



Economy And Labour Market

Scotland's Devolved Employment Services: Statistical Summary (July to September 2023)

Background and Methodology

This document provides background and methodological information to supplement the official statistics publication: Scotland's Devolved Employment Services which was released on the 7th February 2024 and presents statistics for Fair Start Scotland and No One Left Behind up to July to September 2023.

The full publication can be accessed from the [Scotland's Devolved Employment Services Statistics Homepage](#) – opens in a new window.

Fair Start Scotland

FSS is an employability support service, launched in April 2018, which aims to help unemployed people into sustainable employment. Please refer to the [Background Information](#) and the [FSS section](#) for more details on FSS and associated data.

No One Left Behind

No One Left Behind, introduced from April 2019, is a different approach to employability delivery which moves away from funding and delivering a number of separate and distinct employability programmes, to a more flexible approach. Please refer to the [Background Information](#) and the [No One Left Behind section](#) for more details on No One Left Behind and associated data.

Official Statistics

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics ([Access the Code of Practice – opens in a new window](#)) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. The statistics presented for Fair Start Scotland are Official Statistics and statistics presented for No One Left Behind are Official Statistics in Development.

You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards by emailing: employabilitystatistics@gov.scot. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing: regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the [OSR website](#) (opens in a new window).

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Background Information

1. Official Statistics and Official Statistics in Development

Statistics for No One Left Behind are official statistics in development. Official statistics in development are official statistics that are undergoing a development; they may be new or existing statistics, and will be tested with users, in line with the standards of trustworthiness, quality, and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics. These were previously referred to as experimental statistics.

Statistics for Fair Start Scotland are official statistics. While no longer considered in development, user feedback and comments are still welcomed to help improve this publication.

More detail on designation of statistics can be found at: [UK Statistics Authority - Types of official statistics \(opens in a new window\)](#).

2. Reporting Periods

- **No One Left Behind:** This publication reports on all participants who received support from 1 April 2019 to 30 September 2023, except for parents where data covers the period from 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2023.
- **Fair Start Scotland:** This publication reports on all referrals and starts from 13 March 2018 to the end of the most recent quarter (30 September 2023). The service was launched on 3 April 2018. There was an opportunity for referrals to be made and starts to be recorded for a short period prior to the launch of the service, commencing 13 March 2018. Referrals and starts which occurred before the official launch of the service are reported along with the April 2018 data.

Data are not seasonally adjusted and therefore changes between quarters should be regarded with caution. Decreases in participant numbers are typically observed in October-December due to the festive period, with a subsequent increase observed in January-March. This can also impact on April-June as data subsequently levels off. Comparing a quarter with the same quarter in previous years reduces the impact of seasonality. Please note, quarterly data is also subject to more natural fluctuation compared to annual data.

3. Key features of No One Left Behind and Fair Start Scotland

No One Left Behind and Fair Start Scotland are different approaches to employability support and can vary in what support is offered and what groups are targeted. This is likely to impact on both the demographics and outcomes of participants across both approaches. It is therefore not recommended to make direct comparisons.

Table 1: Key features of No One Left Behind and Fair Start Scotland

	No One Left Behind	Fair Start Scotland (FSS)
Start	April 2019	April 2018
Delivery	Scottish and Local Government are working with third and private sector organisations to deliver support which aims to be more joined-up and responsive to the needs of individuals of all ages and to local labour market conditions.	FSS is delivered by a mixed economy of public, private and third sector providers across nine geographical areas throughout Scotland. More information can be accessed at: mygov.scot - find a job (opens in a new window).
Support	The support provided may vary from short, focused interventions or longer term support, dependent upon individual circumstances.	FSS provides individualised one-to-one support to unemployed people facing the greatest challenges to obtaining work, including people with disabilities, convictions, care-experienced young people, single parents, refugees, minority ethnic groups, and those living in the most deprived areas in Scotland.
Duration	Varied	Support is available for 12 months, or up to 18 months in some cases
Re-engagement	The flexible, person-centred support of No One Left Behind acknowledges that participants may experience support differently, based on their individual circumstances and needs – for example, being able to disengage and re-engage in support as required.	Following the extension of FSS beyond the initial three year period, people who have previously received support can re-join the service. There must be a break of at least 13 weeks since the person left FSS to become eligible. As a result, the total number of starts in years 1 to 3 equals the number of people but from year 4 onwards and thus overall, the total number of starts is not the same as the number of people who have received support.

Referral	Individuals can self-refer to No One Left Behind support, or be referred through a variety of channels, including educational providers, Local Authorities, third sector organisations, Jobcentre Plus, and other local services.	A referral can be made by an individual's Jobcentre Plus (JCP) Work Coach. Alternatively, participants can be signposted to FSS through third party organisations or they can self-refer to their local provider if they meet specific criteria. Third-party referrals relate to referrals from outwith JCP.
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For other services across the UK, features of service design (e.g. whether voluntary or mandatory, eligibility criteria) and definitions (e.g. how job outcomes are measured) may differ to a greater extent.

4. No One Left Behind Background Information

Data collection

All participant data is collected and recorded on management information systems by Scottish Local Authorities. Data returns are submitted to the Scottish Government on a quarterly basis.

Statistics on No One Left Behind outcomes were first published in February 2021 for year 1 participants, derived from the aggregate data that was collected during that period. Since then year 1 data has been developed and combined with data currently collected for subsequent periods, which has allowed more detailed information for year 1 participants, including their achievements to be released.

Scottish Government carry out quality assurance on returned data, for example ensuring values are returned in the correct range and comparisons are made over time and between Local Authorities. There are specific areas of data quality which Scottish Government is working on improving with Local Authorities as shown in the table 4 below.

Starts

People are registered to start receiving support by a Local Authority Key Worker.

Ethnicity

The No One Left Behind data template collects ethnic group data as defined by the Scottish Government's recommended question (2022 Census) on ethnic group using the question: What is your ethnic group?

The following options are available:

- A. White – (Scottish), (Other British), (Irish), (Gypsy Traveller), (Polish), (Roma), (Showman / Showwoman), (Other)
- B. Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- C. Asian/Asian Scottish/Asian British – (Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish, Pakistani British), (Indian, Indian Scottish, Indian British), (Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi Scottish, Bangladeshi British), (Chinese, Chinese Scottish, Chinese British), (Other)
- D. African/Scottish African/British African – (African Scottish, African British), (Other)
- E. Caribbean or Black – (Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish, Caribbean British), (Black, Black Scottish, Black British), (Caribbean or Black – Other)
- F. Other Ethnic Group – (Arab, Arab Scottish, Arab British), (Other ethnic group)
- G – (Prefer not to say), (Not recorded)

It is important that results are presented in as much detail as possible but this is often not possible due to small numbers, therefore categories are often combined. While this may hide inequalities that occur between separate ethnic groups, it allows some analysis by ethnicity to be carried out.

For the purposes of this report, category A is presented as White, and categories B, C, D, E, and F are presented as Minority Ethnic. Category G is categorised as Unknown. The term "Minority Ethnic" aids narrative and provides a concise terminology. The terminology used aligns with [Scottish Government guidance \(opens in a new window\)](#).

More detailed breakdowns by ethnicity will be included in future editions when sample sizes allow.

Disability

Before the introduction of the SMF Data Reporting Template (July 2022 for 13 Local Authorities; October 2022 for all Local Authorities), Local Authorities were issued guidance for collecting data on disability status which specified that disability status should be recorded as defined by the Equality Act (2010). Local Authorities then returned data indicating if a participant had a disability by responding, “Yes”, “No”, “Prefer not to say” or “Not recorded”.

However, after the introduction of the SMF Data Reporting Template this approach was replaced by the introduction of two questions which define disability based on the Equality Act: i) Do you have a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more? ii) Does your condition or illness reduce your ability to carry-out day-to-day activities?

The responses to these two questions are then used to define if a participant is disabled as defined by the Equality Act (2010). If the answer to the first question is "yes", and the answer to the second is either "yes, a lot" or "yes, a little" then the participant is defined as disabled.

Further information can be found here: [Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010 \(opens in a new window\)](#).

Parents

Parent data for No One Left Behind was collected from the start of year 2 (April 2020 onwards), including data on lone parents and age of youngest child. Number of children and disabled child within family were also collected from the start of year 2. Both were updated when the SMF Data Reporting Template was introduced (from July 2022 for 13 Local Authorities; October 2022 for all Local Authorities); to number of dependent children and disabled child or adult within family, respectively. The latter allowed better alignment with the ‘families with a disabled person’ priority family group. Whether parents were living with dependent children was also introduced with the SMF Data Reporting Template.

The Scottish Government has identified a number of ‘priority family groups’ at risk of child poverty, further information can be found here: [Tackling child poverty priority families overview \(opens in a new window\)](#).

Please note that the data presented in this publication and the supplementary statistical tables differs in some aspects from the priority family group definitions due mainly to its focus on participants rather than family units.

Economic Status at Start Date

The economic status of participants when support commences. This is not updated if a person re-engages. Through International Labour Organisation (ILO) guidelines, all people aged 16 and over can be classified into states of economic activity: in employment; unemployed; or economically inactive. Economic activity definitions align to ILO definitions however, No One Left Behind also has an at school category and participants aged under 16 can also be classified into one of the three economic activity states noted as opposed to the under 16 ILO classification.

Unemployed

Under ILO guidelines, anybody who is without work, available for work and seeking work is unemployed. The UK applies this as anybody who is not in employment by the above definition, has actively sought work in the last 4 weeks and is available to start work in the next 2 weeks, or has found a job and is waiting to start in the next 2 weeks, is considered to be unemployed.

Economically Inactive

Those who are not in employment and are not unemployed by these definitions are considered to be economically inactive. There are a number of reasons why someone who is not in work may not be actively seeking work. For example many students in full-time education would not seek work, neither will some sick or disabled people, those who have retired, or those who are looking after a family or home, and many other reasons.

Outcomes

Employment

In general, anybody who carries out at least one hour's paid work in a week, or is temporarily away from a job (e.g. on holiday) is in employment. Also counted as in employment are people who are on government supported training schemes and people who do unpaid work for their family's business.

Only Employer Recruitment Incentives (ERIs), in-work training allowances and Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) opportunities paid directly to the employer count toward the total of entering employment. Other subsidies such as Long Term Unemployed opportunities, Young Person's Training Allowance and ILM opportunities not paid directly to the employer are not counted towards employment.

Modern apprenticeships and self-employment count towards entering employment. Participants may be counted as starting a modern apprenticeship or entering self-employment and as receiving a subsidy such as ERI or in-work training allowance.

Further/Higher Education Outcomes

Courses expected to achieve a minimum qualification of National Certificate (NC), or equivalent. NCs are designed for full-time delivery over one year (or part-time over two years). They are aimed at 16-18 year olds or adults in full-time education and are at SCQF Levels 2-6. For more information see: [National Certificates \(NCs\) and National Progression Awards \(NPAs\) - SQA \(opens in new window\)](#).

Duration of Outcomes

Local Authorities contact participants at set follow-up intervals (4, 13, 26 and 52 weeks) and record their status (e.g. in employment, in further/higher education, in training or in school). Participants do not need to have sustained employment for the full follow-up period (e.g. 4, 13, 26 or 52 weeks). They could enter employment, leave, then have returned to employment by the follow-up point and so be counted as being in employment at this follow-up.

While Local Authorities actively contact participants at set follow-up intervals to record their status, participants do not always engage with them. This means there will be a number of follow-ups that are missed, and so the count of participants in employment at each time period is likely an undercount.

Enough time may not have passed for some participants to reach later follow-up points.

Duration of support and outcomes

Outcomes are reported for all starts to No One Left Behind, therefore some participants will have been supported through the programme for a short duration and will not have had the opportunity to achieve outcomes at the time of publication.

Table 2: Summary of No One Left Behind areas of data quality improvement

Source of Error	Description	Mitigation
Start dates	Participants can disengage and re-engage for support as often as they need, potentially with a long period of time between engagements. While Local Authorities are encouraged to always report a participant's initial start date and not to update when a participant re-engages, start dates have been updated in some cases. This leads to participants shifting between quarters and leads to variations in both overall numbers, as well as those reported for each characteristic, between quarters	<p>We are working closely with all 32 Local Authorities to rectify this issue. The importance of not updating start dates when a participant re-engages is written in the corresponding data guidance.</p> <p>We quality assure individual Local Authority reports and go back to specific Local Authorities when needed.</p> <p>We discussed this issue at the Scottish and Local Government Data and Reporting Group which meets every quarter to discuss data collection</p>
Age	Participants can disengage and re-engage for support as often as they need, potentially with a long period of time between engagements. While Local Authorities are encouraged to always report a participant's age at start date and not to update when a participant re-engages, ages have been updated in some cases. This leads to participants shifting between age groups.	<p>We are working closely with all 32 Local Authorities to rectify this issue. The importance of not updating age when a participant re-engages is written in the corresponding data guidance.</p> <p>We quality assure individual Local Authority reports and go back to specific Local Authorities when needed.</p> <p>We are implementing a change to our data template to collect date of birth to improve consistency.</p>
Updating information	According to the data guidance, certain characteristics can be updated (e.g. trans status or disability), as more information becomes available at a later date. This means responses can change between data submissions, which could lead to a reduction in unknowns. However, occasionally, this has led to changes in the data (e.g. changing ethnic group) – this might be the result of more accurate information becoming available, but can lead to shifts in the data	<p>We are working closely with all 32 Local Authorities to rectify this issue.</p> <p>We have increased the volume and level of quality assurance that we carry out on individual Local Authority reports, allowing us to go back to specific Local Authorities with detailed descriptions of issue we have found.</p>

<p>Unique IDs</p>	<p>Unique IDs should be unique to each participant and should remain the same for their duration of support. However, Local Authorities might have more than one ID per person on their system, depending on their stage of support, or might potentially give a participant a new ID if they have been disengaged for a long time. This could lead to IDs changing over time and artificially inflate numbers. It also means we cannot link back to previous data recorded on our old template, and makes it difficult for us to identify if someone has achieved more than one outcome of the same type.</p>	<p>We are working closely with all 32 Local Authorities to rectify this issue. The importance of unique ID remaining the same for each participant is written in the corresponding data guidance.</p> <p>We quality assure individual Local Authority reports and go back to specific Local Authorities when needed.</p> <p>The introduction of National Insurance number can help identify unique individuals.</p>
<p>Reporting of participants</p>	<p>Each quarter, we ask Local Authorities to report all new participants for the new quarter, in addition to all previously reported participants, providing updated information where appropriate. While some details can be updated (e.g. disability status and outcome details), the actual individuals reported should remain the same as previous quarters. However, in some cases participants disappear from previous quarters, or new ones appear. This leads to variations in both overall numbers, as well as those reported for each characteristic, between quarters.</p>	<p>We are working closely with all 32 Local Authorities to rectify this issue. Guidelines of the data that Local Authorities need to provide is written in the corresponding data guidance.</p> <p>We quality assure individual Local Authority reports and go back to specific Local Authorities when needed.</p>
<p>General</p>	<p>When comparing current data with previous quarters, we sometimes find numbers of certain groups (parents, under 25, and 25 and over) appear to decline or see minimal change. There are a number of potential reasons for this:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Changes and upgrades to management information systems. This can lead to issues, for example, participants being missed where they have been reported from external delivery partners. This should improve over time. 2. Updated information on parental status, for instance, whether a participant lives with dependent children. 	<p>We are working closely with all 32 Local Authorities to rectify these issues. Guidelines of the data that Local Authorities need to provide is written in the corresponding data guidance.</p> <p>We quality assure individual Local Authority reports and go back to specific Local Authorities when needed.</p>

	<p>Only parents still living with dependent children are counted in the total for parents.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Duplicated entries from earlier reports have been fixed and removed from the current report. 4. Participants incorrectly being removed when they reach the end of their 52 week sustainment period. As there are no more updates for these individuals, some Local Authorities might incorrectly remove them. <p>Between quarters 3 (Oct-Dec) and 4 (Jan-Mar), changes might be small due to it being quieter over the Christmas period.</p>	
<p>Specific data quality issues in this publication</p>	<p>There has been a decrease in the number of participants returned in some previous quarters by specific Local Authorities which has resulted in decreased totals in this publication for some quarters and years compared to previously published data.</p>	<p>We are working closely with those Local Authorities to understand these issues and rectify where necessary.</p>

5. Fair Start Scotland Background Information

Tables

Detailed statistics on the number of referrals to FSS, number of starts and job outcomes are presented in the accompanying tables. The caveats that apply to national data also apply to Local Authority data.

Data sources

There are two sources of information for the statistics presented in this publication.

The Scottish Employability Tracking System (SETS) is the Scottish Government referrals tracking system for FSS. Information on those referred to FSS ('referrals') and outcomes relating to those individuals, including those who join FSS ('starts'), enter employment ('job starts'), and subsequently achieve employment outcomes ('job outcomes'), is recorded on SETS. It tracks the progress of referrals made to the service and provides management information in relation to performance. It does not contain any personal characteristics.

The statistics in this release are based on figures extracted from SETS on 23 October 2023.

An excel data return is provided quarterly by FSS service providers with personal characteristic information for participants such as age, sex, long-term health condition, disability and ethnic group. It does not contain any service level information.

Both data sources contain an anonymous ID number used to link them together to create a final dataset for analysis.

Information provided by service providers

The statistics on age, gender, long-term health conditions, disability and ethnic group are derived from information collected by service providers when an individual joins FSS. Information is usually collected via a combination of face-to-face interviews, SG equalities monitoring forms, phone conversations and electronic questionnaires using SG recommended questions and published using related output classifications.

Methodology

Referral

The referral numbers published in this release are net figures which excludes rejected referrals. The vast majority of these were duplicates.

Starts

The 'start rate' i.e. the percentage of people who joined FSS is calculated by dividing the number of starts by the number of referrals within a given period. People who were referred in the most recent quarter, particularly at the end, may not have had time to join the service by the end of the month. Because of this, the start rate for the most recent quarter should not be used for considering the overall performance of the service.

Before April 2021, participants were only able to receive support from FSS once, therefore the number of starts on the service is the same as the number of unique people who have received support in years 1 to 3. With the extension of FSS beyond the initial three year period, from April 2021 people who have previously received support may re-join the service. There must be a break of at least 13 weeks since the person left FSS to become eligible. As a result of this change, the total number of starts in FSS, from the beginning of

year 4 onwards and thus overall, is not the same as the number of people who have received support.

Early leavers

An early leaver is someone who exits the service before the end of the pre-employment support period without achieving an employment outcome.

Job starts

When an individual progresses into work, service providers record a 'job start' for the individual on SETS. An individual can enter employment more than once; however the figures in this publication are for the first recorded job. For individuals that re-join FSS, where applicable, their first recorded job during their initial period on the service will be counted as will their first recorded job during any subsequent periods on the service.

Employment outcomes

- A 3 month (13 week) job outcome is achieved when a participant stays in a job, or is self-employed, working 16 hours per week or more, for at least 13 weeks out of 16; that is, continuous employment, but not necessarily in the same job, lasting 13 out of 16 weeks.
- A 6 month (26 week) job outcome is achieved when a participant stays in a job, or is self-employed, working 16 hours per week or more, for at least 26 weeks out of 30; that is, continuous employment, but not necessarily in the same job, lasting 26 out of 30 weeks (breaks in employment must total no more than 4 weeks).
- A 1 year (12 month, 52 week) job outcome is achieved when a participant stays in a job, or is self-employed, working 16 hours per week or more, for at least 52 weeks out of 60; that is, continuous employment, but not necessarily in the same job, lasting 52 out of 60 weeks (breaks in employment must total no more than 8 weeks).

Disability

Disability is defined by two questions: i) Do you have a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more? ii) Does your condition or illness reduce your ability to carry-out day-to-day activities?

If the answer to the first question is "yes", and the answer to the second is either "yes, a lot" or "yes, a little" then the participant is disabled as defined by the Equality Act (2010).

Ethnicity

The Fair Start Scotland data template collects ethnic group data as follows:

- A. White – (Scottish), (Other British), (Irish), (Gypsy Traveller), (Polish), (Other white ethnic group)
- B. Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- C. Asian/Asian Scottish/Asian British – (Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish, Pakistani British), (Indian, Indian Scottish, Indian British), (Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi Scottish, Bangladeshi British), (Chinese, Chinese Scottish, Chinese British), (Other)
- D. African – (African, African Scottish, African British), (Other)
- E. Caribbean or Black – (Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish, Caribbean British), (Black, Black Scottish, Black British)

- F. Other Ethnic Group – (Arab, Arab Scottish, Arab British), (Other)
- G. – Not Recorded – (Not recorded)

It is important that results should be presented in as much detail as possible but this is often not possible due to small numbers, therefore categories are often combined. While this may hide inequalities that occur between separate ethnic groups, it allows some analysis by ethnicity to be carried out.

For the purposes of this report, category A is presented as White, and categories B, C, D, E, and F are presented as Minority Ethnic. Category G is categorised as Unknown. The term “Minority Ethnic” aids narrative and provides a concise terminology. The terminology used aligns with [Scottish Government guidance \(opens in a new window\)](#).

More detailed breakdowns by ethnicity will be included in future editions when sample sizes allow.

Parents

Data on lone parents was collected from the launch of FSS in April 2018. Data on age of youngest child and number of dependent children was additionally collected from late 2019 and we worked with providers to implement and improve the collection of this data for the remainder of year 2, resulting in better quality data for year 3 onwards. As a result, the percentage of parents increases over time, but this is likely to be a result of data collection changes rather than changes to the number of parents supported.

The Scottish Government has identified a number of ‘priority family groups’ at risk of child poverty, further information can be found here: [Tackling child poverty priority families overview \(opens in a new window\)](#).

Please note that the data presented in this publication and the supplementary statistical tables differs in some aspects from the priority family group definitions due mainly to its focus on participants rather than family units. For example, the data covers participants accessing FSS support that are disabled parents but does not include families with a disabled child, therefore differing from the ‘families with a disabled adult or child’ priority family type.

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

The [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(SIMD - opens in a new window\)](#) is a relative measure of deprivation across 6,976 small areas (called data zones). If an area is identified as ‘deprived’, this can relate to people having a low income but it can also mean fewer resources or opportunities. People living in areas with higher levels of deprivation may find it more difficult to find employment.

Urban Rural Classification

The [Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification \(opens in a new window\)](#) provides a consistent way of defining urban and rural areas across Scotland. The classification is based upon population, as defined by the National Records of Scotland, and accessibility, based on drive time analysis to differentiate between accessible and remote areas in Scotland. The classification is available in multiple forms, including 2-fold as used in this publication, as well as 3-fold, 6-fold and 8-fold classifications.

Data quality

Some inconsistencies in responses to the questions on long-term health conditions and disability, as reported by service providers, were identified and amended as follows:

Of those people who responded 'No' to the question asking whether respondents had a physical or mental health condition lasting, or expected to last 12 months or more:

- 6,111 starts answered the second question on extent of limitation (140 yes, a lot; 652 yes, a little; 5,319 not at all). These responses were excluded from the totals.
- 3,599 starts reported one or more long-term health condition (4,005 conditions in total were recorded). These conditions have been excluded from the count of long-term health conditions.

Comparisons with other employment services' data

Please use caution when comparing FSS data with data from other employment services across the UK, as features of service design (e.g. whether voluntary or mandatory, eligibility criteria) and definitions (e.g. how job outcomes are measured) may differ.

Local Authority data

Please use caution in interpreting data at lower levels of geography, as numbers are small in some instances and there are many factors contributing to variations in totals across Local Authorities. The Scottish Government's evaluation of year 1 of FSS suggests factors include the local reputation of FSS staff, the prior roles of staff and the reputation of previous services, the range of other existing services available in the area, the relationship between FSS provider staff and JCP work coaches, and the range and scale of local job opportunities.

Impact of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) on Fair Start Scotland

This publication includes data for FSS over a period from March 2020 onwards when the COVID-19 pandemic, associated public health measures and economic and labour market impacts have caused several changes which impact the statistics published here.

Key changes to FSS include the following:

- 1) Early in the pandemic, The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) refocused their work to deal with the increased demand for benefit claims, so FSS referrals from DWP were paused between April and June 2020.
- 2) As a result of this, there was an increase in the proportion of referrals to FSS through other avenues, particularly from FSS providers' own marketing efforts.
- 3) FSS switched from face-to-face interaction to delivery via phone calls and online interaction. This affected the equalities data collected, with a decrease in people disclosing information on protected characteristics like ethnicity on joining FSS. Data collection methods were adapted to the new circumstances in consideration of data protection guidance. It also caused disruption to some providers where data was held in the workplace and was not available to staff working from home. There were particularly high levels of missing data for ethnicity in July to September 2020. Data collection has since improved. During the quarter April-June 2021 some providers had a limited return to meeting participants in person, depending on the local situation and participant's preference.

4) There was a relaxation of rules specifying how often participants must be in contact with providers, from March to September 2020. This meant that some people who would otherwise be considered to have left the service during this period stayed on FSS.

5) There were fewer job vacancies in Scotland for approximately one year. ONS data showed a sharp reduction in job vacancies in Scotland during April 2020 to approximately 40% of the level seen in February 2020, finally returning to February 2020 levels by April 2021. Lower levels of job vacancies would be expected to affect rates of job starts and outcomes in FSS, but numbers of job starts in FSS didn't necessarily follow trends in job vacancies.

6. Tell us what you think

We are always interested to hear from our users about how our statistics are used, and how they can be improved.

Please consider answering our [short survey \(opens in new window\)](#) on how you found this publication.

7. Correspondence and enquiries

For enquiries about this publication, please contact:

Employability Statistics Team

E-mail: employabilitydata@gov.scot

For general enquiries about Scottish Government statistics, please contact:

Office of the Chief Statistician

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Next Update: May 2024