

Evaluation of the temporary jobs pilot: 'Proving Talent'

Report by the Centre for Economic and
Social Inclusion for the Give Us A Chance
consortium of social landlords

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Foreword

Levels of worklessness and labour market disadvantage among social-housing residents have long been a cause for concern. The introduction of the government's Work Programme in 2011 and the creation of Welfare Reform Act in 2012 created a new landscape for all to operate in. With youth unemployment rising to over one million in 2011, the 'Give Us A Chance' consortium (GUAC) members felt compelled to boost their efforts in tackling youth unemployment.

As registered housing providers working for tenants, we want the Work Programme to work and deliver the ambitious targets set by government. To that end GUAC commissioned the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (known as *Inclusion*) to design a model that would provide a means of creating paid job placements within our organisations by working in partnership with prime contractors. Our temporary jobs model was developed to provide an opportunity for a young person to explore and prove their talent in order that they can develop a fruitful career; hence we decided to call it the 'Proving Talent' model.

Proving Talent builds on GUAC members' positive and successful experiences delivering the Future Jobs Fund paid employment scheme, and their wish to continue to support their young residents and members of their communities with opportunities to gain experience and develop key skills for work.

At a time when assisting tenants and residents into employment has never been so important, the Proving Talent model offers a replicable and scalable opportunity for registered housing providers and Work Programme contractors to collaborate.

This report reveals the positive relationship that GUAC members have forged with Work Programme contractors in order to tackle youth unemployment and clearly illustrates both the financial and social value for all parties concerned, which provides an evidence base for further investment.

The report also contains suggestions for future work. This further supports our determination to create employment opportunities for our tenants and residents therefore increasing employment levels in our communities. In these difficult economic times GUAC members are committed to doing all they can to help the people who matter the most to us – the people living in our homes and neighbourhoods who just need to be given a chance.

Kate Shone, Consortium Chair, Give Us A Chance

Executive summary

'Proving Talent', developed by the Give Us A Chance (GUAC) consortium of social landlords, is a model for temporary paid jobs and training opportunities predominantly aimed at young people. This evaluation uses a mixture of methods to capture the success and outcomes of the first five pilot initiatives up to April 2013.

The Proving Talent model

In order to boost efforts to tackle youth unemployment, the GUAC consortium developed **Proving Talent as a model for providing paid temporary jobs in partnership with Work Programme contractors**. This involves housing providers and Work Programme contractors negotiating a package of mutual funding and support to establish new, six-month, temporary work and training opportunities within housing providers or their supply chains, available exclusively to Work Programme participants. The objective is to give young people at significant distance from the labour market the kind of chance that they would not otherwise have access to, because of a lack of experience, skills or qualifications.

The five Proving Talent pilot partnerships that were developed entailed a **substantial commitment of over £400,000 to 56 temporary jobs and two cohorts on self-employment awareness courses** during 2012–13.

Key findings from the pilot

Housing providers built on the model to establish unique working relationships with Work Programme contractors. These engagement processes took more time than expected, but **positive working relationships emerged that endured throughout**. Housing providers created a range of entry-level job opportunities within their pilots, including roles in caretaking, administration and public relations, while one partnership instead flexed the model to offer a self-employment awareness course to adults. The Department for Work and Pensions' Youth Contract wage incentive offered a financial boost to the temporary jobs pilots, with the result that all but one entered into **light-touch financial arrangements, with the majority of the financial commitment made by the housing provider**.

Housing providers and Work Programme contractors collaborated to develop **formal but open selection and recruitment processes**; deliver **a wide range of support** during the temporary jobs and self-employment awareness courses; provide **training and accredited qualifications**; and offer increasing levels of

formal work-search support towards the end of the employment and training opportunities. Proving Talent succeeded in supporting **participants who were, objectively, at a relative distance from the labour market**, more so than participants on comparable programmes like the Future Jobs Fund. Participants were extremely positive about the level of support and the range of opportunities that they had access to.

Outcomes from the Proving Talent pilot are indicative, as it was still underway at the time of fieldwork. As of April 2013, **25 participants had completed a Proving Talent temporary job (10 of whom had moved into another job immediately), five had left early**, mostly owing to early non-attendance or disciplinary issues, and 22 were still undertaking their temporary job. **Five of the nine participants on the self-employment awareness course had moved into work, volunteering or training**. The early indicative level of outcomes appears to be on a par with comparable initiatives.

As well as hard outcomes, participants experienced **boosts to their confidence, motivation, professionalism and other soft skills** as a result of Proving Talent. Housing providers and Work Programme contractors experienced **strong internal learning and business benefits, and positive impacts on their reputation** and ability to engage with the local community.

Conclusions and lessons learned

Key strengths of the Proving Talent pilot include the high levels of support offered to participants, the training and personal development opportunities available, and the focus on sustained employment beyond the opportunity.

Partnerships could improve their approach to selecting and attracting participants, participant retention, and the way that expectations and challenges are managed and communicated, both to participants and to internal stakeholders.

On the basis of findings to date, we recommend that Proving Talent is sustained and expanded as part of housing providers' wider worklessness and access to work strategies. We offer lessons and recommendations to housing providers, Work Programme contractors and to government to support this. These include the benefits of piloting and working via wider consortia to develop models and understand what works; the importance of targeting opportunities in areas of greatest need or impact; the need to align programme financing and participant selection to both organisations' delivery goals; and the opportunities for government to simplify existing structures around wage incentives, skills funding and Work Programme referrals in order to help these kinds of partnerships to flourish.

1 Introduction

This report evaluates the genesis, experience and outcomes of, and lessons learned from, the 'Proving Talent' temporary jobs pilot. Proving Talent was created and is being delivered by the Give Us A Chance consortium (GUAC) of social landlords.

As a concept Proving Talent was launched at the House of Commons on 12 March 2012, an event at which the Employment Minister at the time, Chris Grayling, spoke in support. The pilot involves temporary paid jobs and training opportunities within housing providers and their supply chains, predominantly aimed at young people. The Proving Talent model builds on GUAC members' positive and successful experiences delivering the Future Jobs Fund (FJF) paid employment scheme, and their wish to continue to support their young residents and members of their communities with opportunities to gain experience and develop key skills for work.

GUAC worked with the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (known as *Inclusion*) to develop the Proving Talent model for delivering temporary jobs in partnership with contractors on the government's flagship welfare-to-work initiative, the Work Programme. GUAC commissioned *Inclusion* to undertake an evaluation of the progress of the pilot up to April 2013.

The aim of this evaluation is to capture the success of Proving Talent in terms of providing jobseekers with valuable experience and a chance to get on the careers ladder. Specifically, the evaluation has been designed to meet the following aims, to:

- capture what is being done within the pilots in order to highlight lessons and best practice
- capture the views and experiences of those taking part
- estimate the outcomes and early impacts of Proving Talent.

In order to do this, *Inclusion* has undertaken the following research activities:

- **Five case study visits**, one to each Proving Talent pilot included in the evaluation. Researchers spent one day with each social landlord, during which they conducted semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with staff responsible for delivering the pilot, a representative from the partner Work Programme contractor, and pilot participants.
- A **management information (MI) collection process** that captured funding arrangements, participant characteristics, pilot activities and outcomes. *Inclusion*

designed a data collection template to capture this information, and worked with each of the pilots to help them gather as much data as possible. An online participant survey capturing the same information was also provided to support pilots in the collection of MI.

- **Roundtable discussions** with those responsible for delivering the pilots and the wider consortium, conducted within GUAC steering group meetings.

Inclusion and GUAC will continue to work together to develop the learning emerging from the Proving Talent pilot, including efforts to qualify and quantify the scheme's longer-term impacts and value for money as it develops and as participants move on from their Proving Talent experience.

This report is structured as follows: chapter two provides a summary of the policy background in this area, and the origins of GUAC and the Proving Talent model; chapter three details pilot design and the formation of partnerships with Work Programme contractors; chapter four covers recruitment to and delivery of the pilot; and chapter five discusses the outcomes to date of Proving Talent, and impacts on participants and on the housing providers and Work Programme contractors involved. Finally, chapter six summarises the conclusions and lessons learned from the Proving Talent experience so far.

2 Background and context

Social landlords have played an increasingly active role in tackling worklessness among their residents and within their communities in recent years. In particular, as large service providers strongly embedded in their local areas, housing providers have offered numerous employment and training opportunities to out-of-work and disadvantaged people, both in their own organisations and within their supply chains. This chapter briefly summarises the policy and operational context of these kinds of activities, and the origins of GUAC's particular approach.

2.1 Policy background: housing providers tackling worklessness

Levels of worklessness and labour market disadvantage among social-housing residents have long been a cause for concern. Research by *Inclusion* for the housing charity HACT found that, in 2011, more than half of working-age social residents were out of work, and that they tended to be further from the labour market than those living in other tenures.¹ The current economic context does nothing to soften this blow. The financial crisis and the prospects of slow economic recovery mean a challenging labour market for a number of groups, particularly young people, for whom unemployment has increased by half since the beginning of 2008,² and the long-term unemployed. Finally, full-scale reform to the welfare system, particularly in terms of reductions to the amount of housing support many households receive, is affecting social-housing residents' ability to pay rent in the short term but also strengthening work incentives for these households overall.

In this context, it is no surprise that housing providers have increasingly sought to help their residents gain access to work and move closer to the labour market. The National Housing Federation's latest Neighbourhood Audit found that, in 2010–11, social landlords invested over £80 million (half of which was their own money and half of which was raised from other organisations) in 1,000 jobs and skills projects that reached 270,000 people.³ *Inclusion's* research for HACT similarly found that housing providers have a clear and coherent vision of their role in helping people into work. This research found that the majority (88 per cent) of housing providers

¹ Gardiner, L. and Simmonds, D. (2012) *Housing providers' approaches to tackling worklessness: Assessing value and impact*, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion / HACT

² Up to January 2013; figures from the Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

³ University of Birmingham (2012) *Building Futures: Neighbourhood Audit*, National Housing Federation

are offering help, advice, services or work opportunities to residents to increase their chances of finding or staying in employment. It also found that most housing providers tackle worklessness by a number of means, making use of effective partnerships with other organisations to do so, and that nearly three quarters see their role as about tackling worklessness throughout their local communities rather than only among their residents.

It is particularly relevant to the Proving Talent approach that, according to the research for HACT, one of the most common ways for housing providers to support people into work is to provide temporary job opportunities within their organisations or their supply chain partners. Seventy-two per cent of housing providers surveyed provided work experience placements, 67 per cent provided apprenticeship opportunities, and 26 per cent provided jobs targeted particularly at workless people. Much of this activity relates to or builds upon the significant role housing providers played as employers within the FJF, a national programme introduced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2009 as a response to significant concerns about the long-term effects of rising youth unemployment. The FJF supported temporary paid jobs for unemployed young people and people living in disadvantaged areas. FJF jobs lasted up to six months, at the end of which employers were encouraged to support participants into sustainable employment. Citing high costs, the coalition government made the decision to end the FJF shortly after taking office in May 2010, with the final FJF jobs starting in March 2011. An independent national evaluation by *Inclusion*,⁴ and subsequent analysis of impacts, costs and benefits by DWP,⁵ highlighted the many positive and long-lasting impacts of this scheme and the potential to build on this model as a means to support disadvantaged young people into employment.

As well as documenting the breadth and depth of housing providers' involvement in tackling worklessness, the research for HACT uncovered areas where the housing provider role might be developed or strengthened. These included more explicitly targeting activities according to levels of need and improving the measurement and communication of impact and effectiveness in this area. In addition, of particular relevance to the GUAC consortium's activities was the finding that housing providers could improve their engagement with mainstream welfare-to-work provision. For example, it was estimated that the Work Programme – the DWP's £5 billion employment programme for the long-term unemployed that is delivered by prime contractors and their supply chains – will engage around a quarter of working-age

⁴ Fishwick, T., Lane, P. and Gardiner, L. (2011) *Future Jobs Fund: An independent national evaluation*, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion

⁵ Department for Work and Pensions (2012) *Impacts and Costs and Benefits of the Future Jobs Fund*

workless social-housing residents. However, only one-quarter of the housing providers surveyed were engaged with it or linking up to it in any way.

2.2 The Give Us A Chance consortium and the Proving Talent model

GUAC is a national consortium of social landlords consisting of 23 housing associations and two arm's-length management organisations. Between them, consortium members own over 350,000 homes and employ around 14,000 people. The consortium formed in March 2011 to look proactively at changes to the welfare system and devise solutions for how housing providers could support young people into work. This was intended to build on members' positive experiences and successes as FJF employers, and their wish to continue to play a similar role at a time of record youth unemployment, and entrenched worklessness and deprivation in many communities.

The role and scope of the group has since been extended and the consortium has started to consider the impact it can have on all working-age tenants, including supporting residents with disabilities and health conditions. The new broader remit of the consortium is particularly important given the depth and complexity of many welfare reforms that are beginning to take effect, especially in relation to disability and health.⁶

In order to continue to provide opportunities for young people, the consortium commissioned *Inclusion* to develop a model for delivering paid temporary jobs in partnership with Work Programme contractors. The Proving Talent model that was developed involves housing providers and Work Programme contractors negotiating a package of mutual funding and support to establish new temporary work opportunities with the housing providers themselves and / or within their supply chains. The model rests on the idea that new vacancies will be offered exclusively to Work Programme participants for a period of six months, and that both the housing provider and the Work Programme contractor will provide training, skills development and support into sustainable employment within this period of time. The principle behind this is to give young people at significant distance from the labour market the kind of chance that they probably would not get access to otherwise because of a lack of experience, skills or qualifications.

⁶ For example, the Work Capability Assessments currently underway for all Incapacity Benefit claimants, and the transition from the Disability Living Allowance to the Personal Independence Payment

To date, a number of Proving Talent pilot initiatives have been set up across the UK by GUAC members and partner Work Programme contractors. This evaluation captures the experiences and outcomes of the first five:

- Radian Group and A4e in Southampton and Eastleigh
- Castle Vale Community Housing Association and Eos in Birmingham
- The Guinness Partnership and Avanta in Newcastle and Greater Manchester
- Richmond Housing Partnership and Careers Development Group in South London
- AmicusHorizon and G4S in London and the South East of England.

Other Proving Talent pilots that are currently taking place did not form a part of this evaluation because they had not been underway long enough at the time of fieldwork and data collection. These include a pilot involving seven housing providers (Forum Housing, Liverpool Mutual Homes, Riverside, Plus Dane, Beechwood and Ballantyne Community Housing Association, Community Gateway and Wirral Partnership Homes) in partnership with Ingeus in Merseyside and Preston.

3 Pilot design and partnership working

This chapter describes the ways in which housing providers built on the Proving Talent model that was designed to establish unique working relationships with Work Programme contractors, specific employment and training opportunities within their own and partner organisations, and particular financing arrangements. This resulted in five different pilot initiatives getting underway with plans to deliver 56 temporary jobs (and two self-employment awareness courses) during 2012–13.

3.1 Establishing partnerships

The starting point and motivation for housing providers was consistent; all decided to get involved with the GUAC consortium and subsequently deliver a pilot because of a strong commitment to helping young people in their communities gain employment opportunities. In addition, housing providers had started to plan for the impacts of welfare reform, and these plans included more strategic efforts around access to work. Some had even started to look at ways in which they could support local young residents in particular before Proving Talent was launched, including apprenticeships and unpaid work experience.

'We have always invested in developing the skills of young people. We recognise that lots of young people in our communities are seriously disadvantaged and that they need opportunities. We see our business as providing a platform for some of those opportunities.' (Housing provider)

Initial engagement with Work Programme contractors was approached in different ways within each pilot initiative. Some housing providers had been speaking to the Work Programme contractors in their area before Proving Talent was discussed. For example, one was already a tier two provider of skills brokerage support within the Work Programme contractor's supply chain, although they had not actually received any participant referrals. The housing provider was engaging with their Work Programme contractor about the lack of referrals around the time they joined the GUAC consortium, and this prior relationship resulted in their quickly agreeing to work together on a Proving Talent pilot. This was also the case for another housing provider who had been engaging with local Work Programme contractors before the Proving Talent model was proposed.

'From our point of view it's about income generation, i.e. is there any way that we can work with the primes prior to the primes coming to deliver the Work Programme? Some of the money we had to deliver services now goes straight to the Work Programme providers so that money is being lost to us. As a local organisation it's really important that we look for new ways to deliver work in partnership with the primes.' (Housing provider)

Not all early engagement with Work Programme contractors was positive. One housing provider had to talk to a local Work Programme contractor for a long time before they were willing to discuss the possibility of working together on Proving Talent. Another housing provider was shocked and disappointed by the negative reaction they received from first Work Programme contractor they approached, and reported that the support they received from the wider GUAC consortium at this point was crucial to their moving forward and securing a meeting with a different contractor. In addition to GUAC consortium support, housing providers felt that involvement from senior staff within their own organisations was vital to establishing productive partnerships at the outset.

Although most engagement processes took more time than expected, positive working relationships developed quickly once Work Programme contractors were on board. Housing providers were surprised by the Work Programme contractors' willingness to design something that worked for both parties.

'The prime couldn't have been more supportive. We began to project plan on the first meeting. The discussion was around what would add the most value to the consortium, to us and to them.' (Housing provider)

Work Programme contractors also reported positive experiences of early engagement. They found the housing providers to be enthusiastic and open about the prospect of working together, with one describing the approach as 'refreshing'. Most Work Programme contractors had not thought to work with housing organisations before, but reported that when they were informed of success on previous initiatives they were impressed and even keener to engage.

'I was pretty much on board from day one. I knew they had done loads of good work on the Future Jobs Fund and they have some pretty good stats to talk about which was really encouraging.' (Work Programme contractor)

Work Programme contractors were also attracted to the outward-facing benefits of Proving Talent. At a time of widespread public concern about youth unemployment, it presented an opportunity to do something new and productive. Furthermore, engaging in socially responsible activities within local communities was felt to show

welfare-to-work contractors in a good light at a time when the industry was being scrutinised.

Finally, Work Programme contractors were attracted to Proving Talent as they were looking to enhance support and opportunities for young people anyway, or to make use of the flexibilities inherent in the 'black box' commissioning model for the Work Programme.

'We were very excited and we knew it could work. It just fits with what the Work Programme is all about: innovation and tailored support.' (Work Programme contractor)

3.2 Creating opportunities

The initiatives that the housing providers took forward stuck to the principles of the Proving Talent model in all but one case. Temporary jobs for young Work Programme participants were designed to last for six months in a variety of roles across each housing provider and the supply chain. The young people were paid and were supported in their roles by both the housing provider and the Work Programme contractor. Organisations worked closely with each other to agree a strategy for recruitment and selection. The exception was the pilot delivered by The Guinness Partnership and Avanta, with these organisations opting to offer opportunities via an eight-week, self-employment awareness course delivered by the Work Programme contractor, Avanta. This pilot did not require participants to be young or taking part in the Work Programme.

Pilots were designed to offer entry-level roles that did not require the young person to have any prior skills or experience in similar or related jobs. This was because housing providers were committed to attracting and supporting disadvantaged young people with complex barriers to work. Most housing providers opted to offer a variety of roles within organisations, as they were keen to trial the programme across different areas of their businesses and to see how well it worked in different departments. On reflection, the partner Work Programme contractors thought that having a number of different roles increased the variety of opportunities they were able to offer their young customers and helped them to attract participants with a range of interests and capabilities. By contrast, one organisation decided to offer placements in just one area of the business, as they wanted to streamline elements like line-management procedures.

Only one housing provider offered roles in their supply chain, although others were considering how they might work with supply chain partners to upscale Proving Talent in the future. This housing provider was motivated to provide access to

opportunities that could not be provided internally; however, involving the supply chain created some difficulties in terms of setting up and managing the pilot from a distance.

Housing providers' decisions about the roles that were offered to the young people were based on a desire to create interesting, rewarding and supportive placements, while also satisfying business needs.

'For us the programme has the potential to help us recruit staff where the business needs it. We're also really committed to the development of the young people so the roles have to be interesting and inspiring. We only selected the sort of roles that would provide a progression experience.'
(Housing provider)

Housing providers varied in the extent to which they built on past experience of similar initiatives, as opposed to creating something new. Some drew heavily on their experiences of delivering the FJF to put together their Proving Talent model, while others were less keen to replicate their FJF programmes and made efforts to design something quite different, particularly in terms of recruitment and selection processes.

'We had lots of success with the Future Jobs Fund. The guys we had are a real selling point and can showcase how far the participants have the potential to get. We were inspired to find an alternative to fill the gap that FJF left and we really wanted to build on previous successes. The model is virtually identical because we think if it's not broke then why change it?'
(Housing provider)

One issue some of the housing providers grappled with was the challenge of sourcing vacancies within their organisations and supply chains. Housing providers had to put in a lot of unexpected time and resource simply meeting with colleagues across the organisation to discuss how departments could be involved in the programme. Initially it was sometimes a struggle to persuade colleagues of the benefits and opportunities of the programme and to reassure them that it would not take up too much of their time. However, once sceptical colleagues were persuaded to trial the programme they very quickly realised the benefits, and housing providers predicted no such difficulties in sourcing vacancies for any future initiatives.

Table 3.1 presents a summary of the opportunities created within the five pilots.

Table 3.1: Opportunities created within Proving Talent pilots

	Eligibility criteria	Overview of vacancies	Duration of engagement	Hours	Pay
Castle Vale Community Housing Association and Eos	18–24 year old Work Programme participants	Internal and supply chain vacancies. Internal vacancies include support work and external roles include working with the Tenants' Residence Alliance	6 months	30 hours per week (Monday–Thursday)	Minimum wage for the first 3 months, increasing to living wage for the final 3 months
AmicusHorizon and G4S	18–24 year old Work Programme participants	Internal vacancies only, including administration, maintenance and special projects	6 months	30 hours per week (Monday–Thursday)	Above minimum wage
Radian Group and A4e	18–24 year old Work Programme participants	Internal vacancies only, including grounds maintenance, public relations, income generation and customer services	6 months	30 hours per week (Monday–Thursday)	Minimum wage
Richmond Housing Partnership and Careers Development Group	18–24 year old Work Programme participants	All internal caretaking roles	6 months	35 hours per week (8am–4pm Monday–Friday)	£150 per week (apprenticeship wage)
The Guinness Partnership and Avanta	Anyone unemployed (or under-employed) in the local community	Self-employment awareness course	8 weeks	n/a	No pay but course is fully funded

3.3 Financing the pilot initiatives and agreeing terms

A boost to efforts to agree a model for financing the four temporary jobs pilots was the November 2011 announcement by DWP of a package extra support to tackle youth unemployment via the Youth Contract. This included a wage incentive for employers of up to £2,275, paid in arrears, for each young Work Programme participant employed for at least six months. As a result of the financial supplement offered by the wage incentive, all but one of the pilots put in place light-touch

arrangements that did not involve Work Programme contractors directly financing wages or contributing in the event that wage incentives could not be claimed. This resulted in housing providers bearing the majority of the financial risk related to the pilots, but did mean that signing-off agreements to work together became a relatively smooth process.

'Because it's a six-month programme, the big thing for us is that we keep the young people in work until the end. The risk for our business comes when a young person drops out and then we don't get paid.' (Housing provider)

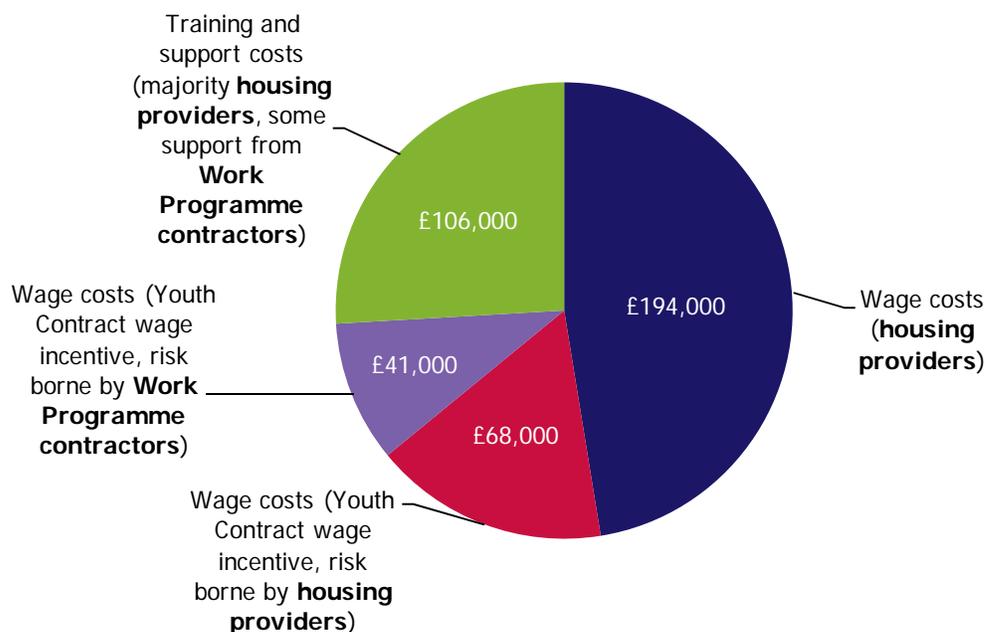
By contrast, one of the four temporary jobs pilots involved the Work Programme contractor contributing to wage costs initially in order to bear the risk surrounding wage incentive payments. This meant a formal contracting process that proved long-winded and necessitated the involvement of board-level staff in both organisations. Both the Work Programme contractor and the housing provider found this experience frustrating; however, in the end both parties were satisfied with what was agreed, especially in relation to sharing risk.

'Although it was a challenge, in the long run everyone was happy with what was finally agreed. The contract is rigorous and can't be pulled apart.' (Work Programme contractor)

The pilot delivering self-employment awareness courses involved a financing arrangement that combined the resources of the Work Programme contractor and the housing provider, both cash and in-kind.

Overall, the terms and financial arrangements agreed by the five Proving Talent pilot initiatives entailed a substantial commitment of over £400,000 to 56 temporary jobs and two cohorts on self-employment awareness courses during 2012–13. The commitment to the four temporary jobs initiatives was around £7,000 per participant, a slightly higher level of funding than the £6,500 per participant that was available from DWP within the FJF, making Proving Talent a comparatively costly programme. This commitment to the five pilot initiatives was split between housing providers and Work Programme contractors, as illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Figure 3.1: Financial and in-kind commitment to the Proving Talent pilot initiatives



Given the original Proving Talent model involved both housing providers and Work Programme contractors directly contributing to the wage costs of temporary jobs and sharing financial risk, the fact that this only happened in one instance raises questions about the financial burden that pilot initiatives placed on housing providers and the potential of the model in the absence of the Youth Contract wage incentive. However, housing providers did not view the arrangements reached as particularly problematic, and thought that they demonstrated a commitment to investing in tenants and building durable relationships with welfare-to-work contractors.

On the basis of the positive experience of the pilot, one Work Programme contractor said they would consider financially supporting such a programme in future. This contractor felt that the wage incentive had been useful in helping them test the model without too much risk to their business, particularly important as they had no previous experience of working with housing organisations. In addition, some pilot partnerships have discussed the possibility of Work Programme contractors providing financial support towards the cost of training and qualifications in any future initiatives. These early conversations suggest that more balanced financial arrangements may be a possibility following the pilot stage.

'Now that we have a bit more cash-flow, [funding] might be something that we look at doing, especially if we look to upscale the programme at some point in the future.' (Work Programme contractor)

4 Recruiting participants and delivering Proving Talent

This chapter describes the approach taken to filling Proving Talent vacancies and training opportunities and the way in which each Proving Talent pilot initiative was delivered, including management and supervision, training, and work-search support. This chapter also describes the labour market characteristics of temporary job and self-employment awareness course participants.

4.1 Recruiting and selecting participants

Most of the young people participating in the four temporary jobs pilot initiatives first heard about the opportunity through their Work Programme advisers. In most cases, advisers encouraged the young people to apply, supported them to prepare applications and CVs, and offered interview preparation. The young people were generally grateful for the support from their Work Programme advisers and felt that it was more than adequate.

'I had lots of support. They told me it would be a really good opportunity to work for a big company and it sounded like a great learning opportunity. They helped me write my cover letter, looking over everything and prepared me for the interview. I think I got more than what I actually needed.' (Young person)

Although young people tended to feel well-supported, housing providers had some concerns about the quality of candidates sent through for interviews. One was particularly shocked by the standard of applications they received and suspected that the Work Programme contractor had not made much effort to support their participants to apply. Finding suitable participants was more difficult and took more time than expected, and in at least one case, a lack of suitable candidates prevented the housing provider from being able to fill all the vacancies they had created within the planned timescale.

In addition, some housing providers were disappointed that they were not able to recruit more of their own residents to Proving Talent temporary jobs. The ability for Work Programme contractors to identify residents of particular housing providers within their caseloads proved limited, and both organisations cited the random allocation element of the Work Programme – whereby participants in an area are randomly assigned to one of two or three different Work Programme contractors – as a barrier to an approach more targeted at residents.

The recruitment and selection process for the temporary jobs pilots worked best when strong professional relationships between individual members of staff in the two organisations were established. For example, one housing provider developed a close working relationship with employer engagement staff at the Work Programme contractor, enabling them to more widely communicate what they were looking for and pre-screen CVs and covering letters. Site visits, both from Work Programme contractors to housing providers and vice versa, were also felt to be extremely helpful.

'We took [the Work Programme contractor] out on site, showed them where the young people would be working and generally introduced them to the company. We felt that this worked really well in getting them to understand what we were looking for and sending over the kinds of people we felt would thrive here.' (Housing provider)

All young people who were interested in Proving Talent jobs were required to undergo a formal application and interview process that was usually similar to the housing providers' standard recruitment processes. This was done in order to simulate a real-life selection process that young people would be able to learn from, especially those who did not have much or any work experience. In addition to this, the interview process helped to establish a professional tone and made it seem more like a real-life job opportunity than a work placement. Lastly, having an interview process made it necessary for the Work Programme contractors to support and prepare potential candidates.

'I thought the interview process was a really good idea because it makes it like a real job. It also makes it real for us. We had to make sure that we were holding up our end of the bargain, doing our pre-screening and making sure the customers were prepared.' (Work Programme contractor)

Through the selection process, housing providers were looking for generic skills and attributes in the young people, and most importantly enthusiasm. Although most were using fairly formal recruitment processes, they were keen to give the young people a decent chance to sell themselves. Interviews were formal but open, and the young people were given more leeway than candidates would normally have.

For those who were not successful at interview stage, housing providers provided feedback to the Work Programme advisers to discuss and follow up with the young people. Work Programme contractors thought that this feedback was beneficial in helping the young people better understand their strengths and weaknesses, including highlighting areas where their adviser could offer additional support. One housing provider delivering the pilot initiative in small waves was keen for feedback

to be given to unsuccessful young people so that they could come back for interviews again in subsequent recruitment rounds. This housing provider reported a complete transformation in an unsuccessful candidate the second time he came for an interview, which he thought was very positive.

The participants on the self-employment awareness course heard about the opportunity through the community centre where the course was being delivered, through word of mouth or because they had come across marketing material that was delivered to homes on the estate. They were invited to come along to an open day where they signed up to the eight-week course. The Work Programme contractor did not select or interview anyone for places on the course and this was largely owing to the fact that a smaller number of people than expected attended the open day. They did, however, ask the participants to commit fully to the course and indicate the kind of self-employment opportunity they were looking to explore. The organisations involved in this pilot had hoped for a larger number of participants on the course and felt like a stronger marketing strategy and longer lead-in time may have helped in this regard.

4.2 Characteristics of the participants recruited

Up to the end of April 2013, 52 participants had begun temporary jobs, and nine had undertaken a self-employment awareness course. The characteristics of these participants are summarised below, although care should be taken in interpreting the quantitative findings as the overall number of participants is fairly low.

As intended in the model design, all those taking part in the four temporary jobs pilot initiatives were young people. The overwhelming majority were current participants on the Work Programme; however, one housing provider elected to recruit a couple of young people who were not on the Work Programme as part of their initiative and forgo the opportunity to claim a wage incentive payment in these cases.

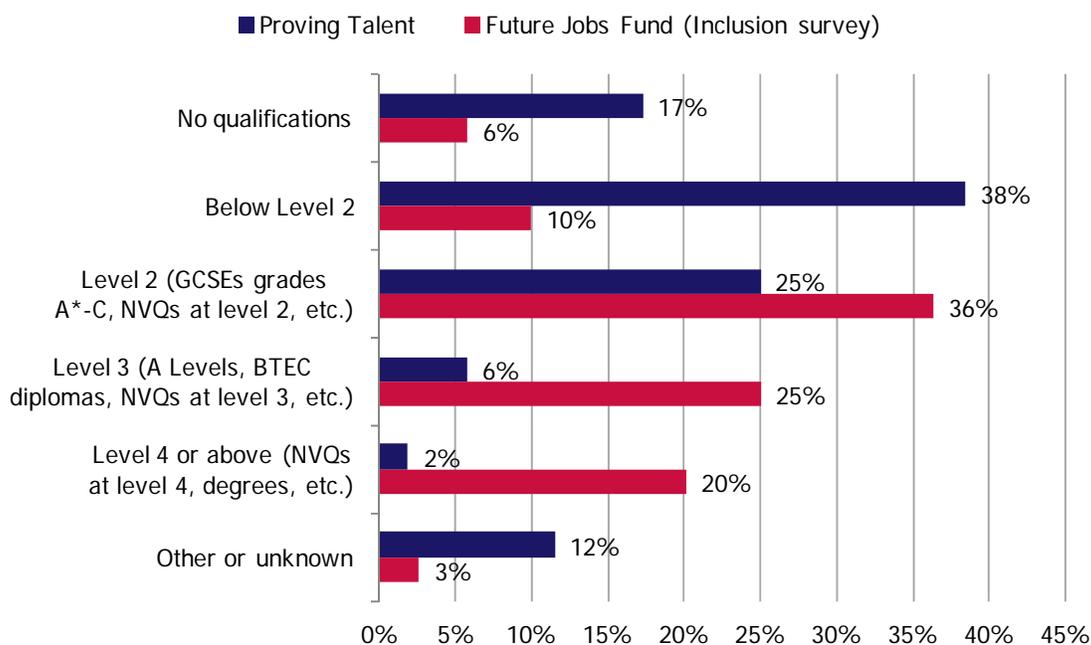
Nearly three quarters of temporary jobs participants (38 of the 52 young people) were male. This is unsurprising as labour market interventions tend to engage more men than women – around two thirds of both those who participated in FJF and young people who have been referred to the Work Programme so far are men.⁷

Young people taking part in the temporary jobs pilot initiatives tended to have low objective skills levels – more than half had no qualifications or qualifications below

⁷ Young Person's Guarantee Official Statistics, Department for Work and Pensions; Work Programme Official Statistics, Department for Work and Pensions.

NVQ level 2. As Figure 4.1 shows, Proving Talent participants tended to be relatively less qualified than those who took part in FJF.

Figure 4.1: Highest qualification of participants in the four Proving Talent temporary jobs pilot initiatives compared to Future Jobs Fund participants

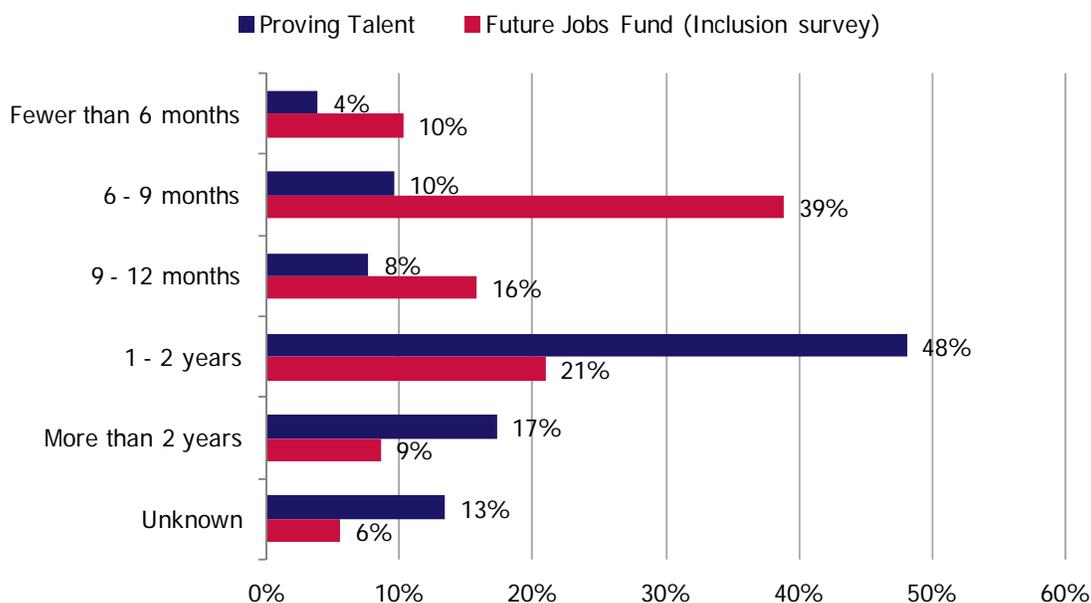


Source: Proving Talent MI data; *Inclusion* survey of FJF participants, July 2011

Interviews with participants in the temporary jobs pilots revealed a range of past employment experience. Some young people had had several jobs in the past, while a number had never worked before. Most said that they had been taking part in the Work Programme for several months before being offered their temporary job opportunity.

Overall, Proving Talent participants had been unemployed for long periods of time before starting their temporary jobs – an average of 15 months. The length of time that participants had been unemployed was relatively longer than it was for those who took part in the FJF, as shown on Figure 4.2. In part this will be a function of the eligibility criteria for the two programmes: most young people became eligible for the FJF following six months claiming out-of-work benefits, while most young people first join the Work Programme (the route into Proving Talent) after a minimum of nine months of claiming.

Figure 4.2: Participants' length of unemployment before beginning a temporary job in the four Proving Talent temporary jobs pilot initiatives compared to Future Jobs Fund participants



Source: Proving Talent MI data; *Inclusion* survey of FJF participants, July 2011

Although fairly limited, the above findings indicate that the 52 young people taking part in temporary jobs pilot initiatives were, on the surface, quite far from the labour market, certainly more so than their FJF counterparts. This suggests that one of the goals of Proving Talent – to provide opportunities to disadvantaged young people with barriers to work – was met in terms of the objective employability of the young people who were recruited.

The nine participants on the self-employment awareness course ranged from 26 to 44 years old and had a range of qualification levels, including some with no qualifications and some with degrees. Some were already self-employed and were undertaking the course in order to scale up their activities, while others had entrenched and complex barriers to employment. For example, one participant was 44 years old and had never had a job. She felt that taking the self-employment awareness course was one of the first positive steps towards employment that she had ever taken.

4.3 Support and resources during the pilot

Across the temporary jobs pilot initiatives young people were given a wealth of support by housing providers. They were fully integrated into their teams with a clear line management structure and, in some cases, buddies or mentoring support.

Most housing providers decided to offer high levels of support to ensure that placements went smoothly. It was seen as important for managers and participants to develop close working relationships quickly so that the young people felt able to flag any issues or concerns that might affect their performance at work or their ability to sustain their temporary jobs.

'It's important to closely supervise our young people. Lines of communication are open and transparent so the young people know that they can speak to somebody if they need to.' (Housing provider)

Support provided by the housing providers was highly valued by the young people. Line management structures helped them feel that they were part of a team and enabled them to perform well in their jobs. Several also noted that it was helpful to have one point of contact with whom you could develop a close relationship with and raise any issues, even concerns unrelated to work.

'This is the best support I've ever had in a job. She's there for me whenever I need to talk to her, not just work-wise but also if I want to talk to her about anything that's happening outside of work. Sometimes in the workplace you feel afraid about going to speak to your superiors and boss, but it's not like that here.' (Young person)

The young people also felt that regular catch-ups with their managers allowed them to monitor progress and review strengths and weaknesses. The outcomes of these discussions were fed into planning future work and linked to training plans. In some cases, distance travelled was being closely monitored on a regular basis and fed into the development of portfolios that the young people could take away with them. These portfolios also included references, feedback from staff, and training certificates.

Housing providers thought it useful to provide young people with these kinds of structures and outputs in order for them to understand their strengths and push themselves to improve. These support structures also helped housing providers understand where the young people needed particular help and encouragement, with a view to refining model design for future temporary jobs initiatives.

To enhance the support offered by the housing providers, it was expected that Work Programme contractors would continue to offer support to the young people as well. In most cases, Work Programme contractors were staying in regular contact with their young people, either via regular short visits or telephone calls, and were assisting young people with any concerns or issues they had that could not be resolved with their employer. The young people found this support useful but not

essential, as their expectation was that their employer would have lead responsibility for support while they were at work.

Some housing providers were disappointed that the Work Programme contractors had not done more to support young people whilst they were on their placements. Several had agreed that the young person work a shorter week so that they could continue to attend appointments and receive work-search support and training from their adviser. These meetings often did not materialise, and in some cases it was felt that the Work Programme contractors were not fulfilling their end of the bargain. One housing provider was planning to draw up and agree a timetable of support with their partner Work Programme contractor before their next cohort of young people started in order to formalise and clarify these roles.

4.4 Training opportunities

Many young people taking part in temporary jobs pilot initiatives were offered access to training whilst on their placements. Most of this was in-house and included health and safety, manual handling and customer services courses. These courses were generally offered to the young people in consideration of their training needs and objectives. One housing provider was keen that the young people take advantage of numerous training opportunities even if courses were not directly related to their roles, and all housing providers wanted to make sure that the young people got as much from their placements as possible. This sentiment was echoed by the young people who were very keen to learn and develop in any way possible whilst they were on their placements.

Several housing providers offered accredited qualifications within their pilot initiatives. Most obviously, the pilot involving a self-employment awareness course was centred on participants' gaining accreditation. Participants in this pilot reported that they were really pleased with a support offer built around a recognised qualification and that it helped motivate them to complete the course and get the most value from their participation. In addition, some housing providers delivering temporary jobs pilot initiatives supported their young people to take NVQ Level 1 qualifications using European Social Fund or Skills Funding Agency funding. It was acknowledged that funding for these courses might not be available for much longer, and that it would be helpful if Work Programme contractors were able to provide some support for training and qualifications in future initiatives.

4.5 Plans for the end of the pilot

In all the temporary jobs pilots work-search support for the young people was stepped up towards the end of placements. Housing providers supported the young people to review and update their CVs with their newly acquired skills and experience, and also helped them think about where they might like to look for work, if they were not going to be kept on. However, it was expected that the bulk of work-search support would be offered by the Work Programme contractor, and as such, advisers stepped back in towards the end of placements. This worked best when there were strong communication channels between housing providers and Work Programme contractors, and when consideration was given to which organisation could best provide job-search support in each individual case. For example, where close relationships had been developed with mentors or line managers, the young person sometimes preferred to receive the majority of work-search support from that individual. Being flexible and tailoring the final elements of support was seen as key to ensuring that the young people had the best chance possible of sustaining employment.

'It's really important that the Work Programme provider works with the customers to move them forward when the placements come to an end. We don't want it ending to impact negatively on the young people.' (Housing provider)

Work Programme contractors had strong financial incentives to keep young people in work following the end of the pilot, and therefore had high expectations of the programmes ability to deliver sustained employment outcomes. Housing providers' motivations were different, but this did not stop the two organisations working together to give young people the best chance possible at the end of Proving Talent jobs.

'If we can't move them into employment as a result of this work, then the pilot has failed because that was the whole point.' (Work Programme contractor)

In some cases preparations were made for some of the young people to stay on working at the housing provider. In these instances the placements had worked out very well and the young people had proved their value and worth to the organisation. The housing providers thought that it was a brilliant outcome to be able to offer some of the young people more permanent positions, and the young people were equally delighted to have earned contracts.

'I'm glad I've got the casual pool job because I don't want to leave. I think this is the job I want to do and I want to work my way up.' (Young person)

Some housing providers would have liked to have kept (more) participants on permanently but did not have any vacancies to offer. However, all housing providers recognised that the original intent of Proving Talent was not a screening tool for permanent vacancies in their organisations, but a means to support a greater volume of young people to move closer to the labour market via short and focused work experience placements.

'We need to ensure that the prime can start working with them to help free up the placements for new participants. The idea is that the programme is meant to be on a six-month rolling basis and it's all about providing lots of opportunities.' (Housing provider)

5 Outcomes and early impacts

This chapter summarises evidence to date of the employment outcomes that the Proving Talent pilot has achieved, and describes the qualitative impacts and less tangible outcomes that have been observed as a result of Proving Talent, both for participants and for the partner organisations delivering the initiative.

5.1 Emerging outputs and outcomes

Completion levels and employment outcomes from the Proving Talent pilot are indicative, as not all participants had come to the end of their Proving Talent experience at the time of fieldwork. Furthermore, because of the relatively low number of participants taking part at this pilot stage, our ability to assess the rate of outcomes in comparison to other initiatives is limited, and all output and outcome statistics should carry a health warning for this reason. Bearing this in mind, up to April 2013:

- Nine participants had started a self-employment awareness course, six of whom had completed and three of whom had left early because of existing self-employment commitments. At least two of those participants who had completed the course moved into work afterwards. In addition to those who entered employment, one participant started volunteering and two participants started college courses funded by The Guinness Partnership through its Education Awards programme.
- 25 participants had completed a Proving Talent temporary job, five had left early, mostly because of early non-attendance or disciplinary issues, and 22 were still undertaking their temporary job.
- 10 of the 25 participants who had completed temporary jobs had a job outcome immediately. In most cases they remained with the housing provider, but in some cases they had been supported into work with a different employer.

The level of 'drop-outs' is on a par with that commonly observed on employment and training programmes for the long-term unemployed.⁸ Given that participants in Proving Talent temporary jobs pilots were objectively quite far from the labour market, and more so than those who took part in the FJF, this in itself could be

⁸ For example, see Fishwick, T., Lane, P. and Gardiner, L. (2011) *Future Jobs Fund: An independent national evaluation*, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion.

considered an achievement. In these pilots, housing providers were disappointed to have to let young people go but felt that they had exhausted all other options and given the young people in question a fair chance to make the opportunity work. One Work Programme contractor commented that they thought the number of drop-outs would be a lot higher than they had seen, given the complex needs and engagement levels they frequently observe among their young Work Programme participants.

Although it is very early days, if employment outcomes continue at this rate as more participants reach the end of their time on the pilot and as the programme enters a new phase, the job outcome rate would be similar to that estimated for the FJF – 43 per cent.⁹ It will also be important to look at employment patterns over time, particularly for those participants who do not complete training and work placements or don't immediately transition into a job. For example, future research with Work Programme contractors could assess how Proving Talent participants fare in the remainder of their time on the Work Programme.

5.2 Perceived impacts of participating in Proving Talent

Proving Talent participants were overwhelmingly positive about their time on the programme and the benefits it had brought to them as individuals. All participants who took part in interviews said that they were satisfied with their experience and would recommend it to others.

One of the key things brought by the Proving Talent experience, according to both participants and the housing providers themselves, was an improvement in the soft skills and employability skills of participants. Confidence was cited as a key benefit arising from both the temporary jobs pilots and the self-employment awareness course. Motivation and communication skills were also seen to have improved as a result of participation. For most pilot participants, integrating into a team and setting and achieving personal challenges were judged to be the key things that helped boost their confidence, motivation, and other soft skills.

'I think it's given them an awful lot. I met them all in the first week and certainly two or three of the individuals have really progressed as people. You can see they have a lot more confidence and motivation. They have better transferrable skills and they are putting things into practice.' (Housing provider)

⁹ Fishwick, T., Lane, P. and Gardiner, L. (2011) *Future Jobs Fund: An independent national evaluation*, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion

'I've learnt that I am capable of doing well in work. Sometimes I didn't feel confident enough, so it's really helped me with that.' (Young person)

'It's improved my confidence – I didn't have much. I used to be shy but the course has given me the push to do a professional cookery course at college' (Self-employment awareness course participant)

Young people also cited opportunities for social interaction in the local area, and the chance to build professional relationships and support networks as positive outcomes of participation. Housing providers echoed this sentiment, commenting that they felt the pilot initiatives had succeed in broadening the horizons of those who would not otherwise have had such an opportunity, for example, by exposing them to new sectors and roles.

'Many of our candidates don't know much about what housing associations do and aren't exposed to these kinds of roles normally. It's a great opportunity for these individuals to be exposed to job roles and sectors that young people haven't really heard about.' (Work Programme contractor)

As well as the soft outcomes and personal development opportunities that the Proving Talent pilot was seen to bring, participants and housing providers were clear that the harder outcomes – qualifications and jobs – were likely to be the key impact of the pilot in the long term. Young participants who had not yet achieved a job outcome following their Proving Talent placement were optimistic that the Proving Talent experience had got them a lot closer to this, and that sustained employment was now something that was within their sights.

'I had an interview for a permanent position but was unfortunately unsuccessful, but I had really positive feedback. They told me I really shone out from some of the other people that applied.' (Young person)

5.3 Impacts on housing providers and Work Programme contractors

Both Work Programme contractors and housing providers cited the positive publicity and wider recognition within the local area that Proving Talent pilots had brought to their organisations as an important impact. Work Programme contractors commented that participating in the pilot had boosted their image both internally and externally, and one mentioned that it had helped them gain traction with people in the local area, where they were previously not very well known. Housing providers similarly cited the reputational and community engagement benefits of being able to offer such opportunities to local people.

'It's helped our reputation and shows that we're willing to invest in young people living in the community.' (Housing provider)

Both partners also emphasised the internal learning benefits of piloting an approach that was new and untested. For Work Programme contractors, the Proving Talent pilot had helped them refine their employer engagement strategies and opened them up to formal partnership working with employers in the delivery of big welfare-to-work contracts. One contractor was already approaching other housing providers to see whether they might be able to offer something similar elsewhere. For housing providers, the pilot had informed their approach to wider welfare and worklessness strategies and, in one case, improved their confidence in testing things with new partners.

'There is a good workable model in place that we can now start exploring with other employers. It's given us an idea of how we can work with big employers.' (Work Programme contractor)

'The biggest thing for us is that it's informed our access to work strategy... and offers a blueprint to develop a more comprehensive offer to our customers.' (Housing provider)

The financial impacts on partner organisations were mixed. Work Programme contractors did not think they would make much money from the pilot itself but some felt they had seen the financial benefits that Proving Talent could bring to their organisations in terms of securing job outcome payments if refined and expanded, and were therefore open to shouldering a greater level of risk in future initiatives. One Work Programme contractor expected to make a loss on their pilot initiative, but thought that this was unproblematic given the wider social and reputational benefits of making a small investment in the communities where they work. Housing providers were not expecting to make any money from delivering the Proving Talent pilot, and most felt happy to have made the investment they had to offering local people a chance. However, some said that, having invested in the pilot in order to test the model, they would hope to bear less of the financial burden in any future schemes.

Although not directly related to covering costs, housing providers did see positive business impacts as an outcome of their involvement in Proving Talent pilot initiatives. Some commented that Proving Talent had provided an opportunity for existing staff to develop professionally by taking on line-management and mentoring responsibilities for the participants. In addition, creating Proving Talent vacancies enabled housing providers to expand business activities or delivery capacity in areas where they were not able to recruit permanent staff at that point. Finally, for some

housing providers, the pilot helped challenge internal stereotypes surrounding the capabilities and employability of long-term unemployed people, which they felt would bring longer-term benefits by opening up and refreshing organisational recruitment strategies.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

At the stage fieldwork was completed, some of the Proving Talent pilot initiatives were still underway, and some of the longer-term impacts of Proving Talent on the participants and organisations involved will only be possible to observe months after all participants have completed their work and training opportunities. Nonetheless, this chapter concludes this evaluation by summarising some of the key strengths and areas for improvement observed within Proving Talent to date, and by bringing together the emerging lessons that the pilot has generated for approaches to providing opportunities for long-term unemployed people and building new organisational partnerships to do so.

6.1 Key strengths and areas for improvement

Many features of the pilot initiatives outlined in this report draw on best practice in providing intensive work and training opportunities to disadvantaged and long-term unemployed people.¹⁰ These include:

- **High levels of support for participants.** Line management structures allowed the young people on the temporary jobs pilots to settle in initially and provided a space where they could set goals and develop. Participants on the self-employment awareness course were also offered appropriate support to attend and get the most out of it. Support was frequently flexible and tailored to the needs of the participant.
- **Training and personal development opportunities.** Supporting participants to take advantage of as many training opportunities as possible brought value to the placements and ensured that participants left with hard evidence of skills developed.
- **A focus on sustained employment outcomes.** Pilots were designed with sustainable employment in the open labour market in mind, and partners worked together to ensure that work-search became a focus toward the end of temporary jobs and training courses.

¹⁰ For example see Finn, D., Blackmore, M. and Nimmo, M. (1998) *Welfare to work and the long term unemployed*, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion; and Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2012) *Work experience placements that work*

However, there were some areas where the design and delivery of the pilots could have been improved:

- **Attracting participants to opportunities.** Some housing providers felt they could have improved the way they communicated to Work Programme contractors the type of participants that would be suitable for the temporary jobs pilots, and that both organisations could have focused more on attracting residents participating in the Work Programme to apply. Both partners in the self-employment awareness course pilot would have liked to have attracted more participants via longer and larger publicity efforts.
- **Participant retention.** Both partners in each pilot were keen to maximise participant retention to a greater extent, having spent time putting tailored work and training opportunities in place. A small completion bonus for participants was suggested as a way of addressing this in future.
- **Transparency about the risks and challenges.** Housing providers and Work Programme contractors saw a need to further manage the expectations of participants in terms of their responsibilities and levels of commitment to work and training opportunities. In addition, some housing providers found it challenging to manage the expectations of internal managers on the temporary jobs pilots, in terms of their responsibilities to participants and the challenges involved in developing young people in the workplace. Being as transparent as possible about the risks and responsibilities involved should be a priority for future initiatives.

6.2 Lessons learned and recommendations

The evidence and lessons emerging from the Proving Talent pilot suggest that the model is a viable way for housing providers and Work Programme contractors to collaboratively provide employment and training opportunities for residents. Furthermore, both housing providers and Work Programme contractors were overwhelmingly positive about their ability to continue to work together, and saw the success of Proving Talent not in what it had achieved so far, but in its potential to deliver more and better opportunities and outcomes for disadvantaged young and long-term unemployed people in the future.

On this basis, our central recommendation is that Proving Talent is sustained and expanded as part of housing providers' wider worklessness and access to work strategies. Housing providers' ability to create varied and rewarding job opportunities in their own organisations and their supply chains, in addition to the commitment many have demonstrated to supporting the employment

and training of people in their homes and neighbourhoods, suggests that they are particularly well-placed to deliver in this way. Furthermore, the GUAC consortium has developed a support and coordinating function designed to maintain these projects beyond the pilot stage, broker new relationships with the Work Programme and share best practice. Therefore, the stage is set for the development and expansion of Proving Talent, and the potential is there:

- **If every current member of GUAC was just to match the initial commitment of the five members involved in these pilots, GUAC could deliver more than 300 opportunities annually.**
- **If every registered housing provider in England matched the initial commitment made by those involved in these pilots, around 2,500 opportunities could be delivered annually.**¹¹

Given that many of those involved in the initial pilots are looking to expand their provision, the potential could be even greater than this.

Following on from this central recommendation, we offer some specific lessons and recommendations for taking Proving Talent's strengths forward, improving the approach in certain areas, and building best practice for supporting disadvantaged residents towards work.

To housing providers, we recommend that efforts to provide temporary jobs and supported employment and training opportunities should:

- **Be allowed enough time and space for design and set-up.** The initial partnership-building work, efforts to bring managers on board and the recruitment and selection process within Proving Talent all took more time and effort than partners had anticipated; however, getting these stages right was seen as essential to the quality of what was delivered.
- **Explore models that are flexible and adaptable.** The original Proving Talent model was adapted by all of the pilot initiatives, most notably in the case of the self-employment awareness course. Pilots were also flexible and adaptable in terms of numbers of participants, and the timing of courses and temporary jobs placements. Particularly at the pilot stage of a programme, flexibility and adaptability appear to be important to getting the approach right.

¹¹ Estimates based on housing provider stock. Sources: Give Us A Chance Briefing Sheet (March 2012), www.giveusachance.co.uk; National Housing Federation; *Inclusion* calculations

- **Use pilots as a means of establishing partnerships and testing what works.** The fact that Proving Talent overtly started life as a pilot initiative seems crucial to what has been achieved and how. The benefits of piloting included building relationships between housing providers and Work Programme contractors, and the option to take light-touch approaches to financial and contractual partnerships in order to test the waters. The ability to operate in this way was, in a large part, down to the financial and in-kind commitment that organisations, mainly housing providers, made to testing and proving the concept.
- **Be targeted at providers' own residents and those furthest from the labour market.** Evidence from this and other evaluations suggests that supported temporary job opportunities are a comparatively costly form of intervention per head but can be the difference for those disadvantaged individuals not well served by more mainstream approaches.¹² Many of these disadvantaged people will be tenants with whom housing providers already have a relationship and will be best-placed to engage. The benefits to the public purse, and to housing providers and their communities will be maximised when opportunities are intensively targeted at these individuals.
- **Benefit from the support of wider partnerships and consortia.** The support and coordinating functions played by GUAC appear to have been essential to developing a workable model initially, maintaining the momentum of the Proving Talent pilot as a whole, and sharing best practice across different sites.

To Work Programme contractors, we recommend engaging with housing providers to create temporary job opportunities for disadvantaged young participants. In particular, we recommend that Work Programme contractors:

- **Target opportunities at social housing residents and candidates that meet housing providers' specifications.** Early evidence from Proving Talent suggests that responsive selection and preparation processes, and the opportunity to engage with their own residents, maximised the potential (and motivations) for housing providers to deliver sustained job opportunities. Therefore, taking the time to respond to housing providers' specific requirements can also be commercially attractive to Work Programme contractors.
- **Provide financial and in-kind support linked to performance and commercial goals.** The Proving Talent model was designed to be aligned with

¹² Fishwick, T., Lane, P. and Gardiner, L. (2011) *Future Jobs Fund: An independent national evaluation*, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion

the way in which Work Programme contractors are funded. The more housing providers create additional opportunities exclusively for Work Programme participants, and demonstrate their success in delivering job outcomes, the greater the onus on Work Programme contractors to offer support towards elements like wage costs and training.

Finally, to government, we recommend efforts to support these kinds of partnerships between organisations delivering vital public services to flourish. In particular, we recommend that government:

- **Make public financial support that can be incorporated into these initiatives, such as the Youth Contract wage incentive, as accessible as possible.** This might involve minimising the administrative burden of such schemes, or reducing the risk involved in arrears payments when additional jobs are being created.
- **Make publicly funded qualifications and training available within these initiatives.** This could include exploring fee remission for temporary job participants when they are in their placement (and therefore not claiming out-of-work benefits), or aligning local skills provision with the kinds of opportunities housing providers are creating in other ways.
- **Support local partnerships by waiving random allocation of Work Programme participants in some cases.** The random assignment of Work Programme participants to two or three local prime contractors means that housing providers need to build multiple partnerships to ensure access to all of their residents who are on the programme. While competition between prime contractors through random allocation may drive performance in general, there is a case to remove this condition for some participants when local partnerships are actively engaging those further from the labour market.

All five pilot partnerships covered within this evaluation are developing the next stage of their Proving Talent delivery, and the lessons from these pilots have already helped other GUAC members to take the plunge and embark on their own initiatives. This suggests that the Proving Talent pilot has built strong foundations to take these lessons and recommendations forward.