



Fair Start Scotland Evaluation Report 2: Local area case studies - year 1 (November 2019)



ECONOMY AND LABOUR MARKET

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November 2019

Research undertaken and reported by Rocket Science UK Ltd., Blake Stevenson
and the Institute of Employment Studies on behalf of the Scottish Government

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Executive Summary

The Scottish Government commissioned Rocket Science UK Ltd, in partnership with Blake Stevenson and the Institute of Employment Studies, to complete a three-year evaluation of Fair Start Scotland (FSS) delivery and outcomes.

This report is authored by the researchers and presents the findings from the in-depth exploration of FSS service delivery with providers, partners and participants in localities in three FSS contract areas (Alloa in Forth Valley, Irvine in South West, and Wick in Highlands and Islands).

Further research reports from year 1 of FSS delivery are also available on the Scottish Government website.

Overall, the research has revealed a strong positive response by participants in the FSS service. Participants value the voluntary, comprehensive and respectful nature of the service and commonly reported that FSS is tailored to the individual, and that key workers provide support suited to a participant's individual skillset, interests and experience. This is also reflected in the feedback from employers, who feel that they have received a high-quality service and received strong and effective recruits.

In all three areas we met FSS staff who were dedicated, conscientious and energetic on behalf of participants. It was clear that they were committed to their roles and often went out of their way to ensure their participants received the support they needed and achieved the outcomes to which they aspired.

The quality of relationships between FSS providers and key local partners varies considerably. This can relate to a number of factors, such as the local reputation of FSS staff, the prior roles of staff and the reputation of previous services. Where there is a wide range of other existing services available in the area, FSS providers have found it harder to get across the distinctive nature of the service, and this may have contributed to reduced referrals. The relationship between FSS provider staff and JCP work coaches is particularly important. We came across an example where the relationship was established and successful, and another example where trust and an effective working relationship is slowly being built.

Our main findings include:

- the broader context of services delivery in localities can make a significant impact on the appeal and effectiveness of FSS – in terms of both the extent to which it is part of a wider service offering and whether it is delivered from a venue which is appealing and accessible.
- the range and scale of local job opportunities has an impact on the FSS service as it can be harder for individuals to find employment opportunities and with unemployment at a long-term low, those who are seeking work tend to present with a range of barriers to work.
- it was generally felt by providers and JCP that the 16 hours a week expectation may be too high for many FSS participants. It was suggested

that fair, quality and sustainable work to a participant may be less than this, but that outcome isn't recognised in the current provider payment model. Both the ability for key workers to begin in-work support for those who have secured and are happy with employment at fewer than 16 hours, and the ability for providers to have the outcome recognised financially by the payment model, were the two most commonly cited frustrations with the existing model.

- the configuration of the FSS providers' staff teams display some interesting differences. While all have adopted the 'key worker' approach, a number of different models and roles are emerging – for example, in one location one member of staff had a combined role of community outreach and employer engagement, and all the staff had caseloads of participants. In another location, roles and responsibilities are more clearly separated among staff. It will be useful to explore the different team roles in depth in future local case studies.
- providers continue to identify challenges around eligible and appropriate referrals. Essentially, this is about the professional judgement that a client will be able to gain and retain at least 16 hours a week employment within 12 months. Since the financial model is back loaded (ie providers can only create a viable service by getting clients into work), providers may be likely to err on the side of caution, while referrers may be more optimistic about what is possible and hopeful that the service will be beneficial for the individual regardless of the outcome.
- the constraints on their ability to fund vocational training was identified as an issue by two of the providers. The FSS funding model – with 70% of funding tied to employment outcomes may be encouraging an emphasis on finding someone a job (and keeping them in a job), rather than helping individuals to invest in training and development in order to get them a better and high quality job which is part of the 'Fair Work' agenda.
- provider staff felt that it was important to reflect the lives of participants by being flexible around clients disengaging and re-engaging with the service. Many clients led chaotic and challenging lives with elements of unpredictability and regular setbacks. This means that it may be better for them to pause their involvement with the service without the time taken out being removed from their 12-month timeframe. Staff felt that flexibility should also extend to the ability able to access FSS more than once and it should be possible to defer a referral to enable participants to come to FSS at a later date when their situation has settled down or they have dealt with a particular issue.
- there was a consistent issue about travel time and costs. At one extreme, staff at Wick spent considerable amounts of time and expense travelling to visit clients across a huge geographical area, and funding those in neighbouring towns to travel to the service by bus. In Alloa there was an issue about participants affording the cost and practicality of travelling to jobs, in Irvine the large labour market offered by Glasgow was essentially

inaccessible to participants due to travel costs, and travel to and from the north Ayrshire rural villages was a noticeable issue.

- the need to be able to prepare some clients for FSS was widely accepted. Many clients who may in due course be able to benefit from FSS currently lead chaotic lives in dysfunctional families and other households. In one location we identified that a specific shorter service was being used as a preparation for FSS focusing on reducing the chaos individuals were facing and establishing routines. This service proved to be a solid stepping stone from which clients could be referred on to FSS.
- the presence of European Structural Funds (ESF) in FSS and other local delivery limits the ability for FSS providers to coordinate and align local provision and use FSS as a way to support a cohesive local delivery environment. Providers noted concern that the match funding requirements to ESF become too difficult to track, manage and evidence the more that providers mix and match services and funding to provide tailored and personalised support for an individual.
- providers appreciate the regional approach of the FSS contract areas. We found that providers were strategically taking a regional approach, but often a more localised approach to delivery. For example, in the contract area that includes Alloa, the three local authorities each run separately operationally. There may be value in certain operational aspects being considered regionally, particularly a regional approach to the job broker function to ensure that participants have access to a broader range of job options.

Recommendations for this FSS contract

The current administrative and monitoring processes appear to be burdensome and stressful for staff, with the system being felt to be clunky and with the consequences of errors being significant. We understand that these are being reviewed.

There are a number of issues about the payment model which providers feel not to reflect the needs of participants with more chaotic lives in an increasingly uncertain job market. It would be timely to explore how the model can be developed to reflect more accurately the difference made by the service in this context. There may also be value in Scottish Government exploring and understanding the impact of ESF funding on coordinating services locally and providing further guidance to providers on increasing coordination within these limitations.

There is a wide variation in the quality of the relationship between JCP and FSS providers and it would be beneficial to explore the features of high-quality relationships and the lessons of this for both providers and JCP staff.

In areas where there is not a strong relationship between the FSS provider and Local Authorities in the area there may be a role for the Scottish Government to work with both parties and JCP to explore the issues and help to find a more effective way forward.

There isn't always a consistent view between referrers and FSS providers as to the likelihood of a participant finding work within 12 months. We came across examples where this is the subject of a discussion between the provider and JCP staff and it is likely to be beneficial for referrers and FSS providers to reach agreement where possible, on whether FSS is suitable for participants prior to the referral.

In areas where there are a lot of competing employability services it would be worth mapping these in more detail to explore, how FSS fits in and to identify how FSS is able to offer a distinctive and complementary service.

The significance of health issues for many participants is clear and a range of different kinds of relationships have emerged to help clients with this area of need. It would be worth focusing in particular on this area in the second round of in-depth locality reviews.

Early considerations for future Scottish Government employability services service

Our work to date suggests that there are a number of areas of particular relevance to the design and procurement of future Scottish Government employability services service:

- The ability of a provider to draw on a range of different kinds of services makes it more likely both that clients will be better matched to the service that suits them best, and that the respective strengths of the services are fully drawn on.
- Similarly, the collocation of a range of related services brings clear benefits in terms of creating an obvious place to go for potential participants and for the easy referral of clients between services.
- In particular, it would be valuable for providers to be able to offer (or have ready access to) both pre- FSS support in terms of helping clients to get into a more stable situation before progressing to FSS, and a shorter sharper intervention to provide a taster for the commitment required by a longer term service.
- It is extremely difficult to quickly establish the range of networks and relationships needed to make a success of a new national service. It therefore makes sense to ensure that provision is able to draw on the well-established relationships which Local Authorities have both in terms of their own services and with other relevant organisations and charities.
- The funding model needs to be able to reflect both the unstable situations of some participants and the dynamic nature of the labour market in a way that is fairer to providers in terms of rewarding their work and the difference they are making to the lives of participants.
- The three-hour engagement principle is, on the whole, supported by providers, and they have proved to be creative in using this both to maintain momentum and to provide a range of experiences which are valued by participants.

- There is a consistent issue about the access available to vocational training courses. There is effective use of JCP and other resources in this area, but the funding is not sufficient to respond to the training needs of a number of clients.
- As with all employability services, the experience, expertise, commitment and connections of staff are a key determinant of the quality and impact of the service. In particular, the difference made when the provider is able to draw on staff with strong local connections and relationships is striking. This suggests that there should be a stronger focus in the delivery process on ensuring that the service will be able to draw on such staff – and that the service as a whole has a focus on staff development and high-quality management.

As a corollary, the better the relationships with complementary local services and activities (notably volunteering opportunities), and the wider the range of available services and opportunities, the more likely it is that the provider can create personalised routes to and through work which meet the needs of individual participants. Where the service landscape is scanty there may be a need for supplementary funding to ensure that participants are able to receive a comprehensive experience.

Introduction and Context

The Scottish Government commissioned Rocket Science UK Ltd, in partnership with Blake Stevenson and the Institute of Employment Studies, to complete a three-year evaluation of Fair Start Scotland (FSS). This evaluation will be centred around nine case studies of localities within each of the nine contract areas. In this first-year report we focus on the first three of these in-depth explorations, covering Alloa (Forth Valley), Irvine (South West) and Wick (Highlands and Islands).

Through these case studies this evaluation seeks to:

- Understand how FSS is being implemented across the different lot areas in Scotland
- Understand the experience of FSS for lead providers, partner organisations, participants and employers
- Identify what is working well and less well in the implementation of FSS
- Identify the lessons learned and recommend changes to consider for the remainder of the FSS contract period as well as shaping what the next iteration of employment support in Scotland might look like.
- This report relates to the findings from year one of FSS and investigates the three year 1 localities. The localities for years two and three (in each of the other 6 contract areas) will be decided in autumn 2019. This report is structured as follows:
 - A detailed look at each of the three localities including the social economic context, the management and performance data, the core features of the service in that locality and the lessons can be learned from delivery in that locality
 - Analysis of the views of participants and non-participants interviewed in each of the localities
 - Key findings and conclusions that draw together lessons and implications from each of the case study localities.

FSS builds on the Scottish Government ambition and strategic direction to move Scotland towards a more integrated and aligned employability landscape that is better able to support those with a complex array of needs, infused with principles around fair work, respect and dignity. FSS offers significant scope for learning around:

- the local flexing of a national service to local needs and conditions;
- how it can complement and support other local provision;
- how its governance and performance can be more locally 'owned', so driving service quality and outcomes; and
- how to better integrate employability support with more specialist support which can include health and housing.

The programme of participant and stakeholder research that makes up this evaluation has been designed to make a contribution to the achievement of this vision and in this first year report we have drawn out the lessons that FSS offers to date about how to create a more coherent and comprehensive employability service that responds to the different needs and labour markets across Scotland.

This year 1 evaluation report is underpinned by the following methodology, conducted in each locality between June and August 2019:

Evaluation activity:
Desk-based analysis of socio-economic and employment trends in each locality
Analysis of the management and performance data of FSS in each locality
Interviews with participants in each locality
Interviews with job seekers in each locality eligible for FSS but who didn't participate in the service
Interviews with FSS service staff including lead providers, and their partners and supply chain
Interviews with other relevant stakeholders in the area

Fair Start Scotland in Alloa

This chapter outlines the key features of FSS in Alloa. The Alloa locality services the whole of the Clackmannanshire local authority area. Therefore, in practice, this case study represents findings from Clackmannanshire more broadly. This chapter covers:

- A description of Clackmannanshire including the socio-economic context and labour market
- Analysis of the FSS management and performance data for Clackmannanshire
- A description of the delivery of FSS in Clackmannanshire
- Key lessons we can draw from this case study area

Area profile

This section provides information about labour market patterns and socioeconomic trends in Alloa and Clackmannanshire, focusing on levels of deprivation, unemployment and skills and education. It also provides descriptions of local-level efforts to increase employability and to revitalise the local economy, as well as common barriers to employment within the local area. The population of Clackmannanshire is around 51,400.¹

There are high levels of deprivation and unemployment in Clackmannanshire

According to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, parts of Alloa are in the top 5% of most deprived data zones in Scotland, with the most deprived areas being Alloa South and East.² Similar levels of deprivation can be seen across Clackmannanshire more generally, with 25% of children in the area living in poverty.³ High levels of deprivation in Clackmannanshire have had an increasing impact on health outcomes over the last few years, with over 25% of children at risk of being overweight or obese in 2017.⁴

¹ National Records of Scotland, 'Clackmannanshire Council Area Profile: Mid-2018 Population Estimates' [Webpage accessed 17/09/19: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/clackmannanshire-council-profile.htm>].

² Scottish Government, 'Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation: Postcode to SIMD Rank' [Webpage accessed 02/07/19: <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD>]; Clackmannanshire Council, 'Population of Settlements' [Webpage accessed 02/07/19: <https://www.clacks.gov.uk/council/populationsettlement/>].

³ Clackmannanshire Council, 'Facts and Figures' [Webpage accessed: 03/07/19: <https://www.clacks.gov.uk/council/factsandfigures/>].

⁴ Clackmannanshire Council, 'Health Across Clackmannanshire' [Webpage accessed 03/07/19: <https://www.clacks.gov.uk/council/healthstats/>].

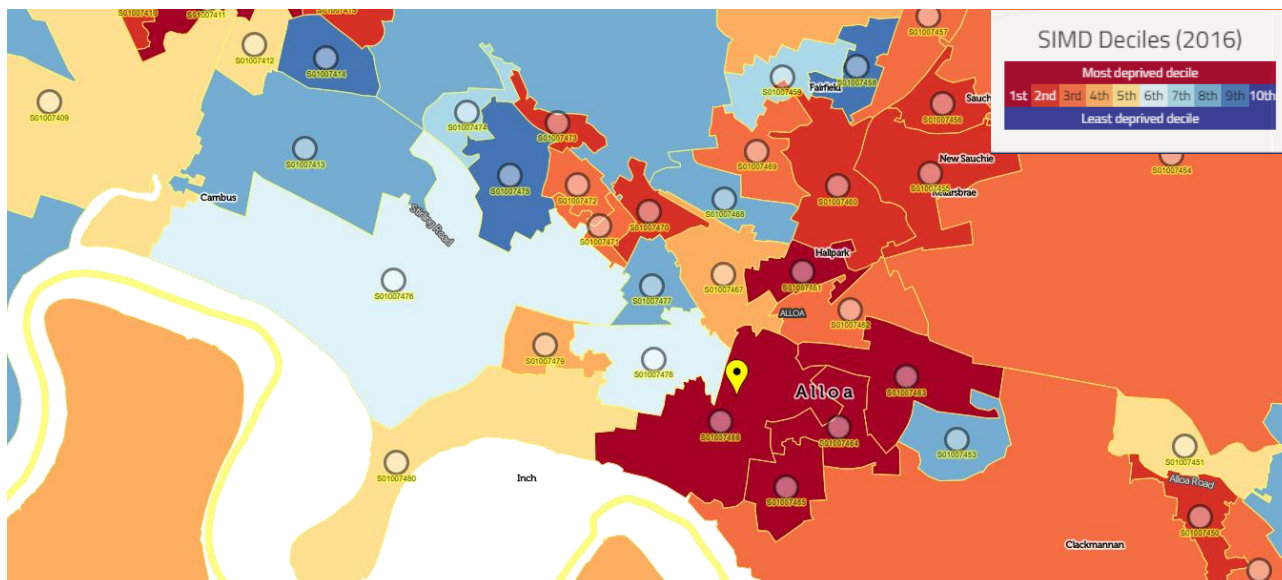


Figure 1: A map of Alloa, colour-coded according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles. The south and east areas of the city are in the most deprived decile [Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2016: Alloa].

Overall, 4.2% of Clackmannanshire’s working-age population claim out-of-work benefits, compared with 3.1% across Scotland.⁵ The age group that has the greatest proportion of benefits claimants is 18-24 year olds (8.1% of whom claim benefits, compared to only 4.3% for that age group across Scotland), while the age group that has the lowest proportion of benefits claimants is 16-17 year olds (1.2%, which is double the proportion across Scotland), followed by 50+ (2.5%, which is a similar level to the rest of Scotland).⁶

The majority of people who claim benefits are male (5.3% compared with 3.2% of women).⁷ There is no available data through the Office for National Statistics that disaggregates data on unemployment by sex in Clackmannanshire. There is a significant gender pay-gap in Clackmannanshire, with males earning £625.10 per week on average and females earning £409.70.⁸ This gap of £215.40 is significantly larger than the average gap in Scotland of £82.70.

On average, residents in Clackmannanshire have lower levels of qualifications compared with Scotland

Clackmannanshire overall has a smaller proportion of people with the highest level of education (NVQ4 and above) than the national level for Scotland (39.8% compared with 44.2%).⁹ It has a greater proportion of people with no qualifications (11.7% compared with 9.7% across Scotland). Within the Forth Valley, 41% of employees work in higher level occupations; 32% work in mid-level occupations and 27% work in lower level occupations.¹⁰ However, it is expected that the

⁵ Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics, ‘Labour Market Profiles – Clackmannanshire’, *op. cit.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Skills Development Scotland, ‘Forth Valley: RSA 2018’ [Webpage accessed 02/07/19: <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/44998/forth-valley.pdf>].

proportion of people in mid-level occupations will significantly decrease (to 23%), while the proportion of people in lower level occupations will significantly increase (38%), overtaking the number of mid-level jobs.¹¹

Transport is a challenge for job seekers and impacts on their ability to participate in support services and travel to and from work

One of the biggest challenges for jobseekers in Clackmannanshire is finding available and affordable public transport. 56% of workers who live in Clackmannanshire commute outside of their local authority, which is the highest in the Forth Valley region.¹² 29% of workers travel to Stirling, 9% to Falkirk, 5% to Fife and 4% to Edinburgh.

However, public transport can be expensive, and some people have neither the knowledge nor confidence to use public transport options.¹³ According to interview participants, people with physical and mental health issues are often unwilling to use public transport.

There are several service providers in the region who help people to overcome some of travel barriers through emotional and financial support, including Skills Development Scotland, Jobcentre Plus, Activity Agreements and Clackmannanshire Works.

There is a lack of employment opportunities in Clackmannanshire with challenges associated in accessing employment in nearby areas

Alloa has the second lowest job density in Scotland (the problems began after the decline of industry which caused a reduction in the number and variety of jobs). Interview participants pointed out that not only are there very few jobs, those that are available tend to be entry-level and low-paid. Moreover, many of the jobs, including retail jobs, are only offered as part-time opportunities.

Interviewees also felt that there are few large companies that are willing to commit to providing opportunities and supported employment to people with disabilities. High levels of competition for jobs in the area leaves little opportunity for people who have barriers to employment (such as age, work experience or long-term unemployment) from accessing the labour market.

Shops in the town centre are closing, reducing the number of jobs available. Some of the only large employers left are the supermarkets and the glassworks.

Clackmannanshire Council have introduced a variety of initiatives that have been aimed at increasing local economic growth and the availability of jobs. These have included:

¹¹ Skills Development Scotland, 'Stirling and Clackmannanshire: RSA 2018' [Webpage accessed 02/07/19: <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/45037/stirling-and-clackmannanshire.pdf>].

¹² Clackmannanshire Local Employability Partnership, 'Employability in Clackmannanshire: A brief guide to services available (2018)' [Webpage accessed 03/07/19: <http://ctsi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Employability-in-Clackmannnnanshire-2018-2.pdf>].

¹³ *Ibid.*

- Investing £400 million in economic development through the creation of the Stirling-Alloa-Kincardine railway; Clackmannanshire Bridge; a number of housing and retail developments; and three new secondary schools.¹⁴
- Renewing the Alloa Town Centre 'Business Improvement District'¹⁵
- Investing £2.4 million in the town centre regeneration project, 'Imagine Alloa'.¹⁶
- Agreeing to the City Region Deal in 2018, which includes an investment of £90.2 million in Stirling and Clackmannanshire, with an estimated creation of around 5000 jobs over a ten to fifteen-year period.¹⁷

The labour market in Clackmannanshire is shaped by higher than average levels of unemployment and low job density (0.48 jobs per person, compared with 0.81 across Scotland).¹⁸ While 77.3% of Clackmannanshire's population is economically active, 4.5% of that group is unemployed (slightly higher than the Scottish average of 4.3%).¹⁹ Overall, 19.8% of households are workless, compared to 18% in Scotland.²⁰ Clackmannanshire has a higher than average proportion of part-time workers (35.7% compared with 33.9% in Scotland and 32.5% in Great Britain).

The biggest industry in Clackmannanshire is the wholesale and retail trade (including motor vehicle repair), which provides 17.9% of the jobs in the area.²¹ The second biggest industry is human health and social work activities (14.3%) and education (12.5%).²² This pattern is expected to continue through to 2028.²³ The industries that provide the fewest jobs in the area include mining and quarrying (0.1%); electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply (0.2%); and financial and insurance activities (0.5%), most of which match the levels of employment in these industries across Scotland more broadly.²⁴

The industries in which the largest expected growth is forecast include construction (11%); professional, scientific and technical roles (9%); and administration and support services (9%).²⁵ Meanwhile, the industries in which the largest employment

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics, 'Labour Market Profiles – Clackmannanshire' [Webpage accessed 02/07/19: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157409/report.aspx>].

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Skills Development Scotland, 'Stirling and Clackmannanshire: RSA 2018' [Webpage accessed 02/07/19: <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/45037/stirling-and-clackmannanshire.pdf>].

²⁴ Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics, 'Labour Market Profiles – Clackmannanshire', *op. cit.*

²⁵ Skills Development Scotland, 'Stirling and Clackmannanshire: RSA 2018', *op. cit.*

decreases are forecast are mining and quarrying (-26%); manufacturing (-14%); and public administration and defence (-11%).²⁶

As in many other parts of Scotland, most employers in Clackmannanshire are micro-businesses, employing fewer than ten people (only 5 businesses in the area are large employers with at least 250 employees).²⁷

Individuals who are out of work in Clackmannanshire often have complex needs – in particular long periods of unemployment and poor mental health

Many interviewees pointed out that a significant number of people in Alloa suffer from mental health problems and the town does not have enough resources to provide effective services. While Clackmannanshire Council offers services through a Community Access Team (CAT) and the Mental Health Resource Centre, people suffering from mental health conditions face long waiting times for referral and treatment.

There are also many people in Clackmannanshire who have been unemployed for long periods of time because of chronic health difficulties or because they are in chaotic situations. Some interviewees also noted that there were cases of intergenerational worklessness.

Recruitment and exposure to employment opportunities is often informal and through word of mouth, increasing the importance of knowing the right people in order to find employment

Interviewees stated that many jobs are offered on a word-of-mouth basis, so a person's exposure to these depends on their network. Members of the community who have weak social ties, or mental health conditions that can cause people to struggle with building relationships, are therefore at a disadvantage when it comes to searching for jobs. This is emphasised by comments from a few participants we interviewed who said that FSS had helped them to find out about opportunities at local employers.

The dependency on networks is also a problem for people with previous convictions or who are members of families with a bad reputation in the area because employers may not be willing to take them on. Because the community in Alloa is fairly small, these individual and family reputations can be well known throughout the community. Interviewees felt that this was less of a problem among larger employers such as supermarkets, but that since most of Alloa's employers are micro-businesses, it remains a significant issue.

There are very few employability providers and providers of specialist services in Clackmannanshire

²⁶ Skills Development Scotland, '*Stirling and Clackmannanshire: RSA 2018*', *op. cit.*

²⁷ Clackmannanshire Local Employability Partnership, 'Employability in Clackmannanshire: A brief guide to services available (2018)' [Webpage accessed 03/07/19: <http://ctsi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Employability-in-Clackmannnnanshire-2018-2.pdf>].

The Council is the biggest provider, and there is also LifeSkills (who have reduced their Clackmannanshire operations) and CTSI. Stirling and Falkirk have a higher range of providers.

Existing provision includes:

- **Jump Start** provides basic skills training to young people, with a focus on increasing employability.²⁸
- **Activity Agreements** provide young people with one-to-one support from key workers, with whom they create action plans that focus on employability and skills development.²⁹
- **Ceteris Business Gateway** provides support for people who are considering becoming self-employed.³⁰
- **Skills Development Scotland** provides a range of careers advice services, including services for Modern Apprenticeships and support for people who have been made redundant.³¹

Access to IT for job seekers is challenging

One interviewee pointed out that the closure of local libraries (including libraries in more rural areas) has made it more difficult for people who do not have access to IT equipment at home to search and apply for jobs. People who live outside or on the outskirts of Alloa are at a particular disadvantage, since they have to pay for transport to be able to access IT facilities.

Many older job seekers in the area have limited IT skills, having spent many years working in industries where they were not required. Some people therefore require extensive support with creating CVs and searching and applying for jobs. This is reflected in comments from some of the participants we interviewed, who said that FSS helped to enhance their skills in creating CVs, searching for jobs on the internet and making online applications.

The affordability and availability of childcare is often a barrier to finding and sustaining employment

Interviewees stated that both the affordability and availability of childcare provided a huge barrier to single parents and working families. For some parents and guardians, the need to pick up children from school means that they can only work for limited hours within a tight schedule and they are not able to take on the irregular hours that most jobs in the area (particularly retail jobs) entail. A few participants we interviewed spoke about childcare being a barrier to finding work, including one who said they had been unable to find a job where the working hours would allow them to drop off and collect their child before and after school.

²⁸ Clackmannanshire Council, 'Youth Employability Services' [Webpage accessed 04/07/19: <https://www.clacks.gov.uk/community/youthemployability/>].

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Clackmannanshire Local Employability Services, 'Employability in Clackmannanshire: a quick guide to services available [Webpage accessed 04/07/19: <http://ctsi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Employability-in-Clackmannnnanshire-2018-2.pdf>].

³¹ *Ibid.*

The affordability and availability of formal identification documents can be a barrier to finding and sustaining employment

Several interviewees mentioned that it is often expensive and time-consuming for clients to obtain the formal photo identification that they need to apply for jobs or driving licenses that would enable them to travel to work. An inability to afford driving lessons has also prevented some jobseekers from applying for jobs where this is a requirement.

Management and performance data for FSS

The infographic below draws on the management and performance data collected between April 2018 and March 2019. It covers all FSS participants who are registered with the Alloa Job Centre which services participants from across Clackmannanshire.

115 individuals participated in 2018/19

55% Male
45% Female

76%
with disability or
health condition

40% aged under 35 years
32% aged 35- 49
27% aged 50+

6% Sustained work for 13 weeks
8% of men 3% of women
7% with disability/
health condition 4% without
1.7% sustained work for 26 weeks

Key trends to note in Alloa and Clackmannanshire are:

- Of the FSS participants whose race and nationality were recorded (n=103), 88.4% were White Scottish, while a further 9.7% were recorded as 'Other White British'. Only one person's race was recorded as 'ethnic minority'.
- 53.9% of all participants were male, while 46.1% were female – compared to 65% male and 35% female across all FSS Lot areas
- 18.3% of all participants were aged 16-24; 21.7% were aged 25-34; 32.2% were aged 35-49 and 27% were aged 50+. Across all FSS lot areas the most common age of participants was 35 to 49 (31% of participants).
- Most participants had a disability or health condition, the vast majority of whom said it affected their ability to work. Of participants whose health status was recorded (n=104), 76% of participants had a disability or some form of health condition – compared to 64% across all FSS lot areas. The most common types of illness were mental health conditions and learning disabilities. Of the participants for whom an illness was recorded, a total of 81.5% said that it affected their ability to work, with 25.9% responding that it affected their ability to work 'a lot' and 55.6% saying it affected their ability to work 'a little'.
- 6% of participants obtained and sustained 13 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week and 1.7% sustained employment for 26 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week. This is compared to 9%, and 4% across all FSS lot areas respectively.
- 8% of male participants sustained 13 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week compared to 3% of female participants.
- 25-34 year olds were the most likely to sustain 13 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week (12%), while participant who were 50+ were least likely to sustain 13 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week (3.2%).

Features of FSS in Alloa

The lot area covers the local authority areas of Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire. The FSS contract is held by a consortium of the three councils with Falkirk Council holding overall responsibility for the delivery of FSS in the contract area.

The three councils operate FSS fairly independently, with each council responsible for the delivery of FSS in their area. The three councils work together to meet reporting and auditing requirements and there are some specialist services including mental health and IPS services that are available to all three councils. While the three services sit separately, operationally the areas report benefit in working together strategically as well as sharing learning and skills. For example, Stirling has experience in running IPS supported employment services which Falkirk identified as helpful in understanding how to implement IPS services in their area.

The FSS service in Clackmannanshire is run by the Council's employability service "Clackmannanshire Works", known colloquially in the area as "Clacks Works". The service is operated out of the Clackmannanshire Council building in Alloa. Clackmannanshire Works has been a long-standing provider of employability services in the area and has well established relationships with the local Jobcentre and third sector organisations in the area. In conversations with third sector organisations and the local Jobcentre all interviewees reported on the long standing and important relationships with Clackmannanshire Works and it is clear that they are a trusted and valued provider in the area. They emphasised the strong communication that they had with FSS key workers and that they felt able to share concerns about FSS participants.

"We've got an excellent relationship with Clacks Works and have done for years. We were all quite glad that they got the Fair Start contract. It's good that we can just pick up the phone and ask how a customer is doing." JCP Staff

In addition to FSS, Clackmannanshire Works also runs an ESF-funded employability programme which is funded until 2021. This project has a regular stream of referrals from the Jobcentre and others.

Clackmannanshire Council also deliver employability support funded through European Structural Funds (ESF). This is entirely separate from any support funded through FSS as contractual arrangements with FSS providers prohibit the use of ESF funded support for FSS participants, specifically to avoid double funding of the same provision. This means that there are two teams of key workers in Clackmannanshire Works – one for FSS and one for their ESF programme. There have been cases where participants have been transferred from FSS to their ESF programme, and vice versa, but no participant receives support from both at once. For example, one participant we interviewed, who is coming to the end of FSS but still needs support, will be transferred to the ESF programme when they complete FSS.

There are small operational efficiencies associated with running more than one employability service at once. The senior key worker manages key workers across both services with her time allocated in budgets between the two contracts. In addition, the externally commissioned IT training is part funded by ESF and part funded by FSS so that only one contract is required, and the service can operate at economies of scale.

FSS in Clackmannanshire follows the key worker model, where participants have a single key worker who works through the service with them. Clackmannanshire Works pays particular attention to ensuring consistency of care for participants and therefore prioritises participants staying with the same key worker throughout their time on FSS. Participants who took part in interviews as part of the evaluation valued this consistency, which allowed them to build a trusting relationship with their key worker. This was especially important for those who needed to improve their confidence or who have more complex personal, emotional or wellbeing issues to address. Their worker provides “someone to talk to” for these participants. The vast majority of regular meetings with key workers occur in the Alloa offices of Clackmannanshire Works.

The service also employs a Job Broker who:

- Identifies work experience placements and work opportunities
- Works with participants to prepare them for their engagement with employer and job interviews
- Develops and manages relationships with employers who have employed participants to manage the early days of placement and employment.
- This job broker primarily looks for employment and work experience placements within the Clackmannanshire Local Authority area. There appears to be three drivers for this approach:
 - A view by staff that Fair Start participants are unwilling to travel beyond Clackmannanshire to take up an employment opportunity
 - Transport options limiting a participant’s ability to easily travel to take up employment opportunities outside Clackmannanshire
 - Operational separation of the FSS lot area meaning that each of the three local authorities in this lot look for employment opportunities in their own area and not each other’s areas.

Clackmannanshire Works has contracted out two particular parts of the FSS delivery:

- The local Third Sector Interface (CTSi) is contracted to provide IT training for FSS participants. There are held in Alloa and nearby Tullibody in Clackmannanshire each week. Two separate 1.5 hour sessions per week are run as 6 week courses introducing participants to IT basics. The other session is held as weekly drop-in class for participants to access support with specific questions they have

- The local Citizen’s Advice Service is contracted to provide 20 hours a week of support for FSS. These 20 hours a week are used to make appointments for participants to have the required benefits calculations done as well as provide support and advice on any other financial or legal concerns they have.

In addition, Clackmannanshire Works has a range of informal relationships with other third sector organisations in the area – for example, The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) has around 10 FSS participants volunteering for them as part of their FSS required work related activity.

Clackmannanshire Works keeps the majority of other support required as part of FSS in-house and it is largely provided by the key workers and the job broker due to:

- In house expertise available that has been built up over a long period of running similar employability services
- A lack of local support organisations and services available to refer to.

Clackmannanshire Works staff describe the FSS service as more akin to a health and wellbeing service than a pure employability service in their area due to:

- A prevalence of long-term unemployment in the area driven by significant mental and physical health barriers to employment and intergenerational unemployment from the history of industry closures in the area
- The existing ESF service in Clackmannanshire already supporting many of those who are closer to employment.

“If we didn’t think they’d get a job in 12 months, I’d still send them to Fair Start, hoping that they’ll manage.” Clacks Works Staff

Lessons from this case study

Those we spoke to were clear that FSS has a number of strengths that set it apart from other employability services:

- Given the low national rates of unemployment there is general consensus that a service that focuses on health and work is an important focus
- Clackmannanshire Works (and Falkirk Council as the lead provider) have valued the relationship they have with Scottish Government and, in particular, the openness with which they have approached their relationship with providers and their focus on continuous improvement
- It is felt that the key worker model is valued and that there is a high level of trust in the quality of the key workers in Clackmannanshire Works.
- Participants value the personalised and wide-ranging support that FSS offers as well as the key workers’ understanding and non-judgemental approach,

which is in line with the Scottish Government's principles of dignity and respect.

In relation to Clackmannanshire specific delivery the following strengths emerged:

- The established relationships and reputation Clackmannanshire Works held appeared to be helpful in establishing the FSS service early as Clackmannanshire Works:
- Is trusted within the community which increases willingness of organisations to refer to FSS and for participants to attend

“Because a lot of our customers have been through Clacks Works, sometimes they know the key workers before they go in.”

- Holds a large amount of in-house expertise in both management and frontline staff on delivering similar services
- Has established relationships with providers and partners that means they can easily access specialist support such as volunteering, IT training, and financial and legal advice.
- Employers had positive interactions with FSS in Clackmannanshire and felt that awareness of FSS was still building amongst employers. Many employers we spoke to felt that the job broker had created a smooth recruitment process and that she understood their needs when assigning clients for work placements. The fact that the job broker provided them with her contact details made them feel confident that they had a point of contact if they needed extra support. One employer was surprised at how easy the process was and said:

“At first, I thought there must be a catch, but there wasn't. It was very flexible.”

Another employer said:

“It was our first experience with Clacks Works and it was spot on, really professionally done.”

- Most employers we spoke to felt that the clients had been useful in the workplace and they had met or surpassed their expectations.
- Employers felt that providing work experience was an important part of contributing to their community and that it would have reputational benefits for them as well

“When you have a situation when you're helping with the community, it says a lot about an employer.”

- In Clackmannanshire it was felt by FSS delivery staff, JCP staff and other stakeholders that job opportunities were limited and that while it was easy to

find a work experience placement, this often didn't turn into paid employment. The importance of managing expectations for those on a work placement was important and that there was often disappointment felt by everyone including Clackmannanshire Works, the participant and employers when successful work experience didn't turn into employment.

- The operation of the service by the three local authorities in the contract area appears to be working well overall and staff from the two local authorities we spoke to see the benefit in taking a regional approach to planning, strategy and resourcing even if operationally the service is run more locally.
- It was noted by partners that FSS in Clackmannanshire seemed to be doing well at coordinating local effort already in place, but that the tight FSS budget limited the ability of the service to invest in more capacity – particularly around supporting organisations that provide supported volunteering placements. It was felt by provider delivery staff, their partners and supply chain that long term sustainability of the broader network of services in an area required financial investment and support in those services to accompany any referrals that occur.

Both Clackmannanshire Works and Falkirk Council appreciate the regional approach to the Fair Start contract. They feel it enables them to work together strategically and share learning and expertise across the region – particularly where one of the areas has a specialist expertise or experience. Operationally the areas have set FSS up as three distinct Local Authority area services as they felt this enabled them to best support their locals. There is very little operational activity happening at a regional level. Therefore, this case study provides limited insight into regional approaches to operational delivery.

This operational separation by the three partners appears to have strengths in that it enables local provision of support in each of the three areas. Clackmannanshire Works reported that under other employability services and by other organisations, provision within the Clackmannanshire area was limited as provision was centralised, usually in Falkirk. They felt that this meant that those living in Clackmannanshire often missed out as they were unwilling or unable to travel to where provision was. However, there may be value in a more regional approach to the job matching function and job broker role to ensure that job opportunities are not arbitrarily limited by each local authority provider looking for roles only within their local authority boundaries.

Those we interviewed also raised several challenges they found in the first year of implementation of FSS which may have implications for FSS more generally:

- Clackmannanshire Works have been able to align existing provision and achieve some operational efficiencies through their various employability services. However, the extent to which Clackmannanshire Works was able fully integrate provision through FSS is limited due the ESF contribution to the FSS budget. Scottish Government may want to reflect on the balance between using ESF funding and enabling service integration for future provision.

- The structured nature of the service can be challenging for participants who still have chaotic lives.
- For some participants, finding employment within 12 months is challenging, particularly for those who have more complex needs. Some of the participants we interviewed experienced significant barriers to finding work and, while they made progress during their participation in FSS, they still required further support to continue moving towards employment at the end of 12 months.
- Flexibility around disengaging and re-engaging is important because unpredictability or setbacks in participants' lives can mean that it is better for them to take a break from the service without the time taken out being removed from their 12-month timeframe. This also includes limitations provided by only being able to access FSS once. Staff reported that participants can be referred who aren't ready at that point but would likely benefit from FSS at a future date, usually once another external factor had been addressed or had settled. However, staff reported that the referral was unable to be declined or delayed to enable participants to come to FSS at a later date.

A number of less tangible outcomes that represent progress towards employment, such as volunteering or full-time study, represent significant achievements for participants, but are not recognised within FSS's payment and outcomes structure.

It was generally felt by those we interviewed across Clackmannanshire Works, their partner organisations and the Jobcentre that due to the nature of jobs and contracts available in the area as well as participant's health needs, it is likely that:

- 16 hours would be too much for some participants to sustain but that FSS did not appropriately recognise jobs with fewer than 16 hours. DWP and Jobcentre staff noted that they had removed references to 16 hours in their policies and procedures and that aligning FSS with DWP expectations around work may be more appropriate

"The bar has been set too high because there are really disadvantaged people."

- The number of hours a participant will work may vary from week to week. Administratively this can pose problems where individuals switch between working more or less than 16 hours a week. These situations switch the participant from pre-work to in-work support and vice versa.

Eligibility for early entry could be extended to other groups of individuals so that those leaving the armed forces can access support. It was felt that waiting for the required time in unemployment to be able to access FSS may place individuals at more of a disadvantage. Jobcentre staff pointed out:

"We have people who are work ready and want the help, but they've not been unemployed long enough"

Clackmannanshire Works are finding that while many participants referred are eligible for the service, some may not be suitable for FSS. In particular, there is concern that, for some participants, employment within 12 months realistic. It is clear that the Alloa Jobcentre have a lot of trust in Clackmannanshire Works and want to refer those who are eligible for FSS in the hope that working with Clackmannanshire Works will change the timeframe of employment.

Reporting is considered to be administratively burdensome and it is felt that this can divert time away from supporting participants. There was also a concern that the rigidity of the reporting can detract from being able to provide a person-centred approach. Suggestions were raised that now that FSS was moving into its second year and Scottish Government had established relationships with providers that reporting requirements could be reviewed. We understand that a review of KDI and KPIs is currently underway within Scottish Government

Despite consultation on devolved employment services suggesting that referrals for support should not include too much historic detail on participants, some [provider] key workers had concerns that they not have many details on participants prior to engaging with them. This was felt to have an impact on the key workers' ability to provide tailored support from the outset and meant that key workers had to rely on uncovering information themselves through working with the participant.

Providers were concerned that some participants can find the induction process intimidating as the FSS induction process is very detailed, and the amount of information required can feel overwhelming for some more vulnerable participants. Providers emphasised the importance of having enough time over a number of weeks to build up relationships with participants and explore their support needs. .

Key workers would like the flexibility to have an early conversation with participants and then give them a chance to think about whether FSS is for them before participation on the service starts.

FSS in Wick

This chapter outlines the key features of FSS in Wick. This chapter covers:

- A description of Wick and the Caithness area more generally, including the socio-economic context and labour market
- Analysis of the FSS management and performance data for Wick
- A description of the delivery of FSS in Wick
- Key lessons we can draw from this case study area.

Area profile

This section provides information about labour market patterns and socioeconomic trends in Wick; Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross; and the Highlands more broadly, focusing on levels of deprivation, unemployment and skills and education. It also provides descriptions of local-level efforts to increase employability and to revitalise the local economy, as well as common barriers to employment within the local area. The overall population for Caithness and Sutherland was 39,732 according to the 2011 census.³²

There are higher levels of deprivation in Wick than many other parts of the Highlands

Some areas of Wick have significant levels of deprivation. In Wick South and Wick North, life expectancy at birth for males in 73.3 years and 72.8 years respectively, which is lower than life expectancy in the Highlands as a whole and lower than the national average (79.2).³³

There is a high prevalence of chronic disease, including Asthma, Chronic Heart Disease, Chronic Kidney Disease, Stroke and Hypertension.³⁴

³² Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 'Caithness and Sutherland Area Profile: May 2014' [Webpage accessed 17/09/2019: <http://www.hie.co.uk/common/handlers/download-document.ashx?id=9e61af71-1b5b-45fc-8e74-074805f77cd7>].

³³ Office for National Statistics, 'National Life Tables, UK: 2015-2017' [Webpage accessed 20/07/2019: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/lifeexpectancies/bulletins/nationallifetablesunitedkingdom/2015to2017>]; NHS Highland, 'NHS Highland Developing Sustainable Health & Social Care Services Caithness' [Webpage accessed 20/07/2019: https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/News/PublicConsultation/CaithnessRedesign/Documents/2018/Briefing%20Caithness_Options%20Final%204%20May%2018.pdf].

³⁴ *Ibid.*

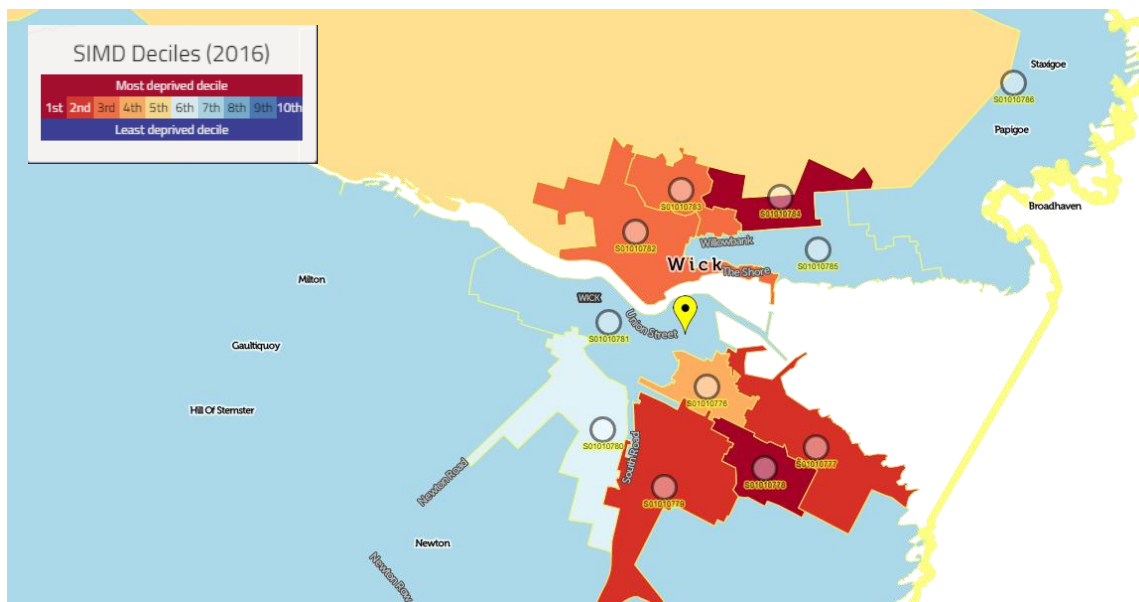


Figure 3: A map of Wick, colour coded to show the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles. Wick North and Wick South are in the most deprived decile [Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2016: Wick]

Across the Highlands, there is a lower unemployment rate than across Scotland generally (3% compared to 4.3%).³⁵ There is also a higher job density of 0.9, compared to 0.81 in Scotland and 11% of household are workless compared to 18% across Scotland. In the Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (CSER) parliamentary constituency, 62.5% of workers are in full-time jobs, compared to 66.1% in Scotland.³⁶

The data does not demonstrate, however, the higher levels of deprivation within Wick. The average claimant count and universal credit unemployment rate for Wick is 3.6%, compared with 2.1% in the rest of the Highlands and Islands.³⁷ Wick also has the second largest proportion of Travel to Work Area (TTWA) unemployment in the Highlands.³⁸

Across CSER generally, the age group with the largest proportion of benefits claimants is 18-24, of whom 5.3% claim benefits, compared with 4.3% across Scotland generally. While 4.2% of males claim benefit, 2.7% of females claim benefits.³⁹

The industry that employs the most people in CSER is human health and social work (16.7%), followed by wholesale and retail trade (including motor vehicle repair) (12.5%) and manufacturing (9.4%).⁴⁰ The smallest industries are electricity,

³⁵ Nomis, 'Labour Market Profile – Highlands' [Webpage accessed 10/07/19: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157421/report.aspx?pc=KW1%205EY>].

³⁶ Nomis, 'Labour Market Profile – Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Parliamentary Constituency' [Webpage accessed 10/07/19: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/wpca/1929380422/report.aspx>].

³⁷ Highlands and Islands Enterprise, *Unemployment Digest: November 2018* (Inverness, 2018), p. 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Nomis 'Labour Market Profile – Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Parliamentary Constituency': these data do not include Universal Credit, which would show a higher proportion of claimants.

⁴⁰ Nomis 'Labour Market Profile – Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Parliamentary Constituency'.

gas, steam and air conditioning supply (0.2%), financial and insurance activities (0.8%) and real estate activities (1%).⁴¹ The largest expected increase in jobs in the Highlands and Islands area generally is expected to be seen in construction; administrative and support services; and professional, scientific and technical jobs.⁴² The most significant decreases are expected to be seen in manufacturing; public administration and defence; and transportation and storage.⁴³

The Highland Council have also invested in some key initiatives to revive the local economy and improve employment opportunities:

- They commissioned a Charrette process that involves local communities in making decisions about Wick's economic development.⁴⁴
- Supported the establishment of 'Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archive' in Wick, bringing over forty jobs to the town.⁴⁵
- A £2.6bn private investment in the Beatrice Offshore Windfarm was agreed in 2014 (with the project's official opening was in July 2019). Wick is the operations and maintenance base for the windfarm, bringing some economic opportunities into the town, though these are unlikely to be far-reaching.⁴⁶

A relatively low proportion of the population in Caithness are highly skilled

Overall, a lower proportion of the population in Caithness have the highest formal skill levels when compared to the proportion across Scotland more generally (33.3% have NVQ4 and above, compared with 44.2% in Scotland).⁴⁷

Across the Highlands and Islands, 35% of jobs are higher occupations; 37% are mid-level occupations and 28% are lower level occupations.⁴⁸ However, the proportion of mid-level and lower level occupations are expected to switch by 2028.⁴⁹

95.5% of school leavers in the Highlands go on to positive destinations, compared to the national estimate of 93.7%.⁵⁰

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Skills Development Scotland, 'Regional Skills Assessment: Highlands and Islands Summary Report 2018' [Webpage accessed 09/07/19: <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/44972/highlands-islands-summary-report.pdf>].

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ JTP, 'Wick' [Webpage accessed 07/07/19: <https://www.jtp.co.uk/projects/wick>].

⁴⁵ The Highland Council, 'Modified Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan)' [Webpage accessed 06/07/19: https://highland.objective.co.uk/events/29315/4147179_accessible.pdf, p. 44].

⁴⁶ SSE, 'Beatrice Offshore Windfarm Ltd' [Webpage accessed 08/07/19: <https://sse.com/media/442250/November-2016-Engagement-Events-Wick.pdf>].

⁴⁷ Nomis 'Labour Market Profile – Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross Parliamentary Constituency'.

⁴⁸ Skills Development Scotland, 'Regional Skills Assessment: Highlands and Islands Summary Report 2018'

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Scottish Government, 'Initial Destinations of Senior Phase School Leavers: No.2 2018 Edition' [Webpage accessed 09/07/19: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2018/02/initial-destinations-senior-phase-school-leavers-2-2018-edition/documents/00531988-pdf/00531988-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00531988.pdf>].

Highland Council has funded a range of employability services, but the range of providers remains limited

The infrastructure of local employability support in the area is limited and the recent closure of the Shirlie Project has reduced it further. Highland Council has a framework of employability providers across the Highland area – these include Clearview 2020, which is also the local FSS provider, and Ormlie Community Association in Thurso which refers appropriate FSS clients to Clearview 2020. Both of these organisations deliver the Highland Council service which provides unemployed people with the tools they need to find work (ie CV production, interview skills and job applications) – these services provide 3 months support which can be extended by a further 3 months if appropriate.

Other support includes the Hi-hope noticeboard (<https://hi-hope.org/noticeboard>) created by the Highland Council in collaboration with NHS Highland and CHIP+ to provide young people with more information on opportunities for further education, training and employment.

There is a gender opportunity and pay gap

There is a gender pay gap in the Highlands of 18%, which is higher than the Scottish average of 14%.⁵¹ There is also segregation in the opportunities available, as women are more likely to be underemployed, work in lower value sectors, work in lower grades and work part time.⁵² Males account for 59% of managers, directors and senior officials and 60% of associate, professional and technical occupations.⁵³

Management and Performance Data for Wick

The infographic overleaf draws on the management and performance data collected between April 2018 and March 2019. It covers all FSS participants who are registered with the Wick Jobcentre which supports participants from across the Caithness area.

⁵¹ Highlands and Islands Enterprise, *Occupational Segregation in Highland: March 2017* (Inverness, 2017: Highlands and Islands Enterprise).

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

31 individuals participated in 2018/19

70% Male
30% Female

29%
with disability or
health condition

46% aged under 35 years
31% aged 35- 49
23% aged 50+

16% Sustained work for 13 weeks
19% of men 11% of women
33% with disability/
health condition 10% without
10% sustained work for 26 weeks

Key trends to note in Wick are:

- Of the participants for whom race and nationality were recorded (n=19), 84.2% were White Scottish; 5.3% were Other White British; 5.3% were Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British; and 5.3% were 'Other'.
- Of the participants for whom gender was recorded (n=30), 70% were male, and 30% were female, compared to 64% male and 35% female in FSS across all lot areas.
- Of the participant for whom age group was reported (n=26), 19.2% were aged 16-24; 26.9% were aged 25-34; 30.8% were aged 35-49; and 23% were aged 50+. Across all FSS lot areas the most common age of participants was 35 to 49 (31% of participants).
- 29% of participants had a disability or health condition – compared to 64% across all FSS lot areas. 71% reported that they did not have a health condition. The most common illness was a mental health condition (44.4% of participants who had a disability or health condition were affected by this). 77.8% of people who had a health condition responded that it affected their ability to work; 22.2% said that it affected their ability to work 'a lot'; 55.6% reported that it affected their ability to work 'a little' and 22.2% said it did not affect their ability to work at all.
- 16.1% of participants obtained and sustained 13 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week. 9.7% sustained employment for 26 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week. This is compared to 9%, and 4% across all FSS lot areas respectively.
- 19% of male participants sustained 13 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week compared to 11% of female participants.
- The age group most likely to sustain 13 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week was 16-24 years (40% of this age group), while the least likely age group was 35-49 (0% of this age group).

Description of service

Wick is in the Highlands and Islands contract area for FSS and the contractor is People Plus, who sub-contract the service in Caithness and north Sutherland to Clearview 2020. There is only one Jobcentre in the area which is also in Wick.

Clearview 2020 is a well-known small provider with strong local links and both Highland Council and Jobcentre Plus talk of a very close working relationship with Clearview 2020. Their three room office is a converted ground floor flat in a residential area in the centre of Wick and is accessible to those areas of the town particularly affected by high unemployment. The FSS service is delivered by two people: the business principal has provided employability support in the area for many years and has a strong working relationship with Jobcentre Work Coaches, local charities dealing with issues around unemployment and poverty, and a range of local employers. She is supported by another member of staff who also has many years' experience of working for employability organisations. The office and is friendly and welcoming, with people arriving for appointments or just dropping in to

update staff on their latest situation. Participants we interviewed praised staff for their friendly, flexible and supportive approach: “they treat you like family”. Around 40 live clients is a typical case load. The main destinations for FSS clients are seasonal work with hotels, bed and breakfasts, grass cutting, and longer term roles in retail, hospitality, care, and security.

From this office, the service covers Caithness and north Sutherland and so involves a very large area with poor public transport. Transport is seen by all the partners as a big issue across the area, in terms of availability, timing, frequency and cost – this affects both access to support and access to work. Some of the participants we interviewed felt that it is important to be able to drive to access support and job opportunities, particularly if they live outside Wick. The minimum return bus fare for FSS clients travelling from nearby towns to Wick is £7.90. The provider meets all FSS clients face to face and this involves substantial travel time and costs.

Clearview 2020 also delivers the Highland Council employability support service locally. This consists of a suite of provision including job search, CV building, and interview skills. The eligibility criteria is long term unemployment (6 months plus) or shorter term unemployed but with evidence of additional barriers to employment. The complementarity of the Highland Council service and FSS mean in practice that there is some scope for the provider to reach a judgement about which service would be better for a particular client. Some of those who refer people to Clearview 2020 talk about the way that the Highland Council service can provide a valuable stepping stone to FSS. Since the Highland Council service provides relatively short intensive support, it can be used to develop clients’ routines and test out their commitment.

“There are people who will engage 1 hour a week [on the Highland Council service] and get used to a pattern of personal support and it can lead to the bigger commitment of [FSS].” Provider

“HC to [FSS] is a useful step – we can tell if they are going to be compliant – are they ready?” Provider

Highland Council see FSS as an ‘ally’ providing an effective complement to their own services and ‘taking up the slack’ in terms of providing support for those further from work.

Apart from FSS and Highland Council support there is very little other local provision apart from related support from charities such as Y People. There is a community support service in Ormlie in Thurso, run by the Ormlie Community Association, which is run by someone with a strong employability background, so in practice there is employability support available there, and the organisation works closely with Clearview 2020 and the Jobcentre in Wick to identify potential FSS clients. This lack of other provision – and in particular specialist provision – has important implications for the FSS service

“There are not many providers left, so there is nowhere to refer clients to for specialist support. We can refer to a GP but any specialist help needs to be at the end of a [telephone] line.” Provider

“There are staff shortages in supporting those with anxiety and depression – there is a 2 year waiting list to see a Community Psychiatric Nurse.” Provider

Clearview 2020 are very reliant on Jobcentre Plus for referrals.

“There has to be a good working relationship with DWP – we are all talking to the same people. I can pick up the phone and say have you referred X, I am working with Y, I have an issue, what do you think. Everything is done with really good intentions.” Provider

“I say, ‘I don’t work for JCP but I work with JCP – we are joined up and this is how we are going to work together’”. Provider

From the JCP perspective, Fair Start is seen as valuable evolution from the Work Service:

“When [FSS] first started – we thought it might be the same old, same old. But in practice they have more time with the client and extra support in work – this is definitely helping retention in work.” JCP staff

There has been an evolution in how FSS is seen and experienced. Initially, people were arriving at the office who said that Jobcentre Plus had sent them, but there is now a much clearer sense that the service is voluntary and involves an active choice by clients.

An important issue in Wick and other local towns is that everyone knows everyone else and it can be difficult for some clients to find work because their family’s reputation precedes them. There are other implications of this – for example, there are clients with addiction issues but these may not be referred to FSS because the lack of anonymity is another factor among many which means there is a low chance of them getting a job within 12 months. There are occasional windows of opportunity for those from families with a local reputation – two recent retail openings in Wick meant that the new store managers were recruiting and they were prepared to recruit people who local employers would not consider.

“Nobody is anonymous – people make links.”

Voluntary opportunities are very important and are seen as a significant stepping stone to jobs. Clearview 2020 therefore maintain a number of relationships with organisations that can offer voluntary roles.

Clearview 2020 maintain close relationships with a range of local employers and report that employers see FSS as a good thing as they know that recruits come with support. As a corollary, Clearview 2020 know the employer and are confident that the recruit will be appropriately supported by the employer. Clearview estimate that about half their FSS clients find work through their own contacts and applications, and half find work through Clearview 2020 promoting a particular individual to an employer. Participants value the support that the service can offer in putting them “in touch with employers”. With so many jobs requiring online applications, staff find that they do a lot of checking of online question and answer sections on job applications to ensure that clients have completed these accurately and fully. This is reflected in comments from participants we interviewed who described receiving support to make online applications: for example, as one said, “I was scared about doing my CV and job applications because it’s all online now... but they [Clearview 2020] guide me with everything”. One employer we talked to appreciated the role of Clearview 2020 in identifying appropriate candidates so they were able to trust any candidate they sent.

The majority of FSS clients seen by Clearview 2020 do not have significant challenges to overcome, although the provider recognises that some participants will need more holistic support e.g. for lone parents. Jobcentre Plus appear to be using the longer term support particularly effectively for lone parents:

“If a child is aged 4 JCP get in touch because Income Support stops at 5 so this can tie into 1 year of [FSS] support.”

Lessons from this case study

The ability of a provider to mix and match local provision for the benefit of the client is clearly an advantage, and the delivery of the short intensive Highland Council provision and the longer FSS service by the same provider allows these to become complementary rather than competitive. It also means that third party referrals can be assessed by the provider and put on the service that is most appropriate to them.

The Highland Council service provides an invaluable ‘stepping stone’ to FSS – not only helping the provider to assess the commitment of the client to a longer term service, but also helping the client to develop the routines and practices that they will need to make the most of FSS.

The combination of services also makes referral from Jobcentre Plus much more straightforward as JCP Work Coaches trust the provider to make the best use of each service depending on the needs and situation of the client – in other words, in some cases, in practice, a Work Coach refers to the provider rather than to a service.

Although the 3 hours face to face (which can also be done by Skype and similar approaches) can be an issue, the provider has been creative in ensuring that experiences can be developed that meet the needs of each client. The issue is not

so much about the time or distance as about finding appropriate kinds of engagement:

“The 3 hours face to face engagement has certainly been an issue – we need to develop work arounds, scrambling to get placements, but JCP, School, and College are all trying to do the same.” Provider

There has been some confusion about the criteria for referral to FSS and although this now appears clearer, there remains scope for improved understanding across partners. Most of the difficulties are resolved through the close working relationship between the provider and JCP.

“Everyone is a bit hazy about the criteria for Fair Start. Of 47 recent referrals – 13 didn’t want to take part, or they were not well enough, or they couldn’t commit. I find it difficult to make sense of criteria and JCP staff do as well.” Provider

There was general agreement from the provider and their partners that, while the voluntary approach had helped with many clients, there was something else needed. Staff across the local partners were aware of people who had benefitted from mandatory programme in past - but would not have participated had the programme been voluntary.

“The main difference from Work Programme is that [FSS] is voluntary - and this is where problems begin. As soon as we mention it is voluntary, they decide not to come. They don’t want to commit to 3 hours a week - there are real issues of travel and childcare.” Provider

For example, a participant we interviewed explained that they left the service early because it was difficult to fit it around caring for their young child.

There is an issue with poor internet cover across north Highlands which makes it difficult for both clients and providers to use online tools.

There are issues about paying for travel, required certification and training. For example, the funding of CSCS cards is an issue – compounded by the only local provider being a private provider in Thurso charging over £300, and the cheaper provision in Inverness being inaccessible. It is possible to use discretionary funding from JCP when there is a guaranteed job, but the provider pays for travel (return bus journey to Wick at £7.90) for local clients and other requirements (eg copy of birth certificate at £15, which many clients don’t have).

For those further from work, a local charity in Wick emphasised the need for help before clients are ready for FSS:

“Their lives are so chaotic – they need more skills before [FSS] – there is no structure to their lives. We are sorting out all of the chaos first. And young people often don’t have a birth certificate, passport, proof of citizenship, provisional licence or bank account.” Local charity partner

This is reinforced by some comments from some participants who had encountered significant barriers to employment, including problems with literacy, criminal convictions, mental health issues, abusive relationships and a lack of confidence caused by being away from work for long periods of time. As one said, “I don’t think Clearview 2020 were expecting such a catalogue of events that I have had to deal with”. One staff member explained that sometimes clients do not want to “cough up all their life secrets”, but it is important for them to know about any issues that might affect an individual’s ability to find or sustain work in order to support them effectively.

Overall, the service provided in Wick by the FSS provider comes across as professional, dedicated and energetic on behalf of participants, the provider’s extensive local knowledge is put to good use, and their high reputation means that referrals are made with confidence. The fact that the same provider delivers two complementary services is an advantage and allows these two services to be used effectively alongside each other.

However, there are few other employability services locally and a lack of specialist provision means that the support available is less comprehensive than elsewhere, with longer waiting times for specialist support. The lack of anonymity in the local area is an issue with some participants finding it hard to find work because of the reputation of their families, though the provider works hard on behalf of participants to challenge this.

FSS in Irvine

This chapter outlines the key features of FSS in Irvine. This chapter covers:

- A description of Irvine, including the socio-economic context and labour market
- Analysis of the FSS management and performance data for Irvine
- A description of the delivery of FSS in Irvine
- Key lessons we can draw from this case study area.

Area profile

This section provides information about labour market patterns and socioeconomic trends in Irvine and North Ayrshire more broadly, focusing on levels of deprivation, unemployment, and skills and education. It also provides descriptions of local-level efforts to increase employability and to revitalise the local economy, as well as common barriers to employment within the local area. North Ayrshire has a population of 135,300.⁵⁴

There are high levels of deprivation and associated health problems

The 2015 SIMD indicated that 51 out of 186 data zones in North Ayrshire are in the 15% most deprived in Scotland, with the highest portion of data zones (19) located in Irvine.⁵⁵ In 2017, 62% of households earned less than £30,000.⁵⁶ 29.3% of children in North Ayrshire are living in poverty.⁵⁷

In 2017, average male life expectancy in Irvine was 72.2 years.⁵⁸ This is lower than the North Ayrshire average of 76.5 years and the Scottish average of 76.6 years for males and 80.8 years for females. North Ayrshire, in 2018, had the highest avoidable death rate in Scotland (at a rate of 373 per 100,000 people).⁵⁹ Social deprivation with access to alcohol, tobacco and fast food has been noted as a factor of this high rate.

⁵⁴ National Records of Scotland, 'North Ayrshire Council Area Profile: Mid-2018 Population Estimates' [Webpage accessed 17/09/2019: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/council-area-data-sheets/north-ayrshire-council-profile.html>].

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ North Ayrshire/Irvine Community Planning Partnership Locality, 'Key Facts'. [Webpage accessed 03/07/19: <http://www.northayrshire.community/your-community/irvine/key-facts/>].

⁵⁷ Education Scotland, 'Nurture in North Ayrshire'. [Webpage accessed 03/07/19: <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/nurture-in-north-ayrshire>].

⁵⁸ North Ayrshire/Irvine Community Planning Partnership Locality, 'Key Facts', *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ BBC, 'Avoidable Death Rate in Scotland Highest in UK'. [Webpage accessed 19/07/19: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-44872590>].

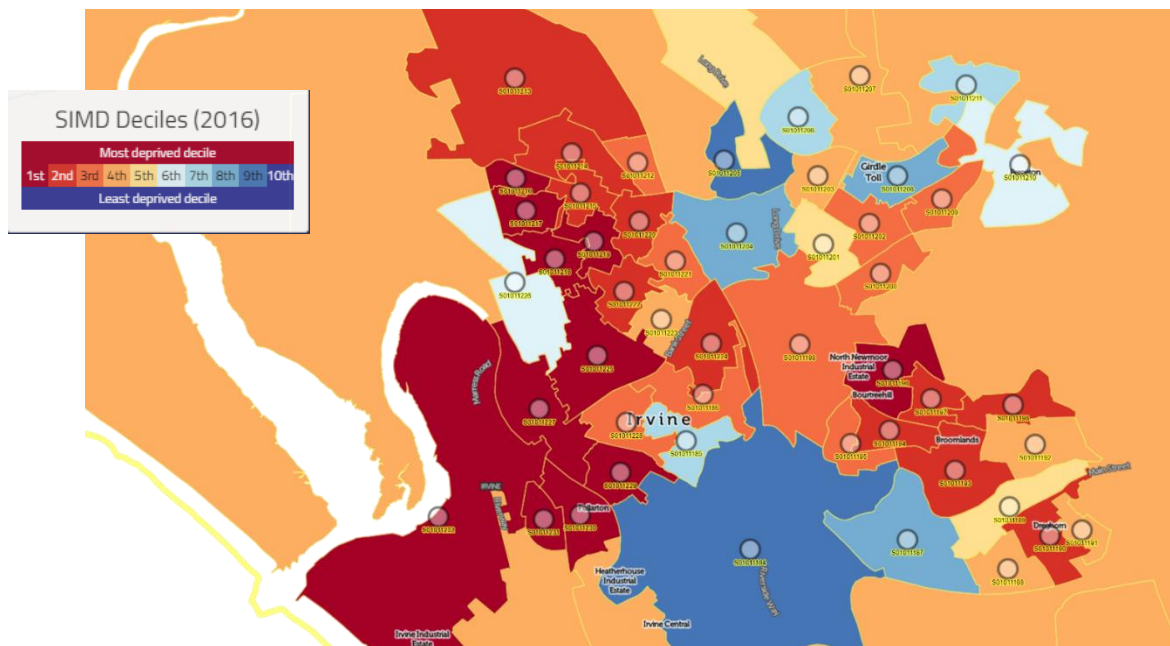


Figure 5: A map of Irvine, colour coded to show the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation deciles. The western and northern areas of the city are in the most deprived decile [Source: Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2016: Irvine]

In 2017, had a working population (aged 16-64) of 83,200 (61.3% of the overall population).⁶⁰ There were 40,000 employee jobs in the area.⁶¹ 65% of these jobs were full-time, while 35% were part-time.⁶² The female employment rate in North Ayrshire is 65.8% compared to 70.3% in Scotland, while male employment rate is 66.8% compared to 65.9% in Scotland.⁶³ There is a low job density of 0.58 jobs per person, compared to 0.81 in Scotland and 0.86 in Great Britain.

The area has higher unemployment rates than Scotland more generally: 5.7% in North Ayrshire compared to 4.3% in Scotland and 4.2% in Great Britain overall.⁶⁴ More males (5.7%) are unemployed than females. However, the sample size for unemployed females is too small for reliable estimates. Almost a quarter (24.4%) of households in North Ayrshire were workless in 2017.⁶⁵ Unemployment rates have been consistently higher in Irvine than the other five localities in North Ayrshire.⁶⁶

The biggest industry in North Ayrshire is wholesale and retail trade (including repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles), providing 17.5% of jobs in the area.⁶⁷ The second biggest industry is human health and social work activities (15%), followed

⁶⁰ Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics, 'Labour Market Profiles – North Ayrshire' [Webpage accessed: 02/07/19: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157425/report.aspx>].

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership, 'Locality Profile Irvine' [Webpage accessed 03/07/19: <http://www.northayrshire.community/wpcontent/uploads/sites/60/2018/02/Locality-Profile-Irvine-Final-Version-Sept2017.pdf>].

⁶⁷ Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics, 'Labour Market Profiles – North Ayrshire', *op. cit.*

by manufacturing (11.2%).⁶⁸ There has been a 1% increase in total employment (1,700 jobs) between 2008 and 2019 compared to a national increase of 2% over the same time period.⁶⁹ Wholesale and retail, human health and social work, and accommodation and food services are forecasted to be the largest employing sectors in 2028.⁷⁰ The industries with the fewest jobs in the area are mining and quarrying (0.2%) and information and communication (0.6%) which are lower than the level across Scotland.⁷¹ The industries with the largest employment decreases are forecast in mining and quarrying (-26%), manufacturing (-14%) and public administration and defence (-13%).⁷²

In June 2019, the total number of people claiming out-of-work benefits was 4,585 (5.6%)⁷³. 2,800 (7.1%) of these claimants were male and 1,785 were female (4.1%).⁷⁴ The total rate of benefit claimants was higher than the 3.1% in Scotland. The claimant rate was highest for 18 to 24 year olds (8.1%), followed by 25 to 49 year olds (6.6%) and those aged 50+ (3.8%).⁷⁵ In March 2017, the Irvine claimant count accounted for one third of the North Ayrshire total claimants.⁷⁶

The population of working age residents is expected to decline by 13% across the Irvine locality between 2012 and 2016, with a decline of the same rate for North Ayrshire.⁷⁷ Those aged 65+ are the only age group projected to increase in size in the Irvine locality (up to 35%) and North Ayrshire (31%).⁷⁸

There have been a variety of initiatives in the Ayrshire region to increase economic growth, investment and the availability of jobs. For example, as part of the £251.5 million Ayrshire Growth deal, the UK and Scottish Governments and the South, East and North Ayrshire Councils will be investing millions of pounds to create approximately 7000 jobs over a 15-year period.⁷⁹

A higher proportion of the population have low or no skills compared to national statistics for Scotland more generally

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Skills Development Scotland, 'Ayrshire: RSA 2018' [Webpage accessed 02/07/19: <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/44994/ayrshire.pdf>].

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics, 'Labour Market Profiles – North Ayrshire', *op. cit.*

⁷² Skills Development Scotland, 'Ayrshire: RSA 2018', *op. cit.*

⁷³ Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics, 'Labour Market Profiles – North Ayrshire', *op. cit.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ North Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership, 'Locality Profile: Irvine' [Webpage accessed 04/07/19: http://www.northayrshire.community/wpcontent/uploads/sites/60/2018/02/Locality-Profile_Irvine_Final_Version_Sept2017.pdf].

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ North Ayrshire Council, 'Growth deal confirmed as Ayrshire celebrates major investment boost' [Webpage accessed 29/07/19: <https://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/news/Growth-deal-confirmed-as-Ayrshire-celebrates-major-investment-boost.aspx>].

In 2018, 37.5% of people in North Ayrshire had the highest level of education (NVQ4 and above).⁸⁰ This was a smaller proportion than the national level for Scotland (44.2%). 10.4% of people had no qualifications which was higher than the figure for Scotland (9.7%).

In the same year, 36% of jobs in the area were higher level occupations, 37% were mid-level occupations and 27% were lower level occupations.⁸¹ 2016/2017 school leaver data showed that 38% of school leavers went into higher education; 32% went into further education; 20% were employed; 5% unemployed and seeking; 2% unemployed and not seeking⁸². A final 4% went into training and activity agreements.

North Ayrshire Council has a long standing focus on local employability initiatives, with a particular emphasis on youth employment:

- The Council offers some **Modern Apprenticeships** for people younger than 20 years old. It includes a 2-week pre-employment apprenticeship training⁸³
- **North Ayrshire Youth Employment Support** provides opportunities for young people (16-24) and supports business growth for local employers. Includes pre-employment support, pre-vocational training, a six months wage subsidy enabling companies to create a new position for the young person, post-employment support if the placement does not become permanent⁸⁴
- **Employability Pipeline** is a multi-strategy service, helping young people increase their chances of getting employment. The council supports the stages of the pipeline through the Employability Hub initiative⁸⁵
- **Employability Hubs** is a multi-agency service with 16 partners giving support to unemployed individuals aged 16 and above. The hubs offer help with CVs, online applications, training courses and English language skills.⁸⁶
- Other employment services in the area include:

⁸⁰ Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics, 'Labour Market Profiles – North Ayrshire', *op. cit.*

⁸¹ Skills Development Scotland, 'Ayrshire: RSA 2018', *op. cit.*

⁸² Scottish Government, 'Initial Destinations of Senior Phase School Leavers: 2018 edition' [Webpage accessed 04/07/19: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/initial-destinations-senior-phase-school-leavers-2-2018-edition/pages/5/>].

⁸³ North Ayrshire Council, 'Modern Apprenticeships (MA)'. [Webpage accessed 05/07/19: <https://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/jobs-and-training/modern-apprenticeships.aspx>].

⁸⁴ North Ayrshire Council Youth Employment Support, 'Employability and Tackling Poverty' [Webpage accessed 05/07/19: http://www.employabilityinScotland.com/media/197226/north_ayrshire_-_youth_employment_support_-_2010.pdf].

⁸⁵ Working North Ayrshire, 'North Ayrshire's Employability Pipeline'. [Webpage accessed 05/07/19: <https://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/Documents/CorporateServices/ChiefExecutive/EconomicDevelopment/local-employment-activity-plan.pdf>].

⁸⁶ North Ayrshire Council, 'Employability Hubs' [Webpage accessed 05/07/19: <https://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/jobs-and-training/employability-hubs.aspx>].

- **Employability Fund Stage 4** gives those 18+ years placement opportunities in North Ayrshire Council for 26 weeks. Opportunity to gain SVQ 2 Business Administration qualification on completion of the placement⁸⁷
- **Progress to work** is a service offered by SALUS, an NHS based provider, aimed at those who are unemployed, live in North Ayrshire and experience health and well-being barriers to employment. It assists people to move closer or return to the labour market. It includes pre-employment packages, having a case manager, action plan and can include counselling, physiotherapy or occupational therapy.⁸⁸

There is a disability opportunity gap

In 2017, the Scottish disability employment gap (the difference between the employment rate of people with a disability and the population as a whole) was 35.8%, with the North Ayrshire gap slightly lower (31.7%).⁸⁹ This figure for North Ayrshire is large due to a lower employment rate and lower disability employment rate in North Ayrshire than Scotland as a whole.

Management and Performance Data for Irvine

The infographic overleaf draws on the management and performance data collected between April 2018 and March 2019. It covers all FSS participants who are registered with the Irvine Job Centre which supports participants from Irvine and the surrounding small communities. There are job centres in nearby Saltcoats and Kilmarnock whose participants are not included in this analysis.

⁸⁷ North Ayrshire Council, 'Help finding work' [Webpage accessed 05/07/19: <https://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/jobs-and-training/help-finding-work.aspx>].

⁸⁸ Salus – Progress to work (North Ayrshire). Available at: [http://www.salus.co.uk/return-to-work-services/case-management/Pages/ProgresstoWork\(NorthAyrshire\).aspx](http://www.salus.co.uk/return-to-work-services/case-management/Pages/ProgresstoWork(NorthAyrshire).aspx)

⁸⁹ North Ayrshire Council, 'Proposal for Supported Employment Service [Webpage accessed 04/07/19: <https://north-ayrshire.cmis.uk.com/north-ayrshire/Document.ashx?czJKcaeAi5tUFL1DTL2UE4zNRBcoShgo=8HmVwgnlu46v2qMP9M3a2o7L%2F4PjAlkDqt6rHQrTRQbLqPuxcTLmgA%3D%3D&rUzwRPf%2BZ3zd4E7lkn8Lyw%3D%3D=pwRE6AGJFLDNlh225F5QMaQWCtPHwdhUfCZ%2FLUQzqA2uL5jNRG4jdQ%3D%3D&mCTIbCubSfXsDGW9lXnlq%3D%3D=hFflUdN3100%3D&kCx1AnS9%2FpWZQ40DXFvdEw%3D%3D=hFflUdN3100%3D&uJovDxwdjMPoYv%2BAJvYtyA%3D%3D=ctNJFf55vVA%3D&FgPIIEJYIotS%2BYGoBi5oIA%3D%3D=NHdURQburHA%3D&d9Qjj0ag1Pd993jsyOJqFvmyB7X0CSQK=ctNJFf55vVA%3D&WGeWmoAfeNR9xqBuxOr1Q8Za60lavYmz=ctNJFf55vVA%3D&WGewmoAfeNQ16B2MHuCPMRKZMwaG1PaO=ctNJFf55vVA%3D>]

71 individuals participated in 2018/19

46% Male
54% Female

72%
with disability or
health condition

36% aged under 35 years
41% aged 35- 49
23% aged 50+

6% Sustained work for 13 weeks

9% of men 8% of women

12% with disability/
health condition 7% without

7% sustained work for 26 weeks

Key trends to note in Irvine are:

- 95% of participants identified as White Scottish and 3% identifying as white other/British, with only 1% from an ethnic group. 1% of respondents chose not to disclose their ethnicity.
- 54% of participants were female, compared to 46% who were male – compared to 64% male and 35% female in FSS across all lot areas.
- 20% were aged 16-24; 16% were aged 25-34; 41% were aged 35-49; and 23% were aged 50+. Across all FSS lot areas the most common age of participants was 35 to 49 (31% of participants).
- Of participants in the FSS service in Irvine, 71.8% of people recorded as having a disability or some form of health condition – compared to 64% across all FSS lot areas. The most common types of illness were mental health and mobility issues. Of the participants who recorded an illness, 58.8% said that it affected their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. 43.3% responding that it affected their ability to work ‘a lot’ and 56.7% saying it affected their ability to work ‘a little’.
- 6% of participants obtained and sustained 13 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week. 7% sustained employment for 26 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week. This is compared to 9%, and 4% across all FSS lot areas respectively.
- 9% of male participants sustained 13 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week compared to 8% of female participants.
- The age group most likely to sustain 13 continuous weeks of working at least 16 hours per week was 50+ years (12.5% of this age group), while the least likely age group was 16-24 (0% of this age group).

Description of service

FSS in the South West contract area is delivered by Start Scotland, and in North Ayrshire the service is subcontracted to one of the joint venture partners, The Lennox Partnership (TLP). The North Ayrshire service is delivered from a two-story community-owned centre in a residential area of Irvine. Downstairs there is a community hall and a café and the upstairs rooms are occupied by a range of service providers including TLP and one of North Ayrshire Council’s Employment Hubs (which is staffed part time).

The service is delivered by 5 staff all of whom have extensive employability experience and have in the past worked for other providers locally. The centre provides a range of services and, after its relatively recent opening, it is developing as a place where local people go to get support on a wide range of issues. Many of these initial engagements are with the centre manager who is then able to refer them to the most appropriate service:

“A lot of people are off the system – we get them in here and I can guide them to the most appropriate service. I can see that [FSS] is working for people.” Centre Manager

The service has approximately 90 active FSS clients at any one time. Most referrals are from JCP but the conversion of these referrals to FSS participants is much lower than for other [third party] referrals. This means that third party referrals are being strongly encouraged by focusing on family and friends and community outreach. JCP referrals fluctuate quite a lot and TLP tries to refresh work coach’s awareness of the service on a regular basis. Two non-participants who we interviewed stated that they became aware of the service through leaflets distributed through JCP, however they were already being supported by another employability service. One of these non-participants stated that there was no particular reason for choosing the other service, as they were signposted to that service when they visited the employability hub, and they felt they might have registered FSS if they had visited on a different day.

TLP is looking to diversify its sources of clients and further increase self-referrals, and is using a variety of means to achieve this. It is using social media and is now getting some referrals from Facebook (sharing posts to the local Jobcentre). TLP have distributed 2,000 leaflets – focusing on Irvine and Ardrossan where there is particularly high unemployment and extensive social housing areas: these leaflets include a number to ring, Facebook/Twitter, and website address. In addition, TLP regularly email clients asking them to refer to family and friends and they hold open days to attract in local residents.

TLP is also developing relationships with Links Workers⁹⁰ to connect with GPs where they can be included in social prescribing options. In addition, there is extensive posting of adverts/posters locally – in chip shops, corner shops, community centres, and GP surgeries (where helpful receptionists can be useful allies). TLP are also using ‘pop ups’ at local Primary School Sports Days. TLP stress the significance of health issues and the extent to which they can feel too much of a barrier to participants.

“Anxiety and depression can get in the way – hence the significance of our links to GPs.” Provider

The significance of health conditions was confirmed through our discussion with Jobcentre Plus staff locally:

“The case load is health conditions – UC, ESA, JSA – across the board in terms of ages: for young people the issue is mental health, for older people the issue is physical conditions. Lots of our customers have major health issues.” JCP staff

⁹⁰ <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/in-the-community/national-link-service/about-the-service/#expanded>

There were implications for JCP referrals to FSS, with the view being expressed that other local providers may be better able to meet the needs of some of these customers:

“Other providers can take more time with serious health issues – SDS, SALUS – more on a one to one basis.” JCP staff

This view was reflected in feedback from two of the participants we interviewed in Irvine. One interviewee said they were “eager” to return to their previous employability service as the support they received from FSS was not personalised enough and too infrequent. They felt that they require more intensive and specific support due to their disability, and that they were only receiving one meeting every fortnight with their FSS advisor, compared with two meetings a week with their previous service. Another, who is not a native English speaker, stated that they chose to leave FSS as they did not have access to a dedicated literacy support worker, whereas they saw a literacy worker three times a week with their previous service.

The FSS service offered by TLP combines community outreach, ongoing support and employer engagement and is driven by a vision which focuses on ‘stabilising the whole life of a client before they go into work.’ The service displays a strongly personal approach – The service displays a strongly personal approach, for examples ending an email to every client when they introduce the staff member who will be involved in their transition to work. This is complemented by a strong network of third sector organisations – who provide some specialist support but mainly are a source of voluntary placements. The range of voluntary opportunities that can be offered to FSS participants is seen as very important – between 5-10% of clients take up voluntary roles, and it appears to be particularly important for young people – providing them with a role on their CV and boosting their confidence. The relationships that have been developed by TLP include community centres, Beith Trust, Cancer Care Shop, Garden/Landscaping and a Mans’ Shed/Allotment.

“We use volunteering for lot of things – if they are anxious this is our first thought – a few weeks of volunteering and then they get a job – it is about confidence.”
Provider

This engagement with third sector organisations is complemented by close working with employers in the early weeks of employment. It is seen as part of creating a rounded approach to the client’s situation. In other words, there is a commitment to ensuring that the whole needs of the participants and their household are met – for example, ensuring that their health condition is managed and any issues about debt can be carefully dealt with.

Participants valued this aspect of the support, with many interviewees identifying the most helpful aspects of FSS to be the support they received to boost their self-esteem and confidence, and to help them to build soft skills such as speaking in public and engaging in social interactions.

This is reflected in the rounded service offered to employers. A major local employer felt that FSS offered a distinctive service in terms of the quality of their relationship with TLP. The provider appeared to offer the company support which went well beyond a focus on the FSS clients – they helped the company find sources of support for all their staff (eg Mental Health, local foodbanks) and this was part of the creation of a new and different kind of relationship which brought mutual benefit.

“Follow up support is important – this can be quite a small issue (eg admitting that they can’t afford to get to the site). Most of our LTU recruits have mental health issues - anxiety, depression, panic attacks – and we have lots of clubs and social activities to counteract this.” Employer

“[FSS] preparation is very good - they came up to find out all about us. No one else has made us aware of the other things they can help us with – eg foodbanks. They think about us in the round. They are really good at documentation – background checks, birth certificate, passport, proof of NI, proof of address.” Employer

Local jobs include warehousing, hospitality/catering, retail including large local supermarkets, call centres, care and health – however many employers are looking for experience in candidates. A few participants who we interviewed also noted that age can be a factor, with employers seeking long-term commitments from new employees. Many local jobs are in the public sector, such as those with the NHS, in the education sector and working for the local authority.

There are good transport links to the Glasgow labour market but for those seeking entry level jobs the travel cost would be prohibitive. More generally, transport is seen as a real issue across North Ayrshire, especially for clients in the outlying villages, in terms of both access to support and to training and employment. There is a lot of alternative local provision of employability support, particularly by North Ayrshire Council and includes CEiS which has had a long standing presence in the area and has been a long term provider partner of the Council. The wider interviews identified some issues about competition, and difficulties in positioning FSS clearly in a crowded local employability landscape. Partners found it hard to pinpoint the distinctive features of FSS compared with other available services, and referrals were often on the basis of trusted working relationships.

“Work Coaches can distinguish [FSS] from other provision but need to be aware that other providers are offering very similar. I don’t know what the USP of [FSS] is – Work Coaches simply tell customers what is available.” JCP staff

The local authority feels that it is able to provide a longer term, more intensive service, and that any new provider will find it hard if not impossible to replicate its long-standing working relationships with a range of complementary services:

There is a huge difference between what a commercial company has time to do and what we can do – the links we have in the Council are substantial and well-established over several years – any provider will take time to establish networks. And there is a lot of duplication of funding across different services.” LA staff

TLP recognises this very competitive local environment:

“It is very competitive locally – there is so much provision and it is over-complicated. I can’t help some clients because of double funding.” Provider

The service is meeting its job outcome targets and staff see referrals and starts as its main issue. The relationship with Jobcentre Plus is not seen as close but the service engages with Work Coaches and seeks regularly to refresh their awareness of the service and what it can offer alongside other local provision. The engagement and awareness of Work Coaches and other staff can make a difference to referrals – for example, the service reported that a new manager at one of the Jobcentres led to a spike in referrals to FSS.

TLP staff see FSS as distinctive and different from Work Service:

“People like coming because it is a choice. They have to come in for 3 hours every week – but a lot of this is blended around their needs. It is more relaxed – it doesn't feel corporate and focused on efficiency.” Provider

“This feels more relaxed, less regimented – people are here because they want to be here and they have heard good stories locally.” Provider

“The key difference from Work Service is flexibility and our scope to be innovative.” Provider

Lessons from this case study

FSS is **delivered from a community owned centre** in a residential area. This centre seen as a place where local people can go for a range of activities, services and support, and the siting of the Fair Start service here has been a factor in ensuring that it is seen as appealing and accessible by local residents. In addition, centre staff are able to guide to FSS those for whom the service appears appropriate, so it is an effective way of reaching those who are not engaging with JCP.

The **dense local support network** for those seeking work means that it is particularly important for any new employability service to develop and reinforce a clear and distinctive position in the market and ensure that it is reaching those who can most benefit from its particular offer. However, the competitive environment

means that there is a lack of a collegiate and mutual support for services, and inter-service referral is limited. In the words of a JCP staff member:

“There are 4 or 5 major ‘supermarkets’ – that is how I feel about the [employability] offer in Irvine - FSS is just one of these supermarkets. It is very hard to see the USP and to have good news stories – there is nothing from Irvine in the [JLP] newsletter.”

The creation of a **‘wrap around’ service for employers** (as well as for clients) has been appreciated – this service goes well beyond a focus on a particular client and appropriate support for them in work to involves thinking more holistically about how the provider can support employers in the wider recruitment and workforce context.

TLP have developed a **careful support system for staff**, with a lot of peer support and regular check ins by the manager. This is in response to two sources of stress – the situation of clients (“Clients can be suicidal”) coupled with the perceived stress of coping with the administrative demands of the service.

“We have a strong team, they help each other but understand importance of self-care. They talk about clients, make suggestions, have case conferences and 1-2-1 reviews. All of them have had Mental Health First Aid training.” Provider

“The KDIs are driven by the right reasons but cause stress – the fear is that, if you miss a drop down box or get the wording wrong, we will incur a service credit – so there is a fear of making mistakes. We get very busy and caught up with the job – and the system is a bit clunky and not as intuitive as it could be. The issue is the time it takes, not the KDIs themselves.” Provider

The **required contact time** is seen as a useful discipline, but it is seen as important to be flexible and respond to the client’s situation and how this may change over time:

“It’s good to get clients in every week – it maintains momentum and it can be their main social interaction, and we can use mitigation reasons if we need to.”

However, the vulnerability of clients is reflected in a lot of re-scheduled appointments – this is seen as part of their health condition –

“They can have a bad day and this allows us to recognise and respond to this.”

“It’s important to work at their pace – they need to buy into it.”

The **inability to fund training** is seen as a problem, although TLP are able to place clients on locally funded catering and food hygiene courses:

“We can only fund training if there is a strong probability that the client will get a job as a result. Because we can’t fund training we need to rely on employers picking up the tab so we need to be open and honest with employers.”

There are two issues about **client referral**. One is the issue of eligible versus appropriate referrals from JCP, recognising that the provider has 12 to 18 months to work with a participant and move them into work:

“There has been feedback from Work Coaches that they have been told that FSS is not suitable for the clients they have referred. Work Coaches are making a genuine referral, but this is not meeting what the provider is looking for. Customers can play off one against the other – and it is very difficult to assess where the issues lie.” JCP staff

Linked to this are issues arising from provider-sourced referrals (third part referrals), where a JCP Work Coach had not been aware of a customer’s health condition until they see [have to verify] a disability-related FSS referral for that individual:

“There has been a huge increase in direct referrals from the provider – nearly all (13/14) have been under FSS 1 under disabled and our eligibility criteria mean they can get direct access from day 1. Not all customers have told the Work Coaches that they have a health issue – and we then see them with their own perception that they are disabled which is a bit surprising. Health has not been seen as a barrier before.” JCP staff

These issues have a significant effect on the **quality of the relationship between the FSS provider and JCP staff**. This has been compounded by staff being recruited from a previous local provider, and this appears to have influenced the perception of both Work Coaches and clients. The frequency and quality of feedback from the provider to Work Coaches is seen as really important in building an effective working relationship and currently Work Coaches report they are not getting the feedback they feel would be helpful and appropriate to support participants.

“There is a need [for the provider] to build up the relationship with Work Coaches and know what is happening to each customer and how they are moving on.” JCP staff

There is a general sense that the **voluntary nature of the FSS service** is helpful but it is clear that it makes the situation of Work Coaches more challenging:

“Clients may not turn up [at FSS] and the voluntary nature becomes more challenging – it’s frustrating when numbers of referrals get talked about. Success relies on customers actually wanting to do it. They can agree to a FSS referral just to get out of the interview and the Jobcentre.” Provider

Participant and non-participant views

In this chapter, we explore participants' experiences of FSS, considering in particular the types of support that work best for individuals, and the difference that participation has made to people taking part.

In addition, we provide an overview of feedback from eligible non-participants (including non-completers of FSS) regarding their awareness of the service, their reasons for non-participation, and, in the case of non-completers, their experiences of FSS and reasons for dropping out.

The information provided in this chapter is drawn from interviews with both groups and with participants' support workers in the three case study areas.

Below we outline the key findings from our interviews with participants, non-participants and key workers, organised under the following sub-headings:

- Referral processes
- Motivations for taking part in FSS
- Reasons for non-participation
- Reasons for non-completion
- Strengths of FSS
- Weaknesses and areas for improvement
- Impact of FSS
- Barriers to progression.

Referral processes

All of the participants who took part in our interviews were referred by, or found out about FSS, through JCP, except two (one of whom heard about FSS from their sister and the other through adverts in their local newspaper and health centre). The arrangements for referral to FSS seem to work well from participants' point of view, with JCP providing an effective gateway to FSS, along with the option for self-referrals.

Motivations for taking part in FSS

One of the key differences between FSS and previous national employment support services is that FSS is voluntary – individuals choose to take part of their own free will. As such, participants were able to articulate the benefits of engaging with the service.

Participants engaged with FSS for various reasons. Most commonly, participants wanted help in finding and/or applying for jobs. A small number had had positive experiences of being supported by the current providers in the past, including one who had previously been helped to find a job, and decided to take part in the hope that FSS would be similarly helpful.

Some participants joined the service to help them build or regain their confidence and sense of motivation. This lack of confidence sometimes related to the process of applying for jobs – for example, attending job interviews – while others wanted help to boost their self-confidence. One participant said they “wanted [FSS] to help me get out of my shell a bit”.

A small number of participants engaged with the service because it gave them something to do or to satisfy Jobcentre Plus. For example, one participant said, “I went to get JCP off my back”.

Others joined the service to learn new skills, such as how to send emails or write a CV, including one participant who had skills in Scottish traditional music and wanted to become a self-employed teacher or performer but needed help with advertising. It was not clear how this help was provided by FSS.

Reasons for non-participation

As a voluntary service, individuals can decide whether or not to take part in FSS. Through the research we identified two main reasons for non-participation.

Firstly, four research participants reported that they have not taken part in FSS because they were not aware of it. This suggests that there may be scope to further increase the profile of FSS among potential participants.

Secondly, two research participants reported that, while they were made aware of the service through leaflets provided by JCP, they decided not to engage as they were already being supported by another employability service. These research participants said that there was no particular reason for choosing another service over FSS. One interviewee stated that they visited the employability hub to register for employment support on the day of another service’s drop-in session, and that they would probably have registered with FSS if they visited on a different day.

Reasons for non-completion

Participants are free to leave FSS before completing the service without sanctions, and six interviewees reported that they had left the service early. Four of these individuals reported positive experiences of their time with FSS and left due to reasons unrelated to the quality of support they received – for example, disabilities, caring responsibilities and childcare issues.

Two of these participants reported that they left the service because they moved on to disability benefits and are no longer looking for work. One explained that their disability benefits were re-approved following an appeal against an earlier failed assessment. This person described themselves as “long-term sick, not long-term unemployed”. Another described leaving FSS because they developed a medical condition as a result of surgery and now receive ESA payments.

However, two participants, both in Irvine, left because they had not received the support that they needed and opted to return to another service as it offered more

personalised and intensive support. This is an issue we return to later in this chapter.

Strengths of FSS

Overall, feedback from participants was very positive and clients identified several strengths of FSS including its comprehensive and tailored approach, the caring, respectful and supportive key workers, the holistic support offered, and the voluntary nature of the support. We describe FSS's strengths in more detail below including, where possible, comparisons with other services that participants have taken part in.

Comprehensiveness

Participants valued the comprehensive support that FSS offers, covering all aspects of preparation for employment. Interviewees appreciated the help and advice they receive to find vacancies, write their CV, make job applications, prepare for interviews and enhance their experience and skills through placements and courses. Very few participants reported having any support needs that FSS did not meet and one said, "What they do is perfect". Another said the service was "On the ball about everything".

Tailored support

FSS aims to understand and support the individual situation of each participant, and participants reported that the support they received from FSS was tailored to their individual needs. Key workers help to find vacancies and arrange placements and training that suits individual participant's skills, interests and circumstances. For example, one participant, who has a young son, said that their key worker was helping them to look for opportunities that would fit around school start and finish times. Others reported undertaking placements relevant to their existing skills and interests. Key workers also provide wide-ranging support to address individual needs including, for example, helping participants to obtain a driving licence, get their hair cut before an interview, or buy new shoes before starting a job. One participant said, "I can pop in anytime... they guide me with everything". Another said, "The way they've supported me, they're spot on".

Many participants who had also taken part in another employability service noted that it did not seek to accommodate their interests and individual circumstances to the same extent as FSS. One, for instance, said it "felt like I was just another number" on another service, where advisors "didn't listen to what you needed... and didn't understand what people were going through".

Holistic support

Participants appreciated the holistic nature of FSS, including support from key workers with other aspects of their lives not directly linked to their employability. For example, we spoke to one participant whose key worker helped them to access financial assistance to buy furniture when they moved out of their father's house and into their own flat, and another whose key worker helped them to arrange medical appointments. Other examples include a participant with a mental health condition who said, "They made sure I was eating and taking my medication" and

another who reported, “I wasn’t sure about Universal Credit and they helped me with that too”. Another said that key workers, “Go above and beyond”.

Caring, respectful and supportive key workers

In line with FSS’s Fair Work principles of dignity and respect, participants described the approach of FSS key workers as caring, respectful and supportive. Across the three providers, interviewees reported that the key workers were friendly, understood their circumstances and genuinely cared about achieving the best outcome for them.

“It was very relaxed and informal, and they always made you feel welcome.”

“They believe in me.”

“They treat you like family.”

“I like how encouraging they are...they know what I’m good at and want to build on that.”

Participants with experience of other employability support felt that FSS key workers are more supportive and respectful than advisers on other programmes. One said that they were “spoken to like a bairn” on another programme, but the FSS worker “puts you at ease”. Another observed that “the FSS advisor listened to you” in contrast to their experience of another service. The exception to this, as already noted, was two research participants in Irvine who preferred the support they received from another programme and dropped out of FSS provision as a result.

Voluntary participation without risk of sanctions

FSS is a voluntary service and people can choose to take part without the risk of sanctions for non-completion or non-participation. Participants and non-participants appreciated this aspect of the service and reported that key workers were understanding when they missed appointments or were unable to take part in activities like IT classes or placements. In one case, a participant turned down a job offer because they did not feel emotionally ready to return to work, and they were able to do this without fear of penalty.

In contrast, participants who had engaged with the Work Programme disliked its compulsory nature and the risk of sanctions for non-completion or non-participation. One, for example, said they felt forced to accept a job through the Work Programme but then left it almost immediately as it did not suit their circumstances, and this had led to a benefits sanction.

Challenges

While feedback about FSS was generally very positive, some participants reported some challenges with FSS.

In Irvine, several participants stated that they much preferred another employability service and chose to leave FSS to return to their previous advisor because they provided more intensive and personalised support. For instance, one interviewee stated that they require intensive and specific support due to a disability, and that support from FSS was not personalised enough and too infrequent. They only received scheduled meetings every fortnight, compared to the two meetings a week from the advisor on the other service. They said that their FSS advisor would leave them alone in a computer room to complete job searches, with no guidance or direction. They said that the advisor did not come through to talk to them and felt that they need someone to be in the room with them. This person left the service after eight months and was “eager” to return to their previous support.

Another participant, also receiving support in Irvine, who is not a native English speaker, left FSS as they did not receive the intensive literacy support they required. They stated that the FSS key worker only saw them once a week, whereas they saw a dedicated literacy worker three times a week with another service, who provided support with English writing skills and in preparing job applications and cover letters.

In Alloa, one participant said they had hoped to receive support with interview skills but there was not enough time to provide this, and in Wick one participant would have appreciated more support with managing their finances.

Given FSS’s focus on providing comprehensive, individualised support to help people progress towards work, it is perhaps surprising that participants reported these examples where FSS had not fully met their support needs. This may indicate a need to ensure that all providers have the necessary resources, competencies and links with other relevant services to support participants fully.

Impact of FSS

Participants and key workers reported a range of positive outcomes for participants. Several interviewees had gained new practical, job-related skills, or renewed their existing qualifications, through undertaking courses and work placements. Participants had built skills in a range of areas such as forklift driving, retail, health and safety, landscaping and welding. Many interviewees also reported being enrolled in IT courses and confidence-building workshops.

Participants also said they improved their skills in job-seeking. This included better awareness of where to look for vacancies, including online sources, enhanced CVs and support with interview skills.

Many of the participants and key workers involved in the research reported that FSS helped participants to feel more confident in themselves and in their ability to find work.

“I’ve opened up more as a person... before, I was always at home and I was never out the house.”

“They helped me see that people should be screaming out for me.”

“It has given me the confidence and experience to go into places.”

Participants attributed this growth in confidence to FSS activities giving them a purpose and “structure” to their week, a chance to meet new people, and a greater awareness of their strengths, as well as enhancing their skills and experience. One participant reported that FSS “gave me the confidence to do interviews” and another, who has not worked for 12 years, said the key worker “has helped me feel more confident”. Another key worker felt that one of their participants “is less quiet than before” and more confident about speaking to people.

Some interviewees told us that FSS helped them to gain experience of different sectors and decide what they want to do. For example, one participant took part in placements in retail and sports development and through these, realised that they wanted to pursue a career in sports development - “I like that they’ve helped me find out what I want to do”. Another liked the fact that their key worker gave them different “ideas to float around my head”.

For some participants, the confidence gained and support provided through FSS helped them to move into work or further education. One participant said that “I got the job because of confidence and self-esteem” developed through FSS, while another “wasn’t confident at all in applying for retail jobs but they supported me the entire way and I feel a lot more confident. That’s how I was able to get my current job”. A third noted that their key worker has “helped me to get into work by showing me how to do my CV and that sort of thing”. Another secured a place at college which they will take up unless they are successful with a Modern Apprenticeship application. Another reported that FSS has “helped me with skills to start self-employment”.

Other participants reported that, although they are not ready to enter the labour market just now, FSS had made them more confident about and interested in finding work when their circumstances change. For example, one single parent who has eight children said that FSS has given them a “taster” and that they are more interested in finding a job when their children are older.

FSS has also had a positive impact on participants’ health and wellbeing and, more broadly, that of their families. Some participants reported that, by helping them to get into work, FSS had helped to improve their financial situation and this in turn had benefitted other members of the family as well. The service helped some participants to meet new people, exemplified by one who said “I don’t feel so isolated”. Another spoke about the importance of the holistic support that FSS

offers and of having the key worker there to talk to about anything that is worrying them - “[the key worker] is there if you need her... she gives the support I need”.

Key workers provide support with a wide range of issues and, as noted earlier, FSS helped one participant to prepare for moving into their own flat, another was supported with their medication, and two or three said their key worker provided support with their benefits.

Barriers to progression

Participants and non-participants reported that challenges in finding and then staying in work were related to a range of individual circumstances. Many interviewees reported that they have struggled to find work because of their parental and/or caring duties. These issues have either prevented them from moving into employment altogether or set limits on the range of roles they could apply to. For example, one participant mentioned that they had to wait for their child to start school before moving into work. Their key worker reported that the participant felt they could not commit to the hours required. Likewise, another interviewee recently became a full-time carer for their grandson and said that, in the jobs they applied to, they were asked to work nights and weekends, without any flexibility.

A lack of skills was another key barrier to employment. Some felt they were hindered by a lack of skills in written English or IT (such as typing) or by not having a driving licence, which one key worker noted was valuable in opening up opportunities for employment further afield.

For some, a lack of knowledge of recruitment processes was also a barrier to employment. We heard from participants who needed help with writing and uploading a CV and applying for jobs online. One participant felt hindered by a lack of interview skills and familiarity with the interview process. They had been in the same line of work for decades, had never attended a formal interview, and had difficulty understanding what was being asked of them in interviews.

In some cases, poor mental and/or physical health has prevented interviewees from moving into and staying in employment. For example, one participant lost their job as a chef because they were experiencing mental health issues, which they described as “a psychological knock”.

Other barriers to employment reported included a lack of job opportunities in the local area and age constraints. For example, one research participant referred to a retail job they applied for which required a 12-year commitment from successful applicants so that they could make progress to middle management. As the interviewee said, “they’re not going to hire someone in their 50s”. Another participant who is turning 60 stated that they received good support from FSS and “managed to fire off lots of applications” but felt their age “works against me” and “employers don’t want to give me a look in”.

We also heard from a key worker that a lack of discipline and/or poor relations with work colleagues has prevented two FSS participants from staying in work. While one participant lost their job because of inappropriate behaviour, the other left due to strained relations with their manager.

Findings and recommendations

In this chapter we draw out the most important findings from our examination of FSS practice in three locations, together with the responses from participants.

Findings

The **immediate context of the FSS delivery** can make a significant impact on the appeal and effectiveness of the service. There are two aspects to this:

- The extent to which FSS is part of a **wider service offering**. In Wick, for example, the provider also delivers a complementary ‘short, sharp’ employability service which provides a taster, a test of commitment, and an opportunity for the provider to assess whether the client will benefit from a longer-term service. In addition, there is scope for the provider to assess which service is best for the client. In Irvine, the service is delivered in a multi-service centre attracts a range of potential clients and the ability to guide them to the most appropriate service. In Alloa, the service is delivered from the offices of Clackmannanshire Works with direct access to a range of Council services.
- The extent to which the service is delivered from **accessible and welcoming premises**. In each of the three locations the service is delivered from highly accessible offices. In Wick the service is in the lower ground floor of a converted house in the centre of a residential area close to the area with the highest unemployment in the town – the open plan, three roomed premises feel welcoming and provide both company and privacy when needed. In Irvine the office is in a relatively new and appealing community owned and run centre which includes a range of activities and a café and increasingly is attracting people seeking a range of support. The delivery of the service in Alloa from the long-standing Clacks Works offices means that there is a familiarity with a well-established trusted provider.

The **nature of pre-existing relationships, local contacts and familiarity, and local knowledge** makes a substantial difference to the ease with which the service has been established. In Wick the service is delivered by a team of two, both of whom have delivered employability services locally over a number of years. In particular, the business principal has excellent working relationships with Jobcentre Plus staff and with a range of local charities and employers in terms of volunteering and work placement opportunities, and is a trusted presence for FSS participants. In Alloa, the delivery of FSS by the long-established Clacks Works organisation has lent the service instant trust and credibility. This can cut both ways. In Irvine the fact that some FSS staff were recruited from previous providers which may not have had consistently strong positive reputations may have made the establishment of good working relationships with both partners and clients harder. In Irvine the Local Authority stressed how hard it would be for any FSS provider to replicate the range and depth of networks and relationships that the Local Authority had built over the years, however assiduously the provider worked at this.

The **relationship between FSS provider staff and Jobcentre Plus** staff is particularly important. The quality of these relationships was strongly related to the length and nature of prior local relationships. In one of the localities the new FSS provider had been keen to run pre-recruitment group sessions at the Jobcentre for those who may be interested in the service, but this was not possible because of national policy (with the Work Coaches' role being to provide their customers with information on the range of local provision rather than promoting any particular service). There was a view that the relationship had never recovered from this false start. In another location there was clearly a considerable amount of trust between provider staff and Work Coaches with a ready and regular flow of information about referrals and clients back and forth – in this relationship there were few issues about eligible/appropriate clients as these were worked out in conversations.

The **density and complexity of the local infrastructure of employability support** makes a big difference to the nature and effectiveness of the FSS service. In the denser, more competitive landscapes there was noticeably weaker communication and joint working, while in the area with very few providers there was a very obvious collegiate feel between the different partners.

The **range and scale of local job opportunities** had an impact on the FSS service, although in all three locations unemployment is at a long-term low, meaning that those who are seeking work tend to present with a range of barriers to work. It was the view of all the providers that, with the right support and help, there should be openings for most clients (particularly given the fact only those who can realistically gain work within 12 months should be referred). However, in two of the locations some clients faced significant employer prejudice because of their families' reputation.

The need to be able to **prepare some clients for FSS** was widely accepted. Many clients who may in due course be able to benefit from FSS currently lead chaotic lives in dysfunctional families and other households, and in one location a charity dedicated to helping them sort out their lives and establish some routines provided a solid stepping stone from which clients could be referred to FSS. All the FSS providers recognised that they need to provide a holistic, long term service to those who faced a number of barriers to work and a history of unemployment and poor mental or physical health. Given this, there is an issue about the difficulty of creating motivational activity during the FSS experience. Providers recognise that it may not be realistic to expect employers to provide these, certainly at the scale that may be required locally, so there are suggestions about the need to provide subsidies for work experience or support enterprises owned by local communities and producing locally useful products and services.

The **configuration of the FSS providers' staff teams** display some interesting differences. While all have adopted the 'key worker' approach, in one location one member of staff had a combined role of community outreach and employer engagement, and all the staff had caseloads of participants. In another location – roles and responsibilities (eg external marketing, community engagement and employer engagement) are more clearly separated among staff. It will be useful to explore the different team roles in depth in future local case studies.

This issue about **eligible versus appropriate referrals** still exists. Essentially, this is about the professional judgement that a participant will be able to gain work for at least 16hrs per week within a year. Since the financial model is backloaded (ie providers can only create a viable service by getting clients into work), providers may be likely to err on the side of caution while Work Coaches may be more optimistic about what is possible.

There appeared to be significant variation in the ability of providers to fund or access training. Some of them funded some short training or certification themselves while others were able to draw down JCP funding up to £150 for things like CSCS certification, while others were able to call on local training (eg food hygiene and cookery) that were delivered by local charities with third party funding. **The constraints on their ability to fund vocational training** was identified as an issue by two of the providers. The FSS funding model – with 70% of funding tied to employment outcomes may be encouraging an emphasis on finding someone a job (and keeping them in a job), rather than helping individuals to invest in training and development in order to get them a better and high quality job which is part of the 'Fair Work' agenda.

Provider staff felt that it was important to reflect the lives of participants by being **flexible around clients disengaging and re-engaging with the FSS service**. Many clients led disorganised lives with elements of unpredictability and regular setbacks. This means that it may be better for them to take a break from the service without the time taken out being removed from their 12-month timeframe. Staff felt that flexibility should also extend to the ability of being able to access FSS more than once. Staff reported that participants can be referred who aren't ready at that time, but may be able to benefit from FSS at a future date (for example, once another external factor had been addressed or their situation had settled down). However, staff reported that it was currently not possible to decline or defer a referral to enable participants to come to FSS at a later date.

There was appreciation of the **regional coverage of the Fair Start contracts**. Some providers felt that it helped them work together strategically and share learning and expertise across their region, particularly where there is specialist expertise or experience in a particular area in the region. This is the case in the Forth Valley contract area. However, at an operational level FSS is set up as three distinct Local Authority area services as they felt this enabled them to best support their local clients. There is very little operational activity happening at a regional level. While this combination of regional sharing and local delivery provides some pointers for future service optimisation, it does raise issues about how to ensure that clients have ready access to regional labour markets, and there may be value in a more regional approach to the job matching function and job broker role to ensure that job opportunities are not arbitrarily limited by each local authority provider looking for roles only within their local authority boundaries.

FSS providers have been **unable to draw on ESF supported provision** – where it is locally available – in creating fully comprehensive pathways for participants. Given the scale of locally available ESF funded support, and the approaching implementation of No One Left Behind, the Scottish Government may want to

reflect on how all available funding can be used most efficiently to enable full local service integration for participants.

Related to this was the **consistent issue of travel time and costs**. At one extreme, staff at Wick spent considerable amounts of time and expense travelling to visit clients across a huge geographical area, and funding those in neighbouring towns to travel to the service by bus. In Alloa there was an issue about participants affording the cost of travelling to jobs in Stirling, and in Irvine the large labour market offered by Glasgow was essentially inaccessible to participants due to travel costs and travel to and from the North Ayrshire rural villages was a noticeable issue.

Feedback from participants

Overall, participants reported very positive feedback about FSS and the service appears to be successfully supporting people to make progress towards employment in line with the Scottish Government's Fair Work principles of dignity and respect. Our key findings from interviews with participants, non-participants and key workers are summarised below:

- JCP and self-referral seem appear to be the two main routes to FSS currently and some non-participants were unaware of the service. This may suggest a need for greater awareness raising of the service amongst organisations supporting potential participants.
- Participants and non-participants experience a range of barriers to finding employment, such as disability, age, caring and parenting duties, and a lack of skills. Common barriers include employers' lack of flexibility to accommodate caring duties, a perceived bias among employers towards candidates from younger age groups, and a lack of IT skills.

Overall, interviewees were very positive about the support provided by FSS.

Participants value the voluntary, comprehensive and respectful nature of the service and commonly reported that FSS is tailored to the individual, and that key workers provide support suited to a participant's individual skillset, interests and experience.

Participants appreciate the holistic assistance FSS provides, which is not always directly related to the individual's employability. Participants reported that key workers often assisted them with individual needs such as arranging medical appointments, applying for Universal Credit, signposting to other services, and in providing moral support with their lives more generally.

Most participants preferred FSS to the prior services, including Work Programme, as their key workers provided more personalised support and were more understanding, but two participants interviewed reported that they preferred another service as FSS did not meet their support needs. This may indicate some weaknesses in the FSS service in Irvine that require further examination.

Participants reported various positive outcomes from taking part in FSS including enhanced confidence, skills and experience as well as reduced isolation. For some, this had successfully helped them to find work, while others felt more confident and positive about their on-going job search.

Appendix 1 – Scottish policy context

FSS built on the achievements of the Scottish Government's transitional employment services and was designed on the basis of extensive consultation with key partners, stakeholders and those who need support in seeking employment. It has a number of features which distinguish it from previous approaches:

- It is built around the Fair Work principles of dignity and respect. Crucially, participation is voluntary, and people can choose to take part without a risk to existing benefits. The Fair Work principles are embedded in the rest of the service design, with a focus on understanding the individual situation of each participant, ensuring that they are treated with respect throughout the process and receive services and support which help them make progress towards work that is fair and can be sustained over the long term.
- It is delivered by lead contractors and their partners/supply chains in nine contract areas across Scotland: there is no local competition for clients or jobs between SG contractors, and the delivery can reflect the different geographies, labour markets and population distribution. It can also take account of the widely differing local infrastructure of support and seek to align with and complement other provision.
- It is being delivered collaboratively across a range of private, public and third sector delivery partners including a range of specialist providers to ensure people receive the right type of support for them.
- It encourages providers to commit to the Fair Work, Workforce and Community Benefits agendas
- It includes an offer of supported employment which helps disabled people learn on the job.

The Scottish Government's ambitions for the Scottish employability service go beyond FSS. There has been a long-term concern about the 'cluttered landscape' of provision and about weak alignment between a range of funding and services which shared the same key aims. This has led to a focus on ensuring clarity, consistency and ease of access for both those seeking work and employers seeking recruits.

This is the concern that lay behind the publication in March 2018 of No One Left Behind: Next Steps for the Integration and Alignment of Employability Support in Scotland. This document focused on how to better align services around the needs of individual clients and it established a set of objectives to inform the alignment of services:

- A system that provides flexible and person-centred support...
- Is more straightforward for people to navigate...

- Is better integrated and aligned with other services...
- Provides pathways into sustainable and fair work...
- Is funded in a simple and co-ordinated way...
- Is driven by evidence, including data and the experience of users...
- Supports more people to move into the right job, at the right time.

Behind these objectives lay a range of commitments to enhance employability services in Scotland. These focus on bringing together a range of services and funding into much stronger alignment. These include:

- Integrating investment in Activity Agreements and the Scottish Employer Recruitment Incentive into the employability approaches of Local Authorities
- Integrating the funding for other services, such as the Employability Fund and Community Jobs Scotland, into a devolved approach
- Developing a collectively agreed national outcomes and measurement framework to help front line service providers – public, private and third sector – align their activity and deliver more flexible services
- Exploring the feasibility of developing the national all-age employment support offer, developing existing digital careers and employability platforms, alongside improved alignment with health and other services.
- Underpinning these lay a commitment to exploring how to better integrate employability support for those who were unemployed and with a complex array of needs which could include health, housing and social justice experience. This was reflected in the announcement in August 2017 of the projects that would receive funding from the Employability Innovation and Integration Fund to join up employability provision with health and social care, justice and housing services.

The focus on exploring some of the practical ways of enhancing more integrated approaches to health and work is shown in a range of initiatives which include:

- The Health and Work Support Pilot in Dundee and Fife (funded by the DWP's Health and Work Innovation Fund and the Scottish Government).
- A recognition, for example, through the review of Glasgow HSCP funded employability projects in Glasgow, of the significance in some areas of employability related investment by Health and Social Care Partnerships which are funding some innovative approaches to employability support for those with health conditions, including addictions, mental health issues and physical disabilities.
- The DWP and DHSS's Work and Health Challenge Fund which

- is now funding 19 projects across the UK – including 4 with a presence in Scotland – which are exploring innovative approaches to creating integrated approaches to helping those with health conditions stay in work or find jobs.

FSS forms a key part of the employability landscape at a time of significant change and evolution in the coordination and coherence of local provision and wide experimentation about effective joined up services for those with an array of needs and barriers to work. This is infused by the focus on fair work and respect and dignity.

Appendix 2 – Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation focuses on providing an insight into how delivery is playing out in practice and seeks to inform future iterations of employability services in Scotland through understanding what works.

This evaluation focuses on developing case studies in 9 localities across Scotland over the three years, one in each contract Lot area. This year one report focuses on our first three case studies -Alloa (Forth Valley), Irvine (South West) and Wick (Highlands and Islands).

This appendix breaks down the evaluation objectives and methodology.

Evaluation objectives

The key objectives of the evaluation are to:

Understand how FSS is being implemented across the different lot areas in Scotland

Understand the experience of FSS for lead providers, partner organisations, participants and employers

Identify what is working well and less well in the implementation of FSS

Identify the lessons learned and recommend changes to consider for the remainder of the FSS contract period as well as shaping what the next iteration of employment support in Scotland might look like

Evaluation methodology

We are carrying out the following tasks in each of the case study areas:

- Conducting desk-based area analysis of the socio-economic and employment trends in each of the localities to understand the local labour market context that FSS is operating in
- Analysing the management and performance data from FSS in each of the localities to understand the profile and numbers of participants and outcomes achieved in the area
- Conducting interviews with participants in each locality to understand their experience of and views on FSS
- Conducting interviews with individuals in each locality who would be eligible for FSS but have not participated in the service to understand potential barriers individuals face in participating in FSS
- Conducting interviews with employers in each locality to understand their experience of and views on FSS
- Conducting interviews with service provider staff including managers and frontline staff delivering FSS locally to understand their experience of and views on the service
- Conducting interviews with staff in partners of FSS providers in the locality to understand their experience of and views on FSS
- Conducting interviews with relevant other stakeholders in the area to understand their experience of and views on FSS.

FSS participants were contacted through a database of all service participants supplied by Scottish Government. We emailed all participants living in Alloa, Irvine and Wick who had taken part in the service for at least 6 months and issued an introductory letter to 112 participants across all three areas – 76 by email and 36 by post. We followed this up with a telephone call to arrange an interview, making a maximum of three attempts to contact each participant. We experienced various challenges in contacting participants, for example:

- Phone numbers were either incorrect or disconnected
- Participants responded to our introductory letter indicating they did not wish to take part in the evaluation
- Participants did not answer and did not respond to voicemail messages left
- Participants agreed to take part at a scheduled time but did not answer when contacted for their interview.

We recruited non-participants by contacting 20 public and third sector organisations with employability services operating in Alloa, Irvine and Wick. These included: local authority-led employability services; community hubs; housing associations; charities that provide employability support; and third sector interfaces. In addition,

we liaised with the FSS providers to explore whether they were delivering other services involving people who were eligible for FSS but not taking part.

As anticipated, identifying eligible non-participants proved challenging. Half of the organisations we contacted did not respond and all but one of the responding organisations were unable to identify eligible non-participants. This was due to various reasons, for example:

- The organisation did not collect data on who had or had not taken part in FSS
- The organisation did not collect data on who was or was not eligible to take part in FSS
- The short timeframe of the research
- The contact could not identify anyone suitable to take part in the research.

In total, we conducted 30 interviews with participants and non-participants – 18 participants and 12 non-participants. This figure is broken down by participant group and type of interview below.

Table 5.1: Interviews conducted with participants and non-participants

	Face-to-face	Telephone	No. of interviews
Participants (out of 112 participants contacted)	5	13	18
Non-participants (from 20 organisations contacted)	8	4	12
Total interviews conducted			30

While both of these figures are below the planned level, the lead-in time for recruitment was shorter than had originally been intended and we are confident that numbers will increase in future years, ensuring that we reach our target number by the end of the evaluation. The interviews we did conduct have, however, already begun to give us a good sense of people’s experiences. Our key findings from these are outlined in Chapter 5

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this <statistical bulletin / social research publication>:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route <specify or delete this text>
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact socialresearch@gov.scot for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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