



North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (North East MSA) North East Trailblazer on Supported Accommodation & Employment: The Opening Doors Project Research Report

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Want to hear more?

If you want to learn more about the research, please contact opening.doors@tynegroup.org.uk

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Executive summary

Each year more people are requiring supported accommodation. For people of working age, they may be in supported accommodation in times of transition or crisis (short/mid-term basis). Not mutually exclusive, people may be at risk of homelessness, at risk or fleeing domestic abuse, care leavers, prison leavers, refugees and asylum seekers, drug or alcohol dependent, or in recovery.

Supported accommodation combines housing with care, support, or supervision to enable independent living. The provision of paid support staff, essential to supported accommodation, leads to rent prices being high compared to general needs social housing or private rental accommodation. These high rates of rent are typically covered through Housing Benefit for people below the income threshold. When someone begins to work, they often face a ‘cliff edge,’ where they lose access to their Housing Benefit and become liable for covering the rent costs in supported accommodation. With the high rates of rent often exceeding income, many people end up in arrears. Unsurprisingly, this contributes to the high rates of unemployment and economic inactivity in supported accommodation and can also create additional barriers in accessing move on accommodation.

Building on previous work undertaken by the Housing Employment Network North East (HENNE)—a partnership of 12 social housing providers across the North East focused on supporting tenants and residents into and towards employment—Tyne Housing (a specialist supported housing provider and HENNE partner) brought together relevant housing providers through HENNE and engaged local authority and academic researchers to *explore barriers and enablers to employment for people living in supported accommodation in North East England, with a particular focus on systemic barriers*.

Design

Between January and March 2026, we set out to:

1. Understand existing evidence on employment interventions for people in supported accommodation
2. Map the scale, regionally, of people in supported accommodation who are affected by unemployment
3. Hear directly from those impacted about the barriers and enablers to employment

Key Findings: Understanding existing evidence on employment interventions for people in supported accommodation

From reviewing key reports and the existing evidence, we found limited UK evidence robustly evaluating employment interventions for people in supported accommodation. Of the evidence we did find, much of this was from the last five years—suggesting that employment is becoming a recognised priority. Successful employment interventions require tailoring to address the unique needs and requirements of people in supported accommodation. Success can be measured using employment, housing, or wider health outcomes.

Key Findings: Mapping the scale, regionally, of people in supported accommodation who are affected by unemployment

In attempting to map the scale in the region, we found less than 4% of people were employed—most which were part-time employment roles. However, existing routine data on this issue was extremely limited and presented several challenges. Employment status for people in supported accommodation is not routinely recorded among housing providers. There are major differences in data availability for commissioned and non-commissioned supported accommodation provision. Data on accessing employment support and sustaining employment are not routinely recorded or reported.

Key Findings: Hearing directly from those impacted about the barriers and enablers to employment

We heard from 76 people who are or were in supported accommodation, 33 staff, managers, and commissioners from across the region, and 14 current or potential employers about current barriers, perceived enablers, and existing interventions focussed on employability for people in supported accommodation. From this, we learned three main things:

1) Employment can feel both aspirational and out of reach for people in supported accommodation

Despite variation in perceptions on whether people felt it was achievable, employment was seen as a key factor for transitioning out of supported accommodation and housing instability. For people in supported accommodation, being unemployed was another way in which they fall behind in life.

2) Systemic barriers and multiple disadvantages are ongoing challenges hindering employment

Navigating employment while on benefits and paying high rent costs in supported accommodation feels like a tight rope of balancing financial risks with potential rewards. Transitioning out of supported accommodation feels out of reach when the current housing and cost of living crisis is exacerbated by low paid, unstable, or inconsistent work. Any employment support or opportunities need to recognise and be sensitive to the needs people in supported accommodation often face.

3) Employment is not simply measured by getting a job, rather for people in supported accommodation, it takes place on a non-linear continuum from building confidence to sustaining employment

Getting a job for anyone who has been economically inactive can be daunting. For people in supported accommodation, negative experiences have the potential to not only reduce the likelihood of future job seeking, but could have major financial implications. Progress occurs incrementally and non-linearly across the employment journey, rather than immediate movement into employment. Notable barriers and enablers exist across and at different stages in the journey. Although discrete intervention opportunities, participants in this study emphasised that, where possible, models or interventions inclusive of the entire journey should be prioritised.

Priority Areas for Future Initiatives to Enable Employment for People in Supported Accommodation

Based on the research findings, we have developed three key recommendations and suggest four opportunities for ‘test and learn’ interventions.

Recommendation 1: There needs to be consistent, robust and centralised reporting of employment and related outcomes for people in supported accommodation. Any investment in employment services or support needs to have clear processes for evaluating impact and outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Commissioners and charitable funders need to prioritise and invest in housing providers to deliver employability support and interventions for people in supported accommodation.

Recommendation 3: Employment support needs to be inclusive of the entire pathway, tailored and personalised, freely available and not end immediately upon starting a job.

‘Test and learn’ intervention 1: Development of a myth-busting resource and training package to increase knowledge and awareness about working while in supported accommodation.

‘Test and learn’ intervention 2: Ear-marked and dedicated funding to cover supported accommodation rent costs for people when they become employed and lose access to rent coverage through benefits—coupled with a pathway into appropriate, affordable move on accommodation

‘Test and learn’ intervention 3: Increased investment in ‘Move-On’ and affordable housing, including improving access to the private rented sector—coupled with low-level support during transition to independent living and employment.

‘Test and learn’ intervention 4: Revamping the existing benefit system at a national level to ensure employment does not lead to someone being worse off financially when they are in supported accommodation.

For additional information about the findings in this report, please contact openingdoors@tynegroup.org.uk

Introduction

This report presents findings from an independent research project carried out by researchers at Newcastle University (Fuse, Centre for Translational Research in Public Health) and the University of Sunderland (Institute for Economic and Social Inclusion) in partnership with specialist housing providers and wider practice partners. The research is central to the *Opening Doors Project*, which is seeking to understand barriers and enablers to employment for people in supported accommodation in the North East of England. The research and wider partnership was funded through the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority Economic Inactivity Trailblazer System Reform programme.

This report presents a brief introduction, before discussing the research undertaken between January and March of 2026. Much of the report focuses on the primary research undertaken with people in the North East, including people in supported accommodation, providers and employers. The report ends with actionable recommendations and considerations for future 'test and learn' interventions. Given the rapid and responsive nature of this work, this report provides a starting point for wider efforts to address barriers to employment for people in supported accommodation.

Why is it important to understand employment barriers for people in supported accommodation?

Supported accommodation is designed to combine housing with care, support, or supervision to enable independent living (MHCLG and DWP, 2024). For people of working age, they may be in supported accommodation due to disabilities or long-term health conditions (long-term basis) or while in times of transition or crisis (short/mid-term basis). When people are living in supported accommodation on a short/mid-term basis it is typically for less than two years although this is not prescriptive. People accessing supported accommodation on shorter-term basis might include people/families at risk of homelessness, people at risk or fleeing domestic abuse, care leavers, prison leavers, refugees and asylum seekers, and/or people with drug or alcohol dependence or in recovery. These groups are not mutually exclusive, and people will often also experience additional health and care needs. It is this group that is the focus of the research outlined in this report.

The Supported Housing Review 2023 demonstrated that the number of people in and needing supported accommodation is rising nationally (MHCLG and DWP, 2024)—with current provision leaving a substantial unmet need (91,100 additional units are needed for people of working age). However, the review noted that sustaining current provision and creating new provision of supported housing is not without significant challenges and barriers.

Due to the number of unique housing providers, there are several forms of commissioned (arranged, funded and overseen by public bodies via formal contract)

and un-commissioned (exempt accommodation without statutory oversight) supported accommodation (Kennedy, Barnes Formby et al, 2025). This leads to differences in costs for residents and differences in the types of housing available (e.g., hostels, refuges, supported living complexes, sheltered housing). Typical rent models in supported accommodation are inclusive of core rent, eligible and ineligible service charges. Core rent and eligible service charges for maintenance are covered through Housing Benefit, rather than a housing allowance through Universal Credit, due to the high costs compared to social housing or private rented accommodation. Rates of rent are higher in supported accommodation to reflect the provision of paid support staff—an essential feature of supported accommodation. Ineligible service charges are covered by individuals directly, often through universal credit, and reflect costs associated with daily life like meals, internet access, among others. However, this funding model becomes more complex when someone begins to work. When someone begins to earn money, there is a risk that they lose their housing benefit and become liable for the full cost of rent. This can lead to some people accruing arrears when they are unable to afford their rent. This implications of this presents real concerns for many people working in supported accommodation.

Unsurprisingly, there are high rates of economic inactivity among people in supported accommodation. Economic inactivity is defined by the Office for National Statistics (2026) as *“People not in employment who have not been seeking work within the last 4 weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next 2 weeks.”* The systemic financial disincentives to entering work result in employment feeling unrealistic for many people in supported accommodation. With current political contexts prioritising economic growth, additional evidence is needed to understand the unique challenges and barriers faced by people in supported accommodation. This is particularly pertinent given the projected increases in people in supported accommodation.

North East Economic Inactivity Trailblazer Programme

The January 2026 labour market statistics showed the highest rate of economic inactivity in the North East region since 2013 at 26.5% (North East Mayoral Strategic Authority, 2026). Poor health and sickness are major drivers in the region for economic inactivity. In response to this the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (North East MSA) has been working collaboratively with the North East North Cumbria Integrated Care Board and Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) to support those who are economically inactive due to ill health return to work. There are a multitude of efforts underway, which all fall under the North East Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme. Recognising that people in supported accommodation face additional risks particularly in early stages of transitioning from benefits, when income is secure and housing costs remain high, North East MSA commissioned a responsive research project to better understand the unique needs of people in supported accommodation in the North East.

The Opening Doors Project Partnership

Building on previous work undertaken by the Housing Employment Network North East (HENNE)—a partnership of 12 social housing providers across the North East focused on supporting tenants and residents into and towards employment—Tyne Housing (a specialist supported housing provider and HENNE partner) brought together relevant housing providers through HENNE and engaged local authority and academic researchers to respond to the commissioned research call. This partnership, hereafter referred to as the *Opening Doors Project Partnership*, comprised a core group of delivery partners and wider strategic links. The core work was undertaken by a cross-sector team of delivery partners, which are presented in Figure 1. More specific details on the design and approach for the research are outlined in the subsequent section. The short timeframes for the work led to a responsive, pragmatic, and action-oriented approach to the research. Practice delivery partners supported with identifying and sharing existing data sources and connecting the academic researchers with key stakeholders (people in supported accommodation, providers, commissioners). Researchers from Newcastle University and the University of Sunderland collaborated as joint leads for the research delivery, which is the focus of this report.

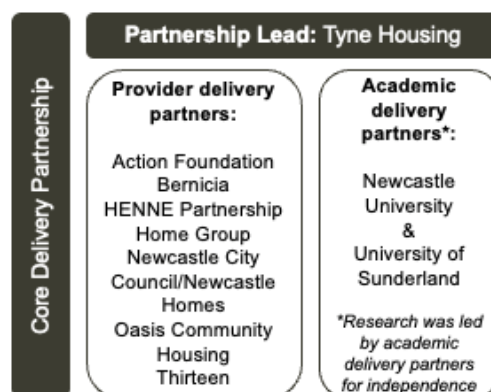


Figure 1. Opening Doors Project Core Delivery Partnership

What did we seek to learn from the research?

The research took place over three months beginning January until the end of March 2026. The research set out to explore barriers and enablers to employment for people living in supported accommodation in North East England, with a particular focus on systemic barriers. To address the overall aim of this research, action and pragmatic research approaches were leveraged.

There were three main components of the research:

1. Understanding existing evidence on employment interventions for people in supported accommodation
2. Mapping the scale, regionally, of people in supported accommodation who are affected by unemployment
3. Hearing directly from those impacted about the barriers and enablers to employment

This has been visualised with an overview of the approaches in Figure 2. This report presents a synopsis of the findings from each of these components, with primacy given to the findings from the third component (primary qualitative study). The final section of this report integrates the learning from across all three research components and suggests areas for future initiatives.

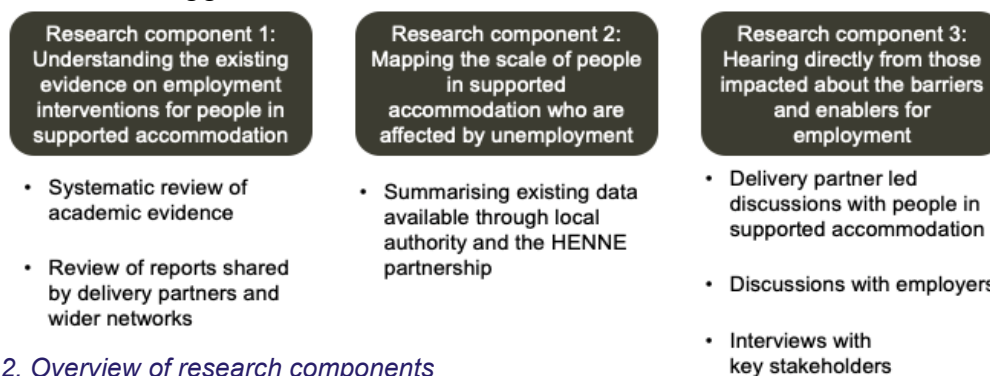


Figure 2. Overview of research components

Understanding the existing evidence on employment interventions for people in supported accommodation (research component 1)

To understand existing best practices, we set out to explore the existing evidence. As part of this we undertook a systematic review of published academic evidence for employment interventions implemented for people in supported accommodation in the UK. These are studies reporting on trials or intervention studies evaluating employment interventions. Additionally, we reviewed reports or resources shared by Opening Doors Project Partnership members.

For the systematic review, we searched five databases, Medline, Web of Science, Scopus, ASSIA, and IBSS, using a search strategy integrating key terms for people experiencing homelessness, employment interventions, and the United Kingdom. Further detail about the methodology and approach is available from the research team upon request. EndNote, a reference management software, was used for organising and deduplicating results prior to title and abstract screening in Rayyan, an online screening tool. After deduplication, 4135 results were screened using titles and abstracts. Studies were screened using the following inclusion criteria:

Stage 1 screening:

- Region: Any studies from the England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland
- Population: People in supported accommodation
- Intervention: Any intervention aimed at getting a person into employment (this could be vocational, skills training, or employability placements)
- Design: Any

Stage 2 screening - all of stage 1 screening criteria, with the addition of:

- Clear identification and differentiation of people in supported accommodation
- Reporting some form of outcomes

Twelve studies were double screened at full text—all of which were excluded. Six studies were excluded due to not meeting the intervention criteria, most not having

an actual intervention implemented or focusing on funding models rather than the intervention. Five were excluded due to not meeting the population criteria, either not explicitly people in supported accommodation or the results of those in supported accommodation could not be disentangled from the main findings. One study was excluded as it did not contain UK data—although this was a systematic review, which is highlighted below in Box 1.

What did the existing evidence tell us about employment interventions for people in supported accommodation?

No studies were identified as eligible for inclusion, highlighting the dearth of peer-reviewed published studies reporting on evaluations or trials of employment interventions specifically for people in supported accommodation in the UK. However, this does not necessarily mean that employment interventions do not happen in supported accommodation. In our searching we identified a systematic review exploring effectiveness of employment-based interventions for people experiencing homelessness (Marshall, Boland, Westover et al, 2022). Although this was not specific to people in supported accommodation, the findings of this systematic review are likely to be broadly applicable in this context. This previously published review did not identify any evidence from the UK, which is in keeping with our review findings, and suggested any evaluations of employment interventions for people experiencing homelessness could be in their early stages. Box 1 highlights key findings from this review, with a note of the relevance of the findings for the North East and people in supported accommodation.

Box 1. Key findings from Marshall et al's (2022) systematic review on effectiveness of employment interventions for persons experiencing homelessness

Sixteen studies were identified, mainly from North America, from which:

There were three main categories for employment interventions:

1. Combined substance use and vocational skills interventions,
2. Supported employment, and
3. Integrated supports including an employment component.

Five key outcomes were used to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions:

- Employment
- Housing tenure
- Mental well-being
- Community integration
- Substance use

The mixed evidence on effectiveness of interventions suggests that any future employment interventions for people experiencing homelessness either require adaptation or novel approaches to enable impact.

Relevance for this research: Any future employment intervention should consider an appropriate and meaningful measure for employment. Additionally with the prohibitive housing cost challenges for people in supported accommodation, housing outcomes should take this into consideration.

In addition to the systematic review, reports shared by Opening Doors Project Partnership members were reviewed. All the reports were from the last five years, suggesting that employment for people in supported accommodation is becoming a recognised priority. Reports ranged from exploratory studies to ‘test and learn’ pilots. Two reports explored employment for young people in supported accommodation (YMCA England & Wales, 2023; Padley et al, 2023)—both highlighted the financial disincentive for working while in supported accommodation. One of the reports highlighted that mental health is often a major barrier and challenge for young people considering employment (YMCA England & Wales, 2023). Box 2 presents an overview of key learnings from reports on interventions. Although all reports focused on young people, many of the learnings will be relevant for the wider population of people living in supported accommodation. All of these reports acknowledge a requirement for sustainable, financial investment to enable successful interventions. While undertaking this research, we identified a recently funded National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) study seeking to assess the impact of supported employment initiatives for people who experience complex barriers to employment (NIHR, 2026). This research will likely have learnings that will be pertinent for people in supported accommodation.

Box 2. Overview of learning from reports evaluating potential interventions to reduce barriers to employment for young people in supported accommodation

Report 1: Breaking Barriers to Work: Return on Investment (YMCA England and Wales, 2023)

This report calculated the potential return on investment for two national reforms:

- 1) Reform 1: Raising the standard allowance for under 25 years of age in supported housing to the same as those over 25 years of age
 - 2) Reform 2: Introducing the work allowance for people in supported accommodation
- Implementing both reforms would cost £110 million per year, but could save up to £11 in tax receipt per £1 in spending.

Report 2: Thomas Parsons Charity and CHS Group Annual Report (2025)

This brief report presents the costs associated with providing an internally funded rent top up for young people moving into work while in supported accommodation. Given the funding nature for the rent top up, there were notable concerns around longer-term sustainability.

Report 3: The Benefits of Youth Report (Raisbeck, 2026)

This report presents findings from a twelve-month scheme, Rent Simplification Proof of Concept, devised by DWP in partnership with West Midlands Mayoral Strategic Authority to test financial support and simplification of the benefits system for young people living in commissioned supported housing who transition into work. £4.57 million was allocated towards the scheme.

Young people who transitioned into employment were only responsible for 13% of their total rent, with the remaining 87% being topped up through the scheme paid directly from local authority to housing providers. The scheme covered costs for a total of six months, although this did not need to be a continuous time period.

Mapping the scale of people in supported accommodation who are affected by unemployment (research component 2)

To better understand the scale of economic inactivity for people in supported accommodation in the region, summary level anonymised data from key Opening Doors Project partners was sought to answer three main questions:

- 1) Number of people in supported accommodation,
- 2) Number of people currently unemployed/employed in supported accommodation,
- 3) Number of people currently receiving employability support in supported accommodation

Requests were sent to a select number of local authorities in the North East and the Housing Employment Network North East (HENNE) partners based on involvement in regional housing networks.

What did we learn from existing data about the scale of the problem?

In attempting to map the scale of the issue, it became apparent that comprehensive and robust data for these questions was not easily available, suggesting that future efforts should involve plans for streamlined capturing of employment for people in supported accommodation and linking this with receipt of employment intervention. There were three main challenges to documenting the scale of this issue:

1. Employment status is not routinely recorded for people in supported accommodation at housing provider level.
2. There is division in data availability for commissioned and un-commissioned supported accommodation beds.
3. Data on employment support or sustaining employment while in supported accommodation is not collected within local authority commissioned provision data systems.

Given these challenges we were unable to truly estimate the scale of the problem. However, across HENNE we estimated a minimum of 8000 commissioned and un-commissioned supported accommodation beds across the region. This was based on figures directly shared by HENNE partners and reflective of reported supported accommodation beds from each partner. Data from local authorities on number of people in supported accommodation suggests that most people are in non-commissioned services. Box 3 presents figures from Newcastle City Council.

Box 3. A deeper dive into the scale of the issue in Newcastle upon Tyne (March 2026)

1701 people currently living in supported accommodation (based on housing benefit data). No further data related to employment is available for non-commissioned support.

For the 752 beds commissioned by Newcastle City Council, Gateway provides data on key outcomes—although clear limitations. 24 people were identified as in work; most in part-time work (16 people). A further 51 people are actively seeking work.

Hearing directly from those impacted about the barriers and enablers to employment (including interventions) (research component 3)

The largest component of the research aimed to capture direct experience with employment barriers and enablers for people in supported accommodation. Perspectives were sought from three main groups: 1) people in supported accommodation, 2) providers of supported accommodation and/or employment interventions, and 3) employers. Participants were recruited through the Opening Doors Project Partnership and wider networks, with a degree of purposiveness to capture differing perspectives; however, given the short-time frames, convenience sampling was used.

A pragmatic approach was taken to data collection, with interviews being undertaken by the research team with key providers and practice delivery partners in the region hosting either one-to-one or workshop discussions with people in supported accommodation and employers. Ethics was obtained through Newcastle University on January 24, 2026 (ref: 70628/2023) and consent was obtained from every person who took part. Participants were asked for demographic details, but this was optional.

All discussions followed three broad areas of inquiry: general thoughts and feelings towards employment for people in supported accommodation, barriers and enablers for employment, and areas for ongoing or future intervention. All interviews with providers were audio recorded and conducted either in-person or online. For discussions led by practice delivery partners with people in supported accommodation and employers, research team members, where appropriate, attended and recorded sessions. Where sessions could not be recorded, notes were captured by the practice delivery partner and shared with the research team. Interview transcripts and notes were analysed using CLIP-Q (Horwood et al, 2022), which involved collaborative, team-based, pragmatic inductive and deductive coding.

Over the three months of the study, we heard from:

- 76 people who are or were in supported accommodation,
- 33 staff, managers, and commissioners from across the region
- 14 current and potential employers from local authority run initiatives

For people in supported accommodation, this included the voices of people aged 16 to 69, with a range of characteristics including British nationality (n=24), refugee or seeking asylum (n=18), young person (n=18), female (n=16), and care leavers (n=6). People could have belonged to more than one category, and were not required to report all of their demographics. Staff, managers, and commissioners were recruited from charities, housing providers, local authorities, government and ranged in level of experience and age. For employers, these involved staff from organisations who have worked with the local council to offer placements as part of employment initiatives.

Across these different groups, conversations focused on three broad areas:

- 1) General perceptions about employment
- 2) The role of systemic barriers and multiple disadvantages
- 3) Employment as a non-linear pathway or journey

Across these three areas, there were positive and negative experiences, as well as perceived and actual barriers and enablers.

What did we learn from speaking directly with people in the region?

Employment can feel both aspirational and out of reach for people in supported accommodation

The diverse nature of supported accommodation populations and differing need requirements leads to differing perspectives regarding employment. Variation in complexity of health and social care needs often leads to people in supported accommodation being at different levels of employment readiness. While some people in supported accommodation feel far removed from the possibility of employment and expressed difficulties in considering it as an option, others expressed a genuine interest and readiness to work but were often hindered by specific barriers. Therefore, challenges and barriers vary, depending on their work readiness and where they are on the employment journey.

When we asked individuals about how they feel about employment, they stated both positive and negative emotions. This is highlighted in Figure 3 where a selection of quotations are presented from people in supported accommodation.

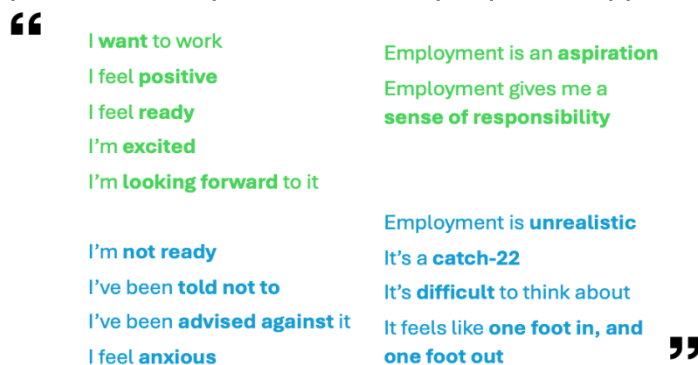


Figure 3 Quotations capturing feelings towards employment expressed by people in supported accommodation

It is important to note that, despite this variation, there was recognition that employment was a key factor for transitioning out of supported accommodation and housing instability. For people in supported accommodation, being unable to be employed was another way in which they fall behind in life. This was particularly concerning for younger people, who likely already were behind people of similar ages due to gaps in education, life skills, and work experience.

Systemic barriers and multiple disadvantages are ongoing challenges hindering employment

The employment journeys of people in supported accommodation are fundamentally shaped by a series of systemic barriers and multiple disadvantages. This illustrates that economic inactivity is not just about individual motivation and skills, but also the impact of external systems and processes. Across the conversations reflecting these challenges, experiences and thoughts were reflected by three broad themes.

Theme 1: Navigating employment while on benefits and paying high rent costs feels like a tight rope of balancing financial risks with potential rewards

One of the most universal barriers to employment discussed was the high cost of rent in supported accommodation and the complex interaction between benefits and employment.

If a resident in supported accommodation finds employment and works over a certain number of hours, Universal Credit and Housing Benefit allowances are reduced, without consideration for the high rental rates. This means a person in supported accommodations becomes liable – at least in part - for paying the difference in rental rates in supported accommodation, even if this amount is more than they are earning. This creates a financial ‘cliff edge’, where people in supported accommodation are responsible for unaffordable high rents, putting them at risk of rent arrears, debt and general vulnerability. This financial risk makes work seem unrealistic, and many people in supported accommodation do not consider employment as an option while living in supported accommodation. Many participants described this situation as a ‘trap’, where they were unable to transition into independent living and move on with their lives due to the financial disincentives.

“I would very much like to be in full-time work...However, when you’re in supported accommodation and reliant on the system, such as Housing Benefit, Universal Credit, you do become somewhat trapped If I was to go out and get a full-time job, really I would need to be in my own tenancy with my own property, whereby that full-time job’s wage could cover the rent and the bills for that place, which obviously can’t happen with where I’m at now.” – Male in supported accommodation

“...they [housing support worker] mentioned that I maybe wouldn’t be able to work at Amazon because I was in supported accommodation. If I had a job, it would have been £1000 [in rent] for one bedroom a month’ – Male in supported accommodation with refugee or asylum-seeking experience

Various individuals reported that employment services or housing support workers advised them against taking work. This is likely due to concerns, among employment services or housing support workers, of financial risks, potential of poor quality and unpredictable work, and wider concerns around wellbeing, resilience, and access to resources.

“I wanted to work but was advised against it due to rents being too high and I didn't want to work for nothing. I was annoyed that I couldn't work, felt stuck and unable to move forward. I even considered cash in hand jobs to be working that wouldn't affect my benefits and accommodation.” – Care leaver in supported accommodation

“... I went to my appointment at the job centre the other day and she was like... ‘Oh, so you're in supported accommodation?’ And then she just said immediately, ‘Oh, so you can't work, then.’ Like, that is just final, ‘You're in supported accommodation, you can't work.’ And, yeah, that is the case because the system doesn't actually allow us to, really.” – Male in supported accommodation

People in supported accommodation and providers frequently noted that for ‘real’ change to occur, system and benefit reform were necessary. To avoid the financial ‘cliff edge’ of sudden benefit tapering and to support people’s transition into employment and independent living, it was suggested that individuals should continue to receive benefits while in initial periods of employment. This would allow people to earn more before benefits were tapered, enabling people to pay their rent, which would assist their move into independent living and accommodation. Fundamentally, this would reduce financial risks related to employment and incentivise people into work. Various participants discussed how continued benefits could assist in the transitional period to independent living:

“... the government should give you a two-year gap where they should still be paying your Housing Benefit, they should still be giving you that extra help, and then you should be able to work... and then save up and get a bond on a property or something like that, because it would help.” - Male in supported accommodation

“... you gain employment, but like for the first six months to the year or whatever, like it doesn't necessarily impact your housing benefit part. If you have benefits and then once you're established, then you look at reducing it and now you're a bit more established in your role...you've now got enough about you to maybe take on starting to manage your own tenancy as well. But I think when you rip all of the support away from someone, day one of them starting to get a job, like that, that makes it almost impossible to succeed.” - Key stakeholder

A system-level initiative is needed so that living in supported accommodation does not disincentivise people on benefits from becoming employed.

Theme 2: Transitioning out of supported accommodation feels out of reach when the current housing and cost of living crisis is exacerbated by low paid, unstable, or inconsistent work

Evident in the research was the significant role of wider societal systems/structures, which compound barriers to employment and independent living. Major issues

include the housing crisis and cost of living, alongside low-paid employment. Access to affordable mainstream housing is key to making employment a viable and sustainable option for people in supported accommodation. However, there are various difficulties in accessing housing, such as long waiting lists for social housing, high rents in the private rental sector, and housing access constraints linked to personal histories of offending or levels of arrears (rental debt). Moreover, the high cost of living and the prevalence of insecure and low paid work, mean that, for some, employment is not seen as something that will significantly improve living standards.

“You’ve got all of those people who are, kind of, ready, willing, able, but they just can’t, and they’re not able to then get moved on to more affordable accommodation, because there’s not enough housing stock, to be bidding for a council property can take years, and that’s somebody who doesn’t have as many personal barriers, that’s someone who’s kind of ready to go, it can still take that long.” – Housing and employment provider

‘All participants shared that low pay compared to the cost of living is a barrier to employment. Person A asked why he should work full time to be just as badly off for money and others agreed’. – Notes captured by delivery partner from workshop with people in supported accommodation

Financial viability of working, particularly low-paid jobs, is unrealistic for most people in supported accommodation without clear processes for transitioning out of supported accommodation into safe and affordable accommodation. In response to this, some of the housing providers in the region have delivered Move-On properties. Move-on properties and support aim to address the shortfall in financial and personal support during the transition from supported accommodation to independent living. Move-on properties are let at a more affordable rent level, allowing for a more viable transition into mainstream accommodation. In addition, continued personal support is integrated into the offer, assisting individuals to find and sustain employment and develop general life skills.

“like, supported housing, it’s not built for people to work, it’s for people to recover. So the solution’s going to have to be the move-on thing, where if people still need support, what’s the solutions for that? But it has to be some sort of semi-individual living arrangements...” – Male in supported accommodation

A case study reflecting ‘Move-On’ properties from across the region is presented in Box 4.

Box 4. Move-On properties: Early success with room for growth

Opening Doors Delivery Partners, Tyne Housing and Home Group, having marked success rolling out their own move-on properties. These initiatives offer a more financially viable transition out of supported accommodation, providing 'move on' properties at affordable rent levels. Crucially, in addition to the affordable housing, both initiatives provided continued support for people in supported accommodation.

“The ‘Move-on programme’ aim[ed] to help those who are currently living in emergency or supported accommodation move forward to independent living. The programme [was] possible thanks to a partnership with Homes England who [funded] the purchase of twelve properties that [could] be let at affordable rent levels as well as the funds to employ a full-time employability coach who works alongside the residents and the wider community.” – Tyne Housing Website, 2026

Despite good examples of move-on initiatives, the need for a much larger rollout was articulated by people in supported accommodation and housing providers. Many individuals remain in supported accommodation because of a shortage of affordable mainstream housing, preventing the transition to independent living. Given the needs of many people in supported accommodation, ongoing support as part of move-on interventions is crucially important for sustaining one's independence and job success. The personalised support of move-on interventions is crucial for building independence and avoiding the cycle of episodic unemployment and homelessness.

“I do think there needs to have more move-on properties, because it doesn't seem to have a lot. Because you've got a lot of people who are waiting to get move-on properties, but, like, there's none there, or not as many there. And you've got, like, 10 people going for one property” - Male in supported accommodation

“Yeah, that is a big thing, having stock. I mean, that is just an absolute nightmare. So you maybe aren't moving people on when they need to be moved on because you just haven't got the stock to move them” - Key Stakeholder

Theme 3: Any employment support or opportunities need to recognise and be sensitive to the unique needs people in supported accommodation often face. Many of the people in supported accommodation have additional support requirements or needs related to their substance use, trauma, poverty, mental and physical health problems, criminal records, language barriers and learning difficulties. These issues can overlap and compound, creating severe barriers to employment and limiting progress along the employment journey. This is often where support staff provision, as part of supported accommodation, plays a key role in enabling people to manage these issues. For many people in supported accommodation, this means progress towards employment occurs incrementally and non-linearly, often beginning with improvements in wellbeing, stability, confidence and engagement rather than immediate movement into paid employment.

“I suppose maybe mental health [barrier to employment]. And you need to try and find yourself again coming into a hostel, supported housing. You have to address those issues first.” - Female in supported accommodation

“I was going to say, for me, some of the barriers have been, through no fault of my own, falling in with the wrong crowd and doing time in prison and mental health going downhill and people won’t touch you.” - Male in supported accommodation

“I’d also say that actually we find that if we’re supporting women who kind of been in sort of an abusive relationship and things, then often the barriers are very sort of finance related because they’ll have, they’ll have had sort of their money controlled or they might not actually even have bank accounts....” - Housing and employment provider

Although addressing concerns linked to health and care needs is often a starting point for many people in supported accommodation for considering employment, it is important to recognise that these issues do not go away and housing support workers can help with this. This can pose challenges for people if they become employed and are at businesses that do not have infrastructure in place to acknowledge this.

Employment is not simply measured by getting a job, rather for people in supported accommodation, it takes place on a non-linear continuum from building confidence to sustaining employment

There is increasing recognition that securing a job is not the only way to measure changes towards economic activity. Progress occurs incrementally and non-linearly across the employment journey, often beginning with improvements in wellbeing, stability, confidence and engagement, alongside gaining skills and applying for jobs, rather than immediate movement into paid employment. Various types of outcomes, including soft outcomes, can illustrate measurable success in the employment journey.

Getting a job for anyone who has been economically inactive can be daunting, but for people in supported accommodation, negative experiences have the potential to not only reduce the likelihood of future job seeking, but could have major financial implications. With this in mind, we have visually presented the employment pathway, with barriers and enablers, below in Figure 4. It is important to note that journeys towards employment are not linear.

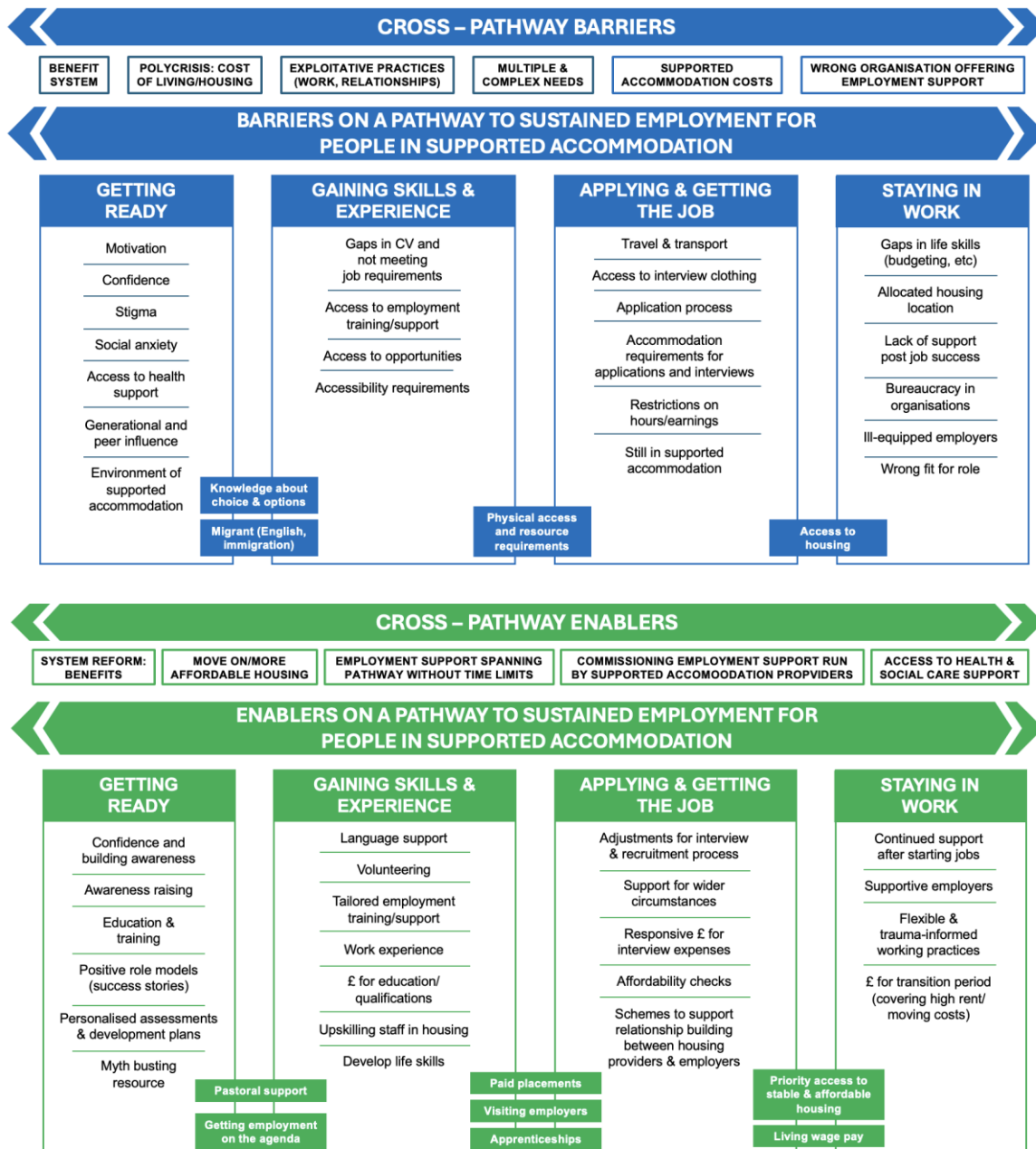


Figure 4 Barriers and enablers on a pathway to sustained employment for people in supported accommodation

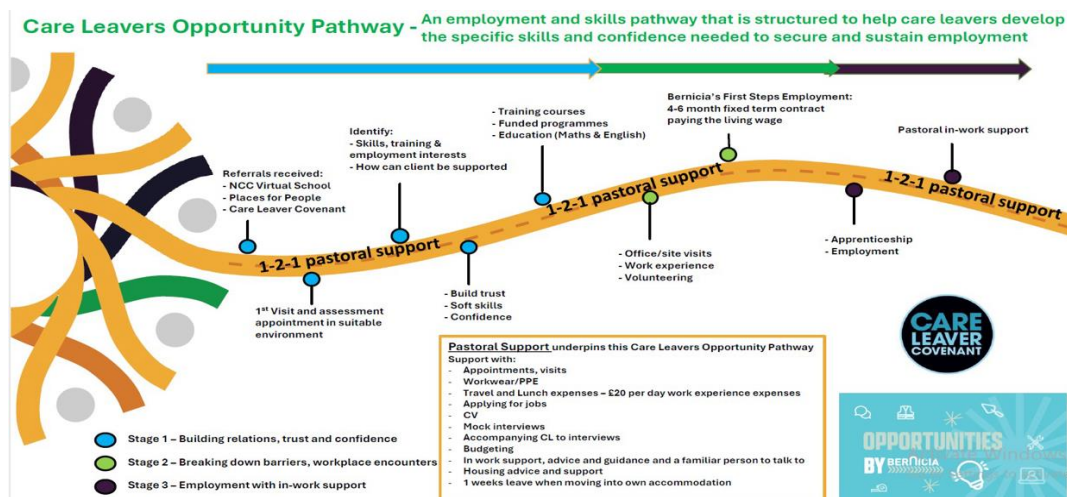
Cross-Pathway Employment Interventions

In the following sections, we will highlight some of the challenges people in supported accommodation face at different points in their employment journey. Due to the variation in people in supported accommodation, it is important to note these are not exhaustive and a person could experience other challenges. Although some areas of the pathway lend themselves better to discrete intervention opportunities, participants in this study emphasised that, where possible, models or interventions inclusive of the entire pathway should be prioritised. Within the region, we identified specialist housing providers which have had early success in implementing employment support spanning the entire pathway. Although there is variation

between the models, there are some key shared learning. Ongoing wrap-around support provided by people, such as housing providers, who have had the time and opportunity to build a trust-based relationship is key. Successful employment journeys begin with initial conversations and confidence building. This is crucial for building rapport with people and developing personalised support plans inclusive of neurodiversity, mental health, and wider needs to enable people to achieve their employment goals. Box 5 showcases the models developed by Bernicia and Thirteen.

Box 5. A deeper dive into existing employment pathway models

Bernicia provides supported accommodation within the North East. As part of their efforts to support care leavers to succeed, they have developed the *Care Leavers Opportunity Pathway* (seen in the below image). Through one-on-one pastoral support they have been enabling care leavers to build relationships, trust, and confidence, break down barriers to employment, and sustain meaningful employment. With buy-in from the CEO, they have been able to develop a comprehensive employment programme with funded skills and training development, living wage placements and in-work support. To learn more you can contact, employabilityteam@bernicia.com.



As part of the Tees Valley Move Forward Scheme, **Thirteen** have delivered the New Start & Green Start Programme as part of their wider employment offer. The success of funded work placements can be seen through increased confidence and work-readiness and many people moving into permanent employment. These programmes have meant that people who normally would be overlooked through normal employment recruitment practices are getting into sustained employment. Through integrating employment support into their wider role as a housing provider, Thirteen have developed proactive, targeted, and tailored support for employment, which leverage the trusted relationships they have built.

Getting ready: Building confidence and addressing misconceptions about employment

The initial phase in the employment journey begins when people start to think about work and consider it as an option. For people in supported accommodation, employment is often not seen as a viable option due to individual barriers and perceptions within the wider community in which they reside. As seen in Figure 4, there are several barriers and enablers at this stage. Many people in supported accommodation reported that personal challenges—including low confidence, health problems, stigma, and peer influence—can prevent engagement with the employment journey. Uncertainty about how work affects benefits and supported accommodation was also common. Table 1 highlights some of these barriers, which require addressing before people can start their employment journey. Although these barriers are pertinent hurdles at the beginning of the employment journey, they may resurface as challenges anywhere along the pathway.

Table 1. Key barriers at the initial stage of employment journeys with suggested interventions

| Key Barriers | Description | Intervention |
|---|---|---|
| Motivation | Low motivation, often linked to mental and physical health challenges, impacts one’s desire and ability to start the employment journey. | Confidence-building activities, which leverage trust-based relationships |
| Confidence | Many people in supported accommodation suffer from low confidence and low self-esteem, especially in relation to finding, applying for and sustaining work. | Confidence-building activities, which leverage trust-based relationships |
| Stigma | Negative stigma related to various issues, such as economic inactivity, mental health, criminal records and living in supported accommodation, harms self-esteem and reinforces disengagement from the employment journey. | Confidence-building activities, which leverage trust-based relationships Personalised assessment & development plans |
| Social anxiety | Mental health issues, such as social anxiety, make it very daunting and uncomfortable to consider work and start the employment journey. | Confidence-building activities, which leverage trust-based relationships Personalised assessment & development plans |
| General and peer influence | Some people in supported accommodation come from families and peer-groups that have experienced multiple generations of poverty and unemployment. This can shape behaviours and priorities that, alongside motivation and confidence, limit progress on the employment journey. | Confidence-building activities, which leverage trust-based relationships Awareness raising and myth-busting |
| Environment of supported accommodation | Living in a supported accommodation environment, where many people are unemployed, can result in a lack of | Awareness raising and myth-busting |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | positive peer role models, leading to low self-esteem and a belief that work is not possible. | |
|--|---|--|

With this stage often marking the beginning of employment journeys, being able to measure gradual success, whether through hard or soft outcomes, is particularly important for ensuring people in supported accommodation feel they are progressing. Efforts or interventions should focus on developing emotional capabilities, such as confidence, self-esteem, and determination, and developing positive attitudes and aspirations to education, work and the future. Additionally, there is a need for awareness raising, assisting people to understand their rights and how work affects benefits and supported accommodation. This will require involvement from housing services and the wider sector.

“So we kind of look at them as small wins, about getting people to attend, like, an activity, and it’s totally unaccredited, it’s just more of a social thing, but it helps to build up their confidence, and then they might think, “Well, actually, now I’ve done that, I’d quite like to go to do some volunteering,” and then it’s really, kind of, small steps with people, but all of that, I would say, counts as, like, the employment journey.”— Housing and employment provider

Although there were several examples of actual or suggested interventions for this stage, our findings suggest the following as two key areas for intervention:

Confidence building activities, which leverage trust-based relationships: At this stage, one of the most effective enablers is confidence-building activities run by organisations who people in supported accommodation trust. Examples of existing activities, run by housing providers, include social meetups, men’s mental health groups, women’s groups, wood and kitchen workshops, sports activities and volunteering opportunities. Getting people in supported accommodation to regularly participate in these types of activities is a vital first step in the employment journey. It fosters essential soft skills—including self-esteem, social skills, and routine—that are critical for helping individuals view employment not just as a possibility, but as a goal they are capable of achieving.

Myth-busting paired with raising awareness and training for providers: Awareness-raising and myth-busting are vital for dismantling the ‘benefit trap’-the fear that work will lead to a loss of financial stability and housing security—by providing accurate and accessible information about work allowances and earnings. Raising awareness ensures that work is seen as a viable opportunity for growth, rather than a gamble that threatens their well-being and security. Having a simple set of resources, easily deployed to non-benefit specialist staff and intelligible to people in supported accommodation themselves will be immensely empowering. Although it is important that any reference is mindful of the different circumstances of benefits, such as Universal Credit, Job Seekers allowance, among others. Without accurate

information about available options, people in supported accommodation become susceptible to exploitative working practices. A care leaver explained:

“I wanted to work but was advised against it due to rents being too high and I didn't want to work for nothing. I was annoyed that I couldn't work, felt stuck and unable to move forward. I even considered cash in hand jobs to be working that wouldn't affect my benefits and accommodation.” – Care leaver in supported accommodation

To address barriers early on in employment the South Yorkshire Housing Association has developed resources for housing staff, providers, and people in supported accommodation. Box 6 showcases some of the learnings.

Box 6. A deeper dive into addressing myths and misconceptions

South Yorkshire Housing Association have a variety of resources that provide clear information about how paid employment impacts benefits. For instance, they provide 'better off calculations' to illustrate how much more individuals or families will earn when in various levels of paid employment. They also have resources to illustrate the significant health and well-being impacts of being in employment. South Yorkshire Housing Association is also trialling a new employment support service for people experiencing homelessness (called IPS-individual placement and support) as part of a national evaluation being run by the Centre for Homelessness Impact.

How will employment affect my Universal credit?

Wage impact

When working out an individuals allowance they use a rule called the 'income taper' meaning that only 55% of your wage is taken into account (i.e. for each £1 earned, you will only lose 55p of benefit till all of the UC allowance is accounted for). For example, if your wage was £100 per month, you would only lose £55 of benefit leaving you better off overall by £145.

People can work roughly 13-15 hours per week at £12.21 before benefits start to REDUCE (Roughly £500 per month)

Don't forget, any earnings under £12570 per year are not subject to tax and National Insurance deductions.

Another rule of thumb is that as long as you are still eligible for an element of Universal Credit, **you will still qualify for Housing Benefit.**

Extra allowances

Some people receive an extra 'work allowance' (if you a look after dependent children, or have been assessed as having a limited capability for work). This allowance means the first £404 earned is ignored entirely by Universal Credit (then anything left over, they still only look at 55% as detailed above).

The allowance can be even higher in some situations (e.g. if you don't get help with rent).

Tip:

The ill health benefit PIP is not means tested and so will not be impacted in any way by any wages you earn.

Examples

Below are a few example scenarios for how Universal Credit will be impacted by paid work... This shows that most people are better off in work, although their benefits are affected, the wages more than compensate for the loss. None of these scenarios take into account Council Tax- as this differs for each local Borough.

More comprehensive breakdowns can be provided when speaking to your local Employment Specialist.

www.findgoodwork.co.uk/refer
goodwork@syha.co.uk

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) - Why employment is an important health outcome

ips@nhs.uk

Gaining skills & experience: Preparing for employment through building skills and gaining experience

When work becomes a consideration and possibility, people transition to preparing for work through building skills and experience. For many people in supported accommodation, socio-economic disadvantage throughout the life course and systemic barriers create significant challenges in developing skills and experiences. Therefore, despite an interest in the possibility of work, it can be difficult to take the next step and become 'job-ready'. Table 2 highlights some of the main barriers that

need to be addressed for people to build skills and meet the requirements listed in job adverts.

Table 2. Key barriers in accessing training and skill development opportunities

| Key barriers | Description | Intervention |
|--|--|---|
| Gaps in CV and not meeting job requirements | Due to complex life histories and socio-economic disadvantage throughout the life course, many people in supported accommodation have gaps in their CVs and lack formal qualifications and experience. | £ for education/ qualifications Volunteering Work experience Work placements |
| Access to employment training/support | Various barriers limit access to training and education, including language difficulties, inflexible structures, limited trauma-informed support, and a lack of qualifications and experience. | Tailored employment training/support Upskilling staff in housing Work placements, apprenticeships |
| Accessibility requirements | Often the unique accessibility requirements of people in supported accommodation are not considered in existing training offers. For instance, no funds to cover travel costs, no access to personal computers or Wi-Fi, and inflexible routines for training and work experience. | Tailored employment training/support |

Addressing barriers at this stage was all the more pertinent in conversations with migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking individuals who had the motivation to work, but

Box 7. Migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking experience

Alongside the constraints of supported accommodation, migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking participants faced distinct barriers to employment. Limited English proficiency was the most common challenge, affecting access to training and education, as well as job applications and interviews. The non-recognition of overseas qualifications was also a significant issue, often requiring retraining and leading to frustration.

“It’s difficult because of the language barriers... they gave it to someone else.”-

Person from the refugee and/or asylum-seeking programme

“Huge issues for people whose qualifications are not recognised in the UK.” - Key stakeholder

Regionally, **Action Foundation**, a charity supporting refugees through accommodation and wider services, offers an innovative response to these challenges. Its language and learning programme integrates English language teaching with employability support, providing targeted, practical assistance. English classes run four days a week and are free and unaccredited, while employability support includes one-to-one guidance, drop-in sessions, employer links, and help with CVs and job searches.

were facing distinct barriers. Box 7 illustrates some of these unique challenges, while highlighting some of the support available regionally.

In our conversations, we heard various actual and suggested solutions that address these barriers. At this stage, much of the focus is on accessing suitable training and education, work experience, volunteering and language support.

Volunteering: In the research, volunteering was acknowledged as a helpful step in the employment journey for people in supported accommodation. However, concerns were noted around potential impacts of volunteering on benefit entitlement reassessments. Volunteering allows people to develop skills, increase confidence, improve general well-being, and provides structure and routine. Importantly, for people who have been out of employment for a long time or have never been in employment, volunteering provides a lower-risk environment to learn new skills. Despite the benefits of volunteering, various challenges were highlighted in the research. This included the travel or meal costs associated with volunteering. Some individuals found it difficult to maintain motivation with voluntary role. It can also be difficult to find suitable positions, especially for people with additional needs.

“And volunteering and all of those different things as well, I think is an important pathway, like, you know, being able to do placements or volunteer or, you know, all of those type of things are integral into that kind of journey to just get a feel and build the confidence rather than straight into work...”

Tailored, flexible and accessible training and support: It is widely recognised that access to training courses and education is often a crucial step to becoming job-ready for people in supported accommodation. Given that many people have been unemployed for sustained periods, and some lack formal education, attending courses that provide new skills and qualifications can be a key bridge to employment. However, mainstream training courses can be unsuitable for many people due to a lack of awareness about the challenges experienced by people in supported accommodation. Therefore, the research highlighted the need for more training courses tailored to the needs of people in supported accommodation, such as trauma-informed training, training that offers flexibility and inclusivity, and training geared towards developing skills to succeed in differing work environments.

“I think it’s about training being flexible, as well, isn’t it? Like, if I try and get someone to do a course that’s Monday to Friday, 9:00 to 5:00, immediately they’re like, “No.” Whereas if it’s like, “Right, it takes longer, but you only have to do a couple of hours a day, or a couple of days a week...and I think it’s being understood that if somebody doesn’t turn up once, not just writing them off.” – Housing and employment provider

Applying & getting the job: Moving towards being employed

As people in supported accommodation transition from preparation to actively securing employment, they begin navigating job applications and interview

processes. Practical and systematic factors can make it difficult to secure interviews and employment. Table 3 presents some of the main barriers people need to overcome as part of this stage. Some people shared their experiences at this stage.

“Because I saw this class job come up for me. Absolutely perfect. It wasn’t minimum wage, though. And it was part-time as well. I rang my mum dead excited, and I was like, ‘There’s this part-time job, 16 hours. I’m definitely going to apply for it,’ and she was like, ‘Yeah, but how much is the wage?’ and I was like, ‘Oh, fuck, I didn’t think of that.[how the role could impact on my benefits]” - Male in supported accommodation

“Say you get it for tomorrow, you won’t get it, you’ll have to get there first and then get it reimbursed. Say you’ve got an interview, and you can go, but you can’t get there, you would have to- Like, not be able to go, because you can’t get there because they can’t fund it.” - Female in supported accommodation

Table 3. Key barriers in applying and interviewing for employment roles

| Key Barriers | Description | Intervention |
|--|---|---|
| Still in supported accommodation and restrictions in hours/earnings | Because housing benefit tapers rapidly when earning above income thresholds, it can be difficult to find employment that does not destabilise an individual's living arrangements and finances, especially while continuing to live in supported accommodation | Affordability checks Work placements Apprenticeships Personalised and focused support through a trusted source |
| Travel & transport | Due to financial constraints, having to travel and pay for transport can limit one’s ability to attend interviews and jobs. | Adjustments for the interview & recruitment process Personalised and focused support through a trusted source Responsive and flexible funding to cover interview attendance costs |
| Access to interview clothing | Constrained by financial limitations and a lack of resources, people can struggle to access suitable clothing for interviews. | Adjustments for the interview & recruitment process Personalised and focused support through a trusted source |
| Application and interview process | Complex or demanding application systems and interview processes can make applying for jobs a complicated and frustrating. Additionally, not having a personal computer can make it difficult to access online application portals. People often felt unclear about asking for reasonable adjustments as part of applying for jobs. | Adjustments for the interview & recruitment process Personalised and focused support through a trusted source |

Gaining direct employment was supported through various enablers and interventions, including paid work placements, apprenticeships, adjustments for the interview & recruitment process, and affordability checks. Many interventions at this stage will require working in partnership with potential employers—this is something several of the housing providers we spoke to are currently doing.

Work placements and apprenticeships: Different pathways into employment, including work placements and apprenticeships, are widely regarded as a key bridge for gaining secure and sustainable work. These forms of employment allow people to develop new skills and gain work experience, while also earning money. Apprenticeships are particularly beneficial as they combine paid employment with the opportunity to gain recognised qualifications. Despite the benefits of apprenticeships and work placements, it was recognised that they are not perfect solutions, as sometimes pay is at a level that will impact housing benefit and potentially destabilise an individual's living arrangements and finances. Government schemes like the 'Right to Try' may be a good avenue for some people in supported accommodation to trial out work without leading to immediate benefit reassessments.

“They offer apprenticeships and they’re really good and they pay above the minimum wage for them and things. Again, housing benefit, that’s still going to be the barrier.” - Female in supported accommodation

Affordability checks: The importance of doing checks to map out current income (benefits, allowances, etc.) and comparing it with expected earnings from a job was widely acknowledged as an important intervention, especially at the applying for work stage. It helps clarify the impact of work on benefits, builds confidence to engage with employment and assists informed decision-making.

“Every time I’ve had a job interview, or anything like that, I’ve been onto the staff members to work out my benefit calculator, so that’s what I’m on about there. I feel like it is a good thing, because I constantly, no matter what job I’m looking at, I’ve got to have it looked at, because I get worried about the fact that it’ll be more than 16 hours, and how much my housing benefit will end up being affected.” - Young person in supported accommodation

Staying in work: Sustaining meaningful employment on a long-term basis

Once someone is in work, there is a transition beyond probation to sustaining meaningful employment. The non-linear process of the employment journey means people often drop in and out of employment, creating recurring insecurity and vulnerability. Therefore, it was widely acknowledged in the research that once someone finds employment, and for them to sustain that role, continued wraparound support is often required. For people in supported accommodation, maintaining employment is often coupled with transitioning into more independent living. Ongoing support during this time becomes even more imperative for ensuring someone

succeeds. Table 4 reports some of the barriers that need to be addressed for people in supported accommodation to sustain meaningful employment.

Table 4. Key barriers in sustaining employment

| Key barriers | Description | Intervention |
|---|--|--|
| Lack of support post-job success | A drop off in employability and well-being support after someone secures employment can undermine their ability to sustain it. This is because many of the underlying personal and systemic barriers often still exist and are exacerbated due to the demands of work. | Continued support after starting work Financial support for transitional period. |
| Gaps in life skills | Gaps in life skills, such as budgeting and managing bills, can lead to debt and difficulties in sustaining employment. | Continued support after starting work |
| Ill-equipped employers | Employers may lack an understanding of the complex needs of individuals living in, or transitioning out of, supported accommodation, leading to unsuitable demands on the employer and ill-suited working conditions for the employee. | Supporting employers to provide more inclusive workplaces through access to additional resources or services |
| Wrong fit for the role | The role may not fit the needs of someone transitioning out of supported accommodation. | Supporting employers to provide more inclusive workplaces through access to additional resources or services |
| Allocated housing location | Being allocated mainstream housing that is not located near to their job, makes attending work both expensive and demanding. For people who are not allocated to different housing, ongoing high rates of rents while in supported accommodation and risk of accruing arrears can hinder sustainability of employment. | Access to stable and affordable housing |

Similar to the previous stage, interventions and support at this stage will likely require the involvement of employers. Although there are several interventions and enablers identified in the pathway figure presented at the beginning of this section (Figure 4), the most universal suggestion across participants was continued support after starting work.

Continued support after starting work: Once someone has gained employment, continued support is widely seen as critical to help people sustain and enjoy their work. It was acknowledged that support is often stopped at this stage, which undermines people’s ability to sustain work. This is because many of the underlying personal and systemic barriers often still exist and are exacerbated due to the demands of work. Wraparound support from a trusted support worker or mentor should be provided during the first year of employment. Continued support helps people to adjust to the realities of work and provides a safety net in relation to

financial changes and wellbeing, ultimately helping people progress and stay in employment.

In some conversations, participants spoke about the potential of the UK Government's 'Connect to Work' scheme to address this gap. Crucially, 'Connect to Work' support continues after someone gets a job, helping people to settle into work and manage issues such as workload and health needs. However, for people in supported accommodation concerns remain about whether such support will build trust and engagement.

“So, the idea with Connect to Work is to get a person transitioned into work quickly and then offered some wraparound support for a year whilst they're in work. So, it's different where normally it's the other way or normally, we used to support with people on provisions for a long time on the goal to get them into work.”- Wider key stakeholder

Going forward: Priority Areas for Future Initiatives to Enable Employment for People in Supported Accommodation

Employment is becoming a clear government priority. There is the motivation and dedication from specialist housing providers and the wider sector to address the current barriers in the region. From the research findings above, we heard of clear and impactful examples where specialised housing providers are being commissioned to deliver employment interventions that are reflective of the unique needs of people in supported accommodation. The ability of specialist housing providers to reach and engage people in supported accommodation in sustainable pathways to employment cannot be overstated. Working in partnership across the sector and placing the unique needs and requirements of people in supported accommodation at the center of any interventions will ensure we are able to address the high rates of economic inactivity in this population.

From this research and the perspective of participants, there were recommendations for any existing or planned employment interventions and clear opportunities for future 'test and learn' investment. Based on discussions, three recommendations and four interventions are outlined below. These are not inclusive of all the potential opportunities.

Recommendation 1: There needs to be consistent, robust and centralised reporting of employment and related outcomes for people in supported accommodation. Any investment in employment services or support needs to have clear processes for evaluating impact and outcomes.

We identified notable gaps in existing evaluations and availability of data. Addressing Recommendation 1 will enable better understanding of the scale of the issue, responsive investment for employment interventions, and monitoring measurable

outcomes for impact. Any outcomes should be reflective of both hard and soft measures, reflecting movement along employment pathways.

Recommendation 2: Commissioners and charitable funders need to prioritise and invest in housing providers to deliver employability support and interventions for people in supported accommodation.

The trusted and existing relationships supported housing providers have with their tenants and residents was noted as a major enabler in encouraging people to pursue employment opportunities. Supported housing providers understand the unique needs facing people in supported accommodation and can provide the wrap-around support needed to ensure success along the employment journey.

Recommendation 3: Employment support needs to be inclusive of the entire pathway, tailored and personalised, freely available and not end immediately upon starting a job.

People in supported accommodation are a diverse group, and people will be at different levels of readiness when it comes to employment. Ensuring the same provider can work individually with a person from the start to end of their journey enables trust to be built, which is key for sustaining positive outcomes. Structured work experience schemes should be offered as part of any employment support to enable skill and work experience development. As part of any employment support, opportunities should be inclusive and responsive to financial requirements. This means people might require stipends to cover travel, clothing, or food expenses when undertaking training.

Recognising all interventions have an economic cost, it may not be feasible to implement all interventions at once. However, we recommend four broad areas for 'test and learn' intervention, which would need to be robustly evaluated.

'Test and learn' intervention 1: Development of a myth-busting resource and training package to increase knowledge and awareness about working while in supported accommodation

For many people, their journeys to employment are halted from inception when they are discouraged from working while in supported accommodation. Developing a myth-busting resource for people in supported accommodation, housing providers, and benefit workers is key for dispelling misconceptions at the earliest point. It is recommended that this is done collaboratively to ensure success. Any myth-busting resource should be accompanied with a training video to supplement knowledge, particularly for providers. Inclusion of affordability checks can help illustrate how someone can work while in supported accommodation. Additionally, the use of successful stories showcasing examples of people in supported accommodation becoming and sustaining employment and moving into affordable housing will support with perception of employment as being an achievable outcome.

‘Test and learn’ intervention 2: Ear-marked and dedicated funding to cover supported accommodation rent costs for people when they become employed and lose access to rent coverage through benefits—coupled with a pathway into appropriate, affordable move on accommodation

One of the biggest barriers to employment is the financial disincentives and risks of moving off benefits and into employment while in supported accommodation. Learning from the success of other interventions, it is recommended that funding is in place to ensure people are only responsible for a reasonable amount of supported accommodation rent and service charge costs (approximately 15%). Any shortfall should be covered through a time-limited centralised pot, which will provide direct payment to supported accommodation providers. To ensure long-term sustainability, anyone accessing the pot should be transitioned into affordable housing (such as ‘move on’ properties, social housing, or private rental accommodations). This will shift employment from being disadvantageous to desirable.

‘Test and learn’ intervention 3: Increased investment in ‘Move-On’ and affordable housing, which provides low-level support during transition to independent living and employment

Affordable housing is increasingly challenging to access. For people in supported accommodation, they can feel stuck in high-cost accommodations due to lack of more affordable housing. This leads to many people becoming reliant on psychosocial and physical support available as part of supported accommodation. Investing in properties or services that provide low-level support while transitioning to independent living and employment is key to sustained employment success. This might also involve harnessing the private rental sector through ethical lettings approaches.

‘Test and learn’ intervention 4: Revamping the existing benefit system at a national level to ensure employment does not lead to someone being worse off financially when they are in supported accommodation

Although there are interventions that can take place regionally, there needs to be a wider system reform to Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. The existing policies and benefit calculations should be revisited so work becomes incentivised. This may involve introducing an allowance for people in supported accommodation to retain a larger portion of their Universal Credit when entering employment. In a shorter-term, schemes like the Government’s ‘Right to Try’ initiative may enable certain people in supported accommodation to try work without negatively impacting on benefits. Although such schemes can still cause fear for people in supported accommodation without clear guidance on processes to prevent reassessment during trial work periods.

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