

# Fair Start Scotland Evaluation Report 5 - Qualitative Interviews with Service Participants - Years 4 & 5 (November 2023)



**ECONOMY AND LABOUR MARKET**

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# Summary

## Background

This report presents detailed findings from 20 qualitative in-depth interviews conducted to capture the views and experiences of participants of the Fair Start Scotland (FSS) employability service. This qualitative research is one element of an ongoing evaluation programme of the service.

Fair Start Scotland is the devolved employability service responsible for providing employment support for disabled people and those at risk of long-term unemployment throughout Scotland. The service launched in April 2018, initially for three years, but has since been extended to accept referrals until March 2024. Evaluation of the service has been conducted throughout its lifetime, in order to understand the participants' experiences and outcomes associated with taking part, and to contribute to continuous improvement of service delivery. The following report forms part of the evaluation of the extension phase, which will contribute to future provision of employability support in Scotland, including the [No One Left Behind](#) approach.

## Prior experience of work search and unemployment

Many respondents who took part in the interviews had been actively looking for work prior to joining FSS, searching for varying lengths of time ranging from a couple of months to ten years. Respondents described their experiences of prior employment as typically involving insecure jobs, such as seasonal or short-term work, often in lower skilled occupations.

In terms of the types of jobs or roles they were looking for at the point of joining FSS, respondents expressed the need to find roles that fitted with their personal circumstances, such as childcare responsibilities or work that they felt capable of given existing health conditions. Being unable to find roles that suited, whether due to the tasks involved, working hours or not wanting to work in areas in which they had previous experience, were reported by respondents as common barriers to finding work. Other barriers reported by respondents included transport difficulties, gaps in employment history, lack of training or relevant work experience, mental health difficulties, a loss of confidence, or problems caused by the Covid-19 pandemic such as changes to job market or changes in ways of accessing employability support. For some, these barriers were compounded by spending an extended period in unemployment prior to joining FSS.

## Experience of support

Respondents highlighted many different types of support as being particularly helpful to them. These can broadly be categorised as practical (direct) help in applying for specific jobs, indirect help with knowledge of job-searching, and emotional or psychological support, to develop respondents' overall abilities to find work. For those who had received in-work support, this tended to be continued contact with their key worker. Respondents described the ongoing contact as helpful as they appreciated the continued support of an 'advocate'.

Respondents indicated that less helpful types of support were those which were less personalised to them. In some cases, this meant training courses or advice which they didn't feel they needed because they already had the relevant skills, whereas in other instances, it involved key workers suggesting jobs that were unsuitable due to the respondent's personal circumstances.

### **Outcomes and impacts**

Some respondents were in work at the point of interview. Of these, the majority were in relatively lower skilled roles<sup>1</sup>, with jobs including call centre assistants, care support workers, administration assistant and a security guard. Some respondents reported they were happy with their roles, either because they felt it was a stepping stone to progress in their chosen sector, or because it matched well with their other circumstances such as health or childcare needs.

Some respondents were less happy with the type of work they were doing, but they were usually relieved to no longer be out of work. Some wanted to work in a particular sector but struggled to find vacancies in their area, or they did not have the required qualifications or experience.

Others were still searching for work at the point of the interview, with barriers that had been an issue to finding work before taking part in the service persisting, such as lack of qualifications or transportation.

In terms of impacts of taking part in FSS on skills and job search abilities, respondents often mentioned having improved CVs, having a better idea of what they should look for in a role, or how to go about finding relevant vacancies.

The most commonly mentioned impact of taking part in the service was increased confidence and motivation in job searching. Several respondents stated that taking part in FSS contributed to an overall improvement in their wellbeing. This improvement in wellbeing was sometimes attributed by respondents to the support from key workers, or the tailored nature of the service. Respondents described key workers helping their confidence, providing reassurance, keeping them on track and being a listening ear.

### **Participant reflections and recommendations for future service delivery**

Participants highlighted strengths of the service. This included:

- kind and friendly staff delivering FSS
- overall supportive nature
- voluntary nature of the service
- personalised elements of support
- specific help with CVs
- practical support in finding work provided to participants

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<sup>1</sup> The reference to lower skilled roles is based on the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) standard Occupational Classification Hierarchy](#)

A few participants mentioned areas of support they felt worked less well. These included instances of gaps in communication with FSS key workers, FSS key workers changing too frequently, or the provision of support through online communication as being unsuitable for their needs.

Areas that could be considered for improvement in the delivery of future employment support services include:

- the consistency of delivery of the personalised approach to support
- additional support tailored to those with childcare difficulties
- continued use of varied communications strategies to ensure all potential participants are made aware of the service
- considering methods to maximise training and work experience opportunities offered to participants

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Fair Start Scotland

The Scotland Act 2016 devolved responsibility to the Scottish Government for contracted employment support for disabled people and those at risk of long-term unemployment. Fair Start Scotland is Scotland's national employment service which aims to support people towards and into work. The service launched in April 2018 and is now in its sixth year of provision.

FSS is underpinned by the following principles<sup>2</sup>:

- delivery of a flexible 'whole person' approach
- services that are responsive to those with high needs
- a drive towards real jobs
- services designed and delivered in partnership
- services designed nationally but adapted and delivered locally
- contracts that combine payment by job outcome and progression towards work

Delivery of FSS has been contracted out by the Scottish Government to five different local providers, over nine geographical Lots across Scotland.

## 1.2 Previous research

As part of the programme of evaluation of FSS, IFF Research were commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation of the delivery process and outcomes for participants during Year 4 (April 2021 – March 2022) and Year 5 (April 2022 – March 2023) of the service delivery. IFF Research have previously undertaken three waves of telephone survey research with FSS respondents over the period of 2019 to 2021, covering the first three years of delivery ([Wave 1](#), [Wave 2](#) and [Wave 3](#) covering respectively Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 of FSS delivery). The aim was to provide a representative picture of how respondents are experiencing FSS and the outcomes associated with taking part in the service.

For the evaluation of Years 4 and 5 of the service, IFF Research delivered two strands of research. Element 1 was a large scale telephone survey of 1,000 participants, and Element 2 was a programme of qualitative work with 20 participants. The findings from Element 1 have been published in a separate [evaluation report](#).

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on values and principles underlying FSS see [Creating a Fairer Scotland: A New Future for Employability Support in Scotland - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

### 1.3 About this report

This report details the findings of the qualitative in-depth interviews (Element 2) conducted with FSS respondents:

- the [first chapter](#) provides an overview of FSS service and its evaluation to date
- the [second chapter](#) covers in detail the methodology of research and continues with a summary of respondents' background
- the [third chapter](#) focuses on respondents' prior experience of searching for work and being in unemployment and details barriers to employment prior to joining FSS
- the [fourth chapter](#) explores respondents' experiences of the support provided by FSS, including an in depth look into why some types of support were considered more or less helpful than others
- the [fifth chapter](#) outlines individual outcomes after receiving support from FSS, including employment status, impact on skills and on overall wellbeing
- the [sixth chapter](#) examines respondents' goals for the future
- the [seventh chapter](#) summarises respondents' views of FSS and outlines what works well and what could be improved
- the [eights chapter](#) describes recommendations for future delivery of employability services based on findings outlines in previous chapters



## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research aims

This qualitative research aims to provide greater insight into the individual journeys and outcomes following FSS support for those who joined the service in Year 4 (April 2021 – March 2022) and Year 5 (April 2022 – March 2023) of FSS delivery. This research incorporated a particular focus on previously identified groups who have significant barriers to employment and are further from the labour market with a focus on participants from families at highest risk of child poverty, participants from minority ethnic backgrounds and disabled participants.

### 2.2 Method

The telephone survey in Wave 4 was conducted in December 2022 and January 2023. A total of 1,000 respondents were surveyed in Wave 4. Most of the FSS respondents contacted in Wave 4 had joined the service between July 2021 and June 2022 (to include both those who joined in Year 4 and Year 5 of FSS delivery), but some had joined FSS in 2020. These two groups are referred to as the 2021-22 cohort and the 2020 cohort. The longitudinal interviews of the 2020 cohort were included to inform our understanding of the longer-term outcomes experienced by FSS respondents.

After the [Wave 4 telephone survey](#) was conducted, 20 respondents to the survey were invited to take part in a one-hour depth interview via telephone or video call. Purposive sampling<sup>3</sup> was used to make sure a mix of experiences were captured and in order to gather more feedback from respondents with characteristics of interest. Individual answers from the telephone survey were used to inform recruitment for the in-depth interviews.

Sampling was conducted to ensure representation of respondents from the following groups:

- respondents from the 2021-22 (fresh cross-sectional) or 2020 (longitudinal) cohorts
- respondents currently in paid work or currently unemployed
- respondents who are parents of dependent children
- respondents classified as being in 'priority family groups'<sup>4</sup>
- respondents who have a health condition or disability which limits their ability to carry out day-to-day tasks
- respondents who are from a minority ethnic background

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<sup>3</sup> A non-probability sampling method whereby researcher select respondents with specific characteristics

<sup>4</sup> [Priority families are those identified by the Scottish Government as being at higher risk of child poverty](#): lone parent families, minority ethnic families, families with a disabled adult or child, families with a younger mother (under 25), families with a child under 1, and larger families (3+ children)

Of the 1,000 respondents who completed the telephone survey for Wave 4, 668 consented to being recontacted for the purpose of being invited to participate in the qualitative research. In total 32 were approached, and interviews were booked with 26. Of these, six participants did not attend the scheduled interview.

Interviews were conducted in January and February 2023. Individual answers from the telephone survey were used to inform discussions and explore aspects of experience not previously covered by the survey.

Participants provided verbal consent to participate at both the recruitment stage and the beginning of the interview. Respondents were offered £20 as a thank you for their participation, which was available to them as a bank transfer, Amazon voucher, or charitable donation.

The interviews covered the respondent's background, working history, current employment situation, experience of participating in FSS, their future outlook and goals and their thoughts on any improvements that could be made to service delivery. The topic guide for the interview can be found in [Appendix 2: Topic guide used for interviews](#).

The shortest interview lasted 42 minutes, whilst the longest took 67 minutes. The average length of interview was 56 minutes. Seven of the interviews were conducted by members of the core research team, who designed and delivered all aspects of the qualitative and quantitative research, the remaining 13 were conducted by IFF's specialist qualitative interviewing team. All interviews were conducted in English language. For several participants English was not their first language, but all of them spoke English to a comfortable level to conduct the interview without support.

Interviews which took place from within IFF's London offices were recorded by IFF's telephone software. Interviews conducted remotely were recorded, where possible, by placing the respondent on speakerphone and using PC/laptop based software to record. In total, 15 interviews were audio-recorded. During each interview, researchers from IFF created 'live' write-ups of the discussion, taking paraphrased notes of all responses and capturing verbatim transcription of sentences and phrases that the researchers felt encapsulated a view particularly well. Where recordings were available, researchers revisited these following the interview to write-up in greater detail the content of the interview, and ensure accuracy of verbatim quotations.

Based on conducting the initial interviews, members of the core research team designed a thematic analysis framework which was organised according to research objectives and topics covered in the interviews. Findings from each interview were written up into the framework by the researcher who conducted each interview. The framework provided a structure for data management, analysis and interpretation. Following completion of fieldwork, members of the core research team conducted personal analysis using the framework to explore answers to the research questions, understand emerging narratives and examine differences by

subgroups. Researchers iteratively reviewed the contents of the framework, identifying patterns of response and exceptions, interrogating how strong and consistent themes were within the framework. The core research team then met for an analysis discussion sessions, during which researchers compared their initial interpretation of the findings and scrutinised the evidence to reach consensus on the key messages.

It should be noted that given the qualitative nature of the research, the views described are not framed quantitatively but rather explored in a descriptive way. This means individual respondents' journeys and experiences can be approached in rich detail. When describing the qualitative results, the terms 'many', 'some' or 'a few' are sometimes used to give a relative indication of the extent to which views were expressed. The term "many" is used when a view or behaviour is fairly widespread within a particular group of respondents and "few" indicates findings applied only to a handful. "Some" indicates a middle ground between "many" and "few". As our sample is not representative of the population of FSS participants, these terms are intended only to illustrate the variety of views and experiences among our qualitative respondents that took part in this study.

Three subgroups of respondents are examined in particular detail throughout the report, in line with characteristics associated with being far from the labour market:

- respondents classified as being in 'priority family groups'
- respondents who have a health condition or disability which limits their ability to carry out day-to-day tasks
- respondents from minority ethnic groups

## 2.3 Background and profile of respondents

Table 1 details the number of interviews conducted by cohort and by characteristics of interest. The data presented in this section is sourced from the telephone survey.

The respondents interviewed were located in seven geographical Lots: East, Glasgow, Highlands and Islands, Lanarkshire, North East, South West and Tayside. Respondents from Forth Valley and West were invited to take part, but either declined or were not available in the fieldwork period. The sample included some respondents who were originally from another country (including locations in Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia and Africa). Of those who were in paid employment at the time of interview, this included a mix of people in part-time and full-time roles. Reflecting the inclusion of respondents from a spread of years of FSS provision, respondents had been involved with the FSS service for various lengths of time ranging from three months to three years. Many of the respondents interviewed were still receiving support from FSS, even if this was limited to still being in contact with their key worker every few weeks as part of the 'in work support' offer. Five were classified as 'early leavers'; that is, they left the service before the end of the 12 month pre-employment support period<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> This classification was based on sample information received from the Scottish Government

**Table 1:** Respondents interviewed by cohort, demographics and characteristics of interest

Characteristic	Wave 3 2020 Cohort	Wave 4 2021/22 Cohort	Total
Gender: Male	3	8	11
Gender: Female	3	6	9
Age: 16 – 24	1	2	3
Age: 25 - 34	2	2	4
Age: 35 – 49	3	7	10
Age: 50 or over	-	3	3
Education <sup>6</sup> : Level 8+ e.g. Degree or above	3	5	8
Education: Levels 6 – 8 e.g. Highers/HNC	1	3	4
Education: Level 5 or below e.g. National 5 or below (including unknown)	2	6	8
Working status: In employment	4	7	11
Working status: Not in employment	2	7	9
Minority ethnic groups	2	5	7
White ethnic groups	4	9	13
Disability or long-term health condition*	4	10	14
Parent of dependent child/ren	3	6	9
Priority family	3	6	9
Total	6	14	20

\*Disabilities and long-term health conditions included mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety, physical conditions such as arthritis resulting in reduced mobility or chronic pain, and learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

<sup>6</sup> [Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework](#) provides more information on mainstream Scottish Qualifications

## 3. Prior experience of work search and unemployment

### 3.1 Working history & job search experiences

Respondents were asked to describe their working history and whether they were actively looking for a job prior to joining FSS. Several respondents reported that they had previously been working in the hospitality sector, often in short stints. In some of these cases, respondents had been made redundant because their employer went bankrupt, sometimes linked with the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Others had a history of casual, lower skilled work such as working in farming or fishing, working in warehousing, answering phones, working as a porter or doing factory work<sup>7</sup>. Often these were seasonal or short-term jobs; these respondents had had intermittent employment histories as a result. A small number of respondents had previously worked in higher-skilled occupations such as law, accounting and real estate, with two respondents previously working in a higher-skilled occupation in a foreign country. Some respondents were long-term unemployed.

Many respondents had been actively looking for work prior to joining FSS, searching for varying lengths of time ranging from a couple of months to ten years. A couple of respondents were returning from a career break taken due to having caring responsibilities or having been on disability benefits, while some were returning to work after having been signed off due to an illness. In connection with the high cost of childcare and the lack of accommodating schedules, many respondents who were parents had been out of work in order to care for their children. A common difficulty was respondents struggling to find a job that was compatible with childcare.

“I didn't want a desk job any more...I wanted something that would be flexible for the kids at school.... to pick them up.”

FSS Participant, Glasgow

Respondents had been searching for work with varying levels of intensity: some described searching for jobs online every day, while others applied to jobs sporadically and without much motivation, linked to an awareness that they were not qualified for some of the positions available. One individual mentioned they were unable to find permanent work specifically due to their lack of training and qualifications. Some respondents had been trying to leave the industry they were working in previously, as they were looking for a different work environment and greater flexibility.

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<sup>7</sup> The reference to lower skilled roles is based on the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) standard Occupational Classification Hierarchy](#)

### 3.2 Type of work respondents were seeking when joining FSS

Respondents were asked what sort of roles or types of jobs they were looking for at the point of joining FSS. Many respondents were searching for a position with flexible hours to fit around caring responsibilities (this was common among respondents who belonged to a 'priority family' group) or to promote a good work-life balance.

"I didn't want a 9-5 job...I'm a single mum so I wanted to be working in a flexible manner."

FSS Participant, Glasgow

Some respondents were looking for part-time work because they had a physical or mental health condition which meant that they felt unable to work full-time, at least in the immediate term.

"First I was looking at part-time to see how I coped [...] if I managed to do that then I could do more hours and ease myself into it."

FSS Participant, Lanarkshire

Respondents were split between wanting to change directions in their career and look for a job that fitted with their previous experience. The former group often wanted to leave the profession or industry they had been in before, for example teaching, hospitality or retail. There was a range of reasons for this, including being physically unable to continue in their profession, needing to find flexible work to fit around childcare responsibilities and simply not wanting to work in the industry anymore.

"I don't want to be a chef anymore...it's not fun anymore."

FSS Participant, North East

Alternatively, respondents were drawn towards a specific profession (e.g. office administration, healthcare, joinery).

"I wanted to give back to the community and I wanted to help people [in health and social care]."

FSS Participant, Glasgow

There was a mix of working conditions that respondents were seeking - some indicated they were looking for a job which would allow them to be active, rather than sitting at a desk all day, while others were looking for a sedentary job because they had an injury or a physical health condition. One individual was specifically looking for a low-stress job to protect their mental health. One individual expressed that they specifically wanted a position which would allow them to work from home.

Looking for a job in their local area was important to many respondents:

- some did not drive and would therefore need to use public transport, so the location of their work needed to be convenient to them

- one referenced childcare responsibilities, as they would need to be able to pick up their child from school
- another wanted to work locally to remain close to their family

Finally, a couple of respondents indicated that they were looking for any kind of job at all, either because they were desperate for any paid work or because they wanted to gain some experience of being in employment.

“Something to get on my CV – it might not be my cup of tea, but I'll do it.”  
FSS Participant, Glasgow

### 3.3 Barriers to employment prior to joining FSS

Respondents were asked what main difficulties they faced in trying to find work before joining FSS. Several common difficulties emerged.

#### 3.3.1 Lack of suitable jobs

Many respondents felt there were no or few jobs available that met their needs. Either in their chosen sector or industry, or in their local area.

“It's very hard in a rural area for a man to get a job - only retail - and there's no jobs out there.”  
FSS Participant, South West

Furthermore, some respondents noted that Covid-19 had reduced the number of jobs available. This particularly affected respondents working in the hospitality sector<sup>8</sup>. One individual noted that after Covid-19 restrictions were lifted, people who were made redundant during lockdown were given priority upon re-hiring, making it difficult for them to find a job. Several respondents were unable to find a job with enough flexibility to fit around their caring responsibilities, while others struggled to find a position that would be suitable given their disability or health condition.

“90% of the roles I was looking at I wouldn't be able to do [due to a health condition], it took my options down quite a lot.”  
FSS Participant, Lanarkshire

Some respondents were unable to find stable work, having previously relied on labour-intensive, seasonal work which was no longer physically tenable for them or which did not offer sufficient hours.

#### 3.3.2 Transport difficulties

Transport was a common barrier for respondents in finding work before FSS. This included the inability to drive, either because they didn't have a driving licence and/or access to a car. This meant they were unable to travel long distances to go to work and were unable to juggle work and childcare, for instance they would be unable to pick their children up from school in time. This also meant the number of jobs available to respondents was much smaller, as they had to focus on jobs

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<sup>8</sup> Eight of the twenty respondents we spoke to had previous experience working in hospitality.

within walking distance or rely on public transport to get to work. The public transport available where respondents lived could be unreliable or severely limited, especially in more rural locations, limiting respondents' job options further.

Some respondents added that some employers require that job applicants have a driving licence, further limiting the availability of viable job opportunities.

### **3.3.3 Childcare provision**

Difficulties finding childcare provision either for children of pre-school age, or before and after school provision was also a barrier for some respondents. A lack of local childcare options in general was exacerbated by difficulties finding childcare that was affordable for what respondents could earn should they find employment.

“It was quite hard to find a job because nurseries are very, very expensive.”  
FSS Participant, Lanarkshire

“[Affordable] childcare doesn't really exist in this part of Scotland.”  
FSS Participant, North East

“[The lack of affordable childcare], I think that's the biggest issue for everybody.”  
FSS Participant, Lanarkshire

Limited hours of childcare services also presented difficulties, with available hours not always matching up to the working hours required by job vacancies. Difficulties with childcare was a particular concern for lone parents. This issue sometimes intersected with transport difficulties, in that respondents needed to collect children from school or nursery, but getting there from a workplace in time was not always possible. For example, one respondent had previously used a taxi to travel from work to collect their child, as the timings of the local bus meant they would have been too late, but this was not feasible long-term.

### **3.3.4 Previous economic inactivity**

Respondents who had previously taken time out of the workforce felt that the 'gap' in their working history was often a barrier when applying for jobs.

“Mainly my CV that's holding me back because there's a gap.”  
FSS Participant, Glasgow

They had usually taken this time out to care for their children or elderly relatives, or due to illness or disability.

### **3.3.5 Inadequate experience or training**

Many respondents struggled to find a job because they did not have the right experience or training for the jobs they were applying for. Many had worked in hospitality before the pandemic and as the supply of hospitality jobs dwindled, they struggled to enter a different sector without the required experience or qualifications.



For those who had been economically inactive for a long time, experience or qualifications they did have was sometimes from some years ago, and could be perceived as 'out of date'.

“Mainly my CV that's holding me back because there's a gap. [...] Obviously they're going to give someone who's more qualified and younger!”

FSS Participant, Glasgow

### **3.3.6 Previously working overseas**

Related to experience and qualifications, some respondents had received their training and qualifications in a foreign country, and these were not recognised in Scotland. For example, one individual was qualified as an accountant overseas but their certificates were not recognised in Scotland. They also needed to gain an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) qualification.

“Why do I have to do it when I can speak, read and write English...”

FSS Participant, Glasgow

Similarly, work experience gained abroad (for example in the legal sector) was not always recognised in Scotland. This was often the key barrier to employment for these respondents, and sometimes resulted in them having to apply for roles below their educational or skill levels. Respondents reporting this issue in the research were all from minority ethnic groups.

### **3.3.7 Lack of confidence**

Many respondents lacked confidence in looking for and applying for jobs. For example, one individual did not know where to start with their job search because it had been a long time since they had last looked for a job. Others had been job hunting for some time without success, which had affected their self-confidence, especially if they were making many job applications and getting no response. Another mentioned their Asperger's tended to make them 'clam up' in interpersonal situations, including interviews.

“Had a lot of confidence issues [...] I don't do well with people a lot of the time. Most of my job-seeking would end at the interview stage - if I got one.”

FSS Participant, Highlands and Islands

### **3.3.8 Mental health difficulties**

Some respondents mentioned their mental health in the context of difficulties in finding work before FSS. This was often linked with confidence, with those experiencing mental health difficulties often citing a decline in their self-confidence, or feeling apprehensive about job applications or interviews. Some respondents had experienced depression or anxiety, which meant they struggled with motivation or the organisational skills to apply for jobs. Indeed, research has shown that depression can impact concentration, clarity of thought and decision-making,

suggesting it can impact the ability to search for and apply for jobs<sup>9</sup>. A couple of respondents specified that they had developed anxiety during the Covid-19 pandemic, and for one individual with a health condition, the requirement to shield had prompted anxiety about their vulnerability.

### 3.3.9 Covid-19 Pandemic

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was felt by some respondents during their job search, such as fewer jobs being advertised, being unable to access services face to face, and pausing their job search, either because they perceive the general messaging to the public to be not not go out of the house unnecessarily, or because they felt it was futile.

“Over Covid, they told us not to do any job searching...to not leave the house even...and after Covid it was harder to find jobs.”  
FSS Participant, Glasgow

It also exacerbated existing barriers. For example, local businesses closing down during the pandemic added to already challenging local job markets. Respondents reported that when things began to re-open, those who were unemployed prior to the pandemic had to compete for jobs with those who had lost theirs in the pandemic, and therefore had more recent experience.

### 3.3.10 Other issues raised

There were several other difficulties in finding work mentioned by individual respondents. These included lack of computer or internet access and suspected discrimination due to age or ethnicity from employers. Those who had more recently moved to Scotland raised language barriers and/or a lack of knowledge about job-hunting in the UK. Another difficulty was the length of time some applications took, reducing the number of applications a respondent could get through each week.

## 3.4 Challenges encountered in previous jobs

Respondents (who had previously been in work) were asked whether they had experienced any challenges in former jobs that made it difficult to continue in that job.

Firstly, many respondents found it difficult or impossible to continue working in their previous job because their physical health was worsening or because they became ill. For example, one individual had pneumonia and was no longer physically able to do their job, while another had muscle tears which made their job as a porter difficult.

“[After diagnosis]...Everything changed and I had to rethink my entire life, especially career paths.”  
FSS Participant, Highlands

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<sup>9</sup> [Mind \(National Association for Mental Health\)](#) website lists symptoms of depression.

Secondly, a few respondents mentioned that their mental health was negatively affected by their work. This was linked to personality clashes with co-workers or employers, a high-stress work environment, working hours and shift patterns, a lack of support provided by employers and a poor work-life balance.

“I worked in a canteen. Working under the head chef was a hard job... they were very demanding, [the head chef] had an ego problem... You were not allowed to have a bad day, you just had to get on with it.”

FSS Participant, East

One individual mentioned that their autism made it difficult for them to be in social situations for too long. They felt overwhelmed after a two-week training course at a call handling centre and did not progress with the job.

Other challenges mentioned by respondents included having a job that was incompatible with childcare responsibilities, unstable employment (for example, zero-hours contracts), getting paid late multiple times by their employer and not working in their preferred industry.

### **3.5 Experience of other employment or skills support services**

Respondents were asked whether they had received help from any other employment or skills support services prior to FSS. Many had not, but among those who had, the Jobcentre was the most common service used.

Support respondents described receiving from the Jobcentre included help with CVs, guidance in searching for jobs online, help to fill in application forms in English, and access to computers and the internet. Experiences of the Jobcentre were mixed, with some finding the support helpful, and others finding it less helpful. Those who found it helpful praised the kindness of the staff and the support with CVs and applications, but others had hoped for more support looking for jobs that fit their particular needs, or saw it as more of an obligation they had to undertake to receive their benefits.

A couple of respondents expressed that they were grateful the Jobcentre had directed them to FSS.

A few other services were used, with varying levels of helpfulness to respondents:

- a local charitable organisation supporting young people with education, training and employability skills; this service was considered helpful, particularly due to the workshops and days in industry provided
- one individual described a service similar to FSS focused on helping autistic people; they found it very helpful because of the care shown by staff and the bespoke, individualised nature of the support

- an employability service (outwith their FSS delivery): this service was considered helpful, particularly because it contacted employers and sent CVs directly, and due to the confidence-building courses offered
- one participated was referred by their GP to an NHS confidence building course which they found to be very useful

### 3.5 Effects of not being in employment

Once respondents had shared their experiences of searching for work before FSS, they were asked to share how not being in paid employment had affected them, including any impacts on their mental health, family life and finances.

Most respondents had experienced a negative impact on their mental health from not being in paid employment. Many had experienced feelings of depression, often compounded by feelings of social isolation and loneliness. Being rejected or not hearing back on job applications made respondents lose confidence and feel like they weren't 'good enough'. One individual remarked that being in paid employment is a big part of a person's identity in our society, which contributed to them feeling 'useless' when unemployed. Many respondents described feeling bored and lacking in motivation. One individual mentioned feeling guilty for being on government benefits. Respondents generally felt unsettled by having a lot of time on their hands and felt their life was on hold, as they could not make future plans. A couple of respondents had experienced mental health breakdowns during this time, and some described a negative impact on their relationships.

"I think not being in paid employment and the pandemic together made me feel rather useless [...] it felt a bit isolating."

FSS Participant, North East

"Good days and bad days, the boredom gets me...I've had a couple of bouts of depression."

FSS Participant, Lanarkshire

Some respondents described a physical health impact in connection with the mental health impact they experienced (e.g. weight or hair loss, becoming less physically active).

Another impact from being out of paid employment related to financial consequences. Respondents described serious impacts like almost having their house repossessed, as well as day-to-day impacts like being unable to pay for hobbies or go on holiday. Most of the respondents interviewed who were in a 'priority family' mentioned experiencing financial issues.

"When I was working I was able to take the kids on holiday [...] You have to have a lot of money to go. [...] I'm sick of having to say wait until I get paid to get [my kids] something they want or need."

FSS Participant, East

Some respondents noted they had to rely on family members or a partner to support them financially. The financial impact was particularly strong for respondents who had family abroad: one individual mentioned being unable to send remittances to their family, another mentioned being unable to visit their loved ones abroad. A few respondents did not describe experiencing a financial impact from being out of paid employment which they attributed to receiving Jobseekers' Allowance or Disability Allowance.

## 4. Experience of support

This chapter explores how respondents originally joined the FSS service, the types of support they received and whether they found this support helpful or not and why. It also outlines why some types of support were not taken up, why early leavers left the service, any support respondents would have liked to have received and exploring any in-work support if this was provided.

### 4.1 Joining Fair Start Scotland and expectations of support

Most often, respondents were referred to the FSS service by their Job Coach at the Jobcentre. In other cases, respondents became aware of the service through word of mouth, social media adverts, an online search, a job fair, a family support service or an employability service provider.

Expectations about what the FSS service could offer varied across respondents. Some simply expected FSS to help them find a job by supporting them in the job search process, including providing help with CVs. Some respondents expected FSS to help them complete relevant training courses and gain qualifications. One individual mentioned they thought FSS would help them develop their soft skills, for instance with telephone and interview skills as well as with overall confidence. Some respondents thought FSS would be able to help them with a career change and 'broaden [their] horizons' by pointing them to new job opportunities. These respondents wanted to change jobs for a variety of reasons including no longer enjoying working in their current role or industry, wanting to become self-employed and wanting to find more stable employment.

"I've been doing this now [working in hospitality] for 27 years. so I didn't have a clue what else I could do, where else I could go..."  
FSS Participant, Tayside

Indeed, another common expectation was that FSS would be able to help respondents move into more permanent work. Other expectations of the service included help in dealing with mental health issues, help with IT, English language help for job applications, advice on how to combine work with childcare, intensive one-on-one support and for FSS to advocate for them to employers.

Having received support from the service, some said they would now recommend it to others, or have done already.

"I would definitely recommend it. I think it's great [...] especially because you [...] aren't charged for it and it's very inclusive."  
FSS Participant, Tayside

### 4.2 Types of pre-employment support respondents received

From their responses to the [quantitative phone survey](#), most of the respondents interviewed had received help with job search activities and applications, had a dedicated key worker or employability advisor assigned to them and had one to one

appointments with regular support and contact. Around half recalled benefitting from the development of a personalised Employment Action Plan.

Responses from the phone survey also indicate that some of the respondents had also received other types of support, including help with managing finances, access to work tasters or work experience and being provided with a laptop or tablet. Further details about pre-employment support received emerged in the qualitative interviews. In terms of managing finances, one individual had received guidance in applying for a £200 government benefit during Covid-19 which they were previously unaware of. They were also provided with vouchers for household essentials like electricity bills as they were struggling to cope on benefits alone. Some reported receiving financial assistance from FSS to pay for their travel to job interviews or travel to their job in the period before they received their first paycheck.

One individual described receiving specialist support for a mental health condition through FSS. This individual was assigned to a different key worker after expressing they were having issues with their mental health; they assumed this was because this new key worker was more experienced in this area. Another individual had received support for a physical health condition. One individual had received help with an addiction.

A few described receiving other types of help on top of the types of support mentioned above, for example one individual described dedicated help with interview skills or confidence-building. A couple of respondents described support akin to pastoral care, including being invited to come into the office for coffee and a biscuit if they needed to, or having staff reach out and check on their wellbeing (including via text message). Finally, one individual expressed the desire to become self-employed and was consequently assigned a different key worker within a different department dedicated to self-employment.

### **4.3 Most helpful types of support**

Respondents highlighted many different types of support as being particularly helpful to them. These can broadly be categorised as practical (direct) help in applying for specific jobs, and more indirect help with knowledge of job-searching, and emotional or psychological support, to develop respondents' overall abilities to find work. The impacts of support received are detailed further in [chapter 5. Outcomes & Impacts](#).

#### **4.3.1 Practical (direct) help in applying for jobs**

Firstly, many respondents found that the help FSS provided in creating or updating their CV was helpful. This included advice on what areas of experience to make the focus and how to account for different circumstances such as gaps or employment abroad, as well as improving formatting and layout. A couple of respondents also mentioned assistance with formal written English, and text editor ('MS Word') processing.

“They got all of my experience [abroad] and down here in one place [on my CV].”

FSS Participant, North East

Another described encouragement from FSS to ‘sell themselves’ more in their CV, with FSS reviewing drafts of their CV and providing feedback on how to make improvements. One respondent described receiving advice on how to tailor their CV to target different types of jobs and industries, whilst another praised the CV support from FSS as ‘a lot more professional’ than previous support they had received in college.

“Completely different with FSS - a lot more professional.”

FSS Participant, Highlands and Islands

Another practical way in which FSS helped was by sending respondents links to relevant job postings. Respondents found this helped them apply to more jobs than they would have otherwise, both by the regularity of the emails they received and by increasing the scope of their search.

“The emails were really handy. I'd go into these jobsites and apply for a job.”

FSS Participant, South West

On a related note, respondents found it helpful that the help provided was tailored to their wants and needs. For example, several respondents found it helpful that FSS had directed them to training courses that were relevant to the specific type of work they wanted. The training gained through FSS in general was considered helpful – respondents highlighted transferable skills training and interview preparation in particular.

Respondents also cited other more direct ways in which FSS had been helpful. These included FSS organising interviews with an employer for a participant, communicating with the Home Office on a participant's behalf, supporting a individual with a grant application and providing financial assistance for travel. For example, one respondent had received a job offer shortly before joining FSS but was unable to accept as they could not afford transport to travel to and from work. As they were still unemployed, they joined FSS thinking they would need to look for alternative opportunities. However, FSS were able to support them financially with transport to enable them to take up the role they have previously been offered<sup>10</sup>.

#### **4.3.2 Developing job search skills**

Another aspect of support which respondents found helpful was how FSS helped them develop their knowledge of job searching. In particular, respondents appreciated being directed to specific websites (e.g. Indeed) rather than just being told to search for job postings online, as one individual had been previously advised by another service.

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<sup>10</sup> Please note that according to eligibility rules for taking part in FSS, participants must not be in any paid work at the point of referral



“[I didn’t know] which websites to choose from.”  
FSS Participant, Glasgow

Respondents also found the support around job applications themselves helpful – for instance, one individual noted they had received guidance which helped them understand application forms and the questions that were asked better, while another appreciated that someone had checked through her job applications.

Furthermore, one individual was looking for a job that was accessible by bus or walking because they needed to be able to pick up their children from school. FSS showed them how to find out where specific jobs were based so that they could apply to jobs fitting this criteria. Another individual was concerned that they would be discriminated against due to their age, but their FSS key worker assured them that employers are prohibited from doing this, and this knowledge helped the respondent to feel more confident about making applications.

“I thought the age thing would have an effect but FSS reassured me no no no they can’t do that.”  
FSS Participant, Lanarkshire

Finally, an individual who had recently been diagnosed with a physical health condition thought they wouldn’t be able to continue working, but FSS showed them several jobs which would be suitable for them which was considered very reassuring and helpful.

#### **4.3.3 Emotional, social and wellbeing support**

Many respondents indicated that their single point of contact (key worker) and the regular one-to-one appointments they had with them was the most helpful aspect of the service they received from FSS.

“I just knew there was someone there.... I just knew there was some looking out for me.... It wasn't just on me.”  
FSS Participant, Tayside

Respondents’ interactions with their key worker had a range of benefits: their key worker reassured them with regards to their future prospects, and pushed them to go beyond their comfort zone in encouraging them to apply for a wider range of job vacancies. Respondents also highlighted the kindness of staff and how they caring they were. The feeling of being valued and having someone else see potential in them was inspiring. The combined effect of these actions was to boost respondent confidence and motivation.

“The 1-2-1 support was really good. It's just nice having someone that’s continually following your progress, checking in once a week. Nice having someone to talk to. [...] I have a much more positive feeling when it comes to

looking for work. They've shown me I've got more value than I thought I had [...] boosted my confidence.”

FSS Participant, Highlands and Islands

“The people I talked to were genuinely nice people - wanting you to move forward in your life.”

FSS Participant, South West

“I think it's beneficial if you have a dedicated person or so checking on you, it makes you feel quite valued.”

FSS Participant, Tayside

One individual appreciated how FSS accepted and showed understanding of their circumstances when they explained that their mental health was fragile and they didn't feel ready to go back to work. They were grateful to keep receiving check-ins despite this. Another individual was struggling after having been diagnosed with a chronic physical health condition, and appreciated how FSS helped them change their outlook to a more positive one.

“It took me some time to come to terms with it [...] FSS helped me understand it wasn't such a big deal and changing jobs wasn't so bad. When you're alone, you build things up in your head [...] It takes an outside voice to say it's not that bad.”

FSS Participant, Highlands and Islands

Some respondents emphasised the social aspect of the FSS service they received as particularly helpful to them. Respondents enjoyed speaking to people with similar experiences. One individual found group sessions 'therapeutic' as they helped them open up.

#### **4.4 In-work support**

Most respondents who were in employment at the point of the interview had received phone calls, emails or texts from FSS, checking on their progress in their new job and more generally on their wellbeing. These check-ins varied in frequency and ranged from once a week when respondents first started their job to once every six weeks. The check-ins became less frequent over time and were gradually phased out when respondents didn't feel they needed the support anymore. Respondents generally found these check-ins to be helpful – some had stayed in contact with FSS to explore training courses or look for new avenues of employment. Even when contact stopped or became less frequent, respondents knew they could reach out to FSS in the future if they needed support.

“It was very important to know they were there if I needed an advocate on my health.”

FSS Participant, Highlands and Islands

A small number of respondents had received financial support from FSS to pay for travel expenses to their workplace within the first few months. This was

appreciated, with one individual noting it would have been tough on their family and the food budget without this help.

#### 4.5 Less helpful types of support

Many respondents said they considered all the support they received from FSS to be helpful. However, other respondents mentioned a range of services (e.g. online training courses) that were not helpful to them because they felt they already had the relevant skills or knowledge. This included knowing how to look for and apply to jobs, how to update a CV, how to handle IT and how to communicate well. One individual who had received support around self-employment found this to be unhelpful because it was too basic and designed for people just starting their career.

A few respondents had received support that was not tailored to their needs. For example, they were sent links to jobs which were too far away to be viable for them, or they were given advice around part-time work which was not their goal. One individual found a group session designed to motivate respondents 'off-putting'. They attributed this to the mismatch between what the course offered and their needs as an autistic individual. They also felt they had to attend as it was perceived to be mandatory. Another found an interview skills training delivered by Zoom to be unhelpful as they were uncomfortable using technology and felt 'camera shy'.

A few felt that the support provided by the key worker could have been improved. One individual was frustrated by the fact that their key worker kept changing (they had had three key workers in their time at FSS); repeatedly explaining their situation to new people made them nervous. Other respondents had highlighted the continuity of their relationship with their key worker as a strength of the service, so the absence of this diminished the impact of help offered by the key worker(s).

For some respondents appointments felt too rushed, with one respondent speculating that key workers' caseloads were too high to allow for longer appointments. A few felt that their appointments with key workers would have been better delivered face-to-face, although typically the pandemic was the main barrier to this.

"The time that they spent with you, they always seemed to be under pressure time wise. [This] restricted the amount of 1:1 support they could give."  
FSS Participant, Lanarkshire

Another respondent felt that they would have benefited if their key worker (or another contact provided by FSS) had experience 'first hand' in their industry of interest, as they felt the key worker did not have enough understanding of the unique aspects of their situation.

"Very rarely did they say something that I had not seen, heard and done in my professional career."  
FSS Participant, Glasgow

## 4.6 Support respondents would have wanted

Respondents were asked if there was any support they would have liked to have received, but did not. They were also asked why they thought this type of support would have helped them.

Firstly, some respondents would have wanted more extensive work experience and apprenticeship options. They felt this did not form a big enough part of the service, as for some it could have offered the opportunity to discover a new career path.

“To experience something in a different industry [...] to dip my toes and see what's out there.”

FSS Participant, Tayside

Secondly, another common type of support respondents would have wanted more of was training, particularly training specific to their strengths, needs or aspirations. For instance, one individual with a physical health condition would have wanted to develop new skills in management, as they felt they had a strength in this area and they wanted to get a job that wouldn't be so physically demanding.

A couple of respondents expressed they would have wanted to receive specific forms of financial support from FSS, namely to help them with childcare costs (via direct funding and information on childcare options available to them) and support to manage their debt (through additional advice).

Other types of support respondents would have liked to receive included support in getting a driving licence, and being put in touch with someone experienced in the industry they were interested in to learn more about whether it might be a good fit for them. Others with particular needs had hoped for more tailored support, for example a respondent in a later stage of their career who was already experienced at job searching, and an autistic respondent who would have liked support tailored to their disability.

## 4.7 Why respondents left early

Respondents who had left the service without achieving a job outcome and before the 12 - 18 month period of pre-employment support had elapsed<sup>11</sup> were asked why they had left early. Respondents had their own individualised reasons for leaving, however a common theme was not feeling ready/able to find (more) work.

One individual was content with their part-time job even though it was under 16 hours per week<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> The classification as 'early leaver' was based on sample information received from the Scottish Government.

<sup>12</sup> Please note that the aim of FSS is to help individuals start on a job where the job outcome is defined as working 16 or more hours per week. A participant who is working under 16 hours per week is still eligible to receive the pre-employment support and well as elements of in-work support

One individual did not feel ready to return to work because of their poor mental health at that time. They were not resolved in wanting to find employment at that stage and felt they were 'taking someone's place' in continuing to receive help from FSS (though they noted FSS had never given them this impression).

One individual reported they were found 'unfit to work' in a mental health assessment initiated by the Jobcentre.

One individual needed to care for a relative.

"One minute I was happy to do it, the next minute, I can't do it."  
FSS Participant, South West

One individual had not consciously chosen to leave the service but had stopped receiving calls.

"They used to call me and then it stopped.... due to the pandemic? No response from them or no idea why..."  
FSS Participant, Glasgow

Among those who had chosen to leave the service, it was clear that their discussions with their key worker had informed this choice. For these individuals, their involvement with FSS had improved their self-awareness and ability to assess what the right course of action was for them at this stage in their lives.

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to help them progress to increase their hours to 16 hours or more and to support them towards achieving sustainable employment.

## 5. Outcomes & impacts

This chapter discusses outcomes and impacts for FSS participants. First it looks at their employment status since taking part in the service. The chapter then explores the impacts on job search skills, the overall benefits of participating, and effects on wellbeing and wider life.

### 5.1 Employment outcomes

Some respondents were in work at the point of interview. The majority were in relatively lower skilled roles<sup>13</sup>, with jobs including call centre assistants, care support workers, administration assistant and a security guard. Some respondents reported they were happy with their roles, either because they felt it was a stepping stone to progress in their chosen sector, or because it matched well with their other circumstances such as health or childcare needs.

One individual who was specifically looking to get into the healthcare sector, was now working as a support worker, and hoped to work for the NHS in the future.

“I wanted to give back to the community and I wanted to help people... I didn't want a 9-5 job.”  
FSS Participant, Glasgow

Another individual had been diagnosed with a health condition that limited their ability to do physical work or stand for long periods, meaning their previous job was no longer suitable. They were pleased to get a job in a call centre, as they would be able to work sitting down, and wouldn't require any physical exertion.

“Anything that involved sitting down!”  
FSS Participant, Highlands and Islands

Some respondents were less happy with the type of work they were doing, but they were usually relieved to no longer be out of work. Some wanted to work in a particular sector but struggled to find vacancies in their area, or they did not have the required qualifications or experience.

“It was not what I was looking for but just took the job and to get out of the benefits system [...] so I'm not going to the Jobcentre [...] [it gave] me confidence... Ok I'm working!”  
FSS Participant, North East

There was a mix of full-time and part-time arrangements for those respondents in work. Most working part-time were happy with this arrangement as it suited their childcare or health needs, however one individual said they would prefer more hours but it just was not possible with school pick up times.

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<sup>13</sup> The reference to lower skilled roles is based on the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) standard Occupational Classification Hierarchy](#)

Some of those who took part in the interviews remained unemployed after receiving support from FSS. This was more likely for disabled respondents who were interviewed, and several respondents identified their health as the reason for continuing to be out of work. Some had experienced a deterioration in their health during the period of FSS support and were no longer looking for work at all. This included respondents who reported being or were in the process of being 'signed off' long-term sick, or had taken the decision themselves to focus on their health.

Others were still searching for work, but their disability or health condition made job searching more difficult. For example one respondent's health condition meant they were restricted in terms of the types of jobs they could actually do, whilst another had started training for a job but had had to stop because it proved too difficult with their disability.

"I was very limited for what I could look for [...] It was frustrating, I know I'm capable of doing things [...] but due to my condition I want to do things but I can't."

FSS Participant, Lanarkshire

Other reasons for respondents not being employed reflected the barriers that respondents reported experiencing prior to joining the FSS service. These included a lack of driving licence, a lack of public transport, not having qualifications or certificates, an inability to transfer professional qualifications or certificates gained abroad and a lack of biometric identification (requested by employers to prove the right to work in the UK).

These all narrowed the number of suitable opportunities. The circumstances of the local job market also continued to play a role – one individual lived in an area where this fluctuated hugely throughout the seasons due to the tourist trade. They had managed to gain a couple of periods of short-term seasonal employment, but were now looking for employment again.

## **5.2 Effect on job search skills and soft skills**

Respondents were asked what effect they felt FSS had had on their job searching skills. Those who felt FSS had improved their job search skills most commonly mentioned improvements to their CV writing skills. One respondent specifically attributed their current employment to the support they had with their CV, as it made them stand out in the application process. This respondent was a single parent from a minority ethnic background who had moved to Scotland a few years prior to joining FSS. They were often asked by potential employers if they had prior experience working in the UK, which they did not. Their qualifications from overseas were not recognised and they had uncertainties about how applying for jobs worked in the UK. They had applied to many jobs previously and not heard back.

“They got all of my experience in [country] and down here in one place [in my CV].”

FSS Participant, North East

Several respondents also described improvements to their general job searching skills, for example by FSS directing them to a range of websites advertising jobs. Others felt they now had a better idea of what they were looking for in a role, and how to spot these aspects when searching.

“Definitely benefited me. It helped me narrow down what exactly I should be looking for in things that I was actually interested in.”

FSS Participant, Tayside

Another described attending a seminar on finding hidden jobs that are not well advertised – this helped them get a summer job as it gave them the confidence to approach local businesses directly about opportunities.

Others said their job application or interview skills had improved as a result of FSS support. The respondent above attended a FSS interview skills session, and they used what they had learnt from this in the interview for a seasonal job they went on to get. They received feedback from their employer that theirs was one of the best interviews they had seen lately. Another described attending practical training and a Q & A session on interviews, which boosted their confidence. One respondent mentioned receiving support filling in job application forms, and felt they had gained a better understanding of what was needed for these.

“Some of the training from FSS was really really useful and I did notice a change in my demeanor from when I started.”

FSS Participant, Highlands and Islands

“[It] made a huge difference. I'm so much more at ease in job hunting than I was before.”

FSS Participant, Highlands and Islands

Respondents who felt FSS had not led to an improvement in their job search skills tended to say this was because the support offered to them was not relevant or tailored to them. For example one respondent felt they were good at looking for jobs online and was hoping for FSS to give training in new skills to broaden the opportunities open to them, but this was not offered. Another was offered support with their CV, but nothing needed to be done to improve it. One respondent had wanted support with interview skills but had not received this, whilst a few had struggled with the remote sessions during the pandemic and felt this had limited their ability to learn.

“If it's just how to do an interview and fill in an application, it's not much help.”

FSS Participant, Glasgow



Respondents were also asked about any changes to their soft skills. These are non-technical workplace skills, such as communication, time management and problem solving. They generally found it hard to identify improvements to their soft skills, however improved confidence was frequently mentioned by respondents in other areas of the interview, suggesting this is the largest soft skill impact of the service.

“It did give me the motivation to apply for things and the confidence.”  
FSS Participant, North East

“Boost your confidence and reduce your stress.”  
FSS Participant, Glasgow

A few respondents did identify soft skills they felt had improved. One respondent said that the support from FSS encouraged them to be more confident and value themselves more, and that their improvements in these areas have also led to an improvement in their social skills. Another said they had more confidence when interacting with managers in their new employment, as a result of learning more about body language through FSS – they find it easier to look them in the eye and speak confidently. Another had done an FSS session on problem solving, and had found this beneficial, whilst one highlighted the improvement to their digital skills.

“[...] using your brain, helping you think outside the box.”  
FSS Participant, Glasgow

Similar to job search skills, some respondents felt there was no effect on their soft skills as this was not something they needed to improve or focus on.

## 5.3 Overall benefits and drawbacks

Respondents were asked about the overall impact of taking part in FSS, including benefits and any drawbacks.

### 5.3.1 Overall Benefits

The most commonly mentioned impact was increased confidence and motivation in job searching. Some described how the supportive nature of FSS encouraged them to persevere when they'd previously found job hunting quite disheartening. Others described increased confidence, feeling more at ease, or a change in their demeanour.

“You get a bit lacklustre [after rejections]. They [FSS] boosted my confidence and my self worth.”  
FSS Participant, Lanarkshire

Linked to this was the personalised nature of the support, with respondents praising the way the service and key workers adapted to their circumstances, needs or preferences. This included key workers understanding the individual barriers to employment respondents faced, as well as the difficulties being out of employment

presented<sup>14</sup>. For example, one respondent talked about support specific to their career aspirations, whilst others raised support for their mental health, and the flexible pace of the service as key benefits.

“They’ve been very good at easing me through what was a very difficult time for me [...] Very understanding – [they] didn’t push too hard, then pushed a bit [...] and always very happy when I achieved something.”

FSS Participant, Highlands & Islands

### 5.3.2 Overall Drawbacks

Not all respondents felt that taking part in FSS had helped them - a couple felt the service was not tailored to their circumstances. In one case the respondent found the support very generic and inflexible, and not specific to their needs, which included autism.

“[The mindset felt like]... right we are going to do this, this and this...not really with any feedback from me... if it doesn't work we'll move on [...] [It felt] very superficial and I could not relax.”

FSS Participant, Lanarkshire

As several of the positive respondents praised the individualised support they received, this suggests a need to ensure this approach is applied consistently across the different areas and providers.

Another felt the service did not offer them anything new, as they already knew how to search and apply for jobs, and felt the service might be more suited to younger people who had not yet developed these skills. They also felt their age (over 50) often counted against them with employers, as well as a large gap in their work history due to caring for their parents, challenges they felt younger people would be less likely to face.

Others said that FSS had not benefitted them much, as they had found a job through other means, or had had to leave the service due to personal circumstances.

## 5.4 Influence on wellbeing

Several respondents stated that their improved confidence as a result of the service had positively impacted on their wellbeing. A number described or alluded to low mood, stress, or feelings of depression prior to the service, and how they were now feeling more positive as a result of taking part.

“[I was] moping around the house - I don’t do that anymore!”

FSS Participant, Highlands & Islands

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<sup>14</sup> A full description of barriers to employment and difficulties experienced whilst out of employment can be found in Chapter 2.

For some, being out of work had seriously affected their self-esteem and their outlook on life in general, and the service had helped them regain this.

“I dont feel completely useless like I did at times [...] It's helped me reassess myself.”

FSS Participant, Highlands & Islands

“Having a job and feeling more useful, being able to think about other things as well and how to move forward with my life, before starting the service I was in a bit of a rut”

FSS Participant, North East

This improvement in wellbeing was sometimes attributed by respondents to the support from key workers, or the tailored nature of the service. Respondents described key workers helping their confidence, providing reassurance, keeping them on track and being a listening ear. Several compared the supportive environment and individualised nature of FSS favourably to previous employment support they had received, which had felt more pressurised.

This improvement in wellbeing was more common in those who had moved into employment. However, some who were not currently employed said they felt the service had improved their wellbeing, through helping them understand that there are different employment options open to them than they previously realised. One of them is currently focused on their health, but felt more positive as FSS helped them realise that there are options for people in their situation when they are ready to return to work. The other described how the one-to-one support from their key worker was really valuable in a difficult year for them as they would come away from meetings with their key worker with a more positive outlook on their situation.

Some respondents said taking part in FSS had no effect on their wellbeing. These broadly fell under two reasons already discussed – either their health had deteriorated since beginning the service, or the help offered by FSS was not tailored to their needs.

## 5.5 Influence on wider life

In addition to the benefits to personal wellbeing, respondents often saw positive changes in other areas of their life as a result of taking part in FSS.

Amongst those who had found employment, most noted the improvement to their finances, which had previously been a source of worry for some. One respondent spoke of the relief of knowing the money is now there when the bills need to be paid at the end of the month. Another individual was pleased to now have a more ‘stable’ income, and felt this had a positive impact on the whole family. Some mentioned a positive impact on their family life and relationships now they had a job: one individual said they were more relaxed and this had improved their relationship with their wife and family.

“They helped everything – every way.”  
FSS Participant, East

Other benefits mentioned by respondents as a result of their improved finances included greater independence. One had now been able to get a driving licence, something that had previously proved a barrier to employment and caused difficulties with family life. A respondent with a physical disability reported that they were now able to visit friends, as the money from their new job had enabled them to buy a scooter. Another was doing an online training course as their finances were more stable, to work towards becoming a Mental Healthcare Assistant.

“The confidence that I can still work even though I'm disabled now [...] It was not just the work front - it affected my personal life. [Now] I can afford to have transport of my own [...] It's made me a lot more independent.”  
FSS Participant, Highlands & Islands

As previously, respondents who had not gained employment felt the influence on their wider life was limited, with some saying it had had little impact. However for some taking part in the service had prompted them to address other factors impacting their ability to work. One had decided to step away from looking to work for the time being to focus on their health, whilst another had realised they needed to get a new immigration lawyer to help them get their identity ratified with the Home Office, so that they could get the biometric identity required by most workplaces for those who are not UK citizens.

## 6. Future outlook

This section covers the future aspirations of FSS respondents. To understand the extent to which support from FSS has enabled participants to 1) meet their employment goals and 2) inspired respondents to pursue further career development, during the qualitative interviews, FSS respondents were asked whether they had any short and long-term goals. They were also asked whether any support was required to help achieve these goals. Most of the respondents could describe their goals for the near future, however, a few respondents struggled to think about long-term plans.

### 6.1 Work or education related goals in the next year

Many FSS respondents interviewed expressed some form of work or education related goal that they would like to achieve in the coming year, although this was less frequent among those not in work.

The most commonly expressed goal was to gain some form of qualification. Most of these courses were usually seen as a 'stepping-stone', where the individual could link the education course to a specific career goal, for example, one individual wanted to study for a nursing qualification to become a nurse. Alongside the goals for further education, respondents were also likely to express a desire to save some money to fund their tuition and living expenses. This suggests that some FSS participants have aspirations to find higher 'quality' work beyond their current employment.

Other respondents expressed a desire to develop skills which would improve their employability more generally. For example, one individual wanted to gain a driving licence, and another wanted to develop their IT skills to support their goal of becoming self-employed.

Other work or education related goals mentioned included to get back into (any type of) employment, to gain knowledge and/or experience through volunteering and to get a promotion in their current role.

There were some respondents who had no plans or goals for the future. For some, this related to an overall loss of confidence: for example, one FSS individual who was not in employment expressed that they found it difficult to look ahead to the future, because in their past they have failed in their previous goals. Another FSS individual expressed that they are focused on being present as opposed to looking ahead, because similarly they have had negative experiences in the past.

“Over the next year it's hit and miss for me [...] [I] live on a day to day basis and don't plan for the future.”

FSS Participant, South West

Some felt unable to make specific plans for the future because they continued to face barriers to working<sup>15</sup>. For example, one individual from a priority family, had to leave the service because of an increase in their caring responsibilities and had no short-term plans for the future. Despite this, they expressed a desire to at some point to be able to provide for their family. Other respondents with long-term mental or physical health conditions (but who felt able to work) had continued to struggle to find suitable positions (e.g. part-time hours or accessibility requirements could not be met), so were less likely to express entering employment as a goal.

## 6.2 Long-term work goals

FSS respondents were also asked about their long-term work plans for the future. Most respondents found this question more challenging to answer, with fewer having concrete goals for the longer-term, usually related to uncertainty they felt about how their situation would evolve.

Among those that did have a longer-term goal, the most commonly mentioned was to find suitable employment. This goal was mostly expressed by those who were not currently in employment, however, some respondents who were working also wanted to move positions. Other long-term work related goals mentioned by fewer respondents included keeping a permanent job (after a period of provisional employment), completing an educational course to improve future job prospects and saving some money.

## 6.3 Further support needed to achieve goals

Finally, FSS participants were asked if there was any further support they felt they would need to help them achieve their longer term goals. This line of questioning was left open and did not refer exclusively to support participants felt they would need from FSS. Many FSS respondents who had clear aspirations for the future felt that they required no further employment support from FSS or any other source to help achieve their goals. This could be because they were happy with the level of support they were currently getting from FSS (for those still on the service), or they were confident that they knew which steps to take to achieve their goals independently.

However, there were some respondents who expressed that additional support would be useful in achieving their goals. For example, one individual would have liked more mental health support, as they felt their wellbeing had declined recently.

“Maybe they should have a sort of counsellor at Fair Start Scotland to help people like me who are confused.”

FSS Participant, South West

A couple of respondents expressed that they would benefit from receiving some form of mentorship. This could be from someone who is an expert in their desired

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<sup>15</sup> FSS offers the option for participants to ‘pause’ their journey and resume receiving support from the service at a later date

field, or just a general employability advisor. This would help these respondents to feel more supported and confident moving in a new direction in their career.

“Someone to tell me - someone to guide me to the right work to get into.”  
FSS Participant, Glasgow

Other FSS respondents would like support funding university tuition fees, as they would struggle to study and earn enough money by working to support themselves at the same time. A handful of respondents expressed a desire for further learning and development, for example they would like improved access to courses, (including funding) which develop soft skills such as communication and confidence.

## 7. Participants' reflections

This chapter examines participants' overall reflections on FSS, focusing on what they felt worked well, things that worked less well, and their suggestions for improvements. Whilst participants were speaking about their experiences of FSS in particular, these aspects are likely to be useful considerations for other employability services, including the No One Left Behind approach.

### 7.1 Things that are working well

Many respondents were very pleased with their experience of the service, and said they would recommend the service to others; in fact, a couple had already done so. A few respondents had a less positive experience, but even then some felt the service would be helpful for others, just not in their particular circumstances. The points below cover the common themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis conducted on what participants felt worked well about the service.

1. **Kind and friendly staff.** Respondents praised the staff that worked at FSS as kind, friendly and helpful. This helped put respondents at ease about accessing the service, and meant they were able to build a rapport with their key worker. This encouraged continued engagement with support, and helped respondents' wellbeing at what could be a stressful time.
2. **Supportive environment.** Many respondents praised the supportive nature of the service, whereby individuals were provided with help to address their difficulties finding work, and were encouraged and motivated by their key workers. The voluntary nature of the service was also important here, meaning respondents did not fear sanctions or other impacts to any benefits, and therefore felt more able to discuss their circumstances and ask for help. This environment, where the sole purpose was to support participants in their steps towards employment, also meant participants were more motivated to engage with the service, and could approach their appointments in a positive mindset, rather than view them as an obligation.
3. **Personalised support.** Respondents who were positive about the service had usually experienced support tailored to their needs. For some that was help finding a job that suited their health needs, or in their sector of interest. Several respondents highlighted that the service treated them with dignity, taking the time to understand their individual circumstances, and supporting them across different aspects of their life, not merely focusing on job applications. Some found being able to go at their own pace, and not feeling rushed a real positive – respondents often had low self-confidence or mental health problems as a result of being out of work, and this steady approach helped build back their confidence.
4. **Support with CVs.** This was the type of employability support that respondents found most useful, with one individual directly linking their improved CV to successfully gaining employment. This support was



especially helpful for those who had been out of work for some time or who had career gaps, as well as respondents who were immigrants, had English as a second language, or who had worked overseas.

5. **Practical support.** There were several examples of practical support that proved helpful to respondents. Examples included helping respondents identify benefits they might be eligible for, assisting them with IT skills and financial support to travel to a new job prior to receiving their first salary payment.

## 7.2 Things that worked less well

As mentioned above, the majority of participants were pleased with their experience of the service, however a small number did highlight aspects of the service that they felt worked less well. Due to the small number, this cannot be presented thematically as above, and it should be noted that most of the following were only experienced by one or two people in the sample of 20.

A few participants felt communication from FSS did not work well. A couple had received no contact from FSS for some time, and were not sure why. They found this stressful and were unsure what this meant for their participation in the service.

“[I] feel really disappointed, am I even with them anymore? I have not heard from them in half a year...”

FSS participant, Lanarkshire

“They used to call me and then it stopped...due to the pandemic? No response from them or no idea why...also another stress.”

FSS participant, Glasgow

Another participant, receiving in-work support, experienced communication difficulties when their key worker changed. Their new key worker called at different times to what had been agreed, causing frustration for the participant who was unable to answer due to work.

"She would not make contact when it was agreed they would...She would try to make contact at non agreed times, they were not suitable as I was at work...times had been arranged to fit around my work.”

FSS participant, Tayside

Another had several key workers throughout their time on FSS and found explaining their situation again each time very stressful.

A couple of respondents found engaging with the service online or by telephone difficult. One found a Zoom session difficult as they did not use technology much, and felt very self conscious on camera. Another participant, who had mental health difficulties, had their face to face sessions replaced by phone calls during the pandemic. Whilst they understood the circumstances, they found phone calls stressful and would become anxious when they knew a call was due.

“I felt a wee bit half pressurised about the phone calls.... and if it was face to face it'd be better...I was stressing out [because] I knew the phone call was coming.”

FSS Participant, South West

A couple of respondents found FSS help limited, because of barriers, or a combination of barriers, outside of FSS's influence. Both saw positives in what FSS offered and felt it would be helpful to others, but felt their individual circumstances limited what FSS could do.

One was over fifty, and had a significant gap in their working history due to being the primary carer for their parents for many years. They were confident in where to look for jobs, but felt their gap in employment and consequent lack of recent skills and experience, as well as potentially their age, was leading to the rejections from employers.

“For other people younger than me that haven't got that gap, it's probably helpful...but just applying for the same old jobs and getting the same answers!”

FSS Participant, Glasgow

Another was a single parent with no family support, and therefore needed a job where hours would fit around childcare. They had also been out of the workforce for several years raising their children, and had limited experience on their CV. They found the local job market had very few opportunities that had suitable hours and matched their skills and experience.

“When I was looking for jobs, they were still the same jobs... there isn't a magic wand, it's not a click of your fingers.”

FSS Participant, South West

### 7.3 Suggestions for improvements

Participants were asked if they had any suggestions for how FSS could be improved. One theme that emerged from this was the suggestion for FSS to facilitate opportunities for participants to gain experience or training. Participants felt this would benefit their CVs, especially where they had long gaps. Others felt this would help them understand what type of job might suit them.

In terms of gaining workplace experience, participants had different suggestions for how this could be achieved, though most would require FSS to partner with local employers. One suggestion was for FSS participants to shadow existing employees to learn about their role and type of workplace. Another suggestion, put forward by a couple of participants, was work trials, whereby participants could trial a job to see if they are suited to that type of role. One suggestion that would not require employer engagement, was for FSS to put on training workshops related to particular sectors or types of role. Participants could undertake this to increase their

knowledge and experience, which they could then demonstrate on their CV or at interview.

One participant suggested that FSS could make links with local employers, whereby a representative from those businesses would come and give a talk to participants about how their business worked. They felt this could help participants learn about the different sectors and jobs available in their local area, and help them narrow down what might suit them.

In terms of training, some participants felt their lack of qualifications (or recent qualifications) was a barrier to employment. They had hoped their participation in FSS might include training in a new skill or type of occupation, or upskilling their existing knowledge.

For example, one participant with experience of caring for family wanted to move into the care sector but found they needed certain qualifications, and would have liked support from FSS to undertake these.

“Would have liked some training in new skills.... thought that was what I was signing up for.... to learn a new trade or vocation.”  
FSS participant, Glasgow

Another respondent suggested FSS forging links with local employers, as well as colleges and universities to offer apprenticeships. They suggested that if the employer identified a skills gap, the participant could then undertake a course at the university or college to learn this. It is likely that these partnerships between employers and institutions already exist, however the respondent may not have heard about them. And they may be primarily aimed at young people in their current form.

There were several other suggestions made, however as with the previous section, were mostly only mentioned by one or two respondents.

One of these suggestions was ensuring that FSS reaches the people who could benefit from it. This came from minority ethnic respondents, suggesting that FSS may be reaching them less effectively than other groups.

One participant had already been looking for work for a year when they heard about FSS on Facebook. Despite being in regular contact with the Jobcentre they had not suggested it to them. They found the service really helpful, and felt there should be more awareness of FSS and what it offers.

“It should be more obvious, the help and the support that they provide, nobody told me I could go and ask for help, it was a big issue, I felt like I was left by myself to deal with it.”  
FSS participant, Lanarkshire

Another found out about FSS through a friend, and suggested it needed to be advertised more.

“I'd think of how to meet the people that need my services.”  
FSS participant, Glasgow

A few respondents also suggested FSS could offer more support in relation to childcare, which presented a challenge in terms of availability and affordability. One felt employment and childcare is not joined up, despite the fact that childcare can be a huge barrier to parents returning to work. They would have liked information on what local childcare options were available, and guidance on how to apply for or obtain it.

“It would have been quite useful to have had something that supports parents, something that could actually help you find childcare options because there wasn't anything for that.”  
FSS participant, North East

They also suggested financial support for childcare would be helpful, for participants meeting certain criteria. Another respondent suggested that FSS could link up with the local council to provide advice on what was available.

Several other participants mentioned lack of availability of childcare, or issues with affordability as an ongoing barrier, but acknowledged this was out of FSS's remit.

In contrast with the majority of respondents, a couple felt the service was too generic, and not tailored to their needs. One said they were not given choice in what sessions to participate in, nor the method through which their key worker contacted them. They also didn't receive an introduction with their key worker. Overall they felt the impersonal approach hindered their ability to build rapport with their key worker, and did not take account of their disability.

“People need to be comfortable so you need to show someone that you [the service] are not just doing this for the money or to get the day over... I want to feel heard and seen rather than just...OK that's cool onto the next thing.”  
FSS participant, Lanarkshire

Another felt the service focused on general job search skills that they knew how to do, rather than the particulars of why they were being rejected so often.

“[I wanted] in the one-to-ones...[to] get into the 'nitty-gritty' of my applications and why I'm not getting interviews.”  
FSS participant, Glasgow

One final suggestion was for FSS to have something akin to a jobs board, where local job opportunities are available specifically for FSS participants.

“I would have jobs there for people, that were available, and work with people to help them get that job and what is needed.”

FSS participant, Glasgow

## 8. Recommendations for future service delivery

Based on the above findings, we have produced the following recommendations. These are based on themes and patterns identified throughout the participant interviews, taking account of their full experiences of FSS, as well as their views. Whilst these recommendations are based on participants' experiences of FSS specifically, they are likely to be useful considerations for other employability services, including the No One Left Behind approach.

- 1. Ensure the personalised approach is consistently applied.** A few respondents who were negative about their experience with FSS felt the service was generic, and not specific to their needs or circumstances. This meant it wasn't helpful to them. Many of the respondents who had a positive experience identified the personalised approach they received as a key benefit of the service and found this really helped them into or towards employment. This suggests the personalised approach is a key strength of FSS, but needs to be applied consistently across all areas of delivery so that all service participants can benefit. This could be supported by ensuring consistency of guidance across all service providers, as well as quality assurance of service provision.
- 2. Provide more support tailored to childcare difficulties.** Many respondents with children had found seeking work very challenging, as they needed a job to fit around the childcare hours offered by local schools and providers, which could be more limited in rural areas. Some would have liked more targeted help from FSS on this issue, such as identifying opportunities particularly suited to parents in this situation, or helping them to get childcare in place so that they were able to look for a job. One individual suggested FSS could advocate for the needs of working parents to help make employers more understanding. The need for greater provision of childcare, as well as improved affordability were also mentioned, but are beyond the remit of FSS. This could be a consideration, however, for the delivery of future employability services.
- 3. Continue to promote services through varied means to reach all groups.** Most respondents had heard about FSS through the Jobcentre. However, a few mentioned that they had heard about the service 'by chance', such as through a friend, and then contacted FSS directly or asked for details at the Jobcentre. These tended to be minority ethnic respondents, suggesting that current promotional methods may not be reaching this group as effectively. These respondents felt they had really benefitted from joining the service, and wanted others like them to hear about the service more easily. FSS is currently promoted through a variety of means, but reviewing how well these reach particular groups - including minority ethnic groups - could

identify improvements and enable more people to access employability services.

**4. Consider how to maximise training and work experience opportunities.**

A number of respondents suggested FSS could develop links or become more joined up with other organisations, in order to enhance or widen its provision. Several suggested stronger links with employers, whereby individuals could shadow employees to build their experience, undertake a work trial to see if they were suited to that role, or attend talks from local employers about their business and opportunities available. One individual suggested FSS could link with local schools, colleges, and universities to offer courses for those with skills gaps, with another suggesting FSS provide training related to specific types of roles in order to boost participants' experience. Links with employers or education providers may be of particular benefit to those with considerable gaps in their employment history, to help them gain more skills or recent experience. Finally, one individual suggested links with organisations offering support for specific barriers that can relate to unemployment such as mental health, gambling, childcare, would be helpful. It would be beneficial for any future service to reflect on how best to engage with other organisations to provide a holistic support offering.

# Appendix 1: Individual participants' case studies

## Individual case study 1: David

David, 21 years old is originally from England and moved to the Highlands and Islands area with family as a child. He has a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome<sup>16</sup>. He has not previously held any form of stable employment, although he has had short-term work in farming, fishing and hospitality.

David has a limited educational background. He is autistic which meant that sometimes he struggles in social settings. He wants to work part-time as he finds full-time work "overwhelming".

"I've had some local businesses that didn't get the whole Aspergers part of it. Some of them thought I was being rude [...] that would annoy co-workers and then the boss."

The Jobcentre referred him to FSS for help with finding permanent work.

He found help from FSS with interview skills particularly useful as he has found this stage of applying for jobs difficult. FSS also generally boosted his confidence because it required him to interact with new people in a supportive environment.

"They've been very good at easing me through what was a very difficult time for me; very understanding – didn't push too hard, then pushed a bit and are always very happy when I achieved something."

Since joining FSS in July 2022, he has found work through two seasonal jobs. He kept in touch with the service for In-Work Support whilst he held these jobs and was able to re-join after each job ended.

David said that he was initially skeptical that the service would be helpful to him, however he feels he has benefited from how tailored the content was, and would recommend it to others in his situation. Although David had not yet found stable employment, he is hopeful the additional experience he has gained will help him to do so.

"I have a much more positive feeling when it comes to looking for work. They've shown me I've got more value than I thought I had and boosted my confidence."

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<sup>16</sup> [Asperger's syndrome is a diagnosis previously given to certain autistic people](#). Autism Spectrum Disorder is now the most commonly given diagnosis.



## Individual case study 2: Gemma

Gemma is in her late 30s and has been in part-time employment for the past 18 months as an IT analyst. At the point when she joined FSS in Spring 2020 she had been unemployed for a year after leaving her previous care job and college course because she was diagnosed with chronic osteoarthritis.

After leaving her care job and stopping her college course, she was applying sporadically for receptionist roles because she felt this role would be better suited to her needs a result of her health condition. However, she had no qualifications in this area and did not feel particularly motivated to find that type of work.

She was hoping that FSS could help her build back her confidence and give her ideas on different careers as well as help on getting some training.

After joining FSS, her key worker helped her improve her CV, and she participated in training sessions on confidence building and interview techniques.

One of the most significant changes for her however was realising, with the help of her key worker, that she had many transferable skills she could offer employers, that were not impacted by her disability.

"Sometimes, you can't make the changes until you have somebody behind you saying it's okay to make the changes. That's what Fair Start [Scotland] offers. I think it's an essential service."

After joining FSS, she got a job as an IT analyst in a call centre. For the first few months she really appreciated knowing the FSS were there if she "needed an advocate for her health".

"The more motivated I got, the less support I needed. They're really good at focusing on what's needed."

She remains in employment in the same role, but no longer receives support from FSS as her time on the service has come to an end. She feels reassured though that the service is there is she needs it again in the future.

### Individual case study 3: Ali

Ali came to Scotland in 2008 as a refugee. He was granted Leave to Remain and the right to work. Most recently he was working as a chef but was let go due to Covid-19 impacting business.

He has worked in a range of casual jobs (e.g. cleaning, catering) over the years but was looking for something more permanent.

He heard about FSS through a friend and mentioned the service to his work coach at the Job Centre who encouraged him to sign up.

He hoped FSS would be able to help him with job applications as his written English was poor, and with training to become a security guard.

FSS gave him access to a computer, helped him with job applications, helped him take a training course to become a security officer and helped him financially (including for travel and benefit applications).

He was able to get a job in security and a job at Tesco but he was eventually let go due to not having the required biometric identity documents.

FSS kept in touch with him by phone after he started his job and this contact continued when he was let go.

His key worker has spoken to the Home Office on his behalf trying to get him biometric ID documents.

He was very grateful for all the support he has received.

“Everything was great, everything fantastic. Very kind, very helpful, very friendly. 100% happy.”

His focus is now to get a new immigration lawyer and apply for a biometric ID. He is conscious he won't be able to find permanent work without this.

## Appendix 2: Topic guide used for interviews

### Introduction (5 mins)

Interviewer introduction

Thank respondent for agreeing to participate

Background to the research: The Scottish Government have commissioned IFF Research Ltd to evaluate the services and support provided through Fair Start Scotland to help people move into and stay in-work, in a steady job. . As part of this we're speaking to people like you who have used these services to hear your experiences and gather your thoughts on what has worked well, as well as possible improvements that could be made to the service.

IF NEEDED: Fair Start Scotland provides this support through organisations such as People Plus, Remploy, Start Scotland, the Wise Group, Triage, Fedcap and Enable,.

IFF Research is an independent market research company, operating under the strict guidelines of the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct. This means that anything you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence, and none of your answers will be attributed to you unless you give explicit permission for us to do so. Under GDPR, you have a right to have a copy of your data, change your data, or withdraw from the research until one month prior to the end of the research project (estimated April 2023). If you'd like to do this, you can contact us at Fair StartScotland@iffresearch.com or on 020 7250 3035. Any personal data held by IFF will be retained for one year after the end of the project, and then destroyed (by summer 2024). Further information about this can also be found on our website at: [iffresearch.com/gdpr](http://iffresearch.com/gdpr)

Participation in this research is completely voluntary, and please be assured that participation will not affect your benefits or the support you receive in any way, now or in the future.

Permission to record: With your permission, I would like to record our discussion to ensure that your views are accurately captured. All information you provide will be kept confidential.

After the interview a written version of the interview will be created, which will be kept within our team and used for analysis purposes only. Your name will not be linked to your views in any reporting of findings (OR in any report we produce), and as a result your views or comments will be totally anonymous. The recording will be deleted once the project is completed.

Based on this are you happy to take part?

Yes CONTINUE

No THANK AND CLOSE

## Background (5 - 10 mins)

I will start by asking a few questions about your background. You may have already given some of this information in the survey but please bear with me.

To begin, could you just tell me a bit about yourself:

- Where you're from and where you live now?
- Who you live with (if anyone)?
- What you're mainly doing at the moment (looking for work, working, something else)?
- When you first joined Fair Start Scotland and your current involvement with the service (if any)

Please can you tell me a little about what led you to join the Fair Start Scotland service?

- How did you find out about the service?
- What did you hope the service could help you with?
- IF REJOINER: Why did you decide to rejoin the service?

Please can you briefly describe your working history prior to this?

Before joining the Fair Start Scotland service, were you actively looking for a job?

IF WAS ACTIVELY LOOKING FOR A JOB:

- How long were you looking for a job before you joined Fair Start Scotland?
- Can you tell me about what you were doing before job hunting?

IF WAS NOT ACTIVELY LOOKING FOR WORK:

- Can you tell me about what you were doing before joining Fair Start Scotland?
- Can you tell me a little about any job(s) you have had previously? Which industry/ies have you worked in?

And please can you describe your employment situation since participating in the service?

- Explore whether they have begun a new job, had job interviews/applications, begun education/training etc.
- IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED: And what is your employment situation now?

## Experience of work search/unemployment before FSS (10 - 15 mins)

I'm now going to ask a few questions about your experience of job seeking and any barriers to finding work you may have faced – we appreciate that these can be different depending on individual circumstances. If there is anything you are not comfortable talking about, please let me know and we can move on straight away.

At the point of joining Fair Start Scotland, what sort of roles or types of jobs were you looking for?

INTERVIEWER PROBE FOR:

- Industries or job roles
- Full-time/part-time/any other specific working hours
  - Reasons for this
  - Any links to caring or childcare responsibilities
- Location – WFH vs on site
  - Any travel/transport constraints e.g. walking distance, accessible by public transport
- Suitability for any disability / health condition

What were the main difficulties you faced in trying to find work before Fair Start Scotland?

INTERVIEWER PROBE FOR:

- What was the job market like where you lived?
  - To what extent were there jobs available that matched what you were looking for?
- How did you find applying for jobs?
- Any difficulties with different stages of job search e.g. finding jobs vs applying vs interviewing
- Were there any specific aspects of looking for work that were you felt were more difficult for you as an individual because of your circumstances?
  - E.g. any health/wellbeing or disability related difficulties
  - Anything resulting from childcare/caring responsibilities
  - Any language barriers

ASK IF PREVIOUSLY IN EMPLOYMENT: And have you experienced any challenges in previous jobs that made it difficult to continue in that job?

INTERVIEWER PROBE FOR:

- Policies and ways of working (e.g. flexi-time/remote working/lack of these)?
- Any difficulties because of the physical workplace (e.g. long periods of time standing etc.)?

- Did you experience any difficulties with colleagues or managers?
- Did you experience any practical difficulties such as childcare, transport?

IF NOT ALREADY COVERED SPONTANEOUSLY: Did the Covid-19 pandemic have any impact on your working status or job search?

Before seeking support from Fair Start Scotland, had you ever received help from other employment or skills support services?

IF YES: Please can you tell me a little bit about this service(s) and what led you to them?

- What was your employment situation at the time?
- How did you hear about them?
- What type(s) of support did you receive?

IF HAS EXPERIENCED OTHER EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICES:

- How helpful did you find these services?
- What was helpful about this service? Why?
- Was there anything you didn't find helpful? Why was that?
- What was the outcome of this support?

What effect has your experience of not being in paid employment had on other aspects of your life?

ALLOW SPONTANEOUS RESPONSE AND THEN PROBE:

- Would you say it has had any effect on your mental health, stress, self-confidence?
- Has it had any effect on your family life? In what way?
- How has it impacted your finances?
- Other types of impacts?

## Experience of support (10 mins)

I'm now going to ask a few questions about specific types of support Fair Start Scotland offered. In the previous survey you did for us, you said you took up the following types of support, is that right?

CIRCLE THE OPTIONS SELECTED IN QUANT INTERVIEW

- A dedicated key worker or employability advisor, that is, one person who oversees your involvement with the service)
- Development of a personalised Employment Action Plan (IF NECESSARY: that is, a set of agreed activities and timescales for helping you back into work, taking account of your skills, history, aspirations and barriers)
- One to one appointments with regular support and contact
- Help with an addiction
- Help with job search activities and applications

- Access to work tasters, work experience or apprenticeship opportunities
- Specialist support for a mental health condition
- Specialist support for a physical health condition
- Help with managing finances or dealing with debt
- Help with English language skills
- Provided with a laptop or tablet

Were there any other types of support you received from Fair Start Scotland, that I haven't mentioned?

- How did this support work?

Which types of support did you find most helpful? Why?

- What did this support help you with?
- What difference did this support make?
- IF INTERVIEWEE HAS A LONG-TERM HEALTH CONDITION/IS DISABLED: Did these types of support or any other types of support you received help you overcome barriers to employment related to your health condition / disability? How?

Which types of support did you find less helpful? Why was this?

- How could this support be improved?

Were there any types of support offered to you that you chose not to take up?

- Why was this?

Is there any support you would have liked to have received, but didn't?

- Do you feel there was any support missing?
- How might this have helped you?

ASK IF CURRENTLY IN WORK (FROM BOOKING SHEET)

Did you receive any support from Fair Start Scotland once you were in your job?

- How did this support work?
- What difference did this support make?

## Outcomes (10 mins)

Overall, to what extent do you think taking part in Fair Start Scotland has made a difference to your life?

INTERVIEW PROBE FOR:

- Benefits of taking part
- Any drawbacks

What affect has taking part in Fair Start Scotland had on:

- Your employment?
- Your job search skills?
  - Including interview skills, preparing CVs etc. if relevant
  - And ability to use computers and the internet
- Your soft skills (e.g. communication, problem solving, time management)?

INTERVIEWER PROBE FOR HOW AND WHY FSS HAS RESULTED IN CHANGES TO THE ABOVE

- Do you think the taking part in the programme has had any influence on your overall wellbeing, or feeling of satisfaction with life?
- Why do you say that?
- What parts of the programme were particularly important to this?

IF NOT MENTION PROBE FOR:

- Any impact on confidence
- Any impact on loneliness/isolation/social networks

What impact has taking part in the programme had on other areas of your life?

INTERVIEWER ALLOW SPONTANEOUS AND THEN PROBE:

- Has it had any effect on your family life? In what way?
- Any impact on your finances?

## Overall views on FSS (10 mins)

Thinking now about Fair Start Scotland, what are your views on the service overall?

- How do you feel about the support you received?
- Would you recommend the service to others needing support with employment? Why?

What do you think are the main things the service does well?

- Why was this?
- What helped you the most?
- What difference did this make to you?

What do you think could be improved about FSS?

- Why is that?
- How could this be improved?
- What difference would this make for those using the service?

If you were designing a service like Fair Start Scotland, to help people find and stay in work, is there anything you would do differently?



- How would this help?
- What difference would this make for those using the service?

(IF NOT ALREADY EMERGED) – ASK THOSE WHO LEFT THE SERVICE EARLY: Why did you choose to leave the Fair Start Scotland service early?

- Was it due to the service itself or some other reason?
- Were you expecting something different from the service? What were you expecting?

### Future outlook (5 mins)

Thinking about the next year or so, would you say you have any goals in terms of work and/or education?

- Is there anything you are working towards at the moment?
- What would you like to be doing in a year's time?

And thinking about the future, do you have any longer-term goals for work?

- What sort of job would you like to have?
- Is there any training or education that you hope to do?
- What would you like to be doing in 5 years' time?

ASK IF HAVE VIEWS ON FUTURE GOALS: Is there any further support you feel would you need to help you achieve these goals?

- What would this support involve?
- Do you know where/how you might get this support?
- How would this help you?

### Closing (2 - 3 mins)

Thank you very much for talking with me today. Before we finish, is there anything else you'd like to say about Fair Start Scotland?

How would you like to receive your £20 thank you gift? This could be as an Amazon voucher, PayPal transfer or as a charity donation.

(if Transferwise has been offered previously: Please make respondents aware that they will get an email from Transferwise saying we have sent them payment and they should claim their payment within one week of receiving that email, otherwise the payment will be returned back to IFF)

If charity donation, ask which of the following:

- Great Ormond Street Hospital
- British Heart Foundation
- Macmillan Cancer support
- Shelter

- Celia Hammond Animal Trust
- Mind
- Centrepont

Would you be willing to be contacted again for clarification purposes or be invited to take part in further research by IFF Research?

- Yes, happy to be re-contacted for clarification purposes
- Yes, happy to be re-contacted for further research
- No, prefer not to be contacted

Thank respondent and close interview

I declare that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.		
Interviewer signature:	Date:	
Finish time:	Interview Length	Mins

### **How to access background or source data**

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

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



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