

Sixteen per cent of housing association residents in London were so financially stretched in 2014 they had used a food bank, pawnbroker, payday loan company or rent-to-own shop during the last year. But residents have a strong commitment to work, despite often complex family or personal circumstances. For some, however, a combination of personal arrangements and job market factors mean their working lives are changeable.

In 2013 g15 commissioned Real London Lives, a major three-year longitudinal study from the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York. This latest report presents findings from the second annual quantitative survey of working-age housing association residents in London, specifically focusing on work circumstances. It benchmarks data against the quantitative and qualitative material gathered to date. These latest interviews were conducted during autumn 2014.

Key findings

- Eighty-six per cent of households working in 2013 were also in work in 2014. Overall, 51 per cent of householders were working in 2014 against 53 per cent in 2013.
- Full-time workers and householders with a partner or spouse were particularly likely to still be in work. Part-time working could also be stable, although movement in and out of work might result from changing household circumstances, such as a need to temporarily provide care for family members.
- Only 38 per cent of the householders who were unemployed in 2013 were unemployed when re-interviewed in 2014. Some had moved into work, others had become long-term sick or disabled, and some were now economically inactive for other reasons. Consequently, the level of unemployment dropped from 21 per cent in 2013 to 12 per cent in 2014.
- The qualitative interviews found that respondents moved in and out work for a range of family and other reasons, with the result that some were unemployed when interviewed in both years but had been working inbetween.
- Few respondents said it was easy to find work in their area, and nearly two thirds thought it was quite or very difficult. Older respondents and people from BME backgrounds were more likely to find it difficult. The most common problems mentioned were a lack of work in the area or too many people chasing the same jobs.
- About one in six respondents were so financially stretched they had used a payday loan company, a rent-to-own shop, a pawnbroker, or a food bank in the past year. The most common users of these services included lone parents, the unemployed, people on full or partial Housing Benefit, people who were long-term sick or disabled, and those in rent arrears.

Working householders

With two years of data now available, the research is finding a strong commitment to obtaining and remaining in work, despite often substantial changes to household formation and circumstances. In 2013, 53 per cent of householders were working, 16 per cent were long-term sick or disabled, 21 per cent were unemployed, and ten per cent had some other economic status (including looking after their home or family, or caring for someone).

Seventy-one per cent of all householders had the same work status in 2014 as in 2013. Householders working in 2013 were the most likely to have the same status one year later, with 86 per cent still working in 2014 (Figure 1).

Consistent work patterns held for different household types. Seventy-nine per cent of single people, 82 per cent of lone parents, and 90 per cent of householders in couples who were working in 2013 were also working in 2014.

People working full-time were particularly likely to be

working in both years. Ninety-one per cent of householders working 30 or more hours per week in 2013 were working in 2014, as were 82 per cent of those working 16-29 hours per week, and 75 per cent working fewer than 16 hours per week.

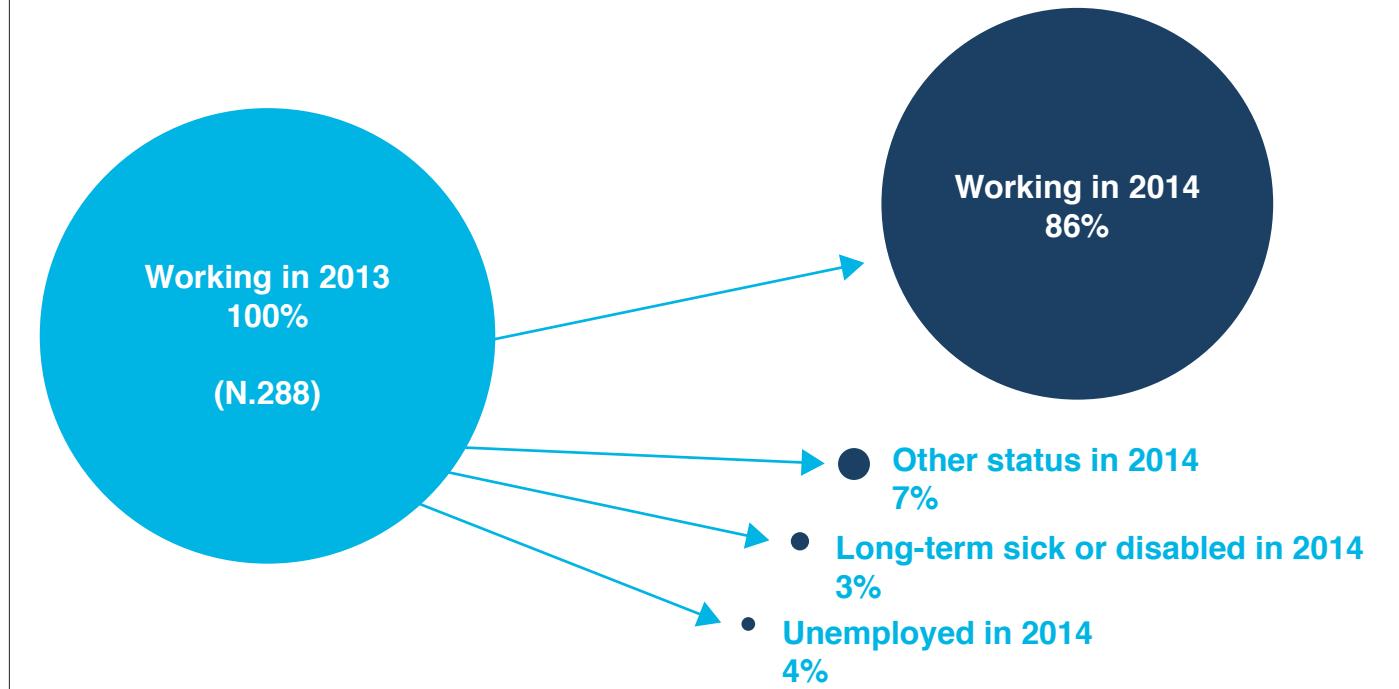
The slightly lower level of work consistency amongst the part-time workers was reflective of a level of churn. Some people had moved in and out of different part-time jobs with temporary spells of unemployment inbetween.

Part-time working could often be a very stable situation. For example Mr I.J., had been working in the same part-time cleaning job for more than nine years, and Miss Q.S. had worked as a university administrator for more than 20 years.

Unemployed householders

The greatest changes in work status were amongst the householders who were unemployed in 2013 (Figure 2). Twelve per cent had moved into work by the time they were interviewed in 2014. Twenty-five per cent said they were

Figure 1: Economic status of householders in 2014 who were working in 2013



long-term sick or disabled in 2014, and 25 per cent had some other economic status in 2014. Only 38 per cent of the unemployed householders in 2013 were unemployed in 2014.

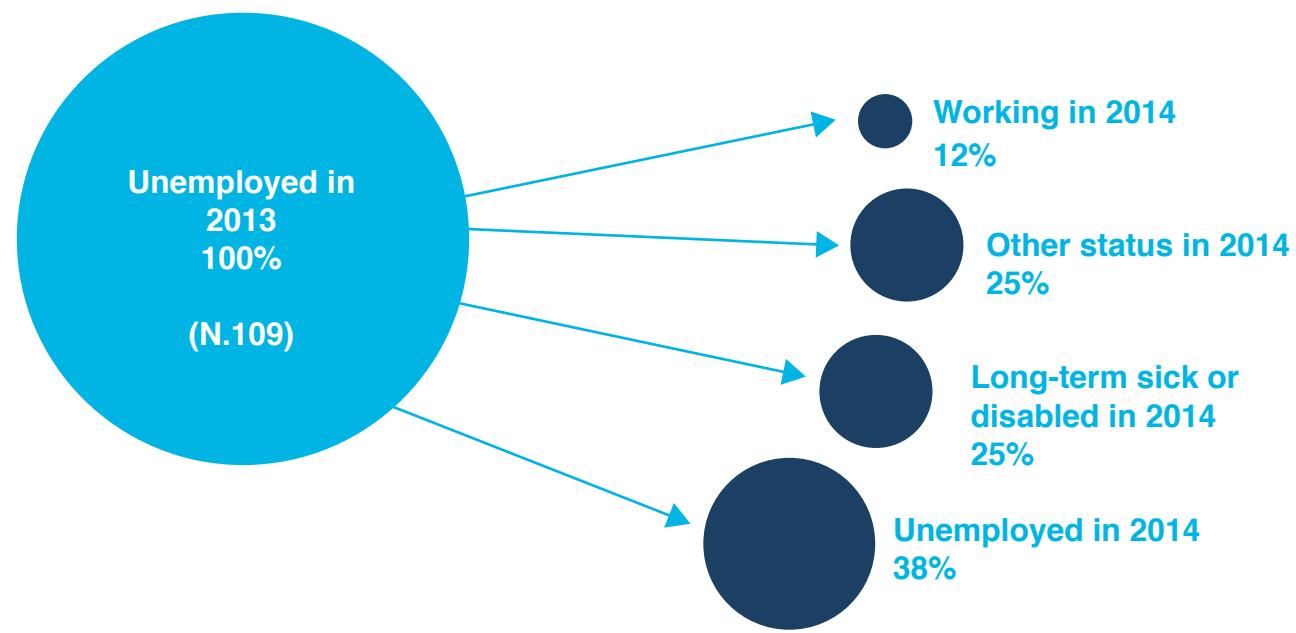
Ms U.W. was unemployed when interviewed in 2013 and again in 2014, but inbetween she had worked for nine months as a nanny. In contrast, Mr A.C. had been unemployed for over a decade, although he had completed a number of training courses during this time. Previously an engineer, after a prolonged period out of the labour market to care for his parents, he felt that there were few opportunities for him now he was in his late 40s.

2013 (51 per cent compared to 53 per cent).

Likewise, nine per cent of householders moved into, and four per cent moved out of, long-term sickness or disability, increasing the overall proportion of long-term sick or disabled from 16 per cent to 21 per cent. The overall proportion of unemployed householders dropped from 21 per cent to 12 per cent as a result of four per cent becoming unemployed and 12 per cent moving out of unemployment.

Movements between different work statuses were often linked to relatively temporary variations in household circumstances.

Figure 2: Economic status of householders in 2014 who were unemployed in 2013



Marginal changes in economic status

Table 1 shows the extent of changes to economic status from 2013 to 2014. Overall, 71 per cent of householders had the same economic status in both interviews, and 29 per cent had a different economic status. The net result of five per cent moving into work and seven per cent moving out of work, with 46 per cent unchanged, means that about the same proportion were working in 2014 as in

Finding work

Twenty-five per cent of respondents thought it was quite difficult and 38 per cent that it was very difficult to find work in their area of London. Only a small minority thought it was easy (Figure 3). Single person households most often said it was quite or very difficult to find work (65 per cent). While 56 per cent of respondents in couples found it difficult, 20 per cent said they found it quite or very easy.

Economic status of the householder in 2013 and 2014

| | Economic status in 2013 (%) | 2013 to 2014 | | | Economic status in 2014 (%) | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|---------|------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| | | Changed (%) | | Unchanged (%) | | |
| | | In (+) | Out (-) | | | |
| Working | 53 | 5 | 7 | 46 | 51 | |
| Long-term sick or disabled | 16 | 9 | 4 | 12 | 21 | |
| Unemployed | 21 | 4 | 12 | 8 | 12 | |
| Other¹ | 10 | 11 | 5 | 5 | 16 | |
| Total | 100 | | 29 | 71 | 100 | |
| N. | 537 | | 156 | 381 | 537 | |

¹ Other includes householders on government training schemes, retired, full-time students, looking after home or family, or carers.

Mr I.J., is a widower in his 50s, with a teenage daughter still living at home. In the past he worked as a minibus driver, but currently holds-down two part-time jobs - one in the early morning and one in the evening - that allow him to be at home to look after his daughter. Now his daughter is older, he is looking to return to full-time work as a bus driver.

The older respondents reported most difficulty in finding work in their area. Sixty-seven per cent of 45 to 54 year olds said it was quite or very difficult, as did 69 per cent of those aged 55 or older. Fifty-eight per cent of respondents who were aged younger than 45 said it was quite or very difficult.

Health conditions often made finding work more difficult for older respondents. The qualitative interviews found some to be dealing with conditions like diabetes, which did not amount to a sufficiently severe long-term illness or disability to prevent them from working, but did restrict their capacity to find and secure appropriate work.

Respondents from a white ethnic background thought it was easier than those from other ethnic groups to find work in their local area. Fifty-nine per cent of white respondents (white British, white Irish, and other white groups) said it was quite or very hard, compared with 68 per cent of black or black British respondents, and 76 per cent of all other ethnic groups together.

The main reasons people felt it was difficult to find work in their area were that there were few jobs available (26 per cent) or too many people seeking the same jobs (23 per cent). Some mentioned difficulties due to having an illness or disability (20 per cent), a lack of the right sort of work (15 per cent), or because they thought employers regarded them as too old (12 per cent). Other concerns were insufficient work experience, the insecurity of jobs, and problems with affordable childcare or caring responsibilities.

The qualitative interviews have found that for some adult migrants difficulties with the English language prove problematic in their search for work, sometimes creating a barrier to obtaining the qualifications needed for certain types of work.

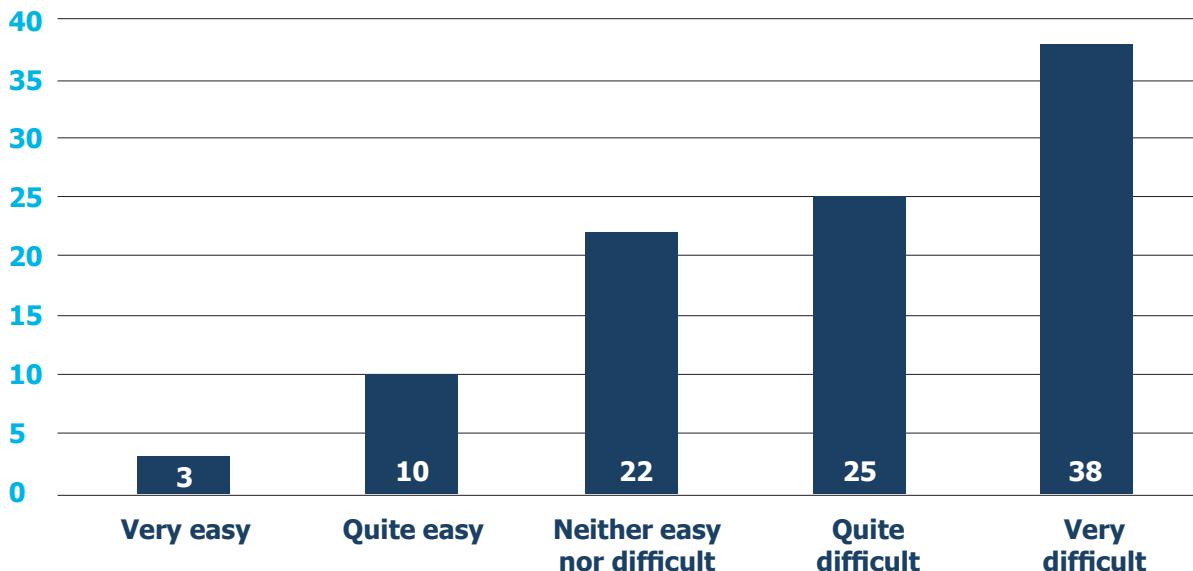
Financial difficulties

Altogether, 16 per cent of respondents were sufficiently financially stretched that they had used one of more of these services over the last 12 months (some used more than one of the types):

- Pawnbroker – eight per cent
- Payday loan company – four per cent
- Food bank – four per cent
- Rent-to-own shop – two per cent

Most respondents who had used a food bank did so no more than six times over the year. However, one respondent had used a food bank 24 times and another 40 times.

Figure 3: How easy or difficult it is to find work in the local area



Pawnbrokers had been used mainly to pay for basic household needs: to buy food; pay household bills, including gas and electricity; and sometimes to buy a birthday present for a child. Rent-to-own shops were used most often to obtain white or brown goods.

Lone parent householders were likely to have used one of the four types of service (23 per cent). Similarly, households headed by someone currently long-term sick or disabled (23 per cent) or unemployed (24 per cent) were likely to have used these services.

Households in receipt of Housing Benefit in one or both interview years were equally likely to be financially stretched (20 and 21 per cent respectively), with little difference between those in receipt of full (20 per cent) or partial Housing Benefit (22 per cent).

The strongest association with use of these four services was for households in rent arrears. Thirty-five per cent

of households behind with their rent in 2014 were in the financially stretched group, compared with just 12 per cent of those who were up to date with their rent.

There was a clear relationship between being financially stretched and how well households said they had kept up with their household bills or credit payments over the last 12 months. Those who were financially stretched included:

- Six per cent of households keeping up with all of their bills without any major difficulties
- Seventeen per cent of households who kept up with all their bills but found it a struggle from time to time
- Twenty per cent of households who kept up with all bills but found it a constant struggle
- Thirty-two per cent of households who had fallen behind with some of their bill payments.

About the research

Real London Lives is a three year programme of research following the lives of a representative sample of working age residents of London's largest housing association landlords. The research includes repeated quantitative telephone interviews and repeated in-depth face-to-face qualitative interviews with g15 tenants by the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York. The quantitative results in this report are based on 560 g15 tenants who were interviewed over the telephone in the autumn of 2013 and again in the autumn of 2014.

About g15

g15 represents London's largest housing associations, providing homes for one in ten Londoners and building a quarter of the capital's new homes. We are working to solve the housing crisis by delivering good quality, affordable homes of all types. A core part of our role also involves initiating and delivering wide-ranging social and economic development activities in the communities where we work.

g15 comprises A2 Dominion Group, Affinity Sutton, Amicus Horizon, Catalyst Housing, Circle Group, East Thames Group, Family Mosaic, Genesis Housing Association, The Hyde Group, L&Q, Metropolitan, Network Housing Group, Notting Hill Housing, Peabody, Southern Housing Group.

More information

The full report, Living a Life in Social Housing by Julie Rugg and Leonie Kellaher of the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York, can be found on the Real London Lives website at www.reallondonlives.co.uk

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For more information about any aspect of the Real London Lives project, please contact reallondonlives@gmail.com