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Executive Summary

Citation for published version:

Johnsen, S, Rayment, M & Moir, J 2025, *Jobs First Evaluation: Executive Summary*. Centre for Homelessness and Inclusion Health, Edinburgh.

Link:

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THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Centre for Homelessness and
Inclusion Health

Jobs First Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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in partnership with



About the Authors

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to extend their sincere thanks to the many individuals who generously shared their experiences and reflections for the evaluation, including Jobs First employees, employers and Social Bite staff. We are particularly indebted to Marzena Farana-Sherlock, Emma Colgan-Blair and Richard White for the compilation of cost and outcomes data and support of the evaluation more generally. The evaluation was funded by Social Bite in partnership with Mitchells and Butlers.

Published: February 2025

Publisher: Centre for Homelessness and Inclusion Health, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK
<https://health.ed.ac.uk/research/current-research/centre-for-homelessness-and-inclusion-health>

Key points

- Jobs First is unique amongst employment initiatives for people with experience of homelessness because it provides support to both employers and employees. Furthermore, it does not require employees to have completed substantial amounts of employability training prior to recruitment.
- It has been very positively received, both by the people it supports to gain and sustain employment and the companies recruiting them.
- Jobs First has enabled employees to acquire skills and qualifications, expand and strengthen their social networks, increased their confidence, and improved self-esteem. It has also provided welcome routine and a renewed sense of purpose for many. The money earned has enabled some employees to obtain more secure housing.
- Many employees have thrived in their job and remained in the role beyond the end of the programme. Employee interviewees who left before completing the programme also reported deriving substantial benefit and that they would recommend it to other people with experience of homelessness.
- Employer interviewees reported that Jobs First had helped them overcome the recruitment challenges affecting some sectors, had reduced recruitment costs, and that their involvement with the programme had been very rewarding. All expressed strong appetite for the programme to be scaled up and replicated elsewhere.
- The programme offers good value for money. For every £1 invested in Jobs First, the programme yields an estimated £3 worth of social benefits (increased economic output and participant incomes, enhanced personal wellbeing and reduced healthcare costs) and enhances the public finances by at least £0.71 (e.g. via enhanced tax revenues and reduced welfare benefit payments). The ratio of benefits to costs would increase even further if all of the benefits of Jobs First, including its role in alleviating the long-term costs of homelessness, could be measured.

Background

This report documents the findings of an independent evaluation of the Jobs First programme. Developed three years ago by Social Bite on the back of learning from the former Social Bite Academy, Jobs First is an employment initiative which targets people with experience of homelessness. Its primary goal is described as being: “to support people who have experienced homelessness into real job opportunities and to increase the amount of opportunities available to them within the job market”.¹

It departs from other employment programmes for people with experience of homelessness because it provides support for employers as well as employees. This includes initial in-depth training for line managers followed by ongoing training and support provided by the Jobs First team. Training is also provided for other (non-managerial) staff members. Co-recruitment is another key feature, wherein Jobs First staff put potential candidates forward for specified vacancies at partner companies, help with shortlisting, and accompany candidates to interview. Jobs First employees are not expected to have completed substantial amounts of training prior to recruitment.

Jobs First employees are each provided with a dedicated Support and Development Worker (SDW) who supports them for the duration of the 15-month programme. The SDW is responsible for developing a person-centred support plan and meeting with employees weekly to deliver support. They provide a wide range of types of support, including for example: advocacy, emotional support,

¹ Social Bite (2021) *Social Bite's Jobs First: booklet for employers*. Social Bite, Edinburgh, p.8.

practical support, referrals to other services, and support with forward planning. SDWs also facilitate and attend regular 'feedback loop' appraisal meetings with the line manager and employee.

At the time of writing, a total of 11 partner employers had been involved with Jobs First, and 67 employees supported into and in employment. The majority of job opportunities to date have been entry-level roles in the hospitality industry (in both back- and front-of-house positions) but have also included work in cleaning, food production, security, and parking enforcement, amongst others. Jobs First is currently implemented in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and London.

The evaluation was conducted by the Centre for Homelessness and Inclusion Health (CHIH) at the University of Edinburgh in collaboration with Rayment Consulting Services Limited. It was funded by Social Bite in partnership with Mitchells and Butlers. In terms of research methods, it involved: a review of international literature; a series of interviews and focus groups with Jobs First employees (n=11), employers (n=9), SDWs (n=4), and Social Bite senior managers (n=2); and cost-benefit analysis (CBA) of Jobs First outcomes and costs data.

Employee and employer perceptions and experiences of Jobs First

The Jobs First programme has been very positively received by both employees and employers. The training provided for employees had been much more useful to some than others, and experience of line management in their new role equally variable. The support provided by SDWs was unanimously identified as a strength of the programme by employees who welcomed its holistic nature, continuity, and relationality in particular. All employee interviewees (including those who had left the programme before completing it) reported that they would recommend Jobs First to other people with similar backgrounds.

A key outcome for employees included an increase in income; this enabled a number to procure more secure housing and/or alleviated stress and anxiety. Other outcomes reported included the acquisition of skills and qualifications, expansion and strengthening of social networks, renewed sense of purpose and/or belonging, provision of routine and structure, increased confidence, and improved self-esteem. Some had excelled in their new roles, being awarded accolades such as employee of the month, for example. Not all employees saw the programme through to the end, however, with personal circumstances making work untenable for a significant proportion at the time.

Favourable reception by employers was usually based on one or more of four rationales, these being: normative (i.e. it was a 'good thing to do'), pragmatic (e.g. it helped redress recruitment challenges), personal (i.e. it was rewarding), and evidence of effectiveness (i.e. positive outcomes witnessed for the individuals they had employed). Employers particularly welcomed the support for recruitment and increased diversity of the workforce which was said to have improved social awareness and empathy amongst existing staff. For most employers, prior expectations about potential problems were either not borne out or were not nearly as problematic as expected. All expressed strong appetite for the programme to be scaled up and replicated elsewhere.

Programme strengths and challenges

Interviewees identified three main strengths which they considered to set Jobs First apart from other employment programmes targeting people experiencing homelessness and as integral to the programme's success. The first of these was the positive relationships forged between Jobs First staff, employers, and employees. The second was the holistic support provided by SDWs. The third was the flexibility with which most (but not all) employers were able and willing to exercise in accommodating the needs of employees (e.g. accommodation of absences and/or provision of part-time roles for individuals living in hostels).

Several challenges were encountered in delivering the programme. Key amongst these was the challenge of balancing flexibility for Jobs First employees and fairness to other staff, especially regarding absence management. A lack of clarity about the nature of criminal offences committed by some employees was another challenge. The 'chaos', insecurity and cost of temporary accommodation (especially hostels) was another barrier. The tendency for some employees to experience 'dips' in mental health which led to their discontinuation of work and/or disengagement from support was a further challenge. The tendency for the Home Office to relocate refugees at short notice and limited language proficiency of some employees were additional barriers to delivery.

A few tensions between programme aims and operationalisation were apparent. One such tension was between the programme's requirement that feedback loop meetings be held in-person on partner businesses' premises and the desire of some employees to exercise discretion as regards their history and/or the fact they receive support from Jobs First. Another was a mismatch between the level of support some employees were provided with vis-à-vis what was actually needed, in that some reportedly did not require the level of support provided toward the latter stages of the programme.

Factors facilitating delivery of the programme included the skill and in particular relational approach of Social Bite staff and level of commitment from senior managers in partner companies. The willingness of some employers to exercise flexibility was another facilitating factor, but it should be noted that not all roles or industries (e.g. factory production lines) are able to accommodate repeat unexpected absences, for example. Factors inhibiting delivery included the 'chaos', insecurity, and cost of temporary accommodation (especially hostels), limited availability of support for mental health problems, and issues affecting immigrants (notably limited language proficiency and forced moves of refugees by the Home Office).

Key lessons learned

A number of key lessons have been learned which can be taken forward. First amongst these was that when engaging with employers it is imperative that a high level of buy-in be obtained from senior managers. Furthermore, the training of employees is more effective when delivered in-person than on-line. Moreover, there is value in being open to the possibilities offered by different sectors, but sight should not be lost of the fact that employers' inclination and/or ability to accommodate risk and/or exercise flexibility is variable.

Additional learning is that there is value in 'starting small', that is, limiting the number of Jobs First employees taken on when an employer first engages with the programme, and that the allocation of line managers will have a critical influence on the likelihood of success. Moreover, there is value in considering the attitudes and personalities of team members that Jobs First employees will be working with on a day-to-day basis so as to maximise the likelihood of them experiencing a

supportive environment. It is also important that details of prior criminal records are explored sufficiently to ensure that individuals are not put forward for roles that will be inappropriate.

A further key lesson learned was that stakeholders associated with the programme should remain ambitious regarding the potential for individuals with experience of homelessness to obtain and retain paid employment, but that they should not lose sight of the scale of challenge many members the target population continue to face, especially if they are in recovery. A key challenge going forward is ensuring that the jobs identified are suitable for the target population, that is, are able to accommodate the flexibility that may be required without compromising the company's operation to an intolerable degree.

Value for money

The evaluation finds that Jobs First delivers good value for money. The costs to Social Bite and employers of delivering Jobs First (including programme staffing, administration and additional employer time to support employees over and above what is typical for a standard employment arrangement) are estimated to amount to just over £19,000 per employee helped into sustained employment.

The Jobs First programme delivers multiple benefits to employees (through enhanced personal income, prospects and personal wellbeing), employers (through assistance with recruitment and wider personal and corporate benefits), the economy (through enhanced output), the taxpayer (through reduced welfare payments, enhanced tax revenues and savings in the public expenditures associated with homelessness), and society (by addressing inequalities and helping to redress homelessness).

Gaps in data allow us to value only some of these benefits and require us to employ assumptions regarding the additionality of outcomes and duration of benefits achieved. However, our analysis finds that the benefits that Jobs First has delivered greatly exceed the costs of the scheme, while also benefiting the public purse. Overall, we estimate that, per £1 invested in Jobs First, the programme yields social benefits of almost £3 and enhances the public finances by at least £0.71 (primarily through enhanced tax revenues and reduced welfare benefit payments). If we were able to value changes in public service use by Jobs First participants, we would expect these benefit: cost ratios to increase further.

Future analysis of the benefits and costs of the programme would be facilitated by the collection of data on public service use by employees, particularly tracking their engagement with housing, physical and mental health, police and criminal justice services prior to, and after entering the Jobs First programme. Another key evidence gap surrounds the effect of the programme in reducing the risk of long-term homelessness and rough sleeping among participants, given the substantial costs to society and public service providers documented in previous studies.

Recommendations

Key recommendations emerging from the evaluation include the following:

- Funding permitting, the programme should be scaled up within the cities Jobs First currently operates in (Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and London) and/or replicated elsewhere in the UK if/where there is evidence of demand for it.
- If scaled up in existing cities, the programme might be expanded into new departments within existing partner companies and/or new partnerships forged with other employers if/where they are able to offer appropriate entry-level roles.

- If replicated in cities where Social Bite does not already have a presence, careful thought should be given to whether it might be appropriate to establish partnerships with other third sector support providers already embedded in those contexts.
- Whatever approach is taken in terms of expansion, it is imperative that any new employer partners becoming involved, and/or SDWs employed (or seconded) to deliver support, embrace fully the aims and ethos of the Jobs First programme.
- Consideration might be given to the potential benefits and/or risks of tapering support via a step-down process before the end of the programme in situations where the employee, manager, and SDW agree the usual level of support is unnecessary.
- That said, thought might also be given to potential for developing a formal but flexibly implemented 'check in' process, if/where consent is given, to enable light touch support for former employees who have completed or disengaged from the programme.
- Consideration should also be given to whether it might be appropriate to conduct at least some feedback loop meetings remotely (e.g. via videoconference) if an employee expresses a preference for this to enable support to be provided more discretely.
- Care must be taken to ensure that details of prior criminal offences are explored in sufficient detail to ensure that no employee is put forward for an inappropriate role.
- Insofar as possible, SDW roles should not combine the task of supporting Jobs First employees with other operational roles in Social Bite services (e.g. management of coffee shops) which also employ programme participants.
- Finally, the programme's data recording systems should be streamlined to improve efficiency and facilitate regular monitoring. Consideration could be given to increasing the range of data recorded (including on public service use by programme participants) to strengthen evidence of the benefits of the programme.

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Publisher: Centre for Homelessness and Inclusion Health, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

<https://health.ed.ac.uk/research/current-research/centre-for-homelessness-and-inclusion-health>

Publication date: February 2025