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# Review of Supported Employment within Scotland: Findings and Recommendations

August 2021



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## About Social Finance

Social Finance (SF) is an ambitious not-for-profit organisation which seeks to drive social change. We work in partnership with government, funders and the social sector to tackle entrenched social problems in the UK and internationally. We seek transformation that is both sustainable and scalable. Everyone at Social Finance believes that change is possible. Our unique blend of skills and backgrounds enables us to create breakthrough solutions to society's toughest problems.

We develop models, products and services that have the scope to drive systemic change to improve people's lives. In the UK, we focus on issues such as homelessness, domestic abuse, mental health, learning disabilities, loneliness and vulnerable children on the edge of the care system. Internationally, we design outcomes-based models for issues such as maternal and neonatal health, education and employment.

### **Health and Employment Partnerships (HEP)**

Social Finance's Health and Employment Partnerships (HEP) team aims to make a major impact on the employment rates of disabled people and those living with health conditions and transform thousands of lives in the process.

Since 2015, the HEP team has played an important role in growing high-quality models to support people with health issues into paid employment. Working with others, we designed, launched and continue to manage the world's first social investment-backed programme to help people with mental health issues, drug and alcohol addictions and learning disabilities into work; supported a Combined Authority to design, mobilise and manage one of the largest health and work trials globally; and led a consortium of experts to launch a national programme supporting mental health and employment services across England.

We are grateful to everyone who took the time to share their experiences and expertise with us as part of this review.

# Executive Summary

## Introduction and methodology

Social Finance was commissioned by the Scottish Government to conduct an evaluation of supported employment delivery within Scotland. Supported employment is an evidence-based, personalised approach that provides support to people with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups to secure and maintain paid employment in the open labour market.

The research was designed to provide a robust, independent review of how supported employment is delivered, and where gaps in provision lie.

The evaluation sought to address the following core research questions:

- Where is supported employment being implemented and where are the gaps in provision?
- What type of service is being provided by Local Authorities, for whom, and what are the outcomes?
- What are some of the reasons for gaps in the service and how can these be addressed?
- How can the service providers be further supported to promote greater consistency and use of service?

We have employed a mixed-methodological approach to the review. The research has aimed to map the current landscape of supported employment in Scotland, assess the quality of provision and provide recommendations for future delivery using the following methods:

- surveys of all Local Authorities in Scotland;
- semi-structured interviews with Scottish Government, providers, service commissioners, sector stakeholders, employers and individuals with lived experience;
- in-depth quality reviews of a sample of supported employment providers in Scotland; and
- focus group meetings with individuals with lived experience, steering group members and Local Authority service leads.

The research took place over a four-month period between May and August 2021. At interim stages throughout the research, findings and themes were presented to a project steering group for their input.

All findings in this report are anonymised so that data cannot be attributed to particular Local Authorities or individuals.

## Findings: Access

Our research aimed to assess both the access to supported employment, and the quality of provision on offer. In relation to access, three key findings emerged during our research:

### **1. There is a complex mixture of local and national provision of supported employment across Scotland**

Supported employment provision is commissioned nationally through Fair Start Scotland, and locally by Local Authority leads. In general, there is a high degree of local autonomy over what provision is commissioned. This made it complex during the review to map out exactly what is delivered where. 27 of 32 Local Authorities reported providing a supported employment service.

The review found that this locally-led commissioning model had many benefits, including allowing local areas to adapt and innovate. However, it appears difficult for individuals to know what support is available to them locally. Research with focus groups indicated that not everyone had been able to access supported employment, even though everyone we spoke with expressed a desire for support to find and keep work. There also appears to be limited mechanisms in place for national government to hold local government to account for making provision available.

### **2. There is a high variability in access rates**

The review found high variability in access rates, linked to the high level of local autonomy in delivering services. Five Local Authorities do not appear to commission any supported employment, whereas other Local Authorities have excellent, high-quality services. Our analysis showed that there was a large range in the proportion of individuals known to have a learning disability receiving support each year across different Local Authority areas. This ranged between 2% to over 60%.

Similarly, funding levels vary widely across different Local Authority areas. Where there is a supported employment service, the funding per person known to have a learning disability locally ranges from £57 p.a. to £1,795 p.a.

There is also a wide range of access to supported employment delivered through Fair Start Scotland (FSS). In two of the nine geographic lots, there are currently no individuals receiving supported employment. There is a wide range in the number of individuals receiving support across the other seven lots, from under 30 to almost 300.

### **3. There is an opportunity to improve access for clients with learning disabilities, and autistic people**

We do not have data on the number or percentages of people accessing supported employment through Local Authority services, or through FSS, who have a learning disability or are autistic. This means that it is challenging to assess the access rates for autistic people and individuals with learning disabilities.

In particular, data on learning disabilities is not always separated out from within all disabilities, making it challenging to know whether needs are being met. Fair Start Scotland providers we reviewed took the majority of their referrals from Job Centre Plus and therefore were less likely to reach those with more complex learning disabilities. Case files showed that most clients had mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression, suggesting that access could be improved for autistic people and individuals with learning disabilities.

## Findings: Quality

The review also found variations in the quality of support on offer throughout Scotland, with some examples of excellent supported employment services, and other examples of services that were not delivering the full 5-stage model and could benefit from additional support to improve delivery.

### **4. There are a range of supported employment models being delivered, with some examples of excellent support; but variation in outcomes achieved**

Across Scotland, there are a range of supported employment models being delivered. The 5-stage model of supported employment and DFN Project Search were most referenced but there are also examples of supported businesses employing and supporting people with learning disabilities.

We heard that, regardless of the specific model of supported employment delivered, there needs to be more clarity over quality supported employment standards to ensure clients receive a good service. There was a significant range in outcomes reported, with one Local Authority reporting that they had supported 10% of clients into work whilst another reported helping 83% of clients to secure a paid job. Similarly, the funding per person supported per Local Authority ranged from less than £1000 per year to over £7000.

The data available on cost per outcome, although a small sample, indicates that Local Authorities with higher budgets per person supported a higher proportion of individuals into work. We heard that funding security allows services to successfully upskill and retain staff, fund in-work support and upskill employers and reduce time and energy spent on funding applications.

Conversations with Fair Start Scotland providers suggested that the current payment by results model acted as a barrier to further investment in supported employment delivery in their locality. This is because the supported employment model requires significant up-front time commitment in vocational profiling with the client and identifying suitable job matches, with no guarantee of a job outcome after this work. This can be challenging when funding is dependent on job outcomes.

We also heard that some funding is contingent on supporting clients into 16+ hours of work. Many clients accessing supported employment may want to work on a part time basis initially, with the aim of working towards full time employment in future. This funding requirement where it exists is therefore a barrier to working with all clients.

Finally, we heard that there are specific challenges to offering quality supported employment in rural areas. These include; the need for long supply chains, raising aspirations and moving away from day centres towards employment support, a lack of local providers, funding insecurity leading to experienced services closing and challenges with access to transport.

## **5. There is limited use of consistent quality standards throughout Scotland, but work is underway to address this**

Our review conducted four deep dive quality assessments of services, following the British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) quality assessment methodology. The sites were selected based on initial data analysis and designed to give a representative sample of commissioning structure, location, and service type.

The deep dive reviews found that there was significant variation in the quality of service delivered across different areas. One Local Authority area had excellent, high-quality provision and high fidelity to the 5-stage model of support, with low caseloads and strong outcomes evidenced. The other Local Authority area offered a pan-disability service with evidence of good practice on some of the 5-stage model, but only very light touch job matching and in-work support. This service also received few referrals for individuals with learning disabilities and autistic people. The Fair Start Scotland services were found not to be delivering the 5-stage supported employment model, had very high caseloads and were not supporting individuals with more moderate or severe disabilities.

There is currently limited use of consistent quality standards for supported employment in Scotland. We heard that this makes it challenging for commissioners to understand the quality of supported employment services. Feedback received suggested that performance management tools used by local commissioners are not designed for supported employment. As a result, providers may offer a “supported employment” service with the best of intentions, but the offering may fall short of the expectations initially set out by commissioners, demonstrated by below-target paid work outcomes. Central standards and regular quality assessment may help here.

Positive work is underway to address the shortfall in consistency. Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE) has developed a 6-stage quality assessment model tailored to the Scottish landscape. This includes assessment of the five stages of supported employment as well as leadership and organisational capacity.

Local Authority leads have done some local work to develop standards and quality assurance that they could take forward and would welcome central standards and assessment. This would include common data standards, collection, and benchmarking of performance.

## **6. There are examples of high-quality employer engagement in Scotland, but opportunities to increase co-production**

We came across many examples of strong relationships between service providers and employers in Scotland. Particularly successful are non-judgemental relationships developed over a period of years through partnership working. We also heard that the Public Social Partnership (PSP) hosted by SUSE is developing innovative ways of engaging employers and showcasing the strengths of employees with learning disabilities and neurodiversity. Building these relationships requires investment on the part of service providers up front, which can be challenging given the short-term nature of many service providers' funding streams.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups highlighted the importance of co-production in building relationships with employers and quality assuring service delivery. Although there are some local examples of high-quality and meaningful engagement with people with lived experience (for example, organisations facilitating training to employers led by people with learning disabilities), we heard that there was an opportunity to do more on this. There was a request for more examples of people with lived experience on boards of supported employment providers or working within them.

Providers felt that long-term co-production work is made challenging by fixed term contracts and short funding cycles. Because there is a range of standards in support, we also heard that clients themselves aren't informed about what is on offer. This makes it difficult for clients to hold providers to account so they deliver a high-quality service.

In addition to funding limitations, providers face ongoing challenges to overcome common myths associated with employing people with learning disabilities. This can be particularly challenging in the instances where providers' key workers have caseloads of 50-60 clients at any one time. The challenge posed by larger caseloads was felt particularly by Fair Start Scotland providers.

## **7. There is positive work underway to develop the workforce**

Efforts to develop staff members within the supported employment space are aided by a range of training opportunities. Positive work is being done by the NIDMAR programme which aims to professionalise the workforce. Some staff are undertaking the Professional Development Award (PDA) in supported employment. Training Systemic Instruction (TSI) also offers a structured approach to teaching vocational and independent living skills, in particular for those with learning disabilities.

In interviews with providers, the PDA was consistently highlighted as being the most useful and relevant qualification for supported employment professionals. Interviewees liked the length of the investment in learning required and noted that the content was very tailored towards their day to day work.

We also heard that there could be value in refreshing the PDA content and ensuring it is up to date for adapted ways of working through COVID, such as more remote working. Interviewees also noted that the training was more suitable for individuals with experience delivering supported employment, and so an entry level course may be useful as an additional course. Finally, interviewees noted that people with learning disabilities deliver supported employment and therefore the qualification should be reviewed to ensure it is accessible for individuals with learning disabilities.

Providers also noted that there is a challenge around marketing, recruiting and funding the role, and the work being done by Scottish Government and the NIDMAR programme to professionalise the workforce is therefore welcomed. We heard calls for more clearly defined career pathways with suggested pay grades, along with a shorter introduction training programme for professionals who are new to supported employment.

## Recommendations

The research identified three key themes and goals to be addressed in future supported employment delivery. These goals were agreed by the project steering group:

1. reduce variability of access across different Local Authority areas;
2. increase transparency of data collection and outcomes; and
3. standardise quality assurance of supported employment.

There is an opportune policy window of about 18 months to March 2023 to develop plans to implement the recommendations within this report. This period coincides with the end of the current Fair Start Scotland contracts and Keys to Life strategy. Underpinning all these recommendations is a goal of creating a culture of high expectations for people with learning disabilities and a focus on mainstream paid employment. This theme came through strongly in focus groups and conversations with people with learning disabilities.

1. **We recommend steps are taken to design a Scottish “Supported Employment Guarantee” over the next 18 months.** This would include funding and targets for local areas to drive consistency in access rates. The Guarantee should allow for local co-design of service delivery with people with lived experience.
2. **We recommend steps are put in place to drive consistency and oversight of supported employment provision through data collection.** This would include access, outcomes and information on the needs and disabilities of individuals accessing support, including through Fair Start Scotland.
3. **We recommend that supported employment quality standards and an assurance approach for Scotland is developed.** Establishing a steering group of providers, commissioners, national government, employers and people with lived experience can support this work.
4. **We recommend that a national supported employment infrastructure programme is developed and commissioned.** This programme will:
  - support the implementation of the Supported Employment Guarantee by undertaking quality reviews, driving high performance through data and operational support, and will support workforce development; and
  - facilitate the work of the supported employment steering group.
5. **We recommend that work continues to support the professionalisation of the supported employment workforce.** This will involve:
  - developing entry level training materials for individuals new to supported employment;
  - reviewing existing training programmes, including NIDMAR and PDA to ensure that they are accessible for individuals with learning disabilities, and are tailored to supported employment delivery; and
  - creating a career pathway for supported employment professionals, including marketing of the role and creation of pay standards across the sector.
6. **We recommend employers are encouraged to deliver more support to people with disabilities.** This may be through:
  - taking forward the work of the Public Social Partnership (PSP) hosted by the Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE). This may include setting up a Scottish Centre of Excellence for employers to share best practice; and
  - making funding available for people with lived experience to deliver training to employers, myth bust and raise aspirations.
7. **We recommend options are explored with DWP to allow supported employment providers to claim Access to Work directly**

- 8. We recommend exploring how “anchor institutions”, such as NHS Scotland, Scottish Government and Local Authorities, can increase the number of jobs available for people with disabilities**
- 9. We recommend making changes to Fair Start Scotland contracts to remove the requirement for 16+ hours of work, and to require data reporting of the disabilities of individuals accessing supported employment.**

*N.B.: this project was completed virtually due to the impact of COVID-19 over the duration of 2020/21.*

# Introduction and Methodology

## Introduction to Supported Employment

Supported employment is an evidence-based, personalised approach that provides support to people with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups to secure and maintain paid employment in the open labour market.

Supported employment is based on the model of “place and train” where participants learn on-the-job with support from work colleagues. This is backed up by the skills of a job coach or employment support worker who provides well-structured, flexible support to both the service user and potential employer. This support includes identifying the skills, preferences and experiences of the individual and matching these with potential employers.

The job coach then searches for a suitable job and provides training in the workplace once this is secured. Onsite training continues to the point where the service user and the employer are satisfied that the duties of the post can be discharged without the day to day intervention or assistance of the job coach. The length of on-the-job support is determined to an extent by some of the natural workplace support that becomes available from colleagues.

The job is not an end in itself. Individuals should be able to access continuing assistance for career progression, to acquire new skills or to move roles. This can include providing specialist support to individuals who want to launch their own business.

A supported employment service typically follows a 5-stage model:



As outlined in the Supported Employment Framework for Scotland<sup>1</sup> the approach is guided by three main principles:

- the job should be in an integrated workplace;
- the jobholder is paid the rate for the job; and
- all individuals have the right to end their reliance on welfare benefits, i.e. reduce poverty.

<sup>1</sup> **The Supported Employment Framework for Scotland**; published February 2010 by the Scottish Government and COSLA.

## Scottish Policy Context

As outlined in A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Employment Action Plan, the Scottish Government has committed to at least halving the disability employment gap in Scotland by 2038. Part of achieving this commitment entails undertaking a review of the current supported employment provision across Scotland, as part of implementing the employment actions agreed in Scotland's Learning Disability Strategy, The Keys to Life and the subsequent implementation framework.

Achieving this goal, and improving disabled people's experience of employment, is a long-term challenge. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is having a considerable impact on many areas of society – in particular health, but also on the economy and the labour market. Evidence from the previous recession suggests there is a danger that existing labour market inequalities could be further exacerbated, suggesting that this focus on improving support for disabled people to enter and retain fair work is now more important than ever.

Whilst some good initial progress has been made in reducing the disability employment gap, it still remains significant, and the Scottish Government recognise sustained and collaborative effort is required.

The Scottish Government believes that supported employment plays an important part in helping those who would otherwise struggle to gain employment in the open labour market into work. As such, it is a model that can make an important contribution to the ambition to at least halve the disability employment gap in Scotland.

Supported employment delivery for learning disabilities and/or autism in Scotland sits underneath these policy frameworks:

- **No One Left Behind:** Scotland's plan for an employability system that puts individual needs at the forefront.
- **A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People:** Written with the involvement of disabled people, this sets out actions to support disabled people to live independently. This includes reducing barriers to employment and halving the disability employment gap.
- **The Keys to Life (2013-23):** Scotland's Learning Disability Strategy; with the ambition that people with learning disabilities should be treated with dignity, respect and understanding and able to play a full part in their communities.
- **Scottish Strategy for Autism (2011-21):** to ensure progress is made in delivering quality services for autistic people and their families.

Supported employment is offered in Scotland through two primary routes. Firstly, it is offered as part of Fair Start Scotland, which started in April 2018 and is now contracted to run until March 2023. Secondly, Local Authorities commission supported employment services.

There is currently an opportune 18-month period to review supported employment policy and determine how to implement recommendations from this review. Fair Start Scotland contracts run until March 2023 and recommendations within this report could be considered in determining what support comes after this. The current Learning Disability and Autism strategy, Towards Transformation, is a two year plan which also runs to March 2023.

## The review of Supported Employment

In April of 2021, Social Finance was commissioned by the Scottish Government to conduct an evaluation of supported employment delivery within Scotland. The research was designed to provide a robust, independent review of how supported employment is delivered, and where gaps in provision lie.

The evaluation sought to address the following core research questions:

- Where is supported employment being implemented and where are the gaps in provision?
- What type of service is being provided by Local Authorities, for whom, and what are the outcomes?
- What are some of the reasons for gaps in the service and how can these be addressed?
- How can the service providers be further supported to promote greater consistency and use of service?

## Our methodology

This report brings together quantitative findings from data collection and analysis of access levels and outcomes achieved. It also includes themes from qualitative research with supported employment providers, commissioners, clients and wider stakeholders.

We have employed a mixed-methodological approach to the review. The research has aimed to map the current landscape of supported employment in Scotland, assess the quality of provision and provide recommendations for future delivery.

The research took place over a four-month period between May and August 2021. At interim stages throughout the research, findings and themes were presented to a project steering group for their input.

Multiple methods were used in the research:

### Local Authority Survey

A survey of all 32 Local Authorities was created and shared with Local Authority leads for completion in May 2021, and yielded 31 responses (97% completion rate). The survey contained 15 questions designed to provide a baseline understanding of the following:

- locations where support is on offer/not on offer
- type of supported employment models on offer

- client groups supported and eligibility criteria
- funding available
- number of clients supported
- outcomes achieved
- gaps and challenges

A list of questions asked are presented in **Annex A**. Themes emerging from qualitative and quantitative survey data analysis are presented in this report. All findings have been anonymised so that gaps, challenges and confidential data cannot be attributed to individual Local Authorities.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

The research involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with over 25 participating organisations to explore their role in supported employment delivery. A full list of organisations represented through semi-structured interviews is included in **Annex C**.

Interviewees were selected to cover a wide range of stakeholders involved in supported employment delivery in Scotland and included:

- Fair Start Scotland prime contractors
- Local Authority service providers and commissioners
- Central Government policy leads
- Third sector providers
- Sector support organisations
- Groups representing those with lived experience

To support open sharing of views, participants were told that feedback would not be attributed to individuals within this report. Instead, themes were collated by the research team and are presented in this report.

### **Lived Experience Research**

The views of those with lived experience was gathered in two ways. Firstly, through individual interviews in case study site areas (see below), and through a focus group meeting facilitated by an organisation working with people with lived experience. This two-hour focus group was facilitated in a semi-structured way to allow the conversation to progress to topics of importance as defined by participants. The aim of the discussion was to understand the experiences participants have received of employment and employment support, what worked well and what they would like to see in an ideal world. This conversation was recorded and quotes and themes from participants feature throughout this report.

## In-Depth Case Studies

Four services were selected for in-depth case study. Two-day full supported employment quality assessments were undertaken on three sites, and a one-day review on the final site. The reviews followed the British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) framework for assessing supported employment quality. The reviews involved the following activities:

- a pre-review self-assessment undertaken by the service
- case file analysis
- interviews with service providers, clients and employers
- feedback and action planning with services

The four services were selected for review based on preliminary data analysis to ensure a range of service size, location and commissioning structure were selected. The four sites were selected on the basis that they were:

Site Number	Rationale for Selection
1	Commissioned through Fair Start Scotland (FSS) and delivered by the FSS contract holder that delivers the highest quantity of supported employment through FSS.
2	Commissioned through FSS, subcontracted to a third sector provider, in a region in Scotland with limited Local Authority supported employment provision.
3	Commissioned by a Local Authority and delivered in house by the Local Authority in a City Region.
4	Commissioned by a Local Authority and delivered by a consortium of local third sector providers.

Each site was presented with a detailed report indicating the quality of their delivery along with areas for improvements. Results of these reviews are not presented in this report to preserve confidentiality of services. However, themes emerging from these reviews are presented, along with anonymised case studies (**Annex B**).

## Focus Group Research

Two focus group research sessions were held with supported employment stakeholders. One focus group was held with the report steering group and another held with the Local Authority supported employment network (LASEN).

An online tool called EasyRetro was used to gather participant feedback and views. Research questions were presented to participants around three elements of supported employment delivery: working with employers, client voice and the quality of support on offer. Views on best practice, gaps and recommendations were collected. Participants were able to vote for feedback that resonated with their experience and a group discussion was then facilitated to draw out key themes.

Themes from these focus groups are presented throughout this report.

## Reflections on Methodology

In a research project of this length it has not been possible to undertake detailed quality assessments of all supported employment providers in Scotland. However, the sample assessed has been selected to provide a good range of different types of providers and commissioning models. It should therefore provide an indicative basis of the range of quality of provision across Scotland.

Although the evaluation was able to gather feedback from 97% of Local Authorities on their supported employment provision, there was limited data available on outcomes and provision centrally. The report explains the challenges mapping the provision in more detail and suggests recommendations to improve this.

We are aware when carrying out reviews and analysis that supported employment provision in 2020 and 2021 has been impacted by COVID-19. However, we also know that supported employment providers have still been able to support clients into work during this period. We have been mindful of the impact of COVID-19 when assessing quality and access to provision.

Finally, although the evaluation has incorporated the views of those with lived experience, it should be noted that the research methodology was not designed by those with lived experience. In recognition of this, researchers used semi-structured interview techniques to allow participants and focus groups to shape the questions asked and findings given.

# Part 1: Access to Supported Employment

## Overview

The team carried out a comprehensive mapping of supported employment provision in Scotland to better understand: which organisations provide supported employment; what types of assistance are offered; demand for services provided; gaps in provision; and outcomes achieved.

In order to map the landscape of supported employment, the following research tasks were undertaken:

- Desk-based research, synthesising and analysing existing data, evidence and outcomes on supported employment delivery in Scotland.
- To supplement the existing knowledge base, we conducted a survey of all Local Authorities via Microsoft Forms, and the response rate was 97%.
- We undertook semi-structured interviews with 7 Local Authorities.
- We held a focus group with the Local Authority Supported Employment Network (LASEN).
- Data analysis of the access and outcomes achieved by Fair Start Scotland providers.

Supported employment in Scotland is generally commissioned either by Local Authorities or as part of Fair Start Scotland (FSS). Fair Start Scotland is a voluntary support service commissioned centrally and delivered across nine geographic lots in Scotland. It aims to provide employment support to people who may need additional support to find work. Within FSS, the service offer for individuals with additional barriers to work is built on the principles of supported employment. The support should be tailored to the individual, and although the service specification says that not every client will receive the full 5-stage model, they should expect a service that includes key elements of supported employment.

Our research aimed to map out access to supported employment across both of these primary commissioning routes.

## Findings

There were three key findings that emerged during our research relating to service accessibility:

1. There is a complex mixture of local and national provision of supported employment across Scotland
2. There is a high variability in access rates
3. There is an opportunity to improve access for clients with learning disabilities, and autistic people

## **1. There is a complex mixture of local and national provision of supported employment across Scotland**

Supported employment provision is commissioned nationally through Fair Start Scotland, and locally by Local Authority leads. This results in a complex mixture of both national and local provision.

Many respondents felt that there are benefits to the mixture of local and national provision. Local Authorities noted that having provision that was locally tailored and could adapt to local needs was positive, particularly to reach more rural communities.

However, the research also highlighted some of the challenges of this delivery model. There is variability in local access levels, a mixture of supported employment models on offer and a range in eligibility criteria. There is also variability in how data is collected and reported, making mapping the provision across the country challenging.

### **Access to supported employment**

The review found that there is an engaged and committed supported employment sector in Scotland, with 97% of Local Authorities responding to our survey. 27 of the responding 31 Local Authorities reported providing a supported employment service (87%). Four (13%) noted that there was no supported employment offering within their Council area. One Local Authority did not respond to the survey.

23 of responding Local Authorities provided data on the number of people supported (74%). This data indicated that there appears to be at least two and a half thousand (2,500) clients in receipt of a Local Authority supported employment service in Scotland. There appears to be an additional ~800 individuals receiving supported employment through FSS. The level of access varied considerably by area (see Point 2 below).

Gathering data on what provision is delivered where was challenging. As noted above, 74% of Local Authorities provided data on the number of people they supported. It appeared that the methods behind their calculations varied, and some data reported appeared to be anomalous. For example, some Local Authorities reported Fair Start Scotland access numbers within their data, whilst others did not. Other Local Authorities reported that there was no supported employment access locally but follow up semi-structured interviews indicated that third sector organisations were delivering small amounts of supported employment locally with European funding.

The areas that were not currently offering supported employment noted the following main challenges:

- Lack of recognised providers of supported employment within the local area
- No requirement to provide supported employment as a core service
- Challenges for employers utilising Access to Work funding to pay for appropriate in work support
- Challenges securing appropriate funding locally to deliver supported employment

These themes and challenges were also often mentioned in survey responses by Local Authorities who were delivering supported employment. Every Local Authority who didn't currently offer a supported employment service recognised that this was a gap and were taking various steps to address it. One Local Authority is in the process of designing and commissioning a new supported employment service. Another Local Authority has multiple services that deliver different elements of the supported employment model, although they do not have one joined up offer delivered by one provider.

“The delivery of supported employment is not viewed as a ‘core or statutory function’ for any organisation, including Local Authorities. [...] leading to a ‘postcode lottery’ in terms of accessing services. This has been the case for too long and needs addressing.”

Local Authority Survey Respondent

## Model Offered

The 5-stage model of supported employment was formally adopted by the Scottish Government in 2010 as *the* supported employment framework for Scotland. The model is guided by the principle that anyone can be employed if they want paid employment and sufficient support is provided. The model is a flexible and continuous process, designed to meet each person's individual needs – and those of the employer.

The five stages are as follows:

**Client Engagement** – an opportunity for jobseekers to find out about the supported employment model and to make an informed choice as to whether it is right for them.

**Vocational Profiling** – A detailed and unique discovery and planning process that enables people to identify what they want to achieve and work out a plan for getting there.

**Job Finding** – The employment worker and client work together to find vacancies that meet the client's employment goals.

**Employer Engagement** – The employer worker learns about the job and works out a plan with the employer on how they will support the client through the recruitment process and in the workplace.

**On and Off the Job Support** – The client is supported to learn the job and sustain employment, this could include job coaching at work, training, support from a workplace mentor and regular workplace reviews.

Of the 31 survey respondents, 20 (65 %) made explicit reference to the 5-stage model of supported employment being provided in their locality. 15 (48%) noted a Project Search site. Project Search is a supported internship programme, aimed at transforming the lives of young people with learning disabilities and autistic people. Programmes are generally delivered in partnership with large local employers. In Scotland Project Search sites are commonly within NHS Trusts, Local Authorities or Academic Institutions. Project Search is not a replacement to supported employment and the two models support and complement one another. Project Search interns benefit from supported employment services that are able to support them into work once their internship has ended.

A wide range of other support was referenced. This includes supported businesses, where individuals are supported by the employer in work. We saw excellent examples of some supported businesses delivering all of the 5-stage model themselves, including supporting employees into other careers and in setting up their own business. Additional examples can be found in the case studies in **Annex B**.

## Access Criteria

A majority of the services on offer noted wide eligibility criteria, welcoming clients with all health conditions and disabilities. Many also support people with additional barriers, for example those with an offending history or an addiction problem. There was limited data available showing the disabilities or needs of individuals accessing supported employment services. Without centralised data it is challenging to assess the extent to which services are reaching individuals with learning disabilities and autistic people specifically. However, our in-depth reviews (see Part 2) found that where services have wider eligibility criteria, individuals with learning disabilities and autistic people may be less likely to access services.

Most services noted that they assisted individuals of any age, but where exclusion criteria were present, they generally focused on individuals under the age of 30. Some semi-structured interview participants expressed concerns that older adults with learning disabilities may be missing out on support aimed at younger participants. Labour market activation policies, such as the Young Person's Guarantee, which are aimed at 16-24 year olds, may not benefit young people with learning disabilities, who may have been held back in school and therefore start their journey to work later in life. This makes it all the more important that supported employment provision is available for all ages.

## Gaps in Provision

A key objective of our survey and conversations with stakeholders was to understand the nature and extent of any gaps in supported employment provision across Scotland.

A number of Local Authorities noted waiting lists for their service due to a lack of capacity. Qualitative feedback also noted an increasing number of referrals for those with complex health issues, including mental health, that more "mainstream" employability provision hadn't been able to support.

Knowledge gaps were also referenced – there was uncertainty around the length of time required to provide high-quality job support to clients with a learning disability, particularly in-work support. Relatedly, services noted gaps around support for people in work but struggling or on sick leave, especially where the client had a disability. Those with lived experience noted that employers often failed to offer ongoing support, with adjustments tending to be one-off and at the start of a client's journey.

**“Demand is high for supported employment provision in our area and therefore we have to operate a waiting list due to the limited capacity of advisors.”**

“We have seen a growing demand for our service in recent times for those with complex issues including mental health issues. Clients require more intensive support than other mainstream models of employability provision aren’t equipped or able to provide.”

“There is a huge gap in the supported employment offer due to a lack of understanding within Local Authority teams. The length of time required to support those with learning disabilities is underestimated.”

### Responses to our survey of Local Authorities

Otherwise, some respondents felt there was a growing focus on younger people out of work (16-24 year olds), and that this could see those over-29 left behind. Some feedback noted that those with specific additional needs could also be better-served – this point is touched upon in more detail under point 3 below. There either may not be specific provision tailored to the needs of those with more complex needs, the deaf community, or within the criminal justice space, to name a few, or they do not meet referral criteria and therefore “fall through the net”.

Local Authorities in more rural locations noted additional challenges around third sector providers closing due to insecurity of funding, and the requirement for them to use long supply chains to reach more remote communities requiring additional funding. There were also feedback that nationally commissioned programmes, such as FSS, were not currently reaching more remote communities.

Many Local Authorities who are currently providing a service noted concerns over future budgets, especially as ESF funding comes to an end. They also noted that where funding has been available as core Local Authority funding, this has helped stabilise provision. They felt that access to core Local Authority funding and making supported employment a core service may help to improve quality.

“The lack of clarity over future funding is a real concern. If provision isn’t adequate at present then how much more marginalised will people with a learning disability become if funding is cut further.”

*Feedback from focus group members with lived experience*

## **2. There is a high variability in access rates**

Survey responses, focus groups and semi-structured interviews highlighted that there are examples of high-quality supported employment service offerings across Scotland. Examples of best practice are noted in Part 2, and in the case studies included in **Annex B**.

However, the use of the term “postcode lottery” was commonplace as interviewees described the consistency of supported employment services across Scotland. As noted above, 16% of Local Authorities noted that they commission or deliver no supported employment.

Where supported employment is commissioned locally, there is variability in the range of the eligible population that it reaches. We analysed the number of people each Local Authority reported as receiving supported employment per year, and compared this to the number of people known to the Local Authority with learning disabilities. Although

the supported employment on offer is likely to be available to a wider cohort of clients in addition to those who have learning disabilities, we have used this as a proxy to understand relative coverage. This analysis showed that there was a range in coverage between council areas between 2% and 60+% of those known with a learning disability receiving support each year.

Similarly, funding levels vary widely across different Local Authority areas. We received data on funding available for supported employment from 20 Local Authorities. Where known, total funding per Local Authority ranges from £0 to £2,000,000 per annum. Where there is a supported employment service, the funding per person known to have a learning disability locally ranges from £57 p.a. to £1,795 p.a.

There is also a range of access to supported employment delivered through Fair Start Scotland (FSS). In two of the nine geographic lots, there are currently no individuals receiving supported employment. There is a wide range in the number of individuals receiving support across the other seven lots, from under 30 to almost 300.

### **Widening Access to Supported Employment**

Feedback from participants in the focus group highlighted the importance of supported employment and the positive difference it can make. However, only a small minority of participants had had the opportunity to benefit from a supported employment service.

*“It’s not just having a job that supported employment helps with, it’s helped with relationships, providing your own home. This wouldn’t have been possible without finding a job – it’s not just finding a job and staying in a job, it’s the other things that finding a job brings, buying a house, providing a partner and just a whole lot of other things that help you to live a meaningful life.”*

*Focus group member*

### **The role of volunteering**

A number of focus group participants spoke about how they had been offered volunteering opportunities to build confidence and skills, but were then not offered the opportunity to take on paid work. One participant spoke about doing many years of volunteering work and feeling frustrated that she wasn’t paid for doing the same job that others were paid to do. Further, there was a sense amongst those working with clients that volunteering advertisements could be misleading, and clients exploited as a result. Terminology used when advertising posts could lead clients to believe that they had a job, and the client would then invest significant time and effort without receiving an income.

Money management can be challenging, making volunteering appear favourable for some. Participants noted concerns with navigating a complex benefits system and the effects working upon their claims.

*“Support is needed to help clients who volunteer to sell themselves onto something else, something better, and something paid.”*

*Feedback from a support worker*

### **3. There is an opportunity to improve access for clients with learning disabilities, and autistic people**

#### **Data availability**

We do not have data on the number or percentage of people accessing supported employment through Local Authority services, or through FSS, who have learning disabilities or are autistic. This means that it is challenging to assess the access rates for clients with learning disabilities or autistic people. We do know however that:

- 1% of all Fair Start Scotland (FSS) clients are reported to have a learning disability.
- Many Local Authority services report wide access criteria for a range of physical and mental health conditions

This suggests that there could be an opportunity to improve access to supported employment for clients with learning disabilities and autistic people.

In particular, data on learning disabilities is not always separated out from within all disabilities, making it challenging to know whether needs are being met. Our mapping of Local Authority and Fair Start Scotland data doesn't include a breakdown of protected characteristics – for example ethnicity, sexuality, age and gender. This is a limitation of our analysis and Local Authorities noted they think there are gaps for clients with additional needs and barriers to work. Without this data it is challenging to assess the extent of these gaps, and there could be opportunities to improve data collection in this area.

*“Not having data which specifically indicates those with a learning disability receiving supported employment opportunities is a huge gap.”*

*Feedback from focus group members with lived experience*

# Part 2: Quality of Provision

## Overview

In order to understand the quality of provision of supported employment across Scotland, the research team:

- carried out over 25 semi-structured interviews with Scottish Government representatives, Local Authorities, service providers, amongst others;
- held a focus group with the research steering group focused on three key themes driving quality of supported employment delivery;
- held a focus group meeting with individuals with lived experience, and spoke with individuals with lived experience in deep dive areas;
- undertook four deep dive audits of supported employment service providers, two of which were with Local Authority providers, and two with Fair Start Scotland providers. This involved use of the British Association for Supported Employment (BASE)-endorsed modified version of the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF). This helped us to review the fidelity of supported employment services delivered in Scotland to the SEQF, an internationally agreed model of supported employment; and
- put the findings from the audits into four case studies, noted in **Annex B** in this report.

## Key findings:

1. There are a range of supported employment models being delivered, with some examples of excellent support but variation in outcomes achieved
2. There is limited use of consistent quality standards throughout Scotland, but work is underway to address this
3. There are examples of high-quality employer engagement in Scotland, but opportunities to increase co-production
4. There is positive work underway to develop the workforce

### **1. There are a range of supported employment models being delivered, with some examples of excellent support but variation in outcomes achieved**

Across Scotland, there are a range of supported employment models being delivered. The 5-stage model of supported employment and DFN Project Search were most referenced by responding Local Authority providers (at 65% and 48% respectively). There are also examples of supported businesses employing and supporting people with learning disabilities. The businesses deliver some or all of the 5-stage model.

There was a consensus from interviewees that having a range of needs-lead support is important. We also heard that these models complement each other and are important to build a strong supported employment landscape. For example, Project Search benefits from high-quality local supported employment providers to support interns into the workplace. Supported businesses play a key role in developing the aspirations of employers and showing what is possible.

However, we heard that, regardless of the specific model of supported employment delivered, there needs to be more clarity over quality supported employment standards to ensure clients receive a good service.

## Paid Outcomes Achieved

Paid work outcomes are a proxy for the quality of service offered to clients.

Through our survey, we received Local Authority data on outcomes from 16 of the 31 respondents. We asked for “data on the percentage of clients engaged in your programme who go on to secure paid employment with your Local Authority area”. The exact wording of the question is noted in **Annex A**.

There was a significant range in outcomes reported, with one Local Authority reporting that they had supported 10% of clients into work. Another reported helping 83% of clients to secure a paid job. Where data was available, the average outcomes rate amongst Local Authority services was 43%. It is to note that some respondents counted training and learning as a positive outcome, with others only counting paid work outcomes.

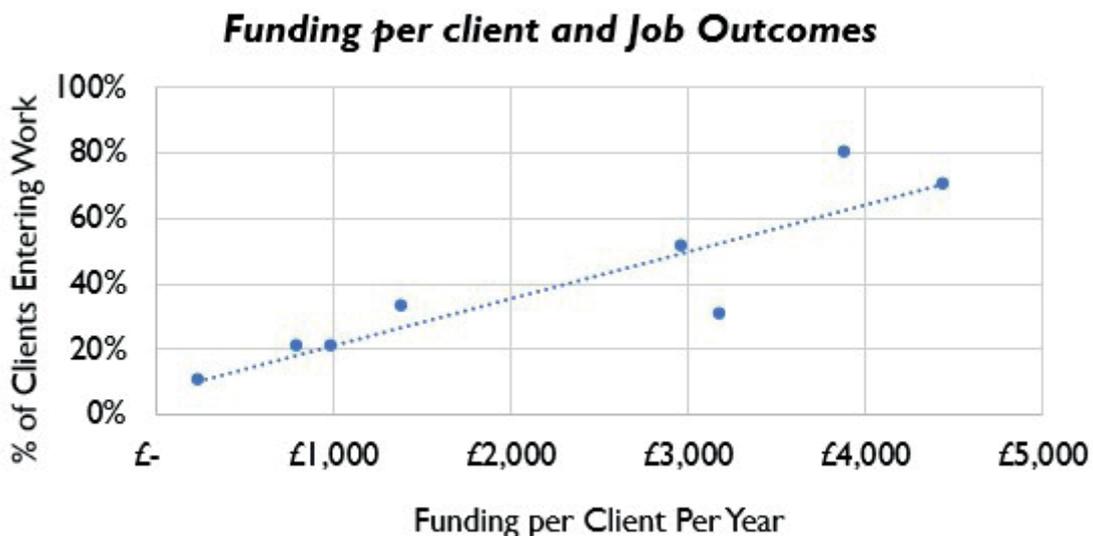
Interviewees noted a perception that perceived poor performance amongst Local Authority services may lead to funding cuts. Their keenness not to be disadvantaged in applying for funding was often expressed through a reluctance to disclose any information about their service that might be made public. However, we heard consistently that in the face of poor performance, investment is needed to improve outcomes.

There was limited data available on longer term outcomes, particularly around the percentage of clients who sustain their job for three or six months, suggesting an opportunity to standardise data collection.

## Variation in Funding

We received data from 20 Local Authorities on their total annual supported employment funding and the number of people supported each year. The funding per client per annum ranged from <£1,000 to over £7,000.

We were able to source *both* cost per client data and outcomes data for eight Local Authorities. We plotted the data, and it is presented below:



Despite the small sample size, the plot would seem to suggest a link between more funding per client, and higher job outcomes. We heard that funding security allows services to successfully:

- upskill and retain staff;
- fund in-work support and upskill employers; and
- reduce time and energy spent on funding applications.

Conversations with Fair Start Scotland providers suggested that the current payment by results model acted as a barrier to further investment in supported employment delivery in their locality. This is because the supported employment model requires significant up-front time commitment in vocational profiling with the client and identifying suitable job matches, with no guarantee of a job outcome after this work. This can be challenging when funding is dependent on job outcomes.

## **16+ Hours of Work**

Some providers, particularly those delivering support under Fair Start Scotland, noted that funding was contingent on individuals entering work for over 16 hours. This was reported to be a barrier to working with all clients. Many clients accessing supported employment may want to work on a part time basis initially, with the aim of working towards full time employment in future.

Other individuals may decide that they want to work part time for the foreseeable future. Supported employment is based on the ethos of client preference and therefore this preference should be supported. We therefore heard calls for the 16+ hour of work requirement or link to outcomes funding to be removed.

## **Delivering Support in Rural Locations**

We heard that there are specific challenges to offering quality supported employment in rural areas. There can be additional barriers to employer engagement, exacerbated by the need to overcome stigma in smaller communities where people are well known to each other. We heard from third sector providers that not all Local Authorities are fully bought into the supported employment model. This is particularly the case in instances where there is a continued and established practice of funding day services for clients, rather than employment support.

There were examples of experienced third sector providers having closed in rural locations due to funding insecurity. Other third sector providers expressed concerns that when external funding ends – such as that from the European Social Fund – locally devolved funding may not be used for supported employment or reach third sector providers.

Finally, we heard from some rural Local Authorities that nationally commissioned support, including FSS, has a limited reach in their areas. This is because of the large geographic spread of some regions, and the need for services to be delivered by third sector providers with strong local links. We heard that currently national supply chains are not reaching all of these communities.

Nevertheless, we heard that The Public Social Partnership (PSP) hosted by the Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE) is creating opportunities for collaboration across Scotland, and is giving larger providers the chance to help smaller providers engage with employers.

There are also examples of providers creatively overcoming rural transport challenges. One provider mapped out journey times across a Local Authority area and picked their site based on where was most easily accessible. They also worked with local community transport providers to increase access to the service.

Our report was written amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, and studied provision delivered amidst challenging circumstances posed by the pandemic. With meetings held virtually on forums such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams rather than in person, there appear to have been more opportunities for stakeholders in more rural locations to engage in meetings that may previously have been difficult to attend. However, increased use of remote working relies on clients accessing services to have digital facilities, and digital poverty remains a risk, particularly in more rural locations where access to transport is limited.

## **2. There is limited use of consistent quality standards throughout Scotland, but work is underway to address this**

### **Quality Standards and Assessment**

There is currently limited use of consistent quality standards for supported employment in Scotland. We heard that this makes it challenging for commissioners to understand the quality of supported employment services. Feedback received suggested that performance management tools used by local commissioners are not designed for supported employment. As a result, providers may offer a “supported employment” service with the best of intentions, but the offering may fall short of the expectations initially set out by commissioners, demonstrated by below-target paid work outcomes. Central standards and regular quality assessment may help here.

Positive work is underway to address the shortfall in consistency. Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE) has developed a 6-stage quality assessment model tailored to the Scottish landscape. This includes assessment of the five stages of supported employment as well as leadership and organisational capacity.

Local Authority leads have done some local work to develop standards and quality assurance that they could take forward and would welcome central standards and assessment. This would include common data standards, collection, and benchmarking of performance.

Project Search sites benefit from a standardised quality assurance framework, data collection and communities of practice. This allows the Project Search central delivery team to understand the quality of services offered in individual locations. It also supports sharing of best practice amongst providers and means that performance challenges can be identified and rectified.

## Co-production

Importantly, our semi-structured interviews and focus groups highlighted that co-production is serving to incorporate the voices of those with lived experience into the design of models.

There are some local examples of high-quality and meaningful engagement with people with lived experience. For example, we heard examples of organisations facilitating training to employers lead by people with learning disabilities.

In general, we heard that there was an opportunity to do more on this – there was a request for more examples of people with lived experience on boards of supported employment providers or working within them.

As noted above, providers felt that long-term co-production work is made challenging by fixed term contracts and short funding cycles. Because there is a range of standards in support, we also heard that clients themselves aren't informed about what is on offer. This makes it difficult for clients to hold providers to account so they deliver a high-quality service.

## Quality of Delivery: Summary

Our review conducted four deep dive quality assessments of services, following the BASE quality assessment methodology. The sites were selected based on initial data analysis and designed to give a representative sample of commissioning structure, location, and service type.

Site Number	Rationale for Selection
1	Commissioned through Fair Start Scotland (FSS) and delivered by the FSS contract holder that delivers the highest quantity of supported employment through FSS.
2	Commissioned through FSS, subcontracted to a third sector provider, in a region in Scotland with limited Local Authority supported employment provision.
3	Commissioned by a Local Authority and delivered in house by Local Authority in a City Region.
4	Commissioned by a Local Authority and delivered by a local third sector provider.

The deep dive reviews found that there was significant variation in the quality of service delivered across different areas. One Local Authority area had excellent, high-quality provision and high fidelity to the 5-stage model of support, with low caseloads and strong outcomes evidenced. The other Local Authority area offered a pan-disability service with evidence of good practice on some of the 5-stage model, but only very light touch job matching and in-work support. This service also received few referrals for individuals with learning disabilities and autistic people. The Fair Start Scotland services were found not to be delivering the 5-stage supported employment model, had very high caseloads and were not supporting individuals with more moderate or severe disabilities. Reasons for this are given below:

## Quality of Delivery: Fair Start Scotland

Our quality reviews of FSS service delivery across Scotland found that services are delivering personalised support to the best of their ability through the contract. When clients enter the service, they are assessed and those identified as having additional barriers to employment are offered supported employment, as required by the Fair Start Scotland contract. However, as noted above, the Fair Start Scotland providers reviewed were not delivering the 5-stage supported employment model.

The main reasons identified for this were:

- **Reaching clients furthest from the job market:** A majority of referrals to Fair Start Scotland come from Jobcentre Plus, via client self-referral. Those furthest from the job market may not self-refer, and so stand to go without a supported employment service offering. In one service, of the clients receiving supported employment, needs tended to include anxiety, mild depression, and milder forms of learning disability.
- **16+ hours of work:** The Fair Start Scotland contract stipulates that clients need to secure 16+ hours of work per week to trigger a success payment. Meeting the target is particularly challenging given the needs and preferences of clients and has been exacerbated by COVID-19's impact upon the labour market.
- **The payment-by-results nature of the funding** makes it challenging for providers to invest upfront in removing barriers to employment and providing ongoing in work support. This means that while the service may be offered to individuals, the five stages of the model are not consistently delivered.
- **High caseloads of 50-60 people** on the part of key workers mean it is challenging to offer truly tailored support which ultimately supports clients to find and sustain a job. Supported employment services would generally have caseloads of around 20 to offer truly tailored support. Some services have different staff members delivering different parts of the service.

However, we did find areas of practice where Fair Start Scotland providers were delivering good, individualised support:

- **Employer Engagement:** One Fair Start Scotland provider views their employer engagement as an opportunity to build diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Employers praised their awareness raising via social media, their staff onboarding processes, and initial worksite reviews to assess suitability for clients.
- **Use of Health and Wellbeing Advisors:** One Fair Start Scotland provider offers a Health and Wellbeing advisor to every individual identified as having additional barriers to work. They are booked in to see a Health & Wellbeing Adviser within four weeks of starting Fair Start Scotland to establish if more in-depth support is required through the Supported Employment Model (SEM), or through Individual Placement and Support (IPS). Vocational Profiling may also be offered on its own.
- **Use of personalized support:** Tailored support is offered to each individual client, and in a COVID-conducive manner. Clients praised the online support offering by one FSS provider, with courses available on a range of topics, including to manage anxiety and build confidence. Weekly check ins have been described as a "lifeline" during challenging COVID times.

## Quality of Delivery: Local Authority Services

Our quality reviews of service delivery through Local Authorities noted a variation in service design, referral criteria and adherence to the 5-stage model across the two services reviewed. One service sits under the local Health and Social Care Partnership, the other is delivered by a consortium of partners with Council and ESF funding. This variation is not surprising given the locally led commissioning model combined with limited use of standardised quality standards.

The service that was delivering particularly high-quality support to individuals with learning disabilities and autistic people had the following features:

- **High-quality delivery of 5-stage model and strong outcomes:** The service staff have an average case load of 12 clients. This enables staff to offer tailored, person-centred support which flexes to the needs of service users. Aided by strong networks with employers, colleges and the NHS, around half of all clients engaged secure employment and half of these sustain it for at least six months.
- **Partnership building:** The team work collaboratively with external parties. Relationships have been developed with wide and varied community organisations, including Prince's Trust, Autism Network Scotland, and Scottish Commission for Learning Disabilities (SCLD).
- **Performance amidst COVID-19:** Although the number of new engagements dropped slightly due to COVID-19, outcomes targets continued to be achieved. With face-to-face meetings not possible, staff used text messaging, phone calls and virtual meetings to support the health and wellbeing of clients. The service made use of the Connecting Scotland programme, ensuring ICT kit and connectivity was available to vulnerable clients.

The main challenges identified through the review were:

- **Securing long-term funding:** The service currently relies on a 40% top-up from ESF. This funding brings challenges such as monthly audits, which are onerous for staff. However in its absence, a strategic challenge will be to secure further longer-term funding.
- **Managing Case Load Size:** The service tries to stick to its small caseload size to provide truly tailored support. This means that they have to find alternative support and services for individuals who are not likely to go on to secure work. They have built relationships with befrienders and mental health services.
- **Training and retaining workers:** Significant resources are used in training supported employment practitioners. Once trained, retaining expertise can be a challenge in the absence of long-term certainty over funding.

The other Local Authority service, which is a pan-disability service, also demonstrated examples of excellent support:

- **The service benefits from a high-quality welfare rights service** as evidenced by external reviews, which adds tremendous value and impact for clients using the supported employment service.

- **All Partners/Providers evidenced a holistic, client-centred practice** with the aim to understand, involve, listen, and provide the best support possible to assist people into paid work. Staff were observed as highly engaged and passionate about their work and delivering the right support for their clients to gain, maintain and sustain paid employment, with low caseloads of around 20 clients to support this.
- **Good use of relevant subsidies and Access to Work** scheme to provide the employer with funding to offer the in-work support.

The challenges identified through this review were:

- **Referrals for people with learning disabilities or autistic people:** People with a learning disability or autistic individuals do not routinely stream into this service and the greater proportion of service users appear to be people presenting with mental health conditions.
- **Employer engagement** could have focused more on building new relationships and carving specific job opportunities. Cross representation of staff reported being more focused on traditional job seeking methods, that lacked some of the depth expected in the 5-stage model.
- **Job Matching and Career Progression:** Given the presenting service users, job matching, in work support and follow along career progression was understandably lighter touch. There was evidence from interviews that staff had the ability to manage more in-depth delivery of in work support for both the employee and employer.

### **3. There are examples of high-quality employer engagement in Scotland, but opportunities to increase co-production**

We came across many examples of strong relationships between service providers and employers in Scotland. Particularly successful are non-judgemental relationships developed over a period of years through partnership working. However, these do often require investment on the part of service providers up front, in order to upskill employers. Offering longer term funding and employer incentives where appropriate can be particularly challenging given the short-term nature of many service providers' funding streams.

In addition to funding limitations, providers face ongoing challenges to overcome common myths associated with employing people with learning disabilities. It is key to showcase the skills that people with learning disabilities can offer to employers, and this requires an investment on the part of providers and employers, not least in terms of time dedicated. This can be particularly challenging in the instances where providers' key workers have caseloads of 50-60 clients at any one time. The challenge posed by larger caseloads was felt particularly by Fair Start Scotland providers.

We heard that the Public Social Partnership (PSP) hosted by SUSE is developing innovative ways of engaging employers and showcasing what employees with learning disabilities and neurodiversity can offer. For example, the PSP has identified seven employers who will now receive return to work training, to enable them to better support staff with disabilities to stay well in work.

One service had success in raising employer aspirations by gathering local employers to an evening dinner. Everyone involved in delivering the evening, from those on the reception desk to those serving the food had a disability and was in receipt of supported employment. It showed directly to employers the skills these staff bring to an organisation. It led to one on the spot job offer and increased engagement from employers.

### **Providing On-Going In-Work Support**

Raising the aspiration of employers and providing long-term in work support was a key theme emerging from focus group conversations. The length of time for which in-work support is offered can be insufficient, with adjustments made by employers often “one-off”. Participants also noted that assistance needs to be provided in such a way that it doesn’t undermine the person receiving it and that working alongside other people with disabilities was viewed as positive.

One client had left a job they enjoyed having been treated poorly and not received support. They noted having been mocked by colleagues for their disability.

*“I wasn’t offered any support and when I asked for it, I was told to ‘put up with it’. I loved the job but hated the people, and so I left.”*

*Focus group member*

The review saw a number of examples, especially through supported businesses, where individuals had been supported into self-employment. One supported business has supported clients to set up their own companies in catering and hospitality. This support is important in delivering the 5-stage model, as client preferences should be taken into account, including those who want to set up their own business.

#### **4. There is positive work underway to develop the workforce**

Efforts to develop staff members within the supported employment space are aided by a range of training opportunities. Positive work is being done by the NIDMAR programme which aims to professionalise the workforce. Some staff are undertaking the Professional Development Award (PDA) in supported employment. Training Systemic Instruction (TSI) also offers a structured approach to teaching vocational and independent living skills, in particular for those with learning disabilities.

### **NIDMAR**

The National Institute of Disability Management and Research (NIDMAR) was founded in 1994. It is committed to reducing the human, social and economic costs of disability. As an education, training and research organisation, NIDMAR’s primary focus is the implementation of workplace-based reintegration programmes.

The NIDMAR supported employment case manager training is designed to support the professionalisation of the workforce and equip case managers to have a values-lead approach to supported employment. Participants take an exam which allows them to

access a professional qualification, the Certified Disability Management Professional (CDMP) registration. There is also a fast track qualification process for individuals who already hold the PDA in Supported Employment Practice. We heard positive feedback from interviewees about the aim of professionalising the workforce. Survey feedback from participants also show most participants reporting that they will be able to implement module learnings in their working life.

However, undertaking NIDMAR training requires a significant time commitment on the part of students, with a six-hour exam required to secure a “pass”. Interviewees from providers and Local Authorities who had attended training or sent team members on the course described NIDMAR training as being interesting, but not necessarily useful in the context of their day-to-day work in the supported employment space, particularly considering the time investment required. Training was viewed as more useful in the context of case management and HR, and is more of an “occupational health qualification” than a supported employment one. We also heard requests to make the qualification more accessible to individuals with learning disabilities. Finally, interviewees noted that the course is more suited to individuals with some experience of delivering return to work services and there is a gap in training for people new to supported employment. We understand that work is underway to develop a NIDMAR apprenticeship programme in response to this.

## **Professional Development Award (PDA)**

The PDA in Supported Employment Practice provides a combination of off-the-job and workplace learning for supported employment practitioners. The award has been designed to be delivered through an inclusive partnership approach; engaging with employers, training providers and approved centres. It provides candidates with the opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding required to work within a variety of settings, with clients who have additional needs. Candidates also develop the skills required to engage with prospective employers and offer them appropriate support throughout the process.

In interviews with providers, the PDA was consistently highlighted as being the most useful and relevant qualification for supported employment professionals. Interviewees liked the length of the investment in learning required and noted that the content was very tailored towards their day to day work.

We also heard that the content may not have been updated for a few years, so there could be value in refreshing it and ensuring it is up to date for adapted ways of working through COVID, such as more remote working. Interviewees also noted that the training was more suitable for individuals with experience delivering supported employment, and so an entry level course may be useful as an additional course. Finally, interviewees noted that people with learning disabilities deliver supported employment and therefore the qualification should be reviewed to ensure it is accessible for individuals with learning disabilities.

## Qualifications and career pathways

The review found variation in the amount and types of training that had been undertaken by different organisations. There was not sufficient data to assess whether services that had undertaken particular qualifications achieved better outcomes. We did hear that because there are not requirements around training for staff, this can result in inconsistent quality of delivery.

Providers also noted that there is a challenge around marketing, recruiting and funding the role, and the work being done by Scottish Government and the NIDMAR programme to professionalise the workforce is therefore welcomed. We heard calls for more clearly defined career pathways with suggested pay grades, along with a shorter introduction training programme for professionals who are new to supported employment.

# Part 3: Lessons for Future Delivery and Recommendations

## Overview

The research identified three key themes and goals to be addressed in future supported employment delivery. These goals were agreed by the project steering group:

1. Reduce variability of access across different Local Authority areas
2. Increase transparency of data collection and outcomes
3. Standardise quality assurance of supported employment

This section presents high level recommendations that could be taken forward to achieve these goals. The recommendations in this section recognise that there is limited scope to significantly amend delivery through current Fair Start Scotland contracts. There is also an opportune policy window of about 18 months to March 2023 for Scottish Government to develop more specific plans to implement these recommendations. This period coincides with the end of current Fair Start Scotland contracts and Keys to Life strategy.

## Reducing Variability of Access and Improving Data Collection

The following policy levers and funding options could present options to align access across Local Authority areas:

- **No-One Left Behind funding:** This is devolved to Local Employability Partnerships and there are increased funding pots becoming available. Funding plans have to be co-produced locally.
- **Local Authority supported employment funding:** We understand that every Local Authority receives supported employment funding, however it is not ring-fenced, no Local Authority mentioned it in interviews, and it may be being used to support other budget lines.
- **Regional Economic Development plans:** Local Authorities have to create Regional Economic Development plans, there could be opportunities for people with learning disabilities to co-produce these.
- **Adult Social Care and the National Care Service:** Employability could feature within the review of Adult Social Care and the National Care Service.

The current funding model for Local Authority provision appears to allow significant local discretion over service provision. This also appears to be the future direction of travel, with No One Left Behind funding devolved to local areas. The ethos around locally owned plans means there are not currently plans for central government to mandate targets around how this funding is used.

The Fair Start Scotland commissioning model is currently centrally driven, but as the quality reviews have indicated, it is very challenging for providers to deliver a locally embedded service to a high needs group as part of a large, nationally commissioned and payment by results driven contract.

We believe that the locally driven model has many benefits, including allowing for high levels of local innovation and responsiveness to need. However, as we have seen, this high level of local freedom can also create risks around high levels of variation in access and outcomes.

**We recommend that additional national oversight and accountability is put in place within the next 18 months to reduce the variability of access rates as No One Left Behind funding plans are launched.**

One potential solution is additional national oversight in the form of a Scottish “Supported Employment Guarantee”. This would include:

- **Targets** for local areas around supported employment access and outcomes
- **Ring-fenced funding** for Local Authorities (aligned to target numbers) + provider block funding.
- **Quality assurance standards** to be followed as a condition of funding • **Co-production** of local service delivery plans
  - **Infrastructure support** with:
    - Delivering high-quality services
      - Hands on support to review services, develop improvement plans
      - Support to establish formal communities of practice to share learnings
      - Support with co-production of Workforce development
    - Data collection and national monitoring of outcomes

There is scope to choose how each of these levers are packaged into a guarantee, and we recommend steps are taken to design a Scottish “Supported Employment Guarantee” over the next 18 months.

We understand that there is a move away from national government setting targets or ring-fenced funding for local areas to allow greater partnership working. There is a careful balance to be struck between local freedom and national accountability to reduce the risk of variation in access rates. The less measures such as targets and ring-fenced funding are used, the more important it will be for national government to set clear quality assurance standards and provide nationally commissioned infrastructure support. This is to ensure that areas provide high quality provision and to reduce the risk of variable access rates.

“A Scotland-wide strategy should set out minimum requirements for supported employment in every Local Authority. There is a need to focus on young people coming out of school, to raise their aspirations.”

*Support worker*

## Data Collection

There is a recognition that without data showing the needs and disabilities of individuals accessing support, there is a risk that people with learning disability and autistic individuals are made invisible in assessing service quality and may be underserved by provision that is aimed at supporting them.

**We recommend steps are put in place to drive consistency and oversight of provision through increased national data collection as part of the Supported Employment Guarantee.** This could involve:

- local areas required to report access and outcomes data for supported employment nationally as a condition of receiving funding; and
- a requirement for Fair Start Scotland providers to report the needs and disabilities of individuals accessing supported employment specifically.

We recognise challenges around national data collection, including around individuals securing diagnosis for learning disability or autism, and therefore we recommend support is put in place. This may include:

- standardised spreadsheets or templates to align data standards across areas; and
- resource available to support providers to better collect, report and monitor data, and to aggregate and analyse data nationally.

## Standardising Quality Assurance

The recommendations in this section are designed to build on the positive work already underway in Scotland to improve the quality of supported employment services. They also include best practice from services in Scotland, as well as developments in England and Wales. It is split into three sections: developing quality standards, workforce development and finally work with employers. Underpinning all these recommendations is a goal of creating a culture of high expectations for people with learning disabilities and a focus on mainstream paid employment. This theme came through strongly in focus groups and conversations with people with learning disabilities.

“It’s not just having a job that supported employment helps with – it’s helped with relationships, providing your own home. This wouldn’t have been possible without finding a job – it’s not just finding a job and staying in a job, it’s the other things that finding a job brings, buying a house, providing a partner and just a whole lot of other things that help you to live a meaningful life.”

*Focus group member*

## **1. Developing quality standards**

There is positive work underway to develop quality assurance standards which can be built on.

**We recommend the creation of Supported Employment Quality Standards for Scotland.** These should build on existing work undertaken by SUSE and Local Authorities and ensure standards are tailored to Scottish landscape. It is important that client voice and co-production is incorporated into standards and a quality assurance framework.

We recommend a supported employment steering group established composed of providers, commissioners, national government, employers and people with lived experience. The group will convene to develop and agree a supported employment quality assurance framework for Scotland.

**We recommend support is put in place to ensure delivery is in line with standards, through a national infrastructure programme to be developed and commissioned within the next 18 months.**

This programme will support the implementation of the Supported Employment Guarantee by Local Authorities through No One Left Behind by undertaking quality reviews, delivering operational support, data management and workforce development. It will also facilitate the work of the supported employment steering group by hosting and chairing these meetings and taking forward actions from this group.

## **2. Professionalising the Workforce**

**We recommend that work continues to support the professionalisation of the supported employment workforce.** This will involve:

- Developing entry level training materials for individuals new to supported employment
- Reviewing existing training programmes, including NIDMAR and PDA to ensure that they are accessible for individuals with learning disabilities, and tailored to supported employment delivery
- Creating a career pathway for supported employment professionals, including marketing of the role and creation of pay standards across the sector.

## **3. Employer Support**

There is an opportunity for employers to deliver additional support and for aspirations to be raised.

**We recommend employers are encouraged to deliver more support to people with disabilities.**

The Public Social Partnership (PSP) coordinated by SUSE has trialled approaches with employers that could be mainstreamed in future. The review heard positive feedback about the innovative work the PSP is delivering and its role in bringing together different organisations across the supported employment sector.

**We recommend that the work of the PSP is taken forward. This may include setting up a Scottish Centre of Excellence for employers to share best practice.**

We have also heard positive examples of supported employment providers delivering training to employers through individuals with lived experience to raise aspirations, break down myths and encourage more job opportunities to be made available.

**We recommend that funding is made available for people with lived experience to deliver training to employers, myth bust and raise aspirations.**

**We recommend that Scottish Government explore with DWP options to allow supported employment providers to claim Access to Work directly.**

The review has heard that providers struggle to benefit from Access to Work funding for in work support, as applications generally have to be completed by employers which is time consuming and complex to navigate, particularly for small and medium employers.

We understand that in other parts of the UK, supported employment providers have been able to access dedicated Access to Work coordinators and the ability to apply for in work support funding directly from Access to Work. The recently announced proof of concept of Access to Work passports, as well as the existing Access to Work forum in Scotland may both present options to take this work forward.

**We recommend that Scottish Government explore how to use “anchor institutions” to increase the number of jobs available for people with learning disabilities and autistic people.**

“Anchor institutions” are those institutions which play a particular role within local economies in maintaining and generating jobs. These employers tend to employ a significant number of people locally, but are also relatively able to withstand periods of recession. Although the impact of COVID on the labour market now looks to be less severe than originally predicted, there are worrying signs that individuals with disabilities are being impacted disproportionately, and that the disability employment gap may be widening<sup>2</sup>. With COVID employment policies such as Kickstart there is a risk that jobs that would otherwise have been available to individuals with learning disabilities and/or autistic people are made available instead to individuals eligible for these schemes. Anchor institutions can play an important role in addressing this. They include the NHS, Local Authorities, Universities, colleges, and other public sector service providers.

NHS England has developed a Learning Disability Employment Programme (LDEP)<sup>3</sup>, which encompasses autistic people, as part of government commitment to employ tens of thousands of people with a learning disability. The Senedd has recently recommended the same to Welsh Government<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Institute for Employment Studies [Covid and Disability Employment Gap](#)

<sup>3</sup> Information available here: [NHS England Learning Disability Employment Programme](#)

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Parliament; Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee; Long-term recovery from COVID-19; March 2021 [NHS Wales Learning Disability Employment Programme Recommendation](#)

**We recommend that Scottish Government develop a learning disability and autism employment plan for NHS Scotland, Scottish Government and Local Authorities. This could form part of the review of health and social care.**

### **Fair Start Scotland Changes**

We understand there is limited scope to make changes to Fair Start Scotland contracts, which is why these recommendations have focused on developing the support that comes after Fair Start Scotland. However, **we recommend some specific changes are made to Fair Start Scotland contracts in the interim period.** This includes:

- removing the requirement for individuals to want to enter 16+ hours of work to allow providers greater freedom to work with individuals who want to enter part time work; and
- requiring Fair Start Scotland providers to report data on the needs and disabilities of individuals who are receiving supported employment.

## Summary of Recommendations

- 1. We recommend steps are taken to design a Scottish “Supported Employment Guarantee” over the next 18 months.** This would include funding and targets for local areas to drive consistency in access rates. The Guarantee should allow for local co-design of service delivery with people with lived experience.
- 2. We recommend steps are put in place to drive consistency and oversight of supported employment provision through data collection.** This would include access, outcomes and information on the needs and disabilities of individuals accessing support, including through Fair Start Scotland.
- 3. We recommend that supported employment quality standards and an assurance approach for Scotland is developed.** Establishing a steering group of providers, commissioners, national government, employers and people with lived experience can support this work.
- 4. We recommend that a national infrastructure programme is developed and commissioned.** This programme will:
  - support the implementation of the Supported Employment Guarantee by undertaking quality reviews, driving high performance through data and operational support and support workforce development.
  - facilitate the work of the supported employment steering group.
- 5. We recommend that work continues to support the professionalisation of the supported employment workforce.** This will involve:
  - Developing entry level training materials for individuals new to supported employment
  - Reviewing existing training programmes, including NIDMAR and PDA to ensure that they are accessible for individuals with learning disabilities, and tailored to supported employment delivery
  - Creating a career pathway for supported employment professionals, including marketing of the role and creation of pay standards across the sector.
- 6. We recommend employers are encouraged to deliver more support to people with disabilities.** This may be through:
  - taking forward the work of the PSP. This may include setting up a Scottish Centre of Excellence for employers to share best practice.
  - making funding available for people with lived experience to deliver training to employers, myth bust and raise aspirations.
- 7. We recommend options are explored with DWP to allow SE providers to claim Access to Work directly**
- 8. We recommend exploring how “anchor institutions” can increase the number of jobs available for people with disabilities**
- 9. We recommend making changes to Fair Start Scotland contracts to remove the requirement for 16+ hours of work, and to require data reporting of the disabilities of individuals accessing supported employment.**

## Conclusion

The review has identified a very positive landscape from which to develop high quality supported employment services across Scotland. This includes providers with many years of experience, motivated and committed policy makers and innovative Local Authority commissioners. And importantly, many individuals with learning disability and autistic people who are passionate about working and with so many skills, experiences and ideas to offer to employers and wider society.

The challenge that this review has identified and sought to address is how to spread these examples of excellent practice across the country and improve consistency and quality of the service offer. This is all with the aim that individuals with learning disability and autistic people can have the support that they rightly deserve to enter and keep meaningful work, with all the benefits that this brings.

We hope that the recommendations in this report will serve as a strong foundation to build this support. Scotland has the opportunity to become the world leader in supported employment delivery and we hope that this review can act as one of the first steps in this journey.

# Annex A

## Survey of Local Authorities

### *Background to this survey:*

Our team at Social Finance is working with Scottish Government to map the delivery of supported employment by Scottish Local Authorities and the Third Sector. Supported employment is a way of providing assistance to people with a disability who need extra support to move towards and into paid work. This review was committed to by Scottish Government as part of Scotland's Learning Disability Strategy, The Keys to Life. Social Finance is a not-for-profit organisation, working to drive social change and improve services for vulnerable people. Our Health and Employment Team aims to ensure that all disabled people have an equal opportunity to thrive through lasting and fulfilling employment.

### *How you are helping us:*

As part of this review, we want to engage with Local Authorities and employability providers in Scotland in order to:

Map the current provision of supported employment in Scotland; Understand the quality of current provision and any gaps; Make recommendations to improve supported employment in Scotland in the future.

In each instance, we are looking to understand provision beyond that offered by Fair Start Scotland.

This survey builds on a questionnaire shared by Scottish Government in 2019. Separate to this questionnaire we will also be undertaking in depth reviews of some services, facilitating semi-structured interviews with providers and holding focus groups with clients. Your answers to this survey will help us map out current provision, areas of gaps and shape recommendations to improve supported employment in Scotland going forward.

### *Questions:*

1. On behalf of which Local Authority are you responding to this survey?
2. Does your Local Authority deliver or commission a supported employment service(s)?
3. Please provide a list of the organisation(s) who deliver supported employment services in your Local Authority.
4. Briefly describe the model(s) of supported employment offered in your Local Authority (e.g. the 5-stage supported employment model, DFN Project Search).
5. Please outline who can access supported employment in your area and any eligibility criteria applied (e.g. age, place of residence, type of support need(s)).

6. Approximately how many people access supported employment services in your Local Authority per year? (Please split by Fair Start Scotland and outside Fair Start Scotland where appropriate).
7. Approximately what funding is available per year for supported employment services in your Local Authority?
8. What are the sources of funding for these supported employment services? (e.g. core LG, ESF, Lottery).
9. Do you have data on the percentage of clients engaged in the programme who go on to secure paid employment within your Local Authority area?
10. If you answered “Yes” to Question 9, approximately what percentage of those engaged clients go on to secure paid employment within your Local Authority area?
11. Are you aware of any gaps in the supported employment offer in your Local Authority? If so, please provide a brief description.
12. We are keen to hear and understand client and employer feedback on supported employment Services. Do you have access to any data or feedback that you would be able to share with us?
13. I would be happy to be contacted by Social Finance to discuss my responses to this survey.
14. If you answered “Yes” to Question 12 or 13, please provide a point of contact. (e.g. email address).
15. Do you have any other comments about supported employment in your Local Authority?

# Annex B

## Case Study 1

### Background

We spoke with a Local Authority provider of supported employment, working to help those with long-term health conditions and/ or disabilities into sustainable work. The most common barrier to employment amongst those referred was a mental health problem, followed by learning/physical disabilities, and autism.

28% of clients self-referred to the service, with referrals from Jobcentre Plus the next most common referral route. A vast majority (84%) of those supported were over 25 years old, and about 25% over 50, indicating less of a focus on those likely to have left school or college more recently.

The unit costs per client supported and per recorded full-time job outcome were comparable with other programmes applying the full supported employment offer, at under £2k and £13k respectively.

### Observations

#### *What is going particularly well?*

**Fidelity:** It was evident from interviews that the organisations providing support offered the 5-stage model of supported employment. Staff confirmed that the model was central to all induction and Personal and Social Development activities, with flexibility naturally required to ensure a truly person-centred offering.

**Quality of provision:** The delivery approach brought together the skills and coverage of multiple organisations, who worked to create a compelling and consistent service offering across their region. A high-quality welfare rights service was evidenced and added value and impact for clients.

**Client focus:** All Partners and Providers interviewed evidenced a holistic, client-centred practice with an aim of involving clients, with a view to providing the best support possible. Staff were observed as highly engaged and passionate about their work to help clients to maintain and sustain paid employment.

#### *What are the key challenges?*

**Referrals:** Referrals for higher-need clients did not typically come the way of the providers. Investment would be required to create and support a structure to expand and manage a deeper delivery of the 5-stage model for such a cohort.

**Securing employment opportunities:** Employer engagement did appear to be weighted towards focusing on traditional job-seeking methods. Given the needs of presenting service users, job matching, in-work support, and follow-along career progression guidance was understandably lighter touch. Were a higher-needs cohort to be sourced, this could pose a challenge.

## Case Study 2

### **Background**

We spoke with a second Local Authority provider of supported employment services. The Council offered its own employability services, whilst also commissioning third sector organisations to deliver more specialist services to those with barriers to the labour market.

Three main services were offered or would be imminently. The two main services had helped almost 50% of clients into work in the past five or so years. Over half of those supported into work had then sustained employment for at least six months. The latest programme of the three would support younger autistic people into work in the future.

The case load amongst staff was comparatively lower than other supported employment services studied, at about 12:1. This enabled staff to offer tailored, person-centred support which flexed to the needs of service users. This was aided by strong networks with local employers, colleges and health services.

### **Observations**

#### ***What is going particularly well?***

**Partnership building:** The team and its direct network clearly had a highly aligned purpose, working collaboratively together and with external parties. Relationships had been developed with wide and varied community organisations, including Autism Network Scotland.

**Performance amidst COVID-19:** Although the number of new engagements dropped slightly due to COVID-19, outcomes targets continued to be achieved. With face-to-face meetings not possible, staff used text messaging, phone calls and virtual meetings to support the health and wellbeing of clients. ICT kit and connectivity were available to vulnerable clients.

#### ***What are the key challenges?***

**Securing long-term funding:** Council funding was supplemented by external top-up funding, yielding monthly audits which were onerous for staff. In the absence of the funding, set to expire in the near future, a strategic challenge would be to secure further longer-term funding. This would enable the service to continue to train and retain expert supported employment practitioners.

**Managing Case Load Size:** The service tries to stick to its small caseload size to provide truly tailored support. This means that they have to find alternative support and services for individuals who are not likely to go on to secure work. They have built relationships with befrienders and mental health services.

## Case Study 3

### **Background**

We also met with two supported employment service providers working within the Fair Start Scotland contract. The contracts started in April 2018 and were most recently extended to March 2023. The supported employment element of the service is delivered within a multi-million-pound contract that covers a wider employability programme. Funding is paid to providers on a payment-by-results basis, once a client enters work, and when they sustain their employment.

In this instance, a large number of referrals into the partner organisations came from Jobcentre Plus. Key workers would then assess the needs of those requesting support, and allocate them to a strand depending on their level of need at presentation. All clients deemed to require more intense support were offered the 5-stage model of supported employment, and were directed to a Health and Wellbeing Advisor.

Employment workers within the service tended to have large caseloads (e.g. 50 or 60 clients) catering for a variety of need.

### **Observations**

#### ***What is going particularly well?***

**Employer engagement:** One of the partner organisations qualified as a Disability Confident Leader, and viewed their employer engagement as an opportunity to build diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Employers praised their awareness-raising done via social media, their staff onboarding processes, and initial worksite reviews to assess its suitability for clients.

**Use of Health and Wellbeing Advisors:** Each of the key delivery partners offered a consistent approach to supporting clients' health and wellbeing. Those clients deemed to require intense support were booked into to see an Advisor within four weeks of starting the Fair Start Scotland programme to establish if more in-depth support was required. This would be through either the Supported Employment Model (SEM), or Individual Placement and Support (IPS). Vocational Profiling could also be offered on its own.

**Use of personalised support:** Tailored support was offered to each individual client, and in a COVID-conducive manner. Clients praised the provider's online support offering in particular, with courses available, for example to manage anxiety and build confidence. Weekly check ins were described as a "lifeline" during the challenges of the pandemic.

#### ***What are the key challenges?***

**Reaching individuals with additional needs:** A majority of referrals came from Jobcentre Plus, via client self-referral. Those furthest from the job market may not self-refer, and so stand to go without a supported employment service offering. Of the clients receiving supported employment, needs tended to include anxiety, mild depression, and milder forms of learning disability.

**The 16+ hours of work barrier:** The Fair Start Scotland contract stipulates that clients need to secure 16+ hours of work per week to trigger a success payment. Meeting the target appeared particularly challenging given the needs and preferences of clients, who perhaps wanted to start or continue with part-time work, or volunteer.

**Achieving outcomes with high caseloads:** With key workers assisting 50-60 clients each, offering truly tailored support was a challenge. The payment-by results nature of the contract meant that the provider takes a risk when investing in ongoing in-work support, or job finding support for those clients further away from the jobs market. This poses a challenge when aiming to maintain the low caseloads required to fully deliver the 5-stage model.

## Case Study 4

### Background

We spoke with a second group of providers operating under the Fair Start Scotland contract. Again, the organisations relied on referrals from local Jobcentre Plus offices and self-referrals, aided by social media campaigns. Jobcentre Plus allocated clients to each of the partners, who tailored their support offering to the level of need. A targeted training and development plan had been created to ensure staff could step up to the challenge of managing clients with different needs.

Having not initially been permitted to do so within the delivery contract, key stakeholder status enabled one provider to engage with local colleges within their lot(s). The goal was to promote the Fair Start Scotland offer to people with learning disabilities and autistic people. However, there had been limited uptake from such sources, likely due to the need to work 16+ hours per week.

### Observations

#### *What is going particularly well?*

**Outreach:** Team Leads demonstrated a clear emphasis on understanding local demographics with a view to engaging those who might not ordinarily access a supported employment service. Client and employer brochures and social media campaigns clearly explained the available service offers. Customer testimonials and success stories were shared and broadcasted widely.

**Preparing clients for work:** Co-produced vocational profiling was offered to all clients in order to support them into sustainable work. Action plans were reported to be consistently developed and to a high standard with clear objectives, timeframes and review times. “Better Off Calculators” were used by advisers with clients and aided the transition from claiming benefits to being in work. The result was that just under half of those in receipt of a supported employment service were accessing work.

### ***What are the key challenges?***

**Supporting higher-needs clients:** Fair Start Scotland referral routes were not viewed as facilitating the pick-up of people with learning disabilities or autistic individuals. About 5% of service users in the lot(s) had a mild learning disability or were autistic.

**Managing high caseloads:** One provider's caseload was reported as being as high as 1:80. Such caseloads posed a challenge when aiming to meet key performance indicators set out in the Fair Start Scotland contract. It was noted that caseloads had dropped slightly amidst COVID-19, with prospective clients choosing to wait to sign up for support.

## Annex C

We received 31 responses to our survey of supported employment providers from Local Authorities. In addition, we spoke to a number of key stakeholders in the supported employment space and their insights feature throughout the report. The organisations consulted are listed below:

All in Edinburgh

British Association for Supported Employment (BASE)

Dumfries and Galloway Council

Dundee City Council

East Renfrewshire Council

ENABLE

Falkirk Council

Fedcap

Forth Sector

Glasgow City Council

Highlands Council

Into Work

National Autism Implementation Team (NAIT)

NIDMAR (Project Lead)

Local Authority Supported Employment Network (LASEN)

People First Scotland

People Plus

Remploy

Scottish Commission for Learning Disability (SCLD)

Scottish Government

Shetland Islands Council

StartScotland

Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE)

Inspired Community Enterprise Trust (Trading as The Usual Place)

The Wise Group

Values Into Action Scotland (VIAS)



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