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Housing Works: Assessing the Impact of Housing Association Employment Support

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About the authors

The Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) is a dedicated multi-disciplinary research and consultancy unit providing a range of services relating to housing and urban management to public and private sector clients. The Unit brings together researchers drawn from a range of disciplines including: social policy, housing management, urban geography, environmental management, psychology, social care and social work.

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Executive Summary

Social housing providers in the UK have a long history of delivering support to their residents beyond housing, including providing employment related assistance. A small but growing area of research investigates the role of employment support outside the mainstream welfare system¹. However, little is known about the support provided, the impact it has on individuals' prospects in the labour market, and related outcomes for housing providers, the taxpayer and wider society. As increasing numbers of people are expected to engage in work search and other work preparation activities in exchange for continued receipt of welfare benefits, the impact of housing provider employment support needs to be better understood.

The membership of Give us a Chance (GUAC) have, as housing associations, been involved in a range of initiatives to improve the employment and life chance outcomes of their residents, including working with employment support organisations and the voluntary and community sector. However, there is considerable variation in the way that housing association employment support is currently provided, and a wide range of tools and measures are used to show the value of these initiatives, from specific organisational measures through to more generic approaches, such as the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT) measures and the New Economy Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) model. Hence, it is often difficult to compare the value of projects based on different approaches and measured using different tools².

This research had two key aims: to contribute to an understanding of what helps people to move closer to, enter or sustain employment and to demonstrate the value of housing association investment in employment related support for residents. The project had the following linked objectives:

- 1** Provide a review of housing association employment related support activity;
- 2** Undertake a review of the impact measures currently used for employment related support across the social housing sector; and
- 3** Provide an understanding of 'what works' in terms of employment related support and the measures used among GUAC members.

Methods

The research involved a mixed-methods approach and was carried out in three key phases:

Phase 1: Initial consultation and review of impact measurement approaches

Phase 1 involved two key activities. Firstly, the research was underpinned by an initial consultation with the GUAC membership to encourage engagement and information sharing. The information received from GUAC members fed into the study design and, more specifically, the development of the research instruments (focus group question guides and survey). Secondly, we subsequently reviewed the impact measurement approaches and tools that were most frequently being used by housing providers in relation to employment support.

Phase 2: Survey of GUAC members

Phase 2 was based on an online survey of all 50 GUAC members, from which we received 30 responses. The aim of this survey was to identify the types of employment related support currently being provided; perceptions of the value of this activity; how the activity was being measured in terms of outcomes; and perceptions of its impact. The survey also supported the identification of case studies for more detailed consultation (Phase 3).

¹ Williams, M. (2015) Delivering change: What Housing Associations can tell us about employment and skills, available at: <http://www.centreforcities.org/publication/delivering-change-what-housing-associations-can-tell-us-about-employment-and-skills/>

² A 2012 report found that 35% of housing associations used internally developed tools, with 41% using externally developed tools and 9% a mix of both. We believe that the figures for internally and externally developed tools are now much higher, however, owing to the drivers outlined below. See: Wilkes, V. and Mullins, D. (2012) Community investment by social housing organisations: Measuring the impact, Third Sector Research Centre Survey Report for HACT, University of Birmingham.

Phase 3: Case study consultation

On the basis of the review in Phase 1 and the survey in Phase 2, we identified six case study areas in which to undertake a more detailed analysis. The housing associations were chosen to represent the geographical spread of the GUAC membership and were as follows:

- Bolton at Home/Starts with you (North West)
- Futures Housing Group (Midlands)
- Monmouthshire Housing (South Wales)
- Thames Valley Housing Association (South East)
- Sovereign (South West)
- Thirteen (North East)

In each location, a focus group with housing association staff and external stakeholders (including Jobcentre Plus, training providers, local authorities and voluntary and community sector organisations) was conducted. In order to maximise the reach of the research, we also invited a further five GUAC members operating in nearby areas to these focus groups. These were:

- Beyond Housing (formerly Coast & Country Housing and Yorkshire Coast Homes) (North East)
- Live West (formerly Devon & Cornwall Housing and Knightstone) (South West)
- Yarlington Housing Group (South West)
- Torus (formerly Golden Gates Housing Trust) (North West)
- Vestia Community Trust (West Midlands)
- Great Places Housing Group (North West, Yorkshire and Humber)

In five case study areas, focus groups were also conducted with tenants who were in receipt of the employment related support. In total, 73 people participated in the case studies, including 31 housing association staff, 16 external stakeholders and 26 tenants.

Findings and recommendations

Overall, the research highlights the importance of the employment related support provided by housing providers and the significant associated financial investment that is made to deliver this support. A variety of employment related activities are being undertaken among the GUAC membership; however, the support most frequently takes the form of information, advice and guidance or the provision of training and in most cases is ongoing, and there have been considerable efforts to measure the impact of these initiatives. More importantly, it is clear that the employment related support delivered by housing providers is making a difference to tenants, housing associations themselves and external stakeholders. There are four key findings from this research:

1 Housing associations provide significant and vital employment related support to tenants

The housing association staff who took part in this study identified a need for housing providers to deliver employment related support. The most frequently stated reasons for their organisations to offer such support were organisational priorities, welfare reform and tenant demand (particularly in the absence of tangible support from the statutory employment support service). From the staff perspective, employment related support was considered to have wider benefits, including helping to reduce antisocial behaviour, setting a positive example in the community, helping people become better tenants, and boosting the local economy – not least through helping local employers fill labour market gaps. Additionally, from the perspective of tenants, it was felt that housing associations were uniquely placed to offer more appropriate employment related support owing to the existing relationships they have with their tenants.

It was also clear that housing associations were regarded as valuable partners in delivering employment related support. External stakeholders commented on how housing associations were able to deliver effective support through their responsiveness, knowledge of the needs of their tenants and relationships with local Jobcentre Plus, training providers and voluntary sector organisations. These strengths ensured tenants did not miss out on the range of available advice and support and helped to avoid the loss of benefits through error or sanctions.

- **Recommendation:** There is a need for housing associations to continue to offer employment related support to their tenants.

2 There is a business case for housing associations to support tenants into employment, and into full-time employment, where relevant

The research demonstrates that there is a business case for housing associations to help support tenants into employment. More specifically, the research shows a relationship between tenant employment and reduced rent arrears, with rent arrears decreasing as full-time employment rates increase. This relationship is less straightforward for part-time employment, which may be due to the under-employment or low incomes of some people who are in part-time employment. Although part-time employment is appropriate for some tenants (e.g. people with caring responsibilities), there are people who would like to work for more hours and should be supported appropriately to do so.

- **Recommendation:** There is a need for housing associations to support tenants into full-time employment, where relevant.

3 Investment in employment related support by housing associations positively affects employment levels

Investment in employment related support was found to have a positive impact on employment rates, with full-time and part-time employment rates increasing with investment of up to approximately £30 and £25 per housing unit per year, respectively. The impact of investment in, and provision of, employment support was found to contrast sharply with the impact of the more punitive side of welfare reform, e.g. the use of benefit sanctions or the benefit cap. For example, the research found a strong negative relationship between tenants affected by the benefit cap and those looking for work, which suggests that this measure was not acting as an incentive to enter paid employment. It appears that the investment in employment support by housing providers was effective as a result of facilitating the building and maintenance of support over time. This enabled tenants to improve their qualifications, confidence and motivation, with positive repercussions for their mental health and overall wellbeing. Moreover, the non-mandatory nature of the support means that housing association investment can be used in agile and responsive ways.

- **Recommendation:** There is a need for those housing associations currently investing less than £25–£30 per housing unit per year in employment related support to consider increasing their investment.

Of the types of employment related support that were being provided, the two that were most commonly associated with increased employment were job clubs and enterprise development to provide employment related support. The housing associations with job clubs had higher rates of full-time employment. Although only a minority of housing associations used enterprise development to provide employment related support, these had the highest levels of both full-time and part-time employment.

- **Recommendation:** There is a need for housing associations to target additional investment in job clubs and enterprise development.

4 Housing associations are increasingly using external tools to measure the impact of their employment support, but there are widespread limitations on the use of existing tools

The research highlights that housing associations are increasingly using external impact measures. However, the level of data collected on tenants and the collation of these data around employment related support vary significantly, both at the organisational level and between individual services/programmes. In accordance with issues identified in the wider impact measurement literature, the low levels of available data suggest a lack of organisational 'buy-in' within some housing associations, where significant numbers of staff do not have ownership of the data or impact measurement tools. This is clearly an issue for future impact

measurement, as it is impossible to accurately measure impact without the relevant data. Furthermore, there is a case for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data to ensure a range of perspectives.

- **Recommendation:** Housing associations need to collect sufficient and consistent qualitative and quantitative data on employment related support and ensure that these are available to all relevant staff.

Overall, the housing associations in this research believed that they were making a positive social and economic contribution by helping their residents into employment. However, at present housing associations have mixed views on the effectiveness of the impact measurement tools that they currently use. Hence, there is a need for housing providers to more clearly demonstrate their contribution through their impact measurement processes. Housing association staff who took part in the research perceived that the average values used in 'off-the-shelf' tools were not always appropriate when applied to their residents owing to the wide-ranging circumstances and goals of individuals and households. Therefore, there is a need for housing associations to use or develop tools that they feel best capture their specific contexts. Although there are mixed views on the effectiveness of the tools available at present, their use could be optimised by a more tailored approach.

- **Recommendation:** Housing associations should work with designers of impact measurement tools to develop measures that can more accurately demonstrate the value of their specific employment related support.

Future work

This is clearly an important area for research, and in this report a number of areas are identified that future research could develop. Although there are significant obstacles to all housing associations measuring impact in exactly the same way, there is scope to identify common ground, which could lead to the development of a number of shared outcomes in order to improve comparability. This could also include the development of new or disaggregated measures, as well as values for variables that are currently more difficult to measure, such as moves towards employment. A first step would be to see whether there is sufficient appetite for this kind of development among the GUAC membership.

1. Introduction



Social housing associations in the UK have a long history of providing support to their residents beyond housing, including employment assistance, and a small but growing area of research investigates the role of employment support outside the mainstream welfare system³. However, little is known about the support provided, the impact it has on individuals' prospects in the labour market, and related outcomes for housing associations, the taxpayer and wider society. This is an area of particular concern for housing associations, as although they operate in a wide range of contexts, there may be low levels of employment among their tenants⁴. As increasing numbers of people are expected to engage in work search and other work preparation activities in exchange for continued receipt of welfare benefits, the impact of housing association employment support needs to be better understood.

The membership of Give us a Chance (GUAC) have, as housing associations, been involved in a range of initiatives to improve the employment and life chance outcomes of their residents, including working with organisations in the employment support sector and the voluntary and community sector. There appears to be a strong need for these initiatives, as many people who are claiming out-of-work benefits struggle to meet the demands of, and sometimes feel they do not receive appropriate support from, Jobcentre Plus⁵. However, there is considerable variation in the way that housing association employment support is provided, and a wide range of tools and measures are used to show the value of these initiatives, from specific organisational measures through to more generic tools and approaches, such as the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (HACT) measures and the New Economy Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) model. However, it is difficult to compare the value of projects that are based on different approaches and measured using different tools⁶.

³ Williams, M. (2015) op. cit.

⁴ Francavilla, F., Kasparova, D., Taylor, R., Smeaton, D. and Sahin-Dikmen, M. (2009) Understanding the worklessness and financial exclusion of Riverside tenants, London: Policy Studies Institute.

⁵ Wright, S., Dwyer, P., Jones, K., McNeill, J., Scullion, L. and Stewart, A.B. (2018) Final findings: Universal Credit, Project Report, Welfare Conditionality, available at: <http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/40414-Universal-Credit-web.pdf>

⁶ A 2012 report found that 35% of housing associations used internally developed tools, with 41% using externally developed tools and 9% a mix of both. We believe that the figures for internally and externally developed tools are now much higher, however, owing to the drivers outlined below. See: Wilkes, V. and Mullins, D. (2012) op. cit.

GUAC therefore identified a need to:

- Gather information on the interventions taking place among social housing associations nationally.
- Identify opportunities and provide practical help for members.
- Influence stakeholders strategically and nationally, making a business case.
- Champion and recognise good practice and partnerships.
- Provide policy makers and housing associations with the evidence and tools they need to design future programmes.

This research aimed to contribute to an understanding of what helps people to move closer to, enter or sustain employment and also to demonstrate the value of housing association investment in employment related support. The objectives of the project were as follows:

- 1 Review housing association activity in employment related support;
- 2 Review the impact measures currently used for employment related support across the social housing sector; and
- 3 Understand 'what works' in terms of housing association employment related support and the measures used among GUAC members.

Before going further, it is important to define some key terms. We use employment related support to refer to services that aim to help people to improve their employability and overcome barriers to employment. This can include jobseekers from any demographic, along with those wishing to sustain their employment. The services range from help with CVs and job searches to in-work support and help in starting up businesses. Other services include benefits and housing advice. Jobcentres are at the more formal and mandatory end of the provider spectrum, but providers take a range of forms, including public sector organisations, for-profit businesses, charities and social enterprises, and include many housing associations.

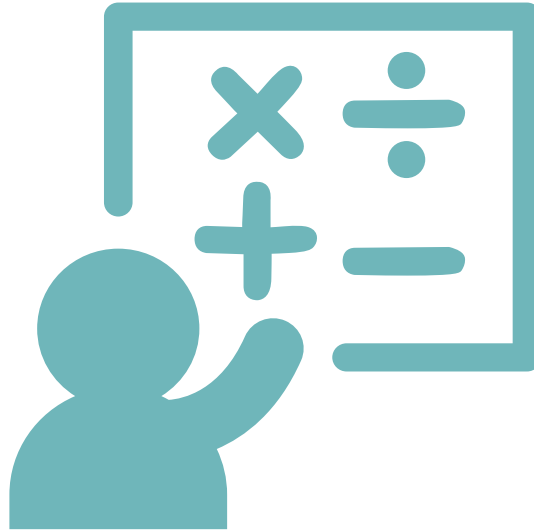
By impact, we refer to the difference that a particular employment related support project or programme makes. This requires an understanding of what the outcomes are and what additionality has been achieved, i.e. the outcomes due to the programme minus the outcomes that would have occurred without the programme, which are sometimes referred to as 'business as usual' or the deadweight⁷. Impact can be difficult to measure without large-scale trials. Other challenges for housing associations attempting to measure the impact of their employment related support include ensuring appropriate processes and systems are in place for data collection and how to measure soft outcomes or the distance travelled, among others⁸.



⁷ DWP (2016) Work experience: A quantitative impact assessment, London: DWP; H.M. Treasury (2011) The magenta book: Guidance for evaluation, London: H.M. Treasury.

⁸ van Poortvliet, M., Keen, S. and Pritchard, D. (2012) Impact measurement in the NEETs sector, London: New Philanthropy Capital.

2. Methods



The research involved a mixed-methods approach and was carried out in three key phases. Ethical approval was received from the School of Health & Society's Ethical Approval Panel at the University of Salford.

2.1 Phase 1: Initial consultation and review of impact measurement approaches

The work for this project was underpinned by an initial consultation with the GUAC membership to encourage engagement and information sharing. The information received from GUAC members fed into the study design and, more specifically, the development of the research instruments (focus group question guides and survey). We also attended the GUAC members' day in London in July 2017 to brief the GUAC membership about the research and request their participation. This was accompanied by webinars with the project steering group in order to address the research design.

We subsequently reviewed the impact measurement approaches and tools that were being used in relation to employment support initiatives to identify their strengths and limitations. The review focused on the most frequently used tools in order to identify principles to aid the measurement of the impact of employment related support among housing associations.

2.2 Phase 2: Survey of GUAC members

Phase 2 was based on an online survey, which was sent to all GUAC members. Our aim was to consult with the entire GUAC membership in order to understand the full breadth and variety of activity taking place across the sector. The survey was designed by the research team in consultation with the GUAC membership and the project steering group. Questions were included on the types of employment related support engaged in, the respondents' perceptions of the value of this activity, and their approach to measurement. Other questions were concerned with target demographics, partners, the duration of employment related support programmes, outcomes, perceptions of impact, what is measured and how, the economic and social value created, and how far providers felt able to measure the effectiveness of this activity. The survey was distributed to all 50 GUAC member organisations via an email link to the Bristol Online Survey website and was completed online.

In order to maximise the response rate, an introductory email was sent out from the GUAC leadership, along with reminder emails. The survey was open between 20th November 2017 and 6th February 2018. In total, 30 responses were received, representing a response rate of 60%. It should be noted, though, that less than a third of respondents were able to provide the information requested about customer employment. The data were analysed using Stata 14 in order to produce descriptive statistics, correlations, cross tabulations and scatter plots.

2.3 Phase 3: Case study consultation

The research team visited six locations across England and Wales between April and June 2018. The housing associations were chosen to represent the geographical spread of the GUAC membership and were as follows:

- Bolton at Home/Starts with you (North West)
- Futures Housing Group (Midlands)
- Monmouthshire Housing (SouthWales)
- Thames Valley Housing Association (South East)
- Sovereign (South West)
- Thirteen (North East)

In each location, a focus group with housing association staff and external stakeholders (including Jobcentre Plus, training providers, local authorities and voluntary and community sector organisations) was conducted. In order to maximise the reach of the research, we also invited a further five GUAC members operating in nearby areas to these focus groups. These were:

- Beyond Housing (formerly Coast & Country Housing and Yorkshire Coast Homes) (North East)
- Live West (formerly Devon & Cornwall Housing and Knightstone) (South West)
- Yarlington Housing Group (South West)

- Torus (formerly Golden Gates Housing Trust) (North West)
- Vestia Community Trust (West Midlands)
- Great Places Housing Group (North West, Yorkshire and Humber)

In five of the case study areas, focus groups were also conducted with beneficiaries of the employment related support. All these participants were tenants of the housing association visited. In total, 73 people participated in this aspect of the study, including 31 housing association staff, 16 external stakeholders and 26 beneficiaries.

The focus groups were digitally recorded, and verbatim transcripts were produced. The transcripts were then coded in NVivo10 in order to produce a thematic analysis.



3. Review of impact measurement tools and approaches



Measuring impact is not a particularly new interest for housing associations. Indeed, they have been measuring their impact in various ways for some time⁹. However, owing to a combination of internal and external drivers impact measurement appears to have been gaining momentum. External drivers include:

- 1** A move towards outcomes-based commissioning in the allocation of public sector funds¹⁰. The context of austerity appears to have intensified this trend, as value for money is of the utmost importance.
- 2** Government requirements for evidence-based policy making. More specifically, the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 promotes the consideration and evidencing of wider social impact among service commissioners and service providers¹¹.

- 3** The development and promotion of measurement tools. The measurement tools available range from research-heavy evaluation methods, such as randomised controlled trials (RCTs), other trials and longitudinal and cross-sectional quantitative and qualitative methods on the one hand, through to off-the-shelf tools. The latter draw on methods such as CBA and Social Return on Investment (SROI) and aim to make it relatively straightforward for housing associations to measure their impact.

These methods will be discussed further below. Here, it is enough to note that there are organisations that promote these tools, and so this may be seen as a driver of impact measurement in housing associations. The development and promotion of measurement tools can also be understood, in part, as a response to demand from housing associations, and so it is also important to consider internal drivers.

⁹ Wilkes, V. and Mullins, D. (2012) op. cit.

¹⁰ For example: Cabinet Office (2010) *Modernising Commissioning: Increasing the role of charities, social enterprises, mutuals and cooperatives in public service delivery*, London: The Stationery Office.

¹¹ Park, C. and Wilding, M. (2013) 'Social enterprise policy design: Constructing social enterprise in the UK and Korea', *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 22(3): 236–247.

These include:

- 1 A desire to be more competitive in funding applications and tendering processes; and
- 2 The motivation to ensure the efficacy of projects and that they are meeting the needs of stakeholders¹².

There are clearly significant reasons why housing associations are becoming more interested in impact measurement, and we will argue below that this is an important development that housing associations should continue to progress. Yet, for several reasons, we do not believe that it would be helpful to be prescriptive about how housing associations should measure impact. First of all, approaches to measurement are more suited to measuring organisational rather than sector-level impact or making inter-organisational comparisons¹³. Also, in many instances housing associations are not seeking to measure the same thing, because they have different priorities, funders and beneficiaries. In addition, there is a need for a sense of ownership over impact measurement, rather than going through the motions. For such reasons, it has been argued that housing associations should not seek the seemingly impossible goal of a single tool¹⁴.

3.1 Debates about methods

Although there are considerable debates about methods, the housing associations that responded to our call for evidence largely reported using approaches that are based on CBA or SROI. This was despite the fact that RCTs are promoted by government and are regarded as the gold standard in evaluation as they allow a direct comparison against what would have happened without the intervention¹⁵. A key drawback of trials is the ethical issue of excluding some people from the benefits of the intervention (this may be a particular concern in the area of employment related support). Other potential shortcomings include the cost, the need for specialist knowledge, and the time required to plan and execute the trial. For these reasons, RCTs are simply not an option for the majority of housing associations' employment related support programmes. Other methods based on trials are subject to the same kinds of limitations.

Cross-sectional analysis using statistical techniques such as structural equation modelling and regression can reveal associations between particular elements of a project and desired outcomes. However, along with the statistical know-how, these techniques work best when set up with the analysis in mind and, where possible, when other variables can be controlled. As such, they require social science expertise and are subject to the planning and time limitations noted above.

CBA is a key method used among housing associations to measure impact. In CBA, the benefits and costs of changes are calculated using monetary values in order to determine whether the benefits outweigh the costs. It has long been used to measure the economic value of public services. More recently, social CBA has extended traditional economic CBA to also consider social and environmental costs alongside economic costs. Its strengths are in facilitating an explicit comparison between various costs and benefits. Monetisation is seen as a weakness by the critics of CBA, however, as it may be incommensurable with what it is attempting to measure¹⁶.

SROI is a more recent development that began to emerge around the start of the millennium. The Cabinet Office published a guide in 2009, which built on the work of organisations such as the Hewlett Foundation and the New Economics Foundation¹⁷. The aim of this government report was to develop guidelines that allowed social businesses to consistently and verifiably account for their impact when applying for government funds. Although this is contentious, it has been argued that there is little difference between CBA and SROI from a technical perspective and that what sets SROI apart is its emphasis on stakeholder engagement¹⁸. However, as organisations prioritise different outcomes, there may be limitations on organisational comparability using SROI¹⁹.

12 Wilkes, V. and Mullins, D. (2012) op. cit.

13 Harlock, J. (2013) Impact measurement practice in the UK third sector: A review of emerging evidence, Third Sector Research Centre Working Paper 106, University of Birmingham.

14 Wilkes, V. and Mullins, D. (2012) op. cit.

15 This approach has recently been used to examine the effectiveness of in-work progression for Universal Credit recipients: Department for Work and Pensions (2018) Universal Credit: In-work progression randomised controlled trial: Findings from quantitative survey and qualitative research, London: DWP.

16 For further discussions of the limitations of CBA and economic-based impact measurement more generally see: Adler, M., & Posner, E. A. (2009). 'New foundations of cost-benefit analysis: A reply to Professors Sinden, Kysar, and Driesen', *Regulation & Governance*, 3(1): 72-83; Ackerman, F. and Heinzerling, L. (2004) *Priceless: On knowing the price of everything and the value of nothing*, New York: The New Press; Richardson, H.S. (2000) 'The stupidity of the cost-benefit standard', *Journal of Legal Studies*, 29(S2): 971-1003; Vardakoulias, O. (2013). *Economics Briefing 4: Social CBA and SROI*, London: New Economics Foundation.

17 Nicholls, J., Lawlor, E., Neitzert, E. and Goodspeed, T. (2009) *A guide to social return on investment*, London: The Cabinet Office.

18 Arvidson, M., Lyon, F., McKay, S. and Moro, D. (2010) *The ambitions and challenges of SROI*, Third Sector Research Centre Working Paper 49, University of Birmingham.

19 Nicholls et al. (2009) op. cit.

Other notable approaches to impact measurement include social accounting and social audit. Social accounting attempts to assign financial values to all inputs, and hence issues similar to those with CBA have been noted²⁰. Social audit uses qualitative data alongside financial information to understand progress towards key objectives. An issue is that it can be very focused on particular aspects of housing associations and is therefore not the most appropriate tool for inter-organisational comparisons²¹. However, as noted above, the housing associations mostly indicated that they used approaches based on CBA/SROI. For further information on debates about impact measurement, see Appendix 3.

3.2 Review of tools

In terms of specific tools, our initial call for evidence suggested that the HACT Social Value Bank was the most widely used. The HACT launched the Social Value Bank in 2014, with the claim that it offers ‘the largest set of methodologically consistent social value metrics ever produced’²². These measures can be used as a standalone methodology or fed into SROI or CBA. The tools, which include the Value Calculator along with an online mapping and analytical tool, are aligned with the principles of SROI but do not by themselves include all aspects of SROI. More specifically, they do not include engagement with stakeholders other than short before-and-after surveys. It should be noted, though, that an aim of the tools is to enable housing associations that would otherwise not have been able to conduct an SROI analysis to measure social value.

A limitation is that, as outcomes are predetermined, it can be difficult to estimate the value of outcomes not included in the Social Value Bank. The HACT have begun a move towards graduated impact measures, but currently the majority of outcomes are binary (i.e. they are either experienced or not). In reality, though, people experience degrees of improvement that relate to many outcomes, such as employability and wellbeing. Although the tools use average values, the HACT argue that these are robust as they are derived from large nationally representative datasets. Nevertheless, they do acknowledge that there may be variations in values between groups and suggest that other methods may be needed in some cases to triangulate results. The HACT also recognise that there are issues associated with calculating the deadweight (outlined above) but suggest

that their use of a standardised deadweight allows a satisfactory compromise for all but the best resourced academic studies²³.

New Economy CBA is another tool available for housing associations to use. It is based on social CBA, which allows the measurement of fiscal, economic and social values of project outcomes to identify the costs and benefits of various services and interventions. It includes ‘cashability’ – the extent to which outcomes result in reduced fiscal expenditure (i.e. government spending that can subsequently be reallocated). For this reason, it can be used alongside the HACT Social Value Bank so that costs to HM Treasury can be included in the analysis. New Economy have published guidance on their approach alongside an Excel spreadsheet model to support CBA, which includes a database of around 600 costs²⁴. The tool is not specific to housing and can be used across different sectors. Produced with input from Whitehall analysts, the methodology is based on the Green Book, which constitutes guidance for public sector bodies on how to appraise proposals²⁵.

The limitations are broadly similar to those noted above for the HACT Social Value Bank. Firstly, the tool does not require stakeholder involvement, and so there may be a tendency for housing associations to focus narrowly on the tool itself. Also, it may be difficult for housing associations attempting to measure outcomes not included in the spreadsheet tool, as the variables are largely binary, and average values are used. However, there are also some limitations that are more specific to this tool. The Unit Cost Database is smaller and increasingly out of date, and users of the tool need to set their own deadweight. Finally, there is a question about whether the stress placed on cashability marks a return to emphasising traditional economic measures.

Although New Economy CBA and, in particular, the HACT Social Value Bank were the tools most frequently referred to in our initial call for evidence, it is important to note that other resources are available. More specifically, a number of case management systems have been reviewed in the context of housing, such as AdvicePro, Lamplight and Outcomes Star²⁶. We do not go into further detail about these here as, although they help to measure progress, they do not provide a broader framework for our understanding of impact in the context of housing (see the definition of impact used above).

20 Polonsky, M. and Grau, S.L. (2010) ‘Assessing the social impact of charitable organizations – four alternative approaches’, *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 16(2): 195–211.

21 Nicholls et al. (2009) *op. cit.*

22 HACT/The SROI Network (2015) *SROI and HACT’s Social Value Bank linkages paper*, London: HACT/The SROI Network.

23 *Ibid.*

24 H.M. Treasury, Public Service Transformation Network and New Economy (2014) *Supporting public service transformation: cost benefit analysis guidance for local partnerships*, London: H.M. Treasury.

25 H.M. Treasury (2011) *The Green Book: appraisal and evaluation in central government*, London: H.M. Treasury.

26 Wilkes, V. and Mullins, D. (2012) *op. cit.*

There are also a range of guides and toolkits available to housing associations that aim to help improve impact measurement. These include advice on how to deliver social value²⁷, along with a focus on producing a theory of change, templates including how to communicate impact, and questionnaires to understand where the organisation is up to in terms of measuring performance and what the next steps should be²⁸. These guides and tools can aid organisational understanding and include case studies and templates, but they are for the most part not standalone impact measurement tools and are often not focused on housing or employment related support.

To promote learning in the employment support sector, the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) have developed their Evidence Hub, which draws together over 400 research reports under categories such as service design, welfare and conditionality, and employers, as well as an evaluation of past programmes²⁹. This represents a significant resource for housing associations to examine existing evidence relating to employment related support, which can assist organisational consideration of impact measurement.

3.3 Summary

As noted above, it is not appropriate to prescribe specific approaches to measuring impact. Still, a number of general principles can be identified at this stage. There is a need for housing associations to measure the impact of their employment related support in order to measure the difference they are making in a systematic way. The basis of this is the collection of good-quality data. Moreover, this measurement should include economic and social value, participation from a range of stakeholders and qualitative and quantitative data, in order to avoid too narrow a focus and to capture a range of perspectives. This requires going beyond simply using an off-the-shelf tool by itself. Working with tool providers to try to find ways of measuring less tangible variables and of disaggregating the values for different groups of beneficiaries may represent a way forward.

²⁷ Temple, N. and Wigglesworth, C. (2014) *Communities count: The four steps to unlocking social value*, London: Social Enterprise UK. See also: Salford Social Value Alliance (2015) *Salford social value toolkit*.

²⁸ Kingston Smith (2012) *Impact measurement toolkit*, London: Kingston Smith LLP.

²⁹ <http://www.ersa.org.uk/evidencehub>

4. Survey of GUAC members



This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the survey data collected from housing associations in order to shed light on the various contexts, the breadth of employment related support activities and associated perspectives. Descriptive statistics are discussed first in order to help paint a picture of the participating housing associations, the type of support provided, their views of the support, its social and economic impact and measurement tools, as well as wider contextual information about customer finances, benefits and employment. Subsequently, correlations between key variables are examined, before an examination of relationships with full-time and part-time employment through cross tabulation and data visualisation.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

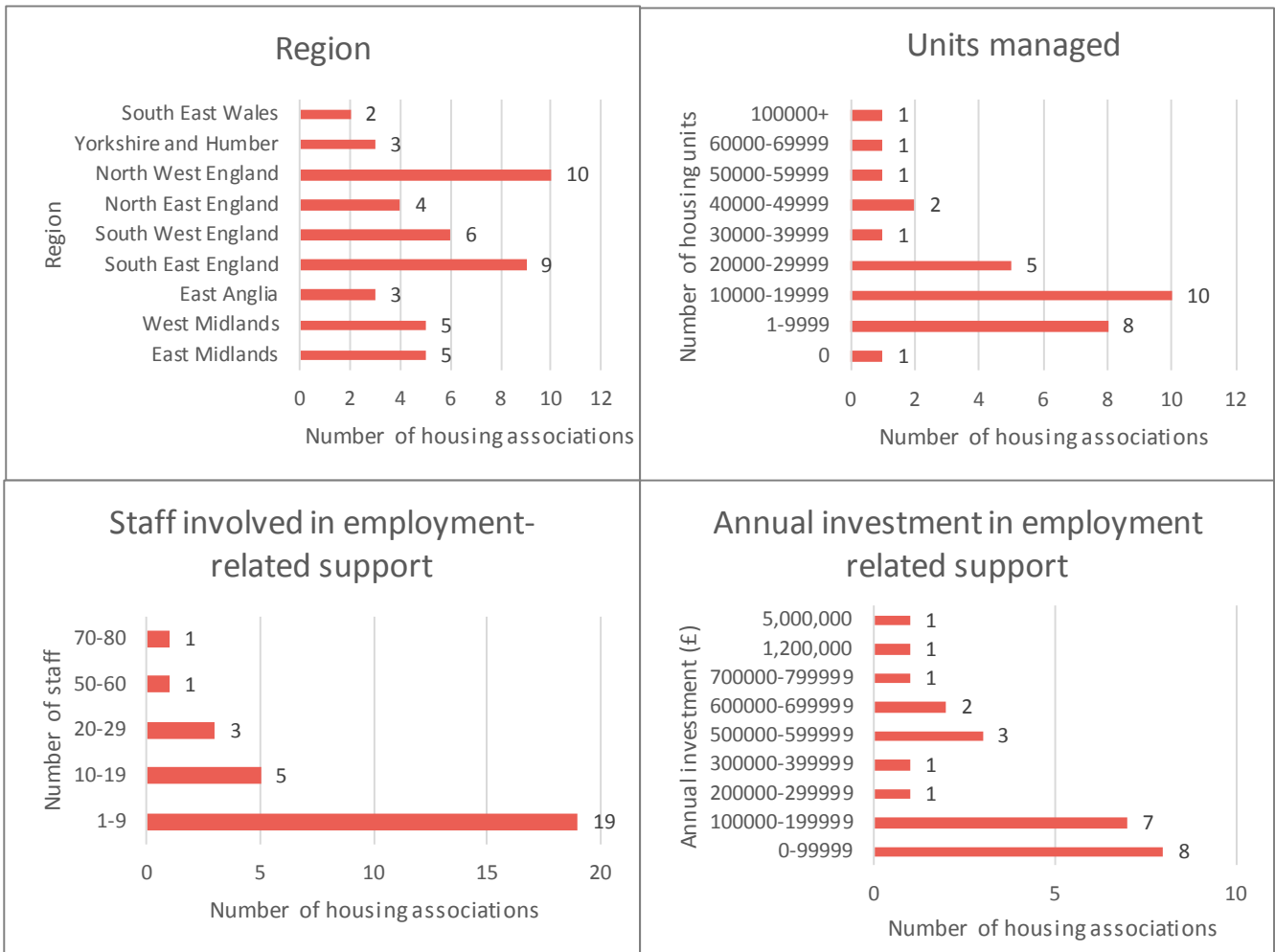
As can be seen in Figure 1, the organisations are representative of the GUAC membership in the sense that they are spread across England and South East Wales. The areas with most respondents are North West and South East England. All but one of the organisations are directly involved in housing provision (the exception being a self-identified social enterprise

that provides employment related support). The most frequent response in terms of units managed was 10,000–19,999 (10 organisations), followed by 1–9,999 (8 organisations); however, there were a minority of organisations with considerably more housing units, with one organisation reporting having over 100,000 housing units. The majority of organisations (19) had 1–9 staff involved in employment related support. At the upper end of the scale, one of the larger organisations had 70–80 employment related support staff.

The financial investment of these organisations is considerable³⁰. Eight of the organisations invest less than £100,000 per year in employment related support, whereas a further seven invest more than £100,000 but less than £200,000. At the upper end of the scale, one housing association reported investing over £5,000,000 per year. Taken together, Figure 1 shows that there is significant employment related support activity on the part of GUAC members around the country, involving a large number of staff and significant financial investment.

³⁰ Indeed, a 2018 study found that the 10 largest GUAC housing association members had invested £18.3m in 2016/17. The authors estimated that if this was nationally representative, UK housing providers would have invested £76.9m in employment and skills related support in 2016/17. See: Dromey, J., Snelling, C. and Baxter, D. (2018) Building communities that work, London: Institute for Public Policy Research.

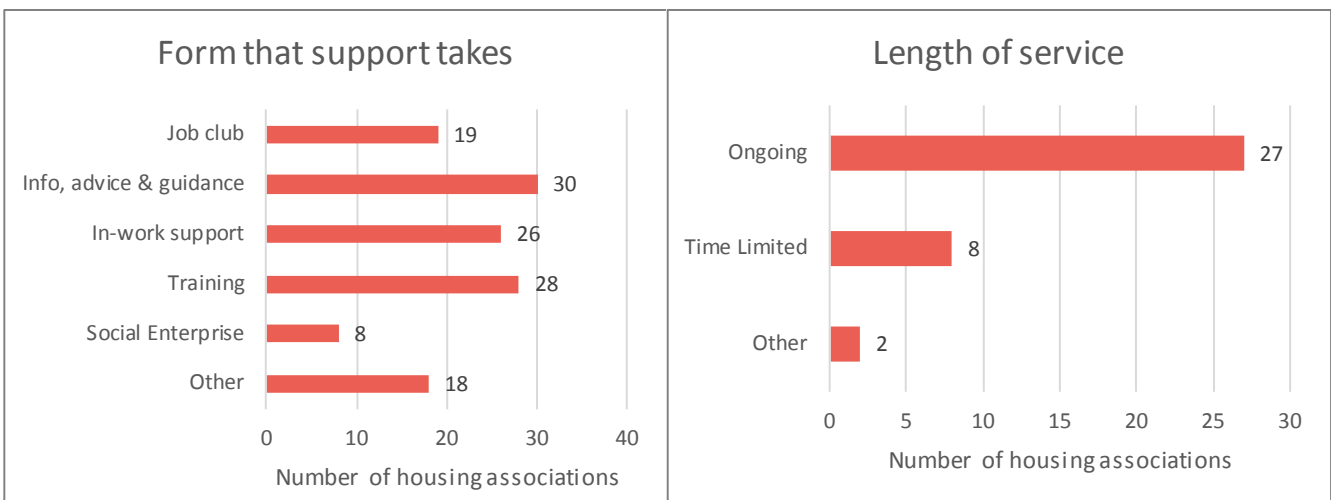
Figure 1 - Housing association characteristics



Questions relating to the type of employment related support allowed respondents to select multiple answers. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the most frequent response regarding the form that support takes was information, advice and guidance (all 30 organisations), followed by training (28 organisations). The 'other' forms of support noted by respondents included volunteering, work experience, enterprise development, apprenticeships, grants and bursaries, laptop loan schemes and projects to

develop resilience and self-confidence in young people. An ongoing employment related support service was reported by 27 organisations, whereas 8 organisations reported time limited services (7 of these also offer ongoing support, with one only offering time limited support). Of the two housing associations that stated 'other', one has been recommissioning on an annual basis and the other has ad hoc partnerships.

Figure 2 - Type of support

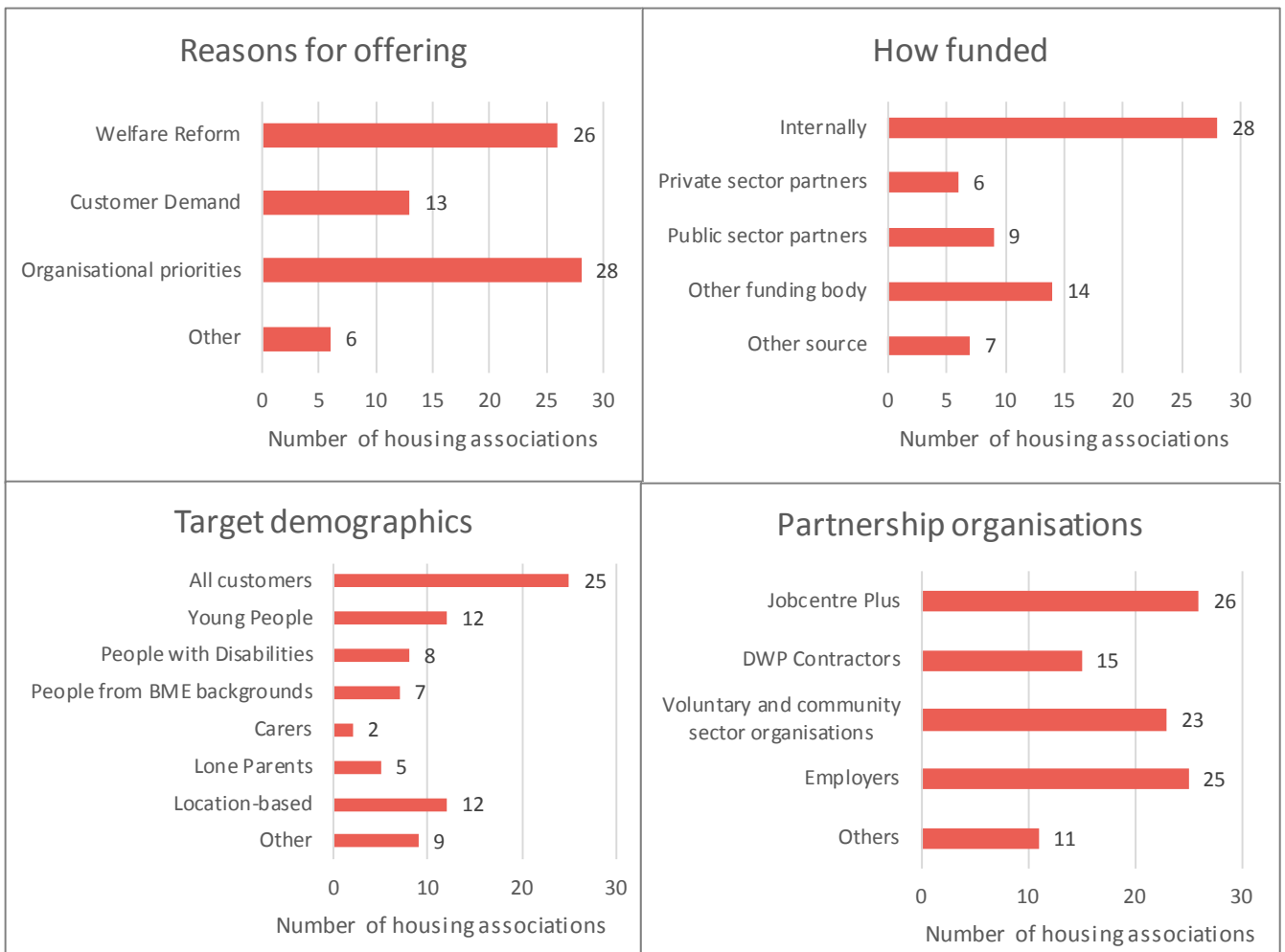


Organisational priorities were the most common reason for offering these services (28 organisations), followed by welfare reform (26 organisations) (Figure 3). Other responses included the 'business case', 'income maximisation' and being asked by partners 'due to our strong track record delivering services in the area'. Almost all the organisations (28) spent their own funds on employment related support activity, although they did also access other funding bodies and public and private sector partners. In terms of target demographics, most of the organisations targeted all customers, with young people and location-based (i.e.

targeting particular areas of the community) being the second most frequent responses (12 organisations each). Partnership organisations included Jobcentre Plus and employers among the most frequent responses. Other partners included schools, colleges, training providers, fire services, local authorities and other housing associations.

In short, there are a variety of activities and ways of working amongst the GUAC membership. In a number of instances, housing associations have diversified support programmes and do not appear to be reliant on a particular partner or funding source.

Figure 3 - Type of support (continued)



As Figure 4 illustrates, HACT Social Value Bank measures are the most frequently used impact measurement tools (22 organisations). It is important to note that all the organisations use some form of impact measurement. Twenty-five out of the 30 housing associations reported using external measures, whereas half the associations use in-house tools. New Economy CBA and data measures and impact analysis from the ERSA and the Institute of Employability Professionals were the other approaches named by the housing associations. Overall, these findings suggest that there has been an increase in the use of impact measurement tools by housing associations in recent years³¹.

Respondents' explanations of their answers also provided meaningful data. Three housing associations commented on how using the HACT Social Value Bank/SROI had shown significant levels of social impact. One of the housing associations stated that they had used case studies alongside this and tracked customer progress. The same housing association commented that 'it's not all about helping customers into work, it's about achieving their goal they have set'. One of the other housing associations using the HACT tools commented on how this helped to show the impact of

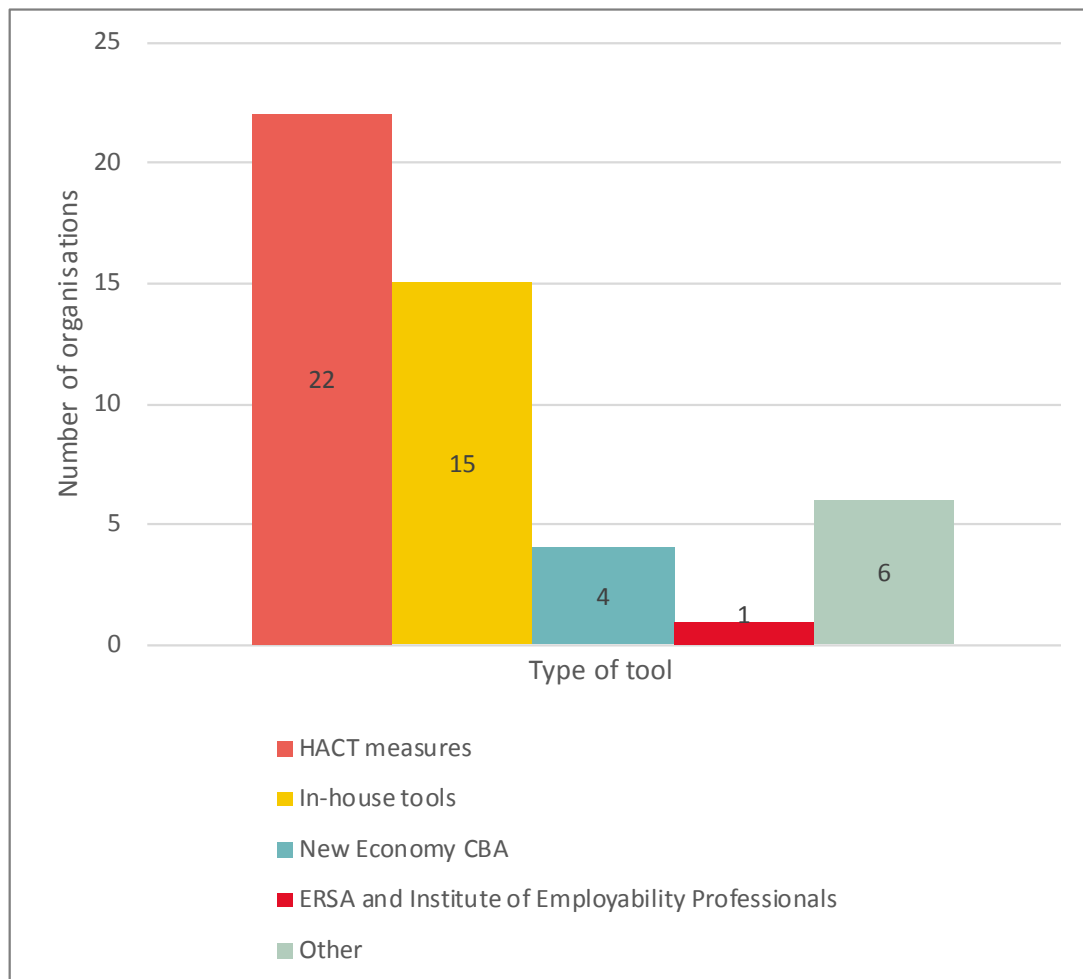
softer approaches: 'Our confidence building programme... provides high values on a par with our employment growth project'.

Other housing associations discussed impact case studies and social accounts, with one commenting that 'When we look at the impact of our employment support service for our residents, we feel the most important measure is their feedback. Case studies and customer comments speak volumes'. Another housing association commented that they focus specifically on key variables: 'Number of tenants engaged in employment services V tenancy performance'.

Significantly, six housing associations stated that they do not collect employment data at the level of detail required. Two of these commented that they are introducing new systems that will help them to collect these data in future. Two housing associations stated that these data are difficult to get hold of/collate.

When reporting their perceptions of issues/areas relating to employment related support, almost all the organisations had a very positive view (14 organisations) or a quite positive view (15 organisations) of their relationships with partners, with just one organisation

Figure 4 - Ways of measuring impact



³¹ In our survey, 83% of the housing associations reported using external measures (25 out of 30). Although the sample was different, this is much higher than the 41% of housing providers found to use external measures in 2012. See Wilkes, V. and Mullins, D. (2012) op. cit.

giving a neutral response (Figure 5). Perceptions of social impact were slightly more positive than those of economic impact. Regarding social impact, 20 organisations were very positive, 7 were quite positive, 2 were neutral and 1 responded 'other' as 'It is too early to say...'. Although still generally positive, perceptions of measurement tools and the organisations' use of these were more mixed. In total, 17 organisations responded positively (quite positive or very positive) when asked how effective they thought the available tools were in helping their organisation measure the impact of employment related support, and 6 gave negative responses. Of the 4 organisations responding 'other',

for one this was because they did not currently use measurement tools, whereas for the others it was due to combinations of strengths and weaknesses, the tools being 'only as effective as the data collected', and questions about the validity of the tools. Respondents seemed to have a slightly more positive view of their organisations' use of the tools, with 21 organisations giving positive responses overall, and 6 giving negative responses. The two that responded 'other' felt that it was too early to comment.

Figure 5 - Views of employment related support

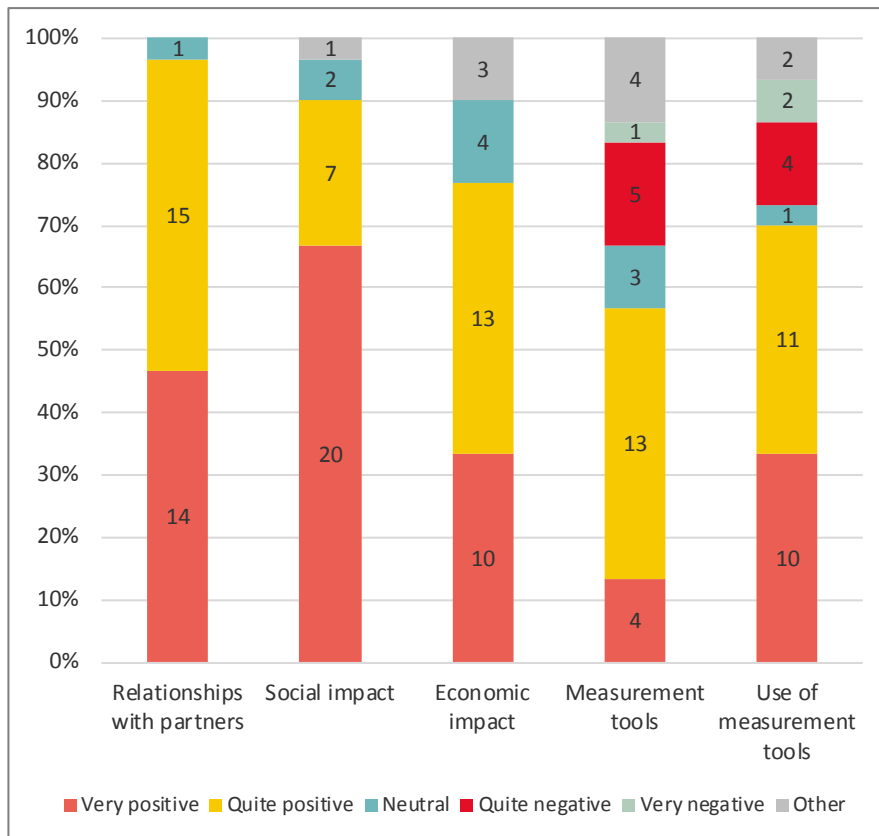
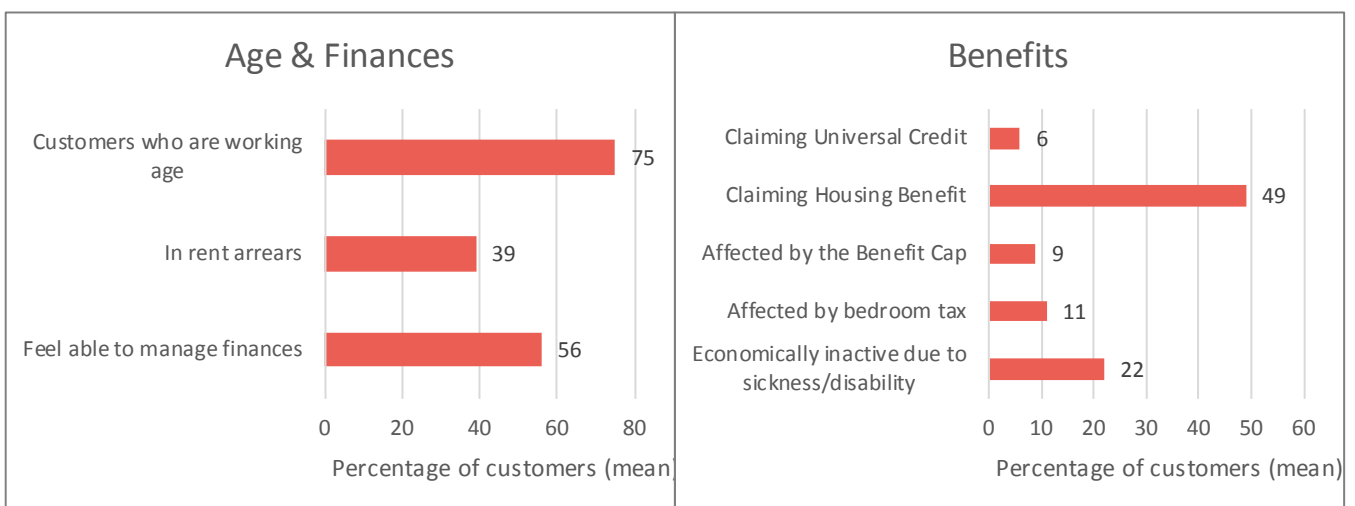


Figure 6 - Information about customers



Less information was provided by the organisations about their customers (Figure 6). Although this means that the responses here must be treated with caution, they do offer some indication of the range of customer circumstances that the organisations need to deal with. The response rates to this part of the survey also suggest that there may be limits to the data that the organisations collect or that these data may not be calibrated around the employment related support service. In terms of the actual data, overall 75% of customers were of working age across the organisations. On average, only 56% of customers reported feeling able to manage their finances, and 39% were in rent arrears. Regarding benefits, 49% of customers were claiming Housing Benefit (in comparison with approximately 16% in Great Britain as a whole³²), with customers claiming a range of other benefits, including Universal Credit (6% in comparison with 3.71% nationally³³).

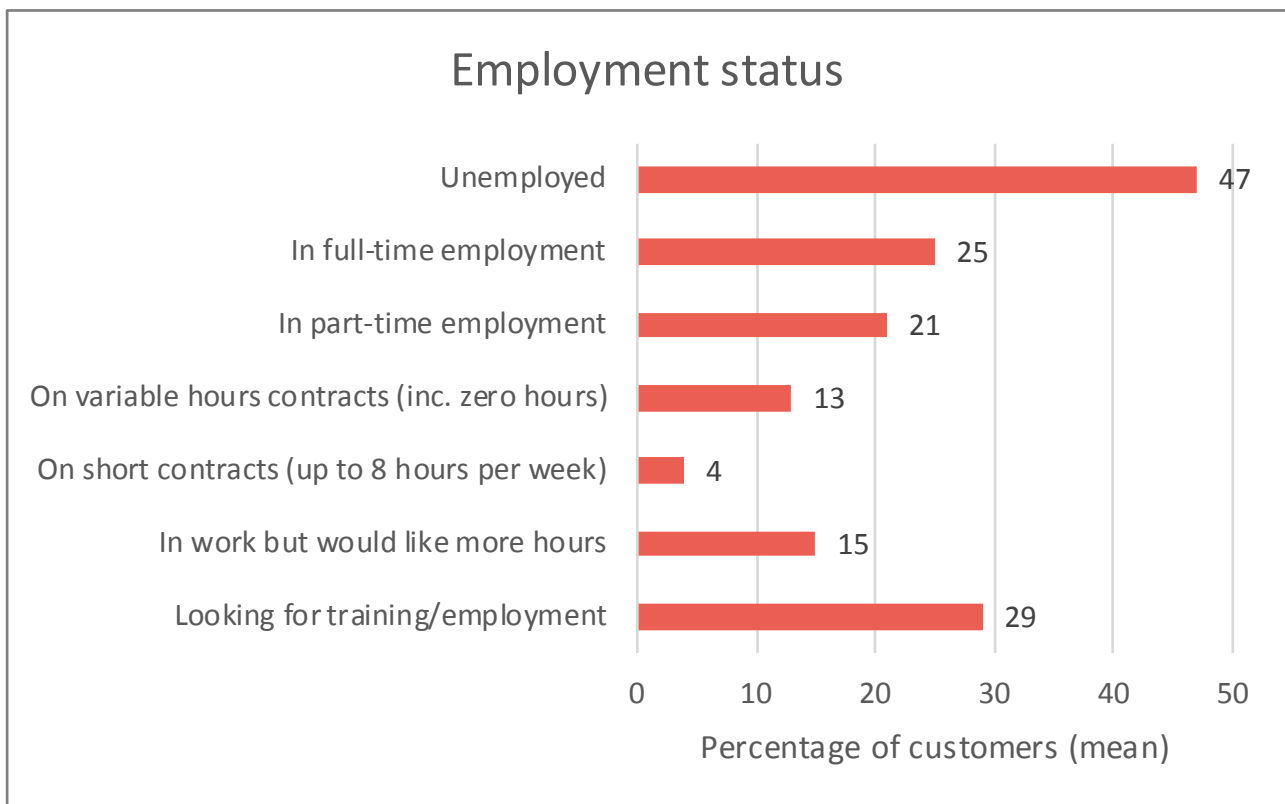
In the case of the organisations that responded to the questions about employment, 47% of customers were unemployed, with 25% being in full-time employment and 21% in part-time employment (Figure 7). Finally, 29% were looking for training/employment. Again, there was considerable variation among the organisations, and, despite the work that they had put into employment

related support, they were faced with difficult circumstances in terms of financial difficulties, high levels of benefit claimants and low levels of employment.

4.2 Correlations

The next stage in the statistical analysis was to examine correlations between key variables in order to establish whether there were any relationships between customer circumstances, the motivation for employment related support, investment in employment related support and employment outcomes. This also enabled us to determine the strengths of relationships between these variables (see table in Appendix 2). Of particular interest are the strong negative relationships between training and full-time employment and between Universal Credit and full-time employment. These suggest that organisations with high levels of full-time employment are not offering as much training and that there are lower levels of full-time employment in those housing associations where there are more customers claiming Universal Credit. To some extent, this is to be expected, as there is less immediate need to train those already in full-time employment, and working full-time in many instances will mean that there is no entitlement to Universal Credit.

Figure 7 - Employment status of customers



³² Calculation based upon the number of Housing Benefit claimants (4,177,820) as a proportion of households in Great Britain (26,437,600). Data taken from ONS (2018) Housing Benefit Caseload Statistics and ONS (2017) Total number of households by region and country of the UK, 1996 to 2017.

³³ Based on 980,000 Universal Credit claimants in Great Britain in June 2018. Data taken from Department for Work and Pensions (2018) Universal Credit Statistics Data to 14 June 2018.

There is a strong negative relationship between in-work support and part-time employment, which suggests that most customers in part-time work do not receive in-work support. Interestingly, there is a strong positive relationship between perceived economic impact and part-time employment, which means that those housing associations that perceived that they had a strong economic impact were more likely to have higher levels of customers in part-time employment. There is a strong negative relationship between customers affected by the benefit cap and those who are looking for work, which means that the benefit cap may not be acting as an incentive to look for work, at least among customers of these housing associations.

In terms of measurement, there are negative relationships between (1) the perceived effectiveness of the measurement tools and annual investment in employment related support per housing unit and (2) the organisational effectiveness of the measurement tools and annual investment in employment related support per housing unit, which suggests that housing associations that have less trust in the measurement tools or their ability to use them are investing more. Rent arrears has strong positive relationships with both perceived social impact and job clubs.

4.3 Cross Tabulation

The next stage was to carry out cross tabulations between selected independent variables and full-time and part-time employment. At this stage, we made a decision to focus more on variables that the housing associations have more control over and therefore analysed the form of employment related support, the reason for offering employment related support, investment in employment related support per housing unit³⁴, the duration of the offer of employment related support, views of impact and views of the measurement tools. We also examined the relationships of full-time and part-time employment in order to establish whether there is a business case for offering employment related support.

The results, which are discussed below, show that there is a business case for efforts to increase employment among tenants, in particular full-time employment, as the higher rates of full-time employment are, the lower rent arrears are. Although investment in employment related support results in increased employment to a certain extent, the type of employment related support (in particular job clubs and enterprise development) and awareness of social and economic impact were also important.

Table 1 - Percentage of customers in employment by form of employment related support

	Job club		In-work support		Training		Information		Enterprise development	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Full-time employment										
1-10%	1	1	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	2
11-20%	2	1	2	1	3	0	3	0	1	2
31-40%	3	0	3	0	3	0	3	0	0	3
61-70%	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Total	7	2	8	1	8	1	9	0	2	7
$\chi^2(3 \text{ df})$	2.25		2.25		9.00		-		5.14	
p	0.52		0.52		0.03		-		0.16	
Part-time employment										
1-10%	1	1	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	2
11-20%	4	1	5	0	4	1	5	0	1	4
21-30%	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
71-80%	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
Total	7	2	8	1	8	1	9	0	2	7
$\chi^2(3 \text{ df})$	1.48		9.00		9.00		-		4.37	
p	0.69		0.03		0.03		-		0.22	

Note: there were a total of 9 responses.

³⁴ We created this variable in order to have a way of comparing organisational investment in employment related support that went beyond raw investment in employment related support to take the number of housing units into account.

Table 1 shows the relationships between the form of employment related support and rates of full-time and part-time employment. The housing associations that have job clubs have higher rates of full-time employment, but the relationship is less clear for part-time employment, with five of the organisations that have a job club having less than 20% part-time employment. None of the housing associations without a job club has more than 20% full-time or part-time employment. Regarding in-work support, the one housing association that does not provide this has 11–20% full-time employment but 71–80% part-time employment (statistically significant). Interestingly, the only housing association that does not provide training has the highest rate of full-time employment (statistically significant) but 11–20% part-time employment (statistically significant). Hence, it could be that they do not perceive a need for training. All the organisations provide information, advice and guidance. Only two organisations use enterprise development to provide employment related support, but one of these has the highest rate of full-time employment, and the other has the highest level of part-time employment.

As can be seen in Table 2, the housing associations that reported welfare reform as a key reason for offering employment related support mostly had low levels of full-time and part-time customer employment. This is to be expected, as their customers are more likely to have been affected by welfare reform. No clear pattern could be discerned in terms of customer demand or organisational priorities, however.

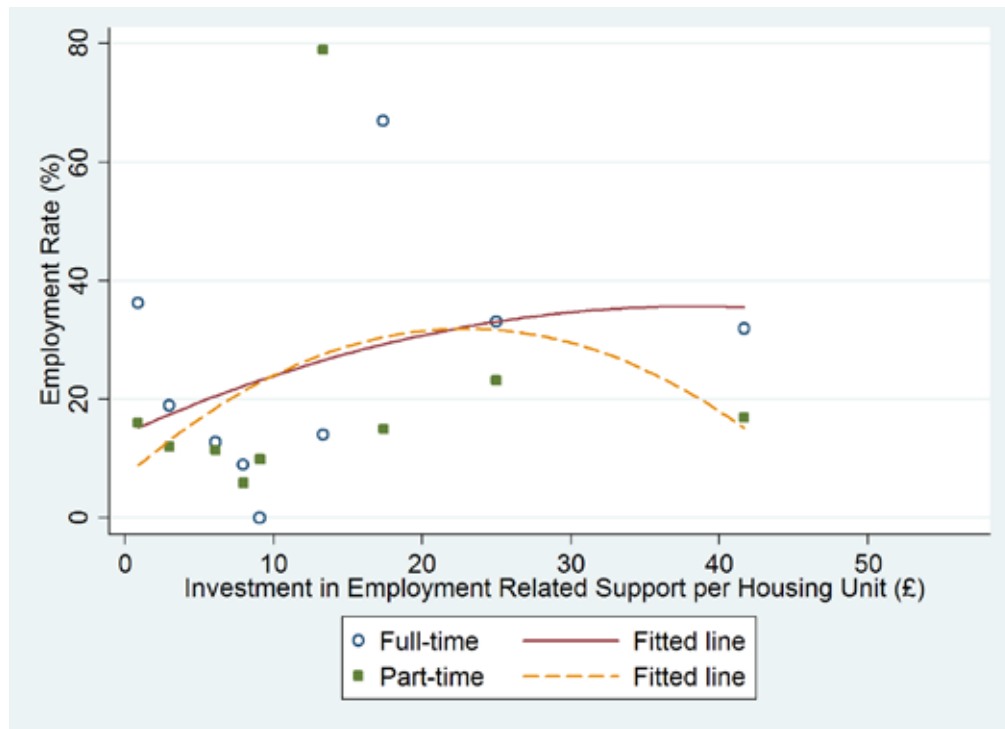
As the scatter plot in Figure 8 shows, there are relationships between employment rates and annual investment in employment related support. Full-time employment increases with investment before levelling off above approximately £30 per housing unit³⁵. Part-time employment also increases in line with investment but decreases above approximately £25 per housing unit. It should be noted that these figures are above the average annual investment by GUAC housing associations in employment related support of approximately £21 per housing unit. Although we cannot be certain why the relationship is less straightforward for part-time employment, one possible reason is that housing associations with higher levels of investment in employment related support may be more focused on getting tenants into full-time employment.

Table 2 - Percentage of customers in employment by reason for offering employment related support

	Welfare reform		Customer demand		Organisational priorities	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Full-time employment						
1–10%	1	1	0	2	1	1
11–20%	3	0	2	1	3	0
31–40%	3	0	1	2	2	1
61–70%	0	1	0	1	1	0
Total	7	2	3	6	7	2
$\chi^2(3 \text{ df})$	6.11		3.00		2.25	
p	0.11		0.39		0.52	
Part-time employment						
1–10%	1	1	0	2	1	1
11–20%	4	1	2	3	4	1
21–30%	1	0	0	1	1	0
71–80%	1	0	1	0	1	0
Total	7	2	3	6	7	2
$\chi^2(3 \text{ df})$	1.48		3.60		1.48	
p	0.69		0.31		0.69	

Note: there were a total of 9 responses.

³⁵ As noted above, we examined investment in employment related support per housing unit in order to improve the comparability of housing associations with different sizes of housing stock.

Figure 8 - Percentage of customers in employment by investment in employment related support

Those housing associations that have been offering employment related support for 4–7 years have the highest rates of full-time employment (Table 3). Those that have offered support for 7–10 years have relatively low levels of full-time and part-time employment, with

the exception of one organisation that has 71–80% part-time employment. These results show that the duration of the offer is relatively unimportant and that there are other factors at play.

Table 3 - Percentage of customers in employment by duration of employment related support offer

	1-3 years	4-7 years	7-10 years	Total
Full-time employment				
1–10%	1	1	0	2
11–20%	0	0	3	3
31–40%	1	2	0	3
61–70%	0	1	0	1
Total	2	4	3	9
$\chi^2(6 \text{ df})$				10.13
p				0.12
Part-time employment				
1–10%	1	1	0	2
11–20%	0	3	2	5
21–30%	1	0	0	1
71–80%	0	0	1	1
Total	2	4	3	9
$\chi^2(6 \text{ df})$				8.33
p				0.22

Note: there were a total of 9 responses.

As shown in Table 4, organisations with relatively higher levels of employment had very positive perceptions of their social and economic impact, with the exception of views of economic impact for higher full-time employment, which were only quite positive. These results are interesting as they reveal a level of awareness of organisational performance. However, these results are only statistically significant for part-time employment and views of economic impact.

Next, we examined the relationships between employment rates and perceptions of the effectiveness and use of impact measurement tools (Table 5). Regarding tool effectiveness, the organisations with quite negative perceptions had relatively higher levels of full-time and part-time customer employment. Regarding the use of tools, the organisations with negative perceptions again had higher levels of full-time and part-time customer employment. Interestingly, these are the organisations with better (or more readily available) data (and thereby potentially better customer insight). It may be the case that organisations with better data that are performing well feel that they have less need for the measurement tools.

Table 4 - Percentage of customers in employment by views of impact

	Social impact			Economic impact		
	Neutral	Quite positive	Very positive	Neutral	Quite positive	Very positive
Full-time employment						
1–10%	0	1	1	1	1	0
11–20%	0	2	1	0	2	1
31–40%	1	0	2	0	3	0
61–70%	0	0	1	0	1	0
Total	1	3	5	1	7	1
$\chi^2(6 \text{ df})$	5.20			6.00		
p	0.52			0.42		
Part-time employment						
1–10%	0	1	1	1	1	0
11–20%	1	2	2	0	5	0
21–30%	0	0	1	0	1	0
71–80%	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	1	3	5	1	7	1
$\chi^2(6 \text{ df})$	2.64			12.89		
p	0.89			0.05		

Note: there were a total of 9 responses.

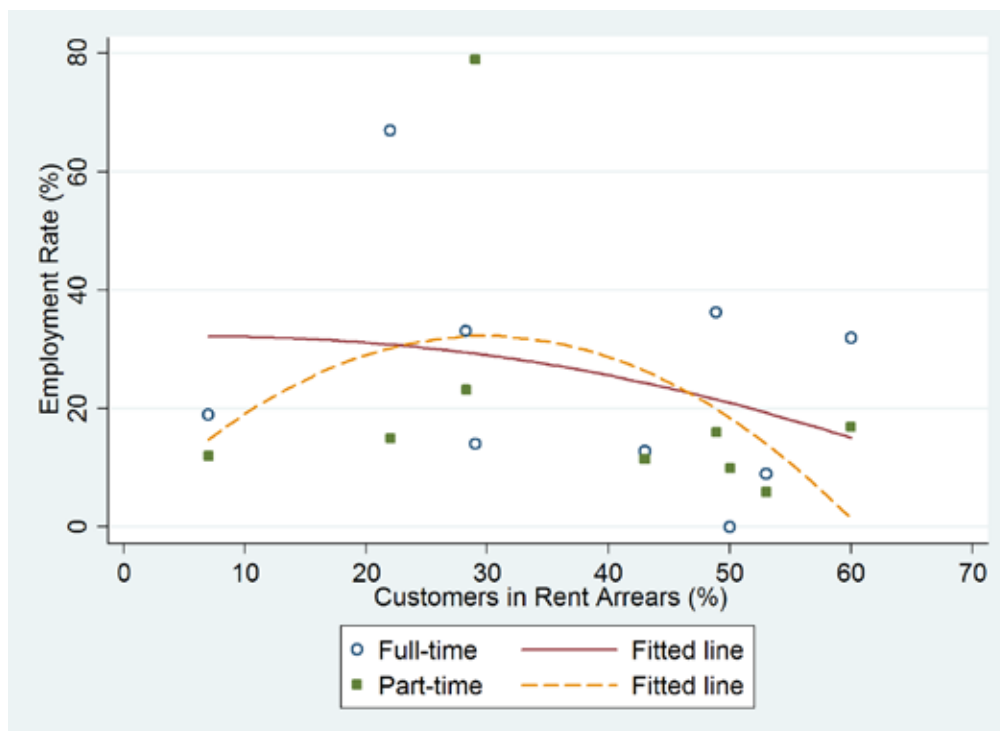
Table 5 - Table 5: Percentage of customers in employment by perceptions of measurement tools

	Social impact			Economic impact			
	Quite negative	Quite positive	Very positive	Very negative	Quite negative	Neutral	Quite Positive
Full-time employment							
1-10%	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
11-20%	1	2	0	1	0	1	1
31-40%	2	0	1	0	3	0	0
61-70%	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	5	3	1	1	5	1	2
$\chi^2(6 \text{ df})$	5.2			8.85			
p	0.52			0.45			
Part-time employment							
1-10%	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
11-20%	2	2	1	0	3	1	1
21-30%	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
71-80%	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	5	3	1	1	5	1	2
$\chi^2(6 \text{ df})$	2.64			10.89			
p	0.85			0.28			

Note: there were a total of 9 responses.

The scatter plot in Figure 9 shows that as full-time employment increases rent arrears decrease. Hence, there is a business case for investing in employment related support. For part-time employment the relationship is more curvilinear, with rent arrears being high for some in part-time employment but low for

others. This may be due to the under-employment or low incomes of some people in part-time employment who want to find full-time work to improve their financial situation. Another potential explanation is that it takes time after entering part-time employment to catch up with rent arrears.

Table 6 - Figure 9: Percentage of customers in employment by rent arrears

4.4 Summary

This chapter has highlighted the variety of employment related support activities and ways of working among the GUAC membership. It is possible to identify some general trends, however. The employment related support on offer most frequently takes the form of information, advice and guidance or training and in most cases is ongoing. The most frequently stated reasons for offering the support were organisational priorities, followed by welfare reform. Most of the organisations targeted all customers, followed by young people and specific locations.



We found a negative association between employment and rent arrears – as the number of customers in employment increases, the number of customers in rent arrears decreases. This relationship is less straightforward for part-time employment, which may be due to the under-employment or low incomes of some people in part-time employment. The findings suggest that there is a business case for efforts to increase employment and to help those looking for additional hours into full-time work.

Full-time and part-time employment both increase in line with annual investment in employment related support up to £30 and £25 per housing unit, respectively. This is above the average annual investment of approximately £21, and hence there may be a case for housing associations to increase their investment in employment related support. The type of employment related support also appears to have an impact, with employment related support in the form of job clubs and enterprise development being most closely associated with employment. Housing associations with the highest levels of employment were aware of their social and economic impact but interestingly tended to have negative perceptions of tool effectiveness and their use of the tools.



5. Case study consultation



As part of this research, we conducted focus groups with housing associations, beneficiaries and external stakeholders to gather their perceptions of the value of housing association employment interventions and how this value is measured. Between April and June 2018, the research team visited 6 locations across England and Wales. In total, 73 people participated in the case studies, including 31 housing association staff, 16 external stakeholders and 26 beneficiaries. After providing background information on the research participants and the nature of employment related support across the sites, this chapter presents evidence on the value of employment related support interventions in the housing sector from the perspectives of beneficiaries, housing associations and external stakeholders. It ends by presenting housing association perceptions of approaches to measuring value and impact.

5.1 Employment support provided in case study areas

The housing association case studies (see Appendix 1) showcase the diverse range of employment related support offered across the sector. The extent and nature of the support provided varied across the case study areas. However, common elements could be observed across the case study sites. All the housing associations involved in the case study visits employed staff with a specific remit to offer employment related support. In all cases support was provided to tenants, but in a small number of cases support was also available to other members of the local community.

In many instances, support involved intensive casework, with particular workers providing tailored support to a cohort of tenants. Here, support was driven by the individuals' needs, as the following quotes from staff and beneficiaries illustrate:

[Staff member] comes, you know, visits, sees how you're doing, offers any advice or support on any issues you've got around looking for work or needing any more training (Tenant)

It's very much dependent on the customer what their needs are (Housing association)

Across the case study areas, support was described as being assertive, person-centred and flexible. Participants had come into contact with the support available through a number of different routes – including promotion via social media (Facebook, Twitter), leaflets through the door, emails and text prompts:

[Name of housing association] will send you text messages: wellbeing group, the cook group, IT group – all sorts of things – to your phone (Tenant)

In two case study areas, participants had been visited by staff members in their homes and had decided to engage with the service after they had been told about it. For one group of young participants, this kind of assertive outreach had been key to their engagement.

Support typically included help with job searching, CV and application writing, the provision and brokerage of opportunities to take up voluntary work, running job clubs and mock job interviews. Practical and financial support also included the provision of funds to cover the cost of appropriate clothing and transport to interviews and once tenants had moved into work, as well as access to computers, which enabled job searching or registering on relevant recruitment sites. Tenants were also supported to identify and attend training courses offered by training providers. In some cases, the housing association covered the cost of course fees:

When I first met [name of housing association worker], I met him at [local café]... I literally sat down, I told him what I wanted to do. While I was sat there, he rang the company and got me on that course... I was just surprised when I first met him, within two weeks I think I got confirmation that I was on the course and my start date, so I was quite pleased about that (Tenant)

In a number of instances, housing associations were also involved in the creation of employment opportunities for their tenants through either directly employing tenants or creating additional opportunities through their procurement practices. Across the case study sites, there were many examples of tenants being supported into paid work opportunities across the organisation, for example in lettings, administration, maintenance and repairs. In addition, support to become self-employed was a common activity across the housing associations visited.

In the case of several housing associations, employment related support continued as tenants moved into work. Examples of this included advice on in-work benefit entitlements and regular phone calls (in one instance workplace visits) to ensure tenants were managing in work and find out whether they needed support with resolving any issues:

You could explain to them that you're not happy in your workplace and stuff like that, and they'll help you (Tenant)

[W]ith everybody that comes through us... [we make sure] they're aware of their rights and the benefits and anything else that they can access. A lot of people are not aware that you can claim Working Tax Credits if they've gone to work... and they think, right, I'm done now, I'm great, I've got a job... They're not realising that they're actually entitled to claim this, which will top up their income, which will enable them to be financially secure whilst working (Housing association)

In addition to supporting people to access and stay in work, housing associations also commonly offered support to tackle isolation and boost confidence.



5.2 The value of housing association employment interventions: tenant perceptions

Most participants in the tenants' focus groups were not in work. There was a wide variation in terms of their distance from the labour market – some were unemployed and actively seeking work, others were engaged in education or training in order to help them to re-enter the labour market, whereas others did not consider themselves able to move into work immediately (owing to health conditions and/or caring responsibilities) but, however, saw work as part of their future in the longer term. Many were volunteering, and a small number of participants were in paid work but receiving ongoing employment related support from their housing association.

Common barriers to work experienced by individuals involved in the focus groups included ill health, caring responsibilities, a lack of work experience and digital exclusion:

I've got joint custody, and most employers don't want to touch me with a bargepole because I have the girls Friday to Monday and then Sunday to Tuesday and half the holidays. It's trying to find work or give up the children (Tenant)

[I'm] not used to this way of doing things online and applying for a job online; that is a big barrier for me (Tenant)

The lack of opportunities available in the local labour market and poor transport infrastructure also posed considerable barriers, in particular in rural and old industrial areas:

I used to work at [large supermarket chain]... Then I used to work at [large retail chain]... and then that's been shut down. Then I'm trying to find another job (Tenant)

Often, multiple factors were preventing movements into the labour market. However, all participants had taken up the offer of help from their housing association to move into (or closer to) work.

We asked support beneficiaries about the value of employment related interventions offered by their housing association, including the impact these had had on them. Significantly, responses were incredibly positive across all locations:

Definitely, [it's been] life-changing, yes (Tenant)

[I've] got a life again. [I] actually feel human (Tenant)

Without the support of their housing association, participants felt strongly that they would have been lower-qualified, lacking in confidence and demotivated. Several also felt their mental health would have deteriorated:

It's building experience and confidence. My opinion, in myself, I don't feel confident... [but] I'm just starting to see it in this voluntary job. I'm opening my mouth, I'm getting my ideas out and then listening as well (Tenant)

There was a general view that the assistance provided was vital in boosting participants' chances of finding work. One tenant, for example, explained that participating in mock job interviews and receiving support to improve the layout of their CV had helped them to improve their confidence and their prospects of finding work:

Without the support of these sort of scheme... I feel like you'd be banging your head against a brick wall (Tenant)

A number of participants who were in work strongly believed they could not have returned to employment without the support of their housing association:



Without these things that are being run, you know, I don't think I'd have ever got back into work because there's no, like I say, there's nothing there from the Jobcentre (Tenant)

In addition to employment related outcomes, the impact of support on participants' wellbeing was valued as much as its ability to help them into work:

Quite a few members of [housing association] staff have changed my life... because I was on a downward spiral after losing my partner. I just didn't want to carry on and live no more (Tenant)

The responses from several participants show that this impact was felt much more widely than at an individual level, and there was also a positive impact on other members of the household:

I don't think I'd be where I was, and I don't think my husband would be where he was, without the contribution of [housing association employment support] (Tenant)

All participants were incredibly complimentary about the support they had received, with workers praised across all the locations. In the words of two tenants:

They've got real heart and they actually care (Tenant)

I can't speak highly enough of them (Tenant)

Service users across the case study sites expressed an overriding sentiment that the value of housing association employment workers was their willingness to dedicate time to build relationships and sustain the support over time, without the pressure of any obligation:

He sat down with me and actually spoke to me as a person and actually asked me what I would want to do or what I'd like to do or what help I could do with. We kind of bamboozled [name of worker] with all the things I would like to do, can do, would do, able to do and my problems, and he was able to put it all together to point me in a direction which no one else has been able to do (Tenant)

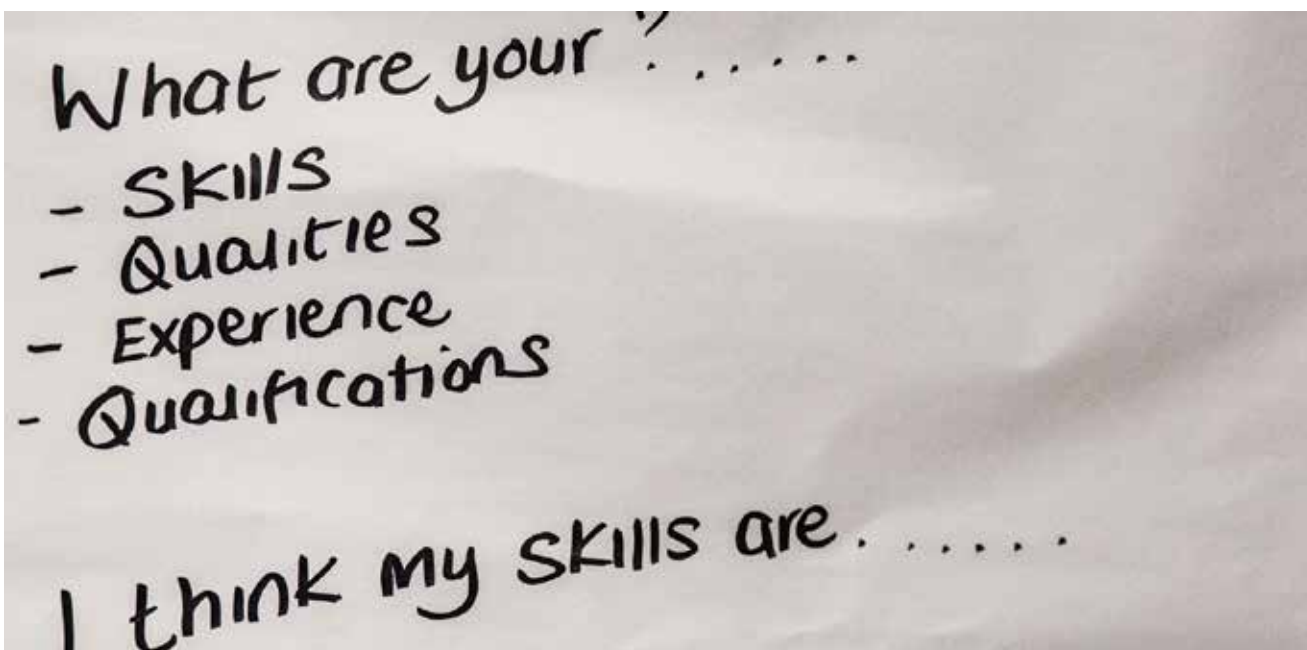
5.3 An important role for housing associations

Service users were asked whether they thought social housing associations should develop employment support in the first place or stick to their primary task of managing tenancies and properties and leave other aspects to organisations dedicated to employability and training. There was a universal consensus that this was a valid and important role. Many tenants felt that housing associations were better placed than other organisations to deliver this type of support. Housing associations, they felt, were uniquely placed to offer employment related support owing to the existing relationship they had with their tenants:

It's a different experience than what you would go to with the Jobcentre... when you've already built up the relationships with [housing association] and the people who work in those centres, I think you feel more comfortable and more at ease. They would get more out of you than what someone at the Jobcentre would do. That's my point of view, anyway. I felt a lot more at ease to talk to someone there than I would at a Jobcentre because I'd already built up good working relationships with them (Tenant)

In addition, it was felt that, because housing associations were not part of the formal employment support sector, they did not have to follow a prescribed set of rules and had a great deal of flexibility.

Across the case study areas, service users talked about a number of other organisations that had provided them with some form of employment related support (including the Jobcentre and local training providers). In many instances, however, the support provided by other agencies was negatively contrasted with that offered by their housing association. This was partly related to the conditions or eligibility criteria attached to help from other organisations – as one participant put it, there was always 'another catch or there's something else' related



to age, benefit status or cost thresholds. It was also attributed to the impersonal and inflexible approach of workers at other organisations, which were perceived as being target- and money-driven:

Every time you [other employment support agency] want me to sign a piece of paper, so that you get paid because you said you talked to me, great idea. That's what it's boiled down to with me and them, and it really irks me (Tenant)

Jobcentre Plus tended to come in for the most severe criticism in this regard. There was an explicit contrast: 'she's [housing association worker] done a lot more than the Jobcentre have done for me'. Housing association staff were also considered to be much more agile and responsive in comparison with mainstream employment services:

[W]ithin the first week, I've started training for my Level 2 Food and Hygiene. About three weeks after that, straight into the voluntary job, so I'm progressing faster than I was with the Jobcentre. I could be on at Jobcentre for near enough six months before I got anything from them, and with [housing association, it's] straightaway (Tenant)



5.4 The value of housing association employment interventions: staff and stakeholder perceptions

Similarly to the tenants we consulted with, housing association staff and external stakeholders were clear that the provision of employment related support within their context was incredibly valuable and important:

We've changed lives in massive ways (Housing association)

They have those relationships with the customers because they're in their houses. They are seen as someone they know (External stakeholder)

Engaging tenants in employment related support was also considered to have wider benefits, including a positive impact on the reduction of antisocial behaviour and boosting the local economy:

If people are sat at home all day, day in, day out, then arguments between neighbours are more likely to happen, and so antisocial behaviour on estates could be lessened in the fact that people are out at work and busy and getting in on a night. They've got things to do as opposed to sitting around (Housing association)



It's not just our customers though it's impacting though, it's our local employers. I mean we're looking to fill that gap that local employers need if we can (Housing association)

Several respondents also felt that supporting tenants into work could also have knock-on impacts, as they were felt to provide role models to other tenants/members of the local community:

I think once somebody sees somebody move into work, they go, 'Actually, I can do it' (Housing association)

One respondent felt that, in addition to helping people move into work, providing support of this kind actually led to people becoming 'better tenants', as the organisation was seen as being 'more than just a housing association':

Rather than seeing us as faceless landlord, they actually become better tenants because not only you have put a roof over their head, you've helped them into work, you have given them voluntary opportunities, you have given them that social contact through events that you put on, and all of that builds up for a better tenancy (Housing association)



However, in comparison with tenants, in some respects housing association staff were more measured in their responses:

If you're looking for work, you couldn't get a more bespoke service than the ones we have... but it's still a very tough job market out there. There are lots of zero-hours contracts and short-term, so it's harder work, I think. The recognition that – it used to be that when we got people a job that was it and we could relax (Housing association)

The need to provide employment related support was in recognition of the fact that employment was a key goal for many tenants. However, in recent years welfare reform (including the introduction of Universal Credit, the bedroom tax and benefit caps) had added impetus across all organisations involved in this research:

We understood that when Universal Credit hit that the best thing we could do would be to get our customers into work. At the end of the day, we focus on rent collection, and if we're not collecting rent we can't function as an organisation... obviously, to improve the lives of our customers as well, but one of the main drivers was to get them into work to be able to pay their rent (Housing association)

It was quite clear for them that if they were a single tenant now, going forward, if they weren't in full-time employment, on universal credit, even our social rents were not affordable, so that's pretty seismic (Housing association)

As part of this, it was recognised that new and significant challenges were facing tenants as a result of recent welfare reforms and the associated push to move more people with poor health conditions into work:

I feel we get an awful lot of residents who are coming through with major anxiety issues, who are afraid to leave houses, who, similarly to as you were saying, they've been put in this position where they have to return to work or begin work (Housing association)

Housing association staff were clear that offering a range of flexible support to reflect the diverse barriers, needs, capabilities and aspirations of tenants was an important aspect of the service they provided:

You need to give clients choice, don't you? It's not one foot fits all, is it really? You've got to have – there's so much diversity in there and what people want to do and what their needs are (Housing association)

Several participants spoke about the benefits of flexibility afforded by core-funded provision. Instead of their work being dictated by externally imposed targets, they were free to develop provision around the needs of tenants. It was felt that such a flexible approach was not possible with the demands associated with external funding sources, which were often narrowly focused on narrowly defined target groups. Furthermore, it was felt that the quality of the support offered was linked to the way in which housing associations were felt to have more invested in positive outcomes for tenants, given their

longer-term relationship with them, in contrast to one-off projects delivered by other employment related support providers:

We will always have that interest in who lives in our homes, and our homes are always going to be there, we will always have that over a project that gets parachuted in and back out again (Housing association)

Across the board, there was felt to be a clear need for housing associations to offer employment related support, particularly in the absence of tangible support from the statutory employment support service:

The Jobcentre, they've got limited times for appointments and things like that (Housing association)

Related to this, a common view amongst participants was a need for a non-mandatory service:

Coming from a background of having worked on the work programmes, having worked on different community initiatives where participation has been mandatory, i.e. you don't turn up, you don't get paid or you get sanctioned, it's quite refreshing coming into an environment, helping people into work because they want to work and seeing them change their life around (Housing association)

If I'm being honest, when I first heard it was voluntary, I thought, 'Oh I don't know if that's going to work', because I'd always worked on mandated programmes... but it has worked, and it surprised me actually, much better (Housing association)

As reflected in the engagement of external stakeholders in this research, housing associations were regarded as valuable partners in the areas in which they operated. Several described feeding into local poverty

and economic strategies. According to the external stakeholders involved in the focus groups, housing associations were ideally placed to offer employment related support, given their intimate knowledge of the situations and needs of their tenants. They were also considered to be highly responsive to local needs. All had strong relationships with the local Jobcentre Plus, training providers and voluntary sector organisations, which ensured tenants were linked into the range of advice and support available in their local areas and helped to avoid the loss of benefits through error or sanctions:

We offer one-to-one support with customers, but we also work with partnership organisations in the different areas that we work in to support customers to achieve their goal, basically (Housing association)

A lot of their tenants were obviously also benefit customers, so it makes sense to work with them, obviously to look at programmes, getting them back into work. So, over the years we've given them a number of grants from our Flexible Support Fund, so we've worked really close with them on those employability schemes, and we've had some brilliant results from those (External stakeholder, Jobcentre Plus)

One of the other things, obviously, that we're involved in at the moment is from the benefits side, with the welfare reforms. Part of my role is to make sure, obviously, that everybody's up to date on that, and that is a big thing for them when they're helping their customers getting into work. So, it's understanding all the benefits system as well and all the changes and how that is going to affect customers if they take work (External stakeholder, Jobcentre Plus)



Given that employment related support is not the 'core business' of housing associations, staff recognised that provision of such support could occupy a precarious position:

We are housing focused. It's about collecting rents. Until we can be seen as part of that rent collection process, I think we will be, this employment related support will be under threat (Housing association)

With the one per cent rent cut, there were organisations that stopped doing resident involvement. There were organisations that stopped doing community work and employment work (Housing association)

However, some felt that their programmes and activities had more strategic buy-in than others. For example, several participants praised the commitment of their CEOs and other members of their senior management teams to the employment agenda and community investment more generally:

Whilst we are able to offer provision, it is about now raising awareness about the role that housing plays in this as credible players. There should be a round table of those regional or capital regional partnerships et cetera, because it's not happening (Housing association)

I think I'm very fortunate that the buy-in from the chief exec... it's that commitment to those properties and those individuals that comes from the top. So, I do a lot less justifying than a lot of my colleagues... [our CEO is] very, very committed (Housing association)

5.5 Measuring outcomes and proving value

Participants in the housing association and external stakeholder focus groups described a range of ways in which they were measuring and demonstrating the value employment related support had for both individual tenants and the organisation as a whole. These ranged from established tools such as the HACT measures to internal monitoring and case management systems. Several participants described conducting sporadic and/or ongoing evaluations of their work.

Given the diversity of provision and the variation in the aims, barriers and aspirations of service users, participants felt that there was no single right way of measuring impact:

It's difficult, isn't it? Everyone thinks they're doing it the right way... [and] you've got different delivery models, you'd never be able to align them (Housing association)

I think we have refined some of the reporting processes purely because from our financial controller's point of view we needed it broken down for our board. So we inherited the generic basic spreadsheet, so to speak, but we've possibly fine-tuned them to make sure that we're capturing all the information that we need to, to report to our board. So, exactly, that is people into employment, people in sustained employment, people that have got into training, into volunteering, you know, people were securing housing because of things that we've done, all sorts of things (Housing association)

We record our outcomes annually, and that will provide stats in terms of how many we've got into employment. If you look at it purely from that point of view, it looks like it's working because we are getting people into employment (Housing association)

The level of data collected on customers and participants' access to these data appeared to vary significantly, both at the level of housing associations and between individual services/programmes. In some cases, this frustrated attempts to prove the impact of the organisation's work. Tracking participants in order to understand the longer-term outcomes of the support provided was also a key challenge:

I want to know, out of those people [who they supported into work], whose rent arrears have reduced? I can't get that information, so until I can I can't intrinsically prove the benefit of what we do (Housing association)

We actually had a really poor management system for records here, going to be honest, in employment and training. We record everything, it's just that it's a number of different places... We're getting better at understanding what information we need to capture, to report all that easily. Yes, I'd say there's still a lot of work that we need to do (Housing association)

In contrast, another housing association had successfully demonstrated a positive impact of employment support on reductions in rent arrears, leading to employment support becoming a more firmly established strategic objective in their organisation:

It showed a positive correlation between providing employment support and arrears going down after a six- or twelve-month period, and, being able to demonstrate that impact on the business, as well as the benefit to the individual, [we were] then able to sell the service more to senior management and to the business (Housing association)

However, it was also recognised that tying an intervention's value to reductions in rent arrears could backfire, as the transition into work could involve additional costs and fluctuating incomes/benefit changes could be difficult to manage:

It's about talking to those different departments, explaining we've helped this person get a job... Obviously, they're not getting their benefits any more, they are in employment, there are different things happening, there is more cost sometimes when you get into employment as well that you're having to pay out, so giving them like a six-month leeway or something to get the rent, so it's not, 'Oh, you're in arrears now' (Housing association)

[Y]ou do find the first couple of months the rent arrears increase, effectively because they're all over with the money, but then after about three to four months they start balancing themselves out (Housing association)

Across the board, participants were sceptical about the value existing tools had, calling into question their appropriateness in the face of both a complex client base and a changing labour market. 'Off-the-shelf' tools were considered 'too blunt', with a tendency to simply record employment outcomes, neglecting the value of 'smaller steps':

It's really difficult to prove that actually that person has gone this far when they are still unemployed, they are still experiencing mental health issues. The fact that they have been out of the house for the first time in six years, how do you prove that? (Housing association)

There was also felt to be a danger inherent in a heavy reliance on such tools to demonstrate impact in terms of their potential to distort the activities undertaken where these were influenced by a need to generate high values at the expense of the range of support welcomed by residents:

So if we're using a tool like HACT to evidence social impact and social value and the value of the work we're doing, we are, to some extent, going to link our project outcomes to the items that are measurable. One of the things that isn't currently measurable are one-off events, so a one-off event wouldn't have a value to HACT at the moment; therefore, that is a disincentive for myself... to run one-off events. If I've been asked to deliver a certain amount of social value, I shouldn't be investing my time in delivering an activity that doesn't have a social value attached to it (Housing association)

Furthermore, it was also recognised that 'employment' in itself may not always be a positive outcome. Instead, the quality of that employment was an equally important consideration:

It's great that they've gone into jobs, but... because the job market's changed so much, certainly our advisors are very clear about how they advise people about the job market. So if people want to go for contracts or zero-hour contracts – entirely up to them, but it's just about understanding the consequences of that. So, where possible, we're trying to get people into more sustained employment which is more helpful for them (Housing association)

It was also felt that standardised tools tended to undervalue part-time employment, whereas in fact this might be the optimal outcome for a tenant:

Then you had the silliness of if someone went into part-time work it was only about £2,000 worth of social value versus someone who had gone into full-time work. Actually, for a lot of our residents that first step into part-time work is much, much bigger than that. That's probably the bigger social value to them (Housing association)

Housing association staff also felt that there were difficulties in pinning down the impact of an intervention in recognition of tenants' own efforts and the support provided by other teams and/or organisations:

Actually, when you boil down the numbers it's all a bit bogus isn't it? We're not making widgets; I don't pull this handle and that appears. We're all involved. They could go into work as a result entirely of their own will (Housing association)

There was also a commonly held view that existing tools could be easily manipulated and that outcomes could be wildly overstated:

[For] just half a dozen customers, and the social value came out at half a million or something. I'm thinking, 'Who's looking at that and thinking it's got any credibility that?' (Housing association)

It brought up these big numbers that I never, ever felt comfortable going out and turning round and saying, 'Look. We've saved £6 million by getting X number into employment', because it's not always that (Housing association)



Staff from several housing associations felt that 'social value' calculations were unnecessary, with senior management being well aware of the value that supporting tenants into employment could have:

The problem with it was, was when we get a resident into work, for our board and our exec board they already have strong currency. It didn't need a social value pound sign that nobody understood sitting next to it. They knew a resident into work would eventually result in better arrears figures and would result in long-term sustainable income (Housing association)

Indeed, a large number of participants firmly believed that value could only be understood in terms of feedback and engagement from their tenants themselves:

We had videos made... of some of our residents, and once the board saw it, they were like, 'Oh, yes'... it is showing them what you do. Yes, they think it's great you've got however many into employment, but a number is a number, and is it meaning anything else?... there's no bigger impact than what your tenants are saying and the evidence there (Housing association)

For one interviewee, it was important to recognise the need to be guided by the voices of tenants in the aftermath of the recent Grenfell tragedy:

[It's] about residents having a voice and it's about organisations seen to be acting in partnership with residents. If residents want these services, then these services have to be there now. Some of the stuff about Grenfell is about residents not being listened to, complacency (Housing association)

The value of employment related interventions was further affirmed when new 'customers' had approached organisations for support following word-of-mouth recommendations from fellow tenants following positive experiences of support:

[W]hen they pick up the phone and they ring you and say, 'Can you help me because you helped so-and-so down the road and so-and-so told me about what you can offer?'; I think that's a success because that is them hearing from a fellow customer that, actually, I worked with [them] and they helped me (Housing association)

Similarly, continued engagement with local employers was also felt to prove the value of an organisation's service to the local economy:

When [you've] got a local employer who's coming back to you for their recruitment requirements, then that's a really good measure of success as well (Housing association)

Several participants argued that there was a need for 'more engaging ways' of demonstrating the value of their work. Several advocated the use of evaluative methods based on the testimonies of service users, perhaps through the use of more creative means of 'storytelling' (e.g. through blogs, sketches or films):

Nobody's scrolling through Twitter looking at 'Housing associations have saved £48 million', they're looking at 'Sean' who's unemployed and this is how this story helped. This is how this service helped 'Sean' get to where he needs to be (Housing association)

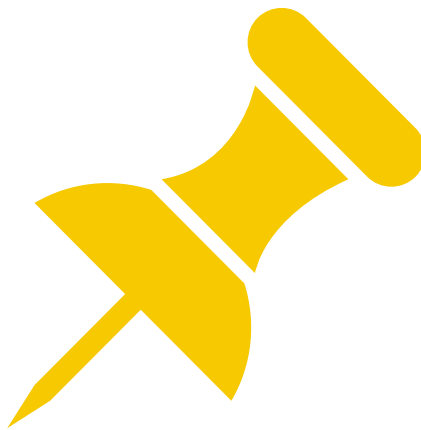
One participant also felt that the housing sector needed to do more to demonstrate their value to the government:

What the sector needs to really continue to do and continue to get better at it is influencing government. We've gone through a period of time when, all of a sudden, governments were really not happy with housing associations. We were the beast that was called 'The Housing Crisis'. Actually, if they think about us as community anchors across the UK, how much additional work that we do (Housing association)

5.6 Summary

In this chapter we have presented the findings from focus groups held in 6 case study locations across England and Wales. It has shown the varied nature of employment related support offered to tenants across the social housing sector, alongside perceptions of tenants, housing associations and external stakeholders of the value of this support. Also apparent was the considerable variation in the extent of recording, monitoring and demonstrating the impact of these interventions. Although some organisations were using tools to demonstrate their value, there was a great degree of scepticism amongst staff about their worth. Ensuring the voice of tenants was heard was considered by all as an important way to demonstrate the value of services.

6. Conclusions and recommendations



This report is based upon:

- 1** A desk-based review of impact measurement approaches and tools
- 2** An analysis of survey data from GUAC member organisations across England and South East Wales engaged in the delivery of employment related support
- 3** Qualitative fieldwork with housing association staff, partners and beneficiaries.

The findings highlight the large numbers of staff involved in employment related support and the associated financial investment. Most importantly, it is clear that employment related support is making a difference to beneficiaries, partners and housing associations. There have also been considerable efforts to measure the impact of these initiatives.

GUAC member organisations operate in a range of social and economic contexts, and many face challenging circumstances in terms of financial difficulties, high levels of benefit claimants and low levels of employment. Common barriers to work experienced by individuals include ill health, caring responsibilities, a lack of work experience and digital exclusion. Structural barriers include the lack of employment opportunities available in local labour markets and poor transport infrastructure, particularly in rural and former industrial areas.

There are a variety of activities and ways of delivering employment related support among the GUAC membership. The support most frequently takes the form of information, advice and guidance or training and in most cases is ongoing. In many instances, the support involved intensive casework with tailored support. The support was assertive, person-centred and flexible, and participants were accessed in a variety of ways, including social media, leaflets, emails and text messages. More specifically, it typically included help with job searching, CV and application writing, the provision and brokerage of opportunities to take up voluntary work, running job clubs and mock interviews. Housing associations offering practical and financial support provided funds for appropriate clothing and transport and access to computers for job searches.

The support did not stop there, however. In a number of instances, housing associations directly employed tenants, created additional opportunities through their procurement practices or supported tenants to become self-employed. In several housing associations, employment related support continued after tenants moved into work. Examples of this included advice on in-work benefit entitlements and regular phone calls.

The key findings and recommendations are as follows:

1. Housing associations provide significant and vital employment related support to tenants

The housing association staff who took part in this study identified a need for housing providers to deliver employment related support. The most frequently stated reasons for their organisations to offer such support were organisational priorities, welfare reform and tenant demand (particularly in the absence of tangible support from the statutory employment support service). From the staff perspective, employment related support was considered to have wider benefits, including helping to reduce antisocial behaviour, setting a positive example in the community, helping people become better tenants, and boosting the local economy – not least through helping local employers fill labour market gaps. Additionally, from the perspective of tenants, it was felt that housing associations were uniquely placed to offer more appropriate employment related support owing to the existing relationships they have with their tenants.

It was also clear that housing associations were regarded as valuable partners in delivering employment related support. External stakeholders commented on how housing associations were able to deliver effective support through their responsiveness, knowledge of the needs of their tenants and relationships with local Jobcentre Plus, training providers and voluntary sector organisations. These strengths ensured tenants did not miss out on the range of available advice and support and helped to avoid the loss of benefits through error or sanctions.

Recommendation: There is a need for housing associations to continue to offer employment related support to their tenants.

2. There is a business case for housing associations to support tenants into employment, and into full-time employment, where relevant

The research demonstrates that there is a business case for housing associations to help support tenants into employment. More specifically, the research shows a relationship between tenant employment and reduced rent arrears, with rent arrears decreasing as full-time employment rates increase. This relationship is less straightforward for part-time employment, which may be due to the under-employment or low incomes of some people who are in part-time employment. Although part-time employment is appropriate for some tenants (e.g. people with caring responsibilities), there are people who would like to work for more hours and should be supported appropriately to do so.

Recommendation: There is a need for housing associations to support tenants into full-time employment, where relevant.

3. Investment in employment related support by housing associations positively affects employment levels

Investment in employment related support was found to have a positive impact on employment rates, with full-time and part-time employment rates increasing with investment of up to approximately £30 and £25 per housing unit per year, respectively. The impact of investment in, and provision of, employment support was found to contrast sharply with the impact of the more punitive side of welfare reform, e.g. the use of benefit sanctions or the benefit cap. For example, the research found a strong negative relationship between tenants affected by the benefit cap and those looking for work, which suggests that this measure was not acting as an incentive to enter paid employment. It appears that the investment in employment support by housing providers was effective as a result of facilitating the building and maintenance of support over time. This enabled tenants to improve their qualifications, confidence and motivation, with positive repercussions for their mental health and overall wellbeing. Moreover, the non-mandatory nature of the support means that housing association investment can be used in agile and responsive ways.

Recommendation: There is a need for those housing associations currently investing less than £25–£30 per housing unit per year in employment related support to consider increasing their investment.

Of the types of employment related support that were being provided, the two that were most commonly associated with increased employment were job clubs and using enterprise development to provide employment related support. The housing associations with job clubs had higher rates of full-time employment. Although only a minority of housing associations used enterprise development to provide employment related support, these had the highest levels of both full-time and part-time employment.

Recommendation: There is a need for housing associations to target additional investment in job clubs and enterprise development.

4. Housing associations are increasingly using external tools to measure the impact of their employment support, but there are widespread limitations on the use of existing tools

The research highlights that housing associations are increasingly using external impact measures. However, the level of data collected on tenants and the collation of these data around employment related support vary significantly, both at the organisational level and between individual services/programmes. In accordance with issues identified in the wider impact measurement literature, the low levels of available data suggest a lack of organisational 'buy-in' within some housing associations, where significant numbers of staff do not have ownership of the data or impact measurement tools. This is clearly an issue for future impact measurement, as it is impossible to accurately measure impact without the relevant data. Furthermore, there is a case for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data to ensure a range of perspectives.

Recommendation: Housing associations need to collect sufficient and consistent qualitative and quantitative data on employment related support and ensure that these are available to all relevant staff.

Overall, the housing associations in this research believed that they were making a positive social and economic contribution by helping their residents into employment. However, at present housing associations have mixed views on the effectiveness of the impact measurement tools that they currently use. Hence, there is a need for housing providers to more clearly demonstrate their contribution through their impact measurement processes. Housing association staff who took part in the research perceived that the average values used in 'off-the-shelf' tools were not always appropriate when applied to their residents owing to the wide-ranging circumstances and goals of individuals and households. Therefore, there is a need for housing associations to use or develop tools that they feel best capture their specific contexts. Although there are mixed views on the effectiveness of the tools available at present, their use could be optimised by a more tailored approach.

Recommendation: Housing associations should work with designers of impact measurement tools to develop measures that can more accurately demonstrate the value of their specific employment related support.

6.1 Future work

This is clearly an important area for research, and in this report a number of areas are identified that future research could develop. Although there are significant obstacles to all housing associations measuring impact in exactly the same way, there is scope to identify common ground, which could lead to the development of a number of shared outcomes in order to improve comparability. This could also include the development of new or disaggregated measures, as well as values for variables that are currently more difficult to measure, such as moves towards employment. A first step would be to see whether there is sufficient appetite for this kind of development among the GUAC membership.

Appendix 1: Case studies

Bolton at Home: Starts with you and UCAN centres

Starts with you project

Starts with you (SWY) is an 'independent' social enterprise and subsidiary of Bolton at Home with the aim of supporting continued delivery of neighbourhood and employment support interventions in the face of increasing pressures on housing association budgets. SWY deliver a range of employment support interventions and commercial service contracts, which create opportunities for entry-level employment, enhance local employment support offers, deliver increased social impact and return profits to the group for reinvestment. To date, all SWY service contract staff have been recruited from the long-term unemployed. Staff have access to an in-work support package providing wraparound help to deal with everything from IT literacy to timekeeping and travel passes to in-work benefits, aimed at improving their chances of sustaining their employment.

UCAN centres

Bolton at Home run six UCAN centres across the town. Running for 20 years, the UCAN centres are based in former libraries and other community venues. They have an open-door policy – services are not restricted to Bolton at Home tenants but are available to the whole neighbourhood. UCAN centres run job clubs and offer a range of training courses, such as a two-day barista course and other opportunities such as a 'pop-up business school' for those looking to start their own businesses. Following increases in the local migrant population, the UCAN centres have also begun to put on ESOL classes. Much of the offer is financed by core funding, enabling the provision of a flexible service largely delivered in-house and tailored to the specific needs of individuals and local communities. The ethos of the UCAN centres is to be open-ended and spend as long as it takes to assist their clients.

Bolton at Home have developed a strong relationship with Jobcentre Plus. JCP workers provide outreach in the UCAN centres, meeting customers, particularly those regarded as 'hard to help' in their local area. JCP staff refer clients to other services operating in the centre,

such as the money advice team, and the two services host joint events. Practical examples of this co-operation include joint working to find solutions for tenants at risk of eviction because they have not received their Universal Credit payments.

Futures Housing Group: collaboration with Jobcentre Plus

Futures Gateways offers a bespoke employment service to customers to empower them to achieve their goals, which could result in training, volunteering or increased confidence on their journey to employment.

Approximately two years ago, Futures Housing Group (FHG) established their own employability service. As part of their initial mapping of the support available locally, and identifying where they could add value, the team made contact with local Jobcentre Plus offices to discuss how they could work together.

Since then, a close working relationship has developed. FHG employment staff regularly attend the Jobcentre, and the two services liaise regarding clients who are both claimants and tenants to co-ordinate support. This has enabled FHG staff to sit with a work coach and explain in detail the particular impact a benefit decision may have on a tenant.

The two services also share information regarding job vacancies and local training opportunities. JCP send FHG details of vacancies and provision available locally, which FHG are then able to distribute to their tenants. The two services have also run joint information and training sessions on the local labour market and the benefits system for FHG tenants, as well as an employability course. This has involved reciprocal sharing of expertise. For example, FHG's money advice team have received guidance and support from JCP on Universal Credit, which they have been able to draw upon when advising tenants, whereas Jobcentre staff have been able to access specialist housing guidance when working with claimants. Further work is planned to identify more benefit claimants who are currently FHG tenants and to work together to assist them.

Monmouthshire Housing Association: inclusion services

Monmouthshire Housing Association (MHA) manage homes in predominantly rural and semi-rural areas of South Wales. Local labour market opportunities are limited, and barriers such as poor transport infrastructure pose issues for tenants seeking work. In-work poverty has also been increasingly identified as a challenge for many of MHA's tenants. MHA observed that arrears were going up among those securing work, in large part because of reduced Housing Benefit revenues and other welfare changes.

MHA's inclusion services provide a ready-made response to the challenges posed by welfare reforms, finding employment and in-work progression/poverty.

The Inclusion Team consists of two service teams, Money Wise (who deal with immediate poverty issues) and Work and Skills Wise (who assist with reducing barriers to employment, skills development and progression).

Initiatives include:

- Six-week jobseeking skills programme
- In-work and out-of-work bursary scheme
- Course enrolment
- Volunteering brokerage
- Laptop loan scheme

One key project is Passport to Progression, where the focus is a 'work, better work, career' concept. This programme is designed to facilitate participants' entry into, and progression in, the construction and care sectors (there are plans to expand the project into retail and administration in the future). Courses are co-designed with employers.

All programmes offered by MHA link into wider support offered by the Welsh Government such as the PaCE (Parent, Childcare and Employment) project to fund childcare for women/men seeking work. MHA were also commissioned, as part of a regional collaboration bid in South East Wales, to deliver the Journey to Work service in Monmouthshire in 2017.



Sovereign: the GOALS UK programme and other employment support courses

Sovereign Housing own properties across a wide stretch of southern England, from Bristol in the South West to Berkshire in the Home Counties.

First run as a pilot in 2017, the GOALS UK programme is a strengths-based employment focused course for tenants of Sovereign delivered by an approved external trainer and consisting of four days' worth of activity delivered over two weeks. Attendees develop a 30-day action plan, which covers all aspects of their lives including employment. GOALS UK complements Sovereign's approach to enabling residents through a solutions focused model that motivates their residents to achieve their goals. The sessions offer each participant the opportunity to reflect in depth on what future goals they want to achieve and what resources and skills they have to begin building self-efficacy to pursue their ambitions. After completing the course, individuals work with Sovereign's employment and training officer to help them to realise their plans. Following the successes of the GOALS UK programme in terms of employment and broader social outcomes (for example, volunteering and participation in residents' associations), Sovereign plan to run the programme again in the near future.

Until recently, Sovereign also delivered self-employment initiatives. Delivered in partnership with Enterprise CUBE, the Strive programme was a 12-week course supporting participants to explore their entrepreneurial ideas. A digital online version of the programme was also offered.

Sovereign have also sought to help women access employment opportunities in skilled trades. A number of 'taster days' were organised, where residents tried out plastering, plumbing and carpentry, followed by supported work placements where individuals developed their skills working in Sovereign void properties.



Thirteen Housing Group

Thirteen have two main employment support programmes. Firstly, the New Directions programme is funded by the European Social Fund and provides support for 15–29-year-olds who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). Secondly, Thirteen also have a core ‘employability team’ for their tenants, which is open to all ages but is predominantly targeted at those aged over 29.

As part of these programmes, the employability team work with tenants to identify any barriers to employment and offer support to overcome these. This includes providing support to produce and improve CVs, write job applications and practise interview skills. The team also help tenants to identify job opportunities in the local area, including through brokerage with local employer contacts. In addition, Thirteen’s employability team work closely with a local training provider, which is able to provide training for residents where training needs are identified. Once service users have moved into work, the team provide additional ongoing support (for example, finance to cover bus fares and clothing) for up to six months.

Thirteen has also run a series of ‘internal training academies’ designed to offer a pathway to work within the organisation. These involved coaching residents through the application process. To date, five academies have been delivered, with participants taking up entry-level vacancies in the rents department, contact centre and grounds maintenance, as well as specific skilled trades.



Thames Valley Housing Association: the Level Up programme and the creation of employment opportunities in-house and through procurement

The Level Up programme

As part of their wider employment offer, Thames Valley Housing Association (TVHA) have commissioned the ‘Level Up’ programme. This is a wellbeing programme for residents who are not job-ready but are dealing with complex issues such as low confidence, debt, mental health issues or substance misuse. The programme is designed to empower residents and improve their skills so they are better able to cope with the challenges they are facing. The actual training for the course is delivered by an external provider. Recognising that moving someone into work too quickly can be counterproductive, the ultimate goal of the programme is to enable residents to become job-ready so that TVHA’s training and employment team can assist them into work or volunteering. However, it is recognised that for some residents success is getting out of the house or expanding their social networks.

Direct employment and procurement

TVHA have established pathways for securing apprenticeships, placements and employment for their tenants both in-house and with suppliers through their procurement system. Volunteer placements are also offered within the organisation, which has led to employment within TVHA for some tenants.

Through larger supply chain contracts, contractors are required to provide social value to the organisation and support TVHA’s social purpose. For example, the company that carries out TVHA’s repairs was contractually obliged to offer internship or apprenticeship options to residents. Similarly, through the organisation’s Community Chest programme, the Community Investment Officer ensures that contracts with charities and organisations specify that they must offer volunteering opportunities to residents.



Appendix 2:

Correlations table

	FT Emp.	PT Emp.	Looking Emp.	Job Club	In-work Supp.	Training	Welf. Reform	Demand	Priority	Org. Unit	Time Offered	Social Impact	Econ. Impact	Tool Effect.	Tool Use	Rent Arrears	B'room Tax	Univ. Credit	Ben. Cap	Hous. Ben. Sick	
FT Emp.	1.00																				
PT Emp.	-0.08	1.00																			
Looking Emp.	0.62	-0.35	1.00																		
Job Club	0.31	0.31	-0.12	1.00																	
In-work Supp.	0.20	-0.98*	0.02	0.11	1.00																
Training	-0.79*	0.10		0.07	0.29	1.00															
Welf. Reform	-0.37	0.27	0.32	0.11	-0.15	0.29	1.00														
Demand	-0.20	0.50	0.11	0.11	-0.05	-0.04	0.34	1.00													
Org. Priority	0.25	0.19	0.41	-0.20	-0.10	-0.07	-0.10	-0.04	1.00												
Invest. per Unit	0.32	0.10	-0.22	0.24	-0.11	0.05	-0.09	0.10	-0.13	1.00											
Time Offered	-0.17	0.37	0.03	0.10	-0.27	-0.05	0.22	0.09	0.08	0.39	1.00										
Social Impact	0.17	0.32	-0.14	0.14	-0.08	-0.17	-0.03	0.11	0.28	0.13	-0.10	1.00									
Econ. Impact	0.18	0.78*	0.00	0.02	-0.17	-0.11	-0.06	0.15	0.30	0.40	0.06	0.54*	1.00								
Tool Effect.	-0.03	-0.40	0.13	0.16	0.15	0.09	0.12	-0.32	-0.14	-0.59*	0.01	-0.36	-0.55*	1.00							
Tool Use	-0.42	-0.60	-0.05	0.00	0.30	0.04	-0.19	-0.24	-0.18	-0.42*	-0.19	-0.48*	-0.44*	0.76*	1.00						
Rent Arrears	-0.29	0.01	-0.08	0.77*	-0.36	0.46	0.46	0.40	-0.13	0.47	-0.37	0.77*	0.27	-0.33	-0.10	1.00					
B'room Tax	-0.04	0.33	0.25	0.02	-0.50			0.21	0.21	0.07	0.35	-0.21	-0.02	-0.32	-0.40	0.54	1.00				
Univ. Credit	-0.82*	-0.22	-0.32	-0.03	0.15			0.06	-0.17	-0.31	-0.26	0.29	-0.39	-0.07	0.06	0.18	0.02	1.00			
Ben. Cap	-0.58	-0.31	-0.61*	-0.09	0.18	0.09	-0.25	-0.31	-0.56*	-0.22	-0.26	0.05	-0.47	0.18	0.40	0.15	-0.37	0.71*	1.00		
Hous. Ben.	-0.57	-0.11	-0.52	-0.26	-0.29	0.30	0.06	-0.27	-0.49*	0.23	0.07	-0.06	-0.35	0.06	0.05	0.36	-0.32	0.12	0.68*	1.00	
Sick	-0.48	-0.32	-0.46	0.29	0.31		0.29	-0.25	-0.69	0.09	-0.07	0.17	-0.80*	0.18	0.69	1.00	-0.46	0.47	0.71	0.67	1.00

Notes: 1. *p<0.05.

2. The missing items are omitted owing to collinearity (a high level of overlap between the variables).

Appendix 3: Further debates about impact measurement

As discussed in the main report, it is important for housing providers to measure their impact, and there are a number of strengths to econometric-based impact measures. However, it is important to be aware of their limitations and to use these methods with caution.

Deliberative approaches to policy analysis have identified a number of concerns relating to economics-based impact measurement. More specifically, there is a concern that monetary value takes centre stage to the detriment of deliberation (i.e. considering the views of stakeholders, including service users)³⁶. This is significant, not least because participation should be central to impact measurement to ensure that it is not too narrow and technocratic. It can also mean that impact measurement results in its own internal logic rather than being open to revising aims and ends in the light of new information³⁷. Indeed, the literature on participatory policy analysis argues that more socially oriented policy outcomes are achieved through processes of collective reasoning and that these are thereby more legitimate³⁸.

A criticism of economics-based approaches to impact measurement is that the values and ways of measuring outcomes are not neutral as they reflect the values of funders and dominant ways of working. Of course, these can exclude tacit knowledge, more intangible activities and even qualitative findings, although many of these approaches advocate the inclusion of qualitative data. Another criticism at a general level is that measures emphasise economic rather than social impacts. Whereas this may be due in part to the fact that the approaches are grounded in econometrics and a view of economic maximisation as an end in itself³⁹, it is also in part due to debates over what exactly social impact entails⁴⁰. Also, much of the literature has been seen as approaching impact measurement from a 'boosterist perspective'⁴¹. More specifically, the tools are used by organisations to

prove their contribution in a competitive environment. Finally, unless these methods employ rigorous pre- and post-tests, it can be very difficult to accurately estimate the difference that the project has made. This is significant, because if the deadweight (i.e. business as usual, or what would have happened without the intervention) is in question, this can lead to invalid results.

In summary, a key challenge is to include both the technical, scientific approach to measuring impact in a consistent and transparent manner and the need for discussion and consideration of a range of perspectives that participatory approaches bring, including an equitable treatment of social value.

36 Ackerman, F. and Heinzerling, L. (2004) op. cit.

37 Richardson, H.S. (2000) op. cit.

38 Dryzek, J.S. (2002) *Deliberative democracy and beyond: Liberals, critics, contestations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

39 Vardakoulis, O. (2013) op. cit.

40 Park, C. and Wilding, M. (2013) op. cit.

41 Harlock, J. (2013) op. cit.





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