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4.How can the local delivery of employment support best respond to the needs of different places and groups, including by helping to fill local skills gaps and channelling support through institutions people trust?

At Communities that Work, we find that employment support is most effective when it is rooted in the places where people live and delivered through organisations they already know and trust. JobsPlus demonstrates this approach in practice. The programme provides intensive, personalised employment support through community hubs in social housing neighbourhoods, alongside a community-led approach which includes community champions. Adapted from a successful US model, JobsPlus combines intensive employment support with financial incentives, including a £400 Into Work Bonus for participants who sustain new employment or self-employment for at least two months. The JobsPlus pilot is delivered from community hubs within or close to social housing communities, alongside wider help with skills, health and wellbeing, housing, finances and practical barriers such as childcare and transport. The programme is open to all working-age residents within the defined neighbourhood, helping to remove formal eligibility barriers and reduce stigma around accessing employment support. Locating support in the community makes it easier for residents to drop in, reduces travel and access barriers, and gives advisers a much stronger understanding of local circumstances and the needs of individual residents. Between its launch in 2024 and December 2025, JobsPlus reached more than 1,000 people, and around one in six eligible residents across the pilot sites [1] .

Local delivery needs to be closely connected to local labour-market demand. The sites have developed employer relationships, vacancy matching and links with education and training providers so that support can respond to local skills gaps and realistic employment opportunities. We also find that success should not be judged only by immediate job entry as for residents furthest from the labour market: progress is often non-linear, with improvements in confidence, wellbeing, skills, qualifications and job readiness forming necessary stepping stones to sustained employment. Local delivery can therefore support residents to make meaningful

[1] Learning & Work Institute (2026) 'Evaluation of JobsPlus' Available at: Final report: Evaluation of the JobsPlus Pilot - Learning and Work Institute

progress towards sustained employment, rather than measuring success solely through immediate job entry.

5.Are there any particular areas or groups, including age groups, being ignored or disadvantaged by the main non-Jobcentre Plus employment support programmes and by the extension of devolution?

We know that social housing residents are under-served by mainstream employment support programmes, particularly where provision is not designed around people facing complex and overlapping barriers to work. As set out in Communities that Work's 'Building Opportunity' report, people living in social housing are more likely than the population as a whole to have characteristics associated with poorer labour market outcomes. As of 2022, social housing residents were more likely to be disabled (41% compared with 17%), from an ethnic minority background (21% compared with 14%), or have no qualifications (18% compared with 5%) [2]. They also represent a significant proportion of the population and are more likely to have low incomes and experience poverty. Efforts to increase the overall employment rate must therefore ensure that social housing residents are not overlooked.

This is particularly important because many social housing residents also face characteristics associated with lower employment rates, including disability and long-term health conditions. Learning and Work Institute research has found that around 600,000 disabled people who are economically inactive would like to work, while only a relatively small proportion of out-of-work disabled and older people receive employment support each year [3]. This underlines the need for employment support that is more accessible, intensive and connected to wider services such as health, skills and childcare.

The JobsPlus evaluation report 2026 reinforces this need. It found that the programme was reaching these residents who are the furthest from the labour market. 81% were out of work when they registered, 25% had no or low qualifications, 39% had parental or caring responsibilities, 33% had a long-term health condition affecting daily life and 33% had low or very low wellbeing. The pilot also engaged groups that can be harder for mainstream services to reach, including young people aged 16-24 and residents from Black ethnic minority backgrounds [4].

Our evidence has also shown that some people require more intensive and tailored pathways into work that mainstream and overused centres may not have the

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[2] Alexander, K. , Evans, S. and Wilson, T. (2022) 'Building Opportunity: How Social Housing Can Support Skills, Talent and Workforce Development. Available at: National Housing Federation - Building opportunity: how social housing can support skills, talent and workforce development

[3] Learning and Work Institute (2023) 'Understanding Benefits'. Available at: Understanding benefits - Learning and Work Institute

[4] Learning & Work Institute (2026) 'Evaluation of JobsPlus' Available at: Final report: Evaluation of the JobsPlus Pilot - Learning and Work Institute

capacity to do. For these groups, a short, standardised employment intervention is unlikely to be sufficient as the support needs to be flexible, sustained and connected to health, skills, childcare and other services.

6.What are the risks and opportunities of devolving more power over employment support, including in areas without elected Mayors?

The main opportunity from further devolution is to move away from a one-size-fits-all model and allow employment support to be shaped around local communities, labour markets and existing networks. Greater local flexibility could create opportunities for place-based models such as JobsPlus to be expanded while retaining their hyper-local approach. JobsPlus shows that a common model can be adapted successfully across very different neighbourhoods when local delivery partners have flexibility over outreach, partnerships, community champion arrangements, employer engagement and the wider support offered to residents. Greater local discretion could enable more authorities to adopt place-based employment support models where these respond to identified local needs, rather than relying on decisions taken centrally in Whitehall. Communities that Work has also begun engaging with Mayoral Strategic Authorities, some of which have expressed interest in the JobsPlus model.

There are, however, risks. Local capacity, governance and partnership strength vary considerably, and without safeguards greater devolution could lead to uneven provision or a postcode lottery. The JobsPlus evaluation found that effective delivery takes time to build: trusted relationships, referral pathways and employer partnerships need sustained investment, while staffing capacity and caseloads must be managed carefully to protect the quality of personalised support.

Short-term funding can make this difficult by undermining the continuity needed to retain JobsPlus staff, build trusted referral pathways and establish long-term local partnerships. Long-term funding settlements are therefore important if devolved employment support is to become embedded and maintain consistent service quality.

7.Which decisions about the design and delivery of employment support should sit nationally, and which should sit locally, and what does this mean for DWP oversight and accountability, including the setting of objectives and outcomes for local areas?

We believe that Whitehall should set the overall purpose and framework for employment support. They should also set a long-term funding entitlement to protect the programmes.

Decisions about how support is delivered should sit as close as possible to communities. Local partners should have flexibility to decide where support is located, which organisations are involved, how outreach is undertaken, how

employment, health and skills services are joined up, and how employer engagement reflects the local labour market.

DWP oversight should focus on outcomes and quality rather than prescribing a single delivery model. Measures should include sustained employment, but they should also recognise intermediate progress for people further from work, such as improved wellbeing, confidence, skills, qualifications, volunteering and job readiness. This would give local areas room to tailor delivery while retaining national accountability for whether people are receiving effective support.

8.How much flexibility do Jobcentres have to procure and deliver their own employment support, and how effectively do they take advantage of whatever flexibility they do have?

Communities that Work is not in a position to assess the full formal procurement flexibilities available to individual Jobcentres. However, the JobsPlus experience shows that Jobcentre Plus can play a valuable role in locally integrated employment support where staff have the capacity and relationships to do so.

In some JobsPlus areas, Jobcentre Plus staff referred eligible residents, maintained a presence in community hubs, carried out better-off-in-work calculations and worked with local partners on health and wellbeing support. These arrangements strengthened engagement and referral pathways. Our evaluation report showed that in other areas, collaboration was harder because work coaches had large caseloads, limited appointment time, catchment areas did not align with JobsPlus neighbourhood boundaries, and identifying eligible residents required manual postcode checks. Data-sharing and reliance on individual relationships were also practical constraints.

9.How strong is the evidence base for how to optimise employment support outcomes, and what explains the difference between the best and worst performing areas? What can be learned from international comparators?

We believe that JobsPlus provides useful lessons about what works and the importance of allowing enough time to evaluate place-based employment support properly. Our JobsPlus final evaluation report, two years on from the pilot's launch, has shown a strong evidence base thus far.

By December 2025, the programme had reached 1,000 participants. 27% of these participants had moved into employment or changed role; among those who moved into work, 61% were still in employment after three months and 55% after six months [5] . The evaluation also found improvements in wellbeing, confidence, skills and job readiness. The analysis identified a combination associated with stronger work

[5] Learning & Work Institute (2026) 'Evaluation of JobsPlus' Available at: Final report: Evaluation of the JobsPlus Pilot - Learning and Work Institute

outcomes like high-quality personalised support operating alongside a strong community champion presence and effective discretionary financial support. Strong local partnerships, accessible hubs and employer engagement were also important enabling factors.

International evidence reinforces this. JobsPlus was adapted from the US model, where the original five-year demonstration produced sustained positive impacts on residents' earnings. A key lesson from the US experience is that place-based models need time to embed, build trust and achieve saturation before their full effects become visible.