Voices of the Future: Building Tomorrow's Housing Sector

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Altair | Chartered Institute of Housing Futures

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1. Executive Summary

The Voices of the Future research, led by CIH Futures, brings together the views of more than 900 young housing professionals across the UK, mostly working in social housing. It is the largest study of its kind, providing invaluable insights on how the next generation experiences their work, sees their future, and envisions a stronger, fairer housing sector.

What we found

Young professionals are passionate about housing's social purpose and the difference their work makes. Eight in ten say helping others or making a positive impact is central to their career choice. Yet most didn't set out to work in housing - they fell into it by chance, not choice. The sector's invisibility as a career option means both housing and young people are missing out.

Once in housing, young professionals find deep meaning in their roles - but also frustration. They report inconsistent experiences of career progression, training, and management support. Pay can fail to reflect responsibility, and workload and wellbeing are at risk, with one in three regularly experiencing burnout in the past year.

While most feel trusted in their roles, some feel unheard in their organisations. Young people want leaders to listen and act on their ideas, not just invite feedback. They also want greater recognition of their contribution, clearer career pathways, and fairer reward structures. Despite the challenges, their enthusiasm for housing shines through. Nearly seven in ten plan to build their long-term career in the sector - provided it continues to offer purpose, growth, and a culture that values their voice.

What this means for the sector

The findings highlight both the strength and strain of housing's future workforce. To attract and retain talent, housing must:

- Make itself visible – actively promote housing as a career of choice.
- Value young professionals' voices – listen, act, and involve them in decision-making.
- Provide consistency and fairness – in pay, progression, and wellbeing support.
- Invest in good management – ensuring line managers have the time and training to develop and empower their teams.
- Foster inclusive networks – creating more opportunities for young people to collaborate, learn, and lead.

In summary

Young professionals see housing as meaningful, impactful work, but meaning alone is not enough. The sector must turn passion into progress, ensuring every young professional feels valued, supported, and inspired to stay.

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who supported the research, whether through completing the survey, speaking in a focus group, or sharing the link to participate.

A special thanks to the following organisations whose generous support made this research possible: PfP Thrive (part of the Places for People Group), South East Consortium (SEC), Karbon Homes, Hightown Housing Association, Riverside, English Rural, National Housing Maintenance Forum (NHMF), Hyde Housing, Devonshires, and Mobysoft.

This research would not have happened without the volunteers on CIH Futures' board, particularly Dean McGlynn who initially proposed the survey, Halisha Kaur, Meghan Rank, Elizabeth Skillen, and Lucy Owen, and the support of the first CIH Futures' chair and past President of CIH, Elly Hoult.

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CIH President

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CIH Futures Board Member

Meghan Rank
CIH Futures Board Member

Halisha Kaur
CIH Futures Board Member

Elizabeth Skillen
CIH Futures Board Member

Lucy Owen
CIH Futures Board Member

2. Key findings at a glance

- The research consisted of an online survey with 914 responses and follow-up focus groups with 16 young housing professionals. Research participants were aged 35 and under and working in housing from across the UK. Findings from the research provide valuable insight into the experiences and views of young people working in social housing.

- Most respondents were early in their career, with two in five having worked in housing for up to three years. Nearly three in four (73%) of survey respondents worked at a housing association and one in ten (16%) in the public sector, most notably at a local authority.

- Most commonly, survey respondents were female (70%), white (87%), aged 31 to 35 (43%) and had never lived in social housing (70%). The largest intersectional group, nearly one fifth of respondents (19%), were 21-35, had never lived in social housing and identified as female, white, heterosexual, and did not consider themselves to have a disability.

- Young professionals appreciate the housing sector's social purpose and diverse range of roles, acknowledging their collective impact in supporting residents with their homes.

88% of young professionals said that having a job that helps people or makes a positive difference was extremely or very important to them.

- Many young people enter the sector by chance rather than by choice, largely due to lack of awareness about housing careers, resulting in missed opportunities for both the sector and potential recruits.

- Nearly seven out of ten people who responded to the survey see their future career in housing. Many young professionals reported significant opportunities to advance and grow their careers in the housing sector. Others experience frustration due to limited opportunities or uncertainty about how to move their career forward.

- Workplace challenges such as high workloads, structural issues, burnout, and resource shortages were reported. Two in five young people said they had experienced burnout at least a few times over the past year (meaning feeling extremely tired, stressed, or overwhelmed because of their job). While most find autonomy in their roles, many young professionals feel their pay does not reflect their responsibilities.

- Young professionals often feel their ideas are undervalued, highlighting a need for managers and organisations to better listen to, and act on, their feedback.

- Young workers are passionate about the housing sector, but this is threatened by weak workplace frameworks. Many features of a 'good job' are present in the housing sector, but career development, employee voice, and workloads can fall short. A stronger, more consistent workplace framework will build the housing sector of tomorrow.

Key findings of what young housing professionals want:

- Meaningful work that makes a difference to people's lives.

- Celebration of achievements.

- Greater awareness of careers in housing.

- Opportunities for growth.

- Collaboration and a shared sense of purpose.

- To have their ideas considered.

- Support for wellbeing.

3. Recommendations

The following recommendations appear throughout the report. In addition to these, there is an overarching recommendation for CIH and CIH Futures to establish a task and finish group to oversee, coordinate, and report on the implementation of recommendations from this report, ensuring accountability and progress (recommendation 22).

Who for	What is required	Relevant report section	No.
Government	Currently, there is limited reliable data regarding the characteristics of young professionals within UK housing. The government should add more detailed classification within datasets to enhance our understanding of the young housing professionals' workforce.	Who responded	1
CIH	Building on the CHOOSE housing campaign, CIH should start a programme on what good work in housing looks like, to share learning and experience. This should bring together personnel, learning and development and wellbeing experts as well as different operational areas and job roles to share good practice, outline job descriptions, and case studies of career progression.	Career development	16
CIH and CIH Futures	CIH and CIH Futures should provide more online networking opportunities for young housing professionals. In addition to the online regional meetings, they should consider online messaging and chats, and youth-specific in-person events. These should be open to members and non-members of CIH to ensure an inclusive, visible sector. CIH should also continue to provide a platform for CIH Futures at their events to ensure young housing professionals have a voice.	An inclusive sector	7
CIH Futures	CIH Futures may wish to consider the findings around who responded to the survey to assess how well their network reflects UK housing and take action to address any indications of under representation. They could use the CIH EDI census results as part of this review.	Who responded	2
CIH Futures	CIH Futures should collaborate with other networks for young professionals in housing and the built environment to amplify voice and opportunities for young professionals.	An inclusive sector	8

Who for	What is required	Relevant report section	No.
CIH Futures	Linked to the recommendation for CIH to start a programme on what good work in housing looks like (recommendation 16), CIH Futures could start a programme to recognise supportive managers as a way of celebrating good practice. This would include young staff nominating managers who help them in their career.	Career development	19
Housing employers	Employers should investigate and action initiatives targeting youth employment. This might include careers advice, work experience, volunteering and social action, or youth employment hiring quotas or targets, and standards. They should sign up to sector and non-sector initiatives to ensure more young people can benefit from a career in housing and the sector can benefit from their talent.	The hidden housing sector	4
Housing employers	To reduce barriers to entry, employers should work with postholders and residents to ensure job descriptions and adverts are clear, jargon-free, and list only essential qualifications and experience requirements.	The hidden housing sector	5
Housing employers	When running staff surveys, employers should look to understand differences by characteristics, such as age, as well as entry route, manager and role. They should seek to address any identified differences in workplace experiences. Similarly, exit interviews should be used to understand differences and shape future experiences.	An inclusive sector	10
Housing employers	Employers should develop an employee voice strategy. This should include leadership support for inclusive employee voice, a range of two-way consultation and communication methods, feedback on how voice is influencing change, and training for managers.	An inclusive sector	11
Housing employers	Organisations should review pay parity across job levels and consider how to acknowledge employees' contributions and provide incentives for their continued growth and development.	Job satisfaction and wellbring	12
Housing employers	Employers should review their activity around wellbeing support, particular the presence of workplace triggers for mental ill health and meeting Mind's Thriving at Work standards and the CIH Shine a Light Work Commitment Guide for the housing sector. They should also actively involve themselves in the latest CIH Presidential Campaign, Rooted in Resilience.	Job satisfaction and wellbring	14

Who for	What is required	Relevant report section	No.
Housing employers	Employers should ensure consistent inductions, training and development, management, policies and structured career development for all roles and entry routes to help young staff realise career pathways and the skills needed to get there. Ensuring greater consistency and standardisation will minimise bias and inequalities.	Career development	17
Housing employers	The role of supportive line managers is crucial to career progression. Organisations should upskill managers and protect capacity to ensure they can provide consistent and effective management, mentorship and support to their teams, enabling young workers to feel more empowered, engaged and confident in their roles. This includes executives and directors leading by example.	Career development	18
Housing employers and managers	Employers and managers should enable young people to attend networking events inside and outside of their organisation. This includes identifying, sharing and reassigning work to enable young people to attend networking events. They should empower young staff to access opportunities they are interested in.	An inclusive sector	6
Housing employers and managers	Managers and organisations should provide opportunities and overcome barriers for young professionals to develop new skills. This is essential for meeting role demands and staying motivated and engaged. This can include access to training, mentorship, shadowing and opportunities to take on new and challenging projects. Leaders and managers should lead by example to create a culture of learning.	Career development	20
Housing employers and young professionals	Housing organisations should engage in lobbying activities to address structural pressures within housing that affect their workforce. This includes joining CIH and National Housing Federation, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Community Housing Cymru or The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations practice groups and campaigns, engagement with Members of Parliament, and local councillors and partners. Young professionals should be active in this lobbying.	Job satisfaction and wellbring	13
Young professionals	Young professionals should work with their employers to engage with local primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities to highlight the careers available in housing. The CHOOSE Housing CIH Presidential campaign can help with this.	The hidden housing sector	3

Who for	What is required	Relevant report section	No.
Young professionals	Young professionals should become members of CIH, volunteer with CIH Futures and access CIH membership benefits, such as events and the mentoring programme, to build their network and experience.	An inclusive sector	9
Young professionals	Young professionals should shape and access wellbeing support and raise concerns with appropriate colleagues, such as managers, people or human resources teams, or wellbeing leads.	Job satisfaction and wellbring	15
Young professionals	Young professionals should engage with development opportunities and provide feedback on learning and development to ensure impact and relevance. They should seek out social learning (group-based or interactive training) to build networks and collaboration.	Career development	21

4. Introduction

Why is this report important?

CIH Futures, the Chartered Institute of Housing's (CIH) voluntary board of young professionals, wants to give voice to the next generation of housing leaders. In summer and autumn 2025, CIH Futures undertook the first research project of its kind to focus on the experiences, aspirations and insights of young professionals working across the housing sector.

The aim of the research was to hear, for the first time, what the key issues for young professionals are, their views on the sector and their roles, and future careers in housing. Hearing these views gives CIH Futures the evidence to amplify and champion the experiences of young people in housing, inform campaigns, shape sector recommendations, and further involve members in their work. This report sets out what the research found, and our recommendations based on the findings. The findings are relevant to senior leaders in housing, personnel, learning and development leads, and young professionals.

About the research

CIH Futures partnered with Altair Ltd on this research. The research consisted of an online survey with 914 responses and follow-up focus groups with 16 young housing professionals, aged 35 and under, working in housing from across the UK.

The survey was live from Thursday, 10 July 2025 until Friday, 8 August 2025. It was promoted through trade press articles, online events, social media, sponsor networks and direct mails to relevant professionals. Altair included 914 responses in our analysis, having removed responses where respondents only answered qualifying or characteristics questions (e.g. age and employer organisation). Responses were analysed for count, frequency and cross tabulations, with the open text question analysed for themes. None of the questions were compulsory except consent and age, meaning response numbers for each question varied.

Five focus groups were held online over Teams with 16 professionals who had volunteered, through the survey, to take part in further discussions. Focus group participants were selected to ensure a mix of employer organisations and job satisfaction. The focus groups covered each of the four UK nations. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed and analysed for key themes, including quotes of key points raised.

About this report

This report explores the experiences, expectations and opportunities for young people in the housing sector. The findings are from the first-ever research with young housing professionals, launched by CIH Futures to give voice to the next generation of housing leaders.

Drawing on survey responses and focus group discussions, the report highlights both the diverse routes into housing and the sector's current challenges in promoting itself as a career of choice. Key findings include the hidden nature of housing careers, the significant social impact valued by young professionals, as well as some frustrations around career progression and voice. We also consider what good work or a good job looks like and how the housing sector meets these principles.

The findings are organised into several sections:

Who responded
The characteristics of survey respondents.

The hidden housing sector
About entry into the sector, the sector's reputation and attracting talent.

An inclusive sector
Focused on feelings of being part of a sector, collaboration, inclusion and influence, as well as reflections on working arrangements.

Job satisfaction and wellbeing
With findings on role satisfaction, autonomy, workload and wellbeing.

Career development
Including learning and development, progression, and future careers.

The Appendix contains more detail about who responded to the survey compared to what is known about the housing workforce and the wider population.

This report is intended to both celebrate good practice and encourage dialogue between young housing professionals and their senior leaders and managers. It also highlights areas of improvement in the industry and should be used to champion the change. This report should be read by housing trade and professional bodies, senior leaders, managers, personnel and development leads, as well as young professionals.

5. What good work looks like

Before reflecting on the findings of this research, we would like to consider the characteristics of what is considered a 'good job' and 'good work'.

Much of the research on the link between happiness and wellbeing and work has been done by the psychologist, Peter Warr. In his 2007 book, Work, Happiness and Unhappiness, he provided a comprehensive account of the job characteristics that affect wellbeing. His framework identified the following factors as relevant:[1]

- Autonomy in how work is done.
- Variety in tasks.
- Clear expectations and feedback.
- Opportunities to use and develop skills.
- Supportive supervision.
- Positive relationships with colleagues and customers.
- Fair treatment and procedures.
- Competitive and fair pay.
- Physical safety and pleasant work environment.
- Job security and career prospects.
- Sense of purpose and societal value.
- Manageable demands and work-life balance.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the professional body for human resources, learning and development, organisation development and all people professionals, has seven principles of good work. These incorporate many of the characteristics outlined above and inform their ongoing work in this area, such as the annual Good Work Index.[2] Table 1 sets out these principles and the areas included. Each section of the report considers findings related to these principles. We conclude with a summary of how well the sector is meeting them.

Table 1 CIPD's seven principles of good work, taken from CIPD (2025) CIPD Good Work Index 2025.

Dimension	Areas included
1. Pay and benefits	Subjective feelings regarding pay, employer pension contributions, and other employee benefits.
2. Contracts	Contract type, underemployment, and job security.
3. Work-life balance	Overwork, commuting time, how much work encroaches on personal life and vice versa, and HR provision for flexible working.
4. Job design and the nature of work	Workload or work intensity, autonomy or how empowered people are in their jobs, how well resourced they are to carry out their work, job complexity and how well this matches the person's skills and qualifications, how meaningful people find their work, and development opportunities provided.
5. Relationships at work	Social support and cohesion, the quality of relationships at work, psychological safety, and the quality of people management.
6. Employee voice	Channels and opportunities for feeding views to one's employer and managers' openness to employee views.
7. Health and wellbeing	Positive and negative impacts of work on physical and mental health, often considered as an outcome of job quality

6. Who responded

A note on representativeness

We do not have reliable data on the characteristics of young professionals in UK housing, or across the wider sector, so it is not possible to understand what a representative sample of young professionals looks like, nor to draw firm conclusions about how representative our survey is. Our research reflects how young housing professionals feel about working in housing. The variety of comments and levels of satisfaction suggests that we have captured a range of views, and the number of responses (914) indicates the survey is likely to be reflective of young people working in social housing.

We have drawn out comparisons between our survey, the likely housing workforce and the population in the Appendix. By clearly outlining the limitations of our data and contextualising our findings within national demographic trends, we aim to provide a transparent foundation for interpreting our results and guiding future research.

It is important to note that there are key differences in demographics by age. Within the UK, younger age groups are more ethnically diverse than older ones, while older people are more likely to report a disability. Younger adults are significantly more likely than older ones to identify as LGB+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other minority sexual orientations) and to identify as trans or non-conforming gender. They are also more likely to hold a degree. In addition, housing is a devolved policy matter, which means the tenure of dwelling stock within each country differs, likely affecting the labour market.

The questions on characteristics, as with almost all the survey, were not compulsory. Over 100 respondents did not answer the questions, but, where people did, they were most likely to select 'prefer not to say' for questions on their sexual orientation and disability. This may limit our ability to fully understand the diversity of young professionals in housing and could skew the representativeness of our findings. It may also reflect inclusivity of housing employers.

Characteristics of survey respondents

Most of the young housing professionals who responded to our survey were aged 31 to 35 (43% of 913 responses). There were very few responses in the youngest age bracket (16 to 20 years) – see Figure 1.

Almost half of respondents had worked in the sector for 3 years or less (46% of 826 responses). A quarter had worked in housing for 8 years or more.

Age of survey respondent

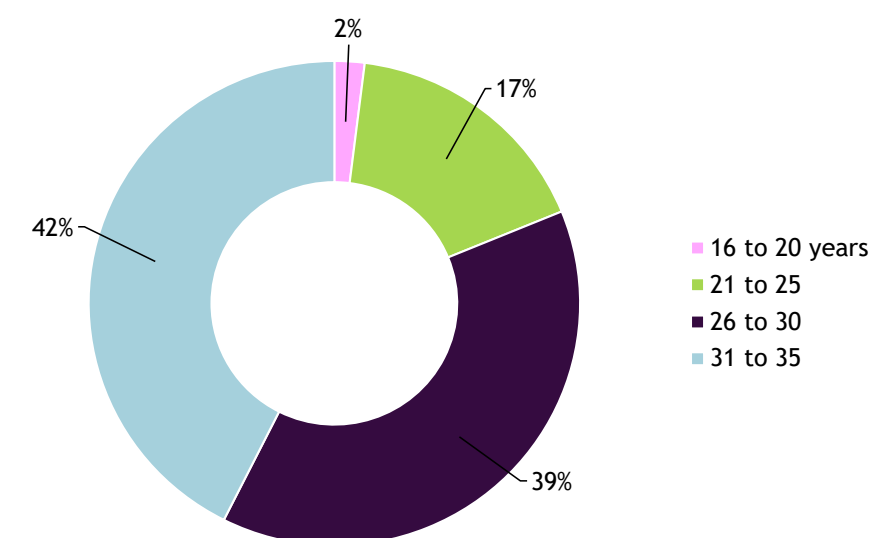- 16 to 20 years
- 21 to 25
- 26 to 30
- 31 to 35

Figure 1 Age of respondents (913 responses)

Around 83% of respondents worked in England, proportionate to the UK population. We had proportionately fewer responses from Scotland when compared to the UK population (4% of respondents worked in Scotland compared to 8% of the UK population being in Scotland), a higher proportion from Wales (10% compared to 5%) and a proportionate response from Northern Ireland (3%)[3]. See Figure 2 for a full breakdown.

In your current role, which country or region do you mostly work in?

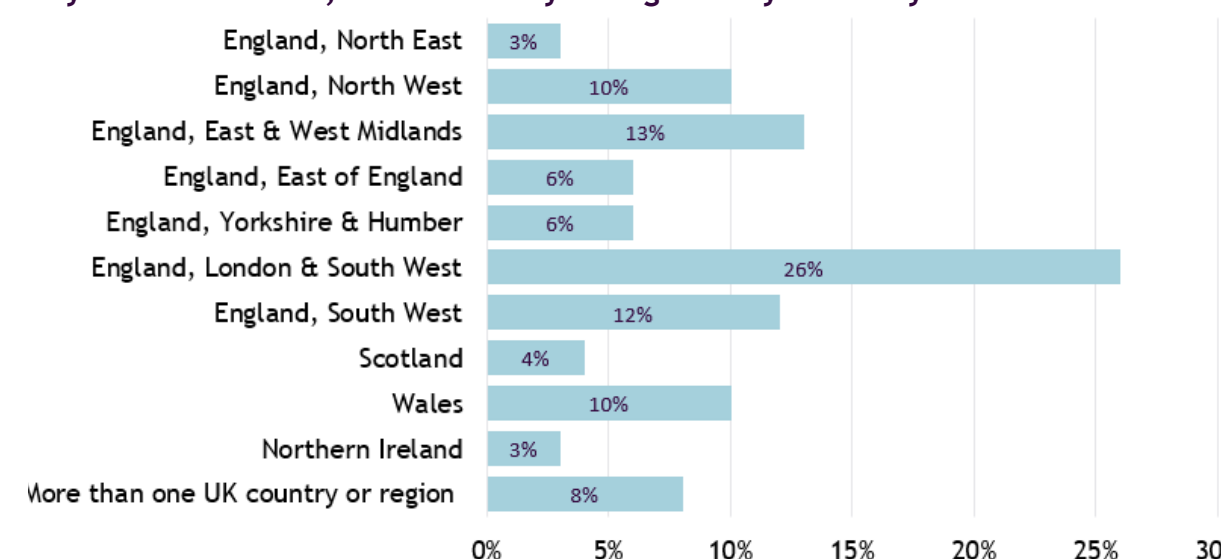| Region	%
England, North East	3%
England, North West	10%
England, East & West Midlands	13%
England, East of England	6%
England, Yorkshire & Humber	6%
England, London & South West	26%
England, South West	12%
Scotland	4%
Wales	10%
Northern Ireland	3%
More than one UK country or region	8%

Figure 2 Country or region respondents mostly work in (880 responses). Please note figures do not equal 100 due to rounding

[3] Mid-2023 Population estimates from the Office for National Statistics, the National Records of Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Three-quarters of respondents worked in a single region of England (75% of 880 responses). The most common region respondents worked in was London and the South East of England, with a quarter of respondents working in this area. This may reflect the fact that London has 15% of England's housing and more dwellings are used for social housing (21.0%) than compared to the rest of England (15.5%).[4] Most commonly, survey respondents worked in a mix of urban and rural areas (45%, n=879). A further 40% worked solely in urban areas, 13% in rural areas with towns, and 3% in rural areas with villages, hamlets isolated dwellings and open countryside.

Nearly three quarters (73% of 913 young professionals) worked at a housing association, with 14% at a local authority or Arms-Length Management Organisation (ALMO). We also received response from those who worked in supported housing support providers (4%), government (including non-departmental government bodies) (2%), consultancy (2%), contractors and direct labour organisations (1%), charities, and trade bodies. Our survey does not represent the views of those working in the private sector, who make up a very small number of respondents. This may reflect the membership of CIH Futures, as well as the greater professionalisation and regulation of social housing within England, the most populous country of the UK.

Of the young professionals surveyed, 58% (n=882) worked in roles that interacted directly with residents, either partially or fully. For those who we know job area, a quarter worked in housing management (25%, n=718), just over a fifth (21%) in corporate roles, 15% in customer services, 12% in property management, and 11% in care and support within supported housing. Development (9%) and comms, marketing and sales (8%) roles also featured.

Figure 3 shows that 61% of young housing professionals who took our survey have a qualification at university level.
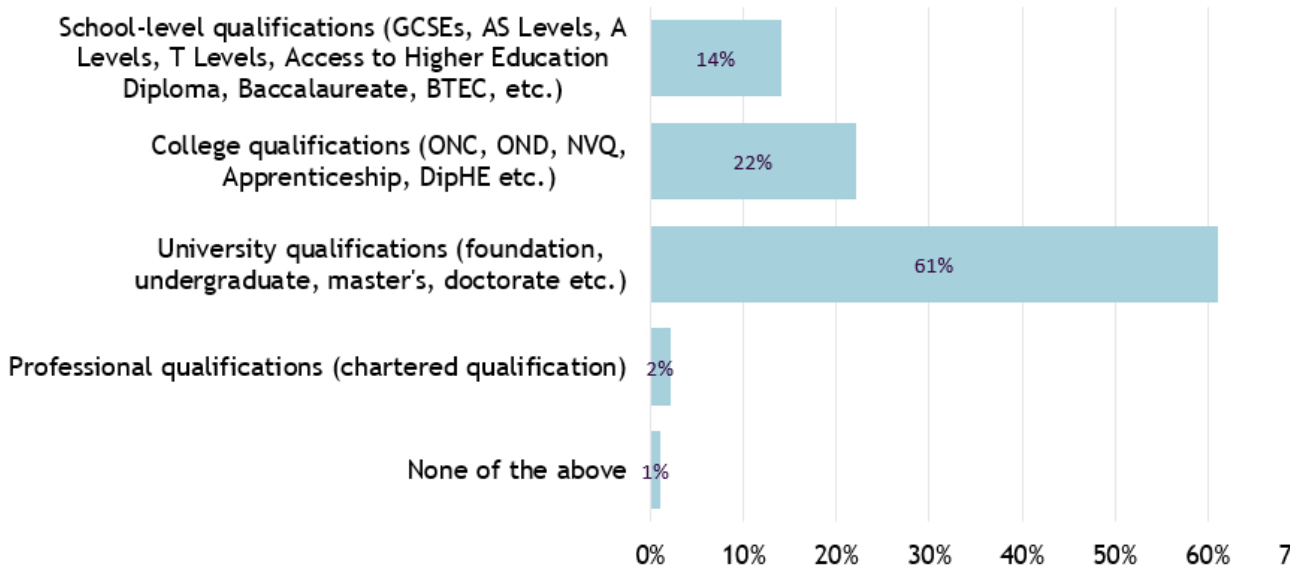
Highest qualification received

Figure 3 Highest qualification received (801 responses)

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[4] _Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Dwelling Stock, Table 109: Dwelling stock by tenure and region, England._

Among the 795 respondents who answered, 70% identified as female and 29% identified as male, with 1.25% of respondents identified as non-conforming or other gender expressions. Most of our respondents identified as white (87.4%), followed by Asian or Asian British (5.5%), mixed or multiple ethnic groups (3.7%), black (2.9%) and other ethnic group (2.2%).

When it comes to sexual orientation, 83% identified as heterosexual or straight, 9% as bisexual, 7% as gay or lesbian and 1% as other sexual orientation.

A significant minority (17.3%) of those who responded to the survey considered themselves to have a disability.[5]

The largest intersectional group, nearly one fifth of respondents (19%), were aged 21-35, had never lived in social housing and identified as female, white, heterosexual, and did not consider themselves to have a disability.

Lived experience of social housing

Of those who answered the question (794 people), 30% are currently living or have previously lived in social housing – see Figure 4. There is no figure for how many people grew up in social housing within England or the UK. In 2023/24, 16% of all households in England (the most populous country in the UK) lived in social housing, a fall from 23% in 1991.[6] This trend of a shrinking social rented sector is similar across other countries of the UK, and suggests that young professionals in older age groups were more likely to grow up in social housing than their younger peers. When looked at by age, latest data for England indicates 16.8% of households headed by someone aged 16 to 24 and 14.3% of households headed by 25- to 34-year-olds live in social housing.[7] Amongst respondents to our survey, 10% currently live in social housing, suggesting proportionately fewer live in social housing when compared to households of a similar age.

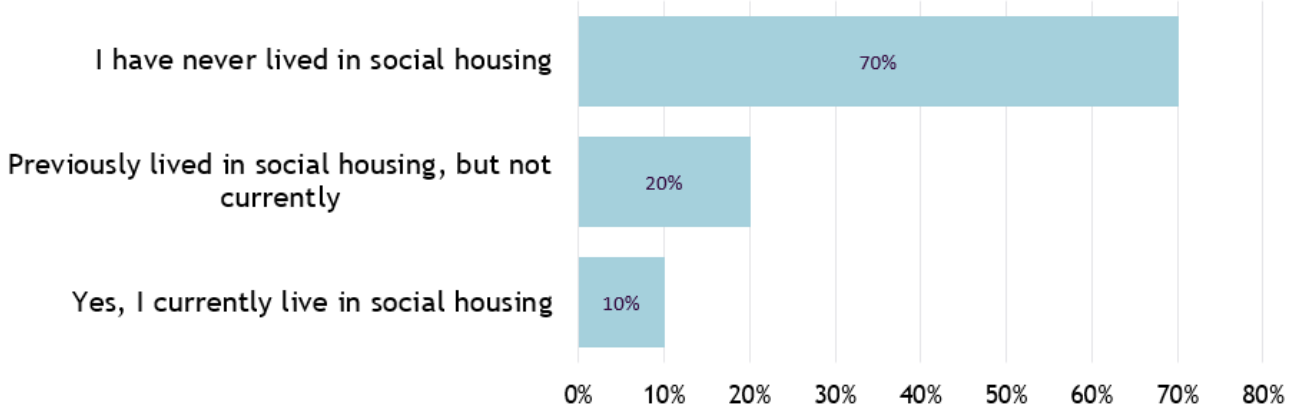### Do you currently live, or have you ever lived, in social housing?

Figure 4 Whether respondents live or have ever lived in social housing (794 responses)

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[5] _Defined in the survey question as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on ability to do normal daily activities._

[6] _Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, English Housing Survey Table FT1101 (S101): Trends in tenure._

[7] _Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, English Housing Survey Table FA1201 (S106): Age of household reference person by tenure, 2023-24._

Discussion

We lack reliable data on young professionals in UK housing, making it difficult to assess our survey's representativeness. Our research found varied opinions and satisfaction levels among young housing professionals, and, with 914 responses, the survey indicates the views of young people working in social housing.

The survey was mostly completed by young social housing professionals. Further research might like to focus on those working in the private sector and, in England and Scotland, young local authority staff. Given that the survey was distributed online (largely through CIH Futures, sponsor contacts, social and industry media), CIH Futures may wish to consider what the results indicate around how reflective their network is of UK housing.

The National Statistics Standard Occupational Classification, used in labour market and population surveys, classifies housing across several categories, with the most specific category for social housing 'Housing Officers', within the overall category of Health and Social Care. We would benefit from more refined classification to greater understand the diversity of young housing professionals and how representative they are of the young UK population. If the young housing workforce is found to be representative of the general population, then future studies would benefit from targeted outreach and tailored survey methods to better understand the perspectives of those identifying as male and from black or Asian backgrounds.

Recommendations for understanding the young housing workforce

Recommendation 1

Currently, there is limited reliable data regarding the characteristics of young professionals within UK housing. The government should add more detailed classification within datasets to enhance our understanding of the young housing professionals' workforce.

Recommendation 2

CIH Futures may wish to consider the findings around who responded to the survey to assess how well their network reflects UK housing and take action to address any indications of under representation. They could use the CIH EDI census results as part of this review.

7. The hidden housing sector

Entry into the sector

Survey and focus group comments reveal a wide variety of routes into housing, from programmes (such as school leaver apprenticeships or graduate schemes) to being placed or applying for roles (such as agency staff) or coming from similar roles out of sector.

Across all focus groups, there was a strong feeling that the sector does not do enough to promote itself as a career of choice. The role of chance was stronger than choice. Research participants were aware of housing as a career because of having grown up in social housing, having a family or friend work in the sector, or "stumbling" into the sector through agency work or a job advert. One focus group participant said that even though they completed a related degree, they were not aware of the career opportunities within social housing until a year after they graduated. Another shared that "I don't know anyone who picked housing as a career. We spoke to a college locally one day that was doing social science and there was not one person in that class that knew about housing or had thought about going into housing at all." Housing was described as a "hidden" career.

The variety of entry routes shows the number of ways that people can enter the sector and the breadth and diversity of experience they bring. But the risk of a housing career being "hidden" is that not only is the sector missing out on talent, but this talent is missing out on what many in the sector see as a rewarding career. One focus group participant quoted Jim Strang, former CIH President, who said about working in housing "You can do more for a family, for a person, in one day than most professionals can achieve in a whole career."[8]

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[8] *Jim Strang's CIH Presidential Dinner speech: full text, Inside Housing, 6 February 2019.*

Reputation versus reality

We asked survey respondents about their expectations for working in housing. Where they did have expectations, these were mainly positive. Young people involved in our research frequently mentioned that they work in housing because of a desire to make a positive difference in people's lives. Many respondents said that they entered the sector hoping to help others, support tenants, and contribute to their communities by providing safe, affordable, and quality homes. For the most part, this is what they have found, with expectations sometimes exceeded:

> *"I wanted to make a difference and improve people's experience with their landlord. I think it has gone further than I expected and I feel really fulfilled and connected."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Making a positive difference was often tied to a sense of social purpose, fulfilment, and wanting to have a meaningful impact. This focus is evident in the survey response, with 88% of people saying that having a job that helps people or make a positive difference was extremely or very important to them (see Figure 5 for a breakdown by response).

How important is it to you that your job helps people or makes a positive difference?

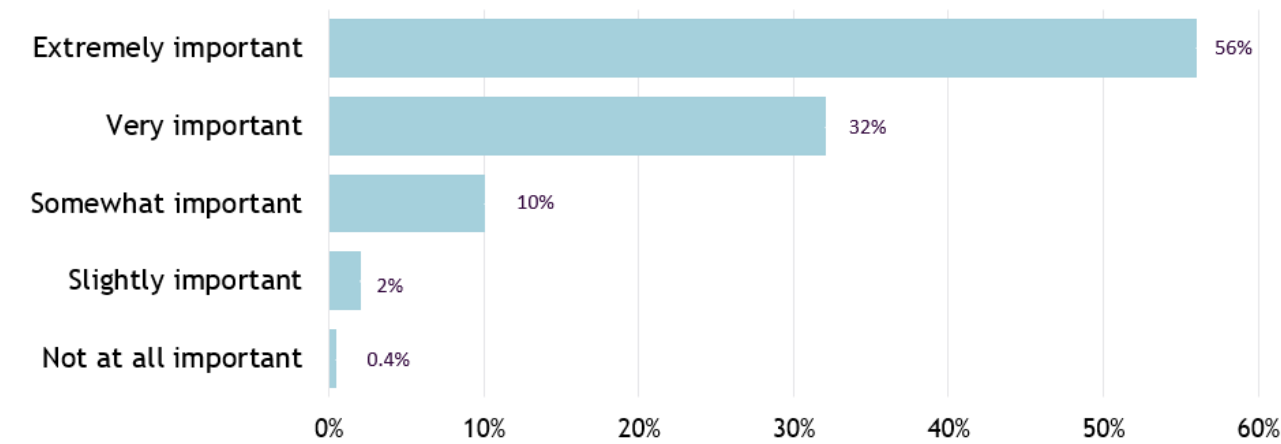|	
Extremely important	56%
Very important	32%
Somewhat important	10%
Slightly important	2%
Not at all important	0.4%

Figure 5 Survey respondents' ratings of the importance of having a job that helps others or makes a positive impact (822 responses)

Not all survey participants had expectations around working in housing, perhaps reflecting housing as a hidden career leading to low awareness of what a career in housing might look like. For those with no expectations, often what they found was a pleasant surprise, finding a real passion for housing:

> *"Came into housing on an unexpected whim and didn't have many expectations for the sector, did not think of it as a career move honestly, however very quickly became passionate about housing and the opportunities I have had have far out met my expectations"*
>
> **Survey respondent**

In some cases, however, those with no expectations have been disappointed. While there are no themes in responses here, issues mentioned include pay not matching responsibilities, lack of career progression, operational limitations, poor culture, and social housing stigma. We will come back to these issues in later sections on an inclusive sector and job satisfaction and wellbeing.

It was uncommon for people to mention they had a negative expectation before joining the sector. For those that did mention this, it related to high workload and stress:

> *"I started in a different department of the local authority and knew housing colleagues well so was aware of the level of stress. I was anxious about the workload and the stress, but over time have adapted and am able to manage my stress. It has met my expectations of how stressful it can be."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

We will discuss workload and stress in the section on job satisfaction and wellbeing.

In the focus groups, we explored the housing sector's reputation as a place to work. Participants reflected on how many people had no awareness or understanding of the sector: "When you say you work in housing, people usually ask, 'what do you actually do on a daily basis?' Like, what is your job?" (focus group). Those not in the sector lacked understanding around the scope and breadth of roles (such as the perception that "the only people who work in housing are housing officers").

The reputation of social housing could also be negative, seen in poor media coverage and negative comments online:

> *"What brings [the reputation] down mainly is repairs…everyone I know that works in housing says it's really hard to keep on top of maintenance. The Google reviews [for my organisation] are awful, all because of repairs."*
>
> **Focus group participant**

In one case, a participant said they might avoid mentioning their place of work to some new acquaintances because "there's definitely a negative attitude out there about social housing" though this didn't deter them from their job.

For focus group participants the reality of their work was very different to the reputation. People emphasised how multifaceted and impactful their work is, how passionate they and their colleagues are to do something that makes a positive difference: "There's so much more to our jobs…than simply managing housing, it's about trying to help people on a daily basis…no two days are the same" (focus group). They also noted the range of opportunities available: "It's limitless, [there's] so many different things you can do in it" (focus group). The lack of knowledge or misconceptions were felt to "undermine" social housing as a place to work, not reflecting most young professionals' experiences of a passionate, hardworking, and socially impactful sector. As one young professional put it "Not everyone gets the opportunity to make a difference in the world – this is ours" (focus group).

There was one area where some participants felt reputation did match reality. This was a view of the sector as outdated and "stagnant". Focus group participants saw this reflected in the same people circling around middle management roles and a lack of innovation or acceptance of new ideas in their organisations. They felt this deterred people from joining the sector. We will discuss this further in the section on voice and influence and around job satisfaction.

Attracting talent

As discussed, housing as a hidden or misunderstood career can be a barrier to young people entering the sector. To address some of the issues above, focus group participants called for greater visibility of housing careers, such as through the CHOOSE HOUSING campaign,[9] and more young professionals engaging with schools, colleges and universities to promote housing as a career.

Another way that focus group participants thought people were put off a career in housing was the language and requirements in job adverts and job descriptions. These issues create barriers to entry, as well as progression. Terminology and requirements made jobs appear inaccessible to those outside the sector or even for those looking to progress. For example, this focus group participant had been encouraging their friends to apply for jobs in housing, but the job descriptions were confusing:

> *"I've actually been trying to get some of my friends to work in social housing, they're applying for jobs, I say 'Look at these jobs, you'd be really good at this' and they're like 'Oh, but I don't even know what any of these things mean' even though I know that, if they were interviewed, they'd probably be fine."*
> **Focus group participant**

One participant who had joined out of sector described themselves as "a bit of an anomaly". Some young people said their tasks did not match their job description:

> *"I applied for a job with the understanding I would work in project management, yet my role is all admin jobs and have not been on a project for several years."*
> **Survey respondent**

Young people also felt jobs sometimes required qualifications that weren't relevant. One focus group participant felt that organisations should review all job adverts and descriptions with both tenants and existing postholders to ensure they reflect the role, require relevant qualifications, and can be widely understood.

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[9] https://www.cih.org/knowledge-hub/professionalism-and-training/choose-housing/

Discussion

When it comes to selecting a job or career, an individual's characteristics can influence their likelihood of selecting a specific workplace, often reflecting differences in values or preferences. According to economic theory, job seekers tend to apply to organisations where they perceive characteristics that will enhance their utility (meaning satisfaction, pleasure or benefit) and overall wellbeing.[10] Talking more about the meaningful work available in housing, alongside other aspects of 'good work', will ensure the sector can match to the most suitable talent, and vice versa.

Young people working in the sector talk about the positive impact their job makes to people's lives and how meaningful this makes their work. This ties in well with different studies exploring what young people want from work. A recent BBC survey found that UK teenagers identified the most important aspect of any future job as 'to feel good about what you do'.[11] Given what our research has found, the sector is very well placed to meet these aspirations for future work.

Housing being a "hidden" career is also likely an experience across many sectors. Young people often aspire to work in more visible careers that they are likely to have seen in action, such as doctors or teachers.[12] Careers education, work experience, volunteering, social action and employer engagement are the bridges into work, yet research shows that each one is in decline.[13] Young people are not informed enough to make career choices, leading to a disconnect between aspirations and opportunities. Aspirations and stereotypes form as early as age seven, so early and consistent outreach is essential to make all careers visible and accessible to young people of any background.[14]

Young professionals and housing organisations need to actively work with primary and secondary schools as well as colleges and universities to raise awareness of the rewarding nature of a career in housing and opportunities available. Given the passion and enjoyment of many young professionals in the sector, they would do well to advocate for housing careers. Employers should work with education and youth services to provide work experience, volunteering and social action for young people, raising awareness of housing as a career and providing bridges into work.

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[10] Bryson, A., Forth, J. and Stokes, L. (2014) *Does worker wellbeing affect workplace performance?* Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and NIESR.

[11] BBC (2025) *Bitesize Careers Survey 2025: Revealed: New entry in top 10 jobs teenagers want*.

[12] BBC (2025) *Bitesize Careers Survey 2025: Revealed: New entry in top 10 jobs teenagers want*.

[13] Youth Employment UK (2025) *2025 Youth Voice Census*.

[14] Chambers, N., Percy, C. and Rogers, M. (2020) *Disconnected: Career aspirations and jobs in the UK*.

There are existing initiatives out there that housing organisations can sign up to. As well as past CIH President Elly Hoult's recent campaign to CHOOSE HOUSING,[15] Charityworks recently noted that they have around 100 candidates who want to work for a housing association but lack sufficient host organisations.[16] A recent report from The Housing Forum Futures Network, a yearly cohort of future leaders selected from across Housing Forum members, called for a £600 million government investment to train 60,000 new housing workers and a dedicated built environment GCSE, promoting construction and planning careers to young people.[17] Each country of the UK also has apprenticeship schemes specifically for housing.[18] Leaders could commit to hiring a certain percentage of their workforce through such apprentice or graduate schemes.

There are also non-sector initiatives, such as membership of Youth Employment UK. Through membership, organisations can access guidance, best practice and recognition through the Good Youth Employment Standards, demonstrating a commitment to providing good quality youth employment opportunities. The ten standards include engagement, inclusion, skills, training, and pay and rewards.[19]

Young housing professionals who answered our survey are more educated than the general population, with 61% stating their highest qualification was at university level compared to 34% of usual residents of England and Wales aged 16 years and over at the time of the Census 2021. This likely reflects the increase in young people delaying full-time work for higher education, with around half of those aged 25 to 29 holding degrees in 2024 versus 28% twenty years ago.[20] Across the UK, high-skilled jobs have not increased at the same rate meaning many graduates now work in positions that once required no degree.[21] To attract talent and remove barriers to entry, it is important that job adverts are written in plain English, accurately describe the tasks, and only ask for experience and qualifications that are relevant.

Recommendations for the hidden sector

Recommendation 3

Young professionals should work with their employers to engage with local primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities to highlight the careers available in housing. The CHOOSE Housing CIH Presidential campaign can help with this.

Recommendation 4

Employers should investigate and action initiatives targeting youth employment. This might include careers advice, work experience, volunteering and social action, or youth employment hiring quotas or targets, and standards. They should sign up to sector and non-sector initiatives to ensure more young people can benefit from a career in housing and the sector can benefit from their talent.

Recommendation 5

To reduce barriers to entry, employers should work with postholders and residents to ensure job descriptions and adverts are clear, jargon-free, and list only essential qualifications and experience requirements.

15 CIH – CHOOSE HOUSING.

16 Rachel Whale (2025) Why isn't the housing sector tapping into the talent that's ready and waiting? Inside Housing 22.09.25.

17 The Housing Forum Futures Network (2025) Breaking barriers: Collaborative solutions to housing delivery.

18 See Department for Education information for more detail on funding for England's scheme, with links to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

19 Youth Employment UK – Good Youth Employment Membership.

20 CIPD (2024) Changing face of the youth labour market.

21 CIPD (2022) What is the scale and impact of graduate overqualification in the UK?

8. An inclusive sector

Being part of a housing sector

Three out of five people who responded to our survey said they 'completely' (24% of 844 professionals) or 'mostly' (36%) feel part of a housing sector – see Figure 6. Satisfaction with current role may be associated with this, with 78% of those who answered completely or mostly part of a housing sector also saying they were satisfied or very satisfied with their role. Those who were neutral or dissatisfied over their current role were more likely to say they felt slightly or not at all part of the sector.

To what extent do you feel part of a housing sector (that is, a group of people from different organisations who work to make sure everyone has a place to live)?
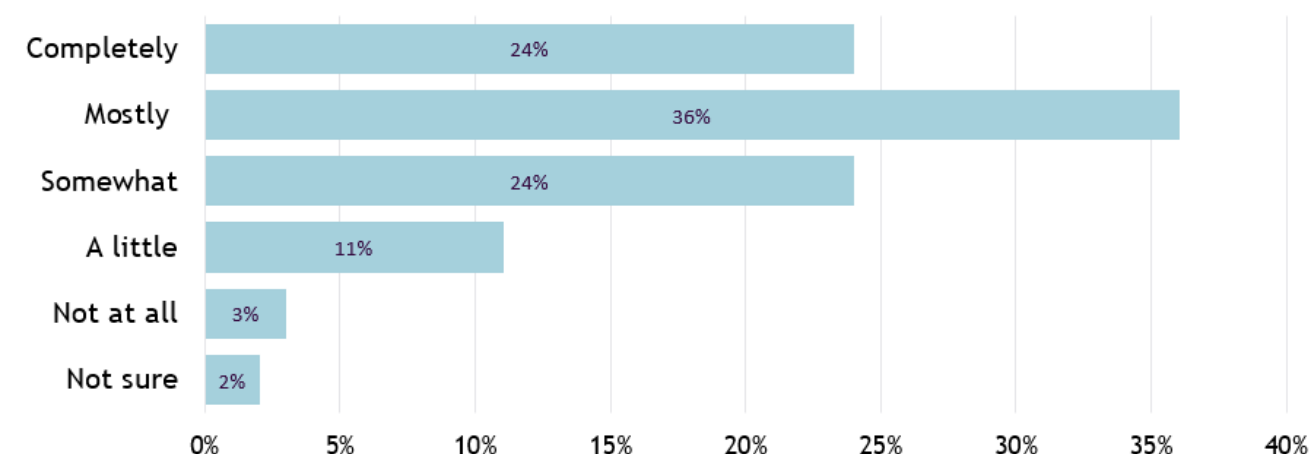

Figure 6 Extent survey respondents feel part of a housing sector (844 responses)

Job area may make a difference, with those working in comms, marketing, sales and housing management disproportionately likely to say they 'completely' feel part of the sector. Those in care and support are disproportionately likely to feel 'not at all' part of the sector: "we work in the care side of the company and this is always second to housing, I feel this should be equal." (survey respondent). A survey respondent shared that it is only since working in senior positions that they have felt like a housing professional.

Those in corporate roles could be less tied to housing, given their relevance in other industries, but survey and focus group comments show that many young professionals in these roles thrive on the importance of housing to people's lives and see their roles as a critical part of this. This survey respondent, who works in contracts, feels completely part of the sector and sees operational roles as critical to delivering safe housing for all:

"[I've] come to understand how even behind the scenes work can have a real impact on people's homes and lives. it's made me more aware of the value of consistency, care and high standards - and how operational roles are as vital in supporting safe stable housing for all."

Survey respondent

The focus groups indicated that, no matter the role, young professionals were motivated by social purpose and, as such, people-focused.

There were some differences in feeling part of the sector based on characteristics. Those of a younger age, who identify as male, and who identify as black were disproportionately likely to give lower ratings for feeling part of the sector. Low response rates for specific characteristics may affect the wider applicability of these findings.

Collaboration and networking

Working with others was clearly important to the young professionals we spoke to for this research. Reflecting social purpose, many survey and focus group participants talked about the happiness they got from working with and helping tenants, colleagues, and the wider sector: "the absolute favourite part of my job is going out and visiting tenants and hearing their stories and making a difference" (focus group)

Young professionals praised the openness and shared practice they found in the sector. They valued the collaboration and shared mission of working in housing and willingness of like-minded individuals to share knowledge, ideas and best practice. Within focus groups, participants discussed how this created opportunities for learning, improvements to policy and practice, better decision making, and increased the confidence and skills of young professionals. It also created a shared sense of purpose and led to new ways of thinking.

Experiences vary by organisation, however, with some collaborative and innovative, others insular and resistant to change. The culture of the organisation has a significant impact on collaboration and so the experience of working in the sector. Young housing professionals spoke of negative experiences around maintaining a customer-focused approach due to siloed working:

"My expectation is that we should be putting our customers first and understand their needs and their expectations. I feel that sometimes the sight on this can be lost due to teams working in a more siloed manner."

Survey respondent

Terminology, capacity, and lack of resources all impact on collaboration. Scope of roles or organisations may also affect this. Roles in a smaller housing association, for example, may offer a breadth of experience and responsibility and provide a rewarding career, but capacity and opportunities for engaging with the wider sector may be less than for roles in a larger organisation. Roles that are reactive may also allow less time for more strategic thinking.

Young people may not always be encouraged to look outside of their organisation. Training and development are often internal, and young professionals are not always notified or given opportunities to attend external networking, perhaps for fear it will reduce focus on their work. This is not just limited to young people, with one focus group participant saying that:

> "I feel like some of my colleagues have worked in housing for years and they've never been to a conference. They've never been to any kind of event. They've never spoken to anyone from any other organisation."
>
> **Focus group participant**

We found that often more structured entry routes offer opportunities to build relationships across organisations and network externally that benefit young professionals. This young person talked about how their graduate programme provided them with opportunities to network and explore different aspects of housing:

> "I had so much exposure to what I wouldn't normally have in the office, meeting different people at different stages of their career, different professionals. I learned so much and that helped me to go and seek out more opportunities and talk to people and network and things like that, which is something I wouldn't have done beforehand."
>
> **Focus group participant**

Another focus group participant described it as a "culture shock" to move from a structured programme, with lots of opportunities to network and innovate, to a job with limited collaboration and networking:

> "We used to go to conferences and learn from people in the sector, and the grad scheme was specifically designed around trying to innovate and try your hand, a bit of variety, to work out what you like. And then to go into a traditional role, which I really, really enjoy, but there's almost no consultation [on process or strategy], it's just filtered down through emails…I don't know of any opportunities for networking externally. And again, that's quite a whiplash from [the structured programme]"
>
> **Focus group participant**

Overall, young professionals called for more collaboration, including collaboration across ages, backgrounds and roles, as in the case of this focus group participant:

> "For anything to be a success, and for the future of housing, there needs to be collaboration and that is working with a variety of people from different ages and different sort of backgrounds in housing"
>
> **Survey respondent**

A lack of networking can not only mean missed opportunities to share insights and learning, but it can also hinder career progression (as we will discuss later). In one focus group, youth-specific, online networking opportunities were called for. This would particularly help where younger people felt underrepresented or unheard in their team or organisation.

Inclusion, diversity and equity

When it comes to inclusivity and diversity in the housing sector's workforce, focus group discussions centred on age diversity, while also touching on other dimensions like gender and ethnicity. Wider diversity around other protected characteristics, such as sexuality or disability, was not discussed. Mostly, participants felt their organisation and the sector were diverse and inclusive. They noted workforce diversity and participation in various benchmarks and training to be more inclusive.

Participants generally felt their organisations had good gender balance. From available data, housing as a sector appears female-dominated in many areas (see Appendix), likely reflecting wider structural issues around gendered work. One focus group participant noted that in her supported housing service "primarily it's middle-aged white women that work here".

Focus group participants indicated that ethnic diversity in the workforce varies by region and organisation. In diverse areas, teams can be very multicultural: "at least where I work, it is extremely diverse in terms of class, ethnicity, nationality, background" (focus group). On wider diversity, a survey respondent with accessibility needs mentioned that before working in housing they were unemployed due to being disabled and their current role "suits my accessibility needs which is what matters most to me."

Age-based discrimination was not widely seen as an issue. Good experiences were talked about around particular managers or colleagues who shared knowledge or treated them as equals, where age wasn't important:

> "My Director would never introduce me with a junior job title, she would always introduce me as colleague. Always. Regardless, like she would anybody else. It was just little things that I now take forward when I'm talking about my team. One thing that always stuck with me, and it was CIH Futures saying as well, she used to say 'If you're good enough, you're old enough'."
>
> **Focus group participant**

Some participants spoke about their ideas as a young person being actively encouraged: "Despite being the youngest in my cohort quite significantly, it very rarely seems important, and in fact I am often seen to be bringing new ideas etc." (survey respondent).

There were, however, some overt and more subtle ways that people felt they or tenants were excluded or overlooked. One survey respondent perceived "a sexist, out of date culture" within housing. Another said that, in a previous role, she was "as a woman, often talked over by male management". A focus group participant spoke about some experience of "belittling" by tenants due to her gender and job area, reflecting a persistent view that certain jobs are gendered. Another said that they had felt treated differently because of their age:

> "When I first started, I did have a few comments about my age and stuff, it was only when I told someone that I was over 30, then they started being a bit different."
>
> **Focus group participant**

In another focus group, youth could be seen as damaging for careers as you had to fight perceptions of experience based on age, even if you had a lot of experience or (in this person's case) were a board member: "because of your age and because of your perceived lack of experience, people aren't necessarily as inclined to take you seriously." A few survey respondents spoke of stigma towards tenants.

These mixed though mainly positive experiences are reflected in the survey findings on discrimination. While 63% had not been treated unfairly while working in housing because of who they are, 30% of people said this had happened, or they thought it had happened to them (with the breakdown in Figure 7). Over a fifth had seen staff treat residents or other staff unfairly because of who they are (see Figure 8). While this is a minority, and there is no indication of when this occurred, it indicates that research participants have witnessed or experienced discrimination while working in the sector.

Some participants raised that representation of young people at senior levels was lacking. This young person was concerned about lack of representation on boards with length of service too often confused with experience and capability:

> "I think there is a huge gap still on boards for younger professionals and I think there is a risk for younger professionals in just that label as experience and capability seems to be linked to time spent in the sector."
>
> **Survey respondent**

Have you ever been treated unfairly while working in housing because of who you are (for example, your race, gender, age, disability, religion, class or sexual orientation)?
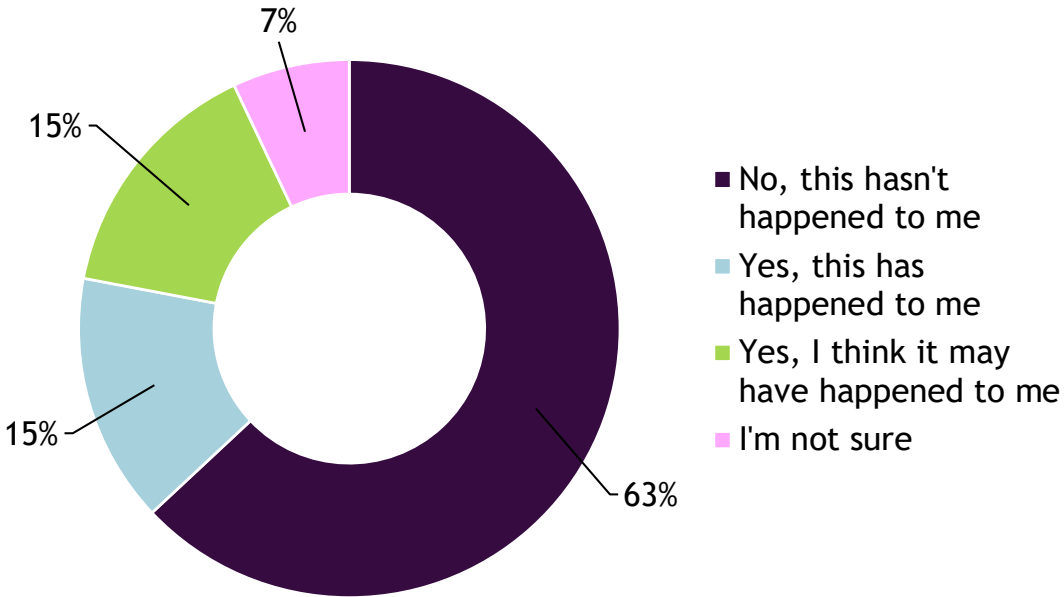

- No, this hasn't happened to me
- Yes, this has happened to me
- Yes, I think it may have happened to me
- I'm not sure

7%
15%
15%
63%

Figure 7 Respondent experience of discrimination (816 responses)

Have you ever seen staff treat residents or other staff unfairly because of who they are (e.g. race, gender, disability, class) while working in housing?
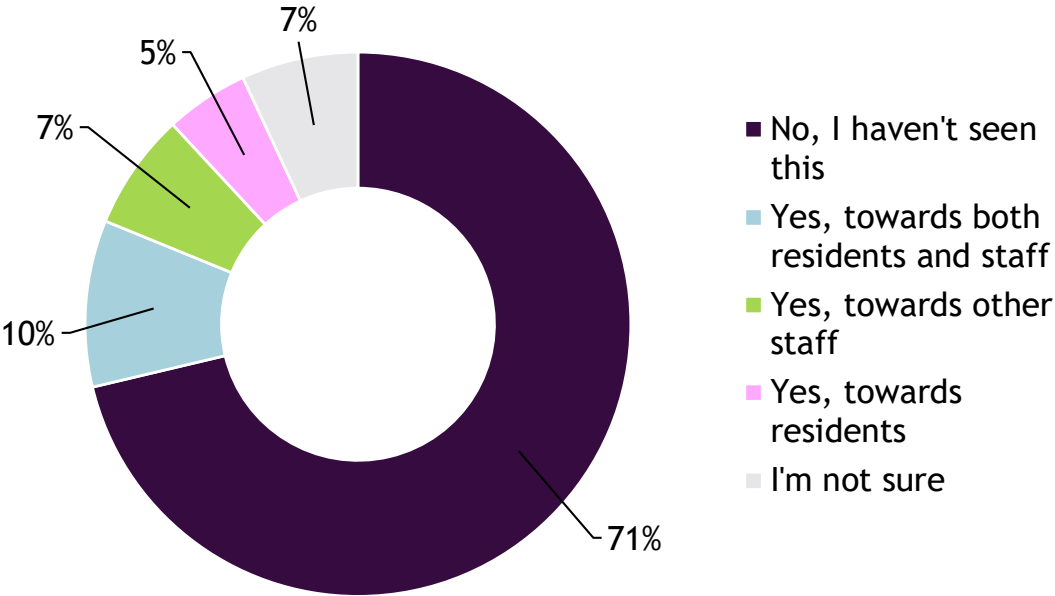

Legend:
- No, I haven't seen this
- Yes, towards both residents and staff
- Yes, towards other staff
- Yes, towards residents
- I'm not sure

71%
10%
7%
5%
7%

Figure 8 Staff treatment of residents or other staff (826 responses)

Young professionals remain underrepresented in leadership, as reflected in National Housing Federation (NHF) workforce data. This shows that, as at 2023, young people are significantly underrepresented at Executive and Board level for the English housing associations who submitted data (see Figure 9). There are some promising signs of a younger leadership, however, with an increase in the proportion of executives aged 35-44 years old from 16% to 25% between 2021 to 2023. This lack of senior representation combined with hierarchy has left some young people disappointed and without a voice.

Age of workforce, executives and boards of 177 housing associations in England compared to population by stock location. Source: National Housing Federation, NHF EDI tool - national picture, 2023
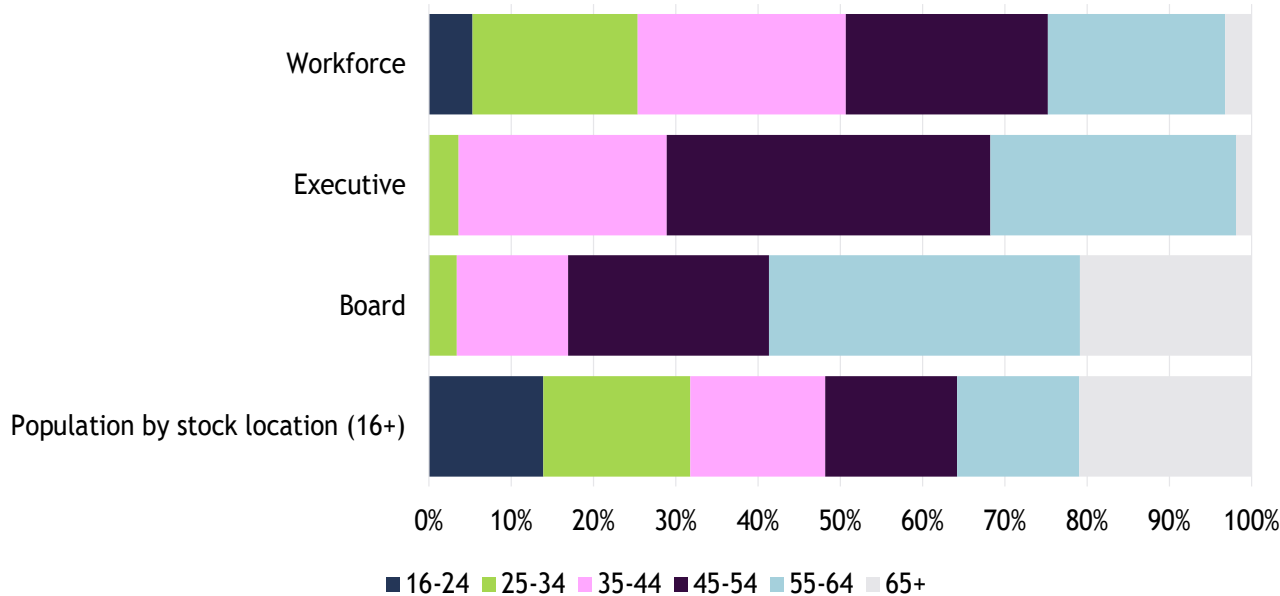

Legend: 16-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+

Figure 9 Age of workforce and senior leaders in England's housing associations, data from 177 organisation. Source: NHF, How diverse is England's housing association workforce in 2023?

Voice and influence

Most young professionals who answered our survey said it was very easy (38%, n=870) or easy (31%) to talk to senior colleagues or share ideas with them. This suggests that for a little over two thirds of young professionals we surveyed, they are easily able to approach their seniors, which may indicate less hierarchy. We also asked about the extent to which organisations listen to young professionals' feedback and took meaningful action in response. The most common answer was sometimes, at 40% (n=821), followed by often at 35%. Figure 10 shows the breakdown in responses.

Do you feel your organisation listens to your feedback and takes meaningful action in response?

- Always: 13%
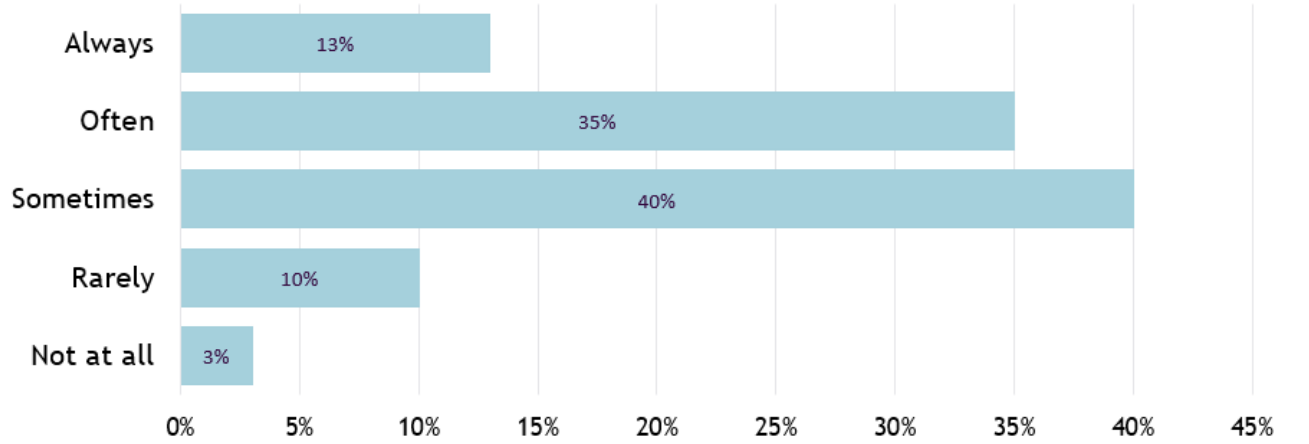- Often: 35%
- Sometimes: 40%
- Rarely: 10%
- Not at all: 3%

Figure 10 Whether organisation listens to feedback and takes meaningful action in response (821 responses). figures do not equal 100 due to rounding.

The difference between ease of speaking to senior colleagues and organisations listening to and acting on feedback may be explained by supportive managers compared to hierarchical structures. For example, this young professional shared how their manager was supportive but they lacked autonomy in a managerial role because most decisions need approval from their Executive Leadership Team:

> *"Most decisions, even those concerning my team or tenants, need to be approved by the Executive Leadership Team, which can feel quite disempowering at times. My direct line manager is supportive and provides the autonomy I need to carry out my responsibilities effectively. However, engaging with senior leadership can be challenging, particularly when trying to introduce new ideas or suggest improvements."*
> **Survey respondent**

Our research indicates that participants feel they have ideas that would positively change things for tenants and their organisations. They clearly valued organisations where they felt their ideas were listened to. For some, these ideas were actively encouraged:

> *"I grew up in social housing, so when the opportunity came up to apply for a job, I jumped at the opportunity…I feel during my time, my lived experience has been heard and considered. My input has been requested and my ideas heard. I feel my local authority is keen to make a difference and offer the best service possible which helps me feel that I am meeting the expectations of my job role, the key part being to make a difference for our customers approaching for assistance."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Many made a direct link between their ideas being heard and better outcomes in service delivery for customers, such as this person influencing processes and procedures to deliver the best possible service:

> *"I work within repairs and have been able to change processes and policies to ensure we are delivering the best possible repairs service to our residents. Any idea to improve the repairs service is supported by my line manager and all efforts are made to implement those changes."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Yet, as with other findings, this experience is not universal. Young professionals sometimes struggle to find receptive listeners for their ideas. Common responses to ideas, raised across the research, were: "this is how we've always done it" or "we can't do this because of x, y and z". One focus group participant said that when they proposed new tenant engagement methods to a senior officer, "they basically said: 'you've asked a lot of my officers already. I'm not prepared to try and do any more' in other words, we're not interested in doing anything different." This left them really frustrated "as a young person trying to make a difference, that's really, really frustrating…you're fighting an ageing workforce that's done things the same way for 25 years". Other participants noted that requests for feedback often led to few actual changes.

This was clearly challenging for young professionals involved in this research. It damaged confidence. In other cases, young people might not speak up to avoid conflict or confrontation. It was also challenging not having their ideas listened to or acted on as it meant they couldn't make the difference they felt was needed. For example, this young person also lived on the same estate where they worked and felt their organisation was missing out on opportunities to improve because it was not listening:

> *"I also live on the same estate [where I work]…and feel at work I am not listened to as much. I feel this is a shame because, being a resident also, I feel some of the input I could have could be life changing for families and truthful for the organisation to be able to change or make better."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Not feeling their ideas are heard reflected the perception that certain parts of the sector are stagnant and slow to change. Survey respondents felt held back by bureaucracy and a reluctance for change. Capacity was also clearly a barrier, with workload and reactive roles leaving little time for strategic discussions or projects. Despite this, there was still optimism and a continued passion to make a difference, as discussed in this instance:

> *"I've also noticed that the pace of change in the sector can be quite slow, and sometimes it feels like younger voices or fresh ideas aren't always taken seriously right away. That said, I'm optimistic. I've met passionate professionals who are genuinely committed to making housing better…I'd love to see more support for early career professionals and a stronger focus on innovation and sustainability across the board. "*
>
> **Survey respondent**

There is a risk that not listening leaves young professionals feeling their input is not valued, potentially driving them elsewhere or even out of sector. This is indicated by this professional's experience:

> *"I would also expect to be listened to, as I have been here longer than those above me in the hierarchy, but these people talk down to me like a child. This is why I am leaving the housing sector soon."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Within focus groups, participants reflected that organisational culture and leadership, individual managers, representation and hierarchy influenced the confidence young people have to speak and the strength of their voice.

Working arrangements

Within focus groups, we asked about whether working arrangements have influenced career development. From responses, flexibility was prized here, allowing young professionals time to attend medical appointments or family responsibilities or undertake training or certain tasks at home rather than the office. Compressed hours gave time for volunteering, which built transferable skills. Young professionals appreciated being trusted to take responsibility for their workload across various work setups. Commonly, where hybrid was possible, home-days were used for focused or complex tasks, and office-days for collaborative work.

Young professionals in focus groups saw advantages to going into an office, for building relationships with colleagues, support, and informal conversations that lead to learning, but one participant was very clear that going into an office does not make them better at their job. Mandatory office regimes may be off-putting unless there is a clear reason for the policy. One focus group participant felt that, as long as it made no difference to customers, there should be flexibility on where staff worked from. Another summarised policy here as "horses for courses, it depends on your role and on the circumstances." Some staff shared experiences of starting fully remote during the covid pandemic, which they described as isolating: "I was just sat behind the screen for two years without meeting people or doing anything in an actual office" (focus group).

Issues around fairness and consistency with working arrangement was highlighted within and across organisations. Focus groups reported tensions around different organisational requirements around working arrangements by job role. For staff working in supported housing schemes, who were often lone workers, working from home was often not an option. This could feel isolating, make them feel unsafe or be unsuitable due to poor office arrangements and frequent interruptions. Another example was an organisation not allowing agency workers to work from home, with the focus group participant unclear of the reason for this recently implementing change in policy. Agency workers were often young people and, as discussed, it is one entry route into the sector.

Given the influence that building relationships is considered to have on job opportunities, one focus group reflected that homeworking could negatively impact on career development. In other cases, however, it has provided more opportunities as people are no longer limited by jobs available in their local area. This survey respondent, for example, shared how they live in a rural area with limited career progression, but the ability to work remotely had opened up management positions for them:

> "I have worked in housing since I left school…I live in a rural [area] and career progression is limited within the housing sector. Following Covid and the ability to work remotely, I have managed to obtain two management roles over the last four years, covering national teams."
>
> **Survey respondent**

Discussion

From our research, young housing professionals generally report a strong sense of belonging to the housing sector, yet experiences may be shaped by factors such as job satisfaction, job area, ability to network, and inclusion.

Young professionals value collaboration and openness, allowing consideration of their ideas for change. Experience of this is not consistent, however, with entry route, culture, and role affecting collaboration, networking, inclusion and influence. Volunteering with CIH Futures, membership of CIH, attending CIH and CIH Futures events[22] and the CIH Mentoring Programme[23] are all ways to access collaboration and networking opportunities. There are other mentoring programmes within the sector, such as Housing Diversity Network (HDN).[24] More online networking for young professionals, such as meetings and online chat, will widen networking and collaboration opportunities.

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[22] https://www.cih.org/events/
[23] https://www.cih.org/membership/member-benefits/mentoring/
[24] https://www.housingdiversitynetwork.co.uk/mentoring

Young people enter the sector to make a difference, and it can be frustrating when they feel their ideas are not being heard or considered. The ability for young voices to influence change varies, with organisational hierarchy and openness to innovation playing key roles. The government has recently introduced a Resident Experience Innovation Fund for social housing, which could help facilitate the testing of young professionals' ideas around engagement with tenants, where co-produced with tenants.[25] Wider workforce research indicates that employees who feel listened to and empowered to speak up by their managers are more likely to report better performance.[26] There is consistent research that involving employees in the workplace enhances job satisfaction and commitment to their organisation.[27] Strong leadership and line managers play a critical role in enabling voice, so managerial training to foster trust and responsiveness is important.[28] CIPD recommend a holistic strategy to encourage collective and individual forms of employee voice with a range of two-way communication and consultation methods with follow-up information to demonstrate how employee voice is influencing change.[29] For a better performing sector, more consistency is needed in youth voice and influence.

Alongside UK housing networks, there are specific youth networks for the wider built environment that young professionals can access. For example, Generation for Change part of Constructing Excellence,[30] Housing Forum Futures Network,[31] while Future of London and Future of Greater Manchester work to provide networking, knowledge sharing and leadership opportunities for urban practitioners in their respective cities.[32] Greater collaboration between these networks will enhance collaboration, networking and influence.

While many praise the sector's inclusivity and diversity, some barriers persist, including underrepresentation of young people at senior levels and occasional experiences of discrimination. Further research might like to explore whether certain protected characteristic groups are more at risk of discrimination than others and any specific barriers to career progression in housing for certain groups, such as LGBTQ+ people[33] or young professionals with a disability or long-term illness.[34] The sector must work to ensure all employees and tenants are treated fairly.

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[25] https://disruptiveinnovatorsnetwork.co.uk/events/social-housing-innovation-fund-improving-tenant-and-resident-engagement/
[26] CIPD (2025) Good Work Index.
[27] For example, Demir S. The role of self-efficacy in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, motivation and job involvement. Eurasian Journal of Educational Research. 2020;20(85):205-24.
[28] CIPD (2019) Talking about voice: employees' experiences.
[29] https://www.cipd.org/uk/views-and-insights/cipd-viewpoint/employee-voice/
[30] https://constructingexcellence.org.uk/network/g4c/
[31] https://housingforum.org.uk/futures-network/
[32] https://www.futureoflondon.org.uk/ https://futureofgreatermanchester.com/
[33] Pride in Leadership (2025) Barriers to LGBTQ+ career progression in the UK.
[34] Public Services Committee (2024) Think Work First: The transition from education to work for young disabled people. House of Lords.

In a survey of what over 8,200 young people want from work, 71% said flexible hours.[35] In housing, similarly, flexible working arrangements are valued where available, though practice depends on specific roles and organisations. Given the gendered nature of many roles in housing there is a risk that flexible working policies risk reinforcing existing inequalities.[36]

Recommendations for an inclusive sector

Recommendation 6

Employers and managers should enable young people to attend networking events inside and outside of their organisation. This includes identifying, sharing and reassigning work to enable young people to attend networking events. They should empower young staff to access opportunities they are interested in.

Recommendation 7

CIH and CIH Futures should provide more online networking opportunities for young housing professionals. In addition to the online regional meetings, they should consider, online messaging and chats, and youth-specific in-person events. These should be open to members and non-members of CIH to ensure an inclusive, visible sector. CIH should also continue to provide a platform for CIH Futures at their events to ensure young housing professionals have a voice.

Recommendation 8

CIH Futures should collaborate with other networks for young professionals in housing and the built environment to amplify voice and opportunities for young people.

Recommendation 9

Young professionals should become members of CIH, volunteer with CIH Futures and access CIH membership benefits, such as events and the mentoring programme, to build their network and experience.

Recommendation 10

When running staff surveys, employers should look to understand differences by characteristics, such as age, as well as entry route, manager and role. They should seek to address any identified differences in workplace experiences. Similarly, exit interviews should be used to understand differences and shape future experiences.

Recommendation 11

Employers should develop an employee voice strategy. This should include leadership support for inclusive employee voice, a range of two-way consultation and communication methods, feedback on how voice is influencing change, and training for managers.

[35] *Youth Employment UK (2025)* 2025 Youth Voice Census.

[36] *Xue B, Chung H, Gu R, et al. (2025) Does the 'right to request' flexible work policy influence men's and women's uptake of flexible working and well-being: findings from the UK Household Longitudinal Study. J Epidemiol Community Health Published Online First: 15 September 2025.*

9. Job satisfaction and wellbeing

Role satisfaction

Generally, job satisfaction across survey respondents was high. Over two thirds of young professionals who responded said they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their current role. In total, 48% (of 877 respondents) said they were 'satisfied' and 21% said they were 'very satisfied' – see Figure 11.

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your current role?
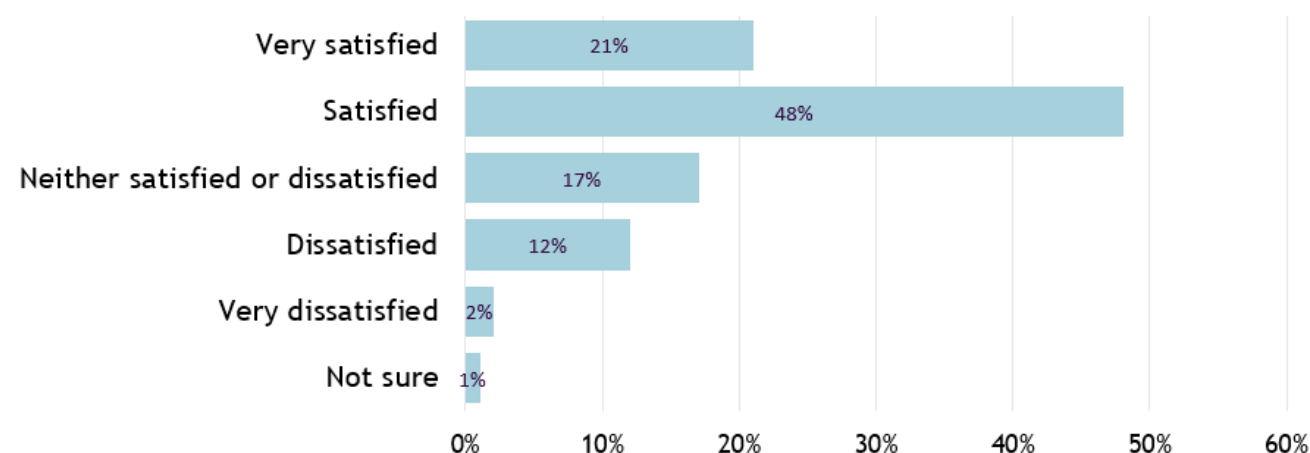

Figure 11 Level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with current role (877 responses)

According to survey responses, and focus groups, there are many contributory factors to job satisfaction, the significance of which will differ for each individual. Key contributors include the ability to make a meaningful impact and experience a sense of purpose, though also important are a supportive culture and teamwork, working with residents, variety and challenge, autonomy, and robust career progression. For example, this young professional spoke about how much they love working in housing for the people-focus, teamwork, and problem solving: "I've loved working in housing, meeting people, being able to problem solve issues people face and working with wider departments." (survey respondent). Others expressed concerns for workload, limited progression, poor pay and recognition, and organisational barriers, such as bureaucracy and how much the wider organisation valued their role.

Pay satisfaction is 46%, with remuneration falling below expectations for 53% of 878 professionals, who say their salary is slightly or far below what they would expect in terms of their role and responsibilities. This does vary by length of time in the sector, with pay satisfaction at 40% for those who have worked in the sector for up to three years, rising to 56% for those who have been in the sector for eight or more years. One survey respondent, who was relatively new to the sector, said: "I definitely feel that salaries could line up better with the sheer volume of work that we all do and the responsibility that we all have to ensure the safety and satisfaction of our tenants."

There was also some difference by job area, with pay satisfaction particularly low for those working in care and support, 66% of whom said their salary was slightly or far below what they would expect. This may reflect lower pay in supported housing, even within the same organisation, as shared by this respondent:

"I found customer services paid £5,000 more than the support worker and Intensive Housing Management Officer role despite IHMO being a senior role. I've noticed the jobs under [one] side of our housing association pay significantly less than the [other] side."
Survey respondent

It may also reflect the responsibilities of scheme managers for both supporting tenants and also health and safety checks: "I did not expect as a mental health support worker to be responsible for a lot of health & safety issues needing repairs." (survey respondent).

Autonomy

There is a clear sense of autonomy for young professionals in their roles, with 88% (of 880 professionals) saying they are fully or mostly trusted to manage their role and responsibilities, as detailed in Figure 12.

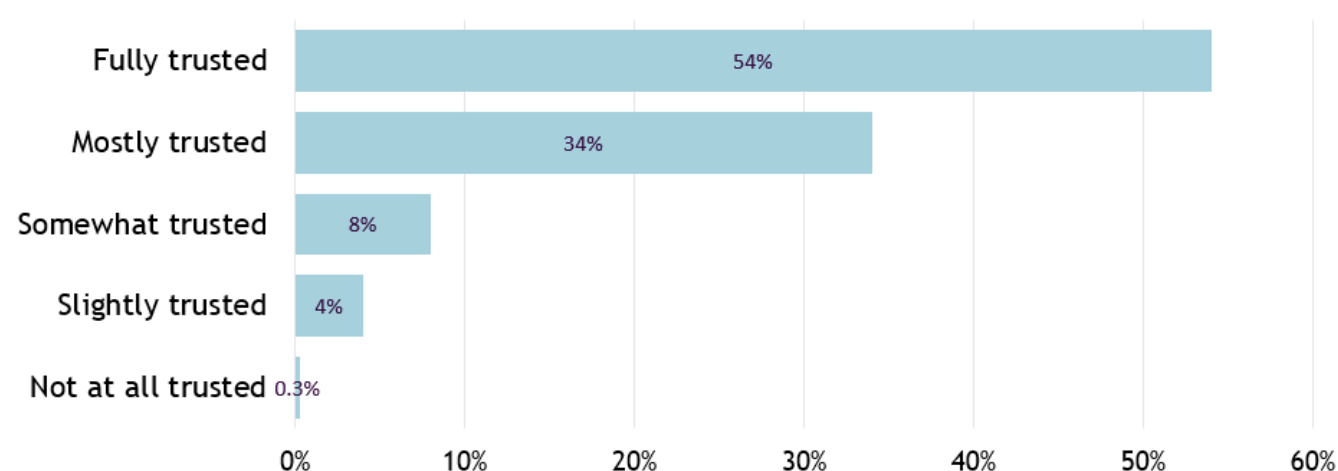**Overall, do you feel trusted to manage your role and responsibilities?**

Figure 12 Feelings of trust to manage role and responsibilities (880 responses)

When it comes to level of responsibility, while a slim majority of young people think the responsibility of their role is about right (52% of 865), nearly a third (31%) would like more responsibility, as shown in Figure 13.

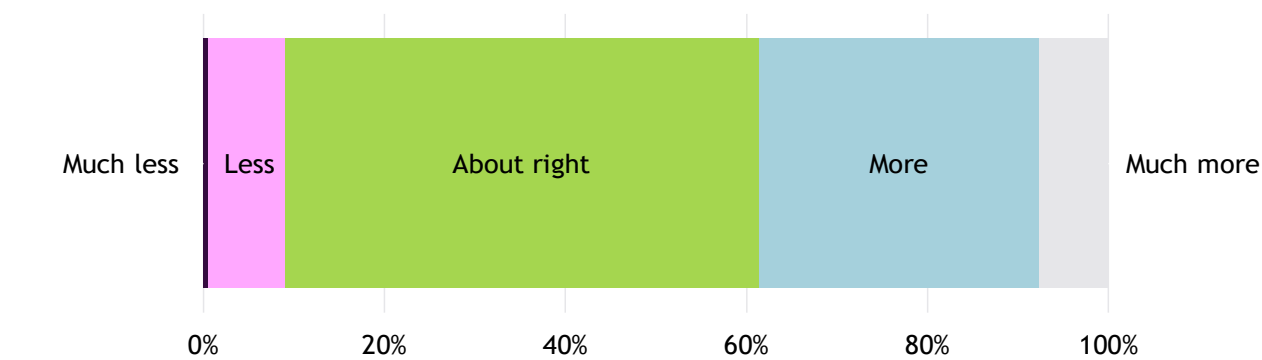**Would you like more or less responsibility in your role?**

Figure 13 Level of responsibility of role (865 responses)

Empowerment within survey comments focused on personal growth, career development, responsibility, supporting others (tenants and colleagues), and agency and influence. One person said they "have a lot of trust placed in me to be able to do things I would like to do to improve our service" (survey respondent), showing the link between empowerment and influence. Freedom to experiment was highly valued, such as this young person working in communications: "It's surpassed my expectations as it's given me freedom to experiment with so much new content and ways of working with customers to get said content." (survey respondent). Another shared that professional development has helped with moving into more trusted roles:

> "I feel I have progressed since starting my career, I have been able to build up my knowledge, skills and behaviours and move into more trusted roles with extra responsibilities. I feel my progression has matched my level of experience."
>
> **Survey respondent**

Supportive colleagues and managers also helped.

Young professionals also revealed the barriers that can undermine autonomy, such as management style, communication and influence, lack of progression, and culture. For example, this young professional said that the lack of transparency and influence for officers was disempowering:

> "Senior management from most departments are not as transparent as they could be and professionals at lower levels at the organisation are drip-fed information and not empowered to share their thoughts or ideas."
>
> **Survey respondent**

Where culture was affecting autonomy, this didn't always affect love and motivation for the job; this might still happen despite the culture rather than because of it, such as in the case of this survey participant, who was motivated by doing the best for residents:

> "I've often been around bad organisational culture, where the executive teams don't trust staff enough, micromanage, and are too unilateral, which has made places less enjoyable to work. I love my job though, and work super hard every day to do it well for residents."
>
> **Survey respondent**

Workload and wellbeing

Young people in our research emphasised that the intrinsic social purpose of their job keeps them motivated. Frontline roles were described as fulfilling, yet the burnout from the role demands was an unexpected reality:

> "Housing is the most fulfilling yet the most challenging role I've ever had. The social values and purpose of my role have met my expectations but how demanding it can be and the burnout at times have been an unexpected part"
>
> **Survey respondent**

Another shared that "Housing is a high pressurised working environment…workload is increased for existing colleagues and turnover is high, due to stress and burnout leading to high turnover" (survey respondent). Others voiced frustration that extra effort isn't always recognised: "Too much work, no work-life balance, not heard and a disconnect from leadership to operations" (survey respondent). Without support, these issues may be particularly challenging for pressures created by reactive 'firefighting' roles, such as Housing Officers and support workers.

Survey respondents and focus group members mentioned having to go above and beyond their paid hours to meet their workload. Seeing the high workload of senior staff was also a turn-off for progression, with the "massive sacrifice" in time not necessarily matched by the salary:

> "There are certain people who are still logged on at like 10:00 at night, 11:00 at night…and on Saturdays and Sundays…That for me is quite off-putting because I already work longer hours than I'm paid to…with the people who are in Head of and Director positions, it just seems absolutely insane and I don't know how they manage having a life"
>
> **Focus group participant**

These kinds of workloads can take a toll. Survey respondents mentioned feeling stress and burnout. Two fifths of young people said they had experienced burnout at least a few times over the past year, as shown in Figure 14. More than a third (36%) of 875 young professionals reported feeling extremely tired, stressed, or overwhelmed at work 'very often' or 'often' in the last 12 months.

In the past 12 months, have you felt extremely tired, stressed, or overwhelmed because of your job? (This is sometimes called burnout).
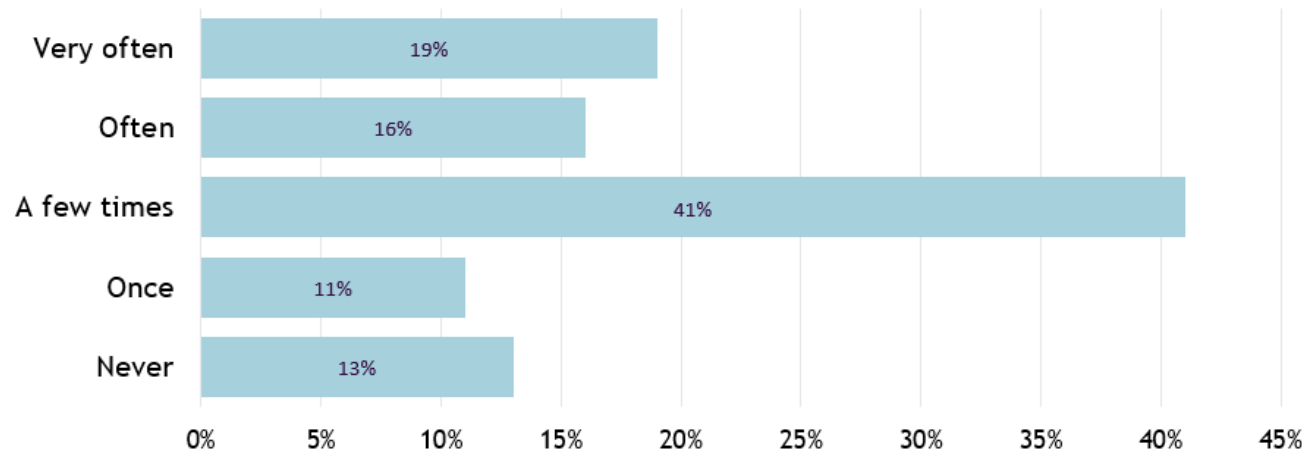

Figure 14 Frequency of feelings of burnout (875 responses)

Comments within the survey and focus groups recognised the pressures that the sector is under and how this impacts their work. This includes cultural change, professionalisation, inadequate systems, lack of resources, cutbacks in partner services leading to less capacity and a shift in responsibility to housing, recruitment challenges, and a high level of tenant need. These all have an impact on the workload and wellbeing of staff and their ability to meet the requirements of their role. Where their needs were met, young people felt better able to deliver for customers: "My needs are met as a colleague and my voice is heard, which helps us to make sure our residents' voices are similarly valued and heard." (survey respondent).

In a focus group, one participant perceived the passion but felt sometimes the wider environment worked against the sector, with a heavy reliance on housing for support as a 'fourth emergency service':

"I've never worked with more passionate people. I think people in housing really care about what they do, and they really believe in the difference that they make and they love what they do. It's just sometimes the environment they're trying to do it in works against them…a friend of mine describes it as a fourth emergency service, but we're the one that everyone comes to first."

Focus group participant

When asked to rank issues that their organisation should focus on in the next 12 months, the top ranked were:

1. Quality of homes

2. Safety of homes for residents

3. Development of new homes

4. Listening to residents

5. Staff recruitment and retention

There was a perceived difficulty of balancing tenant need with business decisions, particularly financial constraints and challenging operating conditions. Lack of resources to deliver ideas was described as 'disheartening':

"That's probably the most disheartening part of working in housing is that you might have the vision and you might have the desire to change things for the better, but ultimately the money's not there, and therefore we can't do much."

Focus group participant

Similar reflections were found in the survey, with this respondent talking about how meaningful their work was but 'structural challenges' can make it difficult to deliver the level of support for tenants that they wish to:

"Working as a Housing Officer has met many of my expectations in terms of meaningful engagement with tenants, solving real-world issues, and making a tangible impact on people's lives. However, I have also found that some structural challenges such as high caseloads and limited access to wider support services can sometimes make it difficult to deliver the level of support I aspire to."

Survey respondent

This was acknowledged as a reason that young professionals may be put-off housing. In a focus group discussion, one participant discussed the abuse that frontline officers can receive and the use of body cameras potentially meaning housing "isn't for everybody" (focus group). Abuse from customers was mentioned across the survey and focus groups, and reflects other research within the sector.[37] This risks young professionals not feeling safe at work. Some research participants spoke about the importance of celebrating the small wins in the face of all these challenges. It was the small wins that provided motivation.

We asked about the support on offer for wellbeing, with 60% (of 875 young professionals) 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with this support in their current role. Yet over a quarter gave a neutral answer to this question, indicating more can be done around wellbeing support. Some survey respondents specifically mentioned a lack of wellbeing support. One shared that they had taken sick leave for burnout but had then been told that if they took more, they would receive a warning:

> "[I] expected that there would be more mental health support for staff but there isn't any apart from generic wellbeing lines we can call. There is very little sick leave we can take without it reflecting badly on us. When I had to take 2 days sick leave because of burnout from the job, I was told I had no more I could take without receiving a warning."
>
> **Survey respondent**

Where wellbeing support is lacking, resilience may be more about informal support or personal skills:

> "I've been supported to fast track my career into senior roles but the support from a wellbeing and stress management perspective was lacking. It was reliant on my own resilience."
>
> **Survey respondent**

Conversely, another young person mentioned that having a clear sense of purpose, structure and direction at work had supported their mental health during times when they'd struggled:

> "The sector has given me a strong sense of purpose, structure, and direction, especially during times when I've struggled with my mental health. Being able to make a difference in people's lives through my work has not only been rewarding professionally, but also personally grounding and meaningful."
>
> **Survey respondent**

[37] https://management.insidehousing.co.uk/insight/exclusive-survey-reveals-huge-rise-in-assaults-on-housing-staff-93388

Discussion

The results of our research show broadly positive findings around job satisfaction and empowerment. Most young professionals report high satisfaction with their roles. Factors such as having meaningful work and a strong sense of purpose play a part in this, along with a supportive workplace culture, good teamwork, interactions with residents, variety, stretch opportunities, autonomy, and opportunities for career growth.

Pay satisfaction, at 46%, is slightly below wider workforce research, with CIPD finding that 52% of nearly 5,000 working adults in the UK are satisfied they get paid appropriately given the responsibilities and achievements in their job.[38] Results for young housing professionals may reflect lower pay for entry level positions, given lower satisfaction for those who have been in the sector for the shortest time, as well as structural issues around funding, particularly in England's supported housing sector.[39] Existing research indicates that higher pay leads to higher job satisfaction, though the relationship tails off at higher pay levels.[40] Research also indicates that when employees put in significant effort but receive little reward, they tend to experience higher emotional exhaustion and greater job dissatisfaction.[41]

With the cost-of-living continuing to affect young professionals, employers must continue to focus on financial wellbeing of staff. Employers should continue to review relative parity of pay and ways to recognise performance, whether through pay, incentives, or other policies and activities. This might include recognition in internal communications, manageable demands, career development, additional days off, personalised messages or gifts, experience-based rewards, regular feedback, or award ceremonies. While pay is just one aspect of a good job, it should be enough to ensure a decent living.

A survey of 8,278 young people aged 11-30 found 60% want fair pay and 59% want autonomy in how they work.[42] In the housing sector, nearly nine in ten young people are fully or mostly trusted to manage their role and responsibilities. Wider research indicates that employee empowerment in the workplace is linked to enhanced job performance, increased job satisfaction, and greater commitment to employers.[43] There could be more consistent empowerment of young housing professionals through addressing identified barriers around management style, communication and influence, progression, and culture.

[38] CIPD (2025) Good Work Index.

[39] https://www.housing.org.uk/resources/how-much-supported-housing-will-we-need-by-2040/

[40] Bryson, A., Forth, J. and Stokes, L. (2014) Does worker wellbeing affect workplace performance? Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and NIESR.

[41] Bryson, A., Forth, J. and Stokes, L. (2014) Does worker wellbeing affect workplace performance? Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and NIESR.

[42] Youth Employment UK (2025) 2025 Youth Voice Census.

[43] For example, Lee, A., Willis, S. and Wei Tian, A. (2018) Empowering leadership: A meta-analytic examination of incremental contribution, mediation, and moderation. Journal of Organizational Behaviour, Volume39, Issue3, March 2018, pp. 306-325

Finally, while almost two thirds of young professionals feel supported with their wellbeing, burnout is a concern. Wellbeing is important for organisations to invest in as it is linked to improved performance, reduced costs and greater innovation.[44] Organisations and managers can make use of existing initiatives to address these issues, such as Mind's Thriving at Work Standards[45] and the related Shine a Light commitment guide from the CIH 2020 Presidential Campaign.[46] Activities within these include developing a mental health plan, leading by example, training and supporting line managers, fostering a supportive culture by normalising mental health discussions, ensuring good work conditions (which links back to flexible working), and monitoring and evaluation through surveys and regular check-ins. The new CIH Presidential Campaign from Julie Haydon, Rooted in Resilience, should also be helpful here.[47]

Addressing causes of stress is particularly important, with most common sources being long working hours, job insecurity, conflicts between work and life, low job control, high work demands and lack of support.[48] Young housing professionals can support this by shaping and accessing available support and raising concerns with responsible colleagues.

Recommendations for job satisfaction and wellbeing

Recommendation 12

Organisations should review pay parity across job levels and consider how to acknowledge employees' contributions and provide incentives for their continued growth and development.

Recommendation 13

Housing organisations should engage in lobbying activities to address structural pressures within housing that affect their workforce. This includes joining CIH and National Housing Federation, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Community Housing Cymru or The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations practice groups and campaigns, engagement with Members of Parliament, and local councillors and partners. Young professionals should be active in this lobbying.

Recommendation 14

Employers should review their activity around wellbeing support, particular the presence of workplace triggers for mental ill health and meeting Mind's Thriving at Work standards and the CIH Shine a Light Work Commitment Guide for the housing sector. They should also actively involve themselves in the latest CIH Presidential Campaign, Rooted in Resilience.

Recommendation 15

Young professionals should shape and access wellbeing support and raise concerns with appropriate colleagues, such as managers, people or human resources teams, or wellbeing leads.

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[44] *What Works Wellbeing (2017) Why Invest in Employee Wellbeing?*

[45] *Mind (2018) How to implement the Thriving at Work mental health standards in your workplace.*

[46] *CIH (2020) Mental Health at Work Commitment guide for the housing sector.*

[47] *https://www.cih.org/knowledge-hub/support-and-wellbeing/rooted-in-resilience/*

[48] *Goh, J., Pfeffer, J. and Zenios, S. (2015) The Relationship Between Workplace Stressors and Mortality and Health Costs in the United States. Management Science 62(2):608-628.*

10. Career development

Learning and development

We found the housing sector offers different opportunities for learning and professional development. Employees have access to programmes, mentorship, and sessions to gain new skills and knowledge.

Our research shows that learning and development broadly comes from the following, with most training and development internal (as noted in the section on collaboration):

- Professional accreditation or training, including specific or technical requirements for certain roles.

- Internal training, often through e-learning platforms, such as on new policies or procedures, but also wider including interview skills.

- Specialist training for roles, such as on compound trauma.

- Structured training programmes, either internal or external, such as graduate schemes, apprenticeships and traineeships or management development programmes.

- Webinars.

- Internal or external mentorship.

- Informal learning from colleagues or others in the sector.

- Conferences.

- Informal or formal networks, such as CIH Futures and the Scotland Housing Network.

- In one case, a focus group participant's organisation encouraged staff to document all types of engagement with housing matters, such as listening to podcasts. If staff were able to demonstrate a commitment to extra research and learning outside of work, then they might be able to apply for a pay review.

Over a quarter of survey respondents (28%, n=801) had professional qualifications, almost all on top of existing qualifications. Focus group participants in England were hopeful that the professionalisation of the sector, through the Competence and Conduct Standard, would help improve upskilling of staff and managers.

There was a concern that managers do not always receive adequate training to manage, perhaps having been promoted to the position through length of service rather than development training or skills in management. Participants called for a greater focus on continual professional development and performance management (in terms of both contractors and staff). For one survey respondent not focusing on this in more junior roles had meant that they were now facing a challenging balance of responsibilities from work, family life, and qualifications:

> *"I am now in a senior management role (head of department) and having to face the reality of balancing my job, my home life and beginning studying to ensure I am suitably qualified for my role. I feel that if my previous employer had valued my personal development, opportunities to complete my Level 4 and 5 qualification would have come far sooner and when I was in a role with less responsibility."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Learning and development was important for developing and delivery of roles and career progression. It was also important for developing confidence. Many survey respondents called for more training and development, for example:

> *"I expected more training and development in the two and half years that I have already been here, there has been no real training or progression, or more opportunities because we are a small organisation. I wanted more hands-on work, more challenges to help me develop and grow."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

As alluded to in this comment, training and development seemed very dependent on organisation, role, and capacity to accommodate. This was also discussed in focus groups, with participants sharing how hard it can be to make time for training when in reactive or frontline roles, particularly when lone workers.

As discussed in the section on entry into the sector, we found several ways that someone can start working in housing. There is a risk that the entry route may affect the training, development and careers of young housing professionals. This is particularly the case when so many people come with no prior experience or understanding of housing. Young professionals were not always getting a clear introduction to social housing:

> *"When I first started in housing I would have expected to have some sort of training in how social housing is run. But everyone I speak to just fell into a housing career accidentally, with no prior training specifically in social housing (depending on the job role)."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Managers were also important here, as a source of learning, mentorship, and directing and carving time out for individuals to access opportunities. For example:

> *"I've been lucky to have some really supportive line managers along the way that have enabled [new roles and opportunities] when the overall organisation's approach to staff training and development has been lacked."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Managers were needed to "direct, to show what's on offer and try and influence to get people involved." (focus group). As included in the job satisfaction and wellbeing discussion, learning and development opportunities can be a good way to recognise and reward performance.

In terms of what further learning or training was needed, suggestions included:

- More focus on safeguarding and vulnerabilities: "all colleagues should have more training around safeguarding/reasonable adjustments/vulnerabilities, no matter what your role is." (survey respondent).

- More practical training to support tenant need: "I would like to see more up-to-date, practical training around ASB, compliance, mental health, substance misuse." (survey respondent)

- Greater use of role shadowing within organisations: "Say I'm interested in what a Patch Manager does, I could go shadow a colleague for six weeks, even just one day a week, to see if that path is for me." (focus group)

- Involving all roles in tenant-facing work: "I think everyone should do tenant-facing work at some point, there's perhaps not enough understanding across organisations that this is the bread-and-butter function of the sector." (survey respondent)

Fostering talent

When it comes to advancing their careers, young housing staff saw a mix of opportunity and frustration. The research indicates that the way the sector fosters talent is inconsistent. Many individuals have found significant opportunities for career growth and development within the housing sector. They have been able to progress from entry-level positions to senior roles, often with the support of their organisation, manager and additional qualifications:

> *"The sector is a great opportunity for young people to get into and build a career. The opportunities I've had in this sector across two different associations has exceeded my expectations in terms of career development and training opportunities."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Yet other young professionals we spoke to expressed frustration with the lack of clear career progression pathways and opportunities. They felt stuck in their current roles and found it difficult to move up the career ladder. It was not always clear to them how to progress, including how to move into different roles and what is required to move into those roles. In other words, young professionals might find it difficult to know how to advance their careers either laterally or upwards. One survey respondent said that the path to develop a career was "not widely shared", another that some staff seemed to have a "cheat sheet for how to get ahead". In the case of this young person, recognition of their work led to higher workload rather than progression:

> *"Personal politics and career progression are prioritised over outcomes for residents. I've frequently been given praise for my work but this often results in taking more on rather than any form of progression role. It feels like certain people have been given a cheat sheet for how to get ahead, when it should be about what we deliver for residents."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

There is clearly more organisations can do to foster career progression, with 43% of 824 people saying that their organisation only offers 'some' support and opportunities for career development and 17% answering 'very little', with the full breakdown in Figure 15.

43% of 824 people said their organisation only offers 'some' support and opportunities for career development.
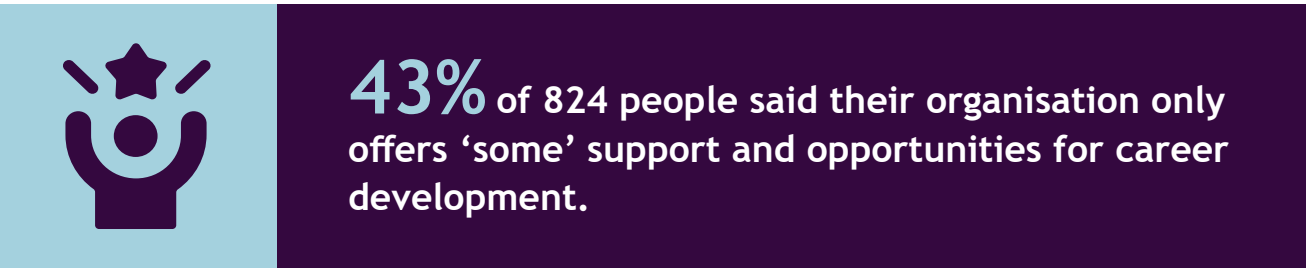
In focus groups, participants across the UK noted that senior positions in housing tend to be occupied by long-tenured staff, with few openings for newcomers. One young professional said that they "feel like opportunity isn't always there". After covering a superior's duties for months, they were passed over when the permanent promotion went to a returning former employee: "That wasn't great for me… there's not a lot of places to go… even when you've gained the experience to do it, you'd need to look elsewhere." The sentiment that you may have to move organisation to move up was echoed by others. A survey respondent's only comment on whether their role had met their expectations was that "Progression doesn't seem possible unless you leave." Another said that housing is "a graveyard for ambition," with training and development holding little value due to lack of opportunities to use new skills and progress: "The organisation is very accommodating of any training/course requests, but unfortunately there's not much use for them as the career progression opportunities aren't there." (survey respondent).

Do you feel your organisation offers enough support and opportunities for your career development (e.g. training, funding)?
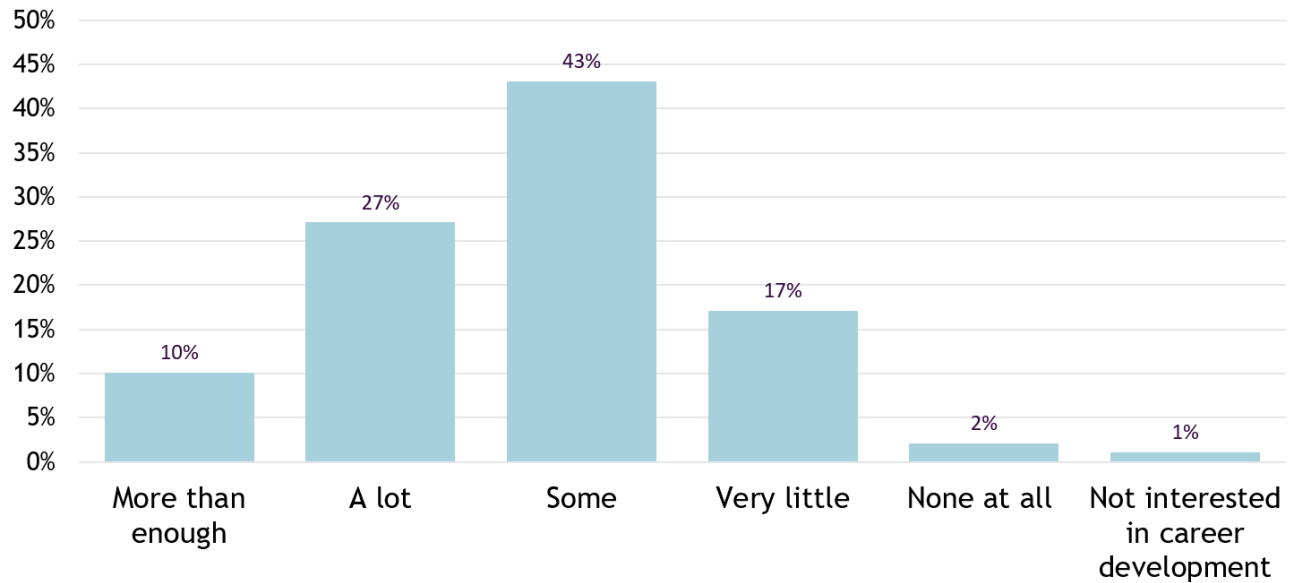

Figure 15 Support for career progression (824 responses)

The size of an organisation was perceived to affect the opportunities for progression, with smaller organisations having fewer roles and so limiting opportunities. In one focus group, a participant felt there were fewer opportunities in the sector due to budget cuts removing positions. Regional disparities may also exist, as alluded to in the discussion on working arrangements and also in the tenure of housing stock in countries or areas, which may limit opportunities to progress.

Young professionals perceive an element of nepotism in recruitment. There was a perception in focus groups that roles are "designed" for certain people; "they've got someone in mind for [a role] when they're writing the job description." Participants spoke of personal relationships influencing hiring decisions, where "friends promote friends". In other words, career development may depend on who you know and not what you know, with people early in their career or without a network most adversely affected by this. Hiring from existing networks and not getting new talent was felt to exclude young people. In one focus group, they said this created a "a walled garden and as young professionals, we're outsiders, trying to get into this garden".

Some said they don't get the support from their managers to progress. For example, this young professional is actively trying to progress but hasn't found management support to do so:

"Expected encouragement in career progression which has not happened, despite several meetings with management and chase up emails, in order to apply for a degree to assist in my existing role but to develop and progress."

Survey respondent

Our survey found over a third of young professionals say their managers 'always' take an active interest in their career ambitions (36% of 823 people who responded). Just under a quarter (24%) said this happens 'most of the time', but 15% said their managers 'rarely' or 'never' take an active interest in their career ambitions. This indicates the variability of support and mentorship for young housing professionals.

Focus groups discussed the importance of managers and more experienced staff playing an active role in young people's career progression, through recommending courses, opportunities, or sharing their knowledge and experience, as well as building confidence. Young staff who are new to the sector will not always know what is out there and need guidance and input from those with more experience. There was acknowledgement that the demands on managers sometimes means time isn't available to achieve this: "Often the will is there, but the time isn't. You're firefighting daily, so training the newbie falls by the wayside" (focus group). In the survey and focus groups, poor management style was attributed to loss of confidence and disengagement.

Certain roles were also considered to give better career progression than others. For example, corporate roles could provide opportunities to work across different services, giving a "unique perspective". Other roles might restrict access to progression. This could be because of the structure of the team (e.g. team leaders in some teams and not others), a perception of organisational neglect, or not gaining the core skills needed to rise up the ranks. For example, this young professional said senior roles needed finance experience, which was difficult to get in housing management:

> *"With the way the sector is going, finance has a massive part to play. If you come from a Housing management background you are restricted on progression due to this unless you study outside of work. There is the CIH qualification, but I don't feel it provides confidence to employers about finance skills."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Some of those who took part in our research praised how much flexibility there is to move across roles in an organisation. This is clearly not consistent, however, given the difficulties others discussed.

Where structured programmes, such as traineeships, apprenticeships, and graduate schemes, worked well they offered a deeper understanding of the breadth of roles within housing and often the opportunity to study, network and collaborate alongside roles, opening up opportunities for young workers:

> *"There was a traineeship being advertised, which gave me a great gateway into housing, to experience in lots of different roles and a chance to do some qualifications, spend time with the likes of the CIH… that's how I ended up where I am."*
>
> **Focus group participant**

This may not be the case for hires outside of such schemes:

> *"My role was not advertised as lone-working but I lone-work more often than not. I feel more like a service manager and don't have much guidance on how to run the service…I do feel like I'm on my own a lot which I never expected, especially as this was my first role out of university."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Temporary staff who completed the survey were concerned about job security and knowing whether there was a job at the end of the contract. This affected engagement and investment in roles.

Finally, one focus group participant had the following advice for young professionals who were not getting what they wanted from their work:

> *"Just be yourself and you will find people who like that, agree with that, respect that, give you space to be that. And if you're not getting that, then nine times out of 10 it's the place, not you."*
>
> **Focus group participant**

A framework of behaviours

Reflecting on how some young professionals feel stuck in their career and are not clear on how they can progress, we would like to share behaviours that may help young people, and managers, as they navigate their careers and workplaces. These are based on the six key principles of Kanter's management theory.[49] The six behaviours that make up this framework are:

1. Show up - be present in meetings and at any offices to build relationships and build confidence to share ideas.

2. Speak up - share information and knowledge and encourage transparency, be confident in asking questions and sharing ideas.

3. Look up - carve time for reflection and wider strategic projects that will address immediate role demands.

4. Team up - build collaboration within and across teams and organisations.

5. Never give up - be persistent and resilient in the face of adversity and challenges.

6. Lift others up - provide feedback, support and training, and access this for yourself.

Future careers in housing

Nearly seven out of ten people who responded to the survey see their future career in housing (24% of 825 'definitely yes' and 45% 'probably yes') – see Figure 16. A similar ratio are 'likely' (47% of 825 responses) or 'very likely' (22%) to recommend a career in housing to others. This suggests that there is a pipeline of future leaders, and that many people's experiences of working in housing are positive enough to recommend it to others. Yet, with one fifth of respondents unsure whether their future career is in housing and whether they would recommend a career in housing to others, there are clearly potential improvements needed for some young professionals working in the sector.

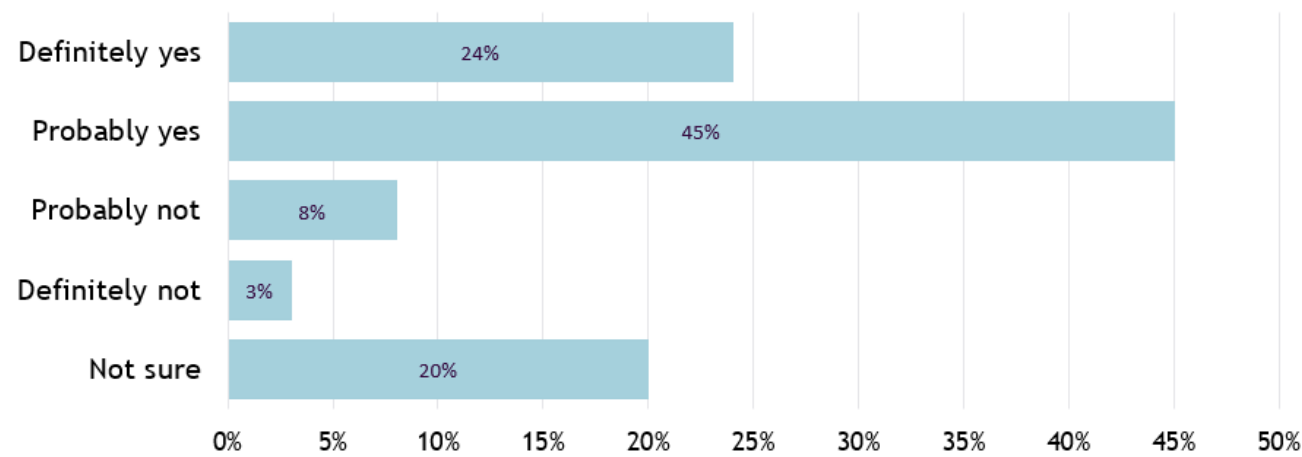**Do you see your future career in the housing sector?**

Figure 16 Views of future career in housing (825 responses)

Survey responses on expectations for working in housing and the extent people's roles so far have met or not met any expectations provides more insight here, though it is important to stress that this question was about expectations rather than future careers. Where people said they definitely or probably didn't see a future career in housing, comments show that these young professionals may experience the following:

- Their job advert and description do not match the reality of their work. This might mean a greater or lesser level of responsibility, a different type of work, or different working arrangements.

- They are disappointed around career progression.

- Their workload being too high, uneven or more reactive than anticipated.

- Their pay not being commensurate with the level of responsibility and complexity of their role, or inconsistent across the organisation.

- They perceive a poor culture, including not listening to or acting on feedback from staff and poor outcomes for residents.

- For some, a feeling that things were getting worse, such as staff leaving, greater workload, more challenging external environment or shifting priorities.

This remains a small proportion of the survey sample, however, with the majority seeing their future career in housing:

> *"I love working in housing, I get to make a big difference to residents within my local communities. Housing is full on and challenging but I have always wanted to work in the sector, and I want to continue working in the sector for as long as I can."*
>
> **Survey respondent**

Discussion

Training is a key feature of good quality work. In the UK, however, there is a reliance on individuals investing in their own skills.[50] Training provided by employers has been shown to have long-term positive effects on wage growth and career progression, as well as shorter term boosts to paid and unpaid overtime and job satisfaction.[51] There is strong evidence that learning typically benefits wellbeing, by fostering social connections, helping people gain new skills, and improving confidence and self-esteem.[52] Training is estimated to provide a positive effect on wellbeing similar to receiving a 1% pay raise.[53]

All this underlies the importance of training and development led by employers, not only for staff but also for operational effectiveness. In addition to the training needs identified by research participants, broader evidence highlights the benefits of training in resilience, leadership, and empathy, as well as the importance of assessing and responding to staff learning agility.[54] Young professionals should be enabled to access opportunities and should feedback on any learning and development to make improvements.

Our research found that many individuals have found significant opportunities for career growth and development within the housing sector. They have been able to progress from entry-level positions to more senior roles. Others feel frustrated with their progress, with a lack of opportunities or awareness of how to develop their career.

[50] *Keep E, James SF (2012) Are skills the answer to bad jobs? Incentives to learn at the bottom end of the labour market. In: Warhurst C, Carre F, Findlay P, et al. (eds) Are Bad Jobs Inevitable? Trends, Determinants and Responses to Job Quality in the Twenty-First Century. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 240-254.*
[51] *Ullah, A. (2025) Labor Outcomes After Employer-Provided Training: Evidence from the Understanding Society Survey. Bulletin of Economic Research, Volume77, Issue2 April 2025, pp. 254-278*
[52] *Fitzhugh, H. and Daniels, K. (2025) A rapid review of reviews on the nature of the relationship between learning and development and employee engagement, wellbeing, attraction and retention. Government Skills and University of East Anglia.*
[53] *Tregaskis, O., & Nandi, A. (2023). Training and life satisfaction: a disrupted pathway to better work. Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research, 29(3), 387-404.*
[54] *Fitzhugh, H. and Daniels, K. (2025) A rapid review of reviews on the nature of the relationship between learning and development and employee engagement, wellbeing, attraction and retention. Government Skills and University of East Anglia.*

A lack of clear career pathways was also identified in research to support the CIH Presidential Campaign in 2020. Just as housing can be a hidden career, it can feel opportunities within it are also hidden. More information is needed on different roles within housing, skills and experience needed for these roles, and routes to develop a career.

We heard about the supportive role of managers in this research. Studies show that employees with positive views of their manager are more likely to say they perform effectively, less likely to say work has a negative effect on their health, and have a lower intention to quit. From our research, managers can support young professionals by treating them as equals, actively seeking their feedback and listening to their views, celebrating their wins, teaching them about the sector, asking them about their career aspirations and giving growth opportunities and training to help them achieve aspirations. There is a risk, however, that managers are not being upskilled or given sufficient capacity to manage effectively. This needs to be addressed to ensure consistency in the support young professionals receive, both within organisations and across the sector.

It is encouraging to hear that young professionals are seeking career advancement within the sector and envision long-term futures in housing. The sector shares challenges related to opportunities for progression with other industries; in a survey of 5,000 employees, CIPD found that 34% don't have career advancement opportunities. CIPD research with young professionals in 2021 identified barriers to career progression as poor quality line management, lack of effective training programmes and poor access to graduate programmes. Employers can improve consistency around the quality of workplace experience across roles and entry routes to overcome these barriers.

Throughout this report, we highlight a lack of consistency of experience of working in housing. This could be networking, collaboration, learning and development, voice and influence, flexible working, and/or career opportunities. These differences risk reinforcing structural bias and inequality. The research suggests that where young people's values and work aspirations are not matched by their employer, they may be able to find more suitable alternatives within the sector. The forthcoming Good Employer Guide from Housing Today should help with identifying housing associations with good employment initiatives. The sector needs greater consistency in workplace experience to improve staff retention and performance and ensure all young professionals have the same opportunities to progress in their housing career.

[55] *Grand Union, De Montford University Leicester, and CIH (2020) Wellbeing at Work in Housing: Executive Summary.*
[56] *https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/goodwork/*
[57] *CIPD (2025) Good Work Index.*
[58] *Crowley, L. (2021) Youth employment in the UK 2021. CIPD.*
[59] *Housing Today (2025) Housing Today's first ever Good Employer Guide opens for entries.*

Recommendations for career development

Recommendation 16

Building on the CHOOSE Housing campaign, CIH should start a programme on what good work in housing looks like, to share learning and experience. This should bring together personnel, learning and development and wellbeing experts as well as different operational areas and job roles to share good practice, outline job descriptions, and case studies of career progression.

Recommendation 17

Employers should ensure consistent inductions, training and development, management, policies and structured career development for all roles and entry routes to help young staff realise career pathways and the skills needed to get there. Ensuring greater consistency and standardisation will minimise bias and inequalities.

Recommendation 18

The role of supportive line managers is crucial to career progression. Organisations should upskill managers and protect capacity to ensure they can provide consistent and effective management, mentorship and support to their teams, enabling young workers to feel more empowered, engaged and confident in their roles. This includes executives and directors leading by example.

Recommendation 19

Linked to the recommendation for CIH to start a programme on what good work in housing looks like (recommendation 16), CIH Futures could start a programme to recognise supportive managers as a way of celebrating good practice. This would include young staff nominating managers who help them in their career.

Recommendation 20

Managers and organisations should provide opportunities and overcome barriers for young professionals to develop new skills. This is essential for meeting role demands and staying motivated and engaged. This can include access to training, mentorship, shadowing and opportunities to take on new and challenging projects. Leaders and managers should lead by example to create a culture of learning.

Recommendation 21

Young professionals should engage with development opportunities and provide feedback on learning and development to ensure impact and relevance. They should seek out social learning (group-based or interactive training) to build networks and collaboration.

11. Our findings on good work in housing

Our research has shown the passion that many young professionals have for working in housing. Yet passion will only take people so far. Without a framework of good work, there is a risk that young professionals will not stay in the sector.

Below we summarise what our research says about whether the housing sector provides good work. Overall, while many features of a 'good job' are present in the housing sector, there remain notable gaps that could be addressed to better fulfil the criteria of good work, particularly around career development, employee voice, and managing workloads.

Dimension	Areas Included	Key Findings from Report
1. Pay and benefits	Subjective feelings regarding pay, employer pension contributions, and other employee benefits	Pay fairly reflects roles and responsibilities for 46% of young professionals.
2. Contracts	Contract type, underemployment, and job security	Underemployment may be an issue with 38% saying they would like more responsibility in their role, though this was not discussed by participants. Those on temporary contracts lacked job security.
3. Work-life balance	Overwork, commuting time, how much work encroaches on personal life and vice versa, and HR provision for flexible working	Younger staff value flexible working practice but noted some inconsistencies in approaches across organisations. Some reported working long hours.
4. Job design and the nature of work	Workload or work intensity, autonomy or how empowered people are in their jobs, how well resourced they are to carry out their work, job complexity and how well this matches the person's skills and qualifications, how meaningful people find their work, and development opportunities provided	Young professionals value the opportunity to make a difference and find housing provides meaningful work and a shared sense of purpose. Our research finds autonomy and variety in housing work, though autonomy varies. Job descriptions do not always match reality and there are external and internal pressures affecting workload. Learning and development generally available though there are some barriers, particularly in customer-facing roles. Access to career support is varied.

Dimension	Areas Included	Key Findings from Report
5. Relationships at work	Social support and cohesion, the quality of relationships at work, psychological safety, and the quality of people management	Young professionals value collaboration in housing. They are generally people-focused and love working alongside colleagues and tenants. Many have supportive managers, but more upskilling of managers may be required to deliver consistent support. There are some risks to safety, particularly around employers not taking action on abusive customers and experiences of lone workers.
6. Employee voice	Channels and opportunities for feeding views to one's employer and managers' openness to employee views	The ability for young voices to influence change varies, influenced by leadership, bureaucracy, capacity and openness to innovation. In some cases, young workers are underrepresented in their organisation, which affects strength of voice.
7. Health and wellbeing	Positive and negative impacts of work on physical and mental health, often considered as an outcome of job quality	There are indications of burnout, with over a third feeling burnout often or very often in the last 12 months. 60% of young professionals were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with wellbeing support in their current role. Meaningful work and development opportunities support positive wellbeing.

12. Conclusion

Young professionals speak very highly of housing, valuing the social purpose within the sector. They talk about the diversity of roles and how each of these roles contributes to the wider purpose of housing, to make a difference to those who need a home. Nearly nine in ten young professionals say that having a job that helps people or make a positive difference is extremely or very important to them: working in housing is their opportunity to make a difference.

Young professionals talked of "falling" into housing, a career of chance and not choice. Housing as a "hidden" career means that the sector is not only missing out on talent, but that young people are missing out on a rewarding career. Research shows teenagers aspire to jobs that make them feel good about what they do. The sector is well placed to meet these aspirations for future work. Housing employers should be actively engaging with local education establishments and youth employment initiatives to ensure young people can access opportunities in housing.

While most remain motivated, young professionals are feeling the strain within their roles. Employers should consider the support in place for younger staff, both formally and informally, to ensure young professionals have the resilience to meet the needs of their roles.

Too often young professionals feel their ideas are dismissed or unheard. Given their desire to make a difference, this was frustrating for young workers. More emphasis should be placed by managers and organisations to listen to young staff, treat them as equals and ensure that any feedback is reflected and acted upon. This includes addressing capacity and resourcing issues to enable strategic consideration of issues that affect day-to-day demands.

Experiences of career progression, professional and personal development, inclusion, and influence are inconsistent. There are many positive stories here, yet it appears the existing skills of the young professional, their entry route, or the luck of their manager, role or organisation will determine opportunities and experiences. This lack of consistency is holding the sector back from making best use of talent and ensuring young people are inspired by a future career in housing.

Young professionals within housing should consider the range of different experiences across the sector. They should consider what they want from a career and what opportunities might be available for them within and outside an organisation. There are many organisations within the sector that offer meaningful work, variety, good career progression, flexible working, good networking, and learning and development. If young people want this from a career, they should seek out these organisations and let employers know this is what they want.

Young housing professionals remain strongly committed to the sector and its customers. They want to carry the sector forward and ask that, to do so, the sector actively lifts them up. For the sector, supporting young housing professionals is an investment in the future of housing. The legacy of leaders is who follows in their footsteps.

13. Appendix A - Comparing responses to population

The closest to reliable data on the characteristics of young housing professionals is the workforce data submitted to the NHF by its members, to monitor diversity of the housing association workforce.[60] This data is limited to England and housing associations who are members of the NHF and covers characteristics for all ages. CIH members have also completed an EDI census,[61] though the sample is smaller than the NHF's data (1,491 members completed the survey compared to 99,363 people included in the NHF workforce data).

Below we explore the characteristics of those who answered our survey and explore how representative they may be of different characteristics when compared to NHF, CIH and Census data.

Age

Based on the NHF workforce diversity data from 177 housing associations in 2023, the age of our survey respondents appears to be broadly reflective of the age profile for what is known about the housing association workforce in England (see Figure 17).

Age of survey respondents compared to age of housing association workforce from NHF data
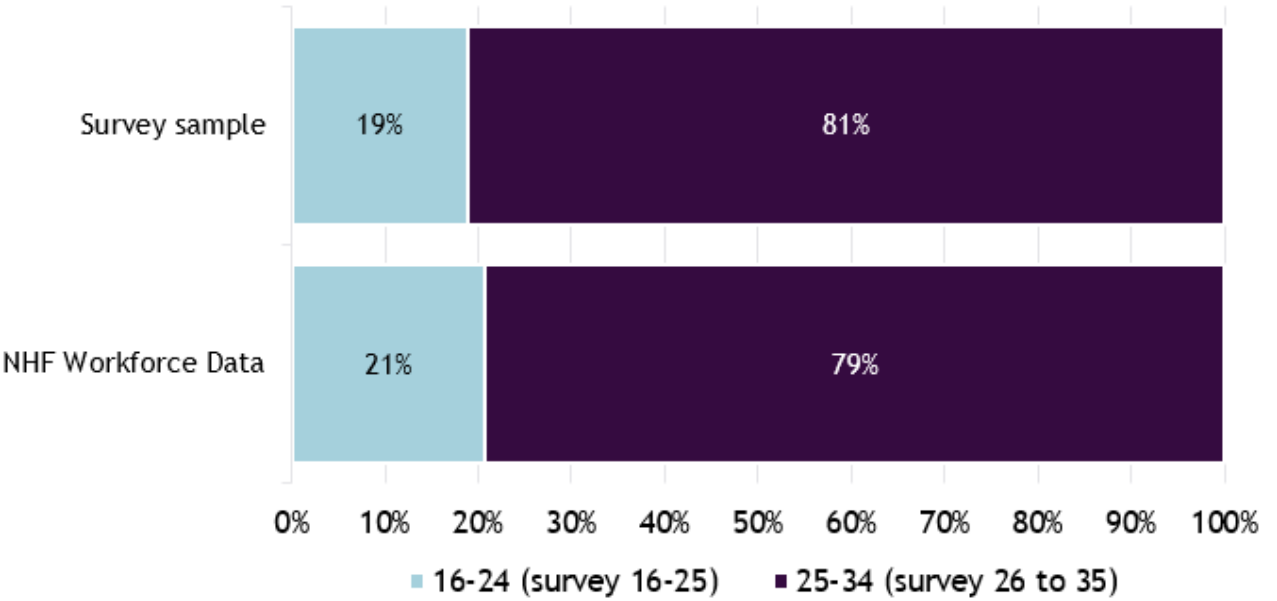

Figure 17 Age of respondent compared to NHF Workforce Data Source: NHF, How diverse is England's housing association workforce in 2023?

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[60] https://www.housing.org.uk/resources/how-diverse-is-englands-housing-association-workforce-in-2023/
[61] https://www.cih.org/media/mgtb0jjd/edi-census-result-report-october-2024.pdf

Country

Around 83% of respondents worked in England, proportionate to the UK population. We had proportionately fewer responses from Scotland when compared to the UK population (4% of respondents worked in Scotland compared to 8% of the UK population being in Scotland), a higher proportion from Wales (10% compared to 5%) and a proportionate response from Northern Ireland (3%).[62]

Organisation

Across the UK, 60% of social housing is owned by a housing association, but this varies by country with a greater proportion of social housing held by local authorities in Scotland (51%) and Northern Ireland (58% of social stock is held by the non-departmental government body, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive). We can infer from this that our survey is likely to be over representative of housing association employees for both England and Scotland - Table 2 and Figure 18 provide more detail.

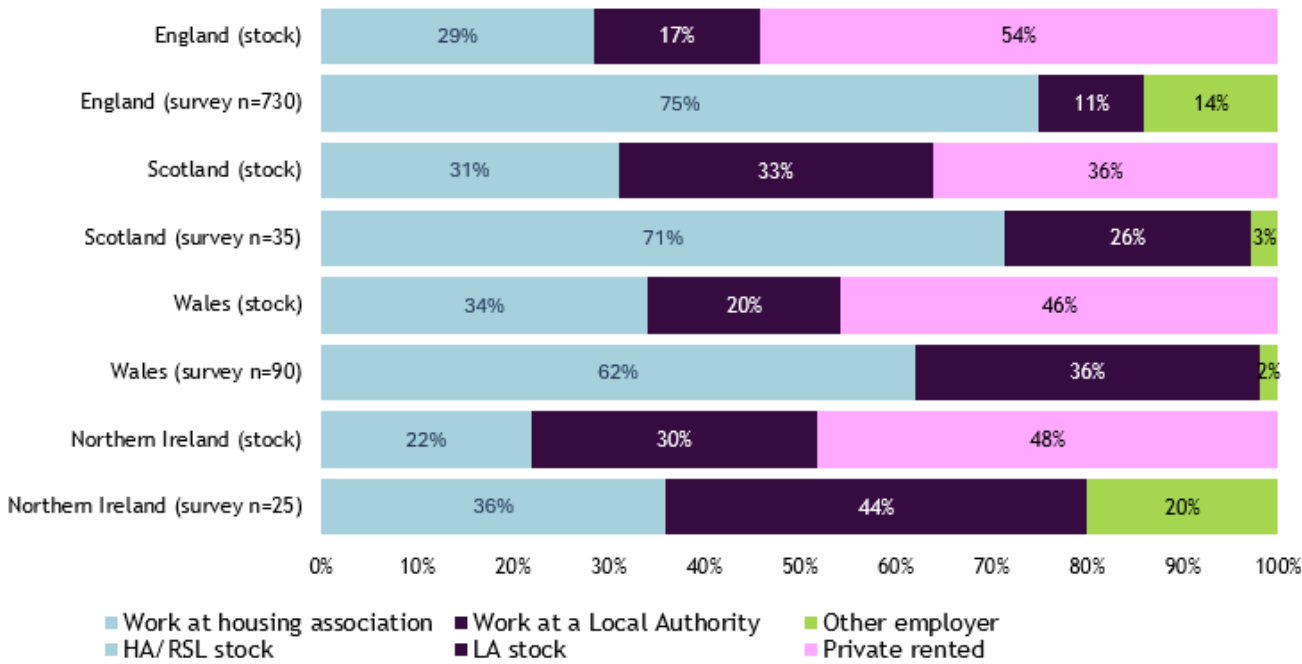**Social and private rented stock in England and survey respondent area of work and employer**

Figure 18 Stock data showing tenure of rented housing as percentage of rented stock and employer of survey respondent by country. Sources as Table 2. Note that 28% of Northern Ireland respondents work for a government organisation, including a non-departmental public body but have been counted as working for a local authority due to the history of social housing stock ownership in Northern Ireland.

Table 2 Social and private rented stock by country as at 31 March 2024 (unless otherwise stated)

Nation	Housing association/ RSL stock	Local authority stock	Total social housing stock	Private rented stock	Source
England	2,602,251 (62%)	1,574,098 (38%)	4,176,349	4,949,614	Regulator of Social Housing and MHCLG
Scotland	307,553 (49%)	325,477 (51%)	633,030	358,000 (estimated for March 2023)	Scottish Housing Regulator and Scottish Government
Wales	149,800 (63%)	88,900 (37%)	241,669	200,700	StatsWales
Northern Ireland	60,838 (42%)	82,869 (1 February 2024) (58%)	143,707	133,758	NIHE, NIFHA, and DfC
UK	3,120,442 (60% of social stock)	2,071,344 (40% of social stock)	5,191,786 (48% of rented stock)	5,642,072 (52% of rented stock)	

Sex and gender identity

Among the 795 respondents who answered, 70% identified as female and 29% identified as male, which is not representative compared to the general population, but may reflect the gender identity of the young housing workforce. Gender representation varies significantly across industries. In official statistics, housing is largely classified as health and social work, which is a female-dominated industry with females making up 77% of this workforce in the UK. In contrast, males make up 83% of the UK construction workforce.[63]

Annual population survey data on occupation and sex from 2024/25 indicates that 60% of 486,700 housing jobs in the United Kingdom were occupied by females, with some variation by type of role and country. It is more likely that people working in a housing association or as a housing officer identify as female compared to property, housing and estate managers – see Figure 19. NHF workforce data also indicates a slightly greater proportion of females across all ages within the workforce (55%) compared to the local population aged 16 and over in participating housing association areas (52%).

In total, 1.25% of respondents identified as non-conforming or other gender expressions. Census 2021 data for England and Wales shows that 1.00% of individuals aged 16-24 may identify as a different gender from their sex assigned at birth, while Census 2022 data for Scotland reports that 0.44% of people aged 16 and over were trans or had a trans history, nearly half of whom were aged 16-24. These figures suggest alignment between the survey response and national data.

Ethnicity

While we do not know the ethnicity of young housing professionals, when compared with NHF workforce data and the population of England and Wales, our survey appears to be over representative of young people who identify as white.

In total, 87.4% of our survey respondents identified as white compared to 81.4% of the housing association workforce and 77.3% of the population of England and Wales aged 16 to 35. Over representation of those who identify as white compared to the population is also seen in the NHF workforce data and CIH EDI census. Our survey does not have as many respondents who identify as black (2.9% of people who answered our survey identified as such) compared to both the English housing association workforce (9.5%) and population of England and Wales (4.8%). It is under representative of people who identify as Asian or Asian British (5.5%) compared to population, though representative when compared to NHF workforce data and also CIH EDI Census of their membership (which found half as many individuals from an Asian or Asian British population in their English membership as in the population of England). The survey response appears to be representative of workforce and population for mixed, multiple and other ethnic groups. Figure 20 shows the breakdown between the population of England and Wales aged 16 to 35 at the time of the 2021 Census, England's housing association workforce, and the survey sample.
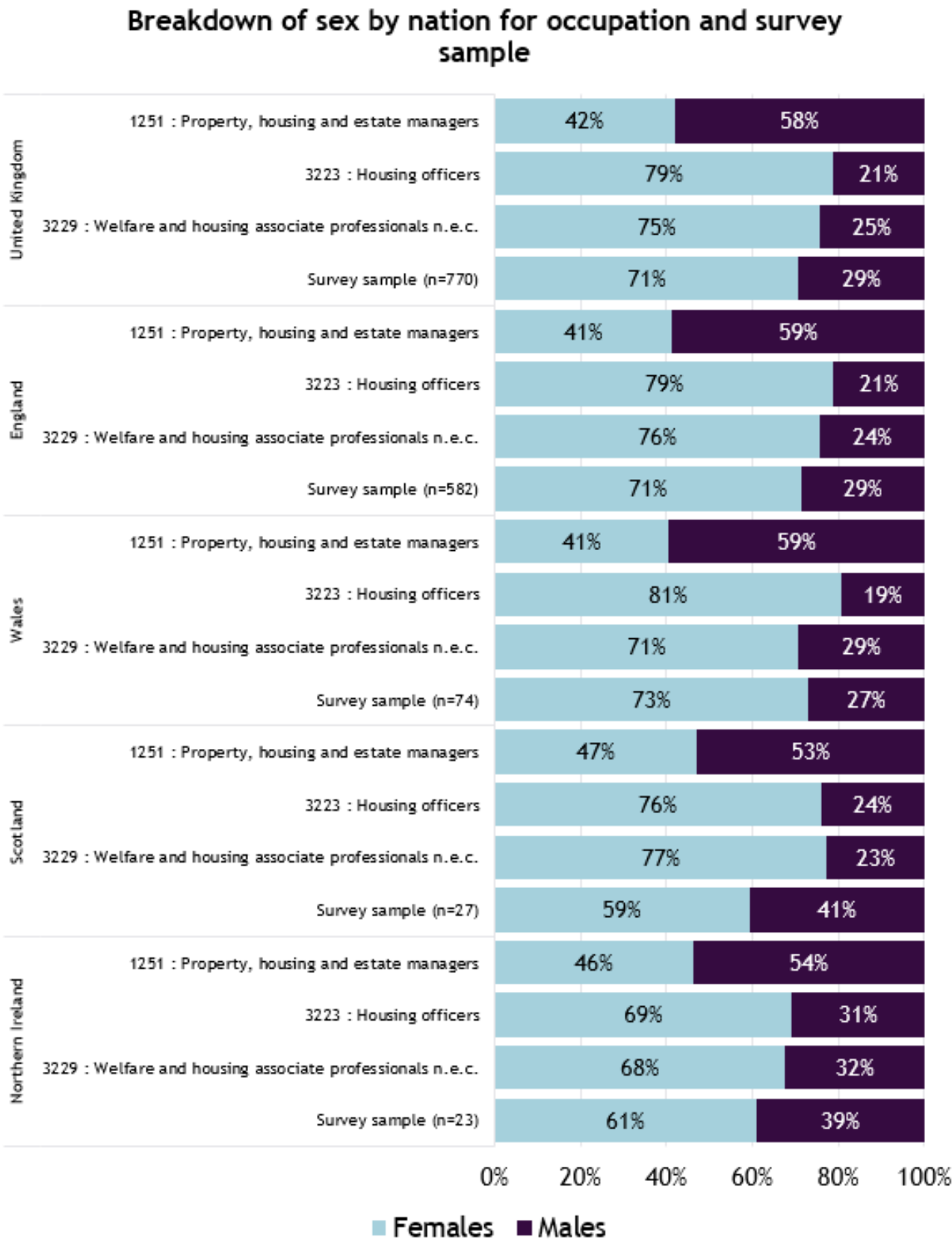

Figure 19 Housing occupations by country and sex, with proportion compared to total survey sample. APS data only available for female and male and no other gender expressions. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding. Source: Annual Population Survey data, Apr 2024-Mar 2025 from Nomis. n.e.c. = not elsewhere classified.

Ethnicity of survey respondent compared to NHF workforce and 16-35 population of England and Wales

	England and Wales (population aged 16-35)	NHF Workforce	Survey (n=787)
■White	77.3%	81.4%	87.4%
■Asian/Asian British	11.5%	5.4%	5.5%
■Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	3.7%	2.5%	3.7%
■Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	4.8%	9.5%	2.9%
■Other ethnic group	2.6%	1.3%	2.2%

■ White   ■ Asian/Asian British
■ Mixed or multiple ethnic groups   ■ Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
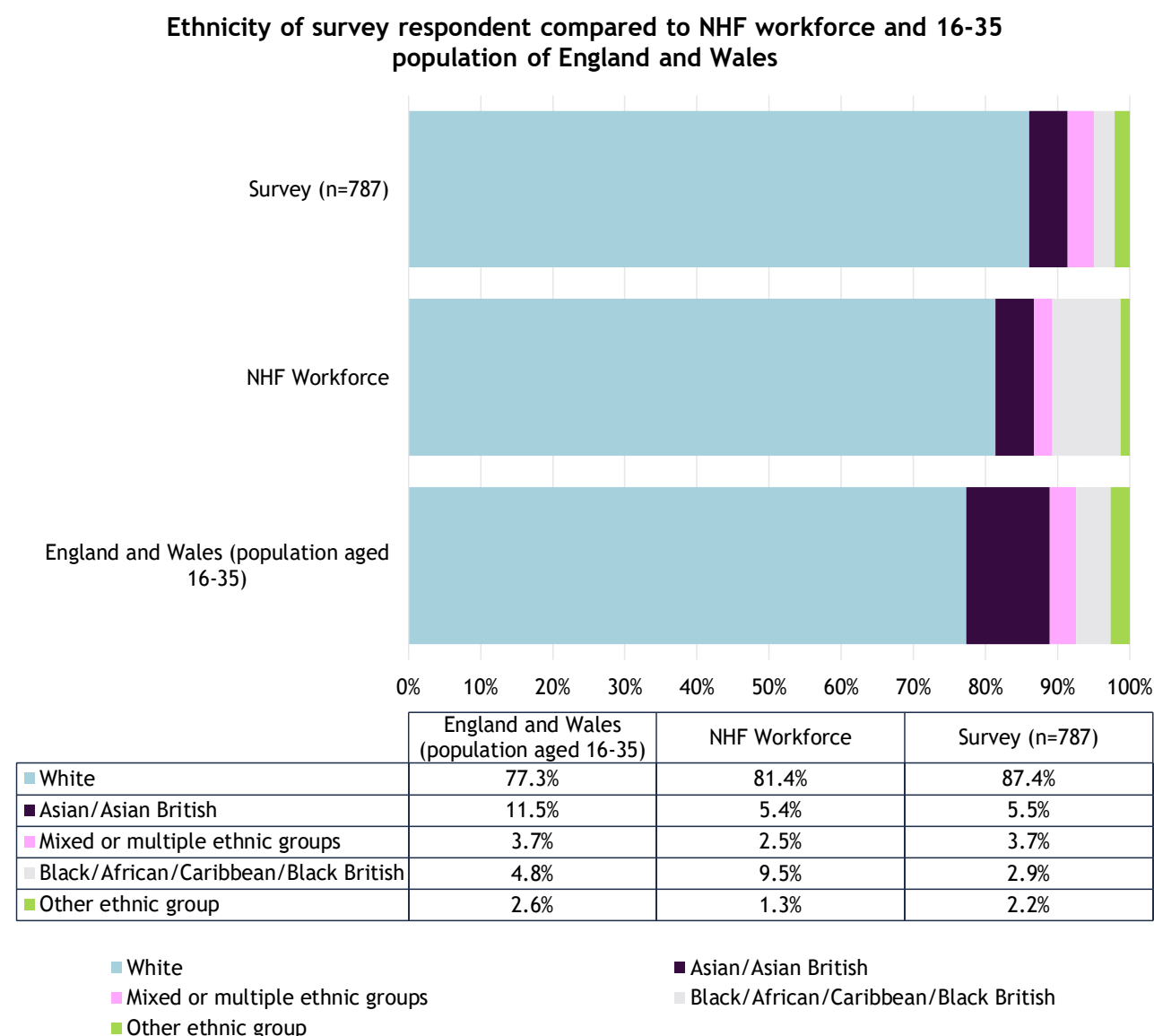■ Other ethnic group

Figure 20 Identified ethnic group of survey sample compared to workforce data and population. Sources: NHF EDI Workforce Survey 2023 and Census 2021.

Sexual orientation

When it comes to sexual orientation, those who responded to the survey are more likely to identify as bisexual or gay or lesbian compared to both the NHF workforce data and the similar aged population of England and Wales. This may be reflective of a more diverse young professional workforce, or it may mean we are not representative of straight or heterosexual young housing professionals. Figure 21 gives more detail.

Sexual orientation of our survey sample compared to NHF Workforce and population of England and Wales. Note the axis starts at 75%.

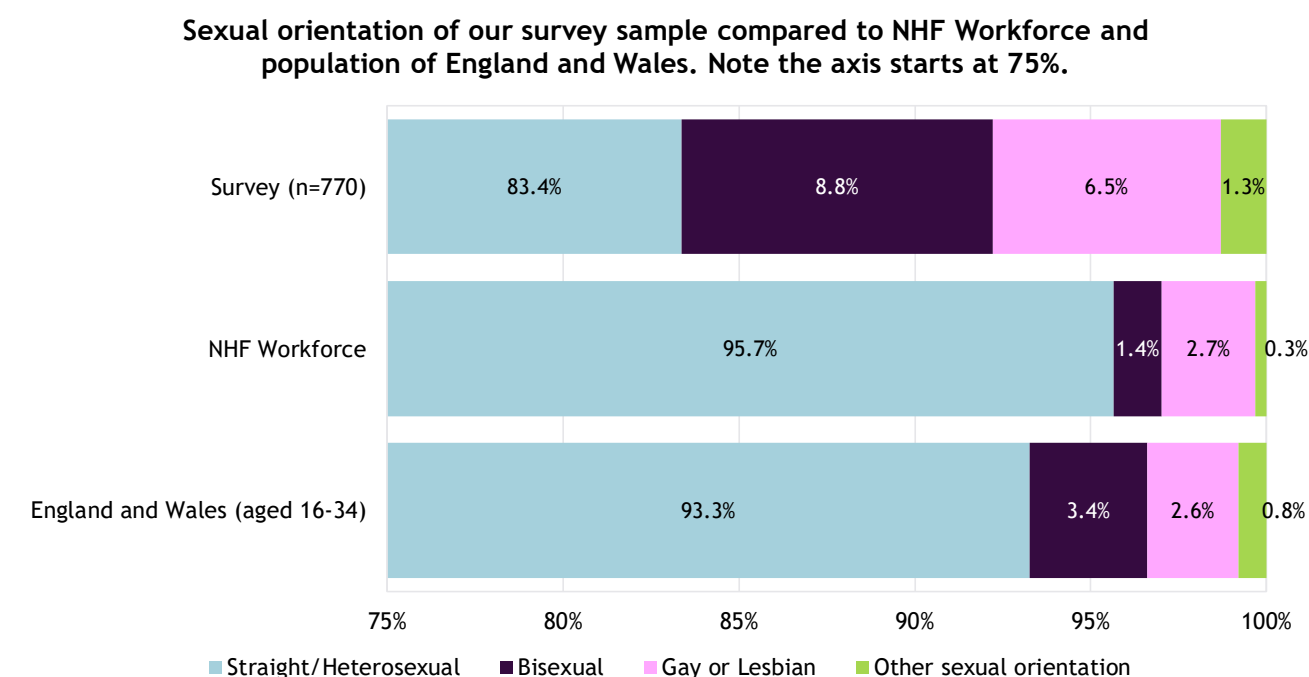■ Straight/Heterosexual   ■ Bisexual   ■ Gay or Lesbian   ■ Other sexual orientation

Figure 21 Sexual orientation identified by respondent (805 responses), NHF workforce data (71,394 people) and Census 2021 population of England and Wales aged 16-34 years.

Disability

A significant minority (17.3%) of those who responded to the survey considered themselves to have a disability.[64] This is higher than NHF data (8.8%), CIH Census data for 2024 (13.3%) and England and Wales Census 2021 data for ages 15-34 (11.8%) – see Figure 22. It may be that the young housing workforce is more likely to have a disability than the population, or it could be that our survey is over representative of those who consider themselves to have a disability.

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[64] *Defined in the survey question as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on ability to do normal daily activities.*

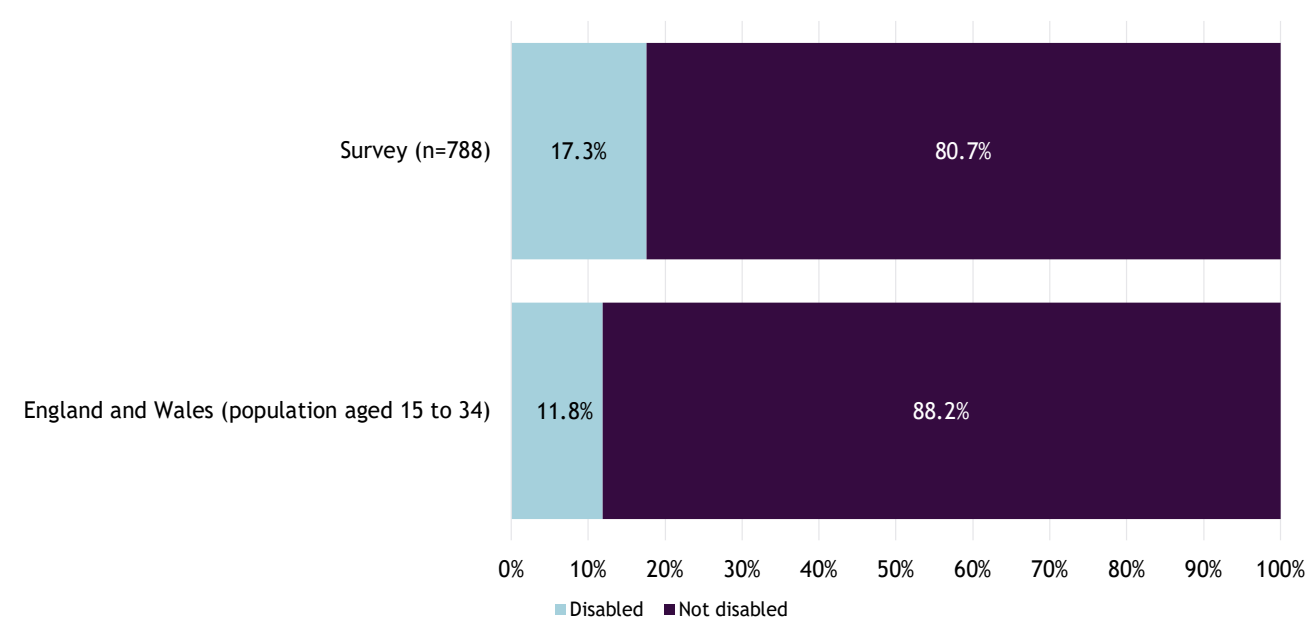## Whether respondent considered themselves to have a disability, compared to disability for population

Figure 22 Whether respondent considered themselves to have a disability (defined as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities) (818 responses) compared to population of England and Wales aged 15 to 34 years at the time of the Census 2021.

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