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Fair Start Scotland Update

I am writing to update the Committee on today's publication of the Fair Start Scotland Annual Report which provides an overview of progress throughout the the fourth year of delivery (2021-22) of our devolved employability service. We have also published research reports highlighting participants experiences and views of the service gathered via online surveys and focus groups.

Annual Report: [Fair Start Scotland Annual Report Year 4](#).

Research Reports:

- [Insights into participants' experiences of Fair Start Scotland Year 4 \(April 2020 – March 2021\)](#):- results from three online surveys'
- [Fair Start Scotland Year 4: experiences of disabled participants or those with long-term health conditions and those from minority ethnic groups](#) ':-results from four focus group discussions'

Despite the current tight labour market, I am sure that the Committee are aware that many people who are eligible for Fair Start Scotland support continue to face difficulties in entering and sustaining fair work, such as those who are disabled, those with long-term health conditions, women, lone parents, and people from minority ethnic backgrounds. The published reports demonstrates how Fair Start Scotland continued to be a positive intervention for those who wanted to move into fair and sustainable employment, through the provision of individualised tailored support.

The reports highlight our ongoing commitment to learn from and respond to evaluation findings, participant and partner feedback. We have implemented a range of continuous improvement activities to ensure that participants have continued to be supported in the way that best suited them, while upholding the key principles of the service in treating people with dignity and respect. These initiatives included moving to a hybrid method of support to best meet the needs of participants as well as allowing previous participants the right to return to the service if they still require support. The report also details the increased demand for

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support with non-work related barriers to employment. Mental health, housing and debt were all increasingly prominent challenges as a result of the economic climate and COVID-19.

The report also includes our response to previous evaluation findings to extend the reach and accessibility of Fair Start Scotland to under-represented groups, which was achieved through commissioning initiatives with CEMVO and Disabled People's Organisations. This will allow us to learn from specialist support organisations, ensuring that those with real life experiences can share their knowledge and support to help Fair Start Scotland tailor delivery to meet individuals' needs to enter and sustain fair employment.

These initiatives and learning will continue through the remainder of the service. We will share this learning with our local government, private and third sector partners and learning will help to shape and inform future employment support through No One Left Behind and our wider public sector ambitions including halving the disability employment gap by 2038 and tackling child poverty.

We publish regular statistical releases on Fair Start Scotland performance and the most recent publication can be found at the link below:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-devolved-employment-services-statistical-summary-16/>

I trust that you and your members will find this update helpful.

Richard Lochhead

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