



Fair Start Scotland Evaluation Report 4: Local Area Case Studies - Year 3 (October 2021)



ECONOMY AND LABOUR MARKET

Fair Start Scotland: Local area case studies - Year 3

Research undertaken and reported by Rocket Science UK Ltd. And Blake Stevenson on behalf of the Scottish Government

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Executive summary

Rocket Science, in partnership with Blake Stevenson and the Institute for Employment Studies, was commissioned in 2019 to complete a three-year evaluation of Fair Start Scotland.

Fair Start Scotland is the Scottish Government's first national employability programme and aims to contribute towards their Scottish Approach to employability that seeks to move Scotland towards a more integrated employability landscape. It is underpinned by the principles around fair work, person centred approaches, dignity and respect. Fair Start Scotland was commissioned in nine contract areas and is delivered by a combination of public, third and private sector organisations all operating and adapting the model to suit the local needs and context.

This evaluation looked at nine case study areas across three years as well as a range of Scotland-wide evaluation activities to draw overarching conclusions about the impact and operation of Fair Start Scotland.



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In the case study areas we contacted:	Across Scotland we contacted:
 Fair Start Scotland Participants	 Fair Start Scotland Lead Providers
 Fair Start Scotland Providers	 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
 Employers*	 Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches
 Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches*	 Scottish Government (SG)
 Other employability service providers and stakeholders*	

While each of the case study areas operates slightly differently feedback appears consistent across the case study areas in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of the programme and the experience and views of the participants.

Key findings from the case studies were:

1	Providers, participants, and stakeholders were generally happy with the design and quality of the service and noted its unique approach that set it apart from prior and existing provision.	5	Fair Start Scotland appears to be undergoing a change in the profile of participants and their needs following changes to the labour market resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic with a greater proportion of new participants having a continuous work history and fewer barriers to employment.
2	Successful delivery relies heavily on the skills and expertise of frontline staff and the quality of the relationships between providers and other stakeholders in the area such as JCP's and Local Authorities.	6	Providers have adapted quickly to service provision under Covid-19 restrictions adopting a range of virtual service activities that would be valuable to include as part of a mixed model of

			delivery in the future. Social media promotion has also proven to be an effective way to increase self-referrals.
3	Fair Start Scotland was often operating in isolation across case study areas, within a cluttered landscape of established provision and where relationships between providers and local stakeholders were often variable and sometimes challenging.		There is a general feeling across case study providers that they would like to see greater flexibility in the way the service is delivered particularly when it comes to meeting reporting requirements. It was generally felt amongst providers that the way job outcomes were measured and paid for disregarded other successful outcomes for example job outcomes of less than 16 hours a week and participants moving into further education and training. These sentiments needs to be balanced against the SG's reporting requirements which are aimed to ensure delivery of a high quality service.
4	Fair Start Scotland is unable to address fundamental structural issues such as local job availability and transport difficulties.	7	

Participants were overwhelmingly positive about their experience with Fair Start and valued the personalised nature of the support and the engagement they had with Fair Start Scotland provider staff. Participants felt that Fair Start Scotland had helped them improve their job search skills, confidence, and employability skills and helped them to move into employment and in some cases volunteering opportunities that they otherwise would not have been able to do.

Our overall conclusions from the three years of case studies are:

1	<p>That Fair Start Scotland is considered to be a high-quality service and is valued by stakeholders, participants and providers for its person-centred approach and for offering types of support that many other programmes do not such as the long duration of support (12 months and in some cases up to 18 months), the emphasis on in-work support, and the flexibility of support available for participants.</p>
2	<p>That the approach taken by Scottish Government has been appreciated by Fair Start Scotland providers and stakeholders such as DWP where feedback was that Scottish Government have been open, flexible, and pragmatic.</p>
3	<p>There is room for improvement in the relationships between Fair Start Scotland providers and Jobcentres with some of the frustration in the relationship arising from misaligned expectations about the number and suitability of referrals coming from Jobcentres to Fair Start Scotland.</p>
4	<p>Fair Start Scotland has not contributed notably to a more integrated and cohesive employability service with all the case study provision operating in parallel with existing provision and acting as another option for those looking for work. This lack of coordinated action appears to be driven by poor local relationships and exacerbated by the issues created with European Structural Funding (ESF) where participants cannot simultaneously be receiving support from Fair Start Scotland and ESF funded programmes at the same time due to double funding risks.</p>
5	<p>The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed a number of benefits in virtual delivery that could provide useful insights into a mixed-model of virtual and face-to-face delivery to ensure that the benefits of each approach are able to be used flexibly to best suit participants and deliver an efficient service.</p>

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While the overall approach appears fit for purpose, there are a number of practical ways that the current Fair Start Scotland model could be improved – to providers the service feels administratively heavy with a large number of reporting requirements inhibiting the flexibility needed to tailor the service to the individual. Further consideration around how to balance public accountability and quality control with the administrative cost of running the programme could be given.

* Employer interviews were largely unable to be conducted in years 2 and 3 due to the pandemic. Focus groups with Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches were unable to be completed in years 2 and 3 due to the pandemic. Interviews with other service providers and stakeholders within the case study areas were conducted as appropriate.

1. Introduction and context

Rocket Science, in partnership with Blake Stevenson and the Institute for Employment Studies, was commissioned in 2019 to complete a three-year evaluation of Fair Start Scotland. Fair Start Scotland is the Scottish Government's first national employability service supporting those who are farther from the labour market. The service aims to reach those who have disability or additional support needs and who have been unemployed for a long time (2 years or more) and others with disabilities and additional support needs. It also aims to support other groups including those with a health condition, those with caring responsibilities, lone parents, refugees, those with a conviction and those from minority ethnic community. It seeks to build on the Scottish Government's ambition to move Scotland towards a more integrated employability landscape that can support those with a complex combination of support needs. This ambition is articulated by the Scottish Approach to employability "Creating a Fairer Scotland"¹ underpinned by principles around fair work, person centred approaches and respect and dignity. Fair Start Scotland has been commissioned in nine contract or lot areas across Scotland.

This report is the third and final in a series of evaluation reports that explore how Fair Start Scotland has been implemented and what lessons can be learned to feed into the ongoing delivery of the service and inform future decisions by Scottish Government and others on employability services in Scotland. Fair Start Scotland offers scope for learning around:

- The way that national services can be adapted and flexed to meet 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

¹ Scottish Government (2017). Creating a Fairer Scotland A new Future for Employability Support in Scotland. Accessed at <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/corporate-report/2016/03/creating-fairer-scotland-new-future-employability-support-scotland/documents/00498123-pdf/00498123-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00498123.pdf>

- How to better integrate employability support with more specialist support which can include health and housing.

To achieve that learning we have taken a case study approach. Each year we have explored how Fair Start is working in three localities within three of the nine contract areas, adding up to nine case studies over the three years of the evaluation. This has provided us with an in-depth understanding of how Fair Start Scotland is being implemented across Scotland, what the experience has been like for lead providers, partner organisations, participants, stakeholders, and employers, and what is working well and less well in the implementation of Fair Start Scotland.

The case study areas for each lot are outlined in the following table:

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3 (2020/21)
Alloa in the Forth Valley (Contract area 4)	Drumchapel in Glasgow (Contract area 1)	Greenock in Inverclyde (Contract area 9)
Irvine in South West (Contract area 6)	Dundee in Tayside (Contract area 3)	Fife (Contract area 5)
Wick in Highlands and Islands (Contract area 8)	Peterhead and Fraserburgh in the North East (Contract area 7)	Motherwell in North Lanarkshire (Contract area 2)

For each case study area we:

- Conducted a brief socio-economic and employment analysis of the area to place the delivery of Fair Start Scotland within a local context
- Analysed management and performance data held by Scottish Government on Fair Start Scotland delivery to provide an understanding of the profile of participants in each area
- Carried out interviews with Fair Start Scotland providers' staff, partners, participants, employers, and stakeholders to build a picture of their experience of the service.

In addition to these case study specific components, in Year 3 (2021) we conducted:

- Interviews with senior stakeholders in Scottish Government, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Lead Providers across Scotland
- A survey of frontline Fair Start Scotland delivery staff across Scotland
- A survey of Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches across Scotland.

These additional activities were intended to provide an overall view of the delivery of Fair Start Scotland during the evaluation period to supplement the conclusions we have been able to draw on the case studies.

The Covid-19 pandemic started just prior to the Year 2 case study field work period. As a result, we were unable to speak to Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches in the case study areas for years 2 and 3. The survey with Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches conducted in year 3 is partly designed to help fill this gap in evidence.

This year's report has been produced against the background of a growing focus on the rolling out of the No One Left Behind² approach to employability. This involves the 'pooling' of a range of the Scottish Government's funding streams which focus on employability and skills and passing this pooled funding to Local Government. Each of the 32 Local Authorities will be expected to work closely with their Local Employability Partnerships to design, implement, procure, and manage an appropriate range of local employability services that meet their specific local needs. In this report we reflect in section 6.3.2 on the lessons that can be drawn from the experience of Fair Start Scotland to date in terms of the implementation of the No One Left Behind approach.

Interviews with employers who had employed Fair Start Scotland participants or offered work experience were also challenging in Years 2 and 3 as a result of Covid-19. Appendix 1 describes the number of employers we were able to reach during our field research across the three years of the evaluation.

²For more details see: [No One Left Behind - Policy | Employability in Scotland](#)

This report provides the findings from our Year 3 case study areas (see chapters 2, 3 and 4) and provides evaluation findings from across the three years to draw conclusions about Fair Start Scotland in total across the three years of delivery. Views of participants can be found in Chapter 5, and our overall evaluation findings can be found in Chapter 6 and cover our operational findings, the impact on participants, and the lessons for the future.

The next three chapters present the findings from our in-depth exploration with providers, partners, and participants in three localities in the Fair Start Scotland contract areas:

- Fife – a large geographical area with transport challenges and high degrees of income inequality
- Greenock in Inverclyde – an area of high deprivation, unemployment, and low job density
- Motherwell in North Lanarkshire – a larger settlement in an area with a history of high unemployment and many existing support services.

Many of our findings were similar between the three case study areas this year and were also consistent with the findings from our case studies in years 1 and 2 of the evaluation. Each case study is explored in detail in chapters below.

2. Year 3 Case Study - Fife

Fife sits within contract area 5 of Fair Start Scotland which covers the City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, Scottish Borders, West Lothian, and Fife. The Lead Provider for contract area 5 is Start Scotland Limited which is a partnership between The Lennox Partnership and Fedcap Employment Scotland. Start Scotland delivery is further supported by Triage Central Ltd and Working Links (Employment) Ltd as subcontractors and delivery partners. Until summer 2020, Momentum Scotland was also one of Start Scotland Limited's delivery partners in the Scottish Borders, East Lothian and Midlothian. Following their closure, Triage Central Ltd³ have taken on greater delivery roles within these three localities. When referring to this case study we are looking at Fair Start Scotland delivery provided to participants living across the Fife Council area.

Fife was chosen as a case study area to explore how delivery works in a large geographical area with varying degrees of rurality as well as the varying levels of deprivation across the area. The Scottish Borders was originally selected as a case study area for contract area 5 but with the recent change in delivery from Momentum to Triage it was felt that Fife would be able to provide more useful insights as it was based on an established delivery approach rather than a recent change of provider occurring at the same time as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The overall level of deprivation in Fife is similar to the national average. However, levels of deprivation are notably polarised, with some areas experiencing very low deprivation (e.g. St. Andrews) and others with most data zones in the top 10% most deprived in Scotland, including Methil, Leven and Kirkcaldy. Fife has the 13th highest rate of child poverty in Scotland, with 24% of children living in relative poverty after housing costs. Unemployment is slightly higher than the national average and low job density partly reflects high numbers of residents commuting out of Fife to work in neighbouring cities Dundee and Edinburgh, in addition to low labour market demand, particularly in mid-Fife and rural areas. While 74% of people in Fife reported they

³ Triage Central Ltd only provide FSS support within Leven and Glenrothes and do not receive referrals from Jobcentre Plus.

were satisfied with public transport in the most recent Scottish Household Survey, poor connectivity for those in mid-Fife and rural areas limits opportunities to access work in other areas within Fife and in neighbouring cities. The table below compares Fife to the Scottish average across deprivation, employment, job availability and transport. It draws on the most recent local authority labour market profile data unless otherwise stated. ⁴

⁴ Labour Market Profile, Fife, NOMIS. 2021. [Online] Available from: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157419/report.aspx#tabjobs>. Accessed 28th July 2021.

	Fife	Scotland
Deprivation summary		
Percentage data zones in 20% most deprived in Scotland ⁵	20%	20%
Local Authority rank / 32 (data zones in 20% most deprived)	11	-
Percentage children living in child poverty ⁶	24%	17%
Local Authority rank / 32 (child poverty)	13	-
Employment		
Unemployment rate	6.3%	4.4%
Claimant count (June 2021)	5.6%	5.2%
Percentage workless households	17.3%	17.7%
Job availability		
Working age population (16-64)	23,1800	-
Economically active	76%	77%
Percentage economically inactive who want a job	28%	23%
Job density	0.66	0.82
Transport		
Number of passenger train stations per 10,000 population	0.82	0.66
Percentage of adults reporting that they are very or fairly satisfied with public transport ⁷	74%	68%

⁵ Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020v2 local and national share calculator. 2020. [Online]. Available from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020v2-local-and-national-share-calculator-2>. Accessed 28th July 2021.

⁶ After housing costs, NHS Health Scotland. Child Poverty: scale, trend and distribution in Scotland. 2019. [Online] Available from: <http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2607/child-poverty-scales-and-trends.pdf>. Accessed 28th July 2021.

⁷ Scottish Household Survey 2019: Annual report. 2020. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-survey-2019-annual-report/>

2.1 Service description

Fedcap Employment Scotland have been delivering Fair Start Scotland since the beginning of the service and brought on Triage Central Ltd in 2020 in order to increase participant numbers in Leven and Glenrothes. Between them they supported 330 participants in 2019/20 and 240 participants in 2020/21. The table below outlines the key Fair Start Scotland statistics across the last two years.

2019/20	2020/21
330 individuals participated in 2019/20	240 individuals participated in 2020/21
Participant profile	
65% were male	60% were male
35% were female	40% were female
77% were disabled or had a health condition	63% were disabled or had a health condition
41% were under 35 years	64% were under 35 years
26% were between 35 and 49	22% were between 35 and 49
22% were over 50	14% were over 50
Job outcomes⁸	
19% of all participants sustained work for 13 weeks	16% of all participants sustained work for 13 weeks
20% of men sustained work for 13 weeks	15% of men sustained work for 13 weeks
18% of women sustained work for 13 weeks	16% of women sustained work for 13 weeks
20% were disabled or had a health condition sustained work for 13 weeks	15% were disabled or had a health condition sustained work for 13 weeks

⁸ Please note that proportion of participants who sustained work for 13 and for 26 weeks presented in this figure is as of July 2021 when the analysis was undertaken

16% who were not disabled or had a health condition sustained work for 13 weeks	14% who were not disabled or had a health condition sustained work for 13 weeks
13% sustained work for 26 weeks	8% sustained work for 26 weeks

Start Scotland cover all geographies in Fife and recruit through referrals from Jobcentre Plus and third parties. They also take self-referrals, usually generated through social media. Triage deliver exclusively in the Leven and Glenrothes areas within Fife and recruit participants exclusively from referrals from Third Parties and self-referrals, mainly through social media.

The service from both Fedcap and Triage is structured as follows:

- Referrals and self-referrals are received by an engagement team who contact the participant, explore the eligibility criteria, provide information on the service, and register the individual if appropriate
- Participants are then allocated a key worker who works with them to set goals, access learning, address barriers and identify employment opportunities
- When participants are ready to apply for jobs, the services' employer engagement teams work with most participants to help them identify and apply for roles and support them through the recruitment processes such as interviews
- Following placement in work, the in-work support team keeps in contact with participants to provide ongoing support as needed. In some cases, participants may request to stay with their original key worker rather than be passed onto the in-work support team.

Operational delivery findings

Fedcap reported that before the pandemic they had strong relationships with the local Jobcentres, were well known to Work Coaches, and were able to generate a good number of appropriate referrals. When the pandemic started, Jobcentre's

referrals reduced as Jobcentres reduced services and focused on responding to the increased number of Universal Credit client registrations. This reduction in referrals was also felt from third party referrals as organisations reduced or suspended services during the pandemic which also led to a large reduction in referrals. Both organisations reported that they had to shift their focus to recruiting participants through social media as a result.

Both organisations have reported huge success in social media recruitment and that while the pandemic prompted the increased focus on social media recruitment, they are intending to retain it for the remainder of the Fair Start Scotland service. Both organisations are trialling a range of different ways of reaching potential participants through social media including:

- Advertising on existing Fife job search and other local community pages
- Paid advertising on Facebook and other platforms
- Trying a range of different messages in social media advertising for example, including a range of job advertisements that participants could access and promoting the range of support to find work that the organisations can offer.

Fedcap and Triage felt that Fair Start Scotland has been successful in attracting and supporting those with disabilities or health conditions, and those who have been out of work for extended periods of time. However staff also observed a shift in the needs of participants registering for Fair Start Scotland once the pandemic started. Following the pandemic, staff felt that a lot more participants were approaching the service after being made redundant after extended periods of employment and were job ready. They noted that many had been in employment for so long that they did not know how to find work and the support they required was less about removing barriers to employment, and more about supporting them through the job search and application processes. This was reinforced by interviews with participants who felt they had the skills to enter work but needed help in looking for jobs.

Staff also reported an increase in mental health concerns amongst participants that have required them to identify additional ways to support participants and access mental health support services as necessary. Staff were pleased that they were able

to adapt the support provided by Fair Start Scotland to be able to meet the needs of this new participant group and credited the flexibility of the service and its delivery in being able to adapt to the changing needs.

Fife's geographical size was noted to present challenges to service delivery in the area. Face-to-face delivery requires travel for both delivery staff and participants – for participants this can include long periods on public transport and for delivery staff high travel times between appointments. Fair Start Scotland provider staff in Fife noted that the remote, phone and online delivery needed during the pandemic has reduced some of these inefficiencies created by travel and has enabled key workers to provide more time directly supporting participants albeit at a distance.

Local Employability Landscape

Fife has a relatively well-developed set of employability services commissioned and coordinated by Opportunities Fife – the Local Employability Partnership in Fife. Opportunities Fife includes the Local Authority including representatives from employability and economic development, education and children's services, and area managers who work with local communities, Skills Development Scotland, DWP, the Health and Social Care Partnership, NHS Fife from a public health perspective as well as corporate recruitment, the Developing the Young Workforce group, Fife Chamber of Commerce, and the Third Sector Interface Fife Voluntary Action. Opportunities Fife jointly plan provision in the area working together to identify and respond to local need. Around 70% of Opportunities Fife's funding is used to externally commission third and community sector organisations to deliver, with the remaining 30% funding in-house Local Authority provision. A portion of this funding is European Structural Funding which means that many participants cannot be on Fair Start Scotland as well as provision funded by Opportunities Fife.

Provider's staff in Fife noted that the well-established provision provided by Opportunities Fife and other third sector provision combined with the UK Government services such as Kickstart and employer grants makes attracting and supporting participants challenging as it felt like there was high competition in the

area for participants. Provider staff identified that they did not work closely with Opportunities Fife.

“Landscape feels full and crowded and confusing for us as providers let alone for participants.” Provider

On the other hand stakeholders from Opportunities Fife felt that they had good working relationships with the Fair Start Scotland in the area and had often found ways to work together. However both Fair Start Scotland providers in Fife and Opportunities Fife noted that the double funding issue created by European Funding limited the amount of joint working that could occur as participants generally could not receive support from both Fair Start Scotland and Opportunities Fife funded provision.

One area that Opportunities Fife would be keen to see further engagement with Fair Start Scotland providers and Scottish Government is in sharing data around participant numbers and successful job outcomes.

“We hear good stories but we don’t see the numbers and don’t know how relative that is.” Opportunities Fife Stakeholders

They felt that increased sharing of information would enable them to plan their provision around Fair Start Scotland to ensure that they were focusing on those that were not being picked up by FSS. They also would like to be able to exchange job outcome information with Fair Start Scotland so that they can understand relative performance and learn from each other.

“When we recommissioned [our services], we considered how to fill gaps around Fair Start Scotland provision rather than duplicate it... but we didn’t know how many people in Fife they were trying to support to inform our contracting...this is not about a single service... it is about working together better when appropriate...better understanding of local need and local provision.” Opportunities Fife Stakeholders

Employer engagement staff within Fair Start Scotland delivery in Fife voiced a concern that it was challenging to engage local employers to access roles for Fair Start Scotland participants due to the wide range of other local provision also approaching employers to find opportunities for their participants. Providers also noted that they were unable to offer support grants to businesses which made relationships with businesses harder to cultivate.

Virtual Service delivery

Both FSS providers noted that they were initially concerned about delivering the service virtually at the beginning of the pandemic in terms of accessibility because of digital exclusion and whether participants would enjoy and find virtual engagement useful. However, staff and participants reported that the virtual service delivery had worked much better than anticipated and had led to a range of service improvements that they would like to retain as part of a mixed approach once face-to-face engagement is resumed. The key findings around virtual service delivery are described below.

Staff and participants reported that participants liked virtual appointments as they were able to access them more easily without travelling and could have regular and shorter engagements with Fair Start Scotland staff when they need it – for example if someone is working through a training module or application process, they can get in touch via phone call or text to ask questions throughout. It also made it easier for staff to reach participants as they were able to give them a call at a time that suited them rather than arranging a single appointment and having participants miss out on support when they were unable to attend.

Staff noted the restrictions in face-to-face delivery from the pandemic have negatively affected the group work they offer. They noted that face-to-face group work was effective at reducing isolation and supporting participants to build social skills and feel comfortable in new and unknown situations. They reported that they are unable to replicate these benefits successfully in a virtual setting.

“The social element of group training is still important. The groups bonds and supports each other. That is missing at the moment, and we want to see that part of it come back.” Provider

Access to a large and varied amount of training and other support virtually was raised as a particular strength in the Fife case study area. FedCap have established a hub that all delivery in their contract areas can access. The hub has a wide range of live virtual training, online resources, and self-guided learning sessions that participants can access. In particular the virtual training available has increased in variety and provided more choice for participants as they do not have to wait for face-to-face training to come to their area to access it and FedCap can offer more specific and tailored training as it can draw on participants from across multiple contract areas to make the attendee numbers viable. The wider range of self-guided learning and resources has provided participants with more flexibility in terms of when they do their activity and paired with the availability of Fair Start Scotland staff over the phone and video call, they are able to access support to answer questions or provide advice as they work through the self-guided learning.

Digital exclusion including access to digital devices and connectivity was reported as a challenge, particularly at the beginning of the pandemic. Staff reported that they have spent time helping participants to access devices, internet connections and providing support to build their digital skills. They noted that the availability of devices and funding for connectivity was outstripped by demand and that additional resources were required to ensure digital exclusion was not a long-term issue with virtual delivery.

2.2 Lessons from this case study

The experience of delivery of Fair Start Scotland in Fife offers the following insights and lessons of relevance to employability provision in general:

- Recruitment through social media can be a powerful way to reach participants if done well and can reduce the risk associated with relying on one or two referral sources.

- A mixed model of delivery that has the flexibility to offer phone, digital and face-to-face engagement and support appears to offer a more tailored approach for participants while also being a more efficient method of delivery. However successful delivery and equitable access requires investment in addressing digital exclusion for participants. However the benefits associated with group work were regularly reported to suffer when the group work is not face-to-face – for example the indirect benefits associated with going into an unfamiliar location, engaging with people participants do not know. Therefore, a mixed approach feels desirable.
- Providing choice and flexibility to participants is helped when services have access to a wider range of training and virtual resources. Virtually provided training and resources enable providers to offer a wider range of training and resources than is possible when delivery needs to be face-to-face in each location.
- In-work support offered outside of traditional working hours appears to be more accessible for participants who may not be able to speak with staff during the working day.
- An understanding and responsive commissioner was reported by the services to be key to being able to adapt the service to deliver within the pandemic. The relationship with Scottish Government (SG) and the pragmatic approach taken by SG was reported as a strength in the relationship between commissioner and contractor during this time.

“Scottish Government have been open to listening to changes, especially during the pandemic, and have been listening to us about what happens when we go back to normality. They have been keen to work with providers to come up with solutions. We have been involved in task and finish groups to identify changes and solutions.” Provider

Our field research in Fife identified other areas that were felt to be working well or less well in the design and delivery of Fair Start Scotland.

What Worked Well

- The ethos of the service felt something that staff were proud to be part of – in particular the voluntary nature of the service, using a person-centred approach and the focus on those furthest from the labour market. Interviews with participants confirmed this, with one noting that Fair Start Scotland was “great, understood my needs, was sympathetic for what I could and could not do, I would recommend Fair Start Scotland to anyone looking for a job”.
- The focus on in-work support was noted by providers, stakeholders, and participants as a strength of Fair Start Scotland as it recognised that finding someone a job was only part of the journey to ensuring someone retains and thrives in employment as well as vital to enable progression as a route out of in-work poverty.
- Staff were positive about the flexibilities around the 3 hours meaningful contact time a week that have been introduced since the start of the pandemic and were keen that this be retained after pandemic restrictions end. It was felt by providers that this reduces the pressure on the participant and enables advisors to tailor their support to the individual’s need – e.g. some parents are able to do less during school holidays but more during school term, while others have health conditions that may mean they need to do less in some weeks and more in others. Being able to mix the 3 hours of time between virtual and in person engagement was suggested by staff as a way to provide more flexibility in the support they offer participants.

What Could Be Improved

- The 16 hour a week job outcome felt arbitrary to staff as they felt it did not recognise the success that it can be for someone to secure a role that is less than 16 hours either as a step towards more hours, or as a suitable longer term role that meets their requirements. There is a concern that this leads to under representation of certain groups in the total outcome figures particularly those who are disabled, have a health condition, or caring responsibilities.

- In an issue related to this staff reported they at times supported participants to find part time job while helping them enrol in further or higher education as a way to build their job prospects and ability to progress once in employment. However staff reported that doing this was costly for providers as they are unable to claim a job outcome payment for those also enrolled in education even if the person is also in work and receiving in-work support at the same time as participating in education.
- There is concern amongst the providers that the increased emphasis SG has placed on improving representation of under-represented groups combined with expectations of higher participant numbers will prove challenging. Many of the under-represented groups identified require more intensive and specialist support than the existing profile of participants, requiring more time per participant and a corresponding change in staffing skillsets. While the focus on these groups is within the original focus of the programme (supporting those furthest from work), there is concern amongst providers that this combination of priorities may compromise the quality of service delivery overall.
- Providers stated that the frequency of the monthly assessments that staff complete with each participant feels onerous. Staff would prefer quarterly assessments to reduce administrative burden and to enable meaningful progress to be identified and reported which can take longer than one month to see.

3. Year 3 Case Study – Greenock, Inverclyde

Greenock sits within contract area 9 of Fair Start Scotland which covers East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire, East Dunbartonshire, West Dunbartonshire and Inverclyde. The Lead Provider for contract area 9 is the Wise Group who are supported by ENABLE Scotland, The Lennox Partnership, Street League and Enterprise Mentoring Limited as subcontractors and delivery partners. Both the Wise Group (the Lead Provider) and ENABLE Scotland (a delivery partner) deliver Fair Start Scotland directly to participants within Inverclyde. The Lennox Partnership, and Street League support The Wise Group in delivery in other parts of the contract area but do not cover Inverclyde. When describing this case study, we will refer to Inverclyde instead of Greenock as the Greenock-based staff provide support for all participants who live within the Inverclyde Local Authority area.

Inverclyde was chosen as a case study area in order to explore how Fair Start Scotland was operating within an area of relatively high unemployment and deprivation. 2020 SIMD data indicated that Inverclyde had the 2nd largest local share of deprived areas of all local authorities in Scotland with nearly half of data zones (44.7%) among the 20% most deprived in Scotland.⁹ Greenock town centre and neighbouring Port Glasgow are among the most deprived communities in Scotland, with low life expectancy, a declining population, high in-work poverty and high levels of worklessness¹⁰. Inverclyde also has the 12th highest rate of child poverty across all local authorities in Scotland, with 25% of children living in relative poverty after housing costs. Inverclyde has 6% more workless households than the national average, low economic activity and notably low job density indicating low labour market demand. Limited service on train lines connecting Inverclyde's towns to Glasgow which pressurises road networks and in turn local bus services. Staff delivering Fair Start Scotland felt that participants in Inverclyde were often hesitant to take work outwith Inverclyde. Sometimes this was driven by transport options, but also a general culture of wanting to work within Inverclyde contributed to this pattern.

⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020v2-local-and-national-share-calculator-2/>

¹⁰ <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/support-for-children-families/joint-childrens-services-planning/about-inverclyde>

It was felt by service staff that this placed additional pressures on finding suitable employment for participants when combined with the relatively low number of suitable job opportunities within Inverclyde.

The table below compares Inverclyde to the Scottish average across deprivation, employment, job availability and transport. It draws on the most recent local authority labour market profile data unless otherwise stated.¹¹

¹¹ Labour Market Profile, Fife, NOMIS. 2021. [Online] Available from: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157419/report.aspx#tabjobs>. Accessed 28th July 2021.

	Inverclyde	Scotland
Deprivation summary		
Percentage data zones in 20% most Deprived in Scotland ¹²	45%	20%
Local Authority rank / 32 (data zones in 20% most deprived)	2	-
Percentage children living in child poverty ¹³	25%	17%
Local Authority rank / 32 (child poverty)	12	-
Employment		
Unemployment rate	5.1%	4.4%
Claimant count	5.7%	5.2%
Percentage workless households	23.9%	17.7%
Job availability		
Working age population	48,200	-
Economically active	71.5%	76.8%
Percentage economically inactive who want a job	17.8%	22.8%
Job density	0.58	0.82
Transport		
Number of passenger train stations per 10,000 population	2.90	0.66
Percentage of adults reporting that they are very or fairly satisfied with public transport (2019 Scottish Household Survey) ¹⁴	76%	68%

¹² Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020v2. 2020. [Online]. Available from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020v2-local-and-national-share-calculator-2>. Accessed 28th July 2021.

¹³ After housing costs, NHS Health Scotland. Child Poverty: scale, trend and distribution in Scotland. 2019. [Online] Available from: <http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2607/child-poverty-scales-and-trends.pdf>. Accessed 28th July 2021.

¹⁴ Scottish Household Survey 2019: Annual report. 2020. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-survey-2019-annual-report/>

3.1 Service description

The Wise Group and ENABLE Scotland have been delivering Fair Start Scotland in Inverclyde since the launch of the service. Between them they supported 150 participants in 2019/20 and 85 participants in 2020/21. The table below outlines the key Fair Start Scotland statistics across the two years.

2019/20	2020/21
150 individuals participated in 2019/20	85 individuals participated in 2020/21
Participant profile	
68% were male	60% were male
32% were female	40% were female
61% were disabled or had a health condition	45% were disabled or had a health condition
47% were under 35 years	57% were under 35 years
26% were between 35 and 49	20% were between 35 and 49
26% were over 50	22% were over 50
Job outcomes¹⁵	
16% of all participants sustained work for 13 weeks	27% of all participants sustained work for 13 weeks
14% of men sustained work for 13 weeks	23% of men sustained work for 13 weeks
22% of women sustained work for 13 weeks	32% of women sustained work for 13 weeks
16% who were disabled or had a health condition sustained work for 13 weeks	21% who were disabled or had a health condition sustained work for 13 weeks
16% who were not disabled or had a health condition sustained work for 13 weeks	32% who were not disabled or had a health condition sustained work for 13 weeks
12% sustained work for 26 weeks	12% sustained work for 26 weeks

¹⁵ Please note that proportion of participants who sustained work for 13 and for 26 weeks presented in this figure is correct at July 2021 when the analysis was undertaken.

The Wise Group and ENABLE Scotland share the referrals from the Jobcentre and both seek to get referrals from third parties and also generate self-referrals through other platforms such as social media. ENABLE Scotland are responsible for around one in ten participants with their provision focussed on participants with complex needs and multiple barriers to employment.

The service from both The Wise Group and ENABLE Scotland is structured as follows:

- Referrals and self-referrals are received by an engagement team who contact the participant, explore the eligibility criteria, provide information on the service, and register the individual if appropriate.
- Participants are then allocated a work coach who works with them to set goals, access learning, address barriers and identify opportunities. Within The Wise Group there are several Work Coaches who are focused on supporting participants with pursuing self-employment while others are supporting participants with finding employment vacancies. In The Wise Group, prior to the pandemic, Work Coaches would cover particular geographies across the contract area (including Inverclyde and the other localities within the contract area). Following the pandemic and homeworking, staff from across the contract area are now supporting participants in Inverclyde where matches are made based on staff availability and caseloads as well as specialist areas of knowledge and support needs. The Wise Group intends to move back to aligning caseloads to individuals in particular geographies once they move back to office based working in the future to minimise travel time for staff.
- When participants are ready to apply for jobs, the services' employer engagement teams work with most participants to help them identify and apply for roles and support them through the recruitment processes such as interviews where this support is needed.
- Following placement into work, the in-work support team keeps in contact with participants to provide ongoing support as needed.

Operational Delivery Findings

Participants are able to access other services operated by The Wise Group (although funding from The Wise Group's Fair Start Scotland budget must fund this where they are used) and are supported to access support available from other organisations. Participants reported accessing other support from these organisations, and the service identified that there were a wide range of services and activities available for participants. However, one area they struggled to access for participants was timely access to mental health support.

Staff across both The Wise Group and ENABLE Scotland reported that, prior to the pandemic, they were able to work closely with Jobcentre Plus staff on increasing referrals and addressing specific issues related to particular participants. As with other case study areas, Fair Start Scotland delivery staff noted that the quality of their relationship with Jobcentre staff reduced over the course of the pandemic, as did the number of referrals they received. However, the pre-existing relationship between the Jobcentre and Fair Start Scotland in Inverclyde does not appear to be as strong as we have found in some of the other case study areas. There was frustration expressed by Fair Start Scotland provider staff in the area that, throughout the period of the service, they regularly receive inappropriate referrals¹⁶ (primarily because providers felt that those who were referred were unlikely to move into employment within 12 months). Staff felt that this is likely due to a lack of understanding by Jobcentre staff about the purpose of Fair Start Scotland, combined with a preference amongst Jobcentre staff to refer to other services and providers first before considering a Fair Start Scotland referral.

¹⁶ 'Inappropriate referral' is a term often used by providers and Jobcentre Plus to indicate whether Fair Start Scotland would be suitable for a potential participant. Some of the Fair Start Scotland eligibility criteria - e.g. around age and duration of unemployment - are relatively straightforward criteria. For other criteria, both Jobcentre Plus staff and Fair Start Scotland providers need to make an informed decision on the suitability of Fair Start Scotland for a participant – for example whether someone is likely to move into employment within 12 months.

Local Employability Landscape

Some of the other notable employability service providers operating within Inverclyde include the Inverclyde Community Development Trust as well the UK Government's Kickstart scheme and Job Entry Targeted Support (JETS). There are concerns among Fair Start Scotland provider staff that competing with these services makes it challenging to attract participants particularly given the longstanding relationship between the Inverclyde Community Trust, who have been operating in the area for a number of years, and JCPs.

Virtual Service delivery

As with other case study areas contacted this year, the Wise Group and ENABLE Scotland noted that they have been putting a greater focus on referral from third parties and from social media over the course of Fair Start Scotland. They found social media particularly helpful during the height of the pandemic but are currently looking at ways to differentiate the service in advertising as they feel that the market is saturated with other providers which makes attracting participants more difficult.

As in other case study areas, staff reported that they were seeing a higher proportion of their participants who are work ready and have lost their job as a result of the pandemic. They reported that they have a larger number of participants who have been in long term employment and are needing help find a new job. This is reflected in the participant figures provided by Scottish Government which shows a decrease in the proportion of participants with a health condition or who are disabled, and an increase in the job outcome proportions which could be partly explained by this changed profile of participants.

As in other case study areas, staff reported initial hesitancy about the impact that virtual delivery would have on service quality:

“If you asked me 18 months ago, ‘Would you deliver it remotely?’, I would have said, ‘Absolutely not, it won’t work’, but it has and it is fantastic.” Provider

Provider staff were pleased with how well the service could be delivered virtually and were keen to see a mixed model of delivery in the future to retain some of the benefits of virtual working that have been made apparent. Provider staff and participants observations about virtual working are outlined below.

Provider staff reported less time spent setting up, travelling to, and waiting on face-to-face appointments where participants were unable to attend. Instead, staff reported they are able to manage their days more flexibly and keep trying to reach participants over the phone and make themselves available to participants to get in touch throughout the day if they have specific questions or support requirements. Staff report speaking with participants more frequently as a result of virtual working as they are able to chat regularly over the phone or via text when participants need them. In general, participants we contacted were happy to engage with staff digitally and one said the contact with staff he had with provider staff during lockdown was particularly important for his wellbeing.

“You could have three or four people booked and two wouldn’t turn up and that was half your day wasted. We didn’t use telephone and zoom beforehand. Now we can, and we can help people throughout a day – for example we can speak to someone at the beginning of the day and send them off to do something then they can get in touch for help and advice throughout.” Provider

“We will become more flexible in a way we work in the future, we hope that Scottish Government will keep it flexible to suit the client need rather than going back to requiring certain face-to-face hours.” Provider

Provider staff reported that there was a shortage of devices that they could access for participants with demand outstripping supply considerably. Free access to devices and support to fund connectivity was identified as key to making virtual services fairer and more accessible. Participants who might have previously visited local libraries, community venues or friends and families’ houses to access services virtually or conduct activities such as online learning or job search were unable to do this due to lockdown restrictions. Informal support with technology that participants

may have received from friends and family in the past to support their accessibility also became more restricted. One participant, for example, noted that she did not have an internet connection but was able to keep in touch with staff by telephone.

However as in other case study areas, staff noted that they would like to be able to use face-to-face engagement particularly for group work and activities with participants.

3.2 Lessons from this case study

The relationship between Fair Start Scotland, Jobcentres and other providers in the area is vital in ensuring a coordinated and joined up service delivery for staff. Fair Start Scotland providers in Inverclyde felt that they were operating in competition with other services with staff reporting that they struggled to be prioritised by Jobcentre staff and often did not receive appropriate referrals.

Our field research in Inverclyde identified other areas that were felt to be working well or less well in the design and delivery of Fair Start Scotland.

What Worked Well

- The duration of the service was identified as a strength and enabled someone to receive a full year of intensive support to enable them the best chance at moving into and sustaining employment as it means they can support people through a number of ups and downs that occur over an extended period of time.
- The voluntary nature of the service was identified as a strength of Fair Start Scotland which contributed to a positive culture. Staff felt it enabled them to work with people who were already motivated which helped in their chances of securing employment. As with other case study areas, Fair Start Scotland participants noted however that occasionally participants were not aware that the service was voluntary when they first engaged with the service, and that while most participants understood it was voluntary some felt that they had to

be there as they were still worried about how their Jobcentre Plus Work Coach may react to non-engagement.

- Explicit in-work support was identified as a strength of Fair Start Scotland and was felt to set it apart from other employability services. Two participants, for instance, reported that Fair Start Scotland funded their travel costs for the first few weeks of their new jobs, and another appreciated staff “regularly checking in”.
- Provider staff noted that retention of the flexibility with regards to the mandated 3 hours of engagement with participants would enable them to better tailor the time they spent with participants to suit their requirements and availability.

What Could Be Improved

- There was frustration amongst staff delivering Fair Start Scotland that the success associated with getting someone employment that is less than 16 hours a week was unrecognised by the service. For some participants moving into any form of work represents significant progress, and it provides them with employment that meets their requirements.
- As in other case study areas, the administrative requirements of Fair Start Scotland were identified as restrictive and time intensive with staff concerned that it often crowds out time they could have spent with participants.

4. Year 3 Case Study – Motherwell, North Lanarkshire

Motherwell in North Lanarkshire sits within contract area 2 of Fair Start Scotland which covers North Lanarkshire and South Lanarkshire. The Lead Provider for contract area 2 is Remploy Limited (now owned by Maximus) who support approximately 85% of participants referred by Jobcentre Plus and are further supported in delivery by ENABLE Scotland. The main office for North Lanarkshire is in Airdrie which provides support for all Fair Start Scotland participants living in the North Lanarkshire Local Authority area. The service is also delivered via co-location - using a mixture of office space within the local Jobcentre and library in Motherwell.

Motherwell was chosen as a case study to explore how delivery works in a significant settlement with a history of high unemployment and quite a high density of existing support services.

2020 SIMD data indicated that North Lanarkshire has the 6th largest local share of deprived areas of all local authorities in Scotland, with just over a third of data zones (34.2%) among the 20% most deprived in Scotland. North Lanarkshire also has the 6th highest rate of child poverty in Scotland, with 26% of children living in relative poverty after housing costs¹⁷. The most deprived communities in North Lanarkshire are mostly located in Motherwell, with notably high deprivation in Motherwell South, where residents experience high unemployment and health inequalities. In this area, 32% of children live in low-income households, nearly twice the national average¹⁸. Jobs density is notably lower than the national average, with around 2 jobs in North Lanarkshire for every 3 working age people. A low proportion of residents are satisfied with public transport compared to the national average.

¹⁷ <http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2607/child-poverty-scales-and-trends.pdf>

¹⁸ https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-11/Motherwell%20Locality%20profile%202020_0.pdf

The table below compares North Lanarkshire to the Scottish average across deprivation, employment, job availability and transport. It draws on the most recent local authority labour market profile data unless otherwise stated.¹⁹

	North Lanarkshire	Scotland
Deprivation summary		
Percentage data zones in 20% most Deprived in Scotland ²⁰	34%	20%
Local Authority rank / 32 (data zones in 20% most deprived)	6	-
Percentage children living in child poverty ²¹	26%	17%
Local Authority rank / 32 (child poverty)	6	-
Employment		
Unemployment rate	6.1%	4.4%
Claimant count	5.7%	5.2%
Percentage workless households	17.0%	17.7%
Job availability		
Working age population	219,100	-
Economically active	74.7%	76.8%
Percentage economically inactive who want a job	28.0%	22.5%
Job density	0.66	0.82
Transport		
Number of passenger train stations per 10,000 population	1.14	0.66

¹⁹ Labour Market Profile, Fife, NOMIS. 2021. [Online] Available from: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157419/report.aspx#tabjobs>. Accessed 28th July 2021.

²⁰ Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020v2 local and national share calculator. 2020. [Online]. Available from <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020v2-local-and-national-share-calculator-2>. Accessed 28th July 2021.

²¹ After housing costs, NHS Health Scotland. Child Poverty: scale, trend and distribution in Scotland. 2019. [Online] Available from: <http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2607/child-poverty-scales-and-trends.pdf>. Accessed 28th July 2021.

Percentage of adults reporting that they are very or fairly satisfied with public transport (2019 Scottish Household Survey) ²²	61%	68%
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4.1 Service description

Remploy Limited and their delivery partners Enable have been delivering Fair Start Scotland in North Lanarkshire since the beginning of Fair Start Scotland. Between them they supported 255 participants in 2019/20 and 120 participants in 2020/21. The table below outlines the key Fair Start Scotland statistics across the two years.

2019/20	2020/21
255 individuals participated in 2019/20	120 individuals participated in 2020/21
Participant profile	
62% were male	54% were male
38% were female	46% were female
39% were disabled or had a health condition	31% were disabled or had a health condition
45% were under 35 years	53% were under 35 years
29% were between 35 and 49	28% were between 35 and 49
24% were over 50	20% were over 50
Job outcomes²³	
23% of all participants sustained work for 13 weeks	24% of all participants sustained work for 13 weeks
22% of men sustained work for 13 weeks	24% of men sustained work for 13 weeks
24% of women sustained work for 13 weeks	24% of women sustained work for 13 weeks

²² Scottish Household Survey 2019: Annual report. 2020. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-household-survey-2019-annual-report/>

²³ Please note that proportion of participants who sustained work for 13 and for 26 weeks presented in this figure is correct as at July 2021 when the analysis was undertaken

20% who were disabled or had a or health condition sustained work for 13 weeks	29% who were disabled or had a health condition sustained work for 13 weeks
28% who were not disabled or had a health condition sustained work for 13 weeks	23% who were not disabled or had a health condition sustained work for 13 weeks
18% sustained work for 26 weeks	14% sustained work for 26 weeks

Operational Delivery Findings

In this area Remploy deploy staff according to level of support required by the participant. For staff working with participants with the highest level of need, the case load is capped at 20-25, while for those closer to the labour market the caseload is around double this number. Remploy recognise the need to help their key workers focus on supporting individual participants and are planning to develop a separate in-work support team so that key workers can focus on support to those in the pre-employment stage. They appreciate that a different set of skills is needed for in-work support, with different forms of engagement, preparation, and support, including starting work appointments, responsibilities of employment, weekly/fortnightly or monthly contact depending on the individual.

As in other contract areas, Remploy felt that they faced early challenges in getting appropriate referrals from Jobcentre Plus, in terms of both scale and appropriateness (i.e. those realistically able to gain work within 12 months). This was further exacerbated by Covid-19 as there was a rapid increase in Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches from mid-February 2021, and some turnover of Jobcentre Plus Managers. This meant that some of the new Work Coaches were not aware of Fair Start Scotland. In response to this Remploy have created a full-time role to liaise with Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches (there are 4 Jobcentres in North Lanarkshire – in Airdrie, Bellshill, Motherwell and Hamilton) and providers felt that this has transformed the referrals Remploy receive from JCP's. It was reported that this change has not only has increased referral numbers received but it also appears to have reduced the number of inappropriate referrals.

Local Employability Landscape

The local impact of Fair Start Scotland in Motherwell and more widely in North Lanarkshire is affected by the range and scale of other services operating in the area, and the strength of pre-existing relationships between Jobcentre Plus and the third sector. North Lanarkshire has a significant range of existing services, focused on those who are longer term unemployed. Routes to Work (RTW) was established by North Lanarkshire Council in 1992 and so is well established with a wide range of relationships with third sector organisations and community-based services. North Lanarkshire's Working is the Council's own complementary service, focusing on policy work, partner relationships and employer engagement. RTW have focused on the provision of specialist support (using ESF funding), particularly those working in the areas of housing (homelessness), health and criminal justice. As part of this effort, RTW has specialist workers focused on those with health conditions, young people, people with convictions, and young people who are care experienced and minority ethnic groups. The Council has also invested in a third sector engagement fund – identifying key partners such as Access for Industry, Street League, Simon Community and Barnardo's to help people with pre-employability support so they can then engage successfully with Routes to Work.

Our interviews with Remploy, North Lanarkshire Council and RTW confirm the feeling that there is no real joint working in place between Fair Start Scotland and the other local providers. Remploy's view is that 'It feels like two different systems' with their being a very limited referral of participants between Fair Start Scotland and RTW services. However, it was noted that Remploy are represented on the Third Sector Employability Forum which helps them engage with a wider range of local third sector providers.

The Council have 25 employability staff and RTW have 75 staff, and in terms of participant referrals (most of which come from Jobcentre Plus) the services of the Council and RTW engage with over 5 times those of Fair Start Scotland. For comparison, Remploy have 8 employability staff in their main office in Airdrie and 13 staff in total.

What this means is that in North Lanarkshire, Fair Start Scotland was introduced into a well-developed service landscape for those further from work, with a wide range of well-established relationships, at a time when unemployment was relatively low and the labour market was quite tight. It was hard for Fair Start Scotland to gain the referrals and build the relationships they needed to supplement and complement existing services. This was reinforced by the focus of existing services also being on those further from work. In addition, involvement in all the existing local services was voluntary and there are a range of well-established outreach relationships. Therefore, compared with some of the other areas we have examined, it was particularly hard for Fair Start Scotland to distinguish itself through its voluntary nature and the length of Support it offered.

There were a number of specific practical implications of this. While many Fair Start Scotland providers reported that they struggled to get the referrals they had been expecting from Jobcentre Plus, it was particularly difficult in North Lanarkshire due to the close pre-existing working relationship between RTW and Jobcentre Plus, with Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches perhaps finding it hard to identify the distinctive features of the new service which looked similar to existing services.

Virtual Service delivery

As has been reported in the other case study areas, the impact of Covid-19 has been substantial. North Lanarkshire saw the same collapse of referrals from Jobcentre Plus that other case study areas saw as Jobcentre Plus staff focused on the registration of new participants to Universal Credit. They also saw the reduction in referrals from other organisations as community services furloughed their staff or moved to telephone appointments only.

There were a number of adaptations to the service as a result of Covid-19. Remploy staff saw a lot of stress and anxiety in their participants during the lockdown periods, and their roles shifted to support participants with these issues, and as a result they often focused on being a source of general support and to act as someone to talk to rather than focusing on specific work goals. They introduced 10–15-minute telephone ‘micro appointments’ to ensure that they were keeping in touch and staff

welcomed the flexibility that the Scottish Government had introduced in terms of the introduction of fortnightly rather than weekly appointments. They recognised that a lot of lone parents were focused on home schooling and school packs were therefore sent out to support such participants. Staff recognised that sometimes they were the only people that participants were talking to so the frequency and nature of the contact was important.

“During Covid we made quite a switch to keeping in touch – for example, we were organising medication etc for those shielding. For some we were their only contact during a week and they trusted us. We were focusing on mental health and hardship support like food banks. All our staff were trained in mental health first aid.” Provider

Another change was the provider developing their use of social media, specifically Facebook, ensuring that there was a single site with high quality and appealing content which would reach current and potential participants.

Remploy also developed online group sessions – for example around confidence building and interviews which allowed a range of participants to share their experience and learning. These were complemented by What’s App groups and video chats. For young participants many of these innovations worked well – they were ‘tech savvy’ and recent schools leavers were able to make progress into college and retail work. Staff reported that for these young people online was a great experience and they enjoyed the remote sessions, and the main concern was about less ‘tech savvy’ participants or those with no internet connection. A staff member noted that, while they could communicate with these participants by phone, it was more difficult to build a trusting relationship with participants in this way. To help them, Remploy had sourced tablets and internet access (mobile phones with data) but some did not know how to use this equipment.

4.2 Lessons from this case study

The experience of delivery of Fair Start in Motherwell and North Lanarkshire offers the following insights and lessons.

What Worked Well

- Remploy were able to respond effectively to the impact of Covid-19, switching their service to a telephone and online service and recognising that the priority was on contact and general support rather than on jobs.
- The introduction of a full-time liaison worker to stay in touch with Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches was felt to have had a significant positive impact.

What Could be Improved

- North Lanarkshire has a particularly comprehensive and well-established set of employability services which operates at a significant scale and with high levels of public awareness. With only a limited prior presence, it was very hard for Remploy to establish a new service quickly, particularly because most of the distinctive features of Fair Start Scotland (long term support, voluntary, link to specialist support) were already well-established features of existing services.
- Similarly, North Lanarkshire Council had a well-established range of employer contacts and training routes, so it was hard for Remploy to make inroads into the local employer market – though employers told us that they appreciated the quality and focus of the support that they had received under FSS.

5. Fair Start Scotland participant views

In this chapter, we discuss participants' experiences of Fair Start Scotland across the three years of the evaluation, exploring referral processes, participants experiences of taking part in the service, key strengths and challenges, and the impact of the service on participants.

We have based the information presented in this chapter on interviews conducted with 70 Fair Start Scotland participants in the nine case study areas across the three years of the evaluation. We also interviewed the key workers who supported the

participants who took part in interviews and, in Year 1, we interviewed 12 eligible non-participants (including non-completers of Fair Start Scotland).

In this chapter, we outline the key findings from these interviews, organised under the following sub-headings:

1. Referral processes
2. Motivations for taking part in Fair Start Scotland
3. Strengths of Fair Start Scotland
4. Challenges to delivery
5. Barriers to progression
6. Impact of Fair Start Scotland.

Where relevant, we also refer to responses from the surveys of Fair Start Scotland provider staff and Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches to better contextualise the findings from the interviews with participants.

5.1 Referral processes

Across all three years of the evaluation, the majority of participants who we interviewed were referred into Fair Start Scotland through Jobcentre Plus. A small number self-referred into the service having heard about it from a friend or family member. Other routes into the service included, for example, via information provided by staff at volunteering opportunities, through other local services (e.g. Enable and a local authority homelessness officer), through an advert for Fair Start Scotland in a local newspaper and another through adverts for Fair Start Scotland on social media.

Participants in general did not report any issues with the referral arrangements.

5.2 Motivation for taking part in Fair Start Scotland

Many participants noted that they took part because they hoped Fair Start Scotland could help them address challenges that made it difficult for them to look for and/or find work. Some had mental or physical health conditions or disabilities which

restricted the type of employment they could engage with. For example, one participant reported that a hearing problem had made it difficult to find suitable jobs and they wanted support from Fair Start Scotland in identifying appropriate vacancies. Another participant described having suffered a spinal injury which limited their opportunities for work – they thought that Fair Start Scotland could help them to find part-time work that took account of their disabilities.

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 in general. For example, one participant in Year 1 said that they “wanted [Fair Start Scotland] to help me get out of my shell a bit”, while some others reported that they found looking for work challenging and needed support to stay motivated.

Some participants, meanwhile, had confidence that they could perform well in the jobs they were applying for, but needed support with aspects related to looking for a job. One, for example, found it “difficult to express myself at interviews” (Year 3 participant) and thought Fair Start Scotland could help with this. Other participants (in Year 2) explained that they had been in employment until recently so had relevant skills but reported needing help to “brush up on approaching employers” and to find a new job as quickly as possible after being made redundant.

Although participation in Fair Start Scotland is voluntary, a very small number of participants in Years 1 and 2 said that they did not have a choice about participation and that they were given the impression by their Jobcentre Plus officer that they had to take part. This highlights the importance of Jobcentre Plus staff explaining the voluntary nature of the service clearly to potential participants before they agree to take part. While the vast majority of Jobcentre Plus staff appear to do so, and we should note that there were no examples like this in Year 3, some may need a further reminder of the importance of this being made clear.

5.3 Strengths of Fair Start Scotland

Despite restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, participants from this year's case study areas were overwhelmingly positive about their experience. They highlighted a range of strengths of the service which were very similar to those identified in previous years. They included:

- The wide ranging and comprehensive support given
- The personalised nature of the support provided tailored approach
- Key workers' respectful, supportive and caring approaches
- The aftercare provided once they were in employment

We describe Fair Start Scotland's strengths from the participant's perspective, as per findings from across the three years of case studies in more detail below.

5.3.1 Wide-ranging and comprehensive support

Many of the participants spoke positively of the wide range of support they had received. This included support with CV-writing, job searches, support to identify suitable employment sectors, support with writing job applications and preparing for interviews. They also highlighted the importance of the support they had received to access work placements, training and volunteering opportunities which participants reported had given them new skills and experience, as well as opening their eyes to potential areas of employment that they would not have previously considered.

Some people in Year 3 referred to receiving help to improve their confidence and technical ability to conduct interviews on Zoom which has become necessary as a result of the pandemic.

Interviewees also described practical and financial support provided by Fair Start Scotland when they were in work. One, for example, said that Fair Start Scotland "offered me a bus pass" (and their key worker confirmed that Fair Start Scotland paid the participant's travel costs for the first eight weeks in the job) as well as money for clothes for work and personal protective equipment.

Another participant had taken part in a Steps to Work programme at his local college which was certified on completion:

“They were instrumental in helping me to take part in an Introduction to IT security course – I wouldn’t have done that before Fair Start.” Participant Year 3

In general, participants felt the support they received was comprehensive and very few participants reported any support needs that Fair Start Scotland could not help with.

5.3.2 Tailored support

Participants highly valued the tailored support that Fair Start Scotland offered them with many feeding back that it felt like it was tailored to suit their individual needs:

“Even during Covid I still received support and weekly calls from my key worker.” Participant Year 3

“They helped with my routine at home, and helped me to balance my work and home life.” Participant Year 3

“They encouraged small improvements in my health and encouraged me to do more light exercise. I got weekly health care check-ins to see how I was feeling.” Participant Year 3

Another participant reported that they could be honest with their Fair Start Scotland adviser about the types of work they wanted to do “without feeling fussy” (Year 3), and the support they received was tailored to this goal – “they actually listened to what I wanted” (Year 3).

Some spoke of their key workers helping to find work which suited their interests and circumstances, while others reported receiving help to address individual needs. One participant, for example, lacked confidence in interviews so they received support in

improving their interview technique through mock interviews; another who lacked confidence was supported to access a course in assertiveness. Another had some retail experience, so Fair Start Scotland built on this and organised a placement at a large retailer.

In other cases, Fair Start Scotland helped participants to identify vacancies suitable to them and any particular challenges they had, which included health issues, childcare considerations as well as lack of experience in employment. 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. Other support that key workers provided to help participants address individual needs included, for example, helping participants to obtain a driving licence, get their hair cut before an interview, buy new shoes before starting a job, pay for bus fares to attend interviews and helping to enhance a participant's digital literacy so they could seek and apply for jobs online more confidently. In another case, Fair Start Scotland advisers helped one participant to write a 'disclosure letter' for potential employers to explain a criminal conviction he had.

5.3.3 Caring, respectful, kind and supportive key workers

Participants described the approach of Fair Start Scotland key workers as caring, respectful, kind and supportive. This is consistent with Fair Start Scotland's principles of dignity and respect and, across all localities that the evaluation has covered, interviewees reported that the key workers were friendly, made the effort to get to know them and understand their needs, and genuinely cared about achieving the best outcome for them.

Some participants said it is "nice to have somebody to talk to – a bit of personal support" (Year 3) about work and the challenges involved. One said they liked that advisers "regularly check in" (Year 3).

This emphasises the importance of providers having well-trained, committed staff – feedback indicates that the quality of key workers is central to a positive experience on the service.

Comments from participants include the following:

“I like how encouraging they are...they know what I’m good at and want to build on that.” Participant Year 1

“[Staff member] was great, understood my needs was sympathetic for what I could and could not do, would recommend [Fair Start Scotland] to anyone looking for a job.” Participant Year 2

“[The key worker] would listen and let me rant and rave. I never got a negative word out of him at all. If he hadn’t been so positive, I wouldn’t have found a job, wouldn’t have been in the right place to find work.” Participant Year 2

5.3.4 Support post-employment

A number of the participants interviewed by us had moved into employment and were able to share their experiences of receiving post-employment support from their provider. All of them were positive about this support. For example, one participant had been supported by Remploy to develop his CV and skills and as a result, got temporary work. Once this work finished, he returned to them for further support. Another participant noted that she gets in work support from her key worker who “calls every week, sees how I’m getting on, if I need anything, how the job is working out” (Year 3).

There were also a few examples of participants who had returned for further support when they became unemployed again. For example, one participant found a job in February 2020, just prior to the first lockdown, then lost it because of lockdown and returned to Fair Start Scotland. They were then supported to find another job in October 2020.

5.4 Challenges to delivery

Unsurprisingly, the main challenge highlighted in Years 2 and 3 related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Feedback from participants suggests that providers have found ways to continue to support participants despite the restrictions, with regular contact being made via telephone and email, and group sessions being held via Zoom or other internet-based platforms. The extent to which participants engaged with the support on offer varied. One participant, for example, said that they were offered support during lockdown but chose not to have much contact with their adviser because there were so few jobs to apply for at that time.

In general, participants' feedback was very positive. However, there were a small number of cases where participants felt the support they were offered was not aligned with their circumstances or goals. For example, a handful of participants stated that they preferred another employability service and chose to return to it because they felt it provided more intensive and personalised support. One participant, who is not a native English speaker, left Fair Start Scotland as they did not receive the intensive literacy support they required. A participant (who completed their Fair Start Scotland support) had hoped to receive support with interview skills but there was not enough time to provide this, while another said they completed a placement at a large retailer but they viewed this as "a nothing trial" (Year 3) because they were not interested in working in retail.

Given Fair Start Scotland's focus on providing comprehensive, individualised support to help people progress towards work, it is perhaps surprising that participants reported these examples where Fair Start Scotland 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.

5.5 Barriers to progression

Interviewees reported various barriers that restricted their ability to move into and sustain work. These included the following:

5.5.1 Covid-19

While providers seem to have found ways to continue to provide support to participants despite all of the restrictions which remain in place due to the pandemic, Covid-19 has impacted in other ways. A number of participants noted that there were very few suitable job opportunities to apply for. In a number of cases participants moved into employment just prior to the initial lockdown in March 2020 but were then made redundant again as a result of lockdown. As noted already, some of these participants then returned to Fair Start Scotland for further support. One participant said that Covid-19 “blew everything out of the water” in terms of their job search.

While there is little that Fair Start Scotland can do to influence this situation, it is important that support providers stay abreast of the latest developments related to the pandemic and its impact on the labour market, and are prepared to support participants accordingly. It is also important to note that this demonstrates that, while Fair Start Scotland was developed while employment levels were high, substantial revision may be required to help the service respond to the significant impact of the pandemic on the economy.

5.5.2 Transport issues

Transport is an issue that restricts the opportunities accessible to some people. In some areas, especially more rural localities, limitations in public transport links means that being able to drive and having access to a car can enhance an individual’s employment prospects. A few participants noted challenges related to this – for example, one was suspended from driving due to a drink driving conviction and another cannot drive, lives in an area not served by public transport, and is reliant on their parents for lifts – and this can restrict the opportunities available to them.

A few participants gave examples of where Fair Start Scotland had supported them to overcome transport-related issues. For example, a few welcomed receiving bus passes from their providers which made it more affordable for them to travel to interviews, volunteering opportunities and work.

“They gave me money for travel to the interview, and for the first three weeks of employment as I could not afford the bus before I got paid.” Participant Year 3

5.5.3 Individual challenges

In addition to the challenges noted above, participants reported barriers to finding and then staying in work, related to a range of individual circumstances. For example, many interviewees reported that they have struggled to find work because of their parental or caring duties. These issues have either prevented them from moving into employment altogether or limited the range of roles they could apply for. For example, one participant mentioned that they could not take a job that started early in the morning because of their child’s drop-off time at school. Likewise, another interviewee was 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.

Other barriers to employment reported included age constraints. For example, one research participant referred who is turning 60 stated that they received good support from Fair Start Scotland 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” (Year 1). Another participant, in their 50’s, said “I’m a difficult case... age is against me” (Year 2).

In some cases, poor mental health, physical health and/or disabilities prevented interviewees from moving into and staying in employment or restricted the types of opportunity they could apply for.

Housing issues were mentioned by two participants as a barrier to employment. One, in Year 1, received support from Fair Start Scotland to secure furniture for their new flat, while another in Year 3 did not disclose that she was homeless at first due to feelings of shame, and this meant that her key worker could not help with this initially.

These examples highlight the importance of the tailored support that Fair Start Scotland offers to help participants overcome the challenges they face to entering and sustaining employment, and of key workers' skills in building a trusting relationship with participants to ensure they disclose the issues that are acting as barriers to finding work.

5.6 Impact of Fair Start on participants

Drawing from interviews conducted between 2019 and 2021, participants articulated that Fair Start Scotland had the following impacts on them:

1. Improved skills for searching and applying for jobs
2. Enhanced confidence
3. Improved skills for employment
4. Support to enter and sustain work.

These impacts are explored in more detail in this section.

5.6.1 Improved skills for searching and applying for jobs

Many participants we interviewed across all three years of the evaluation indicated that they had improved their ability to search and apply for jobs. This included improving their understanding of where to search for jobs, enhancing their CV, developing their skills in completing job application forms and enhancing their interview skills. In Year 3, some participants noted the value of gaining experience in conducting interviews online, which has become necessary as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.6.2 Enhanced confidence

Fair Start Scotland appears to have had a significant positive impact in enhancing participants' confidence in their ability to find work. Key workers confirmed that participants often needed help to improve their confidence before any further support could be offered, and there were several examples of participants who reported an improvement in their confidence.

“I 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.” Participant Year 1

“[Fair Start Scotland] “gradually built up my confidence, just with chit chat, talking to me.” Participant Year 2

“I was very paranoid about leaving the house and that limited the jobs I was willing to apply for. I now have more confidence in applying for jobs as my self-esteem is now higher since finishing the programme.” Participant Year 3

Some participants were encouraged to enter volunteering opportunities as a first step towards employment. One participant in Motherwell, for example, described how positive his experience of volunteering for a charity had been, and reported that “I would never historically have considered volunteering because it isn’t paid but my key worker encouraged me to and it got me out of the house. It has let me use my IT skills and given me experience to add to my CV” (Year 3).

5.6.3 Improved skills for employment

Fewer participants in Year 3 reported having taken part in job-specific skills development opportunities – most described improving CV and job application writing skills, and interview skills. Two participants mentioned gaining experience through work placements and another said they were supported to gain their Construction Skills Certificate Scheme (CSCS) card for working in the construction sector while another had undertaken an IT qualification. In previous years, more participants spoke about the benefits of qualifications and placements in terms of helping them to gain new and improved skills for employment. These included skills that are transferable to any field, such as communication and teamwork, as well as sector-specific competencies such as electrical testing, food hygiene and skills required for workplaces in the retail and construction fields. However, it is likely that fewer opportunities to take part in qualifications and work placements were available

in Year 3 as a result of the pandemic and it is therefore not unexpected that fewer participants had had these opportunities.

5.6.4 Support to enter and sustain work

Fair Start Scotland aims to help people move towards employment, and many of the participants we interviewed reported that they had found work as a result of the support they had received.

Seven of nine interviewees in Greenock in Year 3, for example, found work through Fair Start Scotland in construction, retail, cleaning and employment advice. One participant noted that they “would probably still be jobless” (Year 3) if it were not for Fair Start Scotland and another said they would not have found their job without the service. A third commented that, while they think they would have found a job without Fair Start Scotland, this would likely “have been doing something I hated” (Year 3).

Overall, across all three years of the evaluation many participants said that Fair Start Scotland was crucial in their finding work.

Participants were also very positive about the in-work support they received. This included practical and financial support. For example, one participant said that their key worker had helped them to source a special chair to minimise back pain while sitting at a desk, while others received funding for travel costs. In other cases, participants reported that their key workers regularly checked in to offer moral support and advice on day-to-day issues in the workplace.

6. Lessons Learned Across Three Years

This chapter draws together our lessons learned from across all 9 case studies from the past 3 years as well as from our Scotland-wide evaluation work with key SG and DWP national stakeholders in Year 3. We break these findings down into:

- Conclusions about the overall performance of FSS
- Conclusions about operational delivery
- Articulating lessons for the future including the two-year extension to Fair Start Scotland and lessons for No One Left Behind and other provision in the future.

6.1 Impact and performance

Fair Start Scotland is the first devolved national employability service and it was designed and implemented in a very short period of time. Over its first 3 years it operated in a context of extremes with the service being launched in the context of record levels of employment and a consequently tight labour market whilst Year 3 was dominated by the impact of Covid-19, with Jobcentre Plus pivoting to a focus on new Universal Credit registrations, and many of the usual job opportunities in retail and hospitality disappearing.

Against this background the view of most stakeholders was that the performance of Fair Start Scotland was positive in terms of the quality of the service and experience that participants received. It was felt that a new ethos of a voluntary national service had been established, with a clear focus on sustainable work for those further from work. Stakeholders felt that Fair Start Scotland had an ability to flex services in its contract areas to respond to local demand (in terms of both the demography and distribution of unemployment and the profile of employment). It was however also noted by stakeholders that the service fell short of its ambition to support 38,000 participants.

While there has been disappointment about overall levels of performance in relation to the original ambition, there is agreement that some elements of service delivery have worked very well.

“For people closer to market probably it does what it needs to do and the outcomes are pretty good, but for those with more profound barriers does not provide the depth of support needed.” Scottish Government Stakeholder

There was a sense that there had been an over-reliance on Jobcentre Plus for referrals. The expected levels of referrals had not materialised, and providers needed to rapidly escalate their engagement with third sector referrers and others to get close to their expected client referral numbers. The recent increase in unemployment led to a surge of Jobcentre Plus referrals but it was felt that the service remains vulnerable to changes in Jobcentre Plus priorities – and this increase in unemployment has been accompanied by a wide range of alternative support such as Kickstart and JETS. Therefore, there is a strong sense that there should be a continued focus on generating third party referrals over the remainder of the 2-year extension period left for FSS delivery.

It was also noted that there is particular anxiety about the performance in relation to those furthest from work and with under-represented groups. For those furthest from work, stakeholders recognised that they had underestimated the issues around supporting those with multiple and complex needs and the Individual Placement and Support (IPS)²⁴ approach had not been successfully integrated into the Fair Start Scotland approach:

“... this was not sufficient. Fair Start Scotland can only go so far. IPS and supported employment may be levers – but the take up of these offers has not been particularly high.” Scottish Government Stakeholder

There is now a lot of work going on which is exploring the issues around those with multiple barriers.

²⁴ IPS is a specific programme that supports people with severe mental health challenges into employment. More information can be accessed here: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/what-ips>

“We are now looking at this. Have we got the promotion right? Are providers reaching out to these people – they are not necessarily in Jobcentres every month or week so they are not getting the referral pathways. There are people who could benefit from IPS and supported employment and Fair Start Scotland providers have enhanced their own third party referrals – but it needs much more embedded relationships.” Scottish Government Stakeholder

As a result of performance that was below expectations with regards to under-represented groups - those in minority ethnic groups, care experience young people and those with convictions, there has been action taken to correct this. It was seen as being related to a low level of capacity and knowledge about how to engage with and effectively support these groups.

In response to this particular area, the Scottish Government has commissioned racial equality training and disability diversity awareness training which Fair Start Scotland providers were able to access:

“We are now seeing providers who are clearer about how to engage with these groups, how they like to receive messages, what their preferred approaches are, and they are giving work coaches the underpinning skills and confidence that can engage in appropriate way. There is now some evidence of greater participation.” Scottish Government Stakeholder

Similarly, there is a growing focus on much more specific targeting:

“We set up Fair Start Scotland in response to long term unemployment. But ...it is lacking connections to housing, health, and criminal justice. So it is doing what it set out to do but it is quite narrow.” Scottish Government Stakeholder

A final aspect of overall performance is the high level of those leaving the service early and understanding the outcomes of those who did not make progress into a job. There is a recognition that the issue of high numbers of early leavers is not fully

understood – similarly, the long-term journey of those who did not find work needs to be explored in more detail. Linked to this is the issue of non-job-related outcomes that could be positive and effective for a client – again, this is an area which needs further exploration. In the absence of data around this area it is likely that the full impact of Fair Start Scotland is being under-estimated.

“We don’t understand the level of people who left before their time is up. They have just disengaged. From April this year we have created a restart ability. We should have done this a long time ago...We want to dig with these people – why did they disengage?” Scottish Government Stakeholder

6.2 Operational findings

This section outlines our findings in relation to the operation of Fair Start Scotland including its design and the way it is being implemented.

6.2.1 Fair Start Scotland is valued for its person-centred approach and voluntary nature

Fair Start Scotland staff, participants and stakeholders agreed that a strength of Fair Start Scotland was its ethos of being person centred. It was felt that this made Fair Start Scotland different from other services. The principles of dignity and respect are now embedded, and it is clear from participant feedback that this experience is near universal. There is a recognition that how the service has been delivered is as important as the design of the service itself and the voluntary nature of the service has been an important driver of this. We identified a high degree of pride amongst Fair Start Scotland providers that they were part of something that was going to help people and was better than what had been previously provided. There is now a degree of brand recognition and it is seen as a credible service.

In particular, the following features were identified as important in achieving the ethos behind Fair Start Scotland:

- Its voluntary nature which was seen as an important building block of ensuring participants felt respected and were treated with dignity

- The year long support²⁵ which enabled participants with multiple and complex barriers to move into employment that was right for them and that they were able to sustain
- The explicit in-work support component that was felt recognised that finding a job was only the first step and that retaining a job and thriving in employment required ongoing support
- The tailored and comprehensive nature of the support provided by caring and dedicated staff
- The focus on sustainable outcomes and in-work support – in other words the focus is not helping participants into any job, but a job which provides them with sustainable employment and ideally a platform for further progression in terms of responsibility, skills and pay

Our evaluation identified a range of areas that were felt to reduce the extent to which the service was able to be flexible and tailored to individual needs. It was not uncommon for Fair Start Scotland staff to report that they felt this ran contrary to the intention and ethos of the service:

- The 16 hours a week needed to achieve a job outcome which was felt not to recognise that this was not appropriate for all participants, especially those with health conditions, disabilities or caring responsibilities
- The requirements about frequency and content of engagement with participants – for example the number of hours of engagement per week, the requirement for this to be face-to-face (pre-pandemic), and the frequency of the monthly reviews - which were felt to put in place a structure that participants had to engage with rather than being able to structure an engagement to best suit each participant

There were some particularly useful insights into the voluntary nature of the service identified by the evaluation. The voluntary nature of the service was identified as a strength of Fair Start Scotland in every case study area by delivery staff, participants,

²⁵ Which can be up to 18 months when considering extensions.

and stakeholders including Jobcentre staff. Those we spoke to felt that this ensured that resources were invested in people who were less likely to leave the service early and contributed to an environment where participants were more comfortable as they felt more in control of their participation. However, it is important to point out that in many of the contract areas, many of the existing local employability services are, and always have been voluntary, so it is only in terms of national services that this feature represents a break from the past.

We noted a general feeling amongst Fair Start Scotland staff and participants that sometimes the voluntary nature of the service was not always well understood, with staff reporting that participants can often be unaware it was voluntary when being referred by the Jobcentre. Staff also reported that, in some cases, while participants knew the service was voluntary, they still felt they had to be there due to fear that their Jobcentre Plus Work Coach may put in place benefit sanctions should they not engage with Fair Start Scotland.

“The conversion of [Jobcentre Plus] referrals to Contract Entrant can be challenging in comparison to [Third Party Organisation] referrals.” Provider

Fair Start Scotland’s voluntary nature is trying to do something different from the experience of many participants in the past. Given many participants access Fair Start Scotland through Jobcentre referrals it is unsurprising that the message that the service is voluntary can get lost as a result of their experience with other services and fear of sanctions. It is clear that even a voluntary service can feel like a mandatory service to participants when it is operating within an environment of many mandatory services and benefit sanctions. Ongoing efforts to implement the Scottish Government’s vision of an employability service landscape that is centred on dignity and respect are likely to help shift this impression amongst participants.

6.2.2 The relationship between Scottish Government and providers was consistently reported as being positive, open and trusting.

There has been a strong move away from a conventional provider/commissioner relationship – both Scottish Government and providers speak of the effective

partnership working, the focus on highly collaborative continuous improvement with its emphasis on understanding issues, learning from them and amending aspects of service requirements to enable change.

Across all our case study areas, providers reported strong working relationships with Scottish Government. They felt that Scottish Government's approach was flexible, open, pragmatic, and in this way different from the relationships they have had with many commissioners in the past. They felt that this approach by Scottish Government built a trusted relationship which enabled them to feel like they could work together to make services better through changes and improvements during the contract period. The flexibility around participants disengaging and re-engaging was a commonly cited example of this relationship during our Year 3 case studies.

“The relationship with Scottish Government staff and the way they worked with providers was fantastic – they definitely listen and take things on board and try to change things as required.” Provider

However, the contractual nature of the funding model meant that, despite a recognition from the Scottish Government that there needed to be a range of flexibilities and changes introduced, it was only possible to make some of these.

“Because it was a contracted service, there was not [always] the flexibility to make the changes needed. If we had had more flex in the contract, we could have redesigned elements e.g. we missed a trick in terms of non-job outcomes and then Covid.” Scottish Government Stakeholder

6.2.3 The relationship between Fair Start Scotland and Jobcentre Plus has been central to the performance of the service

There is a general feeling amongst DWP stakeholders and Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches we engaged with that the relationships with both Scottish Government and Fair Start Scotland providers were positive, open, and strong. It was also noted by DWP stakeholders that the engagement with Scottish Government about Fair Start

Scotland had opened up the relationships between the two parties to discuss a wider employability agenda beyond Fair Start Scotland.

It was generally felt by DWP/Jobcentre Plus staff that Fair Start Scotland was a quality service option for many of their customers and that where issues had arisen, they had been addressed openly and quickly by Scottish Government and/or the provider.

“We have seen an increase in the number of customers. So to me that is confirming that the programme is worthwhile, giving us what we are looking for, customers are benefitting from it.” DWP Stakeholder

Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches surveyed generally felt they had a strong understanding of Fair Start Scotland and a commitment to making the service a success. 93% of Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches responding to our survey agreed or strongly agreed that they were clear about what Fair Start Scotland is trying to achieve. 90% of Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches agreed or strongly agreed that they felt committed to making Fair Start Scotland a success. 22% of Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches disagreed that they had a good understanding of Fair Start Scotland, with references to a lack of information flowing from Fair Start Scotland staff to Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches, and the challenge of virtual engagement as a result of the pandemic.

76% of Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches indicated through our survey that they agreed that they work well with their local provider representative. When asked what was working well, a few of these respondents provided the following comments:

“Good communication between provider and Jobcentre.” Work Coach, DWP

34% of Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches surveyed reported challenges in encouraging people to take part in Fair Start Scotland identifying issues such as Covid-19 restrictions, the non-mandatory nature of the service, language barriers and travel issues. When asked what was working well at encouraging people to take part in Fair Start Scotland, a few provided further detail, stating, for example, that:

“It is tailored to individual needs.” Work Coach, DWP

Despite the positive reviews of Fair Start Scotland from DWP/Jobcentre Plus staff, we identified a misaligned expectation between DWP, Scottish Government and Fair Start Scotland providers about the proportion of Fair Start Scotland referrals that would come from Jobcentres as well as the way criteria were being interpreted when determining whether someone was suitable for Fair Start Scotland.

The general view from DWP and Jobcentres is that Fair Start Scotland is one of many quality provisions available to their customers and they need to find the right provision to refer customers to.

“There is so much choice, so much provision, so many organisations wanting to help our customer groups.” DWP Stakeholder

Providers generally feel that the number of referrals received from the Jobcentres was not what was expected and there were concerns that other provision in the areas were being unfairly prioritised over Fair Start Scotland. The pressures around referral numbers were further exacerbated when referrals stopped altogether during the early stages of the pandemic while Jobcentre Plus staff needed to focus on processing new registrations for Universal Credit as unemployment rose.

The relationship between Fair Start Scotland and Jobcentres is complex and in many areas of Scotland has considerable room for improvement. However, there is now a recognition of the risks of over-reliance on Jobcentre Plus referrals and this has placed a growing emphasis on engaging with third parties to attract as many referrals as possible from alternative sources. Getting the balance right between Jobcentre Plus and third-party referrals is likely to be an ongoing challenge during the extension of Fair Start Scotland, and for future services as part of No One Left Behind.

6.2.4 There is still much to do to create a more integrated employability service in Scotland

Fair Start Scotland was intended to be a first step towards a more integrated and seamless employability service across Scotland. In many of the case study areas we explored, Fair Start Scotland was set up in areas where there were already well-established employability services run by local authorities and/or third sector organisations. It was uncommon for the contract for Fair Start Scotland to be held by the dominant pre-existing organisations who were funded by other sources – the only example of this was in Forth Valley (contract area 4 from Year 1’s case study in Alloa) where the delivery of Fair Start Scotland is run by the Local Authority who are the main employability providers in the area.

Where providers already had well established networks of support services and sub-contractors, access to employers and relationships with public sector organisations, there were fewer issues around referrals, competition and accessing support for participants. This reinforces the importance of integrated and aligned service delivery within employability services in Scotland.

The way Fair Start Scotland is structured, and the way it is being delivered in most of the case study areas we explored has not resulted in a high degree of local alignment or cohesion. Instead, Fair Start Scotland appears to be another of many providers in most localities, with services feeling they are in competition with each other for Jobcentre referrals and participant self-referrals.

“We have not got relationship with Local Authorities to a place where the service could fly.” Provider

“Fair Start has not met our ambitions in terms of alignment with local activity. This includes relationships with local authorities, the lack of integration and alignment – and the lack of local ownership as part of local offer.” Scottish Government Stakeholder

Where Fair Start Scotland has been introduced into areas with already well-established and well-connected services providers have struggled more with getting referrals. This is particularly felt in areas such as North Lanarkshire where the pre-existing services already focus on long term unemployed participants and those furthest from the labour market, and services are voluntary, and support is long term – making it very hard for Fair Start Scotland to differentiate itself.

We identified a number of relationships between local authorities, employability providers and Jobcentres that will need to improve if service alignment is increased. It was not uncommon for the competitive bidding process for winning Fair Start Scotland delivery contracts to have contributed to worsening relationships where Fair Start Scotland providers need to engage with organisations who bid for but did not win a Fair Start Scotland contract.

The quality of the relationship is underpinned in some areas by a lack of trust between Local Authorities delivering a public service, and providers who are delivering a target driven outcome funded service for a private sector owner. This lack of trust lies in the behaviours that this outcome funding model can encourage – in other words, a fear or a perception that such providers will seek to maximise their participant base and will need to claim the outcomes, and that this may both reduce their own participant base and may not be in the best interests of the participant.

The extent to which services locally are able to act as partners instead of competitors is further inhibited by the funding criteria where ESF funding means that Fair Start participants are unable to also receive support from a range of other services while being registered with Fair Start Scotland. While this issue of double funding exists, integration and alignment of services will be extremely difficult.

There are two other aspects to the development of a genuinely integrated local employability service:

- The engagement with specialist support services (e.g. mental health, debt management, counselling, addiction services) and with services that engage with priority clients (e.g. housing, health and criminal justice)

- The creation of a local form of governance with the information and intelligence it needs to actively manage performance and tackle weak areas of service.

What has been possible for Fair Start Scotland to achieve in these areas has proved to be very limited. Some multi-service providers have been able to call on other in-house specialisms (e.g. in the area of mental health) to provide specialist support to Fair Start participants but on the whole what we have heard is that the hoped for links with specialist third sector providers have not happened at the scale or with the range needed. This has been put down to the relatively limited scale of funding available, or to unrealised expectations that local specialist providers may be able to offer this kind of support free of charge. Similarly, we have come across no examples of well-developed relationship with housing, health, and criminal justice services on the ground – even in the contract area where Fair Start was led by 3 local authorities. Related to this has been the disappointment that Fair Start has not made the links it that were anticipated with health and local third sector organisations, and the lack of anything new or innovative in terms of engagement with the third sector.

There are limited examples of Fair Start Providers playing a meaningful and influential role in a local governance structure – there are a some examples of a provider being invited to join a Local Employability Partnership or a local third sector provider forum, but we are not aware of examples of this leading to more integrated action or performance management.

This issue of a lack of agreed strategic approaches extends to employer engagement. In all three areas we examined this year, the different services go about their employer engagement activities in a way that is not coordinated with other local employer engagement approaches. This is in part down to the choices made by employers – they have a trusted relationship with a Fair Start Scotland provider (sometimes going back to a time before Fair Start Scotland) or to a particular individual now involved in Fair Start Scotland.

6.2.5 The virtual delivery adopted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic has provided valuable insight into a future mixed model

Fair Start Scotland providers that we spoke to in years 2 and 3 following the onset of Covid-19 all reported that they were initially nervous and worried about delivering a service virtually. However, all providers also reported that they had found delivering a virtual service worked surprisingly well and they were all keen to see a mixed model in the future that enabled them to retain the benefits of virtual delivery while being able to pick back up face-to-face delivery for the elements that needed it.

Recruitment through social media was a significant revelation amongst providers who all reported success in attracting participants through advertising on Facebook including paid advertising and advertising on pre-existing local pages to reach potential participants. Different providers had invested to different degrees in their social media efforts with Fife particularly reporting success with it following a period of sustained effort and trialling new ways of promoting the service.

While providers often noted that social media success was probably in part due to more people being on social media more often during lockdowns, all reported that they would be continuing recruitment through social media as it provided a powerful way to diversify the risk away from over-reliance on referrals from Jobcentre Plus and was much more efficient and effective than fostering the relationships with other organisations to create third party referrals.

Virtual appointments replaced the face-to-face weekly appointments that participants had with Fair Start Scotland prior to the pandemic. These were offered as phone appointments or video calls. Providers and participants consistently reported that the introduction of virtual appointments has been a powerful way to provide a more tailored and efficient service for participants and is something they would like to see retained following the end of pandemic restrictions.

The emphasis on virtual delivery created a need for providers to invest in virtual training and resources so that participants could access training and information online easily and to a high quality. Start Scotland who are a provider across several

Fair Start Scotland contract areas invested particularly heavily in a wide range of training materials and as a result the staff in Fife reported that they were able to offer participants training with less delay – instead of waiting for a particular training service to come to Fife, it was able to be run more frequently as the participant numbers across the various contract areas would enable sessions to reach the critical mass required. The critical mass able to be achieved across contract areas also supported the production of more specialist and specific training and resources so participants had a much wider range of training available to them and could find something more specific to their needs.

One area that staff across all case study areas were keen to see return to face-to-face was some of the group work. While providers identified that a lot of training could be delivered virtually, ensuring there is always a component of face-to-face group work was key for a number of reasons. Participants attended group activities for a wide range of reasons, but staff reported that the real benefits of group activities was often to reduce social isolation, support participants to develop their interpersonal and team work skills, and to become comfortable in new and unknown situations. All of which built skills needed for employment and all of which are difficult to replicate virtually according to Fair Start Scotland staff we spoke to.

Digital exclusion was identified as a key issue to making virtual working possible, fair, and accessible. This included access to digital devices, access to a stable and affordable connection to the internet, and confidence and knowledge around using digital technologies and services digitally. Providers reported that they have been working with participants to access devices, ensure connectivity, and support participants to learn how to engage using these devices. All providers we spoke to in Year 3 said that the number of devices available were generally outstripped by demand by a large margin which hindered their ability to ensure participants could engage during lockdown. We also noted that support to confidently and knowledgably engage virtually and digitally was a struggle for some participants. Participants who previously would have accessed devices at houses of their friends and family, or in community venues were now unable to do so.

We know that some participants received devices and access to a Wi-Fi connection through other services, for example Scottish Government's Connecting Scotland service. We consider that there may be a case for stronger and more intentional links between Fair Start and other services to address gaps of this nature.

6.2.6 Future services need to balance accountability and quality control with proportionate administrative processes, reporting and funding criteria

With any service there is the need to balance the accountability associated with public funding and ensure quality standards are being met. Doing this will always require reporting and administrative processes, all of which take time and resources to adhere to.

With reference to such reporting Fair Start Scotland providers regularly reported that they felt that:

- The administrative processes associated with being compliant were too onerous and detracted from time spent with participants. We identified a sense of fear and frustration around getting administrative processes right because mistakes in administration meant that the provider was unable to claim for payments
- The reporting requirements in place were too extensive and specific which limited providers' abilities to adapt and tailor the service to meet participant's needs

Providers consistently reported that they were impressed with how open Scottish Government were to talk about and review administrative processes but overall felt that this willingness did not always translate into timely action. Providers reported that they felt like the information Scottish Government was requesting from them grew over time, and often with short timeframes to deliver newly requested data and information. Providers identified a number of examples of where changes had been made that were positive – for example being able to re-register someone from the service who left the service early previously – but we found that many of the

challenges reported in our year 1 case studies were still being reported in our Year 3 case studies. In particular:

- The level of information that needs to be collected and uploaded to monitoring systems to meet Scottish Government reporting requirements was consistently reported as being onerous
- The 16 hour a week requirement for being able to claim a job outcome was felt by providers to undervalue the achievement that a job with less hours represented for some participants and did not recognise that for some they were unable to work more than 10 or 12 hours a week (for example), due to health conditions, disability or caring responsibilities. Providers were worried that the outcomes reported under-represented certain groups performance as a result
- The inability to claim a job outcome for someone enrolled in education or training. Providers reported that often they supported participants to pick up part-time work and enrol in education or training part time as a way to support them to access fairer and better paid work and progress in employment. This was felt by providers to be within the spirit of what Scottish Government and Fair Start Scotland were trying to achieve. It felt unfair to providers that they were unable to claim for outcomes in this situation and were worried that it created an incentive for providers to discourage education and training within the job outcome claim timeframes
- The requirement for 3 hours of meaningful activity each week which was felt by providers to not suit many participants, for example those with health conditions, disabilities, or caring responsibilities, who needed to be able to spread their meaningful time over a longer time period than a week – where some weeks they would be able to do far more, and other weeks nothing at all. Providers were concerned that this disadvantaged those with health conditions, disabilities or caring responsibilities as the participants were unable to meet the ongoing criteria for the service and were more likely to leave the service early
- Monthly assessments were also identified as feeling like they were too frequent across many of our case study examples. A preference for these to

be done quarterly was a common message from providers. There was concern that monthly did not enable sufficient time to be able to see progress, increased the administrative time spent by staff conducting them, and were not a productive use of participants' time

- Providers expressed concern that the combined focus on under-represented groups and higher expected participant numbers feels unrealistic. Providers feel that many of the under-represented groups require more specialist and intensive support than the existing profile of participants, which is likely to mean more time per participant is required. There is concern that this combination will compromise the quality of delivery

6.3 Lessons for the future

Although there is a 2-year extension to the initial 3-year contracts for Fair Start Scotland delivery, the future of employability funding and delivery in Scotland is becoming clearer and it will be important to draw fully on the lessons from Fair Start Scotland to inform the roll out of the No One Left Behind approach and to consider how the 2 year extension can be used to try out new approaches. In this section we reflect on these lessons.

6.3.1 Lessons for the remainder of the two-year extension period

The 2 year extension may provide an opportunity to test out some approaches against the background of a common national service and to understand what this tells us about what works, for whom, in what kind of situation.

We have identified a number of areas from our interviews that would be worth exploring in local trials – some of these are already in place or planned:

- Disaggregating the 'under-represented groups' (those who are in minority ethnic groups, people who are disabled, care experience young people, and those with convictions) and understanding both how the groups vary in their needs and how individuals vary within these groups in terms of their personal situation and needs. It is clear from our discussions that the need for a personalised service is particularly important in this area – these are far from

being homogenous groups, but there are issues about context, geography, culture, and those they are in touch with that are highly pertinent and likely to be common across a range of individuals.

- Exploring how to reach and engage the under-represented groups and what forms of support help them make progress into and through work. This is a complex area as it needs to be tackled from both ends: from the supply side, in terms of how to reach and engage people in these groups, how to provide support which is seen as relevant and effective. The 2-year extension provides the opportunity to:
 - Test out different ways of reaching individuals in each of these groups – this may involve co-design processes and an understanding of how to make services genuinely accessible.
 - Testing out joint work in parallel with employers in terms of their wish to diversify their workforce and/or benefit from the particular skills, perceptions, insights and commitment that individuals in these under - represented groups can bring to the workplace.
- Understanding the skills and experience that private sector providers can bring to No One Left Behind. Some of the highest performing contract areas are led by private sector providers and they are likely to bring approaches and skills that can help Local Employability Partnerships develop and implement a high-performance local employability service. The 2-year extension period may provide opportunities for LEP's to engage with private sector providers to understand exactly where and how they can add value to local partnership delivery, and how this expertise and experience can best be drawn upon.
- Reflecting together on how best to procure services for high performance, and how to embed high performance into local governance structures in terms of incentivising or encouraging/rewarding genuinely client focused support that is effective in finding a good match with appropriate and sustainable job areas. There is, for example, a growing interest in trust-based contracting between 'partners' who share a commitment to designing and delivering high performance services.
- Exploring the relationship between high performance and staff skills, pay and conditions and what this may mean for subsequent delivery and procurement.

6.3.2 Lessons for No One Left Behind (NOLB)

Drawing on our range of interviews we have identified seven lessons that can be drawn from Fair Start Scotland for application to the roll out of the No One Left Behind approach:

- The significance of involving all local providers in the effective local governance of a local employability service. With the exception of Lot 4 (Forth Valley), Fair Start Scotland is seen by local partners as a parallel service with little evidence of cross referring of clients. However, in some areas the lead Fair Start Scotland provider is part of the LEP or a third sector provider grouping, although it is clear that the involvement of providers around a local governance table will not be enough to create a coherent high-performance service. This will require the clear and agreed identification of local needs and priorities and commissioning or delivery in a way that ensures clear accountability for high performance delivery
- The governance structure needs to ensure that it is actively managing the performance of all local providers, identifying and acting on weak performance or a lack of collaborative behaviour around the needs of clients. This requires the collection, analysis and sharing of transparent, high-quality data, including insights from clients about the quality, relevance and impact of the services they have experienced
- In many contract areas, Fair Start Scotland got off to a slow start. This was partly due to referrals from Jobcentre Plus being below the level expected, and the associated need to significantly enhance engagement with third parties for referrals – but it was also about the need by many providers to establish a local presence, start building relationships, and recruit staff. Some areas started with an existing local provider being awarded the contract, or well-regarded local staff being recruited or sub-contracted to deliver the service. This did not automatically lead to higher performance (in some areas the prior reputation was poor, and this was harmful to performance) but in all the areas that performed well in the early months this was built on existing capacity and networks. The lesson from this is about the significance of building local capacity and ensuring that the contracting systems can draw on

and reinforce this. NOLB can ensure that this local capacity building is a long-term project, focusing on the development of an appropriate physical presence, the development and regular enhancement of staff skills, and ensuring that high quality data is collected – and can be analysed – to fully understand and respond to performance

- Despite considerable effort being put into designing a financial model which discouraged ‘creaming and parking’ there is a recognition that the scale of resource available to support those furthest from work was not sufficient to ensure a focus on this area. A partnership approach to those who are furthest from work will help under NOLB, but it will be important to underpin this with a financial model that pays for services which may not be directly related to the achievement of a work outcome
- In particular for those with complex needs two key learning points include that:
 - The service has fallen short in terms of the expectation that it would lead to a more integrated service, involving engagement with services such as housing, criminal justice, and health. NOLB will need to be structured locally in a way that will attract and recognise the involvement of this range of services that will be needed to support those with complex needs
 - The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) service that was available as part of Fair Start Scotland to support people with severe mental health difficulties into employment has not worked as an integrated part of the service. Under NOLB there will need to be clarity about how best to support those with severe mental health difficulties into employment and how to ensure that this is fully integrated into a wider service, not least in terms of active engagement with employers
- Finally, the experience of Fair Start Scotland has reinforced the significance of Jobcentre Plus / DWP in any local employability service – in every area they form a significant presence in terms of scale and importance, and they play a vital role both in terms of having the greatest reach of any local service, and so their significance as an effective referrer. Looking ahead to the roll out of the NOLB approach it will be important for each area to fully engage with

Jobcentre Plus / DWP and ensure that Work Coaches are able to fulfil their potential as effective referrers

Appendix 1 Evaluation methodology

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

This evaluation report:

- Outlines the findings from the three case studies conducted in year three
- Details the findings from our survey and interviews across Scotland
- Brings together the findings from years 1, 2 and 3 to summarise the overall findings for the evaluation.

This appendix breaks down the evaluation objectives and methodology.

Evaluation objectives

The key objectives of the evaluation are to:

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

Understand the experience of Fair Start Scotland for lead providers, partner organisations, participants and employers

Identify what is working well and less well in the implementation of Fair Start Scotland

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

Evaluation methodology

This evaluation has multiple components in terms of methodology in relation to:

- Scotland wide research – conducted primarily in Year 3
- Nine case studies across the three years of the evaluation.

Scotland-wide methodology

We conducted the following research in Year 3 of the evaluation (2021) with staff and stakeholders across Scotland in order to understand their experiences of Fair Start over the past three years:

1. Interviews with senior stakeholders - a range of senior stakeholders from across Scottish Government, Jobcentre Plus, and Lead Providers
2. Survey of Fair Start Scotland frontline staff – an online survey of Fair Start Scotland frontline staff across all nine contract case study areas
3. Survey of Jobcentre Plus frontline staff – online survey of Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches across Scotland.

The table below outlines the details of who we interviewed as part of the senior stakeholder interviews.

Who	No.	Organisation/Role
Lead Providers	5	People Plus, Remploy, Fedcap Employment/Start Scotland, Falkirk Council, The Wise Group
Scottish Government	7	Head of Employability Delivery Unit, Interim Head of Employability Improvement and Design, Service Delivery Team Lead, Jobcentre Plus Partnership Leader, Fair Start Scotland Policy and Reporting Lead
Department for Work and Pensions	5	Group Director for East and North of Scotland, Service Leader x2, Senior Customer Service Leader East Scotland, Group Partnership Manager responsible for new DWP programmes, Fair Start Scotland and devolution related engagement

In 2017, as part of a previous piece of work, Rocket Science UK Ltd. had conducted a survey of Fair Start Scotland frontline staff and Jobcentre Plus work coaches to determine their early experiences of the Fair Start Scotland service. This year, we issued very similar surveys to current frontline staff and Jobcentre Plus work coaches to determine whether there had been any significant change in their experiences. The surveys were issued to all frontline staff and Jobcentre Plus work coaches via Scottish Government. In 2017, 172 responses were received from frontline staff. 147 frontline staff responded in 2021. In 2017, 90 Jobcentre Plus work coaches responded to the survey, and in 2021 96 Jobcentre Plus work coaches submitted responses. The full comparison of findings can be found in Appendix 2. Key points are drawn out in relevant sections of this report.

Case study methodology

We have carried out the following tasks in each of the case study areas:

- Conducted desk-based area analysis of the socio-economic and employment trends in each of the localities to understand the local labour market context that Fair Start Scotland is operating in. This analysis was streamlined in Year 3 to enable a fuller analysis of the messages across Fair Start Scotland bringing together the three years of case studies
- Analysed the management and performance data from Fair Start Scotland in each of the localities to understand the profile and numbers of participants and outcomes achieved in the area
- Conducted interviews with participants in each locality to understand their experience of and views on Fair Start Scotland. The total number of participants in each case study area interviewed is outlined in the table overleaf.

Case study year	Area	Participant interviews	Non participant interviews ²⁶
Year 1 – 2019	Alloa	7 ²⁷	1
	Irvine	3	10
	Wick	8	1
Year 2 – 2020	Drumchapel	10	-
	Dundee	10	-
	Peterhead and Fraserburgh	10	-
Year 3 – 2021	Inverclyde	9	-
	Fife	7	-
	Motherwell	6	-
Total		70	12

- Conducted interviews with employers in one locality to understand their experience of and views on Fair Start Scotland. Because of the impact of Covid-19 arranging employer interviews in years 2 and 3 of the evaluation has proved difficult as employers had staff on furlough or it was difficult to get hold of very busy staff in HR roles, so the number of employer interviews was limited.
- Conducted interviews with service staff including managers and frontline staff delivering Fair Start Scotland locally to understand their experience of and views on the service
- Conducted interviews with staff in partners of Fair Start Scotland providers in the locality to understand their experience of and views on Fair Start Scotland
- Conducted interviews with relevant other stakeholders in the area to understand their experience of and views on Fair Start Scotland.

The table overleaf provides a breakdown of the Year 3 case study participant interviewees as has been provided in prior years' reports.

²⁶ We interviewed non-participants in 2019 only.

²⁷ Three interviewees from each of the three case study areas in 2019 also took part in follow-up interviews in 2020.

Case study area ²⁸	Number	Gender		Age		Ethnicity		Deprivation		Disability			
Inverclyde	9	Male	6	16-24	1	White	7	Decile 1	5	Disabled	7		
				25-34	5			Decile 2	1				
				35-49	2			Decile 3	1				
		Female	3	Unknown	2	50-54	0	Unknown	2	Decile 4	0	Not disabled	2
						55-64	1			Decile 5	0		
						Decile 6	0						
						Decile 7	2						
		Fife	7	Male	5	16-24	0	White	1	Decile 8	0	Unknown	0
						25-34	4			Decile 9	0		
						35-49	0			Decile 10	0		
Female	2			Unknown	6	50-54	1	Unknown	6	Decile 1	0	Disabled	6
						55-64	2			Decile 2	1		
						Decile 3	0						
						Decile 4	2						
Female	2	Unknown	6	50-54	1	Unknown	6	Decile 5	1	Not disabled	1		
				55-64	2			Decile 6	0				
				Decile 7	1								
				Decile 8	0								
Female	2	Unknown	6	50-54	1	Unknown	6	Decile 9	1	Unknown	0		
				55-64	2			Decile 10	1				
				Decile 9	1								

²⁸ This data is based on information collected by Fair Start Scotland providers.

Case study area	Number	Gender		Age		Ethnicity		Deprivation		Disability	
Motherwell	6	Male	5	16-24	1	White	3	Decile 1	3	Disabled	2
				25-34	2			Decile 2	2		
				35-49	0			Decile 3	0		
				50-54	0			Decile 4	0		
				55-64	3			Decile 5	1		
		Female	1	Unknown	3	Decile 6	0	Not disabled	0		
						Decile 7	0				
						Decile 8	0				
						Decile 9	0				
						Decile 10	0				
Total	22	Male	16	16-24	2	White	11	Decile 1	8	Disabled	15
				25-34	11			Decile 2	4		
				35-49	2			Decile 3	1		
				50-54	1			Decile 4	2		
				55-64	6			Decile 5	2		
		Female	6	Unknown	11	Decile 6	0	Not disabled	3		
						Decile 7	3				
						Decile 8	0				
						Decile 9	1				
						Decile 10	1				
Unknown	4	Unknown	4	Decile 1	0	Unknown	4				
				Decile 2	0						
				Decile 3	0						
				Decile 4	0						
				Decile 5	0						

Appendix 2 Survey analysis

This appendix includes the analysis from our survey of Fair Start Scotland frontline staff – an online survey of Fair Start Scotland frontline staff across all nine contract case study areas, and survey of Jobcentre Plus frontline staff – online survey of Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches across Scotland. We have also analysed these results in comparison with the results from the original survey in 2017.

2021 Survey of Fair Start Scotland Providers

As part of Year 3 of the Fair Start Scotland Evaluation, we conducted a survey of Fair Start Scotland providers. 147 Surveys were completed. The responses are summarised below.

The respondents work in the following contract areas:

Contract area	Responses	Contract area	Responses
East	30	North East	8
Forth Valley	9	South West	16
Glasgow	14	Tayside	25
Highlands and Islands	12	West	10
Lanarkshire	23	Grand Total	147

The respondents work for the following providers:

Provider	Responses	Provider	Responses
20/20 Clearview	2	Start Scotland	33
Aberdeen Foyer	6	Stirling Council	1
Argyll & Bute Council	2	The Lennox Partnership	8
Clackmannanshire Council	3	The Wise Group	5
Enable Scotland	5	Third Sector Hebrides	1
Falkirk Council	5	Triage Central	17

Other (please specify)	1	Working Links	1
Remploy	46	People Plus	11
Grand Total	147		

Key findings

Fair Start Scotland objectives

62% of respondents strongly agreed and 37% agreed that they were clear about what Fair Start Scotland was trying to achieve.

Describing Fair Start Scotland

64% of respondents strongly agreed and 26% agreed that they could describe to participants what Fair Start Scotland will be like and how it can help them.

The referral process

64% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the referral process was working well. 28% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed.

Appropriate participants

61% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the participants were appropriate for the service. 93% in the South West agreed. 37% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed. 79% in Glasgow disagreed.

Participants' clarity about service

57% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that when the participants arrive, they are clear about Fair Start Scotland and what it will offer them. 37% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed.

Raising ideas

34% of respondents strongly agreed and 47% agreed that they knew how to raise any ideas about the Fair Start Scotland Service and its impact, giving a total of 81% of respondents who knew how to raise ideas - evenly split across all regions.

Implementation information

35% of respondents strongly agreed and 61% agreed that they have been well informed about the implementation of Fair Start Scotland.

Commitment

74% of respondents strongly agreed and 25% agreed that they felt very committed to making the Fair Start Scotland service a success.

Success

58% of respondents strongly agreed and 40% agreed that in general, Fair Start Scotland has been successful in helping people move into work.

What's working well?

When asked to identify which features of the programme were working well, respondents highlighted a number of key features:

- Improved relationships with Jobcentre Plus work coaches
- Strong employer relationships, leading to a good range of job opportunities
- Good relationships with local partners, including the local authority and local third sector partners
- Good working relationships with participants, ensuring that there is understanding of their barriers to employment and working with them to overcome these
- Strong leadership from managers
- In-work support
- The ability to provide access to specialist support provision such as health and wellbeing or support for mental health

What's challenging?

When asked to identify the most significant challenges, a number of issues were commonly cited by frontline staff responding to the survey, including:

- Insufficient or inappropriate referrals from Jobcentre Plus, for example clients being referred who have been unemployed for over 5 years or who are unable to work a minimum of 16 hours per week due to health issues
- Participant behaviours and (un) willingness to work (Covid-19/lockdown has had a major impact on people's mental health and wanting to get out and find work)
- Lack of public awareness of Fair Start - no identity and "brand" not marketed strongly or powerfully enough at a national level initially
- Lack of employment opportunities
- Covid-19 pandemic and the restriction arising out of the various lockdowns

Comparison between 2017 and 2021

This section provides a comparison between the 2017 and 2021 surveys. In 2017, **172** frontline staff participated in the survey and in 2021, **147** frontline staff participated in the survey

Key findings

Fair Start Scotland objectives

94% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Provider Frontline staff indicated they were clear about what Fair Start Scotland was trying to achieve. By 2021, this decreased to 89%.

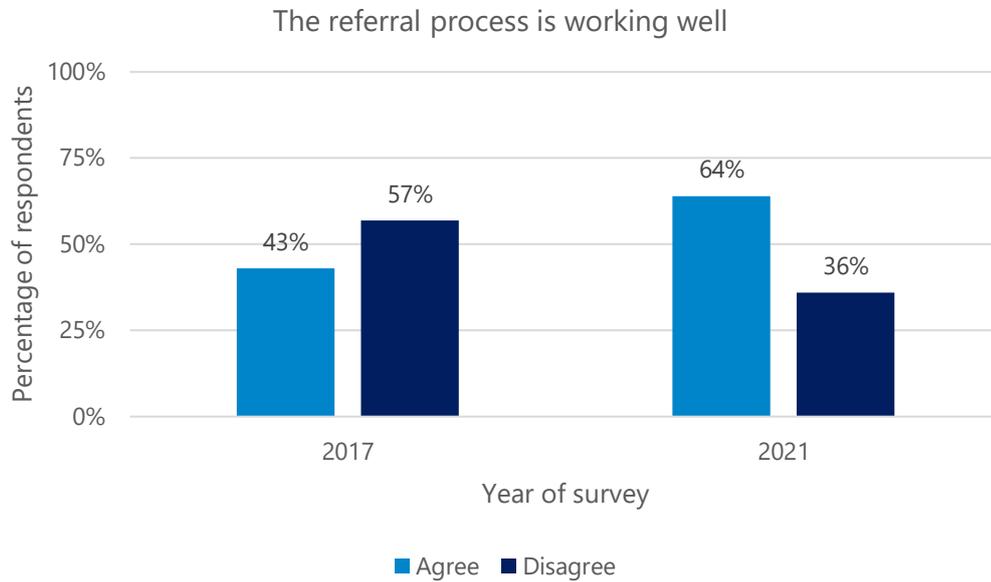
Describing Fair Start Scotland

98% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Provider Frontline staff indicated that they could describe to participants what Fair Start Scotland would be like and how it could help them. By 2021, this increased slightly to 99%.

Referral process

43% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Provider Frontline staff indicated that the referral process was working well. By 2021, this increased to 64%.

“The referral process is working well.” Provider



Suitability of referrals

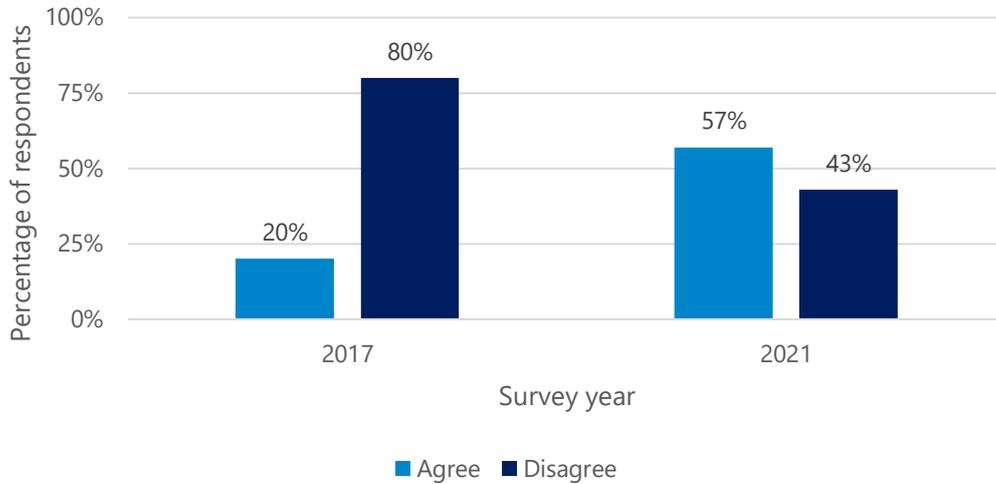
59% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Provider Frontline staff indicated that participants referred to Fair Start Scotland were appropriate for the service. By 2021, this had slightly increased to 61%.

Participant understanding

20% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Provider Frontline staff indicated that when referred participants arrive, they are clear about the Fair Start Scotland service. By 2021, this increased significantly to 57%.

“When referred participants arrive, they are clear about the Fair Start Scotland service and what it will offer them” Provider

When referred participants arrive, they are clear about the Fair Start Scotland service and what it will offer them



Working with Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches

74% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Provider Frontline staff indicated that they were working well with Job Centre Plus work coaches. By 2021, this increased to 85%.

Raising ideas

71% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Provider Frontline staff indicated that they knew how to raise any ideas they had for improving the Fair Start Scotland service. By 2021, this increased to 81%.

Commitment

88% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Provider Frontline staff indicated that they feel committed to making Fair Start Scotland a success. By 2021, this increased to 99%.

Survey of Job Centre Plus Work Coaches

As part of Year 3 of the Fair Start Scotland Evaluation, we conducted a survey of Job Centre Plus Work Coaches. 96 surveys were completed. The responses are summarised below.

Key findings

Fair Start Scotland objectives

60% of respondents agreed and 33% strongly agreed that they were clear about what Fair Start Scotland was trying to achieve.

Describing Fair Start Scotland

62% of respondents agreed and 33% strongly agreed that they could describe to participants what Fair Start Scotland will be like and how it can help them.

Referring clients

55% of respondents agreed and 37% strongly agreed that they knew what kind of client they should be referring to Fair Start Scotland.

Implementation

54% of respondents agreed and 24% strongly agreed that they have been well informed about the implementation of Fair Start Scotland. When asked what was working well, a few of these respondents backed up their response with the following statements:

- Plenty of information available if I need to clarify or query an issue
- Excellent feedback from the hardest to help claimants for one of the providers available in our local area
- Easy to interact with/find out information re claimants' progress.

20% of respondents disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed that they had been well informed about implementation of Fair Start Scotland. When asked what was the most challenging, the respondents cited a lack of information flow from Fair Start Scotland staff to work coaches, and virtual engagement due to the pandemic.

Referral process

51% of respondents agreed and 27% strongly agreed that the referral process is working well. When asked what was working well, respondents referred to the speed of the referral process; and initial assessment identifying appropriate candidates.

20% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed. When asked what was not working well, respondents referred to a lack of feedback from Fair Start Scotland about whether a

claimant is starting provision; and concerns that Fair Start Scotland are refusing referrals despite them already have been assessed as appropriate by Jobcentre Plus staff.

Accessibility

54% of respondents agreed and 12% strongly agreed that it was easy to encourage people to take part in the Fair Start Scotland service. Some respondents referred in particular to the tailored nature of the support, and a sense that customers feel they are receiving more help and are cared about.

32% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed. When asked to explain why, they referred to Covid-19 restrictions reducing people's willingness to leave their home; ESOL language barriers; travel barriers; and the non-mandatory nature of the provision.

Working with local providers

62% of respondents agreed and 14% strongly agreed that they are working well with their local provider representatives. 16% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed. These respondents highlighted concerns about confusion around who the point of contact is locally; a general lack of contact with the local provider; and a lack of feedback from the provider.

Raising ideas

34% of respondents agreed and 7% strongly agreed that they know how to raise ideas to improve the Fair Start Scotland service. 42% disagreed and 17% strongly disagreed.

Commitment

57% of respondents agreed and 33% strongly agreed that they feel committed to making Fair Start Scotland a success. 7% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed.

Comparison between 2017 and 2021

This section provides a comparison between the 2017 and 2021 surveys. In 2017, 90 Jobcentre Plus staff participated in the survey and in 2021, 96 Jobcentre Plus staff participated in the survey

Key findings

Fair Start Scotland objectives

100% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Jobcentre Plus frontline staff indicated that they were clear about what Fair Start Scotland was trying to achieve. By 2021, this decreased to 93%.

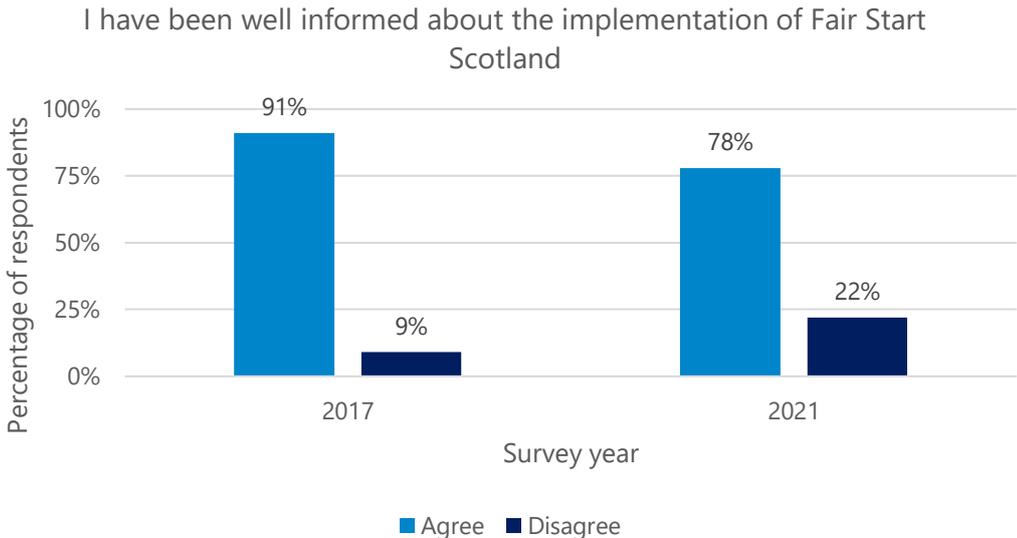
Describing Fair Start Scotland

98% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Jobcentre Plus frontline staff indicated that they could describe to participants what Fair Start Scotland would be like and how it could help them. By 2021, this decreased slightly to 95%.

Implementation information

91% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Jobcentre Plus frontline staff indicated that they have been well informed about the implementation of Fair Start Scotland. By 2021, this decreased to 78%.

“I have been well informed about the implementation of Fair Start Scotland” Jobcentre Plus Work Coach



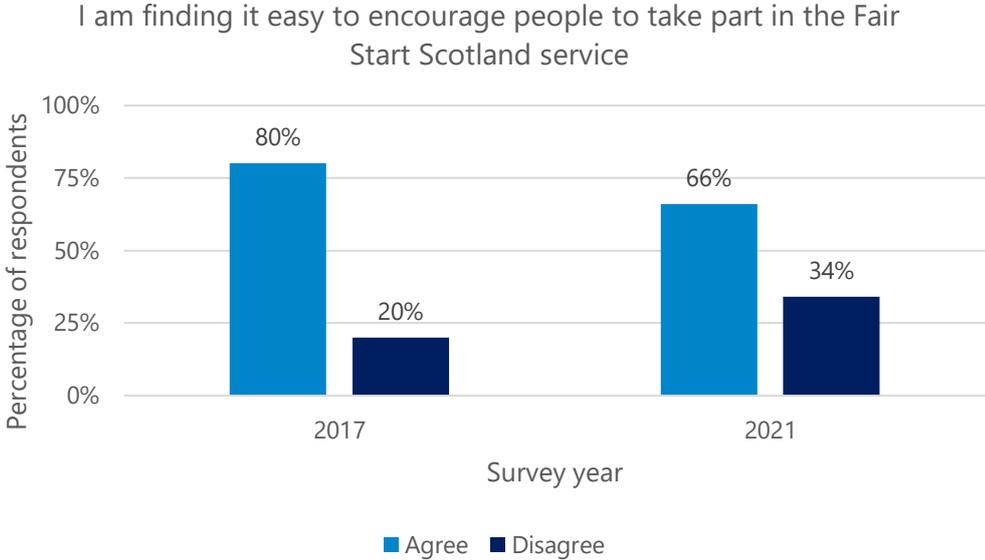
Referral process

83% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Jobcentre Plus frontline staff indicated that the referral process was working well. By 2021, this had decreased to 78%.

Accessibility

80% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Jobcentre Plus frontline staff indicated that it was easy to encourage people to take part in the Fair Start Scotland Service. By 2021, this decreased to 66%.

“I am finding it easy to encourage people to take part in the Fair Start Scotland service.” Jobcentre Plus Work Coach

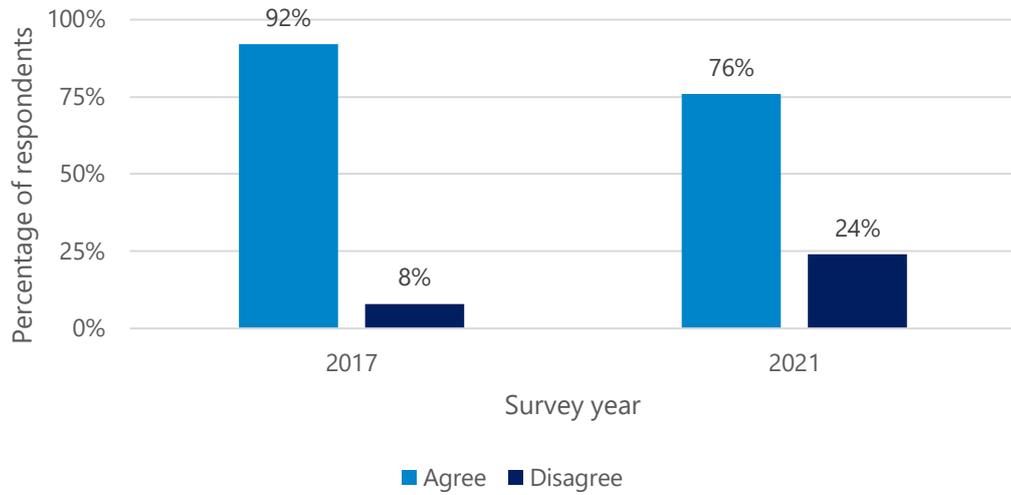


Working with local providers

92% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Jobcentre Plus frontline staff indicated that they were working well with their local provide representative. By 2021, this decreased to 76%.

“The [Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches] are working well with their local provider representative.” Jobcentre Plus Work Coach

The JCP Work Coaches are working well with their local provider representative



Commitment

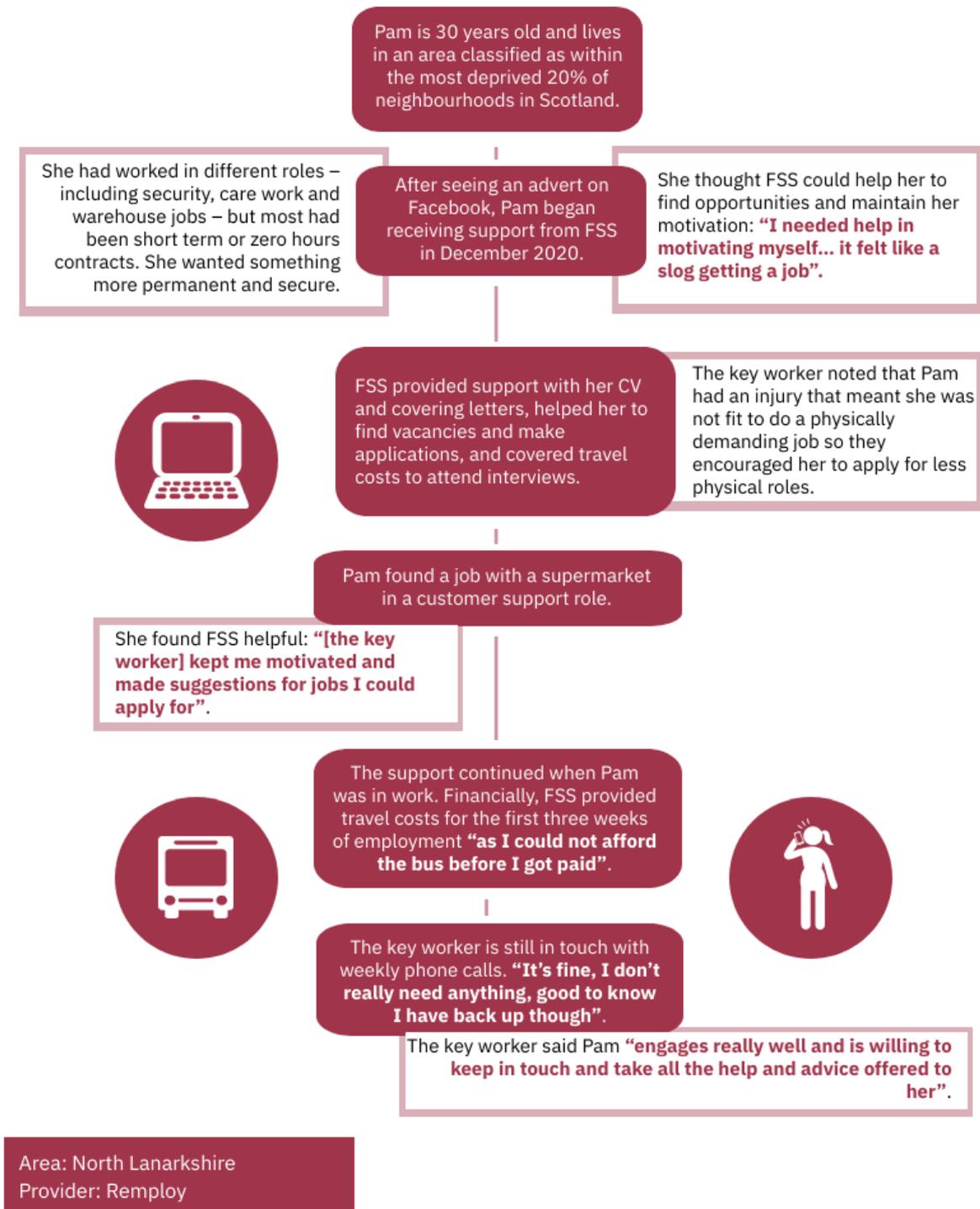
99% of respondents to the 2017 survey of Jobcentre Plus frontline staff indicated that they feel committed to making Fair Start Scotland a success. By 2021, this decreased to 90%.

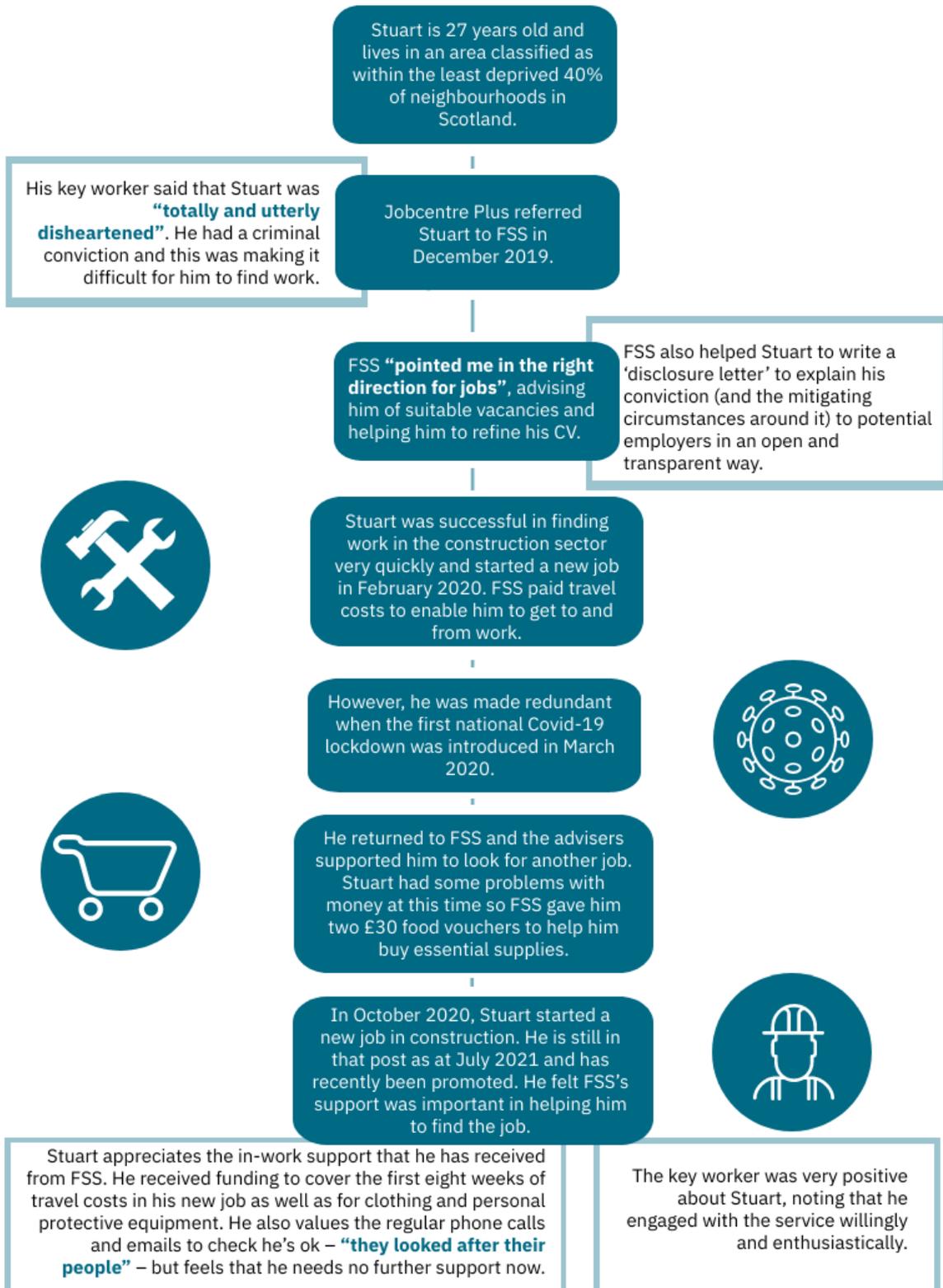
Appendix 3 Participant case studies

Following our interviews with participants we developed a range of case studies to articulate the journeys of a selection of Fair Start participants.



Area: Fife
Provider: Start Scotland





Area: Inverclyde
 Provider: The Wise Group



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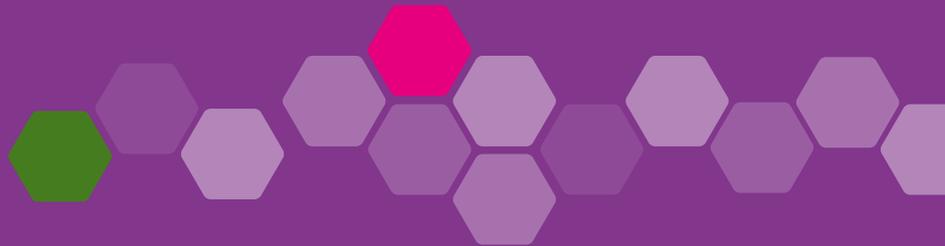
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