Getting Started – an introduction to the housing sector and housing work

What is housing work?

In Britain there are over five million homes owned by housing associations and local councils. Affordable housing needs people who will manage it and provide the services that its customers need. This is where the housing professional comes in.

More than 150,000 people are employed in housing and housing management within the UK. Most of these work for local authorities and housing associations. However, housing jobs can also be found with housing trusts, co-operatives, voluntary organisations, the private sector and commercial bodies and in other public service departments such as social services and health authorities.

Housing Work is really varied and housing organisations provide opportunities for people from a variety of backgrounds including; all ages, experience and qualifications. The work can range from giving advice to homeless people on how they can go about getting a house, to collecting rents, assessing repairs on a house, allocating houses to tenants and even to running a multi-million pound organisation responsible for thousands of houses in one area. The work will vary depending upon the particular functions of the housing organisation, its size and location. Housing stock and social conditions vary from one city to another and between urban and rural areas, which affects the nature of housing work.

There have been many changes in the housing sector over the last few years - growing owner occupation, the rise in homelessness and repossessions, the increasing importance of housing associations, the growth and importance of tenants involved in managing their housing organisation and the recognition that housing professionals needs to work with other public services and partners to regenerate the communities in which people live.

If you choose to work in housing, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that your contribution really matters, because everyone needs somewhere decent and affordable to live. This is why many people are attracted to housing work from other fields, as well as when starting a career. The work is not easy and often challenging, but the rewards in terms of fulfilment are high.

Whether you are a school aged pupil about to leave school; a recent graduate; are looking to change your career direction, or alternatively you are a teacher or careers advisor who advises clients on their options you will find everything you need on the CIH's website in a series of easily downloadable PDFs and booklets.

What sort of People work in Housing?

Because of the diverse range of jobs in the housing sector there are many different types of people working in housing. But you are more likely to be suited to the work if you have the following skills and attributes:

An interest in people’s well being and their living conditions; strong communication and negotiation skills; organisational skills; flexibility and adaptability to a variety of different situations; ability to work on your own initiative and under pressure; a desire to take on responsibility; an interest in developing new skills; an understanding of people from diverse cultural backgrounds and with different needs.
What Types of Housing Jobs are Available?

For those who enjoy contact with a wide cross-section of the public, there are many opportunities in the ‘frontline’ of housing, dealing directly with tenants and supporting their needs and their options. You could be involved in managing an advice centre, helping the public with matters arising from housing legislation, landlord and tenant relationships or rents; or advising tenants on their welfare rights.

Your responsibilities could affect all sorts of initiatives from small sheltered housing schemes to large estates, from special needs housing to everyday maintenance of the housing service. Most importantly, your work could have a direct and beneficial effect on people and their standard of living.

However, housing employers require the support of many disciplines in order to provide an excellent service to all their clients. There are therefore many opportunities in areas such as; HR, marketing and communications, housing law, housing finance and organisational management to name a few.

On the CIH website you can download a number of job profiles of a variety of roles in housing organisations, as well as the popular ‘Why Housing’ booklet.

Do I Need to be Qualified to Work in Housing?

More and more organisations require or encourage staff to acquire housing qualifications. As the professional organisation for people who work in housing, the Chartered Institute of Housing offers a flexible and accessible range of housing qualifications for housing workers at all levels and membership options to reflect study and experience. CIH accredited qualifications are available ranging from Level 2 through to postgraduate level. On the CIH website you can access a list of housing qualifications and courses in your region.

How do I get a Job in Housing?

Vacancies in housing range from clerical work and frontline roles through to senior management. Related jobs also exist in areas such as environmental health and law.

Success will depend upon your own efforts, but there are jobs available in housing throughout the UK and even abroad. You can find job advertisements in the local and national press, as well as the weekly magazine Inside Housing, view the jobs online at www.insidehousing.co.uk and you can also sign up for regular job alerts.

Also on the CIH website you will find a list of recruitment contacts, many of which specialise in housing related positions. Most housing organisations will have their own websites, where they will promote their vacancies and opportunities. You can search on the internet for housing organisations in your local area or region. Once you find the individual websites you can sometimes subscribe to vacancy updates as they arise. If you haven’t got any experience in housing you may wish to consider approaching organisations to see if they have opportunities for work experience, or contact your local Council for Voluntary Services or volunteer agency for information on local community-based housing organisations. Many successful housing professionals begin their careers in this way.

Job applications or circulation of your CV to prospective employers will be enhanced if you have some experience of housing work or voluntary work experience. However, related skills and personal
qualities can be just as important. You will find a range of resources on the CIH website to support you in your job seeking in the housing sector.

Further information sheets in this series:
- Careers in Housing for School Leavers
- Careers in Housing for Graduates
- Career in Housing for Career Changes

Visit [www.cih.org](http://www.cih.org) to find out more about Careers in Housing