



## FINDING THE WAY

employability and the prevention and alleviation of homelessness

### Executive summary

This report is part of SHEN's task of identifying and promoting "what works" in providing people at risk of homelessness with skills for sustainable employment. It reviews the way in which employability services are being developed for and delivered to people facing homelessness in Scotland. These developments are discussed in the context of emerging policy in Scotland and across the UK.

The report reflects policy and practice developed in 2006/7, including the delivery of employability initiatives in local authority homelessness strategies. Links are made to Scottish Government policy, such as the Government Economic Strategy discussion, Skills for Scotland, and Workforce Plus. UK policy on welfare reform and the skills agenda also frame the discussion.

Homelessness strategies submitted to the Scottish Executive by April 2006 are the starting-point for this report, showing how employability is part of the prevention and alleviation of homelessness strategy in most local authorities. However, more work needs to be done to make well-designed employability programmes available to all people at risk of homelessness.

The report recommends a mix of specialist and generic employability services, including Jobcentre Plus, which are flexible enough to adapt to the needs and challenges facing those at risk of homelessness. Flexibility across geographical boundaries and a partnership approach which recognises the expertise of the voluntary sector are most likely to provide a range of flexible services.

Structural issues also play a part in making employment an effective route out of homelessness. Homelessness strategies, Economic Development Forums and Community Planning Partnerships all need to address these issues. More job opportunities in the public sector, engagement with employers and training which responds to local employers' needs, will support people at risk of homelessness in finding a sustainable job.

Recommendations on welfare reform and the role of employability in homelessness strategies and policy are outlined overleaf. SHEN believes that implementing these recommendations will help people find a way to make employment a sustainable route out of homelessness.

Full copies of the report can be obtained from the address below or on our website [www.shen-scotland.org](http://www.shen-scotland.org)

## Recommendations on welfare reform

- The benefits system should encourage and support vulnerable claimants to find a way into the in job market
- Early interventions to tackle employability issues should be encouraged
- Participation in employability training should not be linked to benefits sanctions
- Homelessness should be a specific target for employment services, enabling Jobcentre Plus to support local policies for the prevention and alleviation of homelessness.
- Benefits should be secure and adequate to support those unable to find employment.
- “Make work pay” – people should never become worse-off financially by taking a job
- Benefits rules which act as disincentives to taking up training (e.g. the 16 hour rule) should be reformed
- Soft outcomes on the “employment pathway” should be recognised
- Timescales for finding a job should be realistic, recognising the challenges faced by people at risk of homelessness.

## Recommendations on homelessness strategies and policy in Scotland

- Homelessness strategies should clearly identify how they plan to make employability part of their strategy for the prevention and alleviation of homelessness.
- Effective methods for identifying the current and previous employment of homelessness applicants, and outlining their employability needs should be implemented
- Homelessness strategies should show how they can support people at risk of homelessness find their way through the employment pathway and into work.
- Action plans should identify how specialist interventions for people at risk of homelessness will be established and funded. This should include provision for the 25+ age group as well as younger clients.
- Homelessness strategies should encourage partnership working between homelessness agencies, employment services, including Jobcentre Plus and Careers Scotland, and local education and training providers.
- Homelessness strategies should show how their approach links into the Workforce Plus and Skills for Scotland approach at local level.
- Homelessness strategies should show how the interests of people at risk of homelessness will be represented to Local Employment Partnerships and CPPs.
- All key workers and other advisers should incorporate advice on employability into their work with people at risk of homelessness
- Homelessness strategies should encourage exchange of knowledge and awareness raising between homelessness services agencies and employment agencies and providers.