

# SWC Survey – August 2015

## Employability and Social Security

### Summary Results

The SWC undertook an online survey to gauge the views and opinions of women throughout Scotland on issues relating to employability, as well as some aspects of social security, such as the administration and payment of Universal Credit (UC). Attached are summary results of the survey (along with quotes from those who participated) to the key questions asked.

The SWC thanks the women who took the time to complete this survey and for views, experiences and concerns highlighted as part of the exercise. This information will be used to inform the SWC response to current Scottish Government consultations on Employability and Social Security, as well as the wider consultation exercise being undertaken on 'Creating a Fairer Scotland'.



The Scottish Government outlined its overall aims for employment support in Scotland on 28th April 2015, stressing the importance that service will:

- a. meet the needs of unemployed Scots as well as employers;
- b. meet the employability needs of those who face specific barriers to employment (for example, disabled people, older workers, people with caring responsibilities);
- c. build on existing employment support services in Scotland;
- d. help deliver sustainable employment and economic growth.

What support do you need/have you needed in order to help you find a job?

#### Disabled People/People with long-term medical conditions

*“As a disabled woman, it would be so much easier for me to be able to work from home. That’s not an option put forward by any of the agencies though.”*

*“More needs to be done when services are arranging interviews, particularly when it comes to providing proper and adequate access. Avoid things like having to climb stairs to an interview. I can’t do that because of mobility issues.”*

*“I need an employer to understand that I can become very unwell from a simple cold or sickness bug.”*

### **Applications and Interviews**

*"I would appreciate some guidance as to where to get support to prepare an application, as well as interview coaching."*

*"A central database of vacancies, separated into areas and categories, rather than having to look through lots of different websites. You only get a certain amount of time to use the library computers."*

### **Support from the Jobcentre and DWP**

*"I have a degree and I was made to feel stupid and worthless in 99% of my interactions with the Jobcentre/DWP. I dread to think how people who need more support and confidence must get on."*

*"Take away the targets they seem to have for sanctions and stopping people's money."*

### **Childcare**

*"Childcare was the biggest issue in me accessing work. I struggled to afford the upfront costs as well as travelling costs."*

*"I have two school-age children, one of whom has additional needs due to having had cancer. I need childcare after school, and during school holidays; and flexibility at work to enable me to meet my caring responsibilities."*

### **Carers**

*"I am a carer and it is very difficult to find employment. You can only work so many hours a week and there are very few jobs which fit that criteria."*

*"Specific support is needed for unpaid carers to remain in work, find work or plan for a return to the labour market when caring ends."*

### **Skills and Training**

*"In looking for a job I had a lack of awareness of the skill set I possessed as a result of bringing up my family and running a home."*

*"Some assistance to write a good CV, as well as training in new technology. I need support to find a job that suits my experience, skills and capabilities as I have lots of experience but no formal qualifications."*

### **Working Hours**

*"I have always found it difficult to get a promoted post especially with part-time/job share hours. There seems to be a culture that this is not possible. I worked more years in a full-time post than I wanted to whilst my son was young. I now work at a lower grade than I feel I should be in because I chose to do 2 part-time posts."*

**In your experience, is this support currently available?**

Women commented overall that support was available, however it was limited and could be difficult to access. There were also those who were unable to access any form of support at all.

*“To a very limited extent. The childcare that exists is expensive and limited. For the first four years of my child's time at her primary school, there was no after school club or breakfast club available. I have used informal support from friends. Holiday clubs often run from 10am until 4pm which does not suit parents who work 9-5. Full day clubs are expensive - around £28 per day.”*

*“It pretends to be there but so many people with varying skills, competencies, it was hard to get the individual support. Jobcentre Plus and the work coach were no help.”*

*“Some of it is, but I think more help is needed for parents mums looking to go back to work. We should be able to go on courses that fit around the school timetable, so we can better ourselves, get back to work and give back to our country.”*

**Someone applying for their first job, or someone who has been out of work for some time (for example on a career break or providing a caring role to family) may need help on where to look for a job, or guidance on what to say in an application form or at an interview. Employment Support Services should be able to provide this assistance quickly with support through the Work Programme and / or Work Choice.**

**Have you, or has anyone you know, been referred to the Work Programme or Work Choice?**

*“I have and the interview skills are valuable. However, working for free is offensive and I will not do it. I would prefer to be able to volunteer for a charity or a cause I value. This should still count.”*

*“I have been sent on an employability course, whose conclusion was that my CV is fine and I'm doing the right things. This has, as yet, not resulted in employment.”*

**If you have experience of this, or know someone who has, do you have any comments on aspects which work particularly well?**

**Is there anything which requires improvement?**

Overall women had not had positive experiences of employability services. Many had practical suggestions for improvement.

*“As a worker, my case loads were too high. I had 500 clients, so I couldn't give regular attention to most. A lot of staff received minimal training and had little understanding of how to support people address their challenges. The work programme offers basic employability support. If the client was 'work ready' some good support was available, but those with greater needs were seen as a burden.”*

*“It should be assessment based. Getting into the job market after a long time or for the first time can be very daunting. A lot depends on an individual’s needs. It should not be assumed what people need or do not need.”*

*“Everything requires improvement. People need encouragement and to be treated as individuals, not nuisances to be processed. The Jobcentre should find jobs and arrange interviews for people according to their skills and abilities. Where work placements are found, people should be paid a living wage. Searching for a job should not be in itself a full time job. What is the point of applying for jobs you are not qualified to do because you have to show the Jobcentre that you have applied for a certain number of jobs in a fortnight?”*

*“Some of people need more than the time provided for the work programmes. If you have been unemployed for a long time, it will take time to be in the position to be ready for employment.”*

**Employability plays an essential role in delivering the Scottish Government’s aims of tackling poverty, promoting inclusion and creating a fair and prosperous Scotland.**

**In your opinion, are there any particular groups of people who require additional support to get into / return to work? What kind of support should the Scottish Government provide to them?**

Some of the key groups identified by respondents to the survey included:

- Those who are long-term unemployed;
- Carers;
- Mothers returning to work;
- Older women;
- Lone parents; and
- Those with mental health issues

Women have a number of ideas as to the type of support these groups, as well as others, could benefit from.

*“There will always be individuals and groups of people who require additional support. However this can’t be a one-size-fits-all solution, as requirements will differ from group to group. The best way the government can help is to be empathic and flexible, so that differing approaches may be taken. They also need to be practical. For example, if someone wants to set up a business, they don’t just need to be pointed to a website with information, but rather they need assistance through form filling, creating a business plan, financial planning etc.”*

*“As an unemployed mother of two, I would have to say those with young children do have a battle to get back into work. The costs of childcare are prohibitive when you have been receiving the bare minimum and have to pay childcare in advance. Also it is difficult to find employers who are willing to offer part time or job share positions. I think the government and employers need to recognise that women don’t stop being the people they were before they made the decision to have a family. Stop offering support exclusively at a basic level and take the childcare needs of this sector into account.”*

The current social security system is under review. At present, the UK Government administers and pays all benefits. Under the Smith Commission recommendations and the draft Scotland Bill, some of the powers over systems and payments will be devolved to Scotland.

**What are (or were) your experiences of the current benefits system?**

*"I live in fear of the blue envelope dropping through my door. This anxiety causes exacerbation of my mental health. It's overly complex, unfair and unfit for purpose for people with invisible disabilities. Carers allowance application was easy but restrictions on work meant poverty."*

*"It can be confusing if you have never needed it previously. I claimed for the first time after being made redundant and applied for one benefit only to then be told I should have applied for something else. This resulted in my claim being delayed significantly, it was hugely stressful. You rely on those in the Jobcentre to be able to help you but in my case they made things worse."*

*"TV programmes which seem to be popular at the moment have reported the benefits system as being a vile thing, turning society against each other. Words such as 'scrounger' are so unhelpful."*

**In your experience, are there any aspects of the current system which work particularly well? Do you think there is anything which requires improvement?**

*"It makes no sense that carers are only eligible for such a small amount of financial support for working 35 hours per week in their caring role, which then bars them from eligibility for learning. Caring is stressful enough and the negative health impact is proven. Carers need to be encouraged and enabled to pursue some personal goal with the potential of keeping them mentally well and upskilled to return to the labour market when their caring role ends."*

*"Unfortunately with the rise of foodbanks, it is obviously not working. People need stability, they need jobs that are going to last longer than a few months or a year before being tossed back out onto the benefits system. They need to have contracts written up, whereby the job after an apprenticeship or training will be there."*

*"People still do not have sufficient information about entitlement and how to claim benefits and it would be useful for someone to sit with a claimant and go through everything they are entitled to claim. The use of 08 number helplines causes more financial difficulties for people trying to claim benefits they are entitled to."*

*"I am concerned that people on benefits, some of whom are employed in low paid work, are waiting for long periods without state assistance. If poverty, in particular child poverty is to be tackled, then a fairer payment of benefits must be made e.g. a minimum of weekly."*

**Under the draft Scotland Bill, Scotland will be given powers over the administration of Universal Credit. The Scottish Parliament will also be allowed to vary the amount of Housing Benefit paid as well as have the ability to determine issues around Disability Payments and claims under the Social Fund.**

**Do you have any views on how the new devolved system will benefit women and families in Scotland?**

Many women responding to the survey commented about the potential improvements which could be made once powers are transferred to the Scottish Parliament.

*"In principle I think devolved powers tend to be exercised more fairly than reserved ones. I expect MSPs to be closer to the people affected than MPs are."*

*"The welfare system is there to support vulnerable people and those whose circumstances change for the worse suddenly and unintentionally. Attitudes in Scotland are different. As an English person who has lived in Scotland for 13 years, I know that attitudes and perceptions in the welfare system will change, and that will make a huge difference to claimants."*

*"I think this will enable each individual case to be dealt with on their particular circumstances and help those who are in "non standard " situations."*

*"It will benefit our social needs and requirements greater than the present systems. Women can inform the government of the risks they face under the new welfare system."*

Some of the areas in which women could particularly benefit include benefits for carers, through the way in which payments will be made and the way in which assessments for work are carried out.

**Are there any potential positive or negative outcomes with some aspects of social security being administered by the Scottish Parliament?**

Women identified both positive and negative outcomes with some aspects of social security being administered by the Scottish Parliament.

### **Positive**

*"It must be a positive thing that the Scottish Parliament is responsible directly for the welfare of Scottish citizens, when geographic and climatic differences can be taken into account along with other issues."*

*"The Scottish Parliament could remove the requirement for everything to be done online and provide real people as support for social security applicants."*

*"More autonomy will give staff in Scotland the freedom to be more flexible and supporting when helping women into the workplace."*

## Negative

*“The Scottish Government does not have any extra money to increase the amount of benefits people receive, so it's hard to see at the moment how useful these new powers will be.*

*“There is a risk that we will be overwhelmed and unable to manage the workload of administering the benefits. It could place additional burdens on staff who are already working under challenging circumstances.”*

*“If the UK Government restricts the budget this could be very challenging.”*

*“Benefits administration can be very bureaucratic and costly.”*

*“Changes in systems often results in delays to payments or reduced efficiencies for a period of time. Taking time to get the system fully functional before going live and ensuring staff fully trained in operating it would be beneficial, otherwise claimants could end up worse off.”*



## Conclusions

This summary outlines key points raised through the online consultation carried out by the SWC. As well as this, the SWC is holding an event on Saturday 5th September. We will engage with women who have direct experience of the social security system, changes to benefits and Employability programmes.

The information received both through the survey and the consultation event will be analysed and will be used to inform the SWC response to the ‘*Creating a Fairer Scotland: Helping You Find Your Job*’ consultation.

**It is vital that the voices and opinions of real women are heard by the Scottish Government. If you have any comments to make on any of the questions contained in the survey, or during the consultation event, please do not hesitate to contact us on [info@scottishwomensconvention.org](mailto:info@scottishwomensconvention.org)**

**[www.scottishwomensconvention.org](http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org)**