

No One Left Behind: Review of Employability Services

Research of User and Provider Journeys

July 2018

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Executive Summary

Blake Stevenson was commissioned by the Scottish Government to conduct research to understand user and provider experiences within the pre-employment support system. The findings of this research will inform the Scottish Government's current review of the employability landscape in Scotland.

The research focussed on six Scottish Government-funded employability programmes:

- Activity Agreements;
- Community Jobs Scotland;
- Developing Your Potential;
- Employability Fund;
- 14:19 Fund; and
- Scottish Employer Recruitment Incentive (SERI).

A total of 60 users of these employability programmes were interviewed through this research, along with 31 training providers, employers and other stakeholders.

The research outputs included a report outlining key themes arising from the research and a series of infographic depictions of user journeys through the pre-employment support system, which are embedded in and appended to the main report.

User experiences of employability programmes

Users' experiences of the employability system are directly influenced by their personal circumstances including their experience of school education; situational factors like chaotic lifestyles and caring responsibilities; personal factors like mental and physical health and self-confidence; and existing support systems, such as support from family members and professionals. These individual circumstances, combined with their experience of the employability system, impacted on the success of their engagement and ultimately their employability journey. Four key themes arose from the research which are described below:

Programme content – relevance and fit

Of particular importance to users who were interviewed was the relevance of the programme to the skills they wanted to develop, the readiness of the user to carry out the activities and the contribution of the programme to the next stage in the user's journey. This was a consistent theme across all programmes.

Timely advice and guidance informed by user need and interests

Users viewed timely, appropriate and practical advice as a key factor in their decision to move from one stage to the next in the employability pipeline. However, there were examples given of advisors not understanding users' personal situations and the challenges they were facing and/or not listening to what they were interested in, which resulted in users' journeys stalling or regressing.

Users described good advice as being informed by meaningful discussions, and being delivered by advisors who respected their views and had good insight or empathy with their needs and with the key factors that would affect their journey.

Programmes of sufficient duration

Some of the employability programmes that users had participated in are delivered over a short period of time, which for some - usually those in the later stages of the employability pipeline - was felt to be an appropriate timeframe for their stage of the pre-employment journey. For other users, however, the short timeframe was challenging because they were forced to move on before key barriers were addressed.

Employability programmes with longer timeframes for delivery enable key barriers to be addressed while developing employability skills, and can better accommodate set-backs that users may experience.

Support during the employability journey

The level of support users receive varies across the six employability programmes and takes a range of different forms. Users indicated that support was particularly important at transition points when they are progressing to the next stage in their employability journey.

The way in which support is delivered also has a significant impact on the progression of users. For example, users valued support given by their advisors that showed understanding, was non-judgemental and took account of their views.

A programme designed to meet users' needs

The employability programmes that are seen by users as most supportive and most effective are those that are tailored to their needs and interests and include opportunities to develop relevant skills; have a realistic timeframe; provide practical experience; are delivered by staff who are respectful and empathetic; and include sufficient aftercare.

Provider experiences

The experiences of providers varied greatly, depending on the programmes they were delivering, the target groups of users they worked with, the stage of the employability pipeline and the measurements for success. Again, we identified four key themes from our research with providers.

Focus of the programmes

Most of the employability programmes covered by this research are focussed on young people, whereas providers believe that there is a demand for all-age provision. In addition, providers are increasingly delivering programmes that are focussed on users with multiple barriers to employment, requiring programmes to be delivered in a different way.

As a result of this changing demographic, providers indicated that programmes now need to be designed to meet this wider range of needs. In particular, programmes need to have an added degree of flexibility so that more tailored support can be delivered to users. Through this approach, providers were confident that employability programmes would have a positive impact on the experience of service users.

Administration and evidence

Providers reported significant variation in the administration required by different employability programmes – with those which are heaviest on administration requiring significant staff resource to manage this, especially if providers are delivering across multiple funding streams. They noted that excessive time spent on administration detracts from time spent delivering to users. Providers recognised that they needed to be accountable for the funding they received, and able to evidence their impact, but observed that administration required by programmes needed to be proportionate, and structured in such a way that lessened the administrative burden on both the provider and their users.

Rigid eligibility criteria in some programmes also restricted providers from delivering the most appropriate service to their users.

Providers generally commented positively on national bodies administering funding, which was seen as ensuring consistency and fairness, although there was recognition that this also means that the administering body may not have an in-depth understanding of local context.

Funding and investment in the programmes

Issues relating to funding and investment also varied greatly between programmes.

Short-term funding was seen as particularly challenging for providers because of its impact on planning, resourcing, and staff turnover due to staff leaving as a result of lack of job security. It also limits the ability of providers to offer tailored support to users with multiple barriers.

Providers identified other challenges relating to funding including fixed amounts of funding that have not increased in several years, limits on delivery costs like training budgets, and funding linked to hard outcomes, which were not necessarily appropriate or deliverable with their target group.

Common tracking and monitoring across programmes was seen as desirable by providers to enable a user's journey between different services to be accurately captured. Providers also valued additional support from the administering body such as pro bono organisational development support.

Support on the programme

Given the focus of employability programmes on users with multiple barriers to employment, providers increasingly need to offer significant support to users during the programme and at transition points, to sustain their employability journey. However, some providers do not have the staff or skillsets to provide adequate support. Overall, providers felt that more recognition of the required level of support was needed.

Key considerations

Through this research a number of key findings were identified. In particular, we identified four key components to successfully supporting a person's journey:

- ensuring that the content of any programme is relevant to the needs of users and fit for purpose;
- high quality guidance and advice must be tailored to an individual's circumstances;
- ensuring regular, appropriate support is provided at each stage of the employability journey; and
- a personalised approach is taken.

The research also identified a number of challenges for providers including:

- the focus of many of the current programmes is too limited;
- any future programme needs to take account of the progress, stalling and regression that can affect a user's journey;
- funding mechanisms need to reflect the providers' need to plan and resource the service over the medium term;
- administration and requirements with regards to evidencing progress varies significantly currently between programmes; and
- increasing access to pro-bono resources from administering bodies.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Blake Stevenson was commissioned by the Scottish Government in May 2018 to conduct research to understand user and provider journeys within the employability support system. The information gathered through this research will inform the Scottish Government's current review of the employability landscape in Scotland.

Policy context

The Scottish Government is committed to creating a more person-centred, joined up employability system, which recognises that although Scotland's employment rate is high, greater focus needs to be placed on those people who are furthest from the labour market. To enable this vision, there is a clear recognition that a more flexible approach to employability funding needs to be developed that is capable of adapting over time to changes in the labour market.

The Scottish Government's 2018 Integration and Alignment Plan No One Left Behind: Next steps for the integration and alignment of employability support in Scotland sets out key actions for achieving a joined-up and integrated employability system. These actions include: engaging with people and providers on the future of Scotland's employability system (which is the focus of this research); developing joint action plans with local authorities to address emerging employability themes; identifying and replicating good practice for supporting unemployed people into work; and more specific actions relating to the integration of employment services with existing health, justice and housing services.

Alongside these actions, a long-term change programme has been initiated to create a joined-up employability system that meets the needs of service users. This includes:

- the implementation of the devolved Fair Start Scotland employment support service, which began operation in 2018;
- addressing the disability employment gap through access to Modern Apprenticeship funding and a disability internship programme; and
- piloting the Single Health and Work Gateway in Fife and Dundee to support people with health conditions and/or disabilities access health and employment services through a single channel.

Our research focussed on six Scottish Government-funded employability programmes:

- Activity Agreements;
- Community Jobs Scotland;

- Developing Your Potential;
- Employability Fund;
- 14:19 Fund; and
- Scottish Employer Recruitment Incentive (SERI).

Activity Agreements

Activity Agreements operate in all 32 local authority areas and the model is based on an agreement between a young person (aged 16-19 and who is not in a job, education or training) and an advisor - or 'Trusted Professional' - that the young person will engage in a programme tailored to their needs and strengths, with defined outcomes and progression that will help them prepare for employment, training or further education. Activity Agreements have been incorporated into the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence with the aim of providing young people not in a job, education or training with a tailored programme of activities and learning that will help them prepare for employment, training or further education.

Community Jobs Scotland

This programme provides unemployed young people with training opportunities in Third Sector organisations. CJS focuses on young people aged 16-29 who are care experienced, carers, early Armed Forces Service leavers, have criminal convictions or have disabilities/other health issues. CJS is administered by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and it offers 52-week paid placements that involve at least 25 hours work per week.

Developing Your Potential

This programme, delivered by a consortium of The Prince's Trust, Barnardo's and Action for Children, supports care-experienced young people aged 16-29 to move into appropriate work, training or educational opportunities. There are two strands in this service:

- Intensive Support (ISS) for young people with more complex needs with a project worker providing one-to-one support for a period of up to one year.
- TEAM (delivered by Prince's Trust) - a 12 week employability programme offering young people work experience, qualifications, practical skills, involvement in community projects and a residential week.

Fifteen CJS opportunities are ring-fenced for young care leavers supported by the Developing Your Potential programme.

Employability Fund

The Employability Fund, administered by Skills Development Scotland (SDS), aims to support employability, vocational training and employment opportunities linked to the local labour market. SDS works with local employability partners to help people

of all ages to develop their employability skills through programmes varying in length and content. This programme is targeted at various groups of people including disabled people, unemployed people and ex-offenders.

14:19 Fund

This fund, administered by Inspiring Scotland, currently supports 20 providers to deliver programmes that help some of the most disadvantaged young people aged 14 to 19 who struggle to access employment, education or training. The providers can access a range of development and training opportunities through pro bono support from Inspiring Scotland.

Scottish Employer Recruitment Incentive

This programme is delivered across 32 local authorities and administered by SDS. SERI offers funding of up to £4,000 to private or Third Sector employers who offer employment opportunities to unemployed young people aged 16-29. The funding is available as a contribution toward the costs of recruiting and supporting a young person during their first year of employment.

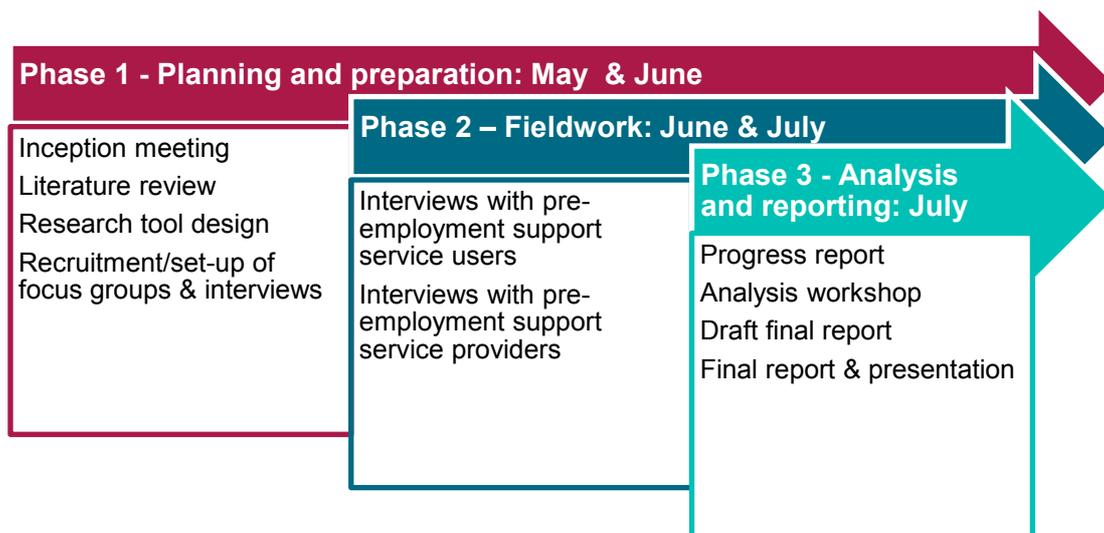
Research approach

The overall aim of this research was to inform policy decisions on the future of the employability system and funding landscape by providing insight into two key aspects of the system:

- the journey of users through the current employability system, including the decisions they make as a result of the support they receive; and
- providers' experiences of Scottish Government-funded programmes including assessment, referral, aftercare support, and funding streams.

There were three components to the research: a brief literature review to consolidate common themes and recommendations from recent research and consultations focusing on the Scottish employability system; qualitative research with users of the employability system; and qualitative research with providers of the employability system. The approach is summarised in Figure 1.1 overleaf.

Figure 1.1 Summary of research approach



At the outset we conducted a short literature review of key documents, provided by Scottish Government, to consolidate the common themes from recent research and consultations focusing on the Scottish employability system. In conducting this literature review, we drew together key themes relating to pre-employment support services. This literature review informed the design of our research tools.

Although we had initially agreed a mixed methodology involving both focus groups and interviews with service users, our experience of the first focus group showed us that the in-depth, personal conversations we needed to conduct to fully understand each person's journey were often too sensitive to be discussed in a group setting. As a result, we moved to conducting a series of one-to-one interviews across a range of organisations and funding programmes.

Over a four week period, a total of 60 service users were interviewed as part of the research. This is lower than the target of 96 in part due to:

- the tight delivery timeframe;
- the timing of the research when many of the stakeholders were beginning their summer holidays which limited their availability to identify and contact service users;
- the target (96) was based on an estimated number when focus groups was the original research design and so shifting this same target to 1:1 interviews was ambitious within the same timeframe;
- some providers agreeing to arrange focus groups for us which they did not then manage to organise; and
- around 12 users not turning up on the days that the interviews were scheduled.

To capture a broad range of experiences of the employability system, a representative sample of service users with a defined set of characteristics including different age bands, levels of socio-economic deprivation, disabilities, ethnicity and those not in education, employment or training (NEET) were engaged through the research.

Participant Profile

Sixty users across the six Scottish Government-funded employability services were interviewed during the research. Table 1.1 shows user breakdown by programme.

Table 1.1 Number of user interviews per employability programme

Programme	Service users
Activity Agreements	15
Community Jobs Scotland	5
Developing Your Potential	3
Employability Fund training	16
14:19 Fund	18
Scottish Employer Recruitment Incentive	3
Total	60

Users' age ranged from 16 to 54. While the majority (51, 85%) of users were under the age of 25, over half (52%) were aged 16-18 (Figure A2.1 in Appendix 2).

There was an almost even split of male (32, 53%) and female (28, 47%) users. In terms of ethnicity, the vast majority (57, 95%) identified themselves as white. Over a quarter (16, 27%) of users had a disability, long-standing illness or infirmity.

Ten (17%) service users said that they were care experienced, in residential care, foster care, a kinship placement or placed under a supervision requirement at home. When considering caring responsibilities, 11 users (18%) cared for a child or children at home and four (7%) said that they had caring responsibilities for a family member because they have a long-term illness or disability.

Although the service users were geographically concentrated within the Central Belt, users from rural areas such as Stornoway, Inverness and Isle of Bute were also interviewed.

The majority of service users we consulted (43, 72%) lived in the 30% most deprived areas in Scotland, according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. Over a third, (21, 35%) lived in SIMD decile 1 (Figure A2.2 in Appendix 2).

Employability services

The majority (73%) of service users had taken part in other courses, programmes or training to help them progress to their current destination and 32% of service users aged 16-19 had taken part in two or more programmes as part of their employability journey (Figure A2.3 in Appendix 2).

Provider interviews

We completed interviews with representatives from 31 training providers and employers, and three other stakeholders, against a target of 35. Table 1.2 provides a breakdown of the number of providers by employability programme, and the full list of providers is included at Appendix 1.

Table 1.2 Number of Scottish Government funded employability programme providers interviewed

Programme	Number of providers
Activity Agreements	4
Community Jobs Scotland	5
Developing Your Potential	4
Employability Fund training	8
14:19 Fund	5
Scottish Employer Recruitment Incentive	5
Total	31

Report structure

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- chapter 2 contains the literature review, completed at the start of the research to help shape and inform the user and provider interviews;
- in chapter 3, we explore the employability journeys of the users and identify the factors that supported or prevented their progression;
- chapter 4 is focused on the providers' experiences of delivering the employability programmes and the factors in programme design that impact on the users' journey; and

- in chapter 5, we summarise the key findings for the Scottish Government to consider when reviewing the employability landscape and designing a more joined-up pre-employment support system.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In May 2018, the Scottish Government commissioned Blake Stevenson to undertake research on user and provider journeys through employability services in Scotland to inform an ongoing review of employability systems in Scotland.

As mentioned earlier, the methodology for the research is in three parts, with the first being a brief literature review of recent research and consultations related to the Scottish employability system, focusing particularly on pre-employment support services and highlighting the key themes and recommendations emerging from the literature. The purpose of the review is not to be an exhaustive summary of research and consultation on employability services in Scotland, but rather to briefly draw out the key themes and recommendations made in the literature to inform subsequent elements of the primary research with users and providers that will be undertaken in the summer of 2018.

Literature review methodology

The literature review was pragmatic rather than systematic. Members of the Research Advisory Group (RAG) for this project provided a list of recently published studies and consultations which was supplemented by an Idox search of grey literature that had been produced since 2008 and a web search undertaken by Blake Stevenson.

Literature included in the review

The RAG suggested a total of 21 research reports or consultations that could be relevant for the review with the Idox and Blake Stevenson searches identifying a further five documents that informed the review. In total, there were 8 policy or consultation documents and 18 research or evaluation reports.

Findings from the review

The findings from the literature identified could be grouped into three areas:

- context (including resource dedicated to employability schemes);
- key themes; and
- recommendations and learning points from the literature.

Context for delivery of services

As a result of new powers devolved under the Scotland Act (2016), since April 2017, the Scottish Government has delivered new employment support services to

those who are disengaged from the labour market. During the initial 12-month transitional period, such support was offered through Work First Scotland and Work Able Scotland, prior to the delivery of Fair Start Scotland, the fully devolved service, from 2018 onwards.¹ Effective partnership working and the development of close working relationships between the Scottish Government and the Department of Work and Pensions were key in determining the success of both programmes during the transitional period.²

Two years before Fair Start Scotland became operational, the Scottish Government outlined the key values underpinning the 'Scottish Approach' to employability services in *Creating a Fairer Scotland: A New Future for Employability Support in Scotland* – key values which would support its vision of providing those who face challenges in the labour market with greater support. These values are:

- that people are treated with Dignity and Respect at all stages during their journey into employment;
- that Fairness and Equality will be a key driver in the provision of employment support, which is not to focus solely on those who have the best prospects of gaining employment; and
- that support is subject to Continuous Improvement, where policies and processes will adapt in accordance with the needs of individuals, employers and communities.³

Research by Cambridge Policy Consultants (CPC) published in 2014 provides important insight into who has been the focus of pre-employment support policy in Scotland in recent years and at what stage in the employability pipeline the available resources have been concentrated (REF). CPC estimated that in 2013-14, in Scotland, total investment in employability support was about £660 million which covers a broad definition of 'employability' to include anyone without work, seeking work and available for work. This figure represented a 6% rise compared to 2011-12.⁴

Youth unemployment has been at the forefront of the political landscape since the 2008 recession, and particularly so since the implementation of Developing the

¹ Employability in Scotland, 'Background on Scotland's Devolved Employment Services'. Online, available at: <http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/devolved-employment-services/background-on-scotlands-devolved-employment-services/>

² SQW, *Implementation Review of Transitional Employment Services 2017: A Report to the Scottish Government by SQW* (2017). Online, available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00528408.pdf>

³ Scottish Government, *Creating a Fairer Scotland: A New Future for Employability Support in Scotland* (2016). Online, available at: <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/creating-fairer-scotland-new-future-employability-support-scotland/>

⁴ Cambridge Policy Consultants, *Review of the Allocation of Employability Resources in Scotland: Final Report* (2014). Online, available at: http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/media/473005/sef_-_employability_research_-_cambridge_policy_consultants_-_final_report_-_november_2014.pdf

Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy from 2014 onwards.⁵ Young people have been a particular focus of pre-employment support in recent years. CPC found that just under half of the total £660 million was allocated to this particular age group in 2013-14. Levels of investment in those aged 20-24 and 25+ were roughly similar and each amounted to about a quarter of total expenditure. These levels of expenditure are in line with unemployment rates for each group which, in 2013, were 27.7%, 16% and 5.3% respectively.

Notable attention has also been paid to funding programmes and activities taking place at Stage 3 (Vocational Activity) of the employability pipeline, according to CPC. They found that in 2013-14, 45% of all funds were spent on Stage 3 activities, closely followed by Stage 5 (In-Work/Aftercare, which received around a third of all funds). They also found that investment was lowest in activities at Stage 1 (Referral and Engagement), with only about 3% of funds being invested in this stage.

Key themes

Youth unemployment and the 'learner journey'

Much of the literature surrounding employability in Scotland has framed issues surrounding employability and employment, within the context of young people, as a long-term phenomenon requiring long-term intervention. For example, one study which drew on longitudinal data from the 1991, 2001 and 2011 Censuses highlighted the "long-term scarring effect of being NEET" for NEET young people, who were likely to continue experiencing poorer labour market outcomes 10 and 20 years further down the line.⁶

The Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality's report entitled *The Life Chances of Young People in Scotland*, published in 2017, emphasised that young people from areas of high deprivation are less likely to transition successfully into employment and more likely to be unemployed, particularly those young people who choose to leave school at the first opportunity. These groups, the study found, had high 'bonding capital' in terms of strong networks with friends and family, but limited 'bridging capital' in terms of links to networks of employment information.⁷

Increasing attention has also been paid towards the 'learner journey' of those seeking employment, suggesting that pre-employment support should be provided as early as possible in a young person's journey. In 2017, SQW and Young Scot

⁵ Scottish Government, *Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy: Implementing the Recommendations of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce* (2014). Online, available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00466386.pdf>

⁶ Scottish Government, *Consequences, Risk Factors and Geography of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)* (2015). Online, available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00487854.pdf>

⁷ Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality, *The Life Chances of Young People in Scotland: A Report to the First Minister* (2017). Online, available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00522051.pdf>

explored young people's experiences of the education and training system and highlighted a series of key decision points for school-age children which influence their learner journeys and which ultimately shape their post-school routes. As an example, those young people who choose to pursue a technical or vocational route after leaving school tend to make decisions based on what opportunities are available to them locally. Such opportunities tend to be short-term and are not usually based on a longer-term career plan.⁸

The research also emphasised the need for stronger links to additional support for young people in tackling personal, social and health issues, with timely support being key to young people's progression through their learner journey. It also highlighted the need for young people to be given unbiased information about different post-school routes including apprenticeships and other vocational training programmes, to enable them to make informed decisions about their future.⁹

Notions of the learner journey are again reflected in the Scottish Government's The 15-24 Learner Journey Review (2018). This review was designed to promote the efficiency and efficacy of the learner journey of all 16-24 year olds "to ensure that all learners are on the right route to the right job, through the right course via the right information".¹⁰

Factors associated with becoming NEET

The literature surrounding Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is currently growing, although it remains scarce within the context of pre-employment support. According to NHS Health Scotland, ACEs are stressful events which occur in a child's life between 0 and 18 years and they have a significant impact on the child's ability to learn and participate in school life. ACEs cover areas such as abuse, neglect and household dysfunction, and research shows that ACEs have a negative impact on children's attainment.¹¹ ACEs can also lead to long-term unemployment.¹² As such, young people who experience ACEs may become a key focus of the policy debate surrounding pre-employment support in future.

The impact of ACEs on becoming NEET was quantified by research undertaken by the Scottish Government in 2015. While ACE factors such as living in a single parent family are associated with NEET status, the single most important risk factor was educational attainment. Failure to obtain an SCQF level 5 or higher by S4 is

⁸ SQW and Young Scot, *Young People's Experience of Education and Training from 15-24 Years: A Report to the Scottish Government* (2017). Online, available at: <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/young-peoples-experience-education-training-15-24-years/>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Scottish Government, *The 15-24 Learner Journey Review* (2018). Online, available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0053/00535273.pdf>

¹¹ NHS Health Scotland, *Tackling the Attainment Gap by Preventing and Responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)* (2017). Online, available at: <http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1517/tackling-the-attainment-gap-by-preventing-and-responding-to-adverse-childhood-experiences.pdf>

¹² They Work For You, 'Adverse Childhood Experiences – in the Scottish Parliament on 24th January 2018. Online, available at: <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/sp/?id=2018-01-24.15.0>

associated with a 10-fold increase in risk of being NEET for males and seven-fold increase for females. Given the correlation between ACEs and attainment, it is unclear whether how much of the increase in risk of NEET is due to low attainment and how much due to ACEs. In reality, while it is likely to be a multifactorial and complicated relationship, the evidence is strong enough to be able to identify those at significant risk of becoming NEET and so therefore in need of additional pre-employment support well before they leave school.

Widening the scope of pre-employment support

While much of the literature and policy debate surrounding employability and pre-employment support has focused on young people, there has recently been an increasing emphasis on other groups in need of pre-employment support – groups who face particularly challenging barriers. This resonates a great deal with Creating a Fairer Scotland aims of fairness and equality as key values.

People with disabilities/long-term health conditions

Disabled people and people with health conditions have featured increasingly in policy debates around pre-employment support. Recent statistics from 2016 show that the employment rate among disabled people is 42.8%, compared to 80.2% of non-disabled people.¹³ As discussed in *A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People*, published in 2016, for a one-year transitional period beginning in 2017, the 'Work First Scotland' service was established to provide employment support to up to 3,300 people with disabilities. This was then superseded in April 2018 by a new devolved programme offering tailored and appropriate pre-employment support to disabled people. There has been an emphasis on removing barriers for young disabled people to prepare them for employment, with key targets in place in areas such as part-time and flexible engagement.¹⁴

Between 2018 and 2020, the Scottish Government will pilot a Single Health and Work Gateway service in Dundee and Fife, with the aim of helping disabled people and those with health conditions to receive targeted support at an early stage, while also considering how to support people with mental health conditions who are perceived to require more continuous support.¹⁵

Ethnic minority groups

As highlighted in *A Fairer Scotland for All: Race Equality Action Plan 2017-21*, racism and discrimination are evident in the labour market and people from minority ethnic groups are restricted in the opportunities available to them. In June 2017, the employment rate for ethnic minority groups was 58.5%, compared to 74.2% for ethnic white people. While people from minority ethnic groups have the highest

¹³ Scottish Government, *No One Left Behind: Next Steps for the Integration and Alignment of Employability Support in Scotland* (2018). Online, available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0053/00533376.pdf>

¹⁴ Scottish Government, *A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People* (2017). Online, available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00510948.pdf>

¹⁵ Scottish Government, *No One Left Behind*.

levels of educational attainment, they are twice as likely to be unemployed as individuals from white communities. This disadvantage is particularly stark for women from these minority groups.¹⁶

As such, the Scottish Government has pledged to work with key stakeholders to produce baselines, measures and targets for ethnic minority communities facing disadvantage in the labour market. It will also work with key partners to produce learning resources to raise awareness of employability issues related to ethnic minority groups and actions to mitigate against these issues.¹⁷

Other key groups

In its No One Left Behind strategy (2018), the Scottish Government highlighted that while youth employment rates are increasing, other groups continue to face challenges in the labour market, including people recovering from substance misuse, those experiencing homelessness and those with convictions. These groups, the report explains, are among those who are furthest from the labour market. It emphasised that more work is required to provide effective and joined-up pre-employment support, and outlined a series of measures that will be taken over the next few years to support these groups into employment. For example, from April 2019, it will work with the Scottish Prison Service to help people with convictions access employment services, at the local and national level, through an agreed referral process, while from August of that year it will work closely with homeless organisations to encourage an increased emphasis on employability within these organisations and to identify referral routes for homeless people seeking employability support.¹⁸

Recommendations and learning points from the literature

Difficulty in measuring effectiveness of employability services

The CPC report reviewing resource allocation of employability resources in Scotland also appraised the systems in place to measure the effectiveness of employability schemes and policy and the true resource dedicated to improving employability. Their key findings were:

- an inability to collate information equally across all agencies and services working on employability;
- investment on the individual rather than on groups could not be ascertained;

¹⁶ Scottish Government, *A Fairer Scotland for All: Race Equality Action Plan 2017-21* (2017). Online, available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00528746.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Scottish Government, *No One Left Behind*.

- a lack of clarity on what a good outcome is, which is not only problematic if people do not gain employment but is also unclear when an individual finds work; and
- shared learning on what works is not happening.

The need for focussed and consolidated support

The Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality's 2016 publication *Shifting the Curve: A Report to the First Minister* highlighted a lack of focus in the pre-employment support delivered to young people. There are a vast number of support programmes for young people in Scotland which, in turn, suggests a need for a more consolidated approach to pre-employment support. This report called for a reduction in the number of government-supported employment programmes aimed at young people aged 16-24 to sharpen the focus. It explained that young people require clear and simple messages about the choices available to them and the impact of these choices, as well as about the support available to help them decide their next steps.¹⁹

In response, the Scottish Government has sought to create a more streamlined and straightforward service for people across Scotland. It has begun working across various policy areas with an employability interest or impact, to improve links with skills, health and social care, justice and housing provision. In June 2017, it launched the Employability Innovation and Integration Fund, which invites proposals testing innovative new approaches encompassing health and social care, justice and/or housing. It seeks proposals demonstrating an integration of employability and skills services with other provision.²⁰

Delivering person-centred, tailored and appropriate support

The idea that pre-employment support should be person-centred is another key theme emerging from the literature. The *Shifting the Curve* report, for example, made the following recommendation to the Scottish Government:

“Ensure that public service delivery is respectful, person-centred and preserves the dignity of people in poverty: pre-employment and in-service training should include the importance of avoiding stigma and developing understanding of the challenges of living on a very low income.”²¹

Person-centredness is one of the key principles underpinning the ‘Scottish Approach’ to the delivery of pre-employment support as discussed in *Creating a Fairer Scotland*, where it is viewed as particularly important in removing any additional barriers faced in the labour market by, for example, people with disabilities. The report cites some examples of how pre-employment services could

¹⁹ Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality, *Shifting the Curve: A Report to the First Minister* (2016). Online, available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00492430.pdf>

²⁰ Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality, *Progress Report on Shifting the Curve* (2017). Online, available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00521921.pdf>

²¹ Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality, *Shifting the Curve*.

adopt a person-centred approach, explaining that individual assessments should explore the life circumstances of the person accessing support, action plans should be tailored to meet their individual needs, and work experience should be undertaken when it is most beneficial to that individual.²²

Research by SQW and Young Scot found that the individualised and tailored support provided through employability programmes such as Activity Agreements had a particularly positive impact on disengaged groups.²³ A study of Women Onto Work (WOW), an organisation that provides pre-employment support specifically to women in Scotland, similarly emphasised the importance of personalised support. This study found that the provision of an individual employment coach to each client was key in assembling an effective, personalised support package and in helping women to feel “motivated and empowered to make progress on their employability journey”.²⁴

Regarding the importance of delivering support that is respectful, that preserves dignity and that avoids stigma, an evaluation of Employ-Able, an employability programme geared towards veterans experiencing mental health issues, found that a key component of the programme was that it provided veterans with access to reliable and non-judgemental support from an advisor. The success of this programme is reflected in the fact that around half of clients had moved into a positive destination such as employment or training.²⁵

Enabling informed decision-making through clear and unbiased information and advice

The 15-24 Learner Journey Review calls for improvements in the information, advice and support offered to young people through long-term, person-centred support for those who need it most, to enable them to make informed decisions about their learning and career. As an example of how to achieve this, in partnership with SDS, the Scottish Government have committed to improving the My World of Work online hub to provide better signposting to all available pathways and support systems for learners in Scotland and to enable them to plan and explore career opportunities linked to their skills.²⁶

A focus on sustaining positive employment outcomes

²² Scottish Government, *Creating a Fairer Scotland: A New Future for Employability Support in Scotland*.

²³ SQW and Young Scot, *Young People’s Experience of Education and Training*.

²⁴ J Botfield, M Dutton and B Lister et al, *Stating Our Case: The Rationale and Practice of Gender Specific Employability Services* (2014). Online, available at: http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/media/317168/wow_stating_our_case_final_report_030314.pdf

²⁵ J Biggar and L Simpson, *Evaluation of Employ-Able* (2015). Online, available at: <http://www.poppyscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/EMPLOYABLE-EVALUATION-REPORT-MAY-15.pdf>

²⁶ Scottish Government, *The 15-24 Learner Journey Review*.

Some of the literature highlights the necessity of providing pre-employment support that not only enables an individual to move into employment but that helps them to sustain their employment. Research by Blake Stevenson into what young people need to sustain a positive destination after completing an Activity Agreement identified some of the key factors behind sustained progression into work, training or education. We found that tailored activities during the Activity Agreement, the development of skills such as confidence, motivation and resilience, and sustained support beyond the Activity Agreement were key to enabling a sustained outcome.²⁷

As part of the No One Left Behind strategy, the Scottish Government has similarly recognised the importance of creating clear pathways from pre-employment support into sustainable and secure destinations. Key to this, the report emphasises, is having a more joined up and straightforward system of employability support in place, allowing people to gain access to the support they need.²⁸

Strong connections and partnership-working across the system

Research by Blake Stevenson has also emphasised the importance of collaboration and partnership-working between those involved in delivering pre-employment support on one hand and, on the other hand, employers, colleges, training providers and other professionals in organisations offering more bespoke support in relation to, for example, housing or health.²⁹

²⁷ Blake Stevenson, *Activity Agreements Sustainability Research: Final Report for YouthLink Scotland* (2018). Online, available at: <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/2460/aa-sustainability-research-2018.pdf>

²⁸ Scottish Government, *No One Left Behind*.

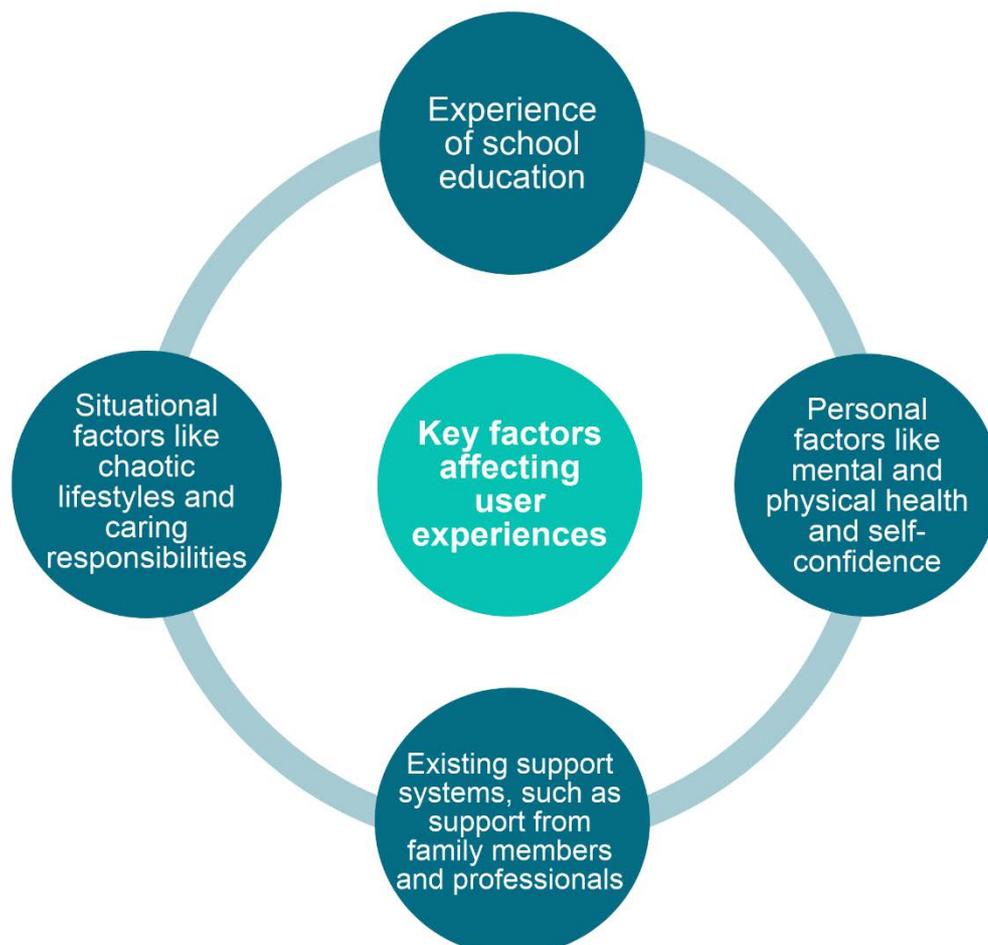
²⁹ Ibid.

Chapter 3: User experiences of employability programmes

In this chapter, we explore the key aspects of the design and delivery of employability programmes that have affected users' experiences. We consider those aspects in terms of their impact and how they could be addressed or improved.

Aspects of programme delivery that impact on the user

60 users were interviewed as part of this research. Across the cohort, there was a wide range of experiences and variation in the journeys to reach their current employability status. Their journeys were affected by many factors, some of which related to their individual circumstances including:



These individual circumstances, combined with their experience of the employability system, impacted on the success of their engagement and ultimately their employability journey.

In considering aspects of programmes that helped or hindered their employability journey, four main themes emerged.



We explore each of these themes in further detail below:

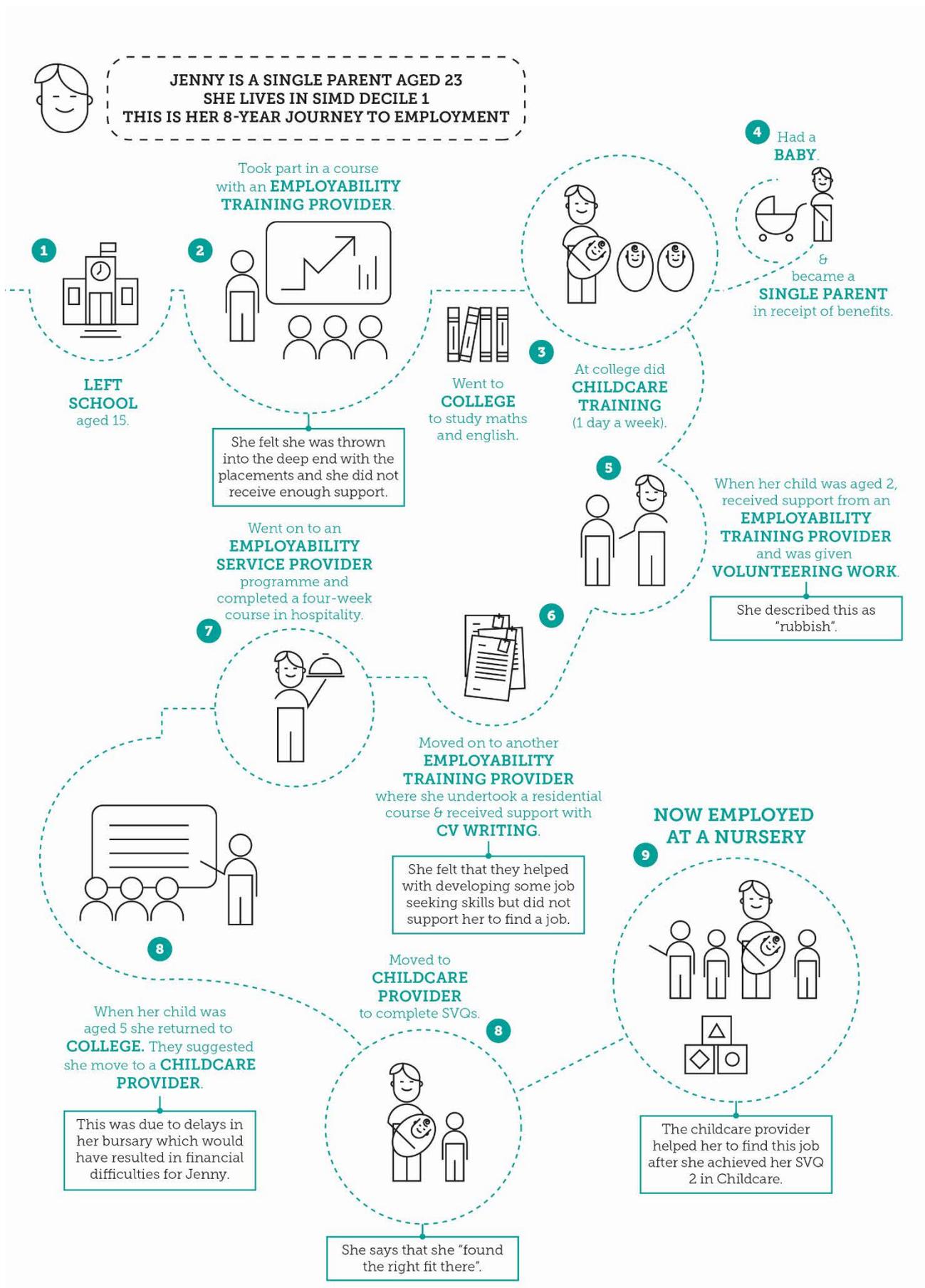
Programme content – relevance and fit

The users interviewed in this research participated in a range of very different programmes, from those that support the development of generic employability skills to programmes offering sector specific placements. Regardless of the provider, of importance to the users was the extent to which the content of the programme was relevant to:

- the skills that the user wanted to develop;
- the readiness of the user to carry out the activities; and
- the next stage in the user's journey.

As can be seen in Jenny's journey below, she faced a number of challenges and issues during her route to employment. Part way through her journey, when she was a young mother, she was involved in a programme that she had little interest in and which she did not value. She was supported on two more programmes before

she found the one that met her needs and interests and which eventually led to employment in the childcare sector.



There were several examples of users being put forward for training or into placements that they had no interest in or actively disliked. In these cases this was demotivating and their disinterest led to non-engagement with the activities or drop-out of the programme. There seemed to be a variety of reasons for this, including: their perceived lack of in-depth careers advice at school; people not being able to articulate their preferences early on in their journey; insufficiently tailored advice beyond school; lack of motivation to identify where interests lie; and for a minority, a lack of financial pressure to identify career opportunities.

User readiness

In the interviews with users, there were several accounts of programme activities that did address their interests and the skills they wanted to develop. However, in addition, some users were dealing with issues in their personal life that prevented them focusing on the activities/the role they were in. Again, this could often lead to a lack of application to the activities or drop out from the programme until their issues were resolved and they were ready to focus back on their employability journey.

Those programmes that had time and resources to support users with their personal issues and then re-engage in the programme activities were better placed to support users to sustain their employability journey.

Progressing the user along the employability pipeline

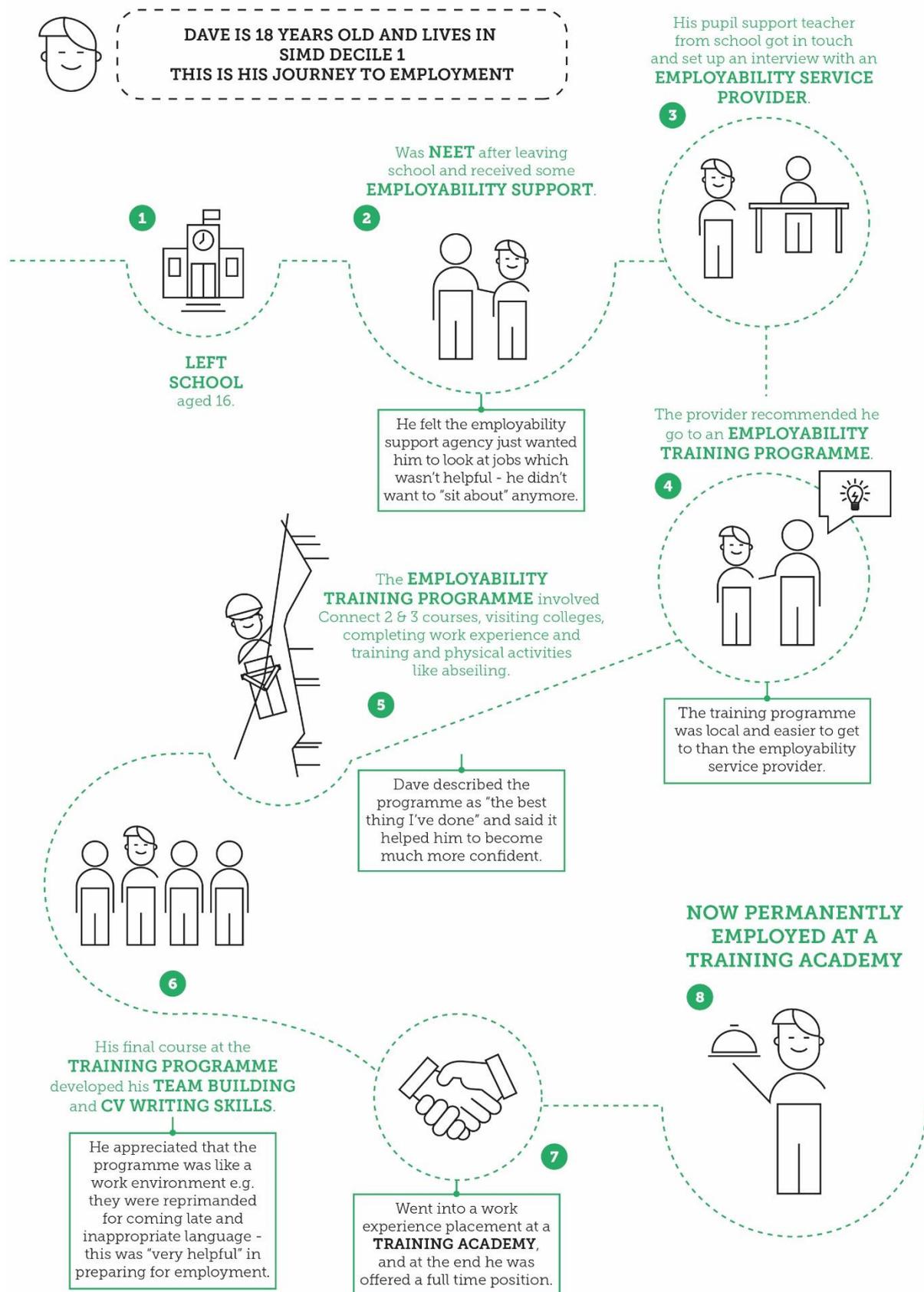
Within the cohort of users who were interviewed for this research, almost a third of the 16-19 year olds had participated in two or more employability programmes. A few users gave examples of their experience of programmes that appeared to be similar to ones that they had already completed and while these users did not articulate that it had resulted in a lack of progression, they did describe feeling disengaged and frustrated.

With programmes that built on and reinforced the user experience and learning from previous programmes, the users could more easily recognise that they were moving forward in their employability journey. This was more evident when a user progressed through programmes delivered by the same provider but focused on and funded by different Scottish Government employability programmes, for example a provider delivering programmes funded by the 14:19 Fund and the Employability Fund.

For some users we interviewed, the journey towards employability was not always linear and life circumstances resulted in regression. Often, people then re-engaged with the employability pipeline later, but for some of the current programmes, there is a presumption that an individual's journey is linear and too little flexibility to react to the individual's changing circumstances.

Some of the users interviewed had reached a point in their employability journey where they needed to develop specific sector skills or achieve a particular qualification. There were others who had acquired those skills but needed support to develop their practical experience of a sector or work behaviour so that they had

the confidence and abilities to enter employment. There were stark examples of providers that built these opportunities into their programmes, as shown in Dave's journey below.



When programmes had this element, or could link into practical experience in a sector, users were better supported to develop and progress their employability journeys.

The programmes that had greater flexibility in how and what they delivered to meet the user requirements were viewed most positively. Highly experienced, committed staff who were willing to go the extra mile were often a key feature of these programmes. These programmes took account of the individual's skills, interests and needs and ensured that the progression was at a pace that suited the individual and, when necessary, was able to adjust to reflect changing needs.

Timely advice and guidance informed by user need and interests

During the interviews with users, good advice and guidance was often a factor in their decision to move from one stage to the next. However, there were several accounts of advisors not understanding users' personal situations and the challenges they were facing and/or not listening to what they were interested in or felt they wanted to do. This meant that an individual could be encouraged to take a place with an employability provider or move into a placement that did not suit their circumstances. This appeared to be more common when users were in the earlier stages of the employability pipeline but meant that they participated in programmes that, at best, stalled their journey or, at worst, led to a regression.

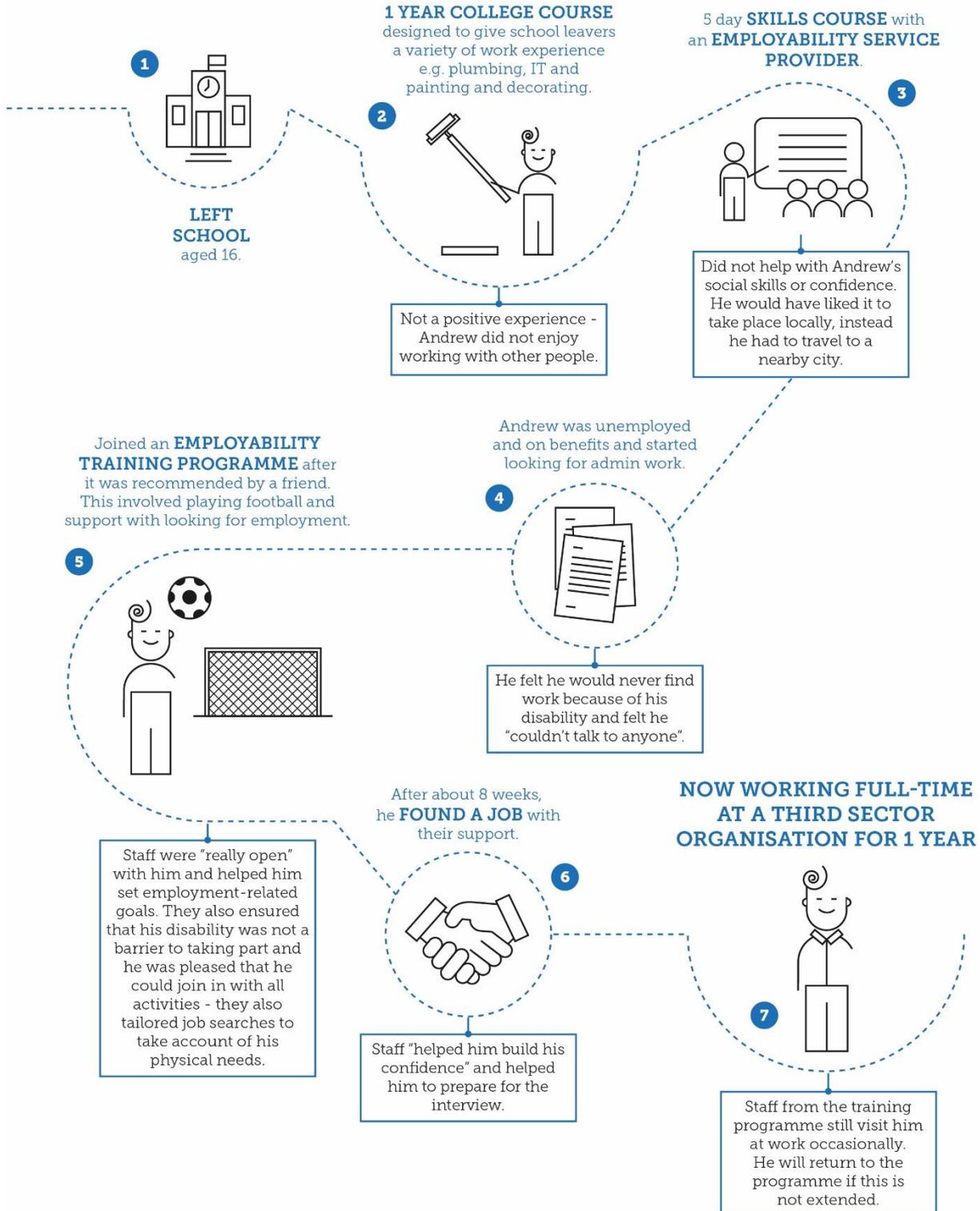
When it worked well, users described advice and guidance that was:

- informed by meaningful discussions with them;
- delivered by advisors/mentors who showed respect for their views; and
- delivered by advisors/mentors who had good insight or empathy with their needs and the factors that would affect their journey.

Andrew's journey shows how staff, with an understanding of his disability and his needs, were able to support him progress on his employability journey.



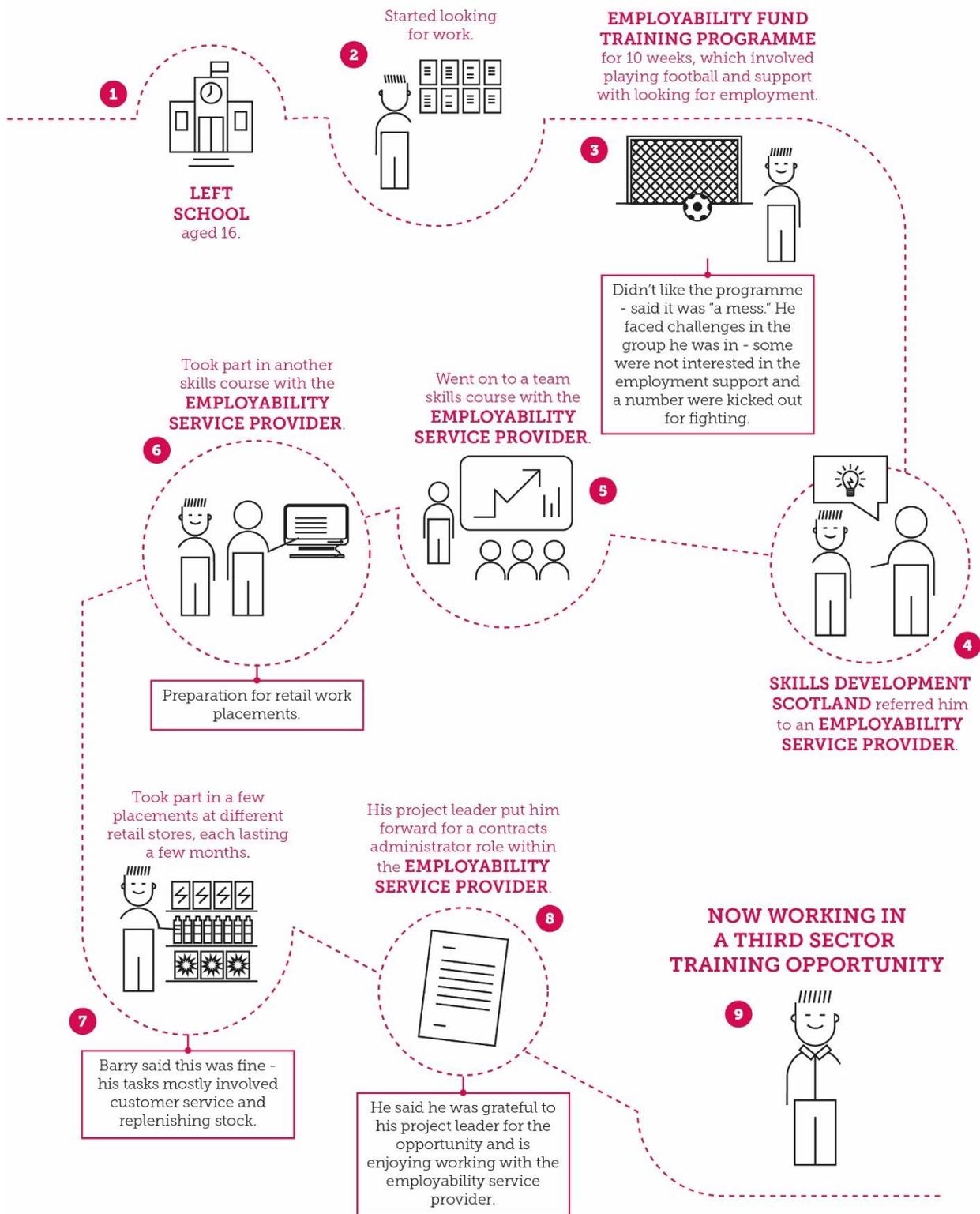
**ANDREW IS 20 YEARS OLD & HAS CEREBRAL PALSY
HE LIVES IN SIMD DECILE 1
THIS IS HIS JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT**



Barry's journey is an example of a care-leaver's journey towards employment.



**BARRY IS 18 YEARS OLD
HE LIVES IN SIMD DECILE 1 AND HE IS CARE-EXPERIENCED
THIS IS HIS JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT**



Interviewees described being listened to, being valued and that the advisor 'gets me'. This was evident in those programmes designed for specific target groups, such as users who were care experienced, where the staff had an empathy and appreciation of the lifestyle and challenges that users were facing and, as a result, provided realistic advice and appropriate signposting to the next stage or the same stage within the user's journey.

Promotion and guidance about pathways in the senior phase of education

Access to relevant careers guidance and the promotion of vocational pathways at school had been limited for many of the interviewees. Some had not had a positive school experience, had not been regular attenders at school and left compulsory education early. In these cases they often missed out on any careers advice.

For others who had received school guidance, they felt that the advice had been quite limited and their post-school choices focused heavily on college courses like construction, hairdressing and childcare. For these interviewees their participation in a college course could sometimes be short-lived and, as well as no longer being engaged in education or employment or training, their confidence and view of further training and education was sometimes negatively affected.

However, there were examples from users where the school guidance staff, aware of local providers, had referred them to a neighbourhood project or organisation that delivered an employability programme, because they recognised that this would be most suitable for the user in supporting them on their journey.

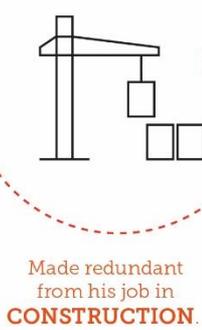
Users needed school guidance staff who had a detailed knowledge of the programmes available locally who were able to present a more complete picture of the potential post-school choices in their local area. This, along with the guidance on potential routes they could take and referral into a suitable provider, would help make the first stage in their employability journey more appropriate and therefore more likely to be sustained.

Programmes that have a sufficient duration to enable users to develop their personal and employability skills

Some of the provision at various stages in the pipeline is delivered over a short period of time, for example, 12 weeks. In many cases this is appropriate for the stage of development and the skills that are being acquired. This is exemplified by Tom's journey where he completed a training course to develop a sector-specific skill at Stage 4 in the employability pipeline.



**TOM IS 54 YEARS OLD AND HE LIVES IN
SIMD DECILE 5
THIS IS HIS JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT**



1

Made redundant from his job in **CONSTRUCTION**.

Got a job as a **DRIVER** and got his **HGV LICENSE**.

2



This was meant to be a temporary job but he enjoyed it and stayed for 5 years.

Made **REDUNDANT** again after 5 years.

3



Tom had never been unemployed before - it was "difficult and pretty daunting".

Earned a Driving Certificate of Professional Competence through the **EMPLOYABILITY TRAINING PROGRAMME**.

6



A lot of employers require their drivers to hold this qualification.

Went to an **EMPLOYABILITY TRAINING PROGRAMME** who helped with searching for jobs and applying for **JOBSEEKERS ALLOWANCE**.

5



The team at the employability training programme were very professional and had a good network of contacts. Tom appreciated that he was constantly getting feedback.



4

Searched and **APPLIED FOR JOBS ONLINE**, but was unsuccessful.

He said it was frustrating that he never got feedback from unsuccessful job applications.

After 1 month of support from the programme he was offered a driving job.

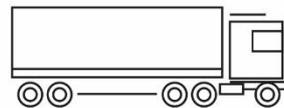
7



His only complaint was the amount of paperwork involved in the process - he said it was very time consuming for both him and the staff.

NOW PERMANENTLY EMPLOYED AS AN HGV DRIVER

8



For other users, short time frames were problematic, forcing them to move on before key barriers were addressed. This usually applied to users at the earlier stages of the employability pipeline.

We heard from several users who had participated in more than three employability programmes at the same (or a similar) stage of the pipeline. While all the programmes were designed to develop their employability skills, some users explained that they were distracted by personal issues and were therefore not ready to move on to the next stage and just needed a little more time before they could move forward.

Programmes that are delivered over a longer timeframe provide sufficient time for users to develop employability skills while addressing their own needs and circumstances, so that personal setbacks can be better accommodated and their place in the programme can be maintained.

Support during the employability journey, particularly at transition points

Across the six employability programmes, there are differing levels of support provided to users during the programme. While particular groups may need more support than others, it appears that the level and nature of the support is key to helping a user sustain their journey. This support can be in all forms from addressing issues at home and practical assistance to getting to a placement, help with applying for a job or having someone to confide in when challenges arise.

In programmes with a mentor or a trusted professional in regular contact with the users, the interviewees commented on the encouragement and confidence that gave them and how valuable this was in helping them to remain on the programme. A crucial time when this support is needed and welcomed is at the transition point, when many users felt vulnerable moving to the next stage in their journey. In programmes with an aftercare element, the users continued to receive support during this period of uncertainty and several users described their mentor/professional checking in to make sure everything was okay, helping them to smooth out any issues and providing general reassurance.

It is not only about access to this support but it is also the way in which the support is provided. Users talked about their mentors/trusted professionals showing understanding, being non-judgemental, paying attention to their views and having a positive attitude, all of which were very encouraging for the users.

It is clear that all users would benefit from some form of support during their employability journey, with some needing it far more than others. However, there are critical points when this assistance, provided in a supportive way, plays a key role in helping users to make the transition to and sustain the next stage of their journey.

Other issues arising

In addition to the four main themes described above, a number of other issues were raised by users during the research. Whilst these issues cannot be considered to be necessarily representative of a wider view, due to the relatively small number of people who raised them with us, they are issues which are likely to be important to others too and which should continue to be considered and monitored through future programmes. These include:

- some specific challenges in rural areas where people have further to travel to reach (employability or employment) opportunities – the cost of this can be high and therefore excluding.
- financial support can be instrumental in helping the employability journey, can act as an incentive to sign-up to take part in a programme, and can be a useful mechanism for encouraging young people in particular to manage their own money for the first time. For others, however, financial support seems to have been incidental to the success of their journey.
- For some people, success is simply about staying in the system rather than progressing.
- Some users appreciated employability support that was modelled on the workplace and familiarised them with what is expected by employers (i.e. being on time and using appropriate language)
- Relationships with other service users participating in an employability programme can have an impact on whether individuals benefit from the programme or not. In some cases, negative influence from other service users may detract from the experience if they are disruptive, while in other cases, like-minded people who share an interest in moving into employment can motivate each other to make the most of the activities they are participating in.
- Opportunities for employability support that can be accessed locally may be preferable for some users, especially those who lack confidence in using public transport, have caring responsibilities or do not have enough money to travel further.
- Finding employment and employability opportunities that fit around family and childcare responsibilities is an important consideration for some users.

A programme designed and delivered to meet users' needs

Within the six Scottish Government-funded employability programmes considered in this research, several targeted specific groups of young people who face additional barriers to employment. Many of the aspects of programme design that help these users on their employability journey are also ones that would benefit the wider cohort of users engaged in the employability system.

From the user interviews, feedback indicates that the programmes that are most supportive are those that are personalised to the needs and interests of users and that have:

- real opportunities to develop skills and abilities relevant to user interests and needs;
- an achievable timeframe for supporting and developing their skills;
- practical experience that will help their readiness to move on;
- staff that are respectful and empathetic and who provide support during the programme; and
- sufficient aftercare until they are stable in the next destination.

In the next chapter, we explore the providers' experience of delivering Scottish Government-funded employability programmes.

Chapter 4: Provider experiences

As described in Chapter 1, the six Scottish Government-funded employability programmes differ in the way they are administered, the funding package on offer, the users they target, the stage of the employability pipeline against which they deliver, and the measurements of success.

As a result, providers' experiences of the employability system and how it can impact on users vary significantly, even amongst providers funded under the same programme but delivering at different stages in the pipeline. Nevertheless, there are themes that consistently emerge, often within particular programmes, which affect the providers and in turn impact on the user experience and employability journey.

From the discussions with the 31 providers we interviewed during this research, the main issues arising can be themed around:



Within each of these four main themes there are a number of key issues and these are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Focus of the programmes

Most of the programmes are focused on young people (aged 29 or under). Only one programme is open to eligible users of all ages. The eligibility criteria of some of the programmes has changed over time in response to the labour market and the economy and, increasingly, programmes are focused on users who face multiple barriers to employment.

As a result of this broad range of eligible users, providers emphasised that the programmes now need to be designed in a way that ensures they can meet both the needs of older users who might, for example, be re-training after being made redundant as well as supporting younger users who, for example, are care experienced and facing a range of personal challenges while trying to progress their employability journey.

To do this, the providers were clear that flexibility needs to be threaded through the programme design and delivery to enable them to deliver relevant, appropriate and tailored provision. Flexible delivery will translate in different ways for different groups of users. For example, some of those programmes aimed at developing users at the early and middle stages of the pipeline would need to be delivered over a longer period of time. Many users within the target groups have social, emotional or health issues that need to be addressed, alongside the development of their employability skills, before they can progress or just to maintain their current stage, and this takes time. This is a point that was echoed by the users in their interviews.

Providers were clear that greater flexibility would positively impact on the service they provide and the experience of their users and, for this bespoke employability support to work, the rest of the implementation and management systems would need to adjust to facilitate a fully flexible approach.

Administration and evidence

Each programme has its own set of criteria for users that are eligible to access the programme, a set timeframe for delivering the support, criteria with regards to the type of support that can be delivered, and individual reporting requirements and amount of evidence that needs to be submitted.

Providers delivering programmes under more than one funding stream described these different requirements and the significant amount of time attached to addressing programme bureaucracy, a resource which they felt could be re-directed to more meaningful delivery of the programme.

In their interviews, the providers recognised that they needed to be accountable for the spend of the funding and report on delivery and progress but that, in some programmes, it needed to be structured in such a way that lessened the administrative burden on both the provider and their users. Providers described 'excessive' reporting requirements to evidence outcomes and to trigger payments.

For example, in one programme the user is required to complete a range of paperwork within the first five days of an individual being referred to the programme. A few providers explained that this meant taking the individual out of the early stages of their training session to complete the forms, which was frustrating for the user and also disrupted their learning. They felt that more streamlined reporting would benefit that programme.

Providers described how the criteria within some programmes restricted their ability to deliver the most appropriate service to their users and that they had to be creative to manoeuvre through the operating requirements, adjust their delivery to fit them or use other funding - like European Social Fund (ESF) monies - to deliver the support the user needed. Some providers were particularly frustrated by the restrictions on training providers or the accredited courses that they could use (and then draw down funding). This was mainly because they felt it did not meet current needs. The 'approved list' was not up to date with local or national providers and some of the accredited courses were out of touch with the accreditations that industry sectors were now seeking from employees. One provider described their unsuccessful attempts to challenge the list or add more relevant accreditations that their users required.

The same Scottish Government-funded employability programme required follow up evidence which triggered payments at certain points after completion of the programme and required information from the user and the user's new employer. Providers explained that this was a time consuming task and involved chasing up the different parties, many of whom did not respond, and it was again more time away from meaningful programme delivery. Some providers rarely secured the evidence from all parties and so they were unable to draw down the final payments. Again there was frustration at what was felt to be an unnecessary level of evidence.

In contrast, amongst the six Scottish Government-funded programmes, there were examples of relevant and proportionate reporting that provided a clear picture of programme delivery but without the administrative burden felt by providers or users on some of the programmes.

Those providers delivering several programmes under different funding streams would welcome greater consistency and simplification of the requirements and processes across the employability system.

In terms of the administration of the programmes, most providers commented positively on the national bodies administering the six Scottish Government-funded programmes, acknowledging the benefit of liaising with and reporting to one organisation, particularly when they were delivering across more than one local authority area. However, they also recognised that this approach meant that the administering organisation could not have the depth understanding and knowledge of the local context. Without this, they could not fully appreciate the availability of services and opportunities, the local workforce and therefore the extent to which that affected the provider's ability to support users and deliver appropriate provision.

Funding and investment in the programmes

The providers identified a number of issues that related to programme funding and investment. Again this varied significantly across the programmes with some providers benefitting from long term funding and access to pro bono support and other providers delivering programmes within short funding cycles.

Short term funding was challenging for providers. All the providers explained the negative impact on their ability to deliver a service to users when the funding arrangements were over short periods. This affected planning and resourcing and sometimes the loss of good staff who needed the financial stability that fixed, short-term contracts did not provide.

There were many comments from the providers about the funding that they received for particular aspects of delivery, and they centred on:

- fixed amounts of funding that had not increased in several years;
- limits on the cost of particular provision, for example training courses, despite the cost, in some cases, far exceeding the allowance; and
- funding linked to hard outcomes.

As already discussed, the users being supported through the programmes are facing multiple barriers that providers need to help them address. These barriers may include drug addiction, disability, mental health issues, chaotic lifestyles, homelessness, caring responsibilities, low self-esteem, poverty, and poor educational attainment, and users often present with a combination of two or more of these.

Several providers explained that the support they provide might lead to changes that enable users to maintain their position on the employability pipeline, or even fall back but stay engaged. Although this can be considered an achievement for some users, under most programmes the support to do this is not recognised because the focus is on linear progression which is unrealistic with the cohort of users now being supported. For example, one provider described how they had had significant success in addressing a user's drug addiction but because no progress was made towards achieving a qualification, they were unable to draw down their allocation of funding for supporting that person.

Providers want to see much better understanding of the challenges of providing support reflected in how the programmes view success and the way outcomes are funded so that providers can invest in appropriate levels of support without needing to 'top up' with funding from other sources, like ESF.

The providers recognise that a system of monitoring/tracking would remain necessary but in future would ideally be one system being applied across all the programmes. This would enable a user's journey between different services to be accurately captured and give those providing support during that journey a more

comprehensive understanding of the distance travelled and the previous support that the user has received.

For some of the programmes, in addition to the financial contribution to delivering the service, providers were able to access resources on offer from the organisation administering the fund. These resources, offered pro bono, ranged from leadership training and employment law, to board member development and IT support. This investment in the form of development of systems, knowledge and advice for the provider was of great benefit to the organisation and further enhanced their effectiveness as an organisation which ultimately benefitted the users. The providers that had accessed this support considered these to be valuable opportunities that should be built into the other programmes so that more providers could also benefit.

Support on the programme

The focus on users with multiple barriers to employment means that providers increasingly need to provide support during the programme and the transition, in order for some users to sustain their employability journey. In most Scottish Government-funded programmes, the resources to provide that support and aftercare are not factored into the costs and so providers are increasingly needing to find ways to support the users. Some providers do not have staff with the skillset or experience to do that and the provider does not have additional funding to pay to bring that support in.

This growing need to provide support at all stages of the employability pipeline was a consistent message throughout the provider interviews and they felt there needed to be greater recognition of the requirement for appropriate support during programmes, regardless of the user target group.

In those programmes where users had access to a trusted professional or mentor who provided that one-to-one support during the user's journey, as described in Chapter 3, they were able to provide the emotional support as well as the practical help to aid the user through the stages of the pipeline or maintain their position when they faced challenges or setbacks. This model of support is one which all providers would like to make available for their users.

Other issues arising

In the case of providers, as was the case with users, we identified a number of other issues which were raised, but not frequently enough to have been considered key themes. We have noted some of these below and again suggest that these be considered and monitored through future programmes:

- A number of programmes are unsuited to disabled people and the additional types of support they require.

- The importance of needs assessments not just being “gap analysis” but identifying route causes of barriers to progression.
- Importance of earlier intervention – to identify and address barriers, and to develop aspirations – “we could be doing much more from the start of secondary education to talk about potential and aspiration with positive role models and engaging employability issues in the family unit”.
- Across different programmes and policy areas, there are very different ways of understanding different barriers. This is a particular issue in relation to disability.
- Empowering people, in addition to supporting them, was considered an important component of service delivery.
- Some providers access funding from a range of employability funding streams and other sources, which allows a more fluid approach to providing employability support to service users. It also enables these providers to allocate more support to service users in a particular employability programme, beyond what that programme would normally provide.
- For some smaller providers, the outsourcing of the service user recruitment process to referring agencies was beneficial because it reduced the pressure on the organisation’s limited internal resources.
- A number of providers had limited awareness of the destinations of service users once they complete the employability programme.
- Some employers involved in employability programmes observed that helping young people into work was consistent with their organisational ethos or aims, or their charitable objectives and this provided an extra incentive to take part.

A programme that is sufficiently flexible to provide the right support

The discussions with providers identified that the inflexibility within some of the programmes restricted their ability to provide the most appropriate service to the users, and in addition, a more flexible approach to delivery and resourcing would mean that they could tailor the offering to the individual user needs.

Timeframes for delivery need to be appropriate to the needs being addressed, with scope to flex the package of support when people stall or regress.

More extensive support at all stages of the pipeline is now a necessity with the focus on users who face more barriers to employability.

A more joined-up approach would reduce duplication of effort and funding, while providing greater clarity to those seeking and offering employability support and to those signposting users into the system.

Chapter 5: Summary and considerations

The purpose of this research was to give a clearer understanding of individual users' experiences of their journeys within the pre-employment support system, which are illustrated in the journeys presented throughout this report.

Across the cohort of 60 service users we consulted during the research, there was a wide range of experiences which were influenced by many factors, including their experiences in the education system, factors arising due to chaotic lifestyles or caring responsibilities, personal issues related to mental or physical health, and the existence or otherwise of effective support mechanisms.

This highlighted the complexity involved in providing the right type of support to suit all needs. We examined the extent to which varying approaches to delivering employability programmes affected these journeys and identified four key components to successfully supporting a person's journey:

- Ensuring that the content of any programme is relevant to the needs of users and fit for purpose (i.e. it offers skills that the person wishes to develop, it is suited to the individuals' circumstances at the point they join the programme, and it supports them to progress to the next stage of their employability journey effectively).
- High quality guidance and advice must be tailored to an individual's circumstances – informed by meaningful discussions and delivered with respect, insight and empathy (from school right through to the point of sustained employment).
- Ensuring regular, appropriate support is provided at each stage of the employability journey – potentially in the form of a trusted professional, mentor, or through programme staff. This is particularly important at transition points when service users are most vulnerable.
- A personalised approach is taken – either through targeted interventions for specific target groups, or through programmes that can flex to meet the needs of a varied group of individuals. Key components to this will include real opportunities to develop skills and interests; achievable timeframes for supporting and developing skills; respectful, empathetic staff; and sufficient aftercare support.

Our discussions with providers backed this up and gave a clear sense of some of the current challenges affecting their ability to provide support in this way. While these challenges are not present in all of the funding programmes we examined, they do feature as a challenge in most. They include:

- The focus of many of the current programmes is too limited. Most of the programmes focus heavily on young people, with only one being open to

users of all ages. Flexibility is key to future delivery – with providers being able to deliver relevant, appropriate and tailored provision within appropriate time-frames.

- Any future programme needs to take account of the progress, stalling and regression that can affect a user's journey.
- Funding mechanisms need to reflect the providers' need to plan and resource the service over the medium term by offering a degree of stability not found currently in some of the programmes.
- Administration and requirements with regards to evidencing progress (which then triggers draw down of funding) varies significantly currently between programmes (and managing organisations). For some programmes, the time and resources spent by providers on compliance is significant and detracts from time which could be spent on delivery. In other programmes, reporting is relevant and proportionate, giving sufficient reassurance about programme delivery and impact, without an excessive administrative burden being placed on providers. The latter is the standard to which future programmes should aspire.
- Funding mechanisms which also support the provider organisations to develop their potential as an organisation are viewed positively. Take-up of pro-bono opportunities offered by funders varies between organisations, but those organisations which have accessed such support have valued it highly (and for some it has been instrumental in making their organisations more sustainable).

Addressing the challenges faced by providers, and the needs of users identified through our research will be important factors in any future employability programme.

Appendix 1 – List of providers

Organisation
Activity Agreements
Edinburgh Council
Citadel Leith
West Pilton Neighbourhood Centre
East Ayrshire Council
Community Jobs Scotland
Auchinleck
Cassiltoun Housing Assoc.
Wiston Lodge
Callander Youth Project Trust
Living Solutions
Developing Your Potential
Prince's Trust
Glasgow City College
Action for Children
Barnardo's
Employability Fund
Routes to Work
West Highland College UHI
Venture Trust (2 delivery staff)
Street League (2 delivery staff)
Barnardo's
Shirlie Project
N Edinburgh Childcare (6 delivery staff)
Fife Works
14:19 Fund

Organisation

Venture Trust

Enable

FARE (2 delivery staff)

Action for Children

Street League (2 delivery staff)

SERI

Stornoway Golf Club

Club 300

Lathallan Nursery

Ladybird Tearoom

Giraffe Trading CIC

Appendix 2 – Profile of Research Participants

Figure A2.1: Age (n=60)

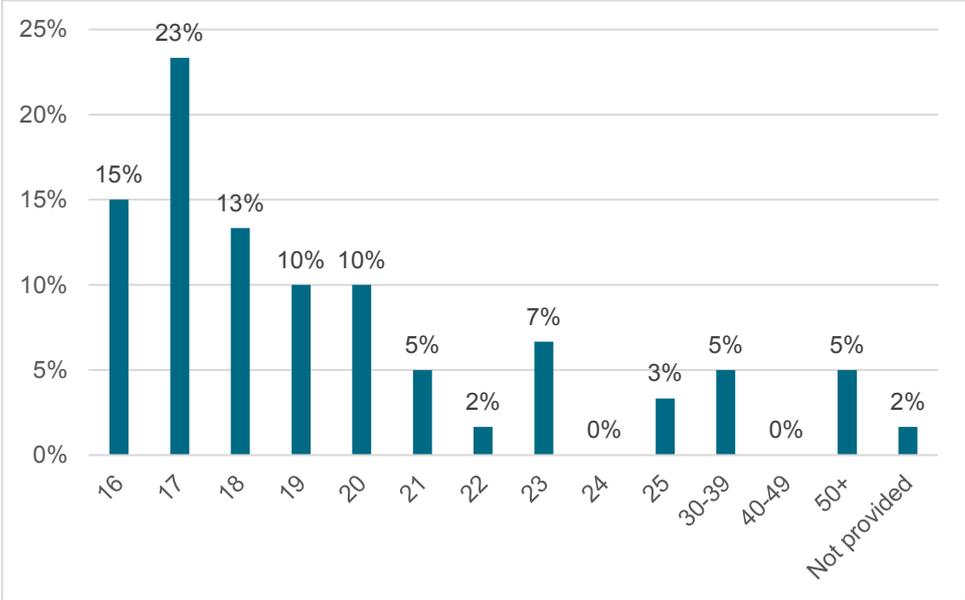


Figure A2.2: Users by SIMD decile (n=60)

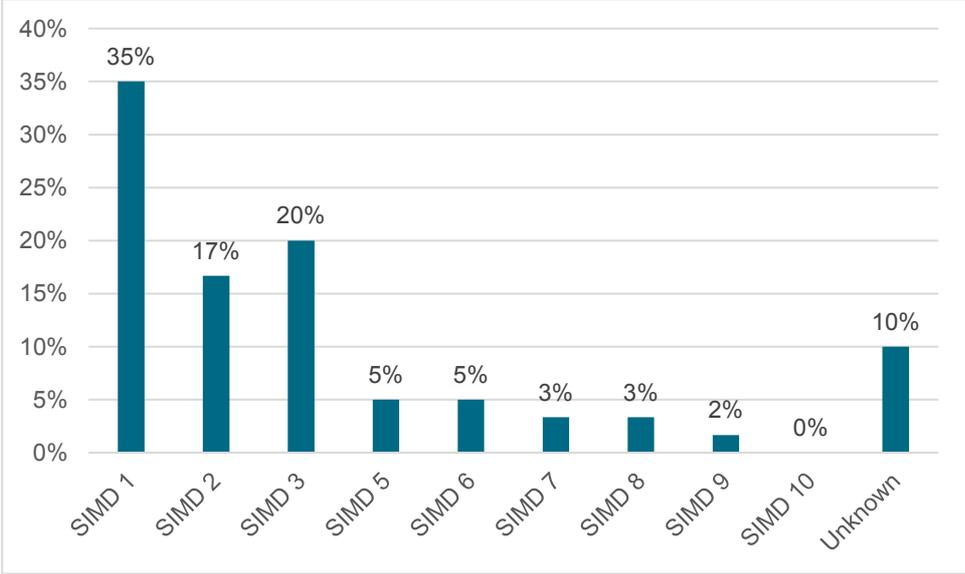
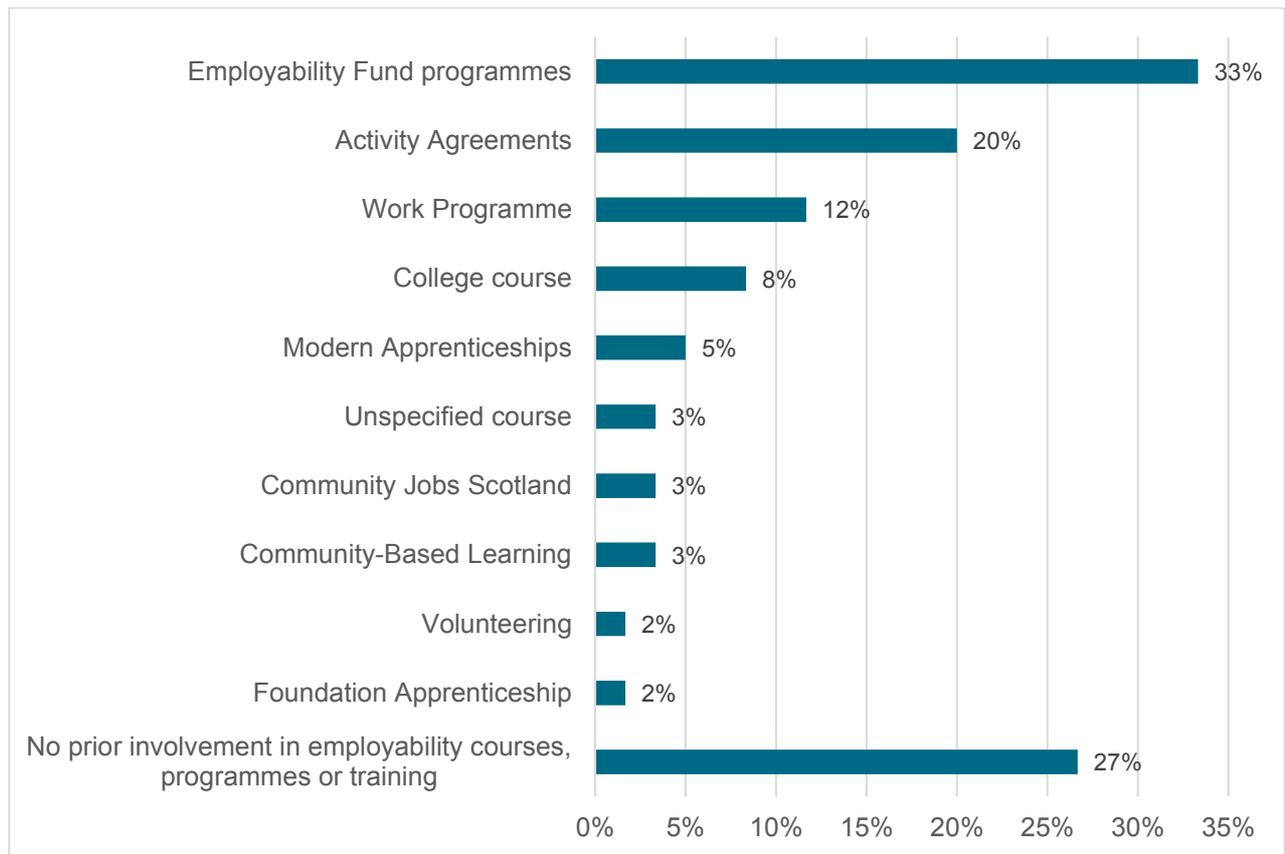


Figure A2.3: Involvement with employability services (n=60)



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Appendix 4 – User journeys



CHERYL IS 36 YEARS OLD & HAS A 4 YEAR OLD CHILD
SHE LIVES IN SIMD DECILE 5
THIS IS HER EMPLOYABILITY JOURNEY SO FAR

1



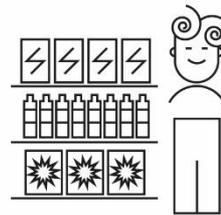
LEFT SCHOOL
aged 17

Went to college to do a 2-year HND in Accounts and Finance.

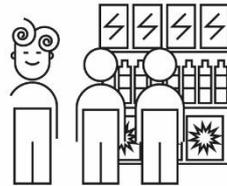


2

Worked part-time in a supermarket whilst she was a college.



Became a full-time supervisor at the supermarket when she finished college.



3

4



Stayed in managerial roles within the sector.

Made redundant in 2018.

5



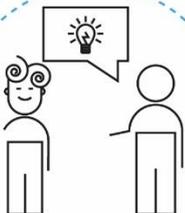
Support from employer with CV development.

Offered a place at university but chose to remain at the supermarket and take a management secondment.

CURRENTLY UNEMPLOYED AND RECEIVING SUPPORT FROM EMPLOYABILITY TRAINING PROGRAMME

6

Went to **JOBCENTRE PLUS** and referred to an **EMPLOYABILITY TRAINING PROGRAMME**.



7

The team at the **EMPLOYABILITY TRAINING PROGRAMME** suggested an accounts course for payroll.



Good fit with what she wanted to do. The employability training programme met the costs of course and travel.

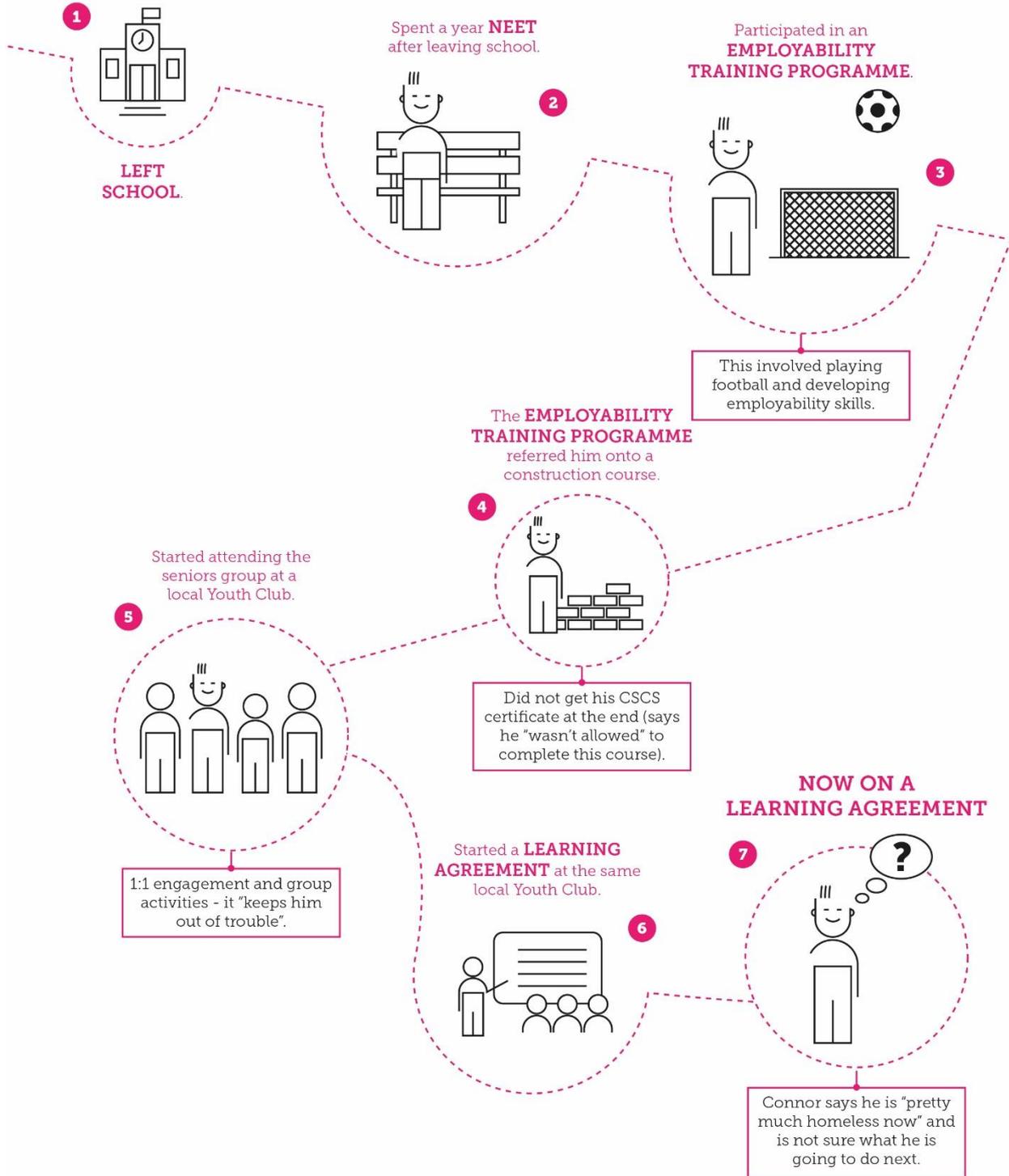
8



She passed both accounts courses but cannot find a job. Employers want more experienced candidates.

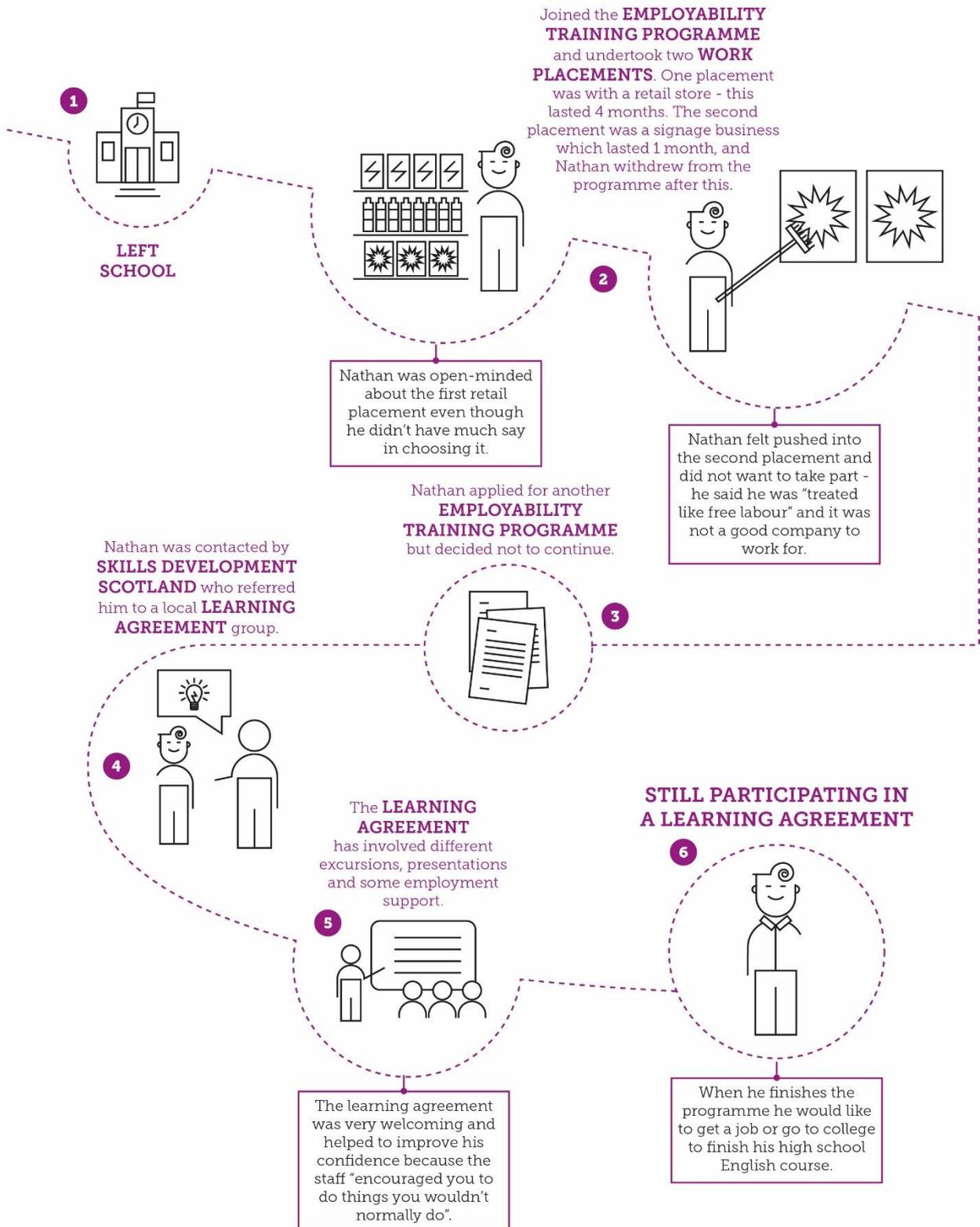


CONNOR IS 19 YEARS OLD
AND LIVES IN SIMD DECILE 4
THIS IS HIS EMPLOYABILITY JOURNEY SO FAR



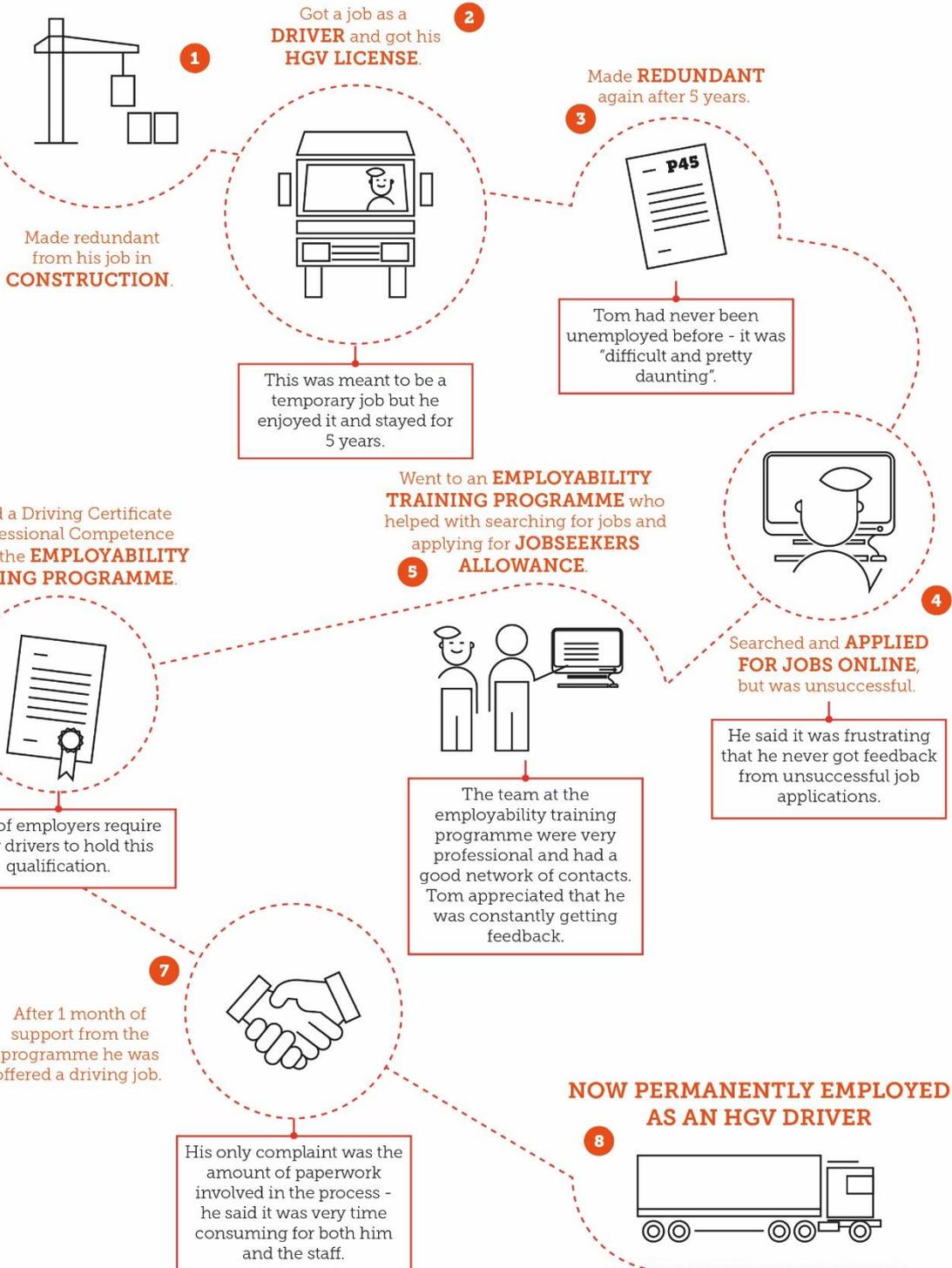


**NATHAN IS 17 YEARS OLD
AND LIVES IN SIMD DECILE 1
THIS IS HIS EMPLOYABILITY JOURNEY SO FAR**



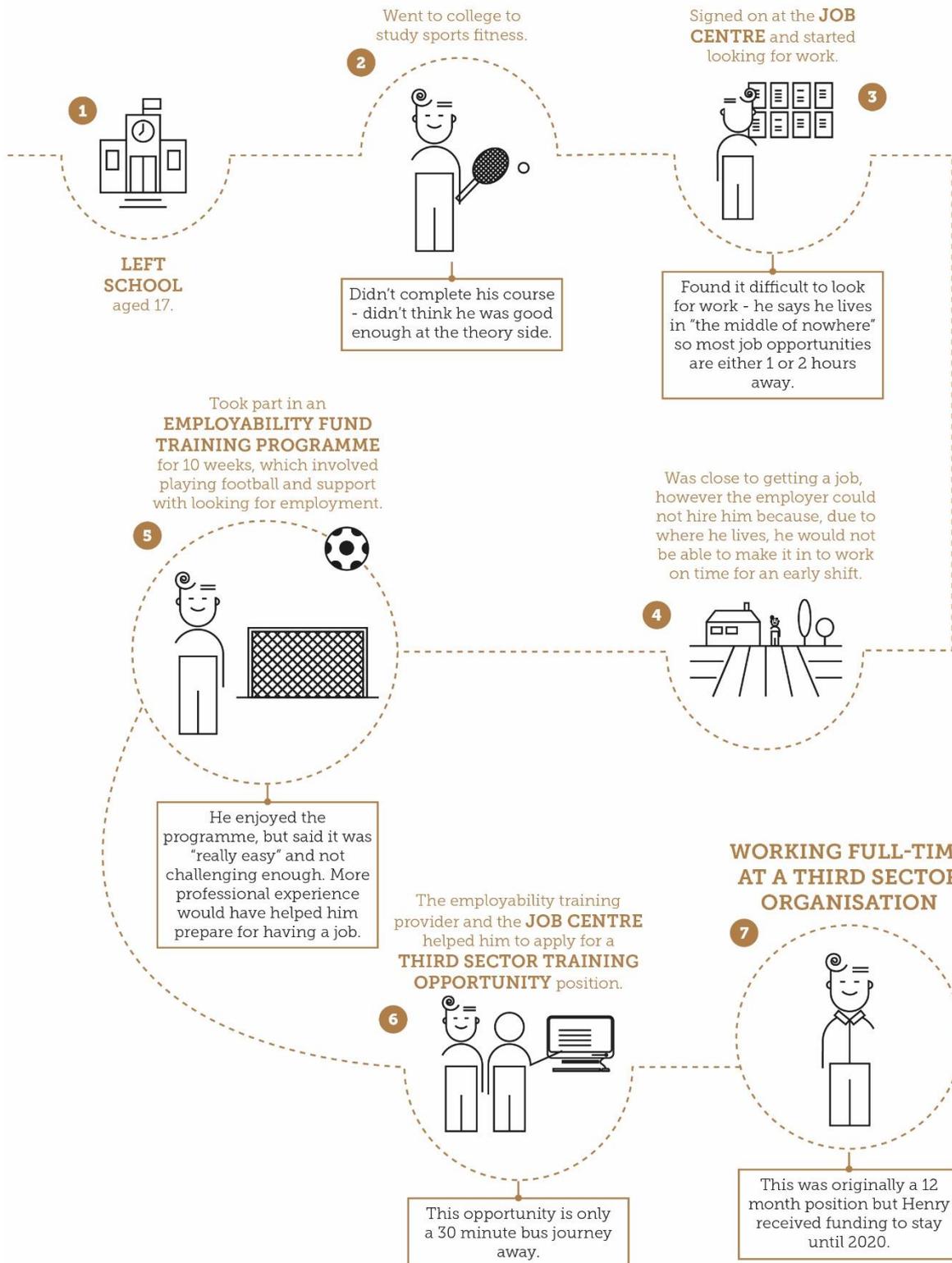


**TOM IS 54 YEARS OLD AND HE LIVES IN
SIMD DECILE 5
THIS IS HIS JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT**



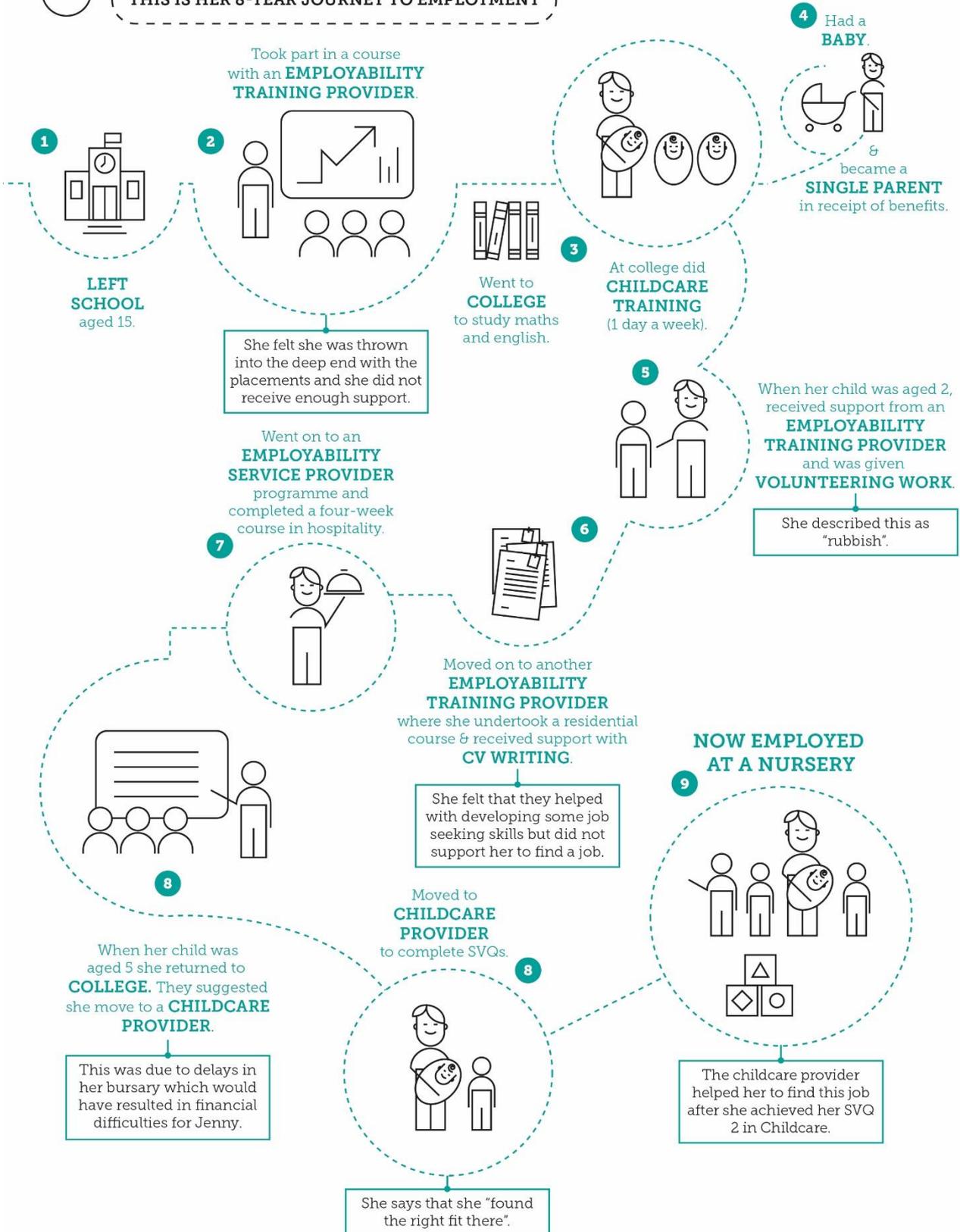


**HENRY IS 20 YEARS OLD
AND HE LIVES IN SIMD DECILE 1
THIS IS HIS JOURNEY INTO EMPLOYMENT**





**JENNY IS A SINGLE PARENT AGED 23
SHE LIVES IN SIMD DECILE 1
THIS IS HER 8-YEAR JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT**





**DAVE IS 18 YEARS OLD AND LIVES IN
SIMD DECILE 1
THIS IS HIS JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT**

1



**LEFT
SCHOOL**
aged 16.

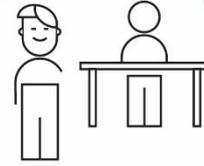
2



Was **NEET** after leaving school and received some **EMPLOYABILITY SUPPORT**.

He felt the employability support agency just wanted him to look at jobs which wasn't helpful - he didn't want to "sit about" anymore.

3



His pupil support teacher from school got in touch and set up an interview with an **EMPLOYABILITY SERVICE PROVIDER**.

The provider recommended he go to an **EMPLOYABILITY TRAINING PROGRAMME**.

4



The training programme was local and easier to get to than the employability service provider.

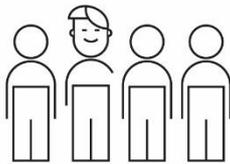
The **EMPLOYABILITY TRAINING PROGRAMME** involved Connect 2 & 3 courses, visiting colleges, completing work experience and training and physical activities like abseiling.

5



Dave described the programme as "the best thing I've done" and said it helped him to become much more confident.

6



His final course at the **TRAINING PROGRAMME** developed his **TEAM BUILDING** and **CV WRITING SKILLS**.

He appreciated that the programme was like a work environment e.g. they were reprimanded for coming late and inappropriate language - this was "very helpful" in preparing for employment.

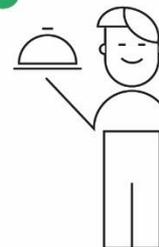
7



Went into a work experience placement at a **TRAINING ACADEMY**, and at the end he was offered a full time position.

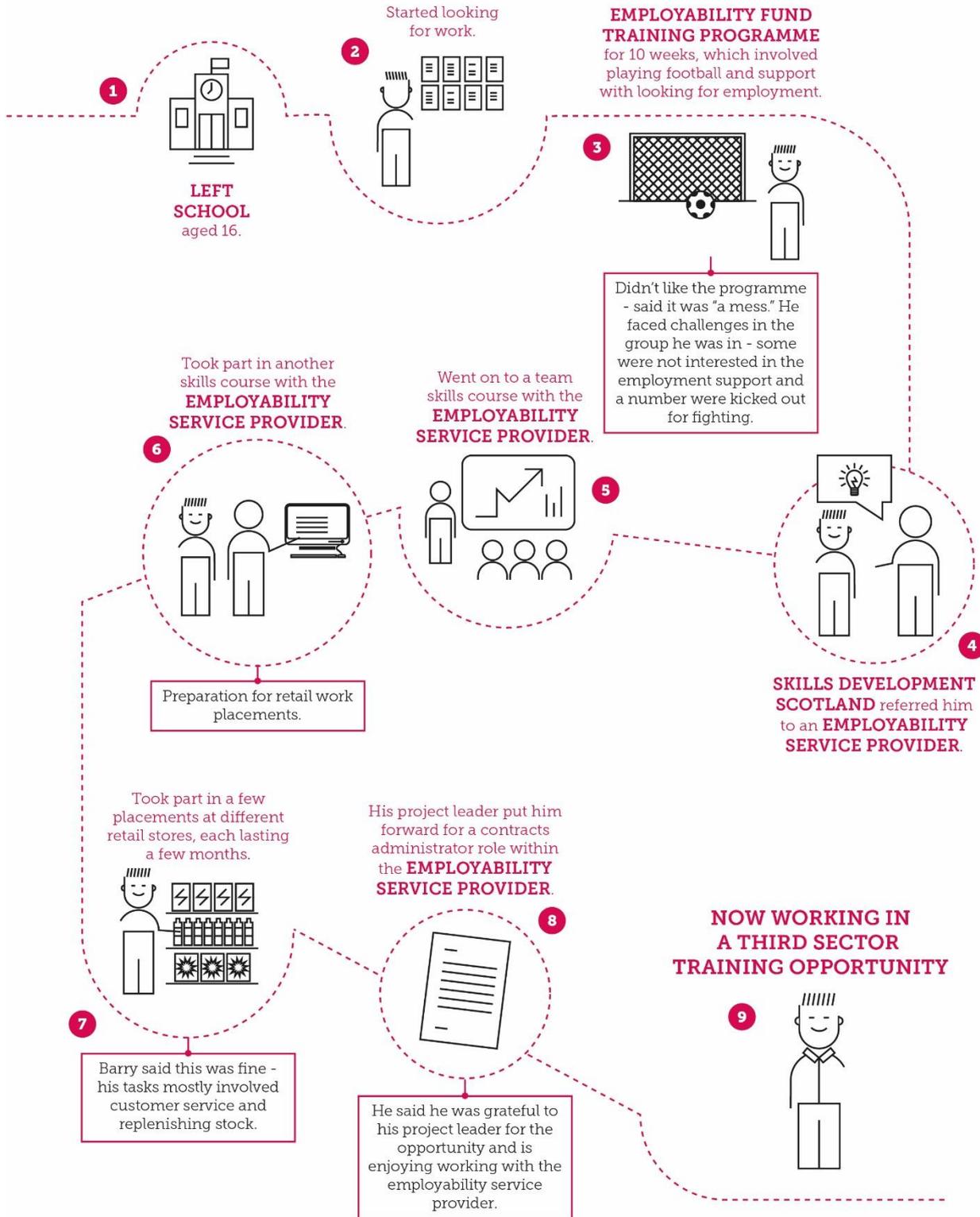
**NOW PERMANENTLY
EMPLOYED AT A
TRAINING ACADEMY**

8



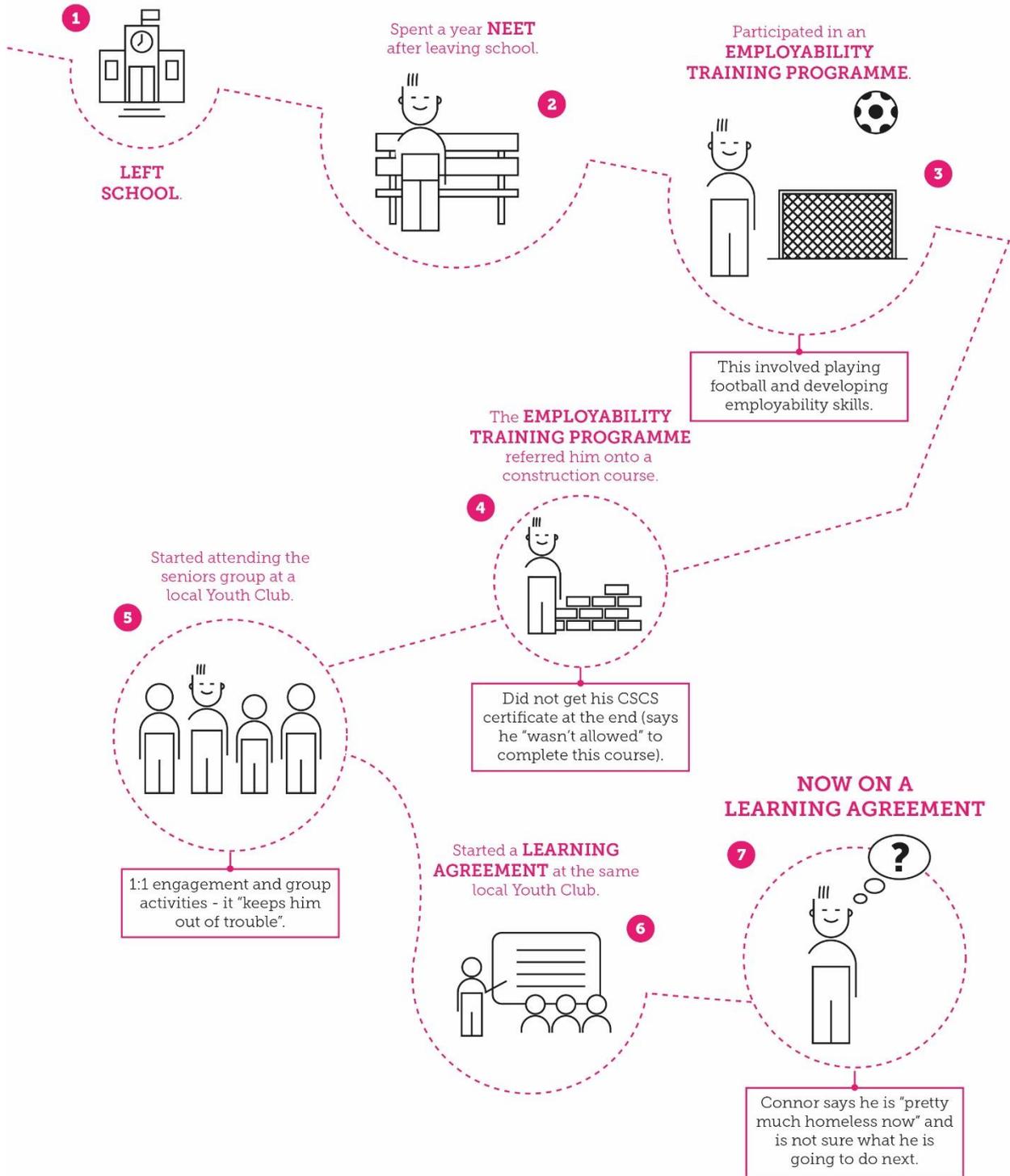


**BARRY IS 18 YEARS OLD
HE LIVES IN SIMD DECILE 1 AND HE IS CARE-EXPERIENCED
THIS IS HIS JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT**





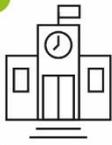
CONNOR IS 19 YEARS OLD
AND LIVES IN SIMD DECILE 4
THIS IS HIS EMPLOYABILITY JOURNEY SO FAR





**MICHAEL IS 19 YEARS OLD
AND LIVES IN SIMD DECILE 6
THIS IS HIS JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT**

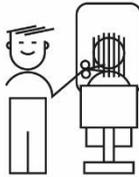
1



**LEFT
SCHOOL**
aged 16.

Joined an **EMPLOYABILITY
FUND TRAINING PROGRAMME**
at a local hairdresser.

2



Started a **MODERN
APPRENTICESHIP** at
the same hairdresser.

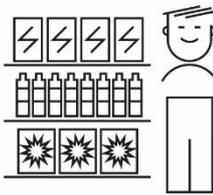
3



He did not enjoy the MA.

Completed the **MODERN
APPRENTICESHIP** and got
a part-time job at a
supermarket alongside
his bar work.

5



Started working part-time
at the bar in a local
sports club to supplement
his income.

4

**NOW EMPLOYED
AT THE SPORTS CLUB**

7



The manager at the sports
club suggested he become
a full-time employee.



6

He was given the
opportunity to combine
his part-time bar work
with a part-time
administrative role
to bring his hours up
to full-time.

Michael enjoys the
"banter" at the sports club,
but also says it has made
him more confident.