

BRIEFING PAPER

Creating a Fairer Scotland: Employability Support

Analysis of Consultation Responses

The Scottish Government ran a consultation process from July to October to seek the views of service users, providers, policy makers, employers and the general public. This involved:

- A Discussion Paper with a request for written submissions;
- A 9 question Survey Monkey questionnaire designed to seek the views of service users specifically; and
- More than 70 events and meetings with groups around Scotland, attended by the Cabinet Secretary for Fair Work, Skills and Training, Roseanna Cunningham, Annabelle Ewing, Minister for Youth and Women's Employment, and several Scottish Government officials.

This analysis has identified six key messages from the responses received.

The 'Scottish Approach' to employability support should:

- Provide a flexible, tailored, 'whole person' approach;
- Be designed and delivered in partnership; and
- Drive towards real jobs.

The devolved replacement programmes should:

- Be designed nationally but adapted and delivered locally;
- Use contracts that combine payment by job outcomes and progression towards work; and
- Have separate employability programmes for those with high needs.

Part 1: The 'Scottish Approach' to employability support

The key messages are that the Scottish Approach to employability should:

- Provide flexible, person-centred support to help people seeking employment to make progress into sustainable, fair work. The support should be tailored to the needs of the client.
- Be designed and delivered in partnership across a number of areas, including employability, education, health and social care services. At the moment the delivery of employability services are seen as fragmented.
- Drive towards real jobs, which mean clients will be able to continue working once their time with the employability service is complete.

Objectives of the Scottish Approach

Sustainable Employment

A strong focus on achieving real jobs in which employment could be sustained is essential for the success of employability services. In order for this to be the case, in some cases clients will require more time and investment than others. Continually placing people on short-term contracts or placements, as happens a lot at present, can harm the confidence of the most vulnerable.

Employability

There is a need to create a talented and versatile workforce that will be able to respond to changes in the labour market as and when they occur. Volunteering and unpaid work can be an important part of the journey to work. For some, it is the best option. This must not be underestimated or undervalued.

Equality

Equality should cover equality of access to employment, equality of opportunity and equal access to employability support. A system of entitlement to support, based on need, was suggested as a possible way forward by some. Geographical equality is also important. The current system is seen to promote a 'postcode lottery' in terms of quality and availability of local support.

Realistic Expectations

Employability support should recognise that employment is not for everyone, or that a period of 'pre-employment' support might be needed before conventional employment is a real option. Services should encourage a wide range of options, rather than trying to force jobseekers into a few pre-set areas, which will not be helpful to many.

Fair Work

There is broad support for the Scottish Government's Fair Work agenda, and the need to see the importance of employability support as part of this. Many people have expressed concern over the use of zero hours contracts and the negative impacts these have on the objectives of sustainable employment.

Flexible working can also be seen as a way to overcome barriers to employment for, amongst others, those living in remote areas, those with caring responsibilities and those with fluctuating health conditions.

Design Principles

Flexible, Tailored and Person-Centred Support

It is vital that employability support is flexible and tailored to the needs of each client. Access to services should be based in individual need rather than strict categories based on age or benefit claimant group. Clients should be able to choose from a 'menu' of services to create a personalised route to work.

Personal action plans should take into account a number of aspects in relation to the client, including geography, transport, health, cultural, economic and social circumstances.

The need for holistic support

There needs to be a 'wrap-around' service covering a range of areas of wellbeing, as well as addressing a range of barriers to employment, such as health (physical and mental), caring responsibilities and economic hardship.

The significance and use of feedback

It is important to use feedback given by clients in both the design and delivery of employability support services. The aim is to make services fairer and more accountable by incorporating the voices of those who use them.

Clarity and promotion of the service

There is a need for more awareness of the entire range of employability support for all who are affected - clients, providers and employers. There is not enough knowledge of the different courses available or how to access them. Suggestions were made which would help raise awareness, such as co-ordination with other services such as schools, libraries and community centres. Specific groups should be made aware of the range of specialist services available to them.

Length of support

It is important that a 'one size fits all' approach is not used to determine the length of time a person should benefit from employability services. Instead, it must be flexible and respond to the needs of the client, the barriers they face and how prepared they are for work when they first seek support.

How should the service be delivered?

Partnership Approach

A multi-agency approach to services is seen as a necessary feature of the Scottish Approach. One of the weaknesses of the current approach is that it is fragmented and does not offer widespread access to all. Collaboration between providers and Jobcentre Plus (JCP) is seen as important.

Concerns were raised over sanctions, particularly that power over these will remain reserved to Westminster. It is, therefore, vital that there is co-ordination with the DWP in this area, so that the powers which are devolved to Scotland do not conflict with those at Westminster.

Employer Engagement

In order to help people find real, sustainable jobs, engagement with employers is vital. This is the case from the stage at which the Scottish Approach is designed, through to increasing opportunities for placements. There is a view that there should be frequent, in-depth engagement with employers when designing future programmes. It is also thought that it would be positive if more capacity was built into social enterprises, with a view to them becoming potential employers.

Early Intervention

Early intervention must form part of employability support services. This should include interventions in key areas such as schools, health and social care services and in-work support.

It is essential to identify, at school or college, those young people who face multiple barriers to employment. This will ensure they are able to receive effective support from an early age. For example, supporting those who face mental health issues at school could limit issues with future employment prospects. There is also a need to provide support to some after job finding, in order to help them make a successful transition from employability services into work.

Quality of Staff

Aspects that are seen as important in creating and sustaining a positive relationship between staff and clients include adequate training and experience for staff, small caseloads to ensure a decent quality of service, establishing a positive, supportive relationship with clients and continuity of that support relationship.

As well as these important aspects, there also needs to be a cultural awareness of diverse communities and groups, staff must have experience in person-centred approaches and they must create a trusting relationship in which people feel able to disclose sensitive but important problems related to employability.

Responding to rural challenges

There is a real need for the Scottish Approach to take account of the specific needs of those in rural areas. Provision in rural areas should be reviewed, with specific mention of a more flexible approach to funding and delivery of services to ensure that people in these parts of the country are not disadvantaged.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Current System

Fragmented services and funding

At present, the way in which services are delivered at the moment is seen as too complex. The principle of partnership between services providers is a long way from being implemented effectively at the moment. One of the reasons for the fragmented approach is the different ways in which various employability programmes receive their funding. More joined-up resource allocation would be more effective instead.

Part 2: The Replacement Programme(s)

Overall, when designing and contracting any new employment programmes, the following should be taken into consideration:

- Programmes should be designed at a national level to prevent significant geographical variation, but should be adapted to suit the needs of local clients. They should also be delivered locally.
- There should be a separate employability programme for those with higher needs, such as clients with health and disability barriers. Current programmes are failing these individuals at the moment.

A National or Local Programme?

There is a belief that a combination of both national and local programmes is needed to meet the needs of the full range of clients. Locally designed programmes are seen to be better for those who are furthest from the labour market, who face multiple barriers - such as time out of work for caring responsibilities, those with mental health issues etc. National programmes are seen to be better for those who are closer to the labour market. It is vital to ensure balance between the two approaches in order that services best meet the needs of clients.

Nationally designed programmes are seen to be important as they ensure consistency of services and take away the potential 'postcode lottery' that locally designed services could create. The quality of the service is of key importance, regardless of where it is designed and delivered.

Who Should Be the Contracting Authority?

Local Authorities were identified as the most popular choice to deliver employability services. Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Scottish Government were also considered to be key choices. Regardless of who is chosen to oversee the delivery of services, there is a need to consult across national and local organisations.

Contracting for Job Outcomes or Progression?

One of the key areas is whether programmes put in place by the Scottish Government when powers are devolved should operate on payments to those delivering the services for job-related outcomes (i.e. the number of people who end up in employment) or client progression (how far individuals are moving along their journey into employment). There is support for a combination of both, in order to keep providers focused on employment, while also recognising the milestones achieved by individuals along their own personal journey.

Integration with Other Services

Work Programme and Work Choice, the two current employability services, have been identified as being separate from other services. Individuals who have experience of these have said that local relationships are being damaged by the objectives of the national schemes. Any replacement programme must allow for and encourage providers to innovate, but it must be clear to all involved what the service is offering.

Work Choice

Current services are seen to be failing higher needs client groups such as Employment Support Allowance (ESA) clients. The way in which the Work Programme is conducted, whereby providers are paid for job outcomes, results in clients who face more significant barriers receiving very little support.

While the Work Choice provision is seen as better for higher needs clients, many are in fact unable to access this service and are wrongly placed onto the Work Programme. Similarly, within Work Choice, those with the most significant needs are not receiving adequate assistance. As a result, there is a belief that a separate programme would be beneficial to those with higher needs, such as health issues and disabilities.

Work Choice Generally outperforms Work Programme

There are a number of reasons as to why Work Choice has more success with clients, specifically those with health and disability issues. These include:

- The voluntary nature of the service means that people are more willing and ready to be actively involved;
- It provides more personalised employment support than the Work Programme;
- Those who provide Work Choice services have specialist expertise;
- The use of supported employment makes a big difference to clients.

Work Choice provides inadequate help to those with the highest support needs

Concerns have been expressed that those with complex disabilities, long-term mental health issues and learning disabilities are not being given enough support. A lack of staff expertise, unrealistic timescales and a lack of genuine and meaningful employment opportunities were identified as key issues.

Access is not available for those in need

The referral process, eligibility criteria and limits on client numbers mean that a large number of people with high support needs are unable to access Work Choice. The demand for these services is, at present, outweighing supply. Suggestions for improvement include removing the referral cap and increasing the number of people referred onto Work Choice, increasing the eligibility criteria, automatic referral for those with mental health issues and having a disability specialist complete assessments.

The duration of support is not long enough

The length of time clients are supported is not enough, especially for those who are furthest from the labour market. There is an incentive under Work Choice to move clients from supported into unsupported (mainstream) employment, which results in people being taken away from jobs they are happy doing. This can have a seriously detrimental impact on them.

Linking Work Choice with Other Services

The integration of services across employability, health, education, social care and housing is particularly important for those on the Work Choice programme. Their health and social care needs are a fundamental factor in them being ready to get into work. The smooth transition between programmes is important, as is the ability to be involved in multiple services at the same time.

Groups needing additional support and their specific needs

The following client groups are considered to need further support in accessing employability services:

- Those with physical health and disability issues.
- Those with mental health issues.
- Those with learning disabilities.
- Young people (aged up to 24).
- Older people (roughly 40/50+).
- Long term unemployed.
- Offenders.
- Those with alcohol and substance misuse issues.
- Lone parents.
- Rural service users.
- Those lacking ICT skills.
- Carers.
- Homeless people.
- Minority ethnic, migrants and refugees.
- Low skilled workers.
- Those with additional support needs.
- Those with low ESOL (English for speakers of other languages).
- Those exposed to established patterns of unemployment.

There is no specific mention of women, in particular the additional barriers faced in entering, sustaining and progressing in employment.



Further information about the Scottish Government's Creating a Fairer Scotland: Employability Support consultation can be found here:
<https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/labour-market-and-workplace-policy/employability-support>

The summary of the survey undertaken by the SWC on this consultation, as well as a copy of the report produced from a discussion event held by the organisation, can be found here:
<http://www.scottishwomensconvention.org/activities/fairerwork>