in their communities. But success is possible, and the years of operating JobsPlus in the US offer important insights and lessons for the UK.

A TRANSATLANTIC LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

The continuing operation of JobsPlus in the US and the rich evaluation literature that has been built up over time offer opportunities for the UK to learn from the US experience. But, just as importantly, the UK’s creative adaptations of the JobsPlus model in Britain offer a learning opportunity for the US, as American administrators and practitioners continue to strive to strengthen the implementation of the model across a wide range of settings.

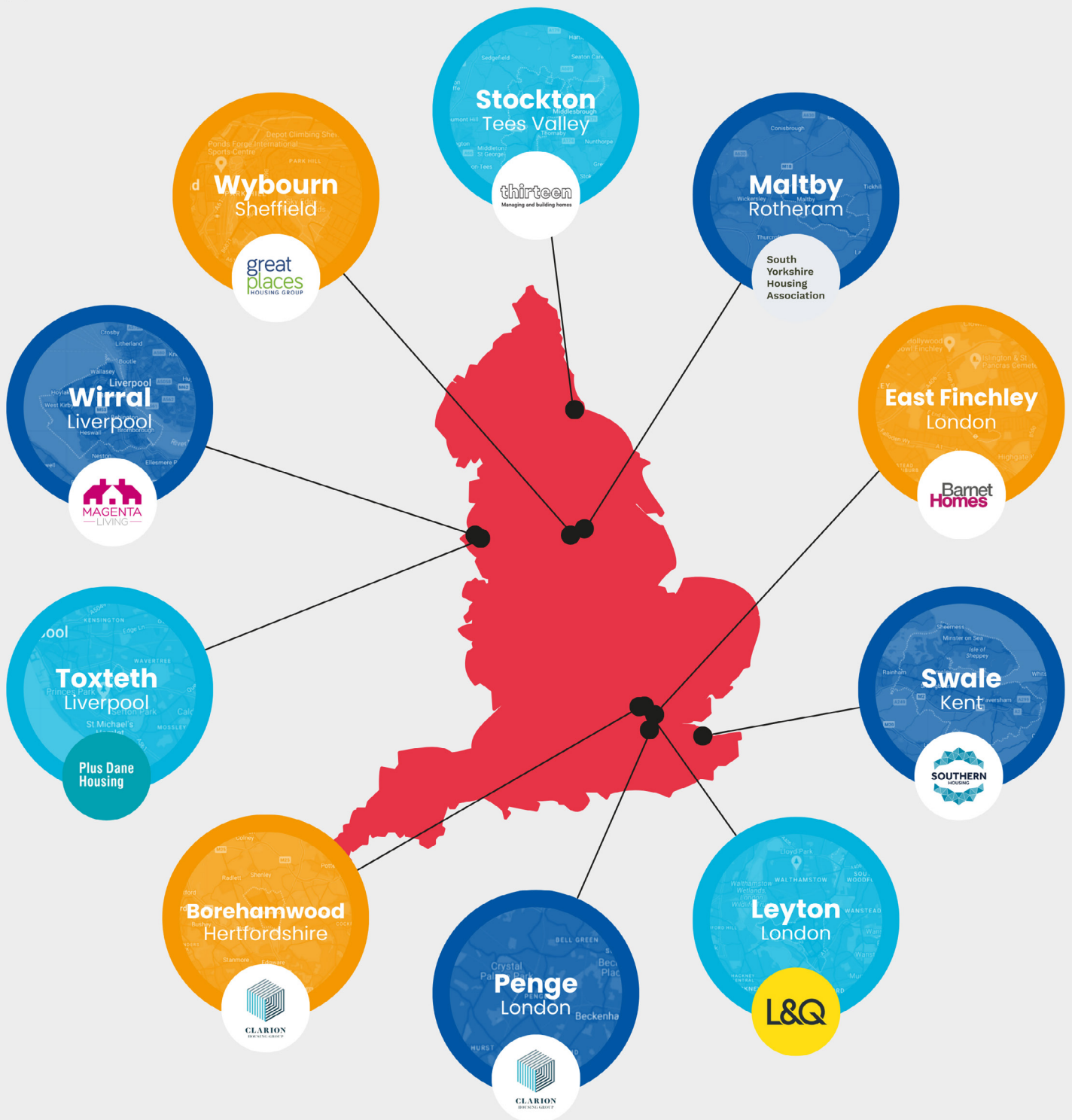
Although the institutional structures, labour markets, and housing and benefit systems differ in important ways across the two countries, the ways of intervening in public housing and social housing communities and taking full advantage of the place-based ways of supporting residents’ efforts to enter work, remain stably employed, and advance in their careers, have much in common.

Sharing creative ideas and lessons from experience would enrich efforts to strengthen JobsPlus in both countries and better serve individuals and communities struggling to get ahead. Efforts are now underway to build such a transatlantic dialogue.

For more information on JobsPlus in the US, see [Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families | MDRC](#).



Our ten pilot sites



JobsPlus



Funded by
UK Government

JOBSPLUS IN BRITAIN: TRANSFORMING LIVES IN SOCIAL HOUSING

03



ROSIE LONGDEN
Head of Community Investment
Great Places Housing Group

[in https://www.linkedin.com/in/rosielongden/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/rosielongden/)

The story of social housing in Britain is one that's worth knowing: a grand narrative that tells us what type of society we are; and which charts our economic and social journey from the ideological roots of "homes fit for heroes" in 1919, through to the ashes of the Grenfell tower.

It's a story of how millions of British people were provided with the stability of knowing that their home was theirs for as long as they wanted it, the foundations on which they could build education, a decent job, and a good life for their children.

While the number of people living in socially rented housing has fallen considerably since the supply peaked in 1981 at almost 5.5 million homes¹, 16% of the population now live in housing association or council-owned properties. And with 1.24 million households on local authority waiting lists², demand well outstrips supply and ensures that only those in the most vulnerable circumstances are allocated a home, most often in the most economically deprived neighbourhoods in the UK. Unsurprisingly then, we know that social housing tenants are twice as likely as the general population to be out of work³ and to face multiple barriers to employment. Even when in work, they are earn less than those in other tenures and are more likely to work in lower skilled jobs⁴.

Further, the national employment picture is really quite dire. The number of people who are economically inactive is spiralling, combined with a cooling labour market and the aftermath of the

2024 Autumn budget which set out plans to raise employers' contributions to National Insurance rates, expected by the OBR to be largely funded by employers squeezing pay⁵.

At the time of writing, we await the government's white paper, Get Britain Working, which is expected to outline a strategy to reach 80% employment by the end of the parliament. And yet, intervention after intervention, programme after programme is delivered to help people find work, 49 of them in England alone, worth £20 billion⁶. Something isn't working.

On 20th June 2006, a social policy researcher, James A. Riccio addressed an obscure sub-committee of Congress and shared compelling evidence about a programme that he had meticulously monitored and evaluated over the previous decade. The programme, JobsPlus, had been trailed across six American cities, targeting those living in public housing and resulted in "substantial and enduring"⁷ increases in participants' earnings and employment opportunities. The model worked, Riccio said, in different cities with different demographics of residents, and in both good and bad economic times⁸.

→ Rosie is Head of Community Investment at Great Places Housing Group, a social landlord and developer based in Manchester. This follows similar roles at other housing associations, as well as jobs at number of UK charities and also in the oil and gas sector.

Her first ever job, secured at her father's insistence, was selling double glazing over the phone. Lured by a 10p per hour pay increase, she swiftly left to work in retail.

She has a degree in Classics and worked as a Latin teacher for a year, during which time she realised she was absolutely not cut out for teaching, or Latin. She holds a post-graduate qualification in Psychotherapy, which was also not a suitable career choice, given that she cannot keep her opinions to herself.

Rosie works across a number of professional networks in the housing sector and is a board member on the Manchester City Council Food Board and Trustee of several community organisations.

Born and bred in East London, Rosie has been living in Manchester for 12 years and has two young children.

¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2017-21), Table 104: by tenure, England (historical series), last updated May 2020.

² Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Social housing lettings in England, tenants: April 2022 to March 2023.

³ Building opportunity: How social housing can support skills, talent and workforce development, Learning & Work Institute 2022.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Resolution Foundation Briefing October 2024.

⁶ Local Government Association, Work Local: Our employment and skills offer to a new Government to boost inclusive growth (2024).

⁷ JobsPlus: A Promising Strategy for Increasing Employment and Self-Sufficiency Among Public Housing Residents Presented Before the Subcommittee on Federalism and the Census, House Committee on Government Reform James A. Riccio, Director Low-Wage Workers and Communities, MDRC June 20, 2006.

⁸ Ibid.

JobsPlus, he explained, was based on the principle of saturation of a culture of work in a neighbourhood, with convenient employment and skills support in the centre of the public housing estate. The services were available to everyone, and included neighbour-to-neighbour information sharing and other benefits and incentives, making working families the norm.

The evidence convinced policymakers to roll-out the model in the years that followed; since 2015 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has awarded over \$136 million through 56 grants to Public Housing Authorities to implement the Jobs Plus Program⁹.

In 2023, 4,500 miles across the Atlantic, the JobsPlus model found its way to The Work and Pensions Select Committee, which recommended its trial in the UK, testing the relationship between the Department for Work and Pensions and housing associations in delivering this place-based intervention. Another 166 miles, from Whitehall to Wybourn, and the model has now launched in Sheffield, one of 10 pilot sites funded by the Labour Market Evaluation and Pilots Fund and managed by Learning and Work Institute with support from Communities that Work, the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and MDRC¹⁰.

Delivered by Great Places, in partnership with local third sector partners, JobsPlus is already showing promising signs of success six months in, with more than 40 residents already engaged with the programme. Delivered from the Pat Midgely Community Hub, a centre owned and managed by Great Places, our employment coaches work with local residents from Wybourn, providing opportunities for learning, self-employment and finding work. Using the principles of JobsPlus, we've also employed three local residents to work as Community Champions, saturating the neighbourhood with information and connecting people who ordinarily wouldn't engage with employment programmes.

On a recent visit, I chatted to Daine, 23, one of our Community Champions, who brims with the type of confidence and energy that is infectious. She tells me she bumped in to one of our JobsPlus participants in a local shop, "I said to her, I've been trying to get in contact with you! And do you know what, she called me back the next day!". A promising start, I think.

So, is JobsPlus a panacea for the employment crisis? And can place-based interventions succeed where national programmes haven't? Our pilot year will give us an indication of what works, and what doesn't. What is clear though, is that Housing Associations across the UK remain committed to realising the ideological vision of our sector: a safe, decent home for those who need it, and the support and opportunities to thrive.



⁹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Jobs Plus Initiative Program.

¹⁰ Learning and Work Institute <https://shorturl.at/otpxM>

SKILLS ENGLAND: BRIDGING GAPS AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

04



The recent launch of “Skills England” by Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer aims to be a major step in closing the skills gap in the UK and promoting economic expansion.

This programme, which formed a key component of Labour’s manifesto pledges, attempts to bring the disjointed skills training system in the nation back to life.

The programme has many of the hallmarks of findings from the five-year ‘[Increase Valorisation Sociale](#)’ applied research project (2018-2023) from the University of East Anglia (UEA), which explored how people in underprivileged communities can be helped into either employment or entrepreneurship over the long term. These suggestions, which emphasise creating connections, assisting in skills-based hiring, providing job-matching services, and working with community colleges, culminated in a recent [whitepaper](#) (2024) reflecting on the role of ‘housing associations as changemakers’ that is highly aligned with the goals of Skills England.

CREATING BRIDGES

One of the key aspects of both our research and the Skills England proposal is the ability to build bridges between the various stakeholders involved in boosting employability. Our whitepaper put forward that having housing officers with employability expertise, who can capitalise on their local knowledge, build trust, and bring together stakeholders from different industries, such as local governments, corporations, social enterprises, and academic institutions was crucial to offering targeted skills development programs in underprivileged communities.

Crucial to the development of these networks is being able to span multiple domains, ‘[build bridges](#)’, and integrate micro-enterprise and employment support services when tackling complex issues, such as regional inequality. Such housing officers, who should work separately from those in housing management, can play this bridge-building role and be trained to motivate, enable, convene, and integrate stakeholders from across multiple sectors. This way, they can bring a multitude of local and regional actors into the task of supporting residents toward work or entrepreneurship, albeit without employing a ‘payment by results’ model of engagement.

Through bringing together employers, trade unions, central and local government agencies, and training providers, Skills England hopes to bring about significant change in this area. By achieving this, it aims to provide a more unified framework to help tackle the skills gap and promote growth throughout the country. We would argue that housing associations can be trusted local stakeholders to help deliver this goal given their commitment to place and ability to coordinate a micro-enterprise and employment support service offer which is both integrated and to which one can return over the long-term in the face of setbacks.

ZOGRAFIA BIKA
Director of Research
Norwich Business School
University of East Anglia (UEA)

z.bika@uea.ac.uk

<https://www.uea.ac.uk/groups-and-centres/a-z/increase-valorisation-sociale>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/zografia/>

<https://x.com/zografiabika>

➔ Zografia Bika is a Professor of Entrepreneurship and currently serves as the Director of Research at the Norwich Business School, University of East Anglia (UEA), UK. She has led the academic evaluation of the £10.8M EU Interreg ‘Increase Valorisation Sociale’ project that aimed to boost enterprise training and job opportunities for thousands of social housing residents in England and France (2018-2023). Adi Gaskell has previously worked as a Senior Research Associate at UEA, for this project and currently advises the European Institute of Innovation & Technology.



ADI GASKELL
Consultant

admin@adigaskell.org

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/adigaskell/>

<https://x.com/AdiGaskell>

➔ Adi Gaskell has previously worked as a Senior Research Associate at UEA, for this project and currently advises the European Institute of Innovation & Technology.

ENCOURAGEMENT OF SKILLS-BASED HIRING

Our whitepaper also emphasises the growth of skills-based hiring rather than assessing candidates according to traditional qualifications. This change is especially advantageous for people who have learned skills ‘by doing’ in unconventional ways.

This was demonstrated by [research](#) published in SHRM, which outlined the value of skill credentialing programmes that offer people who are “skilled through alternative routes” the ability to prove to employers that they have certain skills. Organisations such as [Climb Hire](#) and [Merit America](#) showcase what can be done in the tech industry and recent [data](#) from LinkedIn shows that employers are increasingly open to recruiting based on skills rather than formal credentials.

As part of its role, Skills England will closely collaborate with the Migration Advisory Committee to make sure that the domestic workforce can fulfil the demands of the economy. This strategy is consistent with Labour’s overarching objective of reshaping the apprenticeship levy to better meet the demands of the market, although as with many policies, the implementation will reveal more than the intention.

EMPLOYMENT-MATCHING PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Alongside skills-based recruitment, there is also an important role for middlemen, such as housing associations and training providers, to verify and recognise the skills and learning capabilities of those far from the labour market. Traditional qualifications provide robust and reliable signalling for employers, so those without such qualifications need other forms of signal to act as a mental “guarantor” for employers to feel confident in their hires.

As respected stakeholders in the communities, housing associations can act as trusted labour market intermediaries. This can be important, as many people are frozen out of the labour market due to uncertainty about their skills or character. This

could be gaps in their employment record, mental/physical illness, or even military service. Housing associations can help to bridge that trust gap and provide employers with the confidence to hire otherwise “invisible” workers.

Our whitepaper explains that housing associations increasingly want to move beyond their core job of providing quality and affordable housing and provide a wider range of support for those in the community. They’re doing this either by collaborating with training providers or developing training in-house to make sure locals acquire or mobilise the skills needed by local companies. Housing associations are reputable community partners whose futures are locally invested and can therefore be helpful in matching qualified workers with local job openings.

The INCREASE VS project was a partnership of nine housing associations and training providers in England and France that showcased the potential of this model. Not only were over 1,000 new businesses created and 1,100 people helped into work but also a place-based ecosystem of integrated micro-enterprise and employment support services came into being that extended beyond technical skills to encompass confidence-building that empowers individuals where they live.

A national platform that enables these connections on a larger scale but also engages with place-based deprivation, thus helping to guarantee that skills training is directly linked to career prospects where people live and work whilst capitalising on what local labour market intermediaries can offer, is one way that Skills England may build on this idea.

WORKING TOGETHER WITH COMMUNITY COLLEGES

A common theme throughout our research was the importance of employers and educators working together. Universities have long been engines of economic activity, but we found that community colleges are just as important in supplying the skills needed for local communities to prosper.

Indeed, [research](#) from Harvard demonstrates the untapped potential of community colleges to drive growth, not least because of poor communication between schools and employers. As trusted labour market intermediaries, housing associations can become the “hub” in the centre of a place-based network of partners. They can therefore play a crucial convening role in ensuring education providers and employers are working in unison to ensure the local community has the skills needed to thrive including those needed within the housing associations.

By bringing together different educational institutions and businesses to connect training programs with the demands of the job market, Skills England can underpin and support this kind of cooperation to ensure that the economy has the skills both to spur innovation and also tackle rising regional inequalities, but it’s clear from our research that a wider ecosystem of participants can also play a role, both as active players and as conveners and bridgebuilders.



IN SUMMARY

Tackling the skills gap is crucial to both national and regional prosperity. Our whitepaper mirrors many aspects being taken by Skills England, emphasising the importance of place-based collaboration among stakeholders, developing bridges between sectors and stakeholders, and encouraging skills-based recruitment.

Skills England can make a greater effect and guarantee that everyone, especially 'invisible workers', such as the disabled, people with a criminal record, older adults, military veterans, or people with physical/mental health problems, who face complex barriers to work and have gaps in their employment record are better supported in getting meaningful work. Our whitepaper highlights a number of ways in which this support can be sustainably extended into underprivileged communities that have often proved beyond the reach of previous policies. This new UK government programme aims to provide the groundwork for a more prosperous and inclusive future that works long term in addition to meeting the urgent demands of the economy.

One of the core criticisms of the UK government in recent times is that it is excessively centralised, and the so-called "levelling up" agenda has done little to change that. Our findings from the INCREASE VS project demonstrate how effective local stakeholders can be in delivering meaningful change and improved local earnings particularly for low-skilled workers without requiring central government oversight or funding. If regional inequality is to be effectively tackled, this is perhaps a finding that Skills England should consider.

REFERENCES

Bika, Z. and Gaskell, A. (2024) [Housing Associations as Changemakers - Whitepaper](#). University of East Anglia.

Bika, Z., Gaskell, A. and Orlandi, C.M. (2023) [Cost effective ways to make levelling up happen right now](#). LSE Business Review.

Bika, Z., Locke, C., Orlandi, C. M. and Valcke, B. (2022) Theorising 'best practice' in supporting those furthest from the market into work or self-employment in France and England. [RENT Conference](#), Naples, Italy.

Gaskell, A. and Bika, Z. (2023) [Skills-based employment can help to find 'invisible workers'](#). Forbes.



IN CONVERSATION WITH LORENZO HALL

05



LORENZO HALL FIEP
Founder, Owner, Managing Director
Transform & Achieve

 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lorenzo-hall-fiep-1a973ab/>

In this interview, Communities that Work's Managing Director Lynsey Sweeney speaks with Lorenzo Hall, creator of the "Transform and Achieve" programme, supported by J.P. Morgan.

The programme helps people struggling to find work by offering online resources for personal development in areas like mental health, employment skills, and finance. Lorenzo discusses his background in housing and coaching, the programme's evolution, and how understanding human psychology can drive habit change to boost employability and shape future employment services.

INTERVIEW

Lynsey: Lorenzo, thanks very much for agreeing to be interviewed by me. I'm excited to be the guest editor of the journal, and I'm super excited to speak to you. Could you give us a little background of "Transform and Achieve" your history with it, how it came about, and where it is now?

Lorenzo: My journey with Transform and Achieve started in housing, which is how we met. It began in 2012 under the name "Employment Boot Camp". At that time, I was working for what is now Peabody Group, which was formerly known as Family Mosaic.

I used to do a lot of leadership coaching back then and something that became apparent to me when I was coaching a manager in charge of regeneration and communities at the time, was that they were struggling to get engagement from their residents beyond the typical landlord-tenant relationship.

They wanted to help more with health, wealth, and well-being, but their residents were very unresponsive. So, my coaching has always been on influence and the psychology of influence, starting on the inside and then social influence externally.

Lynsey: Quite profound.

Lorenzo: It has been my passion ever since I began my Continuing Professional Development studies in psychology. So, the manager I was coaching then said, "Well, a lot of your discussion about management of the self could be relevant to our residents." They asked me if I could design something that would attract people, but make it a bit more holistic, and that's when I designed what is now called "Transform and Achieve".

"WE DESIGNED A FIVE MODULAR PROGRAMME THAT INCLUDED FITNESS, NUTRITION, AS WELL AS EMPLOYMENT, FINANCIAL RESILIENCE, AND THE PSYCHOLOGY SIDE OF IT AS WELL."

→ Lorenzo is an experienced transformation and personal growth coach with a demonstrable history of coaching in psychology and mental health, leadership and Executive Coaching. He is the founder, managing director and owner of the Transform and Achieve Program.

Lorenzo is a transformative coach who excels in inquisitive questioning, thoughtful reflection, and intuitive listening.

His coaching sessions have equipped clients with invaluable tools for self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and effective leadership. Lorenzo's ability to tailor his approach to individual needs has consistently empowered clients to achieve significant personal and professional growth.

The Transform and Achieve program has been life-changing for participants, equipping them with a positive mindset, renewed confidence, and practical skills such as resilience, self-motivation, and effective job search strategies. Clients have reported feeling more productive and focused, with enhanced abilities to bounce back from setbacks and present their strengths to potential employers.

With over twenty years of leadership experience, Lorenzo draws on his personal journey through trauma and adversity, along with extensive CPD in applied psychology, to offer thoughtful and practical support to the clients he is privileged to coach. His coaching philosophy centres on empowering individuals through self-awareness, resilience, and continuous growth, helping them unlock their full potential and achieve meaningful success.



Lynsey: So, you designed the whole course?

Lorenzo: Yes, it was a five-module course programme. It was meant to help people who have multiple barriers. It was told to me that our residents have a range of barriers, from being long-term unemployed and having mental health issues to being lone parents and having childcare challenges. Other barriers also included being ex-military or ex-offenders, as well as young people in care and young people leaving care. There is a wide range of people dealing with such challenges, and I used to visit quite a lot of schemes to understand the challenges they were talking about. So, we designed a five-module programme that included fitness, nutrition, as well as employment, financial resilience, and the psychology side of it as well.

Lynsey: So that was 12 years ago now?

Lorenzo: Yes, the original design was called “Fit for Work”, which is a terrible title, but that was the main idea – helping people and stimulating them at a cellular level. At the time, I was reading a lot of stuff about cells, how they have hormones, and how hormones have a big impact on our thinking, feelings, and behaviours. After a while, the organisation changed the name to the more preferred, “Employment Bootcamp”, and eventually we got a pretty good contract from the JP Morgan Foundation. We then decided to change it to “Transform and Achieve”, which is the best name.

Lynsey: Does Transform and Achieve still have those five modules at its heart?

Lorenzo: Currently, it works mostly on four modules, because these days, particularly within the contract and employability sector, the fitness element doesn't seem to be something my customers are buying. So, the five elements are still there, but the fitness one is seldom used within the employability sector. However, it's still used in housing, thankfully.

Lynsey: I think that's a fair observation, there aren't many employability programmes that I can think of that routinely have a physical exercise health element to them. They might signpost to that, they might offer leisure centre benefits, but there isn't a lot of real engagement on that. Based on that, are you saying the housing sector still allows space and time for Transform and Achieve to deliver the fitness module, or is it something that you're trying to bolt onto courses?

Lorenzo: We occasionally get housing contracts that ask us to include the fitness element, that is something we occasionally get from housing. We're not doing a lot of delivery in housing at present, because I think their funding has changed quite significantly, and many of their employability teams have unfortunately been stripped back.

“WHAT DIFFERENTIATES TRANSFORM AND ACHIEVE, I THINK, FROM EVERYTHING I'VE SEEN, IS THAT WE'RE A HABIT-FOCUSED ORGANISATION, WE RECOGNISE THAT PEOPLE FORM HABITS UNCONSCIOUSLY AND THIS IS LEARNED BEHAVIOUR.”

Lynsey: Well, I hope we can get Transform and Achieve back into housing commissioning and more into mainstream employment services, where it certainly has a place. Could you sum up the difference between Transform and Achieve and other courses or experiences that people may have when they go through an employability journey, and any feedback you've had that stands out, shaping or showing what Transform and Achieve is and why it's so impactful?

Lorenzo: The model I designed is based on the psychology of transformation and habit change, as our thinking and behavior are learned.

This can include both helpful and unhelpful habits that impact goal achievement. Most of us, including myself, aren't consciously aware of our competence or incompetence. What sets Transform and Achieve apart is our focus on habits and the recognition that they are formed unconsciously.

In the employability context, people struggling to find work often develop a sense of learned helplessness, as the job search process requires resilience and involves frequent rejection. Unfortunately, the daily habits they form can harm both their mental and physical health.

Lynsey: So, if you can support better habits and link people to the right engagement, rather than just going through the motions, this can help them get a job position that fits them better. Then if you pull those two things together, you're much more likely to have a lasting success for that person.

Lorenzo: Absolutely.

Lynsey: That is super helpful - a few quick final points from me. The government is going to launch a White Paper in the autumn, about how they're going to shape employment services at the DWP level. I know you've met the DWP and other relevant ministers before, in the course of the work we've done together. So, based on what you know works best, if you were in a meeting with a minister now and they said, "Lorenzo, what works best? How do we need to design a programme?", what would you say in a few short sentences to get the message across clearly?

Lorenzo: I think people often struggle to respond well when pressured to meet expectations for achieving their goals. I believe many job coaches and advisors lack the skill to meet people where they are and engage with empathy, focusing on the whole person rather than just ticking boxes. While they want to do a good job, my challenge to the government is whether these advisors have been properly trained in showing empathy and helping individuals transform, regain confidence, and rebuild self-belief.

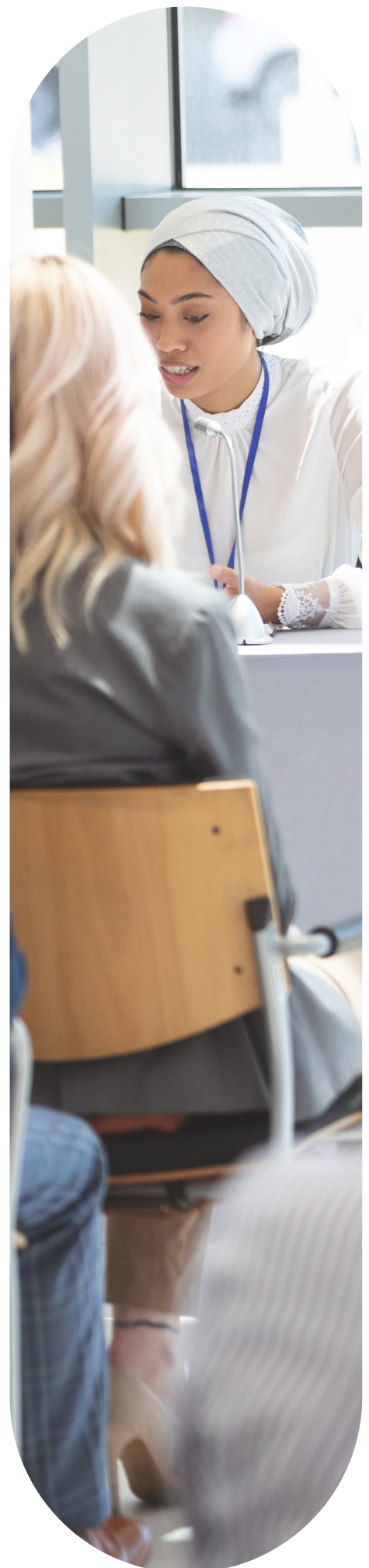
Personal change and transformation coaching is a profound skill, requiring a deep understanding of how the brain works, and I think more focus on this is needed in the industry.

"EVERYTHING MY COACHES LEARNED, THEY LEARNED. WE DIDN'T START WITH THESE LIFE SKILLS, WE'VE COMBINED OUR LIFE SKILLS WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL EDUCATION, AND THAT'S WHAT TRANSFORM AND ACHIEVE DOES WITH OUR CUSTOMERS."

Lynsey: Yeah, it's quite a deep skill, but not impossible to train in, right?

Lorenzo: Absolutely. That's the whole point - it's completely possible. Everything I learned, I learned and everything my coaches have learned, they learned. We didn't start with these skills, we've combined our life skills with psychological education, and that's what Transform and Achieve does with our customers. All our evaluations say, "I didn't know my brain worked like that, and now I've learned to behave and think in new ways" because the period we take them through is the habit change period. So, they form new thoughts, because they form new neural pathways and move away from other default ways of thinking. I think that's what needs to happen.

Lynsey: Maybe it will one day. They are going to make a lot of changes at the DWP, and they might start to commission more in that shape and in that space - I hope they do.



“THERE’S LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL”: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL LANDLORDS IN EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

06



CEDRIC BOSTON
Chief Executive Officer
Unity Homes and Enterprise

 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/cedric-boston-90b61a32/>

This article draws on the findings of a small study conducted by the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) on behalf of Unity Homes and Enterprise and Communities that Work, which explores the important role housing associations can play in supporting tenants with their employment futures.

The original aim of social housing was to give people access to decent, affordable housing, meeting both their physical need for a home that is secure, safe, warm, and dry and to provide a springboard for them to improve other aspects of their lives, most notably health, wellbeing, and economic prospects.

Over the last two decades there has been a significant shift from this dual-purpose role to today’s model where there is a greater expectation on Housing Associations (HAs) to drive the investment in the supply of new housing, to invest more in the maintenance of their housing stock, to decarbonise homes and to raise regulatory and governance standards, arguably at the expense of initiatives to transform the lives of existing tenants.

While there is insufficient evidence of a causal link, the change is taking place at a time when tenants’ need for transformative support has never been greater. Indeed, the poor economic circumstances of social tenants is becoming difficult to ignore, and this situation is only reinforcing

the stigmatisation of the sector (see [IES report](#)).

With the new government’s agenda for both ‘national renewal’ and to ‘make work pay’, we have conducted a small study, which shows that HAs can positively influence tenant lives, often without spending large sums of money, and a lot can be achieved by working to inform and raise tenant expectations and creating a trusted, and non-judgemental relationships with them. In this way HAs can enable and embolden disadvantaged people living in their properties, to improve their social and economic prospects.

CORE MISSIONS AND VALUES

Accepting that the supply shortage of social housing is the main, long-term, priority for the sector, what should also rank high in terms of immediate action to improve the lives of social housing tenants?

There are many contenders, not least the investment needs of the stock, decarbonisation, and the raising of regulatory standards. It is hard to choose, but one critical area that is regularly omitted from the list of contenders for second place altogether is the apparent failure of social housing to improve tenants’ economic prospects and predictive life chances (see [IES report](#)).

Its omission suggests it is less important than the others, but our study suggests it is still considered important, especially by tenants.

→ Cedric Boston is currently the CEO of Unity Homes and Enterprise, a Housing Association based in Leeds that supports people into employment, training or to set up their own business. Cedric has over 30 years’ experience in Housing, 25 of them at senior executive level. He is a former Chief Executive of Arhag, a BME association in London that specializes in addressing the needs of migrants and refugees. Prior to that he was Director of Housing at Lambeth Living, one of the UKs largest ALMOs, and before that the Director of Operations in Richmond Housing Partnership. He has a degree in law and politics and is a member of Gray’s Inn where he qualified as a barrister.



GARETH YOUNG
Knowledge Exchange and Impact Fellow
University of Sheffield

 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/gareth-young-16a69923a/>

 <https://x.com/GarethJYoung>

 <https://x.com/housingevidence>

→ Gareth Young is Knowledge Exchange and Impact Fellow for the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence. Gareth’s role is to run the North of England and Midlands Knowledge Exchange Hub, and he leads on the EDI work of the Centre. Gareth received a PhD from the University of Sheffield in 2016, which investigated the responses to the 2011 riots, in particular the way in which social housing tenants were positioned as being significantly involved in the disorders. Gareth has a particular interest in person-centred approaches to housing, equity in housing and the role of frontline housing practitioners. Gareth is also the co-host of the [Equalities in Housing](#) podcast.

HAs that have a stronger focus on the broader needs of the people living in their properties, who play a wider role creating and facilitating opportunities for them and embrace the challenge of making a difference in people's lives, can have a significant impact. Considering the dual-purpose of social housing this study makes a compelling case, not for displacing one or more of the other secondary priorities, but for initiatives to transform tenant lives, ranking alongside them.

PRESSURES FOR SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDERS

We have explored the increased pressures facing HAs already in this article. From discussions with experts from across the housing sector there remains a mixed response to providing non-statutory services such as employment and business support.

While there are many providers offering support, there was also a sense that some were stepping back from this to focus on increased pressures from recent regulation.

There was also a consistent view that employment and business support should not necessarily be a mandate of a social housing provider, but also that there was an extraordinarily convincing case for why they should be thinking about this type of additional support because of the role they play in communities and their tenants' lives. [National Housing Federation](https://www.clarionhg.com/news-and-media/2022/06/10/a-home-a-job-a-future) report "A Home, a Job, a Future" (<https://www.clarionhg.com/news-and-media/2022/06/10/a-home-a-job-a-future>) outlined four reasons why housing providers are well-placed to offer this type of support:

- 1)** they have uniquely personal relationships with their residents'
- 2)** they operate in some of the country's most deprived areas;
- 3)** they typically take a long-term approach to working with their residents and the communities in which their homes are based; and
- 4)** they can be employers in their own right, with established supply chains which can provide further employment opportunities.

Above all social housing tenants have the poorest economic performance, almost two times worse than the people living in the worst housing conditions in the private rented sector.

HA can make a difference without setting up employment support teams and creating skill development opportunities. Though these have good impacts, many social tenants are not work ready nor even looking for work because they often must overcome physical and psychological barriers to work. Typical physical barriers are carer responsibilities, chronic illness, or the cost of buying work clothes. Interestingly the study shows tackling the psychological barriers, such as lack of confidence, fear of discrimination, the absence of support or role models and anxiety can be more critical and low cost. This is about developing frontline staff and building a culture of support for social tenants that is in play every time we interact with them. Above all the sector may need to change its attitude towards social tenants to build up their confidence and esteem by regarding them as people with possibilities, rather than those with none, having high expectations of them and being able to support those who want to overcome the barriers they face and improve their lives.

AN ORCHESTRA OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

There is no single way to tackle the issues that are wrapped up here. However, by considering people, and their needs, in a sympathetic way, providing a mechanism for those who need it to have someone who can offer sustained, non-judgemental support and mentoring can help people to feel like there is a "*light at the end of the tunnel*" (Unity Homes tenant). What was striking from this study was that through the individuals we interviewed who have used Unity Homes and Enterprise each story was different, and everyone's background, experience and barriers required different support. These barriers coalesced around confidence and that feeling that there was no future for them. However, being able to have someone to speak with, who over time they could trust and build rapport, gave them hope and encouragement

to carry on. For example, one tenant had been unsuccessful at a number of job interviews:

"I DIDN'T FEEL VERY EMPOWERED, AND TALKING TO SOMEONE ELSE AND TELLING THEM MY STORY HELPED ME BECOME EMPOWERED." (EMPLOYMENT SERVICE USER)

By surrounding people with an 'orchestra of service providers' people can be supported to navigate barriers to employment. Who plays what role locally will vary depending on the nature of an area, the different anchor institutions (e.g. large organisation that is rooted in a local community and has a significant impact on its health and wellbeing of residents) that exist within this space and how areas are governed. There is an opportunity in the context of a continually growing devolution agenda for Combined Authorities to take the driving seat in helping to bring together all the different providers (including employers) who can play a vital role in people's lives. With a trajectory of further devolution and greater autonomy over budgets, there could be more potential for creativity and flexibility over what can be commissioned. Even where areas are not operating under a devolution deal, local authorities can play a coordinating role, though it might be that a housing provider has more capacity. Either way, bringing providers together so that it is transparent what support and resources are available, whilst finding a mechanism for people to have someone to talk to, is a quick win for those people who need support right now. There also needs to be a space to share good practice more systematically and make sure this is accessible to those in roles that can have influence, so people can learn about the diverse ways to approach these complex issues.

WHAT CAN HAs DO RIGHT AWAY?

There are a number of things that HAs can do right now, drawing on this study, plus other reports from across the sector (see Better Social Housing Review).

In brief, these include: going back to basics and putting tenants at the heart of what HAs do, and listening to them as 'valued partners'; making sure tenants get 'health checks' which provide a chance for HAs to talk openly with tenants about their wider lives, as this can help to identify where support is needed; with resources tight, HAs should think about support that can help motivate and build confidence to help people who are able to, to get back into work or training¹; and understand that for some tenants, it will be a long journey, but if they are able and willing to take up support, HAs should continue to use resources to support these tenants.



¹ There's a complex hand up vs hand out argument. Participants in this study discussed the importance of non-judgemental support to help them 'see light at the end of the tunnel'. These tenants also sometimes needed immediate financial support too.

EMPLOYABILITY AND HOUSING

ELLY HOULT, DEPUTY CEO PEABODY AND PRESIDENT, CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF HOUSING

07



Not for profit housing associations in the UK have a strong tradition of supporting people into work. It's one of many social initiatives we engage with beyond providing homes and one of the reasons why I'm so proud to work in housing.

ELLY HOULT

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer
Peabody
President of the Chartered Institute of Housing
Co-Chair of the London Homes Coalition



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/peabody-trust/>



<https://www.linkedin.com/in/ellyhoulton2504/>

Today the UK housing sector is the largest non-governmental investor in employment support in the country.

You can trace the roots of employability and social housing back to the Victorian philanthropists like George Peabody, Edward Guinness and William Sutton – they saw housing and work as the two essential foundations for success.

The birth of the modern housing association in the 1960s coincided with rapid social, economic and technological change. Better education and the world of work created new opportunities for social mobility and professional development. But what hadn't (and still hasn't) changed was the enduring poverty in England's towns, cities and urban areas.

Rooted in communities and connected with local people, the emerging housing associations were perfectly placed to support people out of poverty through employment and training. They provided not only a roof and a low rent but personalised support to help people overcome obstacles and gain the skills they need.

Today the UK social housing sector has grown, providing homes for over six million people – around 10 percent of the population. Some of the largest associations look after more than 100,000 homes and invest tens of millions of pounds each year into community activities.

Our work not only provides a safety net for people, but also a springboard to their success. We support people to develop lifelong skills to progress their careers.

SUPPORTING SOCIAL MOBILITY

Social landlords differ widely and take a range of approaches that vary according to their objectives, funding landscape and local needs. Smaller associations can make a massive impact, and large associations' employability work has evolved as their expertise and capacity to invest has expanded.

The type of employability work in the sector is varied and supports different groups. There is what we call the core employment services that are generally open to all in local communities. This is providing life skills like budgeting, CV support and digital literacy as well as soft skills training, including in communication, collaboration, negotiation and leadership development.

There is specialist support designed for people who are further away from work – funded from a range of sources including the European Social Fund, DWP funding and the National Lottery. This includes support for people with health conditions and disabilities, disadvantaged young people and those with multiple and complex needs. This can be the most challenging aspect of the work but also the most impactful.



Elly is Peabody's Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer, and President of the Chartered Institute of Housing. She is co-Chair of the London Homes Coalition, leading on the group's Building Skills for the Future initiative.

With over 25 years' experience in the housing sector, Elly has worked her way up from the role of Supported Housing Officer to executive level roles, working at Orbit, A2 Dominion and Notting Hill Genesis.

Helping people get out of poverty, reduce debts and become financially resilient will always be a vital part of what we do.

PARTNERSHIPS AND INCLUSION

Then there are two workstreams that have grown as landlords and communities have diversified and the world of work has changed over the decades. At Peabody we now have around 4,000 employees, with an Academy that offers apprenticeships, and a people focus that provides graduate programmes, learning and development training and professional accreditations.

Our supply chain generates millions of pounds worth of social value every year. We're able to use our own resources and partnerships to support residents and colleagues into careers that work for them and add value in our communities. This is why my campaign as President of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) this year is called CHOOSE HOUSING. I want to promote the sector as a career and a route to many different professions, and particularly to encourage residents to choose careers in social housing. It's another way our industry can drive opportunity and social mobility.

What we deliver today reflects the modern world of work. Now our teams are expert connectors, linked into business groups and cross-sector networks including further education, local government and the creative industries and professions for example. They help connect young entrepreneurs and emerging small and medium enterprises with expertise and funding to help them grow.

We still provide the foundations for people to develop skills and aspirations, but also have wide-ranging economic inclusion programmes. These supply resources and facilitate networks to harness, support and grow talent in local communities. For us, economic inclusion is about ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances,

have access to the resources, opportunities, and support needed to participate fully in the economic life of their community or society.

The scale of large associations means we're perfectly placed to play a major role in this area. Our supply chain, collaborators and partnerships are more diverse than ever before. Our relationships mean we can leverage expertise and opportunities with major banks, investors and a wide range of professional and creative industries.

Opportunities include work experience and volunteering, mentoring, access to pro-bono business coaching, networking or public speaking experience for example. Complementing and enhancing our relationships with the public sector, these new partnerships are supporting a vibrant and new kind of employability, scaling up our impact in people's lives and local areas.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

The potential for positive impact is huge, but I don't want to pretend it's easy. Poverty endures, including poverty of aspiration and opportunity. It's tough for many people in our communities.

[A 2022 report by the Learning and Work Institute and Institute for Employment](#) found that social housing residents are nearly twice as likely to be out of work as those living in other tenures. It also found that social housing residents in work are twice as likely to work in lower skilled jobs and are on average paid a third less than people who live in other tenures.

The Peabody Index is an annual survey tracking the experience of social housing residents in London. The latest edition in 2023¹ found that most residents are in work and, of those surveyed, 37 percent said they live in households earning less than £30,000 a year. Many people are stuck in a low wage economy that doesn't deliver for them, and that needs to change. We're well placed to help. The not-for-profit housing sector, working with our partners and

supply chains can make a significant contribution to designing a new plan for good jobs, careers and incomes.

This is why organisations like Communities that Work are so important, providing an intersection between housing, employment and government to drive better outcomes for people in England.

I'm a strong supporter of the 'Future that Works' campaign², which calls for a national commitment to create systemic change to tackle unemployment, economic inactivity and in-work poverty within communities. In practice this should involve reforms to the advice and support available in schools as well as an expansion of apprenticeships, giving them equal weight to academic and university education. It should set out how the public and private sector can adapt to changing industries and technological improvements and create economies of scale in green energy and digital services. The report also highlights the importance of partnership working by local leaders, businesses and social housing providers to make sure any investment in local support matches local need.

SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

This kind of systemic change needs to take account of what industry, the economy and society needs. The right training and skills for working people is essential for social wellbeing, individual economic activity, social cohesion and the productivity of the country.

For example, the social housing industry spends billions of pounds improving and maintaining homes every year, adding substantial value to communities, supporting jobs and driving economic growth and productivity. But in the capital, vital remediation and retrofit work as well as day-to-day maintenance and construction activity is at risk from what is becoming a critical skills and labour shortage. The workforce is shrinking all the time and it's not clear that there is a joined-up plan to train the next generation of professional multi-tradespeople.

¹ <https://www.peabodygroup.org.uk/our-work/research-insights/the-peabody-index/>

² <https://www.communitiesthatwork.co.uk/>

This is bad for society and the economy, but it's also a matter of inclusion. Currently, women represent only 14% of the construction workforce in London, with significantly lower percentages (around 2%) in trade occupations. People from an ethnic minority background make up less than a quarter of the construction workforce in the capital. Careers in the trades offer excellent pay, conditions and scope for progression but at the moment the opportunities aren't reaching all of London's diverse communities.

We need to build a more robust and diverse talent pipeline for the future, which is why we've formed the London Homes Coalition. Our group of associations and partners recognise the need for sector-wide collaboration, engagement with further education and training providers, and close cooperation with government bodies at national, regional, and local levels. Together we're looking to innovate and inspire the next generation, trying to create a virtuous circle on skills, training and employability.

LOOKING AHEAD

The UK social housing sector has been intertwined with employment, training and skills since its inception. We've developed great capacity, expertise and partnerships in this area. But there are great challenges ahead after some very difficult years for residents and for the country.

The cumulative impact of austerity, Brexit, the pandemic and then the cost-of-living crisis is perhaps not fully appreciated yet. We want to support people in our communities develop the skills for the career they want. Whether they choose housing, or a trade, or want to explore professional services, the housing sector and CIH as our professional body will be there to help. For more information you can email me at elly.hoult@cih.org.





‘Want’ by Helen Barnard; one of a series ‘The Five Giants: A New Beveridge Report’; Agenda Publishing 2022.

JANE MANSOUR MA, MRES
Director at Institute for Employment Studies
ReAct Programme

 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/janemansour>

‘Want’ is Helen Barnard’s well-researched, thought-provoking contribution to a series of updated Beveridge reports published by Agenda.

This consideration of twenty-first century poverty combines the voices of those impacted most by welfare policy changes alongside Barnard’s clear analysis of the data, economics and politics that drive decision-making.

Indeed, the critical importance of including the public in the redesign of systems is a central contention underpinning the book, so the inclusion of personal experience throughout feels vital as well as illustrative.

There have been a number of rewrites of Beveridge over the decades. Barnard argues that this version, written in the aftermath of Covid, has echoes in the sense of ‘collective ordeal’ Britain experienced as it emerged from the Second World War.

In the same way Beveridge saw the war as offering a chance for real change, so Barnard describes how the pandemic exposed weaknesses in systems, collective strength, and a re-think about the value of occupations previously dismissed as ‘unskilled’.

Some of her optimism for change has been challenged by the re-set of the last few years, but the opportunity she identifies still exists.


The book is divided into several sections, with the first half setting up

the problem – defining poverty, and the myriad of complex and interlinking problems that different groups of people in poverty face – she’s good at drawing different facets of experience together, from practical difficulties to financial realities, to health and the impact of stigma. In the second half of the book, she considers how we move forward from here. A shift she describes in terms of industrial to digital, invoking a meeting between Gordon Brown and Tim Berners Lee to illustrate the challenge of policy making in the modern era.

Her analysis of the problems feels right. She highlights the difficult balance between support for pensioners and people of working age. Certainly, recent evidence on the high levels of mental ill health in young people are thrown into stark relief by her detailing of the weakness of social security protections for young adults in comparison with older ones.

I would have liked to have seen more on family and community structures, including the loss of public spaces, and dynamic populations, and how they relate to and are impacted by poverty. Carers are given a nod in the chapter on disability, and it would have been interesting to hear the voices of informal carers, over a million of whom are living in poverty in the UK.

Barnard identifies access to good jobs as one of the factors driving poverty for this group and this is an area we are currently researching through the ReAct Partnership.

 Jane joined IES in 2021, having been involved in employment and skills for two decades in the UK, US and Australia.

Her experience includes the implementation, delivery and management of welfare-to-work programmes; developing new service delivery models; evaluation; and research.

Focused on translating policy goals into deliverable interventions, she is interested in sustainable employment for those most disadvantaged in the labour market.

Barnard examines how austerity and cuts to public spending have exacerbated poverty, and the impact of the strivers/shirkers lens applied by George Osborne. I enjoyed her framing of 'good politics, bad policy', and the book serves as a heartbreaking reminder of how many people have suffered in the name of making a point.

The role of universality (versus means testing) in building new solutions is fascinating, especially in employability, with the potential of a new Jobs and Careers Service open to all. One of the lessons in the loss of Sure Start is surely the importance of embedding access, use and purpose of public services in broader conversations. Without this, the public's sense of fairness may not align with plans for delivery.

While there is a chapter on tax, Barnard's conceit is that it is the systems set up around the transfer of money in and out of government that indicate what we want and value as a society, and the recent focus on inheritance tax bears this out.

Engagement with public services is a critical issue for employment providers, particularly as the emphasis on voluntary economically inactive groups grows. Pilots such as Jobs Plus will provide useful evidence on the effectiveness of engaging and delivering employment services at a hyper-local population level, rather than by benefit type or other qualifying criteria.

Barnard wants to engage people at an earlier stage, through citizen assemblies of the kind seen in Ireland. She wants to see a different way of working that engages with people throughout, through a Government Co-Design Service.

It would be fascinating to see the impact of an approach-focused, cross departmental unit such as this, perhaps operating like the old Behavioural Insights Unit. I'd have liked more consideration of how employers could be brought into this, especially as flexibility and quality of work play such a big part in meeting the problems of poverty identified throughout.

For those interested and invested in anti-poverty work, there may not be much in *Want* that is surprising (maybe that is a depressing indication of how stubborn and entrenched Beveridge's giants have proven to be), but it is brought together in a really accessible and readable way.

For those new to the sector, it provides a valuable overview and assessment of where we are and could be. For me, the engagement approach advocated by Barnard is most striking, how we build the voices of those most affected into policy making and programme delivery.

After all, as the words of Marc, quoted in the book, show, there is likely much commonality in the desire for the type of lives we want to live:

'THAT'S ALL I WANT. DECENT TRANSPORT, DECENT HOUSE, A NICE FAMILY AND A DECENT JOB AS WELL. AND THAT'S IT.'

The question is how we make sure we all get there.



JOBS PLUS: A NEW WAY TO HELP PEOPLE IN SOCIAL HOUSING FIND WORK

09



STEPHEN EVANS
Chief Executive
Learning and Work Institute

 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/stephen-evans-77071327/>

 <https://x.com/LearnWorkUK>

The Learning and Work Institute is leading trials of a new way to help people in social housing find work. Based on a successful US model, it could help strike a path towards the Government's employment ambitions.

Back in 2022, [Learning and Work Institute argued](#)¹ the UK should aim for an 80% employment rate. This was because other countries, like the Netherlands, have done it, there are enough people out of work but who can and want to work to achieve this, and it could boost the economy by £23 billion.

We're delighted the new Government has adopted this ambition. But it's a stretching one, requiring an [extra 2.4 million people](#)² in work. Getting there will require a step change in the number of people we help to find work each year.

In particular, there's only 1.4 million people who are unemployed, so we'll need to extend employment support to more people who are economically inactive (not looking for or available to start work). Yet only one in ten out-of-work disabled people, one of the biggest groups outside the labour market, get help to find work each year.


Coupled with that, we have a complex array of services, funders and programmes, often with quite specific eligibility criteria, and often with short-term funding too. This can make it difficult for people to know where to get help, and also for those working in employment support to provide the right help for everyone that needs it.

TESTING JOBS PLUS

That's where [Jobs Plus](#)³ comes in. Jobs Plus is an approach demonstrated to work in the US; even 20 years later participants have higher employment rates and earnings.

Together with nine Housing Associations, Communities that Work, Institute for Employment Studies and MDRC (who evaluated the original US trials), [Learning and Work Institute](#)⁴ is now leading Jobs Plus trials in the UK, supported by UK Government funding.



 Stephen is the Chief of Executive of Learning and Work Institute, an independent policy and research organisation focused on lifelong learning and better work.

He previously worked for London government leading on employment, skills and youth, and in HM Treasury on employment, child poverty and skills.

¹ <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/towards-full-employment/>

² <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/aiming-high/>

³ <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/developing-a-jobs-plus-model-for-the-uk/>

⁴ <https://learningandwork.org.uk/news-and-policy/piloting-jobsplus-in-the-uk-creating-more-pathways-to-sustainable-employment/>

Jobs Plus has three core components:

- **Widespread engagement**

The programme takes a 'saturation' approach, aiming to spread the message about the help available to find work to everyone living in the area. This includes supporting local residents to be community champions and working with community groups to spread the word. It also includes an onsite community hub where services are co-located wherever possible, making it the place to go for help with work.

- **Support for all**

Support is open to everyone that wants it, avoiding the 'riddle me this' eligibility criteria we often end up with. Sometimes this means referring people to other existing services (co-located in the hub where possible), sometimes new and extra support.

- **Making work pay**

In addition to existing financial support for work, the US Jobs Plus offered financial incentives through their equivalent of Housing Benefit to ensure that residents would be better off in work. While the UK system is of course different, the principle of ensuring people are better off in work, and believe they will be, is equally important. So a financial bonus for those finding and sustaining work is included.

Each pilot is testing the core approach – support available to everyone who wants it, engaging everyone in a community, and ensuring good financial incentives – but tailored to their local area. This means increasing the amount of employment advisor capacity available, training residents as community champions, spreading the message about the help available, gathering local services in a community hub, and offering a £400 Into Work Bonus for those finding and staying in work for two months. The Into Bonus is disregarded from benefit calculations, so it's a real bonus for people, they don't lose it in reduced benefit payments.

WHY HERE, WHY NOW?

Many of the individual elements of the programme will be familiar to many. But what differs is testing them altogether and setting this up as a trial from the start so we can hopefully see what works and then use that to inform wider rollout and future programme design.

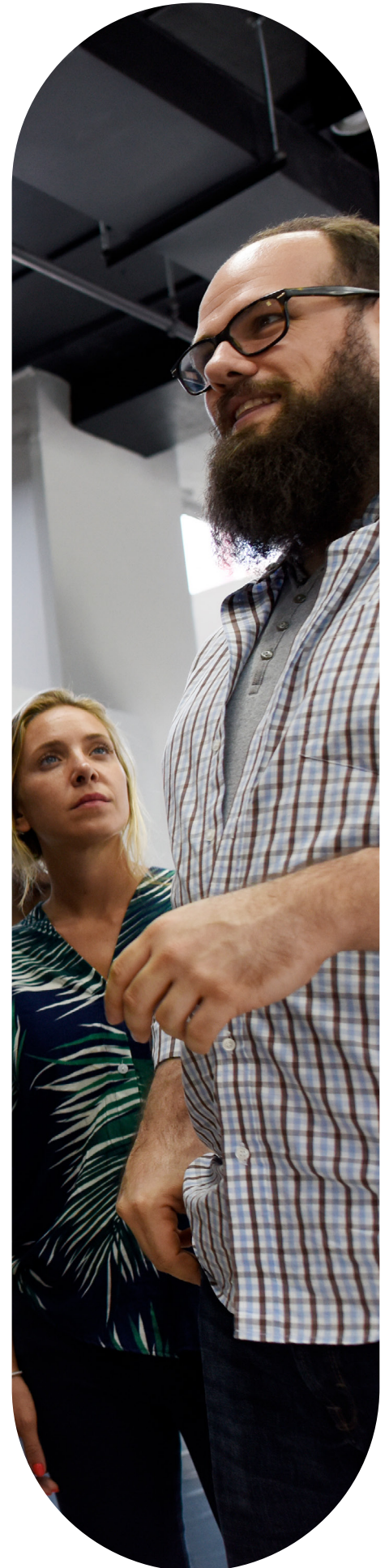
Already there is interesting practice emerging; from supporting residents to spread the word, to working with local shops, to working with residents to tailor marketing messages so they'll be more effective.

Why focus on social housing?

[Our research](#)⁵ found that one in four economically inactive people live in social housing. This is largely because of how the limited supply of social housing is allocated, but also shows there is a real need for support given many want to work. And social landlords, working with many others in employment support, already do so much to help their residents find work. So there is an infrastructure to build on and willingness to test new ways of working.

This is a challenging time: there are lots of stories about recent rises in economic inactivity, employers' struggles to fill vacancies, and tight public finances. But it can be an exciting time too: a commitment to increase employment and a chance to test different approaches.

Social landlords and everyone involved in employment support have a vital role to play in making this a better tomorrow for everyone. We hope Jobs Plus can help in this ambition and look forward to sharing findings as they emerge.



⁵ <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/building-opportunity-how-social-housing-can-support-skills-talent-and-workforce-development/>

AN OPPORTUNE MOMENT FOR HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS TO DELIVER EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS SUPPORT

10



KATE SHONE
Managing Director
Torus Foundation

 <http://linkedin.com/in/kate-shone-24830270>

Housing associations exist to ensure that those in greatest housing need are provided with a good quality property in which someone can create a home.

Our work goes beyond simply putting roofs over people's heads, however the operating environment is becoming more and more challenging.

Torus owns and manages over 40,000 properties in North West England. The majority of our stock is located in Liverpool, St Helens and Warrington. We operate across 11 local authority areas and we maintain excellent relationships with a range of partners to create good places to live at the same time as helping people with some of life's challenges.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimates that 40% of people living in social housing live in poverty*. This would equate to over 17,000 people living in a property owned or managed by Torus not including any other household members. The figures are staggering and the impact of poverty can be seen every day. However people can fall into and escape poverty, it's not a permanent state. One of the ways which can help people to move out of poverty is to enter meaningful work.

The numbers of people who are economically inactive due to ill health and therefore unable to work is higher than pre pandemic levels.

With the Government promising significant investment in the upcoming Get Britain Working White Paper, it really is time to think differently about how organisations work together to help people into meaningful work.

Housing associations have a trusted relationship with tenants and are there for a tenant's lifetime. Our longstanding relationships with tenants and communities enables us to gain insight into their lives, their aspirations, their strengths and the challenges that they face.

It's estimated that 25% of people who live in social housing will be living with a disability and therefore could potentially be claiming inactive welfare benefits. The new White Paper is focused on supporting those who can, to enter work and to put the support around them to enable them to sustain their employment.

Housing associations are one of the biggest investors in employment services, second only to the DWP. Many associations, like Torus will provide an employment and skills offer for tenants, others may commission specialists to deliver and some will signpost tenants to services in their local community.



Kate Shone is Managing Director for Torus Foundation, the charitable arm of Torus Group which owns and manages 40,000 properties in the North West of England. Kate joined Torus Group in September 2016 having previously worked for Clarion.

Kate has worked in the social housing sector for over 20 years in both the general needs and supported accommodation fields. Kate is also Chair of Communities That Work, the UK's leading consortium of social landlords who are rising to the challenge of helping people into work.

In 2015 Kate was awarded an MSc in Management from Chester University where she gained a distinction.

*UK Poverty 2024, Joseph Rowntree Foundation January 2024 [The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK](#)

This combination provides an opportune moment for housing associations to establish new partnerships, rekindle the old or build on existing relationships to deliver impactful, meaningful employment and skills support.

Housing associations are great organisations to work with, they are rooted in communities for the long term, well governed and financially sound. They can bring so much to a partnership and always available for a conversation about programmes that will help tenants and communities.



LEADING A JOBSPLUS SITE

11



Some things are worth the wait and JobsPlus is definitely one of those. I first heard about JobsPlus 10 years ago – and a lot has happened since then: 6 Prime Ministers, 1 global pandemic and a lot of discussions.

SALLY ROSS
Jobs Plus Manager
Magenta Living

 <https://linkedin.com/in/sally-ross-39714126>

 <https://uk.linkedin.com/company/magentaliving>

 MagentaLiving

 @magentaliving

When I saw Jim Riccio from MDRC speak about their American model of local community based employment support working in the heart of social housing I knew that it was something that Magenta Living and other housing associations in Communities that Work should explore.

It's taken a while and a lot of hard work by Communities that Work and Learning & Work Institute to get us here, but JobsPlus is happening!

Bidston Rise is one of 10 sites across the country delivering JobsPlus as part of the pilot funded by the Department for Work and Pensions through His Majesty's Treasury's Labour Market Evaluation Pilots Fund and managed nationally by Learning and Work Institute. JobsPlus offers local, community-based support, advice and guidance to help people living in the area to overcome any barriers that might be stopping them from moving towards work.


We're based in the community house at the heart of the community (geographically and emotionally) to become part of that community. And the most exciting feature of JobsPlus is that anyone who engages with us and moves into work could be eligible for a £400 into work bonus.

Directly delivered employment advice and support is a new approach for Magenta Living.

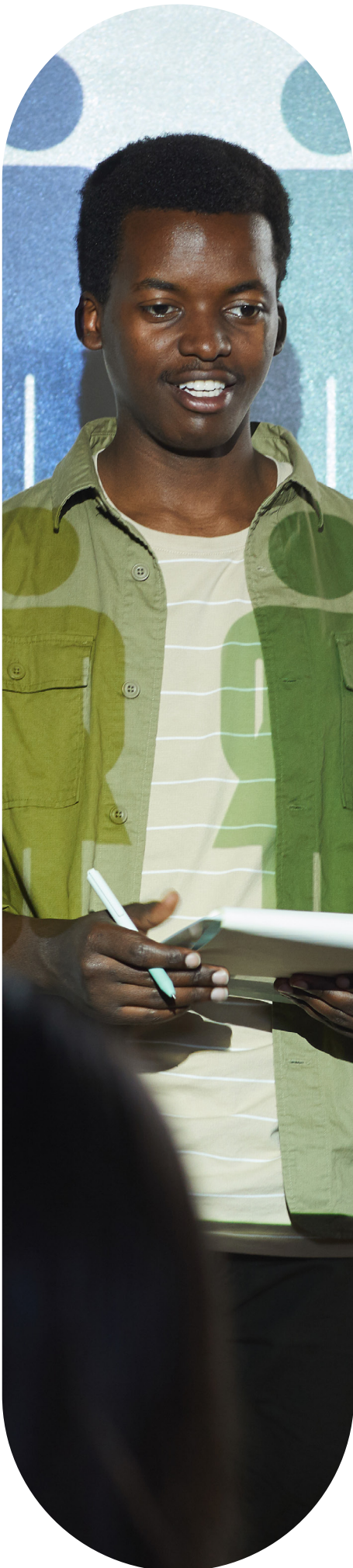
We know the importance of the link between housing and employment and have been working with Communities that Work since it was founded in 2010. As soon as I knew JobsPlus was happening I was determined that I'd be the one to lead the team on this exciting new venture. We needed to move fast and to get the team in place would need a delivery partner. Fortunately, I could 'phone a friend' and Career Connect came on board, bringing their expertise and experience in working with participants furthest from the labour market.

At the core of JobsPlus is our work to engage the local community around employment and skills. We're not here to just work with people who are out of work and help them with a CV and some interview skills, we're not pushing people into any job as quickly as possible or following the same training pathway with anyone that signs up. We're about working at their pace to get where they want to be.

JobsPlus has a saturation approach to engagement and with our small area of less than 400 homes we're able to go and knock on every door to introduce ourselves and build relationships with people across Bidston Rise (even if they don't sign up). This is helping to overcome one of the biggest barriers to our success. There is a mistrust of new people and agencies coming in and doing things 'to' the community.

 Sally Ross is the Jobs Plus Manager at Magenta Living. She has worked across Wirral to bring together partners and customers to deliver employment and skills activities for 15 years.

As an active member of Communities that Work, Sally was involved in the design of Jobs Plus and is excited to see the pilots taking shape.



Over the summer, as we settled into our new base, we've been making it clear that we're here to do things 'with' the community. We've worked alongside existing community activities to get our faces known by just being here and making the occasional cup of tea. Building on feedback from people we've spoken to already we'll be launching our informal drop in sessions with the chance for a chat with our team and key partners over a cuppa... which partner organisations we invite to those sessions will be developed with the people who come along.

To help embed JobsPlus in the community, our team is based in a community house that is also the home of the Core Project who engage across the community delivering kids' activities, bingo and a social supermarket (that offers reduced price food to the local community as part of a partnership to reduce food waste and help with the cost of living) to name a few.

Our co-location gives us access to intelligence and feedback from the volunteers who all live on the estate. There have been some teething problems – some of these community champions have been more accurately described as community antagonists. Initial comments as we moved in included that we're "wasting our time", that it's "not worth working if you have kids" and that "nobody round here wants a job". These views just highlight the scale of the challenge facing the team and prove we picked the right place to try something different. And we're already proving them wrong! During October we engaged with 30 people and had 10 sign up to further 1-2-1 support.

JobsPlus can work with anyone of working age regardless of their employment, health or benefit status. Our current participants range from 17 to 70 and even include a father and son. We knocked on their door after the son was referred to us and surprised his dad by saying that he could sign up too. They're both heading towards training that will help them achieve their career goals.

Engagement was slow to start with, but as more people are getting to know JobsPlus we've had more people sign up – we've got single mums, people with health conditions and young people taking their first steps into the world of work. With all of these participants the 'plus' part of JobsPlus is proving to be essential. We're helping with confidence, motivation, a driving licence or just giving them the time and space to talk through the biggest challenge facing them without judgement. Our participants are facing many challenges in their lives – these can be health related, childcare or a lack of qualifications, confidence and motivation. Any of these can be a distraction from looking for work. Our holistic person centred approach recognises this and the "plus" part of JobsPlus can offer support and signposting to help address these issues.

The participants we're working with are all engaging well and beginning to take those first steps towards employment. We're not looking at quick fixes but working with them to get the building blocks in place to help them find and sustain the job they want. We have people looking at functional skills courses, sector specific training & licences and self employment support. We've helped people think about what they want to do, changed mindsets from "I can't work, I'm on the sick" to "but I might be able to do something..." and have engaged people who aren't engaging with other services. This might take some time... but some things are worth waiting for!

THE CHALLENGES OF PREPARING PEOPLE FOR WORK – WHEN IT'S NOT ALWAYS CLEAR WHAT THAT WILL BE.



ERICA WATTS

Head of Employment, Skills and Inclusion
SNG (Sovereign Network Group)

 Erica.Watts@sng.org.uk

 www.sng.org.uk

 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/erica-watts-38530831/>

There are not many circumstances outside the registered social landlord sector where the person who manages, sold you or part-owns your home also offers support with budgeting, upskilling, CV building, job-seeking and career improvement.

But as Head of Employment and Skills for Sovereign Network Group (SNG), at least some of this support falls within my remit. SNG prides itself as an organisation on 'striving to provide quality, affordable homes in happy, successful places.'

And with 84,000 homes across the South and South-West of England, London and Hertfordshire, we have incredible reach and with that, incredible opportunities to invest for the long-term, creating great places to live, working with customers and partners to support them in realising their potential.

The employability team plays a huge part in supporting SNG to recognise and value the position it holds as a social landlord, homebuilder and community investment provider, as we do not just offer people bricks and mortar – in fact, as an employability professional in this role I have the chance to offer real opportunities to people, helping them to realise their full financial and career aspirations.

The privileged position of being with our residents on their life journey, means that we can also be there when they need us, whatever stage they might be at. In fact, sometimes people don't yet realise that they do need us until crisis is upon them and that is where the first of our challenges arrives.

TIMES ARE TOUGH ACROSS ENGLAND

There is no escaping the fact that financial circumstances in many homes across Britain remain difficult. In 2023, 13 per cent of households were considered fuel poor, but for those living in social housing this rose to nearly one in four homes going without heating during winter months due to rising costs¹.

Similarly, approximately 20 per cent of households faced food insecurity in 2023-24, but this rose to an estimated 45 per cent of those in receipt of Universal Credit².

Those who rent their home from a council or a housing association are still far more likely to be out of work, or in low paid and insecure employment. Furthermore, statistics show that even those who are in work are still struggling financially.

In 2022-23, 63% of children and working-age adults in poverty were living in families where at least one adult was working³.

Focusing on the traditional model of 'any job, better job, career' often isn't working, as many remain stuck with the 'any job' drain of long hours, low rates of pay and minimal opportunities, let alone having the chance to retrain, upskill or change career path.



Erica Watts was appointed Head of Employment and Skills at SNG (formerly Sovereign) in September 2020, with responsibility for the employment support, financial inclusion, digital inclusion and debt advice services for customers. She has worked within Community Investment related roles since 2007 with responsibility for a range of regional and national employment and skills service provisions and externally funded programmes including Love London Working.

Since her appointment, Sovereign's holistic provision to support customers, including comprehensive employment support services, has enabled over 7000 customers to access a range of support, sustain their tenancies and thrive. Integrating sustainable customer support into all of our key housing and neighbourhood functions has been core to our ambition of creating 'thriving communities, over generations' and enhances the ability for the organisation to be proactive, insight and data led. This means we are better able to anticipate the needs of our customers and communities and provide interventions that maximise impact both now and for the future.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2023/oct/29/fuel-poverty-in-uk-hit-one-in-four-in-social-housing-last-winter>

² <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/families-stuck-food-insecurity-are-buying-less-fruit-and-veg-uks-health-divide-widens#:~:text=The%20Food%20Foundation%20data%20shows,Credit%20reported%20experiencing%20food%20insecurity>

³ https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/money-and-resources/poverty/in-work-poverty-trends#:~:text=In%20work%20poverty%20trends%20*%2063%20of%20children,13%20in%202012/13%20and%209%20in%201996/97

At SNG we're taking a bold approach - providing a customer-centred triage to try and identify the needs of our residents as early as possible, so that we can act proactively when working with groups that we know are likely to need support, but are less likely to ask for it. If this sounds complicated, that's because it is. There is a distinct challenge in providing help without being paternalistic or overbearing, but this is why tracking information between departments - where relevant - means that we are aware when the first steps that are needed are in fact to support an immediate need, to help customers heat their homes, provide food or sometimes, both.

A FOOT IN THE METAPHORICAL DOOR

After that need has been met, this 'in' gives us an advantage in terms of building a meaningful relationship with our residents, using tools that other employment services can not and do not have at their disposal. Because we are able to take a longer-term view and support the whole household, taking the time needed to provide support for as long and often as is needed - we can add an additional coaching and empowerment focus.

Our driver is not profit or contract outcomes - or where we do have contracts they align to our values - so we can in fact ensure support is in place to help our residents gain skills and access work, but then also progress into better work thereafter.

We don't profess to have a perfect solution, but because we can offer support flexibly and, where appropriate remotely, which is free and supported with grants where required we are a welcome resource to many people, in a way that interactions that other providers of employment support are not able to offer. With this advantage in mind we have taken a diversified approach, working closely with those who progress into paid work to ensure that opportunities for progression and upskilling are available, especially where people aspire to change sector or career.

Our emphasis on in-work coaching for those in employment, teaching brokerage skills so that people feel comfortable reaching for higher paid positions and developing opportunities and access to professional, career jobs in growth industries are all part of the toolkit that we offer.

For industries like care, security, retail etc.... the hours combined with lack of progression can prevent people from accessing better work because they have neither the time nor the funds to retrain, but the partnerships that we are able to leverage due to our size and influence offer opportunities as yet to be imagined.

Employment support services, as with every industry, need to think more radically to create sustained change and long-term opportunities. This is why SNG are working in partnership with HACT on our 'Green Employment Pathway'. Running until September 2026, the project will enable residents, with a focus on those living in social housing (circa 6%) in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP), to access advice, guidance, vocational training, and sustainable work and career options within Green Skills and emerging green roles and organisations.

This two-year project will support residents across BCP through a cross-sector partnership. It focuses on how collaboration in the social housing sector and beyond can provide innovation and opportunity with a focus on green skills, training and jobs in local communities that simultaneously help reach the sector's Net Zero goals. The project will deliver employment support focused on green industries in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP), but we also want to use it as an opportunity to develop long-term, productive connections with employers in the area. Ideally, this pilot project will bridge the gap between the training and paid opportunities currently available, while improving all of our knowledge and understanding of what 'green' really means.

Currently, green jobs are well understood to be a growth area with a significant skills gap, but the term

is still vague. The UK government website defines green skills as "the knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in, develop and support a society which reduces the impact of human activity on the environment,"⁴ but several definitions focus on technical skills to support net zero targets. Still others are broader, encompassing enabling functions within green organisations or focusing on softer skills and abilities, such as engagement and consultation. Some definitions are practical, focused on retrofitting homes, and training for activities such as a heat pump and solar panel installation, and maintaining access to alternative power sources, all of which, of course, is also relevant to SNG on a wider level.

Although the lack of consistency in definition makes it challenging to accurately assess demand, requirements and skills gaps - it also brings an opportunity. As housebuilders, landlords, employers and community investment providers, I believe social landlords have a key role to play in supporting future job creation and ensuring that those positions and career paths are accessible both for those living in our communities and to those employed by SNG.

We want to use this project with BCP and associated industry partners as an opportunity to improve people's awareness of green skills, green career paths and the options available to them and, crucially, to provide the practical employability support that could make these dreams a reality.

Finally, we want to use this project as an opportunity for wider sector learning and to develop partnerships and routeways that can provide real opportunities for people in the future. If you are an organisation that would like to find out more, think you can support the outcomes of our programme or would just like to be part of the conversation, please get in touch!

⁴ <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/11/07/what-is-a-green-job-everything-you-need-to-know/>

GREENER HOMES KEY TO UNLOCKING THOUSANDS OF JOBS

13



Previous research found that decarbonising the North's homes could create up to 77,000 new good, green jobs.

TRACY HARRISON
Chief Executive
Northern Housing Consortium (NHC)

 <https://x.com/THarrisonNHC>

 <https://x.com/NHC>

 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/tracy-harrison-9239011b/>

 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/northern-housing-consortium/>

The Northern Housing Consortium's (NHC's) latest piece of research **'Warm Homes, Green Jobs: Meeting the Net Zero challenge in the North'**¹ looks at how devolution could bring together housing providers, businesses and skills providers to create jobs and training opportunities in the communities they serve. However, for this to be a reality, it must be underpinned by longer term government funding for greener homes. Tracy Harrison explains more:

One of the biggest challenges our members face is improving the energy efficiency of the North's social homes. As part of the UK's commitment to achieving net zero by 2050, decarbonising our homes – a source of almost a quarter of our carbon emissions – will play a key role. This will be more difficult in the North. With almost a quarter of homes built before 1919, homes are less energy efficient, on average, than across the rest of England.

To meet the government's target of all rented homes achieving EPC Band C by 2030, more than a quarter of a million homes, in both the social and private rented sectors, will need to be retrofitted each year across the North. This is before we turn to the much harder challenge of fully decarbonising all homes, as most properties will need upgrading to some degree.

While this will be challenging and expensive to deliver, the potential rewards are huge. In addition to reducing energy bills for residents, making homes warmer and tackling fuel poverty, it also has the potential to create thousands of jobs and bring significant economic benefits.

Over summer 2024, we interviewed 50 professionals to better understand what is needed to deliver net zero in our homes.

We wanted to find out how existing funding for retrofit was being used, how different providers are approaching their journey to Net Zero, and what they need from government to both deliver more energy efficiency upgrades and deliver on the economic and employment potential presented by retrofit. **Warm Homes, Green Jobs**², covers all this and more, exploring how reforms to funding and skills policy can help ensure that social housing retrofit can help create new jobs, including for people living in social housing.

One of our key findings was that there is widespread scepticism amongst housing providers about whether a workforce currently exists that could deliver the level of change we need to see. This is largely because existing funding for this work has been too short in length – usually through programmes of just a couple of years. To really drive change and support the

Tracy Harrison is Chief Executive at the Northern Housing Consortium (NHC). Over the summer the NHC undertook research 'Warm Homes, Green Jobs: Meeting the Net Zero challenge in the North' which identifies how the social housing sector can take the lead in delivering warmer, greener homes across the North – and unlock a new generation of green jobs. They interviewed 50 people from social landlords, local authorities, combined authorities, contractors and procurement professionals as part of a research project to better understand what is needed to deliver net zero in our homes.

The Northern Housing Consortium (NHC) is 'the voice of housing in the North'. Members include local authorities, housing associations and Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs), who manage 9 out of 10 socially rented homes in the north of England, as well as Mayoral Combined Authorities. Many members either run their own employability programmes or provide funding to programmes and partnerships looking to support residents into new employment opportunities, including those furthest from the labour market.

¹ <https://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/warm-homes-green-jobs/>

² <https://www.flipsnack.com/northernhousingconsortium/warm-homes-green-jobs-full-report:xf2mncrzp/full-view.html>

long-term expansion of operations and workforces, longer-term funding of five or ten years at least, is essential.

Short-term funding makes it almost impossible for housing providers to plan out their future investments in properties. Numerous housing providers told us that they wanted to begin planning their future workforce requirements and recruit new people to work in retrofit but were unable to do so until they had finalised a plan for their homes. Longer term funding would enable longer term planning. This would also help providers to expand their own employability programmes and recruit residents looking for work and apprenticeships.

The short-term nature of funding also means that the wider supply chain does not see a future pipeline of work long enough for them to deem it worthwhile to scale up their operations and take on new employees at scale. To increase the number of people working in this space, planned work needs to be at a scale great enough for it to become a no-brainer for companies to scale up and open new employment opportunities.

The scale needed to shift the dial and open up new employment opportunities can also be found when multiple housing providers work in partnership with one another locally. In the [Liverpool City Region](#)³, six of the region's largest housing providers are working in a consortia on an SHDF-funded retrofit programme. This has already created 91 jobs within housing providers' organisations and across the supply chain.

As devolution expands in the future, areas should have greater control over funding for retrofit. This will enable them to align funding with the needs of homes in their area, and to coordinate support to aid the creation of new jobs and employability support programmes to help bring new entrants into the workforce.

There is potential to link new job opportunities to social housing communities. This will bring new

people into the retrofit workforce by providing them with employability support and opportunities to learn new skills. Even though we are being held back from delivering on this agenda to the fullest, there are already some green shoots of good practice out there.

Partnerships like the [Housing Employment Network North East \(HENNE\)](#)⁴ and their 'Green Start' initiative show the way. HENNE is a collective of 12 affordable housing providers based in the North East, collectively managing over 195,000 homes. Their work helps to support tenants – especially those furthest from the labour market – to overcome barriers to employment, develop new skills and find job opportunities.

In 2021, they launched their New Start programme which provided 200 work placements for residents. Building on this success, HENNE's new Green Start initiative aims to support residents into new employment opportunities in low-carbon sectors, including retrofit, by offering paid placements with local employers, as well as pre-employment training and qualifications, guaranteed interviews and wider one-to-one employability support. The scheme has already received funding support from the North East Combined Authority, and will provide a minimum of 45 placements by March 2025.

Another example is from regeneration specialists RE:GEN Group and their [RE:GEN Academy](#)⁵. Their work – primarily in social housing communities, including delivering government funded retrofit schemes – began in the North East, but is now expanding across the North.

REGEN's Academy works with their sub-contractors, local community groups and social landlord employability teams, based in the communities where they are delivering work. It links individuals who are unemployed to specific vacancies in construction and retrofit.



³ <https://www.unlocknetzero.co.uk/insight/comment/safe-warm-homes-and-good-green-jobs>

⁴ <https://www.tynehousing.org.uk/henne/>

⁵ <https://regen-academy.co.uk/>

Academy learners are supported through qualifications, a skills bootcamp, bespoke employment support, a guaranteed interview for a role and further support to find alternative positions if necessary.

This means that people work on delivering energy efficiency improvements in their own community. Over the past 12 months, the Academy has supported 12 cohorts with a total of 121 learners. For two of these cohorts, 100% of learners progressed into secure employment. Fifteen Academy graduates are now in full time employment with RE:GEN, while 28 more are employed with supply chain partners.

Initiatives like this are making progress. But with longer term funding certainty, housing providers will be able to scale up this work so more people, in more communities, feel these benefits.

The experience and insights of social landlords working on schemes like the above could be used by Government to take forward this agenda. Unfortunately, this type of employability support has never really been seen as a key part of the skills landscape. With the establishment of Skills England, the government's new skills oversight body, there is the opportunity to correct this.

Skills England should view social landlords and their employability functions as key stakeholders to engage with and learn from, in addition to businesses, trade unions and training providers. This would allow the insights of social housing providers to inform the government's work to ensure the skills system meets the needs of the economy and that the government can fulfil its ambition to "create opportunity for all."

As we make progress towards net zero by 2050, the decarbonisation of social housing in the North presents an enormous opportunity to foster economic growth and create green jobs over the next 25 years, addressing the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty.

The task ahead is ambitious, but with the right long-term support, the social housing sector is well-placed to lead the way on this critical work for the benefit of its residents and communities.



THE CENTRE FOR EMPLOYABILITY EXCELLENCE

WHERE RESEARCH MEETS PRACTICE FOR OUTSTANDING OUTCOMES

CENTRE FOR EMPLOYABILITY EXCELLENCE

Our vision is to be at the forefront of the best research, policy, and practice, serving as a conduit between research findings, policy and exceptional employability provision.

We aim to link the work of academics and researchers, policy makers and employability services internationally, enabling them to make use of evidence-based research findings, program reviews and insights to drive the Quality Improvement agenda, empowering providers everywhere to deliver their employability services to the highest standards possible.

And through the IEP Learning Academy, we will utilise this resource of research and practice to develop practitioners and ensure the highest levels of excellence in service delivery.

If you want to stay informed, please contact CfEE@iemployability.org

ISSUE 14 SUMMER 2025



QUALITY IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK



Join the movement towards enhanced quality standards with the IEP Quality Improvement Framework.

This unique framework is not just another quality assurance mechanism. It's a comprehensive blueprint derived from independent research and evidence, tailored specifically to enhance employability services.

Looking to embed the QIF in your organisation? Need support and guidance? We're now offering bespoke services to help you ensure seamless integration and maximum impact.

Plus! You can now access the QIF through the Mesma platform.

Simply email: quality@iemployability.org to learn more and kickstart your journey towards excellence.

**INSTITUTE OF EMPLOYABILITY
PROFESSIONALS**

3rd Floor
86-90 Paul Street
London
EC2A 4NE



020 3974 2033



enquiries@iemployability.org



myiep.uk



@iepinfo



@iepinfo