

Response to Social Justice and Social Security Committee inquiry into addressing child poverty through parental employment

On behalf of the SLAED People (Employability) Group, which represents the Employability Leads from across all 32 Local Authorities

Parental employability delivery landscape

From person-centred key worker support, to specific interventions to build confidence, skills and qualifications, and through sector specific training and intermediate labour market opportunities, every Local Authority area in Scotland has an employability offer available to support parents to progress towards, into and whilst in, employment.

The level and availability of support will vary depending on location, funding, evidence of need and resources. From a coaching offer to help build digital skills in Aberdeen, Money, Debt and Budgeting advice in Argyle and Bute, to formal training and qualifications in East Lothian, and specific support for ethnically diverse families in Edinburgh, the range of services that have been developed to support parents has been wide-ranging.

Dedicated funding has been available to Local Authorities through the Scottish Government Parental Employability Support Fund since 2020, specifically targeted at the [six 'priority groups'](#) of:

- mothers aged under 25
- minority ethnic families
- lone parents
- parents whose youngest child is under one
- parents with three, or more, children
- disabled family members

However, many areas have aligned additional funds through council core budgets, No One Left Behind, European Structural and Investment Funds or other funding streams, and this has ensured that support is available to a much wider group and is very much aligned with the No One Left Behind ambition of providing flexible, person centred, locally evidenced employability services.

Local employability partnerships

In each area, the Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs), consisting of representatives from partners such as relevant council departments, Skills Development Scotland, Department for Work and Pensions, Developing Young Workforce, the Third Sector Interface, Chamber of Commerce or similar and other local stakeholders - have a role to play in identifying and agreeing the priority groups and employability activities which should be provided in their own areas.

Using a variety of data such as School Leaver Destinations, unemployment figures, child poverty, SIMD information and feedback from service users the LEPs review their existing offers to identify gaps in provision and then utilises a number of commissioning routes to be able to address these.

Many areas use a mixed economy of delivery, with some services delivered by internal council employees, in addition to grant funded or contracted provision offered by the third and/or private sector, working closely with services provided by SDS, DWP and Fair Start Scotland providers.

Every LEP has an active 3-year delivery plan – covering 2022 – 2025 – which is updated annually to reflect the priorities for the year ahead, the funding allocated to it and the predicted outcomes against investment.

Tackling child poverty lies at the heart of all LEP plans for delivery in the year ahead. Through the additional investment in Parental Employability Support in line with Best Start, Bright Futures, a number of new initiatives and programmes are planned across the country.

Alongside the further development of more holistic employability services which meet the needs of parents, early discussions have taken place around the development of a Parental Transitions Fund to support parents, and families, as they move into employment. Further investment in supporting upskilling to access growth sectors, encouraging parents to investigate self-employment opportunities and working with the public and third sectors to offer a variety of part funded employment opportunities with real progression routes are all very much under development.

Local child poverty action reports

Under the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 local authorities and health boards have a duty to produce annual Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPARs) highlighting what they have done and what they plan to do in the coming 12 months to address child poverty. These reports describe strategic activity across a wider range of services and policy areas such as employability, childcare, housing, information and advice, emergency financial support, transport and planning.

Support for parental employability provides an opportunity to ensure LEPs are strategically aligned with wider work to address child poverty at local level.

Tackling child poverty event – November 2022

The Improvement Service led 'Tackling Child Poverty event' held in November 2022, brought together local Child Poverty, Employability and Early Learning and Childcare leads from across local government, with input from Scottish Government colleagues from each of the policy areas and lived experience involvement from One Parent Families Scotland.

There were showcases from Dundee, Fife and Renfrewshire and the opportunity for discussion with colleagues around some of the local issues facing specific areas.

Feedback from the event concluded that the success of employability provision for parents is dependent on a whole systems approach to tackling child poverty, which together help to ensure more sustainable outcomes.

This includes, but is not limited to, the availability of childcare – (for those aged 0-2, 3- 5 and also school aged), access to money and debt advice, transport links, availability of holistic health and family wellbeing support, and a commitment to longer-term guaranteed funding.

Key points taken from discussions focussed on Family Wellbeing, Childcare, Employability, Parents, Employers and Rural challenges, with the clear message being that more 'joined-up' working across departments, sectors, regions and wider partners is key to the success of all future delivery.

Key Messages:

Participants were asked to highlight key messages to feed back to senior level decision makers. These included:

- Data Sharing and communication with parents needs to be addressed at a national level – to ensure equity of information across all LAs
- There is a need to align strategic direction and communications across all relevant policy areas
- There is a need to ensure funding for parental employability support is secure and long term
- Senior decision makers should understand that meaningful improvement is happening – but won't be achieved overnight
- Strong and clear leadership is needed on whole systems working
- Adequate and flexible childcare services underpins a whole systems approach to parental employment

Tackling child poverty event – February 2023

Following the success of the event in November, a follow-up session was held in February for the same networks of leads – Child Poverty, ELC and Employability – with a focus on school-aged childcare.

In addition to hearing more about the School Aged Childcare early adopter plans, there were presentations from the Dundee early adopter community project and lived experience input from a single mother who benefited from support, learning from the Pathfinder Project in Glasgow and information on other funding streams that are available to support parents.

This included proposals for the additional investment of £69.7m in tackling child poverty through Parental Employability Support, the DWP Flexible Support Fund that can support with up front childcare costs, the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, Access to Childcare fund and the Child Poverty Accelerator Funding.

Colleagues shared their experience on what had, or could potentially work well in fostering closer working relationships across the workstreams, discussed where employability and

childcare services were working together effectively and where they had knowledge of local initiatives which were sustainable and scalable.

Key Messages

Participants were asked to highlight key messages to feed back to senior level decision makers. Many were similar to the previous messages and included:

- There is a need for sustainable, multi-annual funding in order to allow for planning and implementation
- There is a need for more research and resources in order to understand and address the challenges of remote, rural and island communities.
- It is felt that a National Framework with local delivery would be most effective.
- A review, and widening, of acceptable qualifications to support and overcome SACC resourcing challenges may help

Conclusions

Although there are services in place across Scotland to support parents looking to progress into and in employment, this varies by location. The points listed below would support the future development of employability provision for parents, leading to more sustained outcomes and would likely have an impact on tackling child poverty:

Funding

A move to multi-annual funding is crucial in removing one of the main barriers to delivering long-term employability provision. Where this isn't possible, LAs/LEPs would benefit from earlier communication of funding allocations, a better understanding of scope and restrictions of the fund and maximum flexibility in relation to contingent liability/ accruals to allow for future planning and continuity.

Data sharing

Support for a national approach to data sharing across public services would allow earlier intervention and support to be made available to those who require it, without having to rely on voluntary engagement.

Reporting

Whilst progress has been made in the development and use of the Shared Measurement Framework, there is still some way to go to evidence the overall value of employability services. Further evaluation, especially using those with lived experience of service use, should be encouraged and supported, to help gather and share evidence of what works.

Strategic capacity

Both those leading on Employability and those working to strategically address child poverty (through, for example the implementation of Local Child Poverty Action Reports) should have sufficient support and capacity to allow a joined-up strategic 'whole systems' approach to be taken.

Island/rural communities

More support should be given to research and support better understanding of the discrete set of circumstances that affect more rural areas in delivering employability provision to parents.

Childcare

There must be more focus on school-age childcare, up to early teens, in order for parents to be able to access the support services, training and employment that would help to lift them out of poverty.

Employers

A national campaign to encourage employers to offer flexible, family friendly, fair work is required, especially in sectors who are experiencing skills shortages. This would ultimately improve parental engagement with employability services and lead to a reduction in job vacancies.

Lived experience

In line with the Scottish Approach to Service Design (SAAtSD), it is imperative that the voice of lived experience is considered, both locally and nationally, when developing and designing employability services for parents. Particular consideration should be given to how opportunities for engagement are made accessible to parents in the priority groups.