WELFARE REFORM COMMITTEE
THE FUTURE DELIVERY OF SOCIAL SECURITY IN SCOTLAND
WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SCOTLAND

Introduction: Employment Support Scotland and the employability sector

This briefing paper has been developed by Employment Support Scotland to provide a brief overview of the work of the employment support sector in Scotland and to share its key recommendations for future provision.

About Employment Support Scotland

Employment Support Scotland is an ERSA (Employment Related Services Association) network comprising organisations who currently deliver or have an interest in the delivery of employment support provision in Scotland. ERSA is the UK wide sector body for the employability sector and has over 200 members spanning the private, public and voluntary sectors.

Participants in Employment Support Scotland are diverse, including the prime contractors of Work Programme and Work Choice and many of its subcontractors in Scotland. Members also deliver other employment support schemes funded and commissioned by the Westminster government, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish local authorities, European funds and other funding source.

Employment Support Scotland is committed to sharing the expertise and learning of its members to drive and support the design and delivery of employment support provision in Scotland that best meets the needs of its jobseekers to ensure they have fair, progressive employment, which enables them to achieve their potential. To support this the Network has undertaken a series of events to feed into the Scottish Government’s (SG) consultation: Creating a Fairer Scotland: Employability Support: A Discussion Paper. These have included member telekits, consultation events held with Scottish Government and a written submission. Employment Support Scotland has responded to the Smith Consultation and the Scottish Devolution (Further Powers) Committee consultation on Scotland Bill draft clauses. It also sits on the Scottish Government Advisory Committee on employment support in Scotland.

This paper seeks to:

- Give a brief overview of the work of the employment support sector; and
- To highlight some of our key asks of Scottish Government for the future design and commissioning of provision;

About the employment support sector in Scotland

The employment support sector in Scotland delivers services to help improve the employability of jobseekers and future jobseekers, including those who wish to progress in work. Organisations delivering services are sometimes called providers and include large multinational companies, small specialist organisations, local authorities and housing associations amongst others. In total, approximately 20,000 people work directly within the core sector across the UK, with others based in subsidiary sectors such as local authorities...
and housing associations, with still more operating in supportive roles delivering services such as health or skills support.

The sector delivers a range of services to jobseekers, much of which is tailored to the individual's needs. However, some of the most common support mechanisms are set out in the grid below:

<table>
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<th>Common aspects of employment support</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment of jobseeker needs, including skills deficits, health issues and</td>
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<td>family circumstances</td>
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<td>Careers advice and guidance linked to the local labour market</td>
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<td>Brokerage of and support for work experience placements</td>
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<td>Housing support services</td>
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<td>Business start-up support, including business planning support and access to loans</td>
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<td>Job preparation and job brokerage</td>
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**Employment support programmes**

The sector is currently funded from a range of sources, including Westminster government monies, Scottish Government investment, local authority funding, European Social Fund, trusts and foundations, social investment and organisations’ own core funds. Recent research by Cambridge Policy Consultants indicates that around £660 million is spent on employment support in Scotland.

The Smith Agreement means that future employment support funding previously commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will now be the responsibility of the Scottish Government. The list below gives details of key recommendations from Employment Support Scotland to the Scottish Government as it considers the future design and commissioning of employment support provision in Scotland. Its full list of recommendations can be found in its written submission.

**Priorities for future design and commissioning of employment provision**

**Assessment**

- Employment Support Scotland believes that a holistic needs-based initial assessment should be undertaken on day one of unemployment. Those with significant skills and health needs should be fast tracked to suitable provision.

- Members believe that there should be one record of a jobseeker's assessment and progress towards work, which should be owned by the jobseeker and could be shared across different providers with jobseeker permission.
• Flexibility should be built into the system to recognise the changing support needs of a jobseeker at different assessment points in their journey into work.

• Finally, in order for assessment and delivery to be carried out consistently across providers, Scottish Government should consider how to embed quality assurance in the role of advisers by working with organisations such as the Institute of Employability Professionals (IEP) to set standards for qualifications, skills, capabilities and training needs.

**Early intervention:**

• Employment Support Scotland supports both the principle and practice of early intervention, both in changing lives and saving money. In particular, it believes that early intervention should focus on:
  - Earlier intervention for young people who are NEET or likely to become NEET, with immediate referral to specialist support through schools or Jobcentre Plus and signposting to careers advice.
  - Individuals who have acquired a disability or health condition and who have recently fallen or at risk of falling out of the workplace.
  - Support for initiatives such as ‘outcome funds’ which bring together a range of funding streams specifically to fund early intervention activity.
  - Investment in skilled professionals, coaches and mentors supporting young people in schools.
  - Building on the good quality careers advice, information and guidance both within the school setting and through the My World of Work website.
  - Working with the vocational rehabilitation process and company insurance schemes to ensure that individuals acquiring a disability of health condition are supported to return rapidly to work wherever possible, with the employer supported to make any necessary reasonable adjustment.

**Commissioning**

• Employment Support Scotland believes contracts should be commissioned at Scottish Government level. This has the advantage of setting a common data framework, avoiding a postcode lottery of services, streamlining the bidding process and allowing for easier communication to employers.

• If commissioning were to take place at national level, members believe that mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that local authorities are able to contribute to the procurement process. If local authorities are not bought into provision at an early stage, it can be difficult for providers of services to integrate their provision effectively with local authority run services, including social care.

• A key principle for any strategy should be that organisations involved in the commissioning of services should not be involved in direct delivery to avoid any potential conflict of interest.

**Programme design**

• Employment Support Scotland members believe that SG has a substantial opportunity
to streamline radically the employment support services available to jobseekers, thus reducing duplicating/competing services operating in the same geographies. However, it also understands that a simple landscape will be difficult to achieve, given that councils, corporates and other funders are likely to launch new initiatives for a range of political and other reasons.

- Employment Support Scotland considers that all jobseekers deserve the opportunity to benefit from improved integration that devolution should bring. It also considers that the implementation of progress measures and more flexibility around the time spent on employment support and moving between different provisions will positively impact on all.

- Future employment support must reflect demographic changes, which show older people, those with disabilities, families with children and those in (low paid) work are the groups increasingly in poverty.

- Employment Support Scotland considers that a two year programme allows enough time for many jobseekers. However evidence shows that long term unemployed jobseekers with significant barriers need a significant amount of time to make progress on employment support. Therefore Employment Support Scotland recommends the inclusion of milestone measures coupled with a flexible time scale for those with the longest initial prognosis times which would ensure that the support can be consistent and appropriate, serving the needs of all jobseekers.

**Procurement**

- Employment Support Scotland believes that the procurement stage, realistically, takes around four to six months depending on the model being procured. There then needs to be sufficient time for programme mobilisation. Lessons should be learned from previous Whitehall programmes that have been rushed through with a detrimental impact on providers and the quality of support for jobseekers.

**Fair work and progression**

- Employment support Scotland believes that Scottish Government should make available its overall economic assessment of labour market needs. This would enable employment support to reflect the needs of local areas and promote in work progression, as well as supporting the fairer jobs agenda.

- Scottish Government should consider how both employers and providers could be incentivised to work more closely together to allow for ongoing support in the work place and to promote in-work progression.

- Scottish Government should also consider how to promote the valuable contribution that people with disabilities make within the workplace, with the aim of reducing the disability gap.
Priorities for the sector
More widely across the UK ERSA is calling for:

- Reform of Jobcentre Plus so that it is rewarded for getting jobseekers into work rather than for merely moving them off benefit.
- Fundamental reform of the sanctioning regime – employment support works best when there is a positive relationship with the jobseeker.
- Reform of the Work Capability Assessment, to ensure that is right first time.
- Synchronisation of Universal Credit and employment support policy, so that self-employment as a pathway to work is not disincentivised.