

Questioning Fair Start Scotland

Is Fair Start Scotland, really a 'fair start' for the disabled people of Scotland?

Last month, Jeremy Balfour, Conservative and Unionist MSP for Lothian, posed a written question to The Scottish Government about what he believed to be the poor performance of their flagship employability programme for disabled people – [Fair Start Scotland](#).

A Statistical Summary report for Scotland's Devolved Employment Services, published in August 2020, revealed that participation in the programme had fallen from 55 percent in the first year to 27 percent in April to June of the third year.

It was highlighted that just over half of participants who had volunteered to be part of the Fair Start programme in its second year left early without having completed their pre-work support programme.



Mr Balfour questioned Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills, over the results of a survey conducted with the Social Security Experience Panel, which was made up of 83 percent disabled people, that showed 74 percent of

respondents had not heard of Fair Start Scotland.

Mr Balfour said: “It is frustrating that the implementation of the Fair Start programme has been so poor. This was the opportunity to increase employment rates of disabled people and close the employment gap, instead the employment rates for disabled people are decreasing.

“It was particularly disheartening to hear the results of the Social Security Experience Panel survey which highlights that awareness of the programme remains low amongst those who would be its main benefactors.

“When I questioned the SNP Minister Jamie Hepburn about these failings, the answers I received were disappointing to say the least. The government is falling short of supporting the disabled people of Scotland.

“There has been chances over the first two years to make changes to the programme and provide greater support for those who it was intended to help but it seems none of these chances were fully taken.”

The answer which the Minister provided read as follows: “

Answer

“Fair Start Scotland aims to support those further from the labour market towards employment, and provides 12 – 18 months of pre-employment support. As participants join each month, not enough time will have passed to present a complete picture of employment outcomes for many of them. Time must then also be taken into account to allow participants to reach 3, 6 and 12 months employment. Each quarterly release of statistics presents a developing picture of employment outcomes for year two of the service, which will increase as more participants move through the service into work, and sustain that work over time.

“The most recent statistics published on 25 November 2020 show that, of the 27,076 people who started on Fair Start Scotland, 8,329 participants (33%) went on to start work.

“The statistics also show that the majority of participants who started a job went on to sustain them for at least 6-12 months:

- 71% of people starting work went on to sustain employment for 3 months;
- 78% of those who sustained employment for 3 months reached at least 6 months; and
- 77% of those who sustained employment for 6 months went on to reach at least 12 months.”