

REPORT TO THE SOCIAL RENEWAL ADVISORY BOARD FROM THE ADDRESSING LOW INCOME POLICY CIRCLE

1. Background

The Addressing Low Income Policy Circle is made up of members of the Poverty and Inequality Commission, members of the Social Renewal Advisory Board and Co-Chair of the Scottish Leaders Forum Action Group on Child Poverty. The circle also had expert advice from officials from Scottish Government, COSLA, a local authority and Public Health Scotland. In order to reduce overlap with other policy circles, the circle has focused on addressing low income through employment, training and education.

The circle commissioned a number of organisations to run deliberative workshops with experts by experience and heard directly from some of those involved in the workshops. The circle also heard from a number of experts by experience who spoke at circle meetings. Their views, experiences and ideas have informed the proposals that the circle is making and a summary of the feedback from the workshops is attached as an Annex.

2. Context

Employment should be a route out of poverty but many people are unable to access employment and many of those in work are still in poverty. Poverty is particularly high amongst single women with children, people from some minority ethnic groups, and households with a disabled person. People from these groups face additional barriers to work, and employment rates are lower.

Even where people are able to access employment this is not necessarily a route out of poverty. Sixty per cent of working age adults in poverty and 65% of children in poverty live in a household where someone is in employment. The pandemic has highlighted the precariousness of work for many people, with those already on low incomes and at greatest risk of poverty being hit hardest by the economic impacts. As unemployment rises those who already faced barriers to employment will increasingly be competing with those with more recent work experience. Employers may be even less likely to take on those who require adjustments or flexibility in their job.

3. The circle's approach

The circle has focused on employment, education and training and considered the structural factors, employer-related factors and individual factors where action is needed if employment is to address low income. While the circle has taken this approach, in reality employment cannot be seen in isolation from other drivers of low income and there are clear links to the work of other circles, particularly the Financial Security Circle. The circle has given particular consideration to those people who were already at highest risk of poverty and those that have been particularly hard hit by the impacts of the pandemic, and has looked at where there are gaps in implementation between the Scottish Government ambitions and the actions being taken.

4. Big Challenges/Big Choices

In a difficult and uncertain economic climate, with unemployment rising and a growing divide between those who have and have not been badly hit by the economic impacts of the pandemic, the circle has identified some big challenges that need to be considered in trying to address low income through employment.

4.1 Ensuring policies and funding benefit people on low incomes, women, disabled people and people from minority ethnic communities

Despite the Public Sector Equality Duty, the Fairer Scotland Duty and the commitment to mainstreaming equality and carrying out impact assessments, many policies do not take account of equalities and socio-economic disadvantage in their design. At best they are treated as an additional consideration, rather than as a core part of policy design and decision-making. This means that policies and funding that could be tools in reducing inequalities can instead reinforce them. There is a clear gap between the intention and practice.

4.2 Developing a credible, authentic, power-sharing way of involving experts by experience in policy development and decision-making

When the policy circle engaged with experts by experience they were emphatic that they should be more involved in decisions that affect them. This is likely to require significant culture change in the way that the Scottish Government works. The circle does not underestimate the challenges in doing this and the potential risks attached to doing this badly. It will be important to develop a model of what 'good' looks like when involving experts by experience to minimise these risks and ensure accountability. The Poverty and Inequality Commission is developing its own approach to involving experts by experience in the coming year, based on guidance co-produced by experts by experience,¹ and the Scottish Government should look to see what it can learn from the Commission's experience.

4.3 Acknowledging the potential tensions between supporting businesses to prevent unemployment and ambitions for Fair Work in Scotland

The Scottish Government is spending a lot of money supporting businesses to remain viable through the pandemic. Some of this money will be going to businesses that do not pay the living wage and provide insecure and inflexible work. As a result, despite the Scottish Government's ambitions, it is likely to be spending very significant amounts of money supporting poor quality employment. It could attach Fair Work conditions to the grants and rates relief that it provides, but there is a risk that some of these businesses could not meet these requirements and there could be resulting unemployment. This tension needs to be acknowledged and considered in future decision-making.

¹ <https://povertyinequality.scot/publication/guidance-for-the-poverty-and-inequality-commission-involving-experts-by-experience/>

4.4 Addressing the implementation gap between policy ambitions and delivery

There is an implementation gap between policy ambitions and delivery. The Scottish Government's policy ambitions are often strong and there are often good examples of small scale projects doing a good job of delivering those ambitions on the ground in some local areas. There is a gap, however, in action and funding that enables those ambitions to be delivered at scale across Scotland. In some cases there are also gaps between the high level ambition and the targets that the Scottish Government is setting itself; for example, the Scottish Government has set a target of 25,000 more people being paid the real Living Wage, but in 2019 there were around 380,000 earners in Scotland who did not earn the Living Wage.

4.5 Ensuring that the Scottish Government is using devolved powers to their full potential, even when significant powers needed are reserved

Important powers that would help address low income through employment are reserved. In particular reserved areas include employment law, social security related to unemployment or low income, and the legal barriers to work for asylum seekers. These are areas where the Scottish Government cannot take direct action, although it can push the UK Government for change. However, it is important for the Scottish Government to ensure that it uses the full powers it does have to drive change, which may require innovative and creative approaches.

4.6 Ensuring place-based approaches benefit those at highest risk of poverty

The Scottish Government has an increasing emphasis on place-based approaches, including Community Wealth Building and the idea of 20 minutes neighbourhoods. Place-based models in themselves do not necessarily benefit everyone and it has been suggested that such approaches can exclude women, people from minority ethnic groups and disabled people. This is particularly the case if they ignore sectors in which women play a greater role, such as care, retail and hospitality. The actions that result at a local level do not always meet the outcomes the policy intended. Place-based approaches need to take account of these issues and have a common definition of place, better use of evidence and reflect the needs of those at highest risk of poverty.

5. Proposals for the Social Renewal Advisory Board

The circle has identified a number of proposals for the Social Renewal Advisory Board. We have grouped these into those that address structural barriers, those that address employer-related barriers, and those that address barriers faced by individuals. The circle is clear that it is not enough to focus on addressing individual factors such as skills and training without also addressing the structural barriers that people face. Employers also need to play a role in ensuring work addresses low income.

Our proposals support delivery of the following National Outcomes from the National Performance Framework:

Poverty: We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally

Fair Work and Business: We have thriving and innovative businesses with quality jobs and fair work for everyone.

Economy: We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy

Human Rights: We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination

Communities: We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe

In addition to the specific proposals relating to employment the circle is also making a proposal about the involvement of experts by experience. The message that came through very strongly from all the deliberative workshops was that experts by experience should be more involved in decisions that affect them. For example, the group with unpaid carers felt very strongly that it was wrong that the board for the Review of Adult Social Care did not have an unpaid carer on it. They argued that carers need to be involved in shaping the policies that shaped their lives, otherwise their needs cannot be properly addressed. In the workshop with Radiant and Brighter, the group of black women felt that there was nothing in Programme for Government for them and that many of the actions described would not help them or meet their needs, and that black women were not well represented in decision-making. Credible and meaningful involvement of experts by experience in decision-making is likely to require significant culture change in the way that Scottish Government works. The Poverty and Inequality Commission intends to trial a new approach to involving experts by experience in its work over the next year and the Scottish Government should look to learn from this.

Proposal 1: The Scottish Government should actively involve experts by experience in shaping and designing the policies and actions that affect them.

Experts by experience should be:

- empowered through more use of approaches such as meaningful participation and co-production
- involved on boards and reviews (such as the Adult Social Care Review and Social Renewal Advisory Board) which affect them
- supported to work closely with policy officials and Ministers
- recognised as having valuable insight and experience and compensated financially for this.

5.1 Addressing structural barriers

The circle considered many of the structural factors that act as barriers to employment addressing low income. It focused particularly on issues related to ensuring that the benefits of investment and new jobs are shared by those at highest risk of poverty; the gender pay gap; childcare; and unpaid care.

Creating new jobs

Despite the Scottish Government's ambition to create good jobs that pay fair wages and the significant amount of investment that is being made in response to the pandemic, it is not clear that the Scottish Government's investment will necessarily address low income. The Scottish Government acknowledges the disproportionate impact that the pandemic is having on women, people from minority ethnic communities and disabled people but the action does not appear to be designed in a way to ensure that these groups benefit. The sectors identified for focus and investment are characterised by occupational segregation.

Proposal 2: Wherever public money is being spent it should be working as hard as possible to tackle poverty and inequality – whether that is public sector employment, training, pay setting, commissioning, procurement or investment.

Proposal 3: Childcare and social care should be designated as key growth sectors in future economic strategies.

Proposal 4: The Scottish Government should designate a proportion of the Green Jobs Fund specifically for enabling people from areas of socio-economic deprivation, women, single parents, people from minority ethnic communities, refugees, disabled people, carers and young people to train for and access Green Jobs. This funding should be focused on people within these groups who are furthest from the labour market. The Scottish Government should set a target for representation of these groups in Green Jobs and identify the proportion of funding needed to achieve this. It should set out how it will monitor whether the funding is being used for this purpose and how it will evaluate the impact.

Proposal 5: The Scottish Government should review the procurement element of the public sector equality duty in order to ensure that public sector procurement plays a role in advancing equality.

Gender pay gap

Gender segregation exists in many sectors in Scotland and the undervaluation of "women's work" such as care and cleaning is a key cause of women's low pay. The Scottish Government aims to reduce the gender pay gap for employees in Scotland by the end of this parliamentary term and has published *A Fairer Scotland for Women*, a strategic action plan on the gender pay gap, but there are no specific actions in the action plan to address the undervaluation of women's work.

Proposal 6: The Scottish Government should ensure skills interventions have reducing occupational segregation as a central aim.

Proposal 7: The public sector's wage-setting, procurement and commissioning powers should be used to drive up pay rates and terms and conditions in the care and childcare sectors.

Childcare

The early learning and childcare commitment was due to be rolled out in August 2020 but the duty to provide 1140 hours has now been put on hold for a year due to COVID-19. There are also questions about whether it is flexible enough in practice to meet the needs of parents who work non-standard hours. Even when the 1140 hours offer is rolled out it does not deliver enough hours of childcare to cover full-time working and is not available when women are making decisions about whether to return to work following maternity leave. Evidence shows there are also issues around availability, affordability and flexibility of out of school care. Research shows that years spent working part-time or taking time out of the labour market to care for family negatively impacts women's pay, progression opportunities and pension.

Proposal 8: The Scottish Government should focus first on delivering the existing early learning and childcare commitment as a matter of priority.

Proposal 9: The Scottish Government should build on the existing offer to provide 50 hours per week of funded, good quality and flexible education and childcare for all children between six months and five years old to enable parents, in particular women, to work full-time if they choose or need to. This should be integrated with a funded or subsidised out of school care entitlement to develop an integrated childcare offer from 0-12 years. An integrated childcare offer should include provision that meets the needs of disabled children.

Unpaid carers

Unpaid carers have been particularly hard hit by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a decrease in support and increases in the amount of care they are having to provide. Some have had to reduce their hours or give up work and many are struggling financially with increased costs. While the increase in Carer's Allowance and the coronavirus supplement have been welcome they do not recognise the full value of the work that carers do and many carers are unable to claim Carer's Allowance. As a result many carers experience poverty.

Proposal 10: The Scottish Government should commit to future Scottish Carer's Assistance providing unpaid carers with a higher level of income that better reflects the value placed on the care they provide. It should carry out modelling work to look at how best to:

- Provide support to carers caring 20+ hours a week
- Deliver a minimum income guarantee for unpaid carers and ensure they are passported to other relevant benefits and services.

5.2 Addressing Employer-Related Barriers: Business conditionality and Fair Work

Employment law is currently reserved to the UK Government, therefore the Scottish Government does not have the legal power to legislate to improve pay or terms and conditions. The Scottish Government's current approach to delivering Fair Work is built on collaboration, engagement, and using its wider powers and policies to exert

strategic influence. The voluntary approach limits the scale of impact: for example, in 2019 there were 356,550 private sector businesses operating in Scotland but only 744 had signed up to the Business Pledge and only 1,874 were Living Wage employers in Scotland. While others may be offering Fair Work in practice there is nevertheless a clear gap between the ambition and the impact that is being achieved.

The Scottish Government has begun to make more use of its own funding to drive Fair Work through its procurement and attaching conditions to grants. However, during the pandemic we have seen large amounts of funding and rates relief given to businesses that do not offer Fair Work. This is a potential lost opportunity to use government intervention to improve pay and conditions. There are difficult considerations for government about the risk of losing jobs if conditions are attached to funding but also risks attached to propping up low pay, poor quality jobs.

Proposal 11: Scottish Government, local government and the wider public sector should commit to attaching fair work criteria to all grants, contracts and funding as standard, unless it can be specifically demonstrated that there is a reason not to do so. In doing this they should consider:

- How to mitigate against risk of favouring large organisations with greater expertise in procurement or in applying for grants
- How to ensure there are the skills and expertise needed for more active contract management.

Proposal 12: The Scottish Government's review of the Small Business Bonus Scheme should identify how any future version of the scheme can be linked to fair work criteria.

Proposal 13: The Scottish Government should consider how tax powers can be used to incentivise action on fair work by increasing costs to employers who do not offer fair work. The Scottish Government should model different options for doing this to identify the most effective lever (e.g. local payroll tax, business rates supplement etc.)

5.3 Addressing The Barriers Faced By Individuals:

As unemployment rises, those who already faced barriers to employment will increasingly be competing with those with more recent work experience. Employers may be even less likely to take on those who require adjustments or flexibility in their job. A focus on reducing overall unemployment could mean those furthest from the labour market get less support. There is also evidence that additional groups of people are being badly hit by the employment impacts of COVID-19. Older workers who lose their jobs may find it particularly hard to find new employment, while young people may struggle to enter the labour market in the first place, with potential long-term consequences.

The Scottish Government has said that it recognises that some groups of people, including women, people from minority ethnic communities, disabled people and older people may find it harder to access work and that this has been exacerbated by the pandemic. While the intention is there to support those who face barriers to

the labour market, this is not necessarily delivering in practice. An evaluation of Fair Start Scotland, for example, highlighted that women, people from a minority ethnic background and young people were under-represented in the service, and that the proportion of people joining Fair Start Scotland who report a disability is decreasing. There is also a particular gap in employment and employability support for carers.

Supporting people with employability and skills

There needs to be flexibility in access to and the design of employability programmes to ensure that they meet the needs of participants and to ensure that the outcomes measured do not discourage providers from working with those who face the greatest barriers to the labour market. Employability provision should incorporate mental health support, which is particularly important in the current context. There also needs to be greater support for people to access training, education and qualifications

The scale of the existing investment in skills, training and employability is also not sufficient in the current context. The National Transition Training fund, for example, aims to support 10,000 people but unemployment has already reached 128,000 and is expected to increase very significantly over coming months.

Proposal 14: Each employability or skills programme/funding stream should be required to set out what action it will take to ensure that people from minority ethnic groups, refugees, disabled people, women, single parents, young people, older people, carers and people from deprived areas benefit from what it offers. Monitoring information should be collected for each programme/funding stream about access, what support has been provided and outcomes for these groups. This data should be intersectional and include the types of skills/training, industry/occupation for outcomes in order to measure the impact on occupational segregation. The information collected should be used to develop and refine programmes to achieve the intended outcomes.

Proposal 15: The Scottish Government should increase funding for the Parental Employment Support Fund and create an equivalent to the Youth Guarantee for parents from priority families engaging with programmes funded through the Fund. This should offer a guarantee of work (with a wage subsidy provided if necessary) or funded training or education if a parent has not got a job after engaging with the programme for an agreed period. It should also include support with childcare if needed.

Proposal 16: The Scottish Government should consider setting up a Scottish Enterprise Opportunities scheme for young people to provide support to young people to set up their own business.

Asylum Seekers and migrants with no recourse to public funds

UK Government rules preventing asylum seekers from working mean that at present employment cannot be a route out of poverty for asylum seekers. Experts by experience told us about the negative impacts of not being able to work while seeking asylum, particularly given the long time this process can take. The system

often leaves people in debt, with few job opportunities, with a loss of confidence, and starting their lives in Scotland in poverty.

Migrants with no recourse to public funds and EEA national workers with similar restrictions on benefit entitlements are also at high risk of poverty and in some cases destitution. They are often working in low paid, insecure or seasonal employment (including agricultural work, food processing, hospitality, retail and tourism) which are sectors impacted hard by current economic effects of COVID-19.

Proposal 17: The Scottish Government should increase their calls on the UK Government to allow asylum seekers to work while they are awaiting a decision on their asylum claim.

Proposal 18: The Scottish Government should clarify whether asylum seekers and migrants with no recourse to public funds can access employability support services. If this is possible, the Scottish Government should facilitate access to employability support services; ensuring asylum seekers and migrants have access to all aspects of the provision including allowances and expenses for participation where this is part of the intervention. This should include:

- Training employability providers on rights of asylum seekers to volunteer and to education
- Funding specialist employability programmes for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants.

Proposal 19: The Scottish Government should engage with employers to promote the right to volunteer of asylum seekers, and review guidance to employers so they have an increased understanding of the right to work of refugees and asylum seekers, how to make their workplaces attractive and more accessible and why having a diverse workforce meets business needs.

6. Issues to address

In addition to making its proposals, the circle also wants to comment on implementation of the Social Renewal Advisory Board's recommendations. In making decisions about what actions to take the Scottish Government should be clear about what impact the actions are expected to have and how this will be measured. The circle is clear that the actions resulting from the Social Renewal Advisory Board's recommendations should be a living, active plan/programme that can change in response to the data and evidence coming through from the actions and initiatives. This will require proper monitoring and mandatory data reporting, in a standardised way to maximise comparability, with baseline data collected at the beginning. It is important that intersectional data is collected to increase our understanding of the different experiences and impacts for different groups of people.

5 November 2020

Annex: Deliberative workshops with experts by experience

Introduction

As part of its work developing recommendations for the Social Renewal Advisory Board, the Addressing Low Income Policy Circle agreed that drawing on the insight and expertise of experts by experience was absolutely crucial.

We worked with organisations across Scotland to deliver five workshops with experts by experience in early October. Each workshop was designed and facilitated by the different organisations to suit the needs of the group they were working with.

However, they all roughly followed the same format:

- Discussion of life during lockdown and the challenges faced
- Views on Programme for Government actions on employment, education and training
- Ideas for longer term actions needed to address inequalities and tackle poverty.

The organisations we worked with were Radiant and Brighter, Carers Scotland, Young Scot, Scottish Women's Aid and Poverty Alliance. Individual summaries of each of the workshops were written up and agreed with the workshop participants as an accurate representation of discussions. These provide some additional context on the impacts of the pandemic on different groups and include deliberations on existing actions and ideas for longer term actions. Some of these ideas have been incorporated into the circle's proposals for the Board. Some ideas have not been taken forward at this stage but are included in the write-ups for others to draw upon.

In addition to the workshops, the circle also heard directly from experts by experience at some of its meetings. These experts were working with One Parent Families Scotland and Better than Zero and presented to the circle on their experiences and ideas for action. Their evidence, alongside evidence from the workshops, informed the development of the circle's proposals.

Radiant and Brighter

Radiant and Brighter brought together six black women, including current asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and those who had been so in the past. Their stories were often harrowing and it was an emotional meeting.

They began by sharing their backgrounds and their experiences of coming to Scotland. They discussed the negative impacts of not being able to work while seeking asylum, particularly given the long time this process can take. The system often left people in debt, with few job opportunities, and with a loss of confidence. This meant they had to start their lives here in poverty and rely heavily on support from charities.

It was pointed out that in Canada and the US you are allowed to work when seeking asylum but in the UK you are not. This did not make sense to the group and they discussed how the opportunity to work would help on so many levels – it would

reduce poverty, allow people to contribute to the economy, and reduce the need for the state to financially provide for them.

There was frustration here towards the Scottish Government and the response they so often heard when they raised these issues – that asylum is a reserved issue for the UK Government. They felt there was more the Scottish Government could do to help.

Some told stories of experiencing very difficult times throughout lockdown, for example, of being placed in unsuitable accommodation and being isolated. Having no recourse to public funds meant that they were not eligible for vital support such as the Scottish Welfare Fund or the vouchers provided as free school meal replacements. This was described as being “left for dead”. However, as one woman put it, their lives prior to Covid were already like lockdown. The only difference for them now was that others were also experiencing it.

The group discussed some of the actions included in Programme for Government. They felt that there was nothing for them in this and felt that many of the actions described would not help them or meet their needs. They discussed some other ideas of what might help them:

- The group did not feel that the creation of “new, green jobs” would help them at all. This was an action which didn’t take into account their circumstances, such as the restrictions on employment while seeking asylum. They felt there needed to be the creation of something specific to help those in this situation, for example, new benefits or funding.
- The women felt that a positive action for them would be better access to self-employment or business start-up advice. This was because migrants often find it difficult to find paid employment and therefore turn to self-employment. However, there was a lack of support or advice for them in this area.
- Child care responsibilities limit job opportunities as most jobs don’t fit into the hours when childcare is available so there was felt to be a need for better and more flexible childcare.
- It was considered a good thing that the government recognised that ethnic minorities often faced problems in securing employment, and also good that they were thinking how to address this. However, they did not feel that the suggested action of a toolkit to help employers recruit more ethnic minorities was sufficient. There were also questions around what this toolkit would look like and how they could get involved in its development.
- The women also discussed how this toolkit missed the point of the real issues around employment for ethnic minorities, such as why they tend to be in lower paid jobs. They noted that there are schemes now where ethnic minorities can access six month internships but that this often does not lead to permanent jobs. Furthermore, even when people get into work, they can be pushed out because of racism. They felt the response needed to be much more than just a toolkit and a good place to start would be to seek to understand why ethnic minorities do not have access to better jobs.
- “Ethnic minority” was considered to be a very large grouping and the experiences of different groups within that can be very different. Therefore,

there needs to be more understanding of the different ethnic minority communities and their different experiences.

- Being involved in decisions around things that affected them was very important to the women. They felt they should be involved in developing and implementing solutions and noted that black people, particularly black women, were not well represented when these sorts of decisions were being made.
- Another suggestion was for the government to work to better understand racism in Scotland and how it is addressed in school and employment.

The women were asked for a final message to feed back to the Scottish Government. One said:

“Our communities are very strong people. We are healthy and believe in community spirit. We are skilled and educated. We are equipped. When you get here, you shouldn’t feel so trapped. Training and education are not accessible... Anybody can do anything if given the right tools. When people come in they should be asked – what skills do you have? Let them better themselves. Green jobs? Pffff. Don’t give me the colour, just give me a job.”

Carers Scotland

Carers Scotland brought together seven carers from across Scotland. This group began with an open session where the carers were asked to share their experiences during the pandemic along with what might have helped them through this time.

The group felt that they needed to discuss pre-Covid experiences of unpaid care as this was necessary context to understanding the impact of lockdown. In particular, Carers Allowance was not felt to be working well (a statistic that only 10% of carers claim this allowance was raised by a member of the group) and there were significant issues with social care and Self Directed Support. They described having financial worries with stories shared of how universal credit did not cover their living costs, the reliance on savings to cover basis costs and the hidden poverty of carers and disabled people. There was also worry about what would happen to them when their caring journey ended – “When it ends, you are left with nothing”.

The pandemic was felt to have exacerbated many of these existing issues. They talked about being “broken” because of the extreme pressure they were under with their caring roles, particularly as many of their formal sources of support closed and informal support through family and friends was harder to access during lockdown.

The group did not feel there was anything in Programme for Government that would help them. They strongly felt there should more specific actions taken to address the needs of carers.

There were two specific actions in Programme for Government which did mention carers. First, a campaign to raise awareness of the support available to carers. The group did not feel this was sufficient in relation to the support they needed and was in stark contrast to the extensive support that had been offered around employment such as the job retention scheme. Additionally, the group pointed out that even if

they knew the system fairly well, it was still difficult to get support, which is something the campaign would not address.

Second, the announcement of the Review of Adult Social Care was discussed. The group felt very strongly that it was wrong that this board did not have a carer on it. They argued that carers need to be involved in shaping the policies that shaped their lives, otherwise their needs cannot be properly addressed. It was also noted that the Social Renewal Advisory Board did not have a carer on it.

Some ideas for actions which the group discussed were:

- To be bold and take radical action. Stop tinkering.
- The employment system needs to change to offer more flexible support for carers, particularly those who want to make their way back into employment. This could involve having jobs which are completely flexible, so for example, part-time with the option to work hours when you can or sharing a role with others so that there is more support and cover available for when carers cannot work.
- There needed to be more targeted support to help carers into employment. It was felt that carers were more likely than others to have been made redundant or given up their jobs during lockdown. One suggestion was for paid employment placements for people in their 40s and 50s which are flexible and part-time.
- Employers and others should be more aware of the difficulties that carers face. For example, one carer reported an experience of going to the job centre and being told they could work in locations far from their home. No consideration was given to their caring responsibilities and what this meant for their ability to travel to work.
- Caring needs to be more valued as a profession. People do not want to enter into a caring profession because it is not paid enough but the value of these jobs is huge.
- Carers need to be considered when employers think through the future of home working. Need to be careful of the balancing act for carers here particularly as no additional support can be brought into homes at the moment to help with caring.
- Social care charging was felt to be applied inconsistently across the country and needs to be rethought. Currently it includes carer income and savings in the financial assessment, resulting in carers being deprived of essential income, which places further stress upon carers and their role.
- Carers Allowance needs to be redesigned – this needs to start from scratch and should not be an attempt to adapt what we already have. This was also discussed in the context of the Living Wage and Fair work as the group were keen to consider how they corresponded with what support unpaid carers get. For example, it was noted that Carers Allowance was the same amount, regardless of the hours you spent caring which was not in line with the ethos of a Living Wage. One solution considered was to have a basic income type benefit for carers.
- There should be more consistency across local authorities of what support is available to carers and how to access it. The group understood the current model as the Scottish Government having legislation and then producing

guidance notes for local authorities. However, this was then “open to interpretation” by local authorities leading to differences between areas.

- Experts by experience should be on every board which is making decisions which affect them. They should be paid and their particular needs around caring should be taken into account and supported. Paid experts by experience could also work alongside policy makers and Ministers in developing and implementing policy.
- The Scottish Government “need to find the money” to support carers. There was a certain impatience with the amount of money which had been found to help businesses during the pandemic, while carers had often received a message of “it’s too difficult” when they had asked for additional support.

The group were asked if they wanted to provide a final message to the Social Renewal Advisory Board:

“We are done, we are broken, you cannot continue to rely on us without effective support. No-one has addressed the issues carers are facing. By not involving us, you have minimised our contributions. We are saving the state money. Stop tinkering, it is time for radical action.”

Young Scot

Young Scot organised an online workshop attended by eight young people aged between 16 and 21, from different areas of Scotland, including the Highlands, West Lothian and Ayrshire.

The group shared experiences of lockdown. Some of the issues which were discussed were:

- The importance of school lunches, food parcels and the key role played by local authorities and schools in contacting families to make sure they had what they needed.
- The problems caused by people stockpiling and how this meant young people could sometimes not get what they needed from shops. This was described as a strange and scary experience.
- The importance of access to electronic devices for school and college work
- The difficulty of finding space and quiet to do school work during lockdown
- The overwhelming feelings surrounding going back to school and the physical and mental toll this has taken. It was noted the teachers had been “amazing” at providing support during this time.

The young people were then split into groups and discussed the various measures included in the Programme for Government.

Employment Support Programmes such as the Parental Employability Support Programme and Fair Start Scotland were positively received. The perceived benefits of these actions were boosting confidence and helping people find a job who may be struggling financially. One young person, who was a parent, was keen to receive more information on this as they felt it would help them

When talking about the Living Wage and Fair Work, the young people questioned why the minimum wage did not apply to young people. They said it did not make them feel good and it was quite discouraging.

The action to provide laptops to disadvantaged children and young people was felt to be a good idea but needed more detail on the specifics. For example, was this a gift or was it a loan? It was also felt that the need for a laptop did not disappear when leaving school with many young people in need of such equipment to help them with further / higher education or job seeking.

The young people were asked to think of 100 ways to help those trapped in poverty and from this, they chose two to develop into a more specific plan. These were:

1. Money management and dealing with debt

Some of the young people described their issues with debt and problems with paying this off. Having more support around this would help young people and families stuck in a cycle of poverty.

The young people were keen for a system that was more flexible and placed more trust in them. They would like to pay back their debts, but to make repayments dependent on how much money they had available each month. This would stop them struggling financially month by month. These loans should be interest free or at least low interest.

They also wanted to be better educated on money, taxes and benefits. They felt this would help them make better decisions around earnings and debt.

2. Support for people living in poverty from local communities

The young people discussed the types of support that can be available within local communities such as food donations, community pantry/exchanges, provision of school uniforms, bike maintenance, packages with school materials etc. They felt it was important this support was offered in a discreet and dignified way.

Scottish Women's Aid

Seven women attended the group organised by Scottish Women's Aid. They began by speaking about their experiences during lockdown. They told of what a difficult time this had been for them and the impact it had on their mental health. Many of the women spoke about their anxiety and depression and how it became more difficult to manage during lockdown following the closure of support organisations and the lack of access to doctors and pharmacies.

Some had children and told of their struggles in meeting their needs. In particular they had found it difficult to support learning and felt they had not had great support from schools. They were also worried about the effects of lockdown on their children's mental and physical health.

The women spoke of finding it difficult to move out of lockdown and having anxiety around the restrictions and being around people again – “my safe place is at home, so I tend to stay at home”. Some of the women had worked throughout lockdown but still found it challenging to return to more of a normal routine. They also spoke of financial worries, such as debts and the impact of the two-child limit on tax credits.

A number of actions from Programme for Government were discussed and some ideas for new actions were raised.

- It was felt that there needed to be more recognition of the fact that women often end up in low paid jobs because of childcare. The women suggested that there should be more support for women who are finding it difficult to get a job because of childcare. They also felt employers should be more compassionate towards the realities of having children.
- Mental health issues and disabilities were felt to be barriers to getting a job. Employers should be trained to have a better understanding of mental health issues and employees should be better supported by counsellors and mentors within the workplace to have a good chance of making a success of their employment.
- More support for those leaving school was also discussed. It was felt that careers advice in schools could be better and more focused on skills. Apprenticeships were also felt to be a good idea as it provided the opportunity to learn on the job.
- There was not a great deal of awareness around the Parental Employability Support Fund or Fair Start Scotland. The women felt these should be better promoted and some were surprised they had not been mentioned in their job centre visits. They also felt they should be more accessible, available to more people and more flexible – one woman had been discouraged from applying to Fair Start as they were told if their mental health issues meant that if they had to stop the scheme, they would not get another chance at it.
- The women felt there should be better access to laptops and the internet. This was felt to be necessary for many different aspects of life such as education and job seeking.
- The suggestion in Programme for Government for an ethnic minority toolkit was felt to be a little vague. An alternative focus could be on understanding different ethnic backgrounds and how to make sure that people can use their skills to make the best contribution.

Poverty Alliance

Poverty Alliance organised a workshop bringing together four people with lived experience of poverty.

The group discussed their experiences, and that of their communities, during lockdown. They discussed the isolation that lockdown brought, issues with visiting relatives in care homes and the impact it had on mental and physical health. One of the group members felt that the main impact had been on jobs and described the experience of their son who had his hours cut significantly during the pandemic. Another group member, who is disabled, pointed out that while it was unfortunate

that there is now so much redundancy and unemployment, this is something that disabled people have lived with for a while.

There was an interesting point raised about the impact of the pandemic on communities and how it may have led to less trust within communities and even families.

On a more positive note, it was felt that the switch to digital had allowed disabled people to become more involved. That said, disabled people were still less likely to be online and it was felt to be crucial to look at digital inclusion and how it can be increased for disabled people. Working from home was also a positive development for disabled people. The benefits of this should be captured and developed.

The group discussed some of the actions from Programme for Government.

Investing in Green Jobs:

- Green jobs were believed to be important – the group felt we all need to recognize the importance of looking after the world we live in.
- This fund (£100 million) represents significant amount of money but the group questioned how it will work in practice. This could bring about positive changes if these jobs aren't precarious jobs. People, and in particular young people, require employment to be secure.
- For disabled people what do green jobs mean? How will they be supported to access this employment? Concepts of things such as accessibility mean different things to different people. Need to recognize what is required for people such as assistive technology.
- Disabled young people often fall through when moved to adult support. Need to consider transport and other barriers people face as well as the interactions with education and what's available at colleges etc.

Scottish Youth Guarantee:

- Young people still face barriers accessing support. We can't consider post school without looking at what happens within the schools for young people in terms of their transitions. There is often division within school for those who are 'Expected to go to University' and 'those who don't fix that box'.
- Historically we saw good work taking place in the regeneration hubs. This focused on the having people within these partnerships who had lived experience as well as within some strong leadership. Need to recognize the value of lived experience within this area. This can recognize some of the more invisible barriers people face.
- Availability of apprenticeships needs to be looked at in greater detail. These are attractive as they provide applied training and learning. Seen to offer greater security for young people.
- Timing of support is critical for young people, need to ensure they are encouraged and supported to achieve their aspirations whatever that may be.

Employability schemes:

- Fair Start Scotland was not felt to be good from a disabled perspective. It does not take into account the additional support needs that a disabled

person have – and assumes people are ready to get into employment. It was felt to be disappointing that this is to be extended for another 2 years.

- The rhetoric of many employability schemes was described as promoting the belief that the result will be securing employment. However, one group member described their reality as moving from scheme to scheme with false hope. They also discussed how going on a scheme meant coming off benefits and then having the challenge of getting back on benefits.
- It was also discussed that there were too many different schemes claiming to do similar things and an idea for having one overarching organization was floated.

Some ideas for future actions were also discussed:

- There was felt to be a strong need to hold the government accountable for the successful delivery of all these policies. Various ideas were put forward, for example, user involvement schemes or a small public body. The need for more transparent statistics around employability schemes was also mentioned.
- Carers allowance was felt to be insufficient and there should be recognition of caring as a role which is paid the living wage.
- Transport for young people was felt to be a continuing issue. Things like bus passes etc are expensive. There is a need to widen free bus passes.