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Centre for Homelessness and
Inclusion Health

Jobs First Evaluation

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in partnership with



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Executive Summary

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” (Social Bite, 2021, p.8).

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, 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 of 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.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Existing research provides compelling evidence that poverty is a precursor to homelessness for most (but not all) of those who experience it; furthermore it indicates that the vast majority of those who experience homelessness suffer from persistently low income in the long term.

(Johnsen and Watts, 2014, p.iv)

The links between homelessness and poverty have long been recognised in policy circles within and beyond the UK (FEANTSA, 2007, 2009). The role of employment in offering a potential route out of both these social ills has been stressed repeatedly in UK housing policy (Crisis, 2024; Tunstall et al., 2013). The wider psychosocial benefits of work, which include (but are not limited to) offering a sense of purpose, fostering meaningful use of time, and promoting community integration, are also widely endorsed in policy in and beyond the UK (Marshall et al., 2022).

That said, existing evidence suggests that people with current or past experience of homelessness face many barriers to accessing and retaining paid employment (FEANTSA, 2007; Gray et al., 2022). Key amongst these include: a lack of stable housing, vulnerabilities and unmet support needs, low educational attainment, limited (or no) prior work experience, discrimination by employers, and (in the UK) work disincentives associated with the welfare benefit system (Johnsen and Watts, 2014).

Mainstream employment services available to the general public are noted to be poorly suited to many people with experience of homelessness on grounds that the jobs offered are often inappropriate and the programmes insufficiently sensitive to their needs and circumstances (St Mungos, 2010; Gray et al., 2022; Hough et al., 2013; Sanders et al., 2013). This issue is by no means unique to the UK, as generalist employment programmes have long been criticised in other European contexts for the very same reasons (FEANTSA, 2009; OSW, 2007).

A number of service providers within the UK homelessness sector have developed a range of specialist employment-focused services in response to such issues (Johnsen and Watts, 2014). These initiatives have varied in scope and mode of delivery, but usually share a focus on provision of pre-employment education and training, work experience, and/or time-limited support once in paid employment (see Chapter 2).

Developed by Social Bite, Jobs First is an employment initiative which targets people with experience of homelessness. It departs from other programmes because it provides support for employers as well as employees. 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” (Social Bite, 2021, p.8). Furthermore, Jobs First does not require employees to have completed substantial amounts of employability training prior to recruitment.

This report documents the findings of an independent evaluation of the Jobs First programme. 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.

1.2 Jobs First history and description

The Jobs First programme was inspired by and builds upon its predecessor, the Social Bite Academy, which provided individuals who had experience of homelessness with jobs in Social Bite coffee shops. The Academy was based on a 'place and train' model wherein participants were not required to hold formal qualifications but were trained on the job and provided (in the initiative's latter stage) with wraparound support. The Academy's work was severely curtailed by the onset of Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 given the pandemic's impact on the hospitality industry.

Jobs First was developed shortly thereafter, in 2021, with the support of Spring Impact's Scale Accelerator scheme¹. The programme was informed by learning generated by the Social Bite Academy, particularly the non-negotiability of ongoing support for employees, along with evidence from Individual Placement Schemes regarding the ideal duration of support in employment programmes targeting users of mental health services (see Chapter 2). Jobs First was thus devised as a 15-month programme for employees which integrates support for both employees and external employers. It is premised on the expectation that employees will keep those jobs after the support is withdrawn at the end of the programme.

A programme coordinator was employed in July 2021 and the first Jobs First employee recruited three months later in October 2021. During its first three years of operation, Jobs First has been delivered in the cities in which Social Bite already has a presence and existing links to other organisations via its coffee shops, these being Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and London.

An overview of key stages and milestones in the Jobs First programme is portrayed in Figure 1. The initial phase involved relationship-building with potential employers and charity partners who would provide referrals.

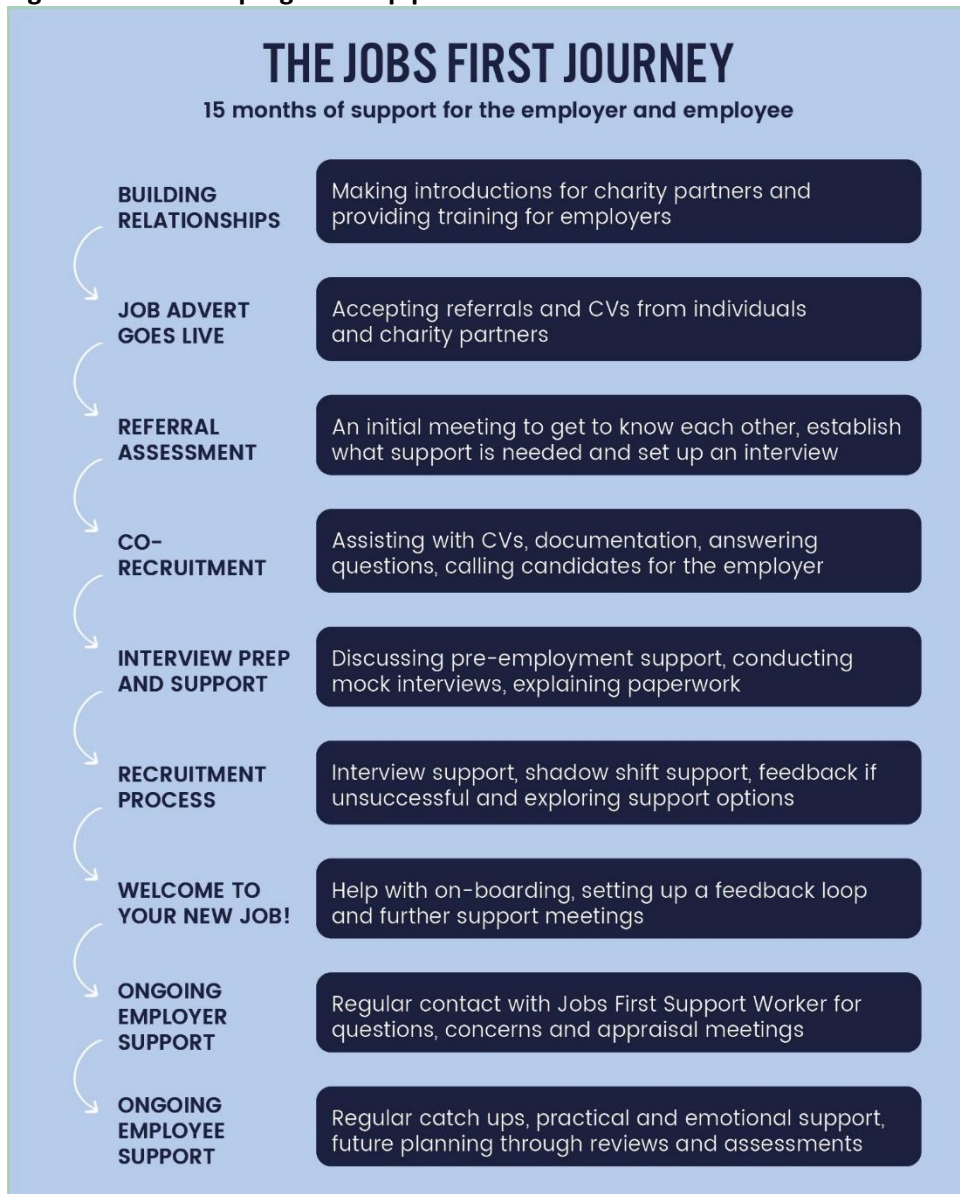
Co-recruitment is core to the Jobs First model. When employers have an entry-level job vacancy, details will be circulated to charity partners who will then refer potential candidates. Sometimes potential candidates are people using Social Bite's free food services or individuals who have worked with the organisation as a supported volunteer.

To be eligible for Jobs First, an individual must be either: a) currently experiencing homelessness (but not sleeping rough at the point of referral); or b) have experience of homelessness or be at imminent risk of homelessness and needing support to obtain and retain paid employment. Migrants must have entitlement to work in the UK. Everyone who is referred is contacted to ensure that they understand what they have been put forward for and what the advertised role entails. An assessment is then undertaken to explore and discuss their motivation, experience, and support needs.

Jobs First Support and Development Workers (SDWs) then help employers shortlist candidates for interview. They also attend the interview, wherein they usually remain neutral unless feeling compelled to prompt a candidate who is underselling their skills and/or experience. Constructive developmental feedback is provided for unsuccessful candidates and referral to other agencies provided if appropriate.

¹ <https://www.springimpact.org/programmes/>

Figure 1: Jobs First programme pipeline



Source: Social Bite

Social Bite then liaises with employers to arrange a start-date for employees and support them during the induction period and thereafter. Employers are responsible for ensuring that employees receive a full induction and that they are equipped with the skills necessary to carry out the role to which they have been recruited. They also line manage the employee and deal with any work-related issues including payroll and, if/where necessary, disciplinary action.

Another defining feature of the Jobs First programme is the training provided for partner employer staff by the Jobs First team. This includes initial in-depth training for line managers followed by ongoing training and support as and when required. Training is also provided for other staff members to learn about Social Bite and the Jobs First programme. This generally involves educating existing staff about the breadth of homelessness experiences (including hidden homelessness), providing an overview of the barriers people with experience of homelessness typically face in the job market, myth-busting common misconceptions about homelessness, and explaining why Social Bite endorses a trauma-informed approach.

Jobs First employees are each provided with a dedicated support and development worker (SDW). The SDW is responsible for developing a person-centred support plan with employees which aims to identify and address anything that is creating a barrier to gaining and sustaining employment or improving their quality of life. Personal support plans are reviewed on a quarterly basis. Further to this, SDWs meet with employees on a weekly basis to deliver ongoing support for the duration of the programme. They provide a wide range of types of support, including for example: advocacy, emotional support, practical support (e.g. dealing with welfare benefits, budgeting), 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. These are initially held weekly during the probationary period, which is three months for most employers, or fortnightly thereafter if the probationary period is longer than three months. Feedback loop meetings offer an opportunity for discussion of issues such as: motivation, personal presentation, communication skills, performance of duties, and adherence to professional boundaries. The SDWs also offer ongoing support to the line manager throughout the programme and assist employees and line managers to discuss future plans as and when appropriate.

It was initially anticipated that the Jobs First programme would involve eight partner employers and support 60 employees. At the time of writing, a total of 11 partner employers had been involved (with 10 still involved), and 67 employees supported into and in employment.

Partner employers involved to date have included Andron, BaxterStorey, B&Q, Change Waste Recycling, G4S, Heritage Portfolio, Holroyd Howe, Mitchells and Butlers, Nairn’s, NSL (part of Marston Holdings), and Scotia UK. The majority of job opportunities have been entry-level roles in the hospitality industry (in both back- and front-of-house positions) but have also included jobs in cleaning, food production, security, and parking enforcement, amongst others, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Employee work types

Type of work	No. of individuals
Hospitality	38
Customer services (parking attendant)	12
Cleaning services	9
Factory worker	4
Security	1
Sales	1
Engineering and design	1
Retail	1
Total	67

1.3 Evaluation aim and methods

The evaluation aimed to assess the potential costs and benefits of Jobs First and capture implementational lessons learned since its inception. It was underpinned by the following research questions:

1. What are the costs and benefits of Jobs First and how do these compare?
2. How is the Jobs First programme perceived and experienced by employees and employers?
3. What are the main strengths and limitations of the programme?
4. What factors facilitate and/or inhibit Jobs First programme development and delivery?
5. What if any lessons have been learned regarding how to deliver the programme most effectively?

A number of research methods were employed. Firstly, a *review of international academic and grey literature* was conducted to assess existing evidence regarding the effectiveness and cost of employment programmes targeting people experiencing homelessness and other relevant groups. This was used to inform later stages of the evaluation.

Secondly, a series of *qualitative interviews and focus groups* was conducted involving a total of 26 individuals. These included:

- in-depth individual interviews with 11 employees who were currently receiving or had recently received support from Jobs First;
- in-depth interviews with 9 senior representatives of partner employer companies who had been involved in the provision of jobs for and/or line management of Jobs First employees;
- a focus group discussion with 4 frontline Jobs First Support and Development Workers (SDWs); and
- a group interview with 2 senior representatives of Social Bite who were responsible for the strategic oversight and delivery of Jobs First.

All interviews and focus groups were conducted remotely via video or audio conference on Microsoft Teams. All were recorded with the permission of the participants, transcribed verbatim, and coded thematically. Minimal detail regarding the demographic or other attributes of participants is provided in quotation attributions to preserve their anonymity.

Thirdly, a *Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA)* was conducted. This drew upon:

- data on programme financial costs provided by Social Bite (e.g. staff costs, overheads and in-kind costs etc.) covering the period October 2021 to May 2024;
- anonymised data on outcomes for programme participants provided by Social Bite (e.g. employment, income, housing status etc.) covering the period October 2021 to July 2024; and
- qualitative data from the interviews with employers (n=9) and employees (n=11) (see above).

Limitations of the data available mean that only some of the benefits of Jobs First could be valued in monetary terms, such that the cost-benefit analysis was not fully comprehensive². A detailed account of the methods employed to assess costs and benefits is provided in Chapter 5.

Ethical approval for the evaluation was obtained from the University of Edinburgh's School of Health in Social Science Research Ethics Committee.

² Monitoring data provide some general information regarding the health and housing status of participants, and their interactions with the criminal justice system, but do not give detailed records of public service use. Furthermore, the benefits for participants' physical and mental wellbeing are difficult to value, and detailed data on these aspects are lacking. The limited duration of the evaluation is a further challenge in assessing the programme's benefits, with the evaluation covering a period of three years between 2021 and 2024. A limited number of participants (12) have completed the programme, while a further 19 are still on it, limiting the sample size. Furthermore, the full benefits of participation in influencing participants' wellbeing and public service use are expected to take many years to be seen. The lack of a comparison group is also a barrier to robust evaluation, making it difficult to define a counterfactual (i.e. to assess what would have happened to participants if they had not entered Jobs First).

1.4 Report outline

The report comprises five further chapters. Chapter 2 synthesis findings from the review of literature. Chapter 3 documents Jobs First employee and employer expectations and perceptions of the programme. Chapter 4 presents findings regarding the main strengths and challenges associated with Jobs First, together with key lessons learned during the first three years of implementation. The findings of the of the Cost Benefit Analysis are presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 draws together the evaluation's key conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter summarises the findings of a review of existing literature considering the effectiveness and cost of employment programmes targeting people with experience of homelessness. The review was conducted to inform the design of the cost-benefit element of the evaluation and to contextualise the findings reported in subsequent chapters. It drew on both academic and grey (non-academic) sources and was international in scope, but the discussion below focuses predominantly on UK-based research where this is available. The chapter opens with an overview of the volume and remit of existing evidence, before synthesising the insights it provides regarding the outcomes and costs of employment programmes for people experiencing homelessness.

2.1 Volume and nature of existing evidence

The headline finding from the literature review is that there has been surprisingly little research focussing on programmes for people experiencing homelessness as compared with those targeting other so-called ‘vulnerable’ groups. In this vein, after recently conducting an international systematic review of existing evidence on a range of employment-based interventions targeting people experiencing homelessness, Marshall et al. (2022, p.2142) concluded that the evidence base on this issue “is in an early stage in development”. The relative lack and limitations of evidence are most stark when one considers the comparatively greater volume and rigour of research assessing the effectiveness (and to lesser extent cost-effectiveness) of employment-focussed programs targeting people affected by severe mental illness, most notably Individual Placement and Support (IPS) schemes.

This IPS model was originally developed in the United States of America as an intervention targeting people with severe mental health problems. It is based on the supported employment theory which argues that individuals with some identified disability should be helped to find ‘competitive employment’ from the outset and not made to wait until after finishing some treatment or training programme (Frederick and VanderWeele, 2019). Put another way, it adopts a ‘place-and-treat/train’ approach which differentiates it from treatment as usual (TAU) approaches which can usually be described as ‘train/treat-then-place’ (*ibid.*). There is a now substantial body of evidence, including multiple Randomised Control Trials and meta-analyses, assessing the effectiveness of IPS interventions for the original target population (Dixon et al., 2002; Frederick and VanderWeele, 2019), and other groups such as people experiencing alcohol and drug dependence (Marsden et al., 2024).

Whilst there has been a level of interest in IPS provision for people experiencing homelessness in the UK for some time, it has not been replicated here for this group to date. That said, the model has very recently been identified as one of eight approaches to help end rough sleeping and reduce homelessness which will be piloted and evaluated over the next three years in England under the Centre for Homelessness Impact’s major Test and Learn initiative³. Encouragingly, the findings of an RCT assessing the impact of an IPS ‘adjunct’ to support already provided to (recently homeless) Housing First clients (a subpopulation with so-called ‘complex needs’) in Montreal – which showed that adjusted odds of obtaining competitive employment were higher in the IPS group than the TAU group – gives grounds for optimism regarding its potential effectiveness for people experiencing homelessness more generally (Poremski et al., 2017). Employment rates observed on the project were however low compared to those reported in other IPS programmes, at 34% rather than the 60% or greater more typically recorded (*ibid.*).

³ <https://www.homelessnessimpact.org/news/15m-programme-to-elevate-evidence-of-what-works>

For now, evidence on the effectiveness of employment initiatives targeting people experiencing homelessness in the UK is limited to the evaluations of a number of much smaller scale, including some very localised, programmes. A number of commentators have noted that the limited number and small size of employment-focussed projects for homeless people in the UK limits the extent to which impact can be rigorously assessed (Jones and Pleace, 2010; Tunstall et al., 2013; Quilgars et al., 2008). These limitations are compounded by the fact that many evaluations are reliant on poor quality monitoring data given difficulties associated in tracking service users after they have gained employment and/or stopped receiving support (e.g. Johnsen and Sosenko, 2012; Luby and Gallagher, 2009). Furthermore, high levels of participant attrition between data collection stages have been problematic for studies using a longitudinal approach (e.g. Bretherton and Place, 2019; Pleace and Bretherton, 2017).

That said, of clear relevance is Pleace and Bretherton's (2017) evaluation of Crisis' Skylight service in six cities, these being Birmingham, Edinburgh, Liverpool, London, Newcastle and Oxford (see also Bretherton and Pleace, 2019). The programme included individual support for people with experience of homelessness for job seeking, such as help assembling a resumé, assistance searching for work, training in interview techniques, assistance with transport, and access to appropriate clothing for interview. The mixed-method evaluation was conducted over two years and involved the analysis of anonymised administrative data, semi-structured interviews with staff, focus groups with service users, and a qualitative longitudinal cohort study with tracked a group of service users over four in-depth interviews conducted at six-monthly intervals.

Another relevant study was the evaluation of the Skills, Training, Innovation and Employment (STRIVE) pilot, a London-based pre-employment and skills programme targeted at people experiencing non-statutory homelessness and claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), Employment Support Allowance (ESA) or equivalent legacy sickness benefits (MHCLG, 2018). This was delivered by St Mungos and Crisis Skylight between 2014 and 2017 and was funded by MHCLG and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The evaluation consisted of: 1) a process evaluation (involving analysis of monitoring information and interviews with support providers, participants, and external stakeholders); 2) qualitative assessment of outcomes (which compared self-reported outcomes compared with a business-as-usual group, assessed via interviews); and 3) and value for money assessment (involving a literature review, modelling exercise to calculate unit costs, costs per outcomes achieved, value of impacts and return on investment and a sensitivity analysis). Further detail re the third component is provided below.

Also of note is Kessler's (2024) evaluation of a small NHS England and Improvement pilot initiative aiming to facilitate access to employment in Health Care Support Worker (HCSW) roles for people with lived experience of homelessness. Key features of the programme included identifying and securing involvement of NHS Trusts, recruiting individuals with lived experience (led by Groundswell), delivery of a three-day pre-employment course, application of individual participants and Trusts appointing HSCW posts (again, with the support of Groundswell). The evaluation comprised interviews with 22 people in different roles. A total of 22 individuals with lived experience engaged in the pre-employment events; this was well short of the target number. A total of 10 job offers were made. A number of barriers and challenges to operation in each phase of delivery were identified. Quantitative data regarding other outcomes were not collected.

2.2 Outcomes and costs of employment programmes

A key theme in existing evidence is that employment acquisition and retention outcomes for many employment programmes targeting people experiencing homelessness in the UK are modest at best,

and in some instances, poor (Johnsen and Watts, 2014). For example, whilst 40% of participants in Crisis' pre-employment programme for homeless central and eastern European migrants gained paid work within the three year pilot period (Johnsen and Sosenko, 2012), the job outcomes rate recorded for the Single Homeless Enterprise Project (SHEP) was only 18% (Davies et al., 2011), and a mere 2% of individuals involved with St Mungos' 'Pathways to Employment' programme moved into paid employment (plus a further 4% into voluntary work). Similarly, Luby and Gallagher (2009) report that even with the intensive personalised support provided as part of the SmartSkills programme, progression to paid employment was 'relatively low'. The Crisis Skylight evaluation concluded that the intervention had helped 'most' of the 83 people who completed three evaluation interviews over an 18 month period or all four interviews over 24 months (Bretherton and Pleace, 2019); some (39%) had returned to paid work, others to education and training (18%), and another group were "actively seeking work with a sense that they had a realistic prospect of finding it" (*ibid.*, p.69).

Furthermore, after reviewing evidence on UK employment-based programmes for people experiencing homelessness, Johnsen and Watts (2014) note that evaluations do not always succeed in collecting data on service users' incomes after they acquire paid work, but that the (limited) evidence available indicates that these tend to be low (Johnsen and Watts, 2014). Of those service users obtaining work after engaging with Crisis' preemployment programme for A8 and A2 migrants, for example, 22% earned the minimum wage and a further 66% between the minimum wage and £10 an hour; only a small minority (5%) earned more than £10 an hour (Johnsen and Sosenko, 2012). Whilst not providing details regarding the proportion of service users achieving different wage levels (or averages thereof), the SHEP evaluation reports that all clients who gained employment got jobs above the minimum wage, ranging from £6 to £14.23 per hour (Davies et al., 2011).

On a more consistently positive note, the UK-based evaluations referred to above provide compelling qualitative evidence that such programmes contribute to positive 'soft' outcomes such as improved self-esteem, confidence and motivation, for example; also that they positively impact on other areas of service users' lives by reducing levels of participation in anti-social behaviour or substance misuse, and/or strengthening social support networks (Davies et al., 2011; Hough et al., 2013; Luby and Gallagher, 2009; White, 2011).

Whilst mostly rather dated now, existing evidence regarding employment programmes for people experiencing homelessness in the UK records costs savings or offsets. Johnsen and Watts (2014) observe that, taken together, the earliest studies on such programmes provided some, albeit limited, evidence that these initiatives do have capacity to generate cost savings for the exchequer via a reduction in the welfare benefit bill and/or increased revenue from taxation. For example, ORC International (2006) calculated that helping 125 people experiencing homelessness into proper and stable employment each year could save the economy as much as £5.6 million, or £45,000 per client, each year. More specifically, for those out of work for more than five years the cost of getting them back to work was calculated as being between £12,000-£14,000 at the time; for those who have been out of work for less than two years the equivalent figures are £4,000-£6,000 (St Mungos, 2010). In a similar vein, White's (2011) evaluation of the 'In Work Staying Better Off' project concluded that the provision of coaching combined with motivational interviewing represented value for money, as the average cost per client by the end of the project was £141.24, this reportedly being approximately one third of the costs incurred per client using Jobcentre Plus and other employment programmes at the time.

There have also been some analyses of the broader social return on investment associated with employment, training and education programmes targeting people experiencing homelessness. Business in the Community (2012), for example, calculated that its 'Ready for Work' programme

which engaged UK businesses to support disadvantaged groups (including but not only people experiencing homelessness) by providing work placements and post placement support generated a total of £3.2 million in benefit to society over a five-year period. The relative contributions to this figure were broken down as follows: reduced re-offending savings (34%), Supporting People savings (21%), benefits savings (33%), tax and national insurance gains (7%), and health savings (4%) (Business in the Community, 2012).

Whilst concluding that the Crisis Skylight scheme helped ‘most’ of the service users participating in the evaluation, Bretherton and Pleace (2019) also observed that some of the work secured by Skylight clients was mundane and unpleasant, relatively poorly paid, and/or insecure especially where contracts were ‘zero hour’ or temporary in nature. Where secured, housing obtained was sometimes insecure and/or of poor quality. Furthermore, they concluded that there were clear limits to what the programme could achieve, in that making some individuals ‘work ready’ was not a realistic prospect. A nominal success, Bretherton and Pleace (2019, p.74) note, was not necessarily a lasting solution to homelessness, in that “some of the programme users entered a liminal state, not homeless, but not a comfortable distance away from homelessness either”. No evidence was found of ‘working homelessness’ amongst programme users, but working while being in state of housing insecurity was an outcome for some (Bretherton and Place, 2019)

Despite the limits noted above, many of the early evaluations of UK employment programmes targeting people experiencing homelessness conclude that education, training and employment programmes ‘work’ on grounds that they help service users overcome at least some of the barriers to employment that they commonly face (Johnsen and Watts, 2014). Luby and Gallagher (2009) for example, note that ‘a high proportion’ of individuals using Crisis’ SmartSkills programme ‘progressed onto adult learning’, while the vast majority of the people using the agency’s pre-employment programme for central and eastern European migrants reported gaining qualifications as a result of their involvement (Johnsen and Sosenko, 2012). Similarly, St Mungos reported that in 2012/13, 84% of the 604 clients who worked with on their ‘Pathways to Employment’ programme utilised and benefited from the training and learning support provided (St Mungos, no date).

In their review of existing evidence, Johnsen and Watts (2014) also observe that almost all the evaluations of employment programmes targeting people experiencing homelessness offer detailed recommendations as to practices which appear to increase the likelihood of their leading to positive outcomes. These include, by way of example: the provision of personalised support from knowledgeable workers; specialist apprenticeships; continuation of support after jobs are found; and having supportive, flexible and ‘available’ managers (Broadway, 2013; Hough et al., 2013; St Mungos, 2010). Johnsen and Watts (2014) also note that these employment programmes appear to be most effective, that is, are most likely to lead to the acquisition and retention of paid work amongst those service users with low support needs whom are closest to being ‘work ready’ at the point of recruitment; positive outcomes are more difficult to achieve with people experiencing homelessness with high support needs, albeit that they are highly likely to derive significant psychological and other benefits from such programmes.

2.3 Conclusion

The review of literature has revealed a notable dearth of evidence regarding the effectiveness of employment initiatives targeting people experiencing homelessness as compared with equivalents for other ‘vulnerable’ populations (e.g. people affected by severe mental health problems). Furthermore, much of the available evidence for UK-based homelessness employment initiatives is now rather dated.

Existing evidence reveals that employment acquisition and retention outcomes for most programmes targeting people experiencing homelessness have been modest at best, and sometimes poor. It does nevertheless consistently report other positive outcomes, particularly as regards improved self-esteem, confidence and motivation, and/or reduced involvement in problematic substance use or antisocial behaviour. Several prior studies in the UK have also recorded cost savings, offsets and/or positive social return on investment.

Chapter 3: Employee and Employer Experiences

This chapter documents the perceptions and experiences of Jobs First articulated by both employee and employer interviewees. Programme monitoring data is also drawn upon where relevant.

3.1 Employee profile, perceptions and experiences

3.1.1 Demographic and housing status profile

The age and gender profile of Jobs First employees is shown in Table 2. Of the 67 employees recruited to the programme by July 2024, 54 were male and 13 were female. Their ages were spread from under 25 years to over 55 (Table 1). Slightly less than half (n=30) were British nationals; the others were migrants from other countries in Europe (n=14), Africa (n=11), and Asia (n=7). Nationality was unknown for the remaining 5 individuals.

Table 2: Employee age and gender breakdown, July 2024

Gender	Age (years)					TOTAL
	<25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	
Female	0	4	3	2	4	13
Male	5	18	13	12	6	54
TOTAL	5	22	16	14	10	67

Jobs First monitoring data indicates that slightly less than half of Jobs First employees were living in settled housing at the point of recruitment to the programme, with 24 holding their own social (council or Housing Association) tenancy, 3 living in private rented housing (some of which was on a shared basis), and 1 being an owner occupier. A total of 17 were living in temporary accommodation, of which 4 were in a hostel, 3 in self-contained temporary accommodation, 2 on a ship (accommodating Ukrainian nationals), and 8 for whom the type of temporary accommodation was not specified. A further 11 were staying with friends or family ('sofa surfing'), and 1 in a host house under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Small minorities were living in supported accommodation (n=3) or living with their partner (with the tenancy being in their partner's name) (n=2). Housing status was either not specified or unclear for the remaining 5 individuals.

3.1.2 Programme completion rate

As noted in Chapter 1, by the end of July 2024 a total of 67 individuals had been supported into and in employment via the Jobs First programme. Of these, 12 individuals had completed the programme, 19 were still on it, and 1 had left for another job. The remaining employees (n=35) had disengaged or discontinued work before completing the full 15 months. The length of time that early leavers were involved ranged from less than one month to 13 months, averaging at four months.

It is not possible to draw direct comparisons between these figures and those reported for other employability programmes given that the target groups are slightly different and projects have recorded engagement and/or employment outcomes in different ways (see Chapter 2). That said, Jobs First's overall employee retention rate might be viewed favourably given the modest and sometimes poor employment outcomes recorded in other programmes (see Section 2.2).

The primary reasons for early exits recorded by Social Bite were often unrelated, or not directly related, to programme participation. For example, many were due to pre-existing mental or physical

health problems, housing issues, being recalled to prison, problems relating to Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) disclosure assessments, or moving away from the area. Other employees were noted to have left because aspects of their role did not suit them or as a result of communication difficulties or conflicts with other people in their workplace. This variability in rationale for leaving prior to programme completion was confirmed by interview data (see Section 4.2).

Interview data also highlighted the benefits of participation for those employees who did not complete the full 15-month programme as well as those who did. It was particularly notable that employee interviewees who left before completing the programme reported deriving substantial benefit, particularly improved self-confidence and motivation, and that they would recommend it to other people with experience of homelessness. The full range of benefits for participants are documented in detail below (see also Section 5.2.1).

3.1.3 Overall view of programme

The programme had been very positively received overall by all employee interviewees, including those who had completed the programme (n=3), those part-way through at the point of interview (n=6), and those who had left before completing it (n=2). Without exception they reported that they would recommend it to other people with similar backgrounds.

It's [Jobs First is] great ... I would recommend it to anybody having difficulty getting work and getting into work that suits them. (Employee)

Of course I would recommend them ... The people that I met, they made an impact on my life and I'll remember them for the rest of my life because they gave me a chance when I didn't think I was ever going to get a chance again. (Employee)

The following sections provide an overview of their reflections regarding specific elements of the programme, namely their experiences of training, job recruitment, line management, ongoing support, and the impact the programme has had on their lives.

3.1.4 Training and job recruitment

The training provided prior to be putting forward for jobs was greatly valued by some employee interviewees, especially those who had been out of work for a prolonged period and/or lacked confidence in job interviews, for example.

[The training] was quite good because ... before that, I hadn't done my CV for about two, three years, so it was badly needing rewritten ... It'd been a long time since I'd been in a working environment. (Employee)

I found it helpful. I used to speak really really quickly. I know I still do, but not as bad as I was. She [support worker] said to me that I need to slow down. Or try to, anyway! [laughs]. She showed me how to do presentations like. And how to present myself physically. And how to explain things but not over-explain things, because I tend to do that, like. Wee things like that. (Employee)

A few others had derived rather less benefit from the training, given their pre-existing experience and/or confidence with the job application process.

Interview stuff and that, preparing you for going to the interview and stuff like that, and CVs and that ... Aye, they sat down and done all that stuff. It's not stuff that I genuinely needed help with, but it is stuff they done with you anyway. People do need that, so aye, that's something that's a benefit for people, aye. (Employee)

They [SDW] helped me with doing my CV and stuff like that, and getting it suitable for the job roles that I was looking for. They helped me with interviews and stuff, they asked me if I wanted to do mock interviews. I told them I didn't have to because I was quite confident in interviews and I do quite well in interviews anyway, even though it had been a long time since my last interview ... I already had a CV, it just needed updating and tailored to fit the jobs that I was going for. (Employee)

On the issue of recruitment, a number of employee interviewees noted that they felt reassured knowing that employers were aware of their background.

See because I'm involved with Social Bite, they've [the employer has] got an idea of what kind of people are going through the door, because it's all right saying, 'here's a job for you', but if they don't know who you are, what you've been through, they might get a wee bit of a shock when you turn up and you're a wee bit rough and ready. (Employee)

The same was true of having a Job First representative accompany them to the job interview; indeed, several interviewees commented that this helped significantly with their confidence.

They come to the interview as well - when you're coming to see the employer for the first time. Yes, they did help a lot ... I would like to thank them again. (Employee)

Some employee interviews had secured jobs in fields for which they had little or no prior experience. A few noted that whilst they were enjoying the roles they were in, the programme could potentially be enhanced going forward if a wider range of roles were available.

What would be good would be ... a wider range of job opportunities. More partnerships with different kind of work. Maybe construction. Just different... Aye, that's probably about the one thing I'd say would maybe be a wee bit better, because if there were more options on the table, I probably wouldn't have picked [this] role. (Employee)

3.1.5 Ongoing support from SDWs

The holistic support provided by SDWs was highlighted as an invaluable aspect of the programme by employee interviewees.

I had never been involved with a job search process or a place that just helped you the way they did. It just felt like if you had a problem with something, even if it wasn't to do with jobs, if it was housing stuff, they'd just help you. (Employee)

[My SDW helps with] quite random things like getting help to reapply for my passport, get my provisional driving licence sorted. Like, if I've got any problems with my housing, they can help me with that. Just general day-to-day stuff. (Employee)

She [SDW] went over and above, like, got me sorted with travel. And got me clothes and the like. All these things I needed, I could just go and ask ... If I needed to make calls she would get me the right numbers and explain the situation, like. (Employee)

The continuity of support after securing a job was also widely praised by employee interviewees.

For me, it was a lot better than processes I went through before and helped to get into employment and stay in employment. They don't just help you get into work ... They stay with you the whole time, come and see you every week ... If you're in the Job Centre, as soon as you're employed, you can't just come back. You're left... (Employee)

On this issue, a number of interviewees alluded to the ontological security that comes from having someone to speak to whilst on the programme.

It's really helped me mentally. Just knowing there is someone else there to speak to. (Employee)

I know I can call if I need to and [support worker] will answer ... That makes a big difference. (Employee)

The relational approach of staff was also frequently highlighted as a valued element of the programme.

The people that work there, they're really nice. They know what they're doing. They're totally professional, but they're really friendly people, they're down to earth and they're willing to go above and beyond for you and stuff like that ... They're selfless really. (Employee)

She's [Jobs First support worker is] sensitive to how you're feeling that day. Like if you're feeling overwhelmed or whatever. And that, that means a lot. (Employee)

I would say the best thing was the staff they have. They don't seem like, I mean, they're good at their job, they're serious about their work, but they just seem laid back, casual, when they speak to you. When you see them sometimes they take you for a coffee or make sure you feel all right and they just want you to feel comfortable. It's very relaxed and I like that attention. (Employee)

The extent of departure from their prior experience in Job Centres was frequently commented on.

With the Job Centre, there wasn't any help or anything there. It was just you need to do it or you get your benefits stopped ... It was a better process going through the Jobs First programme because ... you get your own, what do you call it, like a support worker ... They were more hands-on and they were already involved with employers. (Employee)

I couldn't talk to people in the Job Centre. I found the Job Centre staff unbearable. I had a few occasions where they stopped benefits and ... it was the Job Centre's fault. The woman I spoke to was rude ... The Job Centre has no empathy and they just don't help people. It's a traumatising experience, going to the Job Centre. You don't know whether you're going to go in and get spoken to like an idiot or get your benefits sanctioned. (Employee)

They [Jobs First support workers] don't speak down to you. Normally when go to other agencies they speak down to you. 'You've not got this' or 'you've not got that' or whatever. With this is about 'What do you want? Are you interested in this, or in this?'

Do you know what I mean? They leave it down to you. They don't force you into a job you don't want. So that's a lot better than going to the Job Centre. (Employee)

3.1.6 Line management

Employee interviewees' relationships with their line managers were widely variable. Many reported that their line managers or supervisors were extremely supportive and/or had invested substantial time in their development.

I've got a supervisor who works at the café ... He's really good, and he's quite approachable as well. I found years ago, like you go to approach somebody, and they could be quite standoffish, but no, he's like, you ask anything, and he'll try and answer it as well as he can. (Employee)

My supervisor has taught me loads. He's been great, like. (Employee)

A small minority relayed much less positive experiences, however. For example, one noted that their line manager had failed to take account of adjustments that had been agreed at the point of recruitment (see also Section 4.3.2).

I remember I was applying for a part-time office cleaner, and during that first interview, several times I repeated, that 'Look, I only can accept part-time in a small office' ... because I can't work eight hours ... They knew my ... physical limitations, and they accepted me ... But the job was supervisor in a huge office ... I let Social Bite know ... My line manager ... the way she talked with me was more and more aggressive. ... And they were [Jobs First SDW was] brilliant at mediating this kind of conflict. (Employee)

3.1.7 Outcomes and impacts

Employee interviewees highlighted several positive outcomes which they attributed to their engagement with the programme. Key amongst these was improved financial wellbeing:

It certainly helped me financially. Going to work ... as a parking attendant ... obviously isn't the most glamorous work. It did help me get the opportunity to get on top of some of some financial difficulties over the years, with being homeless ... I'd like to move on to further employment. Right now, this is the job I need to keep because there's ... not a lot of jobs around that give you a comparable wage. (Employee)

Obviously, I've got a wee bit more money to play with now ... I've got a wee bit more money to play with after I pay my bills ... and the money that I give my [family member] and stuff like that. (Employee)

I'm making money! So, having that little extra bit of money has changed my lifestyle. I've got more options to do things ... Yes, it's like, because I'm earning money ... I could go out. If I want to go out, I could go out. I like going to concerts, so I go and do that myself. I like travelling, so, yes. (Employee)

Several interviewees noted that increased income had enabled them to improve their housing status, by for example providing them with means to secure private rented housing.

It's been helpful financially and on accommodation. Before I was on the programme, I used to live with some people from my church, but through that, when I started working ... I was able to rent a room by myself and it's helping me pay my rent and bills every month. And that actually gives you some kind of security, because if you don't know when your next rent or bill is going to come from, that's a bit difficult. (Employee)

I found once you get a house, it gives you like a... It's almost like a foundation to build on. Once you've got a house, it's like you're in a more settled environment. Then, it's like, well, I've got my house now. What's the next thing in place, and you build it up and build it up? Whereas, like [name of transitional accommodation scheme], the rent's quite high, so that's kind of prohibiting people from actually working there. (Employee)

Improved financial wellbeing had also led to reduction in levels of stress or anxiety for a number of employee interviewees.

The pay is quite good, here, so my financial situation is okay now ... I'm definitely less stressed, so I think it's good. (Employee)

For me, I think the name given to it kind of sums it all up, because if you have a job, at the end of the month, you get something in your account and something is coming in your pocket. So, it gives you that security and that peace of mind ... If I'm working, I know my rent is secured, what I'll have for dinner or lunch is secured, because the money will come into your account. (Employee)

The expansion or strengthening of social networks was identified as an additional beneficial outcome of the programme.

I've met a lot of nice people in the company that I work for, and I became really friendly with a lot of people there. So, it's nice ... making friends and stuff like that. (Employee)

I don't really have many friends, so really my social... Probably, my social thing is like work because, apart from that, I basically, for the best part, I just come home and do nothing, and if I do anything, it's usually by myself. So, yes, usually, my main social ring is like my work, and that's it. (Employee)

Further to this, a number observed that Jobs First had given them a welcome sense of purpose.

Up until [year], my life was pure chaotic as fuck. I was in and out of jail, homeless, caught up with addiction, and didn't know any other way of life. I went to rehab ... I came out, I got into a relationship, had a wain [child], had a lot of problems ... and I relapsed again. I got involved with [name of homelessness charity] and then Social Bite, and that was the turning point ... I wouldn't have got into a job without it. See if I wasn't working, I'd have probably fell back to my old ways, because I didn't have anything to keep me going ... I needed something ... So, Social Bite fell into place just at the right time. (Employee)

For some interviewees, the routine and structure offered by the programme was viewed as a key benefit.

It's gave me a routine. It's gave me something to focus on during the week. I know I have to be there Fridays. It's like people are relying on me now ... I know when I go in, I know

what has to be done. Yes, it's given me a bit of discipline as well, knowing Thursday night, like, okay, I need to get to my bed. I've got to be up at eight in the morning, make sure my uniform is ready, be presentable, be punctual. (Employee)

The final outcome frequently commented on by employee interviewees was improved self-esteem and/or sense of self-worth. For some, this had the knock-on effect of instilling optimism and hope for the future.

I would recommend it [Jobs First], yes definitely. It's a good way of gaining confidence, your esteem back. It will improve your life. I think it's improved mine. (Employee)

I think, on the whole, it's been a good experience for me. Yes, I've built up ... more confidence. I've built up... Like, hopefully, I'll pass my assessment on Friday, and it's got... It's something I can add to my CV. After my 12 months, I can go and apply to do café work if I want to ... I finish in [month], so we're going to have a discussion, see what my further options are moving forward. (Employee)

Notably, the two employee interviewees who had left the programme before completing it also emphasised the positive aspects of it. One had left because the physical requirements of the job they were recruited to exceeded what they were able to cope with; the other because of a series of personal crises and deterioration in mental health.

I just had too much going on ... with my health and [name] dying ... I felt overwhelmed and just couldn't cope ... I'd still recommend Jobs First 100 percent. They really went over and above to help. (Employee)

3.2 Employer perceptions and experiences

This section documents the perceptions and experiences of Jobs First narrated by employers. It provides an overview of their motivations for becoming involved, overall reception of the programme, observed outcomes for their company and Jobs First employees, perceived benefits for wider society, and opinions regarding potential programme replication.

3.2.1 Motivations for involvement with Jobs First

Most employer interviewees noted that the primary motivating factor underpinning their involvement with Jobs First was the programme's close alignment with their company's ambitions regarding corporate social responsibility and desire to combat inequalities in access to employment.

The main reason for being involved is to make things better somewhere along the line for somebody ... It's like anything, you give something, you don't expect a good result from it, but if you do you get a result as well, more than just appreciation, then quids in, that's even better. (Employer)

One of the partner organisations ... they only had one position. So I've sent a couple of CVs to them, and people came for interview ... Four people interviewed and she [employer] hired another one. She said, 'Because I want to give him a chance.' ... So she hired two people, which was amazing. (Staff)

For others, the programme was seen as a potential avenue to address workforce shortages and difficulties recruiting people to entry-level jobs.

It was actually my equivalent in [name of company] that approached me and said, 'We work with Social Bite. We've got three employees through them. If you're struggling with recruitment, perhaps you might be interested.' So ... that's how I was made aware of them ... and got involved. (Employer)

3.2.2 Overall reception of the programme

The programme was very positively received overall, with all but one employer interviewee expressing intention to continue their involvement going forward (see Section 4.2). In each case, this favourable reception was founded on one or more of four rationales. The first of these was normative, in the sense that being involved was seen as a 'good thing to do', an avenue to operationalise corporate social responsibility, and opportunity to 'give something back' to society.

I think it's a good idea ... It's good for the community, it gets people into work, it helps people. (Employer)

These are people that have struggled to get a second chance, if you like ... Jobs First is giving people the chance to work in the same kind of roles as everyone else, get the experience, build up their CVs, build up their confidence. (Employer)

The second rationale was pragmatic, in that the programme helps to address recruitment challenges (see also Section 3.2.3).

It did look good in terms of our CSR [corporate social responsibility] ... But honestly, the reason we did it is because we were struggling to recruit ... We were struggling to attract people in [name of city] ... I thought, well, I can't lose out of this because Social Bite will find the person, train the person ... and then just give them to me. The only commitment from me was to give them that support over that six months [probationary period] ... I felt like it was win-win. (Employer)

The third rationale was personal, in that staff in employing companies derived satisfaction and reward from their involvement.

I think Jobs First, and I say this to anyone who asks me, is one of the most rewarding things I've ever got to be a part of in my career so far. It's the thing I've been the most proud of driving forward within [name of company]. (Employer)

The team have found it really beneficial to be able to give somebody an opportunity, whereas if we hadn't ... offered this programme, they wouldn't have maybe had an opportunity to work or have that support. I think for us it's been really rewarding because ... the members of the team that we gave a chance to ... have become very valued employees. (Employer)

For everyone ... who are involved in it is something that they're incredibly proud of ... I know you can't quantify it, but the reward has been huge for everyone who's been involved in it. I think, only speaking for myself, but being able to see people progress from how they started out and they were maybe quite shy and a little bit reserved to now being super confident and taking on that leadership role has been amazing ... Its really, really rewarding. (Employer)

The fourth rationale was founded in evidence of the programme's effectiveness, that is, its success in supporting (the individuals recruited to obtain and (in most but not all cases) retain employment.

It works ... In our experience, we haven't picked up on anything that could be improved. The process has been pretty smooth sailing. We just think it needs to be replicated, because it is effective, and it does add value. (Employer)

I'm very much an advocate of it ... It does work. I believe that every business at [name of umbrella company] should have a candidate in their business. (Employer)

3.2.3 Requirements of and outcomes for employers

A key benefit reported by employer interviewees was support with recruitment, and in particular time savings in finding suitable candidates.

It doesn't come at any extra cost ... We appreciate that go-between person, and it actually makes the process easier. Yes, so not monetary saving, but definitely time just to find the right candidates ... From my experience in recruitment and HR, it would save us days, because then there's less to-ing and fro-ing wondering if, well, number one, the candidate's even interested or well suited for the role. (Employer)

So it does save us time through the recruitment process ... With Jobs First we have that conversation ... they've already screened the person, so it's going straight to that interview stage, and they know that that person's got their right to work ... So it does speed up. It takes out that middle section of finding the candidates and chasing them. (Employer)

A few also mentioned modest savings in terms of not having to pay advertising costs:

[It does not save] in terms of payroll and incentives, but in terms of recruitment. Advertising costs and the usual costs associated with recruitment can be cut by having a suitable candidate referred through the Jobs First programme. (Employer)

A number noted that additional time was often required for managerial staff to participate in feedback loop meetings.

The only [cost is] in terms of, I suppose, potentially additional time in terms of the feedback meetings and the structure of the support that's in place ... I suppose it's just that additional time in terms of the more structured coordination of the meeting with the support worker (Employer)

Effectively, there's no real cost to the business ... Just a bit of extra time from me. (Employer)

Employer interviewees did however without exception emphasise that this additional time requirement was modest and more than outweighed by the benefits of programme participation.

So ... there's a bigger cost for my time, as opposed to the people who would perhaps normally be doing recruitment or the accommodating any sort of sessions with their support worker. Again, is a cost to the business because that's an hour that they're not deployed, but I wouldn't say it's a massive cost. (Employer)

There was a fair amount of time involved in general discussion with them as to how things were going. There's a disadvantage to that in terms of the sheer amount of time it takes, but a massive advantage in terms of the benefit to the support for the new employee and probably helping us to pay more attention to that individual than we might in other cases. (Employer)

Supporting them [Jobs First employees] was a time-consuming process ... Yes, but it was worth it ... We had to invest more time, but I must say we knew that would happen before I signed up to it ... They wouldn't be with Social Bite if they didn't have problems is how I saw it. We just didn't know what those problems would be. (Employer)

Another positive outcome noted by employer interviewees was increased diversity of background within their workforce and social awareness amongst the existing staff team. Better understanding of homelessness causation and barriers people experiencing homelessness face when trying to (re)enter paid work was noted to have led to greater empathy amongst senior managers and the wider staff team.

I think, from my point of view, it was a really interesting process, a bit of extra training on what it meant to be homeless, and better insight into what it means to be homeless, and what the barriers are to getting back into work once you have been homeless for a long period of time. (Employer)

There's a training programme that you go through, so you have that more of an understanding of what these people have gone through, and it probably leads the team leaders and other people who are involved in the day-to-day management of these people to have a bit more empathy. I think that has probably trickled down to the other people they manage and are a bit more understanding of people's situations. (Employer)

Involvement with Jobs First had also inspired some employers to alter the way they frame questions in recruitment more generally, for example placing less emphasis on gaps in an applicant's curriculum vitae. Similarly, some modified on-the-job training or induction processes to allow more time and be more accommodating of a wider range of life experiences:

I think just how we induct and do our training has been a huge thing for us ... It's just highlighted some things that we can do better, and that we now do do better ... It's definitely made me look at how we teach and how we develop. I've learnt that ... although we take them all on the same journey, people learn differently and at different speeds, so that's been a massive lesson for me. (Employer)

[It's been] educational for the employer as well, like really changing their perspectives ... One employer in particular had said... They would always ask, 'Well, why are there all these gaps in the CV?' How do we reframe that and we just get to know the person, and that will come out? Why do we have to be so stringent? (Staff)

3.2.4 Outcomes observed for Jobs First employees

Employer interviewees highlighted a number of benefits for employees which they had observed. These broadly echoed those identified by employee interviews (see Section 3.1.6). Key amongst these was an increase in confidence:

Confidence, first and foremost [has been the main benefit for employees] ... It's given them a new lease of life. It's given them accountability. It's getting their life back on track. (Employer)

So the confidence just got better and better as the time went on ... I'm not sure what he'd been through, but I know he was on his own, been treated poorly in whatever country he'd come from, and he was trying to set up a new life in [name of city], and he was working for us whilst he was trying to do that. (Employer)

The acquisition of skills and, in some cases additional qualifications, was seen as a further benefit:

They've definitely got more skills. They've been on an external coffee course, so they're all now barista trained, which they probably would never have had the opportunity to do ... I think it's been great for them. (Employer)

The people who worked for us didn't stay for very long, but I think they, as a stepping stone, as giving them a little bit of stability for a period of time, and of a sense that they had achieved something, did help, by the sound of things, in their career progression. (Employer)

A number of employers also commented on employees' increased incomes and the effect this had on their ability to secure more stable housing:

[Name of employee] was sofa surfing when he joined us, and ... now he's renting somewhere. His intention is to get, live on a boat on the canal. That's when he has enough money in the bank and sees the right boat, then that's what he's going to do. (Employer)

They also commented on employees' improved sense of purpose, identity and/or belonging:

For the individuals, it's just given them a sense of purpose, I suppose ... Just having that safe space for them to be able to come to work, do their job, have a purpose in their life, because they've obviously come from difficult backgrounds. (Employer)

[That] sense of belonging is almost embedded in the employee when they get into a routine after they are taken on ... That sense of self and that identity is cultivated. (Employer)

Almost all employer interviewees shared examples of 'success stories', including a number of employees whose contributions at work had been publicly acknowledged via accolades such as 'employee of the month' or similar.

So actually, no, we haven't had any issues. In fact ... two of our staff members hired through Jobs First have actually been nominated employee of the month ... Not because they're from Jobs First, but they've added value considerably in their role, and been recognised for it. (Employer)

The candidates that have remained with me are fantastic team players. One of them even progressed on to doing their apprenticeship. Within [name of company], she won apprentice of the year. (Employer)

A number noted that the success of some employees has exceeded their expectations:

There were various unknowns ... Yes, if we could do nothing other than take somebody ... and put them in a stable situation without any advantage to us, then that was fine. If in doing that, they could actually go out, see customers and install kit, and do it moderately well, that would be brilliant. In fact, [they've] done more than done that ... It's undoubtedly worked better than we might have hoped for. (Employer)

For the majority of employer interviewees, prior expectations or concerns regarding potential problems were either not borne out in practice, or if they were, these were not as problematic as anticipated.

To be fair, it's working better, because I was expecting more challenges, and absenteeism, and lots of other stuff, but the three people are doing really well. (Employer)

High levels of absenteeism was an issue for some employees, however, and not all remained in employment for the duration of the programme (see Chapter 5). Employer interviewees reported that most absences and programme discontinuations were caused by employees' personal circumstances which made work untenable for them at the time.

[For] the team that has not made it through the programme ... It's not been the right time for them. Each one that we've had, it's not been an issue with their work and how they do the work. It's their own personal circumstances that overruled their situation ... They're just not ready to be back in that working environment ... When they are ready, we'd happily take them back. (Employer)

So this particular employee did not work out. There were productivity issues ... The employee went absent without leave. The communication stopped from the employee to manager, and there was a clear indication given from the employee that they were not in a place to continue working in the way in which we needed them to ... [because of] personal circumstances ... As I say, what happened in this case could equally have happened through the traditional recruitment route as well. (Employer)

Employer interviewees did nevertheless make a point of emphasising that those who left the programme before completing appeared to have benefited from engagement with it.

One person became a problem, and was dismissed, but everyone else, there were various reasons [for leaving]. One was a ... refugee, and just the obstacles from the Home Office made it difficult for him to stay on. One had difficulty at home, and so just wasn't reliable enough, and he just reached a point where he couldn't continue to commit to the hours that we needed. So I think they got something out of it. I think it was part of that recovery process, and that they did have a job, they had something to put on their CV, and so I think for most of them it was a positive experience. (Employer)

We gave it a good go, and I think we probably did have a positive impact on the people's lives, and I think Social Bite continued to support them in the background, even after they'd left us. I haven't had a full update on them, but most of them sound as if they have moved on to other things and are doing well. (Employer)

3.2.5 Perceived benefits for wider society

Employers highlighted three main ways that the programme benefited wider society. The first was a benefit to the public purse by enabling someone who was economically inactive to become productive:

You've taken somebody ... who would otherwise be a drain on government and cost to society, who could be unwell ... mentally or physically, who could have all sorts of issues that just, by nature of them now being in a stable situation, won't arise. And we've got somebody, one more person being productive in terms of being in a job that is bringing good results to them and to us. I think from everybody's point of view it's very positive. (Employer)

Second, some employer interviewees highlighted the value of improving public awareness of inequalities affecting people experiencing homelessness and enabling staff members and/or customers to play a role in combatting these:

For greater society, it sends out a message that nobody is excluded from the opportunities that we have here, and actually the things that could be perceived as barricades and like a blockage, we want to partner with organisations that remove that to give us all an equal opportunity. Because there's no reason why they cannot be contributing members of society. They're just put at a disadvantage, and we try to remove that. (Employer)

I think we have a lot of regular donors and regulars in the coffee shop, and for them now to see the benefits of people getting to come and work in the coffee shop, and see some of the things that we do as a company and a charity, I think makes customers feel a little bit more involved. (Employer)

Third, the programme was seen as offering a potential solution to workforce shortages in entry-level jobs in some sectors, such as hospitality:

There is such a shortage of hospitality professionals in the UK at the moment ... especially because of Brexit ... If we can give opportunities at lower levels, support them ... as part of this programme, then we're setting the industry up for success in the future. If we don't do programmes like this as an industry, what else are we trying to do, because we don't attract young people from schools ... [or] coming fresh out of college. (Employer)

3.2.6 Opinions regarding replication

Employer interviewees expressed strong appetite for the programme to be scaled up:

I think that if more companies got behind it, we would see more people come out of the benefits system, and I genuinely think it's been really, really good ... Some people it's been amazing for, and the three people that we work with, especially, they're going to go on and do great things, and they're out of the benefit system, which is a massive, massive thing for them. (Employer)

If it can add value on this side of [name of city], where else can it add value? It just needs people willing to implement the system and collaborate ... I just think it's a great programme, and it should be rolled out wherever it can be. (Employer)

Notably some of the employer interviewees representing UK-wide companies reported that there was demand for its replication in other cities where their organisation had a presence:

We're UK wide and when I tell people about the success we have with it within Edinburgh and London, it's always, 'Well, how can we get involved?' It's like, 'Well, they're not in your area, so you'll have to look elsewhere.' (Employer)

There would be so many opportunities ... In London, places like that - we struggle to recruit. We always have and always will in Bristol. If there was something out there in Bristol, I'd snap someone's hand off because it's just we can't recruit. (Employer)

Employee interviewees were unanimous in encouraging other employers to consider partnering with the programme if it were to scale up:

My advice to other employers would be to do it ... If for nothing else, just to see the benefits of it for them, and how it changes someone's life ... It genuinely is a great programme. (Employer)

I would definitely advise anyone if they had the opportunity to get involved with it ... I would say go for it. Definitely. (Employer)

They did however emphasise that employers should be fully cognisant of: firstly, the need to exercise flexibility with many individual employees; and secondly, that supervisory input is often required from senior rather than middle managers.

[My advice to other employers would be] just definitely to do it but be mindful. You've got to be patient because you don't know who's going to come through the door. You don't know what they've been through and what their personal circumstances are at that time when you recruit them. So it's just be open-minded and willing to adapt because we had to ... Just be conscious that that that could happen, I suppose. (Employer)

To scale it, I don't think the operations director of a business can really be doing one-to-ones with shopfloor employees every fortnight for more than one person, and with the people we had, they ended up being quite complex, so I wouldn't have wanted to put that on the shoulders of my team ... There's a scalability problem there, in that it took quite senior management to manage them and to run the process, which probably isn't sustainable for too many people. (Employer)

A number also emphasised the need to be mindful of preserving the programme's key ingredients in order to maximise the likelihood of success going forward, as discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

I think Jobs First is successful because of the people it has involved, from both its employers and the team at Jobs First and them being able to build those relationships with employers ... It absolutely should be replicated across the country, but I think it needs to be done in the right manner. (Employer)

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has documented the very positive receipt of the programme 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 for the individuals they had employed). Employers particularly welcomed the support with 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.

Chapter 4: Programme Strengths, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Drawing upon interview data, this chapter documents the key strengths of the Jobs First programme, the challenges encountered in its delivery, and operational lessons learned since its inception.

4.1 Key programme strengths

Employer and employee interviewees highlighted three core strengths that they deemed integral to the programme's success and/or set it apart from other employment programmes targeting people experiencing homelessness and other disadvantaged populations.

4.1.1 Relationships

First amongst these was the primacy accorded to and establishment of positive relationships between key parties, that is, between Jobs First staff, employers, and employees.

I think the relationship we have with the ... team with Social Bite ... as close as we do have really supports us and the individuals to get the best out of them while they're here. I think it's just communication and relationship building is a key part of this. (Employer)

I think Jobs First is successful because of the people it has involved, from both its employers and the team at Jobs First and them being able to build those relationships with employers. (Employer)

These relationships had been especially successful where each party had been open to receiving and acting upon constructive feedback.

I think the relationship built with employers is the main strength ... We've worked with a lot of other local organisations and things to help with recruitment, and we have never had anything be as successful ... as we have with Jobs First. That really does just go through to the desire for them to communicate well and understand what jobs and things we have available and what they actually entail. They're always willing to learn and take on feedback. (Employer)

The benefit was that Social Bite didn't find us the person and then just leave them with us. They were there ... supporting that person. So the benefit would be if we had a problem with something ... we would tell Social Bite that and they would go and manage that with that person. So that helps the employer because they're explaining to the person who they've got a relationship with, 'Look, you need to improve this or you're going to fail your probation,' that kind of thing. (Employer)

4.1.2 Holistic support

Second, there was widespread consensus that the provision of holistic support addressing a wide range of needs for the duration of the programme was a key strength and distinguishing feature.

I think the fact that they support the employees as well is another great strength of it. The support that the employees get from Jobs First is really, really great. Like I said,

we've used other organisations, and the support stops when they get in the door. Then at that point, if there's anything that happens, we don't have anywhere to turn but also the person doesn't ... That continuing support I think is really important. (Employer)

We've really benefited from having the go-between person, so the wraparound support when going through Jobs First, and so that has eradicated any issues that would arise. If an employee is struggling, they know they can speak to the line manager, but also on the other end, they can speak to the person that connected them to the role. (Employer)

4.1.3 Employer flexibility

Third, interviewees frequently emphasised the value of the flexibility exercised by employers. This, employer interviewees noted, was prompted by improved understanding of homelessness and the barriers people who have experienced it face when trying to (re)enter the job market.

It's definitely worth noting that if you say you want to support those that are at a disadvantage, you have to be knowledgeable about the issues they face. The reason that we're so, I think, successful in terms of this partnership working and offering employment, I would say is due to an understanding of the obstacles that do exist, as well as being willing to make amendments where necessary. (Employer)

By way of example, some employers have been open to offering the option of part-time work for some roles in recognition of the implications of loss of Housing Benefit entitlement for individuals living in temporary accommodation whilst working (see also Section 4.2.3).

We accommodated his circumstances and changed his hours for him to suit what was going on. So he started off full-time, 40 hours a week, and then he was struggling to do a certain shift because of the bus time, so we didn't force him to do that shift. Then he was having housing issues. I'm not sure of the details, but it was to do with what he was earning, he would have been better off working 16 hours ... So we allowed him to do that. (Employer)

A few employer interviewees also noted that they had been able to accommodate employee absences in a flexible manner. This was not true for all companies, however, most notably where production lines required a full team complement and repeat unanticipated absences are extremely problematic.

4.2 Main challenges and limitations

A number of challenges have been encountered, some of which have prompted minor modifications to the programme's delivery since it started. Each is discussed in turn below.

4.2.1 Balancing flexibility and fairness

A number of employers noted that it was difficult to balance the desire to offer flexibility for Jobs First employees with the practicalities of being fair to other employees, especially as regards unanticipated absences.

Most of the people, out of the four or five people that we had, came in and they fitted in fine, and they would have done a good job if it weren't for other factors in their background which meant they struggled to attend work regularly. We stretched the

rules as far as we could for them, but at the end of the day, we have an absence management process that needs to be consistently deployed for everybody. (Employer)

I think one of the challenges for us, where we've got lots of employees, it's difficult to have the Jobs First group as being different, because everybody has difficult experiences at work ... The Jobs First employees aren't actually that different from our wider workforce, and so it's difficult for us to make exceptions for them when we don't for other people. (Employer)

4.2.2 Dealing with criminal backgrounds

Whilst many employer interviewees expressed openness to recruiting Jobs First employees with criminal records, one noted that this had caused difficulties with one individual when their background was known to other members of the existing workforce.

With one of the people it became a problem because other people in our workforce knew about their background and history ... and that became an issue ... So you can keep confidentiality ... but ... [if] the history becomes apparent, then it becomes quite difficult to manage. (Employer)

On this issue, employers emphasised the need for transparency about the nature of criminal histories to ensure that candidates are not put forward for roles that may be inappropriate.

We've had that a couple of times where there's maybe been a conviction and they [Jobs First] don't have a full picture of it, and we need to know because we're putting these people out on the street and they're interacting with the public, and ... we obviously have to do disclosure checks and things ... We're happy to employ people with convictions, but ... we need to just know what it is ... The transparency maybe needs to be a bit better at times. (Employer)

4.2.3 Temporary accommodation and hidden homelessness

Issues associated with temporary accommodation (e.g. hostels and night shelters) and hidden homelessness (e.g. staying with family or friends because an individual has no home of their own, that is, 'sofa surfing') presented a number of challenges for the programme.

First amongst these was the tendency for congregate forms of temporary accommodation (especially hostels) to be noisy, 'chaotic', and occupied by people involved in active substance use. This, some employees noted, made it difficult to get sufficient rest between shifts and/or presented a threat to their recovery from drug or alcohol use.

I was staying in the [name of temporary accommodation] at the time and there were addicts on either side, and fights and things all the time. It was really hard. Thankfully my [name of family member] got in touch and said I could go and stay with them. I wasn't homeless for very long, thank god. (Employee)

I wish there was some way they could help to speed up the housing. 'Cause if you've got a job and you're homeless it's hard. To you know, get there and be on time. The one thing I'd say would be good if they linked the Jobs First and housing together as a lot of people coming from my background are homeless or in accommodation that's not

conducive to making a real go of things. That's the one thing I think would give people more a chance of turning things around. (Employee)

The insecurity of temporary accommodation was also problematic for a number of employees, including those living in self-contained temporary accommodation or sofa surfing, as well as those in congregate temporary accommodation.

I think where people might struggle is that they've been in a hostel or something, and then suddenly something doesn't work out for them ... [and] they have to go back to rough sleeping or have to find a friend's... It can often be that crisis point as well that stops it from working ... Or ... 'Okay, I'm in emergency accommodation. They've told me I'm going to have to keep moving.' That can be difficult. (Staff)

So recently this guy was hired. He's in temporary accommodation ... and he's working. All of a sudden he gets a letter, 'You need to vacate the property' ... He had to leave. He sent me a text. He called his line manager that this is the situation, 'I cannot work'. Now his mental health is all over the place. He's thinking, 'Where am I going to go?' The silver lining is the person who interviewed him and gave him a chance, she's going to take him back. (Staff)

This insecurity was most acute for individuals staying in peripatetic night shelter accommodation, which a few interviewees noted is the only option for some people with no recourse to public funds.

I lost a good opportunity, job opportunities. For example, [cleaning in] big offices in central London, just because I was in a shelter two hours away and the next month I didn't know where I would be. (Employee)

I was in a night shelter ... Because of my job, I had to leave the shelter before 6:00 am, but I only could be back from 6:00 pm ... So for four weeks I was over 12 hours out, even during weekends ... So that's why I became worse, and worse and worse, physically talking ... I had to pick up two buses to go to the job, another two buses to be back and then wait an hour-and-a-half, in a library nearby the shelter or in ... McDonald's. (Employee)

In addition, the high cost of temporary accommodation effectively ruled out the option of full-time work for employees in hostels. Some employers offered part-time work in recognition of this fact (see above).

The issue I found when my employee here started is if you start working when you're in temporary accommodation, the cost is really high. So when you're not working you get housing benefit and it covers it, but when you start working it is quite expensive. (Staff)

If they're in temporary or supported accommodation ... the financial implications is a big one for us. What we'll try and do is work with employers to say we understand. Sometimes it might need to be a full-time role, but employers have been quite flexible in saying, 'Actually we're going to give a part-time role, because we understand while people are in temporary accommodation they can't afford to work full-time.' (Staff)

Echoing the findings of prior research into employability initiatives (see Chapter 2), an observed tendency for Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff to deter people experiencing homelessness from paid work was a source of significant frustration for Jobs First staff.

A big block for me can sometimes be the DWP, because they'll tell people not to work because it's not financially viable for Housing Benefit. That is really frustrating, to be honest... (Staff)

4.2.4 Mental health issues

The tendency for some employees to experience 'dips' in mental health which led to their discontinuation of work and/or disengagement from support was also identified as a challenge to programme operation. This was particularly problematic given the very long waiting lists for mental health that are widespread across the UK.

Mental health, I would say ... is probably the biggest reason why people leave the programme. Whether that might be that they've taken a dip in their mental health and need to take some time out, possibly their recovery journey and something's triggered them, but particularly that mental health piece about, 'I need to get on the right medication. I'm going to engage with a CPN [Community Psychiatric Nurse] now,' and I guess the employment and the routine unlocking trauma that they might not have dealt with. (Staff)

Usually because of the mental health that it dips ... and no matter what you do... How much scaffolding can we build for them to go to work, with these things happening in the background? You feel helpless in that situation. (Staff)

4.2.5 Language and immigration issues

Some employees' limited proficiency in English had presented a challenge. Their experiences highlighted a need for clarity and transparency regarding language requirements of jobs and candidates' level of proficiency in the language.

We had someone who maybe didn't have enough of an understanding of English, which obviously you do need because it is a customer service facing job ... [And] we had someone who didn't speak English up for an interview, and it sets everything off on the back foot. I think there'd been just a miscommunication, either from our part or Jobs First's part. (Employer)

The tendency for the Home Office to relocate refugees at short notice had also been very disruptive, with some employees having to terminate their involvement with the programme after being moved.

We have a lot of refugee asylum seekers, and so sometimes the immigration might be the reason why they have to leave us, because the Home Office are relocating them. Really sad case. Someone was doing really well in [name of city] but they relocated them to [name of city]. They do have another job now, but that's sometimes outwith their control. (Staff)

4.2.6 Unpredictability of (some) employee schedules

The unpredictability of some employees' work schedules or shifts – which is a common phenomenon in some of the sectors in which many Jobs First employees work (e.g. hospitality) – can make scheduling feedback loop and support meetings difficult. Last-minute meeting cancellations and situations wherein SDWs were not informed about employee unavailability due to training or the need for them to cover other staff members' absences, for example, were particularly problematic for the SDW who covers both Edinburgh and Glasgow given the financial and time cost of 'wasted' travel.

4.2.7 Tensions between programme aims and operationalisation

Some interviewees noted that there is a tension between the programme's requirement that feedback loop meetings are 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. For this reason, some staff members suggested that consideration might be given to allowing at least some of these meetings to be held remotely, for example via videoconference.

There's one girl that I supported, she said, 'I don't want to see you' where she worked. I said, 'Why?' 'Because everybody questioned why do I have a social worker.' ... It doesn't look good if you're not disclosing anything and then people are saying, 'Oh, this person comes, and she always says she's from Social Bite.' They google, 'Oh, it's a homeless thing.' ... You're just singling out that person when you go to their company. (Staff)

Further to this, some employee and staff interviewees highlighted a mismatch between the level of support some employees were provided with vis-à-vis what was actually needed. On this issue, a few suggested that it may be appropriate to taper the level of support more quickly than is the case presently and potentially terminate support early where relevant parties agree that it is not required.

I guess what they could do better ... if they recognised someone who doesn't need a lot of help, they could lessen their support. I mean that as in, they did come and see you every week for a while, maybe for six months or ... for the first few months, then it goes to every two weeks. Then, once a month. They just break it down ... the more confident and the more better you get at your work ... If they notice somebody like that, they could lessen their support and give the extra support to somebody else who might need the extra support. (Employee)

Once the person is sorted and they don't need anything from us, they should say, 'No, I'm fine. Thank you for your support.' That's it ... We work through this trauma-informed, approach as well, and from my experience working in the sector, once a person that's experienced homelessness has sort themselves out, they want to forget about the past, and we are part of the past. (Staff)

That said, it was also noted that there may be value in offering 'check-ins' and, if necessary, light touch support if/where this is requested by former employee after the 15-month programme end-point. On this issue, it should be noted that there is an inherent tension in any time-limited programme which aims to offer relational support; Jobs First is not unique in having to navigate this.

There was also a tension noted as regards the role of the SDW who has a dual role of supporting Jobs First employees working in Social Bite coffee shops, whilst also managing other staff in these cafes, especially as regards maintenance of confidentiality.

4.3 Lessons learned

The lessons learned during the first three years of implementation can be categorised into three broad themes, these being issues relating to: firstly, engagement with (new) employers; secondly, maximising the degree of fit between employees and jobs; and thirdly, balancing ambition for employees with realism regarding the scale of challenge many still face.

4.3.1 Engaging with employers

A core lesson has been that buy-in from senior staff in employer partner companies is critical for the programme to be successful at the level of individual businesses. The commitment of such individuals is essential to the creation of positive experiences for individual employees.

There needs to be a buy-in from the people involved. It needs to be something that the employer feels passionately about. I think that needs to be a bit of a driving force there ... I don't know anyone who thinks that this isn't a great programme or a great thing to be involved in, but it's just making sure that they have that desire to be committed to the programme. (Employer)

I guess the biggest thing for me is actually, sometimes in a company it's the person who's driving it forward. Whoever brings that scheme in, who's passionate about it, really wants to drive it forward, is really important ... You find which employers are really going to be your longstanding supporters, if you like. (Staff)

It was also discovered early on that training delivered in-person at employer premises was more effective than on-line training (e.g. provision of videos). Staff at employing workplaces tended to engage with in-person training more positively. Furthermore, in-person training enabled the Programme Coordinator to get a 'feel' for the company's receptiveness to the programme and its target population, assess the suitability of potential job roles, and consider actions that might increase likelihood of successful placements in the company.

On this issue, the importance of 'standing firm' on the requirements from employers, particularly but not only in relation to engagement with training, was emphasised by staff employees:

I think being able to ask the difficult questions, being able to challenge in a kind way, is what has brought employers with us ... I think we could have been, 'This employer wants to get involved, so we'll just ... do what we can to make it work.' I think really standing strong on those boundaries of, 'This is what the programme is. This is what we need...' Yes, there has been some flexibility to that ... but we need to stick to the core and make sure that people do that training. (Staff)

A further lesson learned was that there is value in being open to the possibilities that different sectors or job roles might offer; or put another way, one should not assume they are not feasible even they depart significantly from the type of roles the programme has offered to date. One Jobs First employee had for example successfully maintained a technician role involving substantial travel. In this vein, a few interviewees noted that there is value in being led by what the target

population wants when reaching out to, or responding to expression of interest from, new employers.

I remember being on the call at the time with the corporate partnerships manager [about an employer partnership opportunity] and we were thinking, 'Okay, this is different. Not sure how it's going to work' ... [but] the person's [employee is] still there. They've finished the programme, they're thriving ... I think it's challenged our assumptions, and also just brought a sense of ... how many people are really interested in certain roles, and why should we shut that off? Really, we'll always speak to people that we're supporting to say, 'Well, what roles would you like to see?' and have been a bit led by that as well. (Staff)

Further key learning regarding partnerships with employers is that companies' willingness and/or ability to accommodate risk and exercise flexibility is variable. This may reflect different level of risk appetite to at least some extent but is also strongly shaped by the nature of the industry each company is nested within.

It's quite difficult for us to end up being a stepping stone, bringing someone in for a few months, putting quite a lot of time into supporting them, and then they move on. That doesn't really work for us, so we'd need to find a way of making sure that anyone we brought in was likely ... we'd want it to be likely that they would stay with us for a year, two years, five years ... Once you invest in their training, you don't want them to stay three months and then leave us. We slightly lost confidence that ... it was a long-term employee solution for us. (Employer)

4.3.2 Matching jobs, employees and managers

A key lesson relating to the point at which candidates are put forward for roles 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. On this, employers emphasised that phasing recruitment helps to avoid overwhelming existing staff and allows time for culture change.

We're very fortunate, because we started small and with one person in each city. I think we've done it the right way. We've not overwhelmed the Jobs First employees; we've not overwhelmed the teams. We've done it in baby steps, which I think has been a huge benefit. We're still learning. (Employer)

We took too many in the first run and realised that actually, one at a time and a staggered approach is the best way to support them and manage it moving forward ... The first three that we [took on] did have had a number of challenges, they needed a little bit more support from us than the current person does, and having three that needed that little bit extra support was probably a bit too much to start with. I think that's the learning ... Don't run before you can walk. (Employer)

Several interviewees emphasised the criticality of identifying the appropriate individual(s) to line manage Jobs First employees, both in terms of the time they could commit to the role, their skill set, and their attitude toward the Jobs First programme and people it supports:

Lessons learned from our business' perspective is that we do need to have the right manager involved. And by that I mean the manager who can afford the time to commit

to the process properly and to be at a suitable level of management training to provide the right support from our side. (Employer)

I'm working with [name of company] ... One of the managers, actually a few of the managers on one site, they're absolutely amazing. But there is another manager that, oh my God... So yes, it's really, really, really down to the managers. (Staff)

One employer emphasised that there is value in distributing line management /supervisory responsibilities across senior staff teams in larger organisations:

We might split the [employees] on the programme across the business, just so that there's a manager responsible for each one, and not one person having all three ... In [my] experience ... splitting them across departments works a bit better for the on-site managers. (Employer)

A number of interviewees also noted that 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:

[Jobs First employees were received] better in some locations than others, and that's not necessarily the reflection of the person. That's probably more of a reflection of the existing people ... So as a business, we know our employees and we know who would support that and who's likely to try and push back against us. So we just had to be conscious of that. (Employer)

The importance of clarity and transparency regarding any criminal offences was also emphasised by a few employer interviewees, given the imperative to ensure employees are not placed in inappropriate roles (see also Section 4.2.2)).

I think background, being a bit more clear about background ... We don't need to know everything, but if there are specific things that may become a problem in the workplace ... So it's quite difficult, but we'd certainly be thinking about what sort of background checking we'd be doing ... to make sure that we weren't putting anybody at risk ... I don't have a perfect solution to what level that should be, because I think if you do it too rigorously you'd end up not employing anyone with a difficult background. But I think you need to go into it with eyes slightly more open than we were, so you can just manage the risk better. (Employer)

The Jobs First team adapted the assessment tool used in light of this early learning, with a view to reducing the risk of mismatching employees and roles.

4.3.3 Being ambitious but also realistic

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 also not lose sight of the scale of challenge that many members the target population continue to face.

So the support that everyone at Social Bite is giving the Jobs First people is fantastic, and I think, if anything's going to work, what they have put in place should work and is great, but I think it's difficult to duck the fact that it is something very difficult that

they're trying to do, and getting people back into work when they've got difficult circumstances is always going to be difficult, so it's not always going to work. (Employer)

Employer interviewees highlighted two groups who had in their experience been particularly challenging to support and/or faced especially high barriers when trying to sustain work. The first include individuals with a criminal record relating to offences involving interpersonal violence who were 'local' to the area (and thereby known by other employees); the second, individuals at an early stage in their recovery journey from substance use:

I think it becomes very difficult for people who have a complicated criminal background, especially in things with domestic abuse and things like that, once they're apparent. In a small city, where people have seen that in newspapers, the knowledge of that can become more widespread around the workforce, so I think that's a problem. I think if it's something who'd relocated from somewhere else, and they had more of a clean, fresh start, I think that could work. (Employer)

I think in terms of substance abuse ... they need to be well on their road to recovery, and well clear of that. Because one of our Jobs First employees was still under treatment for substance abuse, and again, that just - he wasn't far enough down that road of recovery to be able to be a reliable employee. When we can't make that many exceptions for people. If they're committed to a contract, they need to be there on time. (Employer)

That said, one employer emphasised that levels of staff turnover in their industry are very high in general, hence someone leaving the programme early should not necessarily be interpreted as a 'failure' on the part of either that individual or the Jobs First team.

We've had a few different employees over the course of the time. Some have worked out, some have stayed longer, some have moved on to other roles ... I think it's just for all different circumstances ... It's not worked out for the individual for whatever personal reason, they've identified that and gone on and done something that works for them, that's fine. It's catering for you, staff turnover is high anyway, so we're used to it. (Employer)

A key challenge going forward, some employer interviewees noted, was ensuring that the jobs identified are suitable for the population the programme targets, that is, are able accommodate the flexibility that may be required for at least some employees without compromising operation to an intolerable degree.

I think we need to be helping people get back into work, and I think it is a really good model to do that ... I can't really fault the work that Social Bite are putting into supporting the Jobs First candidates. That's not at all the problem. I think the problem is just finding the right sorts of jobs for them ... I think it is fundamentally a good concept, but all I can really say is, from the experience we had, it didn't really work for us, and it caused ... a bit of disruption in the workforce, and factory cultures are quite sensitive to that. So it just got to a point where I thought there was potential risk of upsetting the equilibrium we have. (Employer)

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted three main strengths which interviewees considered to set Jobs First apart from other employment programmes targeting people experiencing homelessness and were

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 those 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.

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 accommodate the flexibility that may be required without compromising the company's operation to an intolerable degree.

Chapter 5: Cost Benefit Analysis

This chapter assesses the Jobs First programme's value for money. It opens with an overview of delivery costs. This is followed by documentation of benefits for employees, employers, public finances and the wider economy. The final sections describe the cost benefit analysis undertaken and presents conclusions regarding programme benefit: cost ratios and overall value for money.

5.1 Costs of delivering Jobs First

The costs of delivering Jobs First include:

- The costs incurred by Social Bite in running the programme, as recorded in the programme budget.
- Costs incurred by employers which are additional to those of a standard employment arrangement. These mostly involve the extra time required to support Jobs First employees (see Chapter 3).

Table 3 summarises expenditures by Social Bite on the Jobs First programme to date. These amounted to £319,000 at 31 May 2024. More than 90% of these were staff costs. There were also minor expenditures on travel and expenses, conference costs, laptops, advertising and marketing.

Table 3: Financial Costs of Jobs First Programme at 31 May 2024*

	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	Total Programme costs
	£	£	£	£
Wages and Salaries	137,865	110,282	42,786	290,933
Fixed assets (laptops)	-	700	1,400	2,100
Travel and associated costs	6,278	5,781	956	13,015
Jobs First Conference Costs	-	10,401	-	10,401
Advertising and Marketing costs	756	-	718	1,474
Other costs	759	536	16	1,311
Total Costs	145,659	127,699	45,876	319,234

*Data are for financial year to 1 June to 31 May.

Based on these data, the total cost per employee sustaining employment through the programme to date amounts to £24,556. However, this is an overestimate, since a portion of the expenditures to date relate to employees who are still on the programme, some of whom can be expected to gain positive employment outcomes. Indeed, of the 19 employees on the programme in July 2024, 12 of these had been on the programme for more than 6 months so had a relatively high chance of gaining sustained employment outcomes.

By estimating the expected employment outcomes of employees currently on the programme, as well as the projected cost of supporting these employees, the **adjusted programme cost per employee gaining a sustained employment outcome is estimated at £16,829.**

Information about the costs incurred by participating employers was obtained through the employer interviews. Three of the nine employers interviewed indicated that their participation in the programme had not required additional time or costs compared to a standard employment arrangement. While the Jobs First programme involves regular catch-ups between employers, employees and Jobs First support workers, these three employers indicated that they would expect to devote a similar amount of time to supporting new staff whether or not they were on the programme. The other six employers indicated that participation in Jobs First had involved some additional time for managers and employees in participation in regular support meetings with Jobs First support workers. For them, the additional time involved was mostly fairly limited in extent, averaging 40 hours per manager and 45 hours per employee.

Based on these data, and applying appropriate hourly rates, the average cost to employers per participating employee per month was estimated at £104. The total time costs for employers to date are estimated at £57,609.

Six of the nine employers interviewed also indicated that they made some cost savings through participation in Jobs First. These mostly related to recruitment costs, since Social Bite provided them with a pre-selected new recruit, saving them time and expenses in advertising, screening and interviews (see Chapter 3). The average recruitment cost saving was estimated at £245 per Jobs First employee.

Taking account of savings in recruitment costs for those successfully recruited through the programme, the net costs for employers are estimated at £2,281 per successful recruit.

The total unit costs (programme and employer costs) are therefore estimated at £19,110 per employee gaining a positive employment outcome.

5.2 Benefits of Jobs First

The review of literature (See Chapter 2) suggested that benefits of Jobs First potentially include:

- Benefits to employees, which include enhanced income and improvements in mental and physical health and wellbeing resulting from employment.
- Savings in the costs of public services associated with homelessness, which include homelessness support, police and criminal justice, and physical and mental health services, as well as welfare benefit payments.
- Benefits to employers, which include staff recruitment and retention, reputational benefits and contributions to corporate social responsibility objectives.
- Benefits to the economy, which potentially include enhanced productivity and economic activity rates, and increased tax revenues.

The following subsections discuss each of these types of benefit and quantify them as far as possible.

5.2.1 Benefits to employees

As reported in Chapter 3, the benefits of the programme in increasing employment opportunities for people who would otherwise struggle to get or retain a job were noted in both the employer and employee interviews.

Data provided by Social Bite indicate that, at July 2024, a total of 67 employees had participated in Jobs First. Of these, 19 are currently on the programme. Of the 48 no longer on the programme, 13 had achieved positive employment outcomes, either completing the programme (12) or progressing into another job (1). Of these, 8 were working full time and 5 part time. The remaining 35 had left the programme for a variety of reasons. Reasons recorded in Social Bite monitoring data include being unable to retain their jobs because of mental health challenges, housing problems, motivation or performance issues, while others moved away from the area. These figures highlight the challenges facing the target group, but nevertheless demonstrate that Jobs First has been able to achieve positive employment outcomes for more than a quarter of participants.

Employer interviews indicate that almost all Jobs First participants were being paid the living wage of £11.44 per hour, though at least one employee had achieved a pay rise above this level.

Data on the housing status of participants indicates that most were in some form of stable accommodation prior to commencing the programme, though a small number were sofa surfing or in temporary or hostel accommodation (see Chapter 3). Of the 13 participants achieving positive employment outcomes through the programme, most remained in stable accommodation (council, housing association or private tenancy) though one was still sofa surfing even on completion of the programme.

Although the available monitoring data are lacking in detail, Jobs First participants reported a range of mental and physical health problems prior to commencing the programme, with many having a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse (see Section 5.2.2). Of the 13 participants recording positive employment outcomes, nine reported an improvement in their mental and/or physical well-being during the course of the programme.

The 'Movement into Employment: Return on Investment Tool' (PHE, 2017) estimates that each person moving into employment achieves average health benefits equivalent to 0.0675 Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs). Government guidance on wellbeing appraisal (HM Treasury, 2021) puts the value of a QALY at £60,000 in 2014 prices, equivalent to £77,600 in 2023 prices⁴. This suggests that the value of wellbeing per person moving into work is £5,238 per year. This is likely to be conservative, because we would expect that mental and physical health issues among Jobs First employees (who have experienced homelessness) to be greater than for unemployed people in general, and therefore the potential gains in physical and mental wellbeing through employment to be greater.

5.2.2 Savings in public service costs

Homelessness imposes substantial costs on public service providers (Pleace, 2015). These include

- Homelessness services - including accommodation and support services.
- Police and criminal justice services – homelessness is associated with increased contact with police, courts and prison services.

⁴ Using the [GDP \(Gross Domestic Product\) Deflator](#) published by HM Treasury

- Physical and mental health services – homeless people are more likely to experience physical and mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse, increasing contact with emergency health services (ambulance, accident and emergency services) and treatment services.
- Welfare benefit payments – as a result of unemployment and low incomes.

Some estimates have been made of the scale of these costs in the UK. For example, the National Audit Office (2017) estimated that local authorities in the UK spent more than £1.1 billion in 2015/16 on homelessness, with more than three quarters spent on temporary accommodation. Pleace and Culhane (2016) estimated public spending of £34,500 per person per year for a sample of 86 homeless people in York, Birmingham and London. This included annual average costs per person of homelessness service use of £14,808, NHS service use of £4,298, mental health of £2,099, drug and alcohol services of £1,320 and the criminal justice system of £11,991. Johnsen et al (2022) found that Housing First Scotland clients incurred average expenditures of £23,000 each on police/criminal justice, physical and mental health and homelessness services prior to entering the programme.

These figures demonstrate the substantial public service costs of homelessness. However, the estimates of Pleace and Culhane (2016) and Johnsen et al. (2022) relate to cases of long-term homelessness, typically among people facing severe and multiple disadvantage. They are not typical of Jobs First participants, who, although they have experienced homelessness, normally have some form of accommodation and relative stability in their lives before entering the programme. Nevertheless, these numbers demonstrate the potential benefits of programmes such as Jobs First if they are able to reduce the overall incidence of homelessness and costs associated with it.

Data do not permit a detailed assessment of changes in public service use among Jobs First participants. Without detailed data on the levels of contact with police/criminal justice, health and homelessness services among the Jobs First cohort it is not possible to assess changes in the costs of these. Programme data do indicate that, of 67 participants in Jobs First, at initial assessment on joining the programme:

- 16 reported mental health problems, 16 physical health problems and 15 a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse;
- 18 reported previous (14) and/or current (9) criminal proceedings against them.

These figures suggest the potential for Jobs First to bring about savings in the costs to police/criminal justice and health services associated with homelessness; however, such savings would take time to be observed and current data do not allow them to be measured.

Despite having experienced homelessness, programme data do not indicate that the Jobs First cohort are significant users of homelessness services at the point of entry to the programme. While the programme has helped some employees to move from temporary accommodation to more secure tenancies, the data are insufficient to enable an assessment of whether this has resulted in any savings in public service costs.

However, the data indicate that the programme has helped to reduce welfare benefit payments to those achieving positive employment outcomes. Of the 13 employees achieving successful employment outcomes, 12 were in receipt of welfare benefits on commencing the programme, but only one received benefits on completion. Based on standard Universal Credit rates, we **estimate that annual welfare benefit payments for this group in aggregate declined from £47,320 to £3,057, an average saving of £3,405 per employee achieving a successful employment outcome.**

The Public Health England (2017) Movement into Employment: Return on Investment Tool estimates average savings in costs to National Health Services of £85 per year per person returning to work, at

2016/17 prices. This is equivalent to £121 at 2023/24 prices. While this is the best estimate available, we might expect it to underestimate the potential benefits to the NHS of Jobs First employees gaining work, given the range of mental and physical health problems associated with homelessness and experienced by the Jobs First cohort.

5.2.3 Benefits to employers

As noted in Chapter 3, the nine employers interviewed expressed positive views about the Jobs First programme and the benefits to their business. These included a range of personal, social and business benefits. The most frequently cited benefits were the personal satisfaction gained by the employer and colleagues in seeing employees progress, assisting recruitment, the successful hiring of a valued and productive team member, increased diversity and social awareness in the workforce, and the ability of the business to give back to/ make a positive contribution to society.

5.2.4 Benefits to the economy

As well as yielding savings in the costs of public services, Jobs First benefits the economy by increasing employment, that is, helping people into work who would not otherwise be able to get a job. To the extent that this increases overall employment in the economy, it enhances economic output and increases tax revenues. The gross value of the output of Jobs First employees can be estimated based on their earnings and employer National Insurance Contributions.

The degree to which Jobs First increases net output in the economy depends on the extent of additionality. The jobs created may not be additional if:

- Jobs First creates jobs for people who would have found work elsewhere in the absence of the programme (known as ‘deadweight’ in economic terms); and/or
- Jobs First creates jobs for participants that would otherwise have been filled by others, who are now unemployed as a result (referred to as ‘substitution’ in economic analyses).

Employment is more likely to be additional if:

- Jobs First employees would not otherwise be able to find a job, because of barriers relating to their personal circumstances (reducing the likelihood of ‘deadweight’); and
- There is a shortage of labour, such that employers find it difficult to recruit staff, while people who might otherwise fill the relevant positions can find work elsewhere (reducing the likelihood of ‘substitution’ in the economy as a whole).

It is impossible to measure the extent of additionality in the absence of detailed data relating to the employability of Jobs First participants, the recruitment challenges facing employers, and the choices and prospects facing potential alternative recruits.

A major reference source on additionality, the Homes and Communities Agency Additionality Guide (HCA, 2014), provides guidance on assessing different aspects of additionality. It suggests the application of “ready reckoners” to estimate the extent of additionality in the absence of empirical data (none - 0%; low - 25%; medium - 50%; high - 75%; and total - 100%).

Data above (see “Benefits for employees”) suggest that the majority of employees would not be able to get a job if not provided with an opportunity through Jobs First, such that rates of deadweight are likely to be low. There are also reasons to believe that substitution effects are likely to be low, in view of the tight UK labour market and number of unfilled vacancies (House of Commons, 2023). Employers are typically businesses in sectors with large numbers of vacancies, such as food services

and support service activities, while assistance with recruitment is one of the main benefits of participation cited by employers.

Additional tax revenues resulting from employment can be estimated from earnings by applying standard rates and thresholds for Income Tax and National Insurance Contributions. It is assumed (conservatively) that all employees received the national Living Wage. **It is estimated that each additional job created by Jobs First increases government tax revenues by £2301 per year, comprising Income Tax of £875, employee NICs of £349 and employer NICs of £1077.**

5.3 Assessment of costs and benefits

5.3.1 Method

Estimates of the unit costs of Jobs First are given in Section 5.1, and the benefits (as far as they can be quantified) in Section 5.2. A cost benefit analysis was undertaken, compiling estimates of these costs and benefits over time, and calculating the present value of these using a social discount rate of 3.5%.

The value of future benefits depends on how long the additional employment created through Jobs First is sustained. This is not known, and it is necessary to employ appropriate assumptions. As a central estimate, the CBA assumed that each additional job created would deliver benefits to the employee and taxpayer over a 5-year period. Table 4 outlines the key inputs and assumptions employed in the analysis.

Table 4: Key Inputs and Assumptions used in analysis of costs and benefits

Parameter	Value	Details
Cost per employment outcome	£19,110	See section 5.1
Mean annual earnings per employee	£16,906	Based on national Living Wage and data on full time and part time positions – see section 5.2.1.
Value of output per employee	£17,984	Earnings plus employer NICs.
Enhanced personal wellbeing per employment outcome	£5,238	Value applied in PHE Return on Investment Tool – see Section 5.2.1.
Annual savings to NHS per employee gaining work	£121	Value applied in PHE Return on Investment Tool – see Section 5.2.2.
Savings in welfare benefit payments per employee	£3,295	Based on Universal Credit rates and earnings
Tax and National Insurance receipts per employee	£2,301	Based on standard income tax, employee and employer NIC rates and earnings.
Social discount rate	3.5%	Applied to future benefits and costs, in accordance with HM Treasury Green Book guidance.
Additionality	50%	Proportion of benefits assumed to be additional, after taking account of deadweight and substitution. See Section 5.2.4.
Future duration of additional employment outcomes	5 years	Assumed that benefits arising from employment outcomes last for 5 years from entry into programme.

Two forms of CBA were undertaken:

- A social cost benefit analysis, taking account of the overall benefits to society, which include enhanced economic output, health and well-being benefits and reduced costs to the NHS.

- A public finance analysis, taking account of savings in welfare benefits, additional tax revenues and reduced NHS costs.

The social CBA excludes taxes and welfare benefit payments, which are treated as transfers between members of society rather than affecting overall costs and benefits from a societal perspective. A sensitivity analysis was included, testing the effects of different rates of additionality (0%, 25%, 50%, 75% and 100%) and different durations of future benefits (2, 5, 10 years).

5.3.2 Results

Table 5 presents the results of the CBA, based on the central assumptions of 50% additionality and that the additional benefits resulting from employment outcomes are sustained for 5 years following entry to the programme. The table presents estimates of the present value of costs and benefits, applying a 3.5% discount rate. They are expressed as the average benefit and cost per successful employment outcome.

Table 5: Estimated Benefits and Costs of Jobs First*

	Social CBA	CBA based on public finance benefits
Costs per employee gaining employment (£)	18,055	18,055
Benefits per employee gaining employment (£):		
Economic output	40,599	
Enhanced personal well-being	11,825	
Reduced healthcare costs	273	273
Reduced welfare benefit payments		7,439
Increased tax and NICs		5,195
Total Social Benefits (£)	52,697	
Total Benefits to Public Finances (£)		12,907
Net present value of benefits (Benefits minus costs, £)	34,642	- 5,148
Benefit cost ratio (B/C)	2.92	0.71

**All figures are expressed as present value in £, applying a 3.5% discount rate to future costs and benefits. Employment outcomes are assumed to last an average of 5 years, with an additionality rate of 50%. CBA is partial as only certain benefits and cost savings can be valued.*

Based on these assumptions, each successful employment outcome, gained at an average cost of £18,055, delivers social benefits of £52,697 and savings to the public finances of £12,907. The largest social benefits result from enhanced economic output, with a present value of £40,599 over 5 years. **The estimated social benefit: cost ratio is 2.92, suggesting that each £1 invested in Jobs First delivers benefits to society worth almost £3.**

The CBA based on public finance benefits (welfare payments, tax receipts and savings in healthcare costs) gives a benefit: cost ratio of 0.71, suggesting that each £1 invested in Jobs First improves the public finances by £0.71.

These estimates are conservative as they underestimate the likely costs of public service use of homelessness, and wellbeing gains of helping people with experience of homelessness into work.

They are also based on minimum estimates of earnings and tax receipts of Jobs First employees. The inclusion of only five years of benefits for each job created could also be considered conservative. The results are sensitive to certain key assumptions, especially those related to the additionality and duration of employment outcomes.

Table 6 presents a sensitivity analysis to illustrate the effect on the estimated social benefit: cost ratio of changes in these two key variables. It shows that even with 25% additionality (i.e. a net increase of one job per four created), the estimated benefits greatly exceed the costs if this additional employment lasts for at least 5 years. Using our favoured assumption of “medium” (50%) additionality, this additional employment only needs to be sustained for 2 years for the benefits to exceed the costs. More favourable assumptions about the degree of additionality and duration of employment increase the benefit: cost ratio further.

Table 6: Sensitivity of Estimated Social Benefit: Cost Ratio to varied assumptions

Additionality Ratio	Years of Sustained Employment			
	2	3	5	10
0% (No additionality)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
25% ("Low" additionality)	0.61	0.91	1.46	2.69
50% ("Medium" additionality)	1.23	1.81	2.92	5.38
75% ("High" additionality)	1.84	2.72	4.38	8.06
100% (all outcomes are additional)	2.46	3.62	5.84	10.75

Table 7 presents a sensitivity analysis for the benefit: cost ratio based on public finance benefits. Here we find that the benefits to the public finances exceed the costs of the programme if there is 50% additionality and these jobs are sustained for 10 years, or if there is 75% additionality and the jobs are sustained for an average of 5 years.

Table 7: Sensitivity of Estimated Public Finance Benefit: Cost Ratio to varied assumptions

Additionality Ratio	Years of Sustained Employment			
	2	3	5	10
0% (No additionality)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
25% ("Low" additionality)	0.15	0.22	0.36	0.66
50% ("Medium" additionality)	0.30	0.44	0.71	1.32
75% ("High" additionality)	0.45	0.67	1.07	1.98
100% (all outcomes are additional)	0.60	0.89	1.43	2.63

The analysis does not take account of the potentially large savings that the programme could deliver in reducing the long-term risks of chronic or repeat homelessness. For example, the costs to the public services in supporting long-term homelessness have been put at up to £35,000 per person per year (Pleace and Culhane, 2016). While these costs are not representative of Jobs First participants, to the extent that the programme helps to prevent long-term homelessness of participants, it could be expected to yield much larger savings to the public purse. No data were available to allow us to evaluate the likely magnitude of such risks.

5.4 Conclusion

We estimate that the costs to Social Bite and employers of delivering Jobs First 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.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This report has documented the findings of an independent evaluation of the Jobs First programme. It drew upon a literature review, qualitative interviews with a range of stakeholders, and cost-benefit analysis of outcomes and costs data.

6.1 Key findings

The evaluation finds that Jobs First delivers good value for money. Even though evidence of the value of the benefits of Jobs First is incomplete, it suggests that they exceed the costs of delivering the programme almost threefold, while also enhancing the public finances by reducing welfare benefit payments and enhancing tax revenues. Improved data (particularly on public service use by Jobs First employees) would likely increase estimates of the benefits of the programme.

Jobs First was very favorably received by employers and employees alike. They especially appreciated three key elements of the programme, these being: the positive relationships developed between key parties (Jobs First staff, employers, and employees); the ongoing holistic support provided by SDWs; and flexibility of (most but not all) employers who had amended their practices given improved understanding of the barriers the target population faces in relation to accessing and maintaining paid employment. These attributes were deemed to set Jobs First apart from other employment programmes targeting people with experience of homelessness and key ingredients to its success.

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).

Several key lessons have been learned as regards what helps and hinders delivery at the point of engaging with and training employers; so too matching employees with appropriate roles. A key point to emphasise is that sight must not be lost of the scale of challenge the programme and its participants face given employees' backgrounds. Jobs First does not lead to a sustained employment outcome for all employees recruited, but many have thrived in their job and even those who left before completing the programme derived substantial benefit and would recommend it to other people with experience of homelessness.

6.2 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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