

# Renfrewshire Employability Partnership Conference 2022



## ***Re-connecting our Services and Communities (No One Left Behind)***

Wednesday 22nd June 2022

## Conference Report



no  one  
left behind



## 1. Introduction

The conference was organised by the **Renfrewshire Local Employability Partnership (RLEP)**. This is the strategic employability partnership group for Renfrewshire. It is responsible for the development and delivery of Employability Services and ensuring these are appropriate to meet the needs of service users.

Regular conferences, networking and training events have helped to create a very strong partnership of employability service providers and other stakeholders over the years however the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on partners ability to connect and engage.

This year's event recognised the need to re-connect local employability services with communities and organisations across Renfrewshire and to build new connections recognising the need to promote the benefits of work to a wider audience. This includes unemployed residents and others who have not been considering work due to other priorities such as caring or parenting or because of health issues.

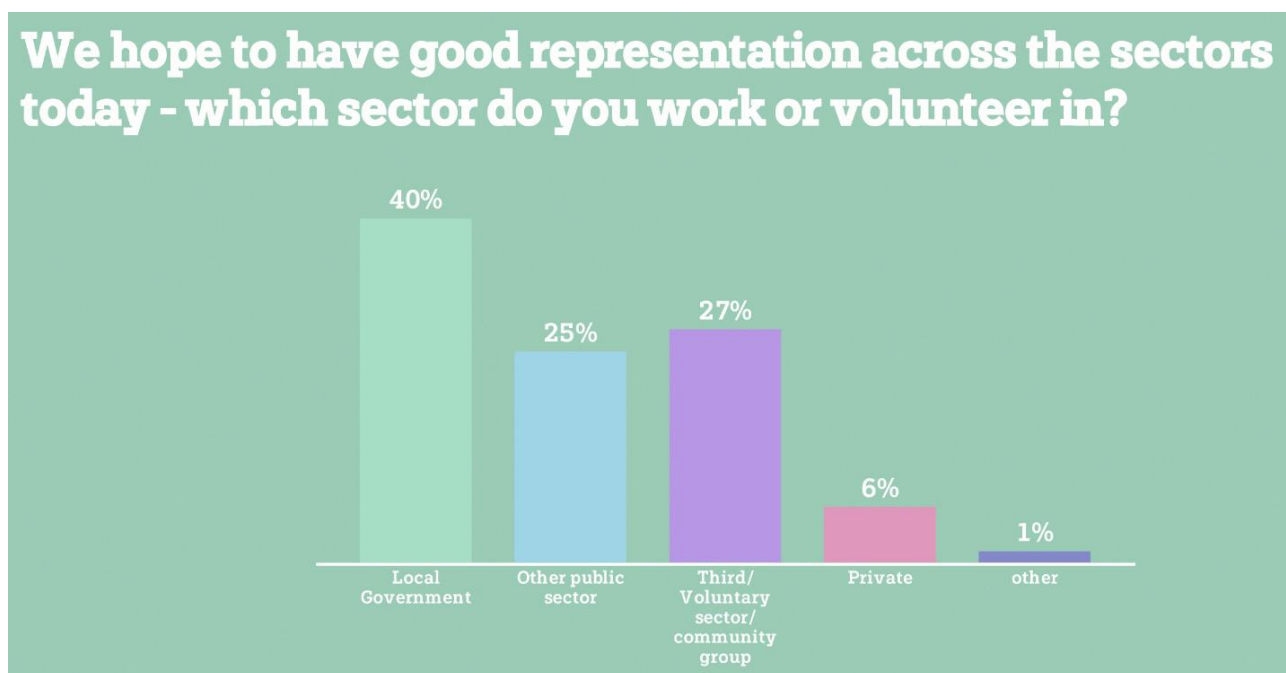
The conference aims were to:

- Provide an insight into the changing employability landscape and Renfrewshire's economic position including how employability can help to tackle child poverty and other inequalities.
- Learn from stakeholders working within and out with the field of employability about how the local partnership needs to change/develop employability services to attract and support more people and help them realise their potential.

## 2. Format and Attendance

This was the 9<sup>th</sup> annual conference and the first face to face event for nearly 3 years.

The scale of the event was limited to allow for a level of social distancing and over 100 practitioners attended.



The event was over a morning and included a plenary session followed by workshops. An interactive tool (Mentimeter) was used throughout to gather participant information and feedback.

The event was chaired by Ruth Cooper, Economic Development Manager, Renfrewshire Council; Ruth is Chair of the RLEP and also Chair of the Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development (SLAED) Group. The SLAED Group is the professional network for economic development officers from across Scotland's 32 local authorities.

### 3. The Plenary Session

The first part of the day included presentations by a number of RLEP member organisations focussing on the Renfrewshire Economy – New Challenges and Opportunities in Employability.

1. Maurice Gilligan, Area Manager, Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
2. Patricia Dowd, Senior Customer Service Leader, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)
3. Ruth Cooper, Economic Development Manager Renfrewshire Council; RLEP Chair
4. Bob Grant, Chief Executive, Renfrewshire Chamber of Commerce
5. Allan Dick, Economic Development Manager, West College Scotland
6. Karen McIntyre, Community and Partnership Manager, Engage Renfrewshire

To summarise, in addition to presenting a very wide range of statutory and discretionary employability services and opportunities for Renfrewshire residents, the key points raised by the speakers were:

1. A very different economic and labour market context with:
  - unemployment at pre-covid levels
  - best ever school leaver destinations
  - more people becoming economically inactive through health issues or early retirement.
  - more vacancies than active job seekers
  - some businesses struggling to recruit, and in some cases increasing pay rates to attract and sustain staff
  - significant concerns over rising prices and costs of living for residents and businesses.
2. A significant and shared challenge of engagement, not unique to Renfrewshire and requiring different approaches including working hand in hand with all front line services, community organisations and groups. This will include promoting services and the benefits of learning and work to those not currently considering employment due to health, caring or other circumstances or barriers.

This was followed by two presentations:

1. **The Renfrewshire Employability Delivery Plan**, Kay McIntosh, RELP Partnership Coordinator.

Participants were given an overview of this new plan which aims to engage 1500 residents this year from a range of priority groups all of whom require more intensive or specialist support to progress towards, into and within employment. The provision outlined for 2022-23 is a comprehensive package of support that will be tailored to suit every individual including:

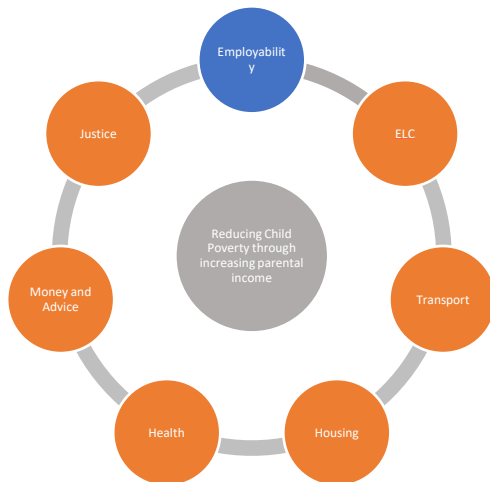
- Key worker support.
- Vocational and personal development training and support for all ages from those in their last 6 months at school upwards.
- Access to up to £3000 for individuals looking for specific training to help access work or progress in work(if on a low income)
- Specialist support for those requiring it.

- Financial help to tackle childcare; transport and other costs associated with training or the transition into employment.
- Wage subsidies for employers creating jobs for residents with significant barriers to work
- Paid work placements, traineeships and internships.

The plan will evolve over time and the conference findings and further evidence from stakeholders will shape this as will further changes in the economy.

## 2. Employability at the heart of Tackling Child Poverty, Ruth Cooper (as above)

This presentation highlighted the increased focus on employability within the Scottish Government's new Child Poverty Delivery Plan which will provide additional employability resources for Renfrewshire.



The call to action is that employability needs to be linked in with other services – one intervention in isolation won't have the impact required.

All of these interventions in the graphic alongside other aspects of public policy, like Fair Work, need to work together to have the required impact on child poverty.

Key to the success in Renfrewshire will be engaging parents – both those not currently working and those in low-income jobs who would like to increase their earning potential.

The slide pack for the conference is available here on the RLEP News page <https://investinrenfrewshire.com/rlep-news/> providing more detail and including a case study reflecting the financial benefits of taking a part time job and remaining on benefits.

## 3. Workshop Findings

All 12 tables were each given the same questions (below) but with each table having a priority group to consider. A number of the tables were asked to focus on parents, and in particular specific groups of parents at greatest risk of poverty. Others considered the needs of carers; young people; people with criminal convictions; people affected by homelessness; people with disabilities and health issues.

### 1. To what extent does employability feature as part of your discussions with your clients/service users/members?

Although the majority of attendees regularly discussed employability with those they work with a significant minority either did not discuss or could do so more. A key objective for the conference was to engage with organisations falling into the latter group so this was positive.

### 2. What can we all do to ensure staff across services regardless of sector are aware of the support available?

Better communication, through a range of channels and approaches, was the common response and a number of specific actions are included in the action plan attached (appendix 1).

Several tables suggested RLEP develop a Communications strategy. This is in fact a new requirement for all LEPs in Scotland so will be progressed over the next 6 months. Albeit that improvement is required in how we communicate and raise awareness of the employability support available, there was positive feedback about existing approaches including conferences, like this one, and the Practitioners Forum. The latter was felt to be a good vehicle but would benefit from more organisations attending, in particular those out with the employability sector.

Another key message was the need for lived experience/service user engagement to inform our approaches and in particular how we best communicate with the public and our priority groups.

### **3a. What do you think has been holding people from our priority groups back from engaging in employability activity?**

Common themes across all of the priority groups included:

**Transport Issues** - positive feedback about the free bus travel for under 23s however the time to process applications could be quicker and older young people and adults would benefit from this. Some areas such as the airport/Inchinnan; Bowfield and Ingliston are hard to get to without a car as can be shift work e.g. with care and hospitality roles.

With a significant proportion of services based in Paisley, accessibility was raised as a barrier to engagement with outreach being a solution alongside providing transport support.

**Financial Barriers** – as well as costs associated with transport (above) and childcare (below) there are many others. This includes changes to household situations impacting on household income - e.g. 1 member of the household moving into employment can affect benefits for everyone. The increased cost of living may encourage some to look for work but will also put others off making changes at this time.

**Digital Exclusion** - a lack of access to IT/internet/digital skills and low digital confidence was raised as a barrier to engagement with services and well as to work. Online support as opposed to face to face was also seen as a barrier albeit that it can be helpful for some e.g. those with mobility issues.

**Appointment Based Engagement** - inflexible systems can present challenges particularly for those with more barriers/more chaotic lives. Drop in can be more attractive and effective albeit there may be resource issues. Location of services is very centralised in Renfrewshire which restricts access to appointments and, when including travel, can take up a lot of time and cost.

**Lack of Confidence to Engage** – due to perceived lack of skills and qualifications or self worth. Reduced engagement in services has reduced confidence due to the pandemic restrictions.

**Mental Health Issues** - have increased as a result of the pandemic. Many people becoming more isolated and disengaged from services.

**Gaps in CV** - anxiety about how to deal with this - could relate to parents; carers; those who have been in custody and others who have not worked for a while.

**Lack of Awareness of Breadth of Support and Opportunities Available** - mixed responses in relation to use of social media- whether this was as good as it needed to be – it can't be the only channel as many don't use. Need for simple messaging and for a single point of contact. Links to Communications theme above.

In addition, the tables reported a number of barriers to engagement specific to their priority groups:

**Ethnic Minority Groups** – Language and cultural barriers need to be addressed.

**Parents - Childcare Issues** - Lack of awareness of what is available with some parents making the assumption that there will not be training or job opportunities to fit with their family circumstances. Much that the free childcare offer has improved significantly, some tables reported that childcare provision still needed to be more flexible to meet working/training/education patterns. Costs of childcare also raised and a lack of understanding of costs/and financial supports available.

**Working Hours-** A lack of 10am-2pm job roles or roles which fit around school/nursery core hours.

**Young people** – A lack of good role models and family history with bad experiences from the past. Also ‘young people don’t know what they don’t know – where to start?’ Parental earnings can impact on young peoples access to support e.g. no Universal Credit.

**Carers** - Overarching issue around the identification of carers generally – both carers themselves not recognising or identifying themselves as carers; and services not identifying clients as carers – often not asking the question or making the connection that caring could be the reason that people may not be engaging or (think they are) able to work. Concerns around how supportive or flexible an employer would be – especially if they have an emergency care situation if still caring – hybrid/home working models and shorter hours could be helpful for carers but not all employers offer this

**Homeless People** - 30% - 40% of the applications for homeless support come from those already in employment. A major issue is private landlords selling up in current market making people homeless. Homeless flats cost a minimum of around £150 per week just for rent. This can lead to debt as although working they cannot afford to pay the support bills. If living in homeless accommodation it is often better not to go into employment due to rental costs.

**People with Health Issues and Disability** - Stigma /fear of judgemental attitudes – especially in relation to those in recovery. Compassion fatigue- example for those with significant health issues – off sick regularly. Reasonable adjustments may be seen as unreasonable so belief that better off not going into employment.

**People with Criminal Convictions** - low self-belief, the feeling that they will always be at the back of the line and are ‘damaged’ in the eyes of the employer so just don’t take part in job searching activities. Tend to take any employment as it’s a chance rather than something that they are interested in so affects motivation and in some occasions becomes a revolving door as they don’t stick in the job.

### **3b .What can you/we do to increase this engagement and support more people to consider work as something that could be good for them?**

All tables discussed actions and decided on 3 or 4 to share with the wider audience. These have been collated into a single action plan attached as appendix 1

## **4. Case Studies**

To raise awareness of how services are impacting on Renfrewshire residents, employability advisors shared the stories of a number of clients who have benefitted from accessing support. These will be shared on the RLEP web pages in due course.

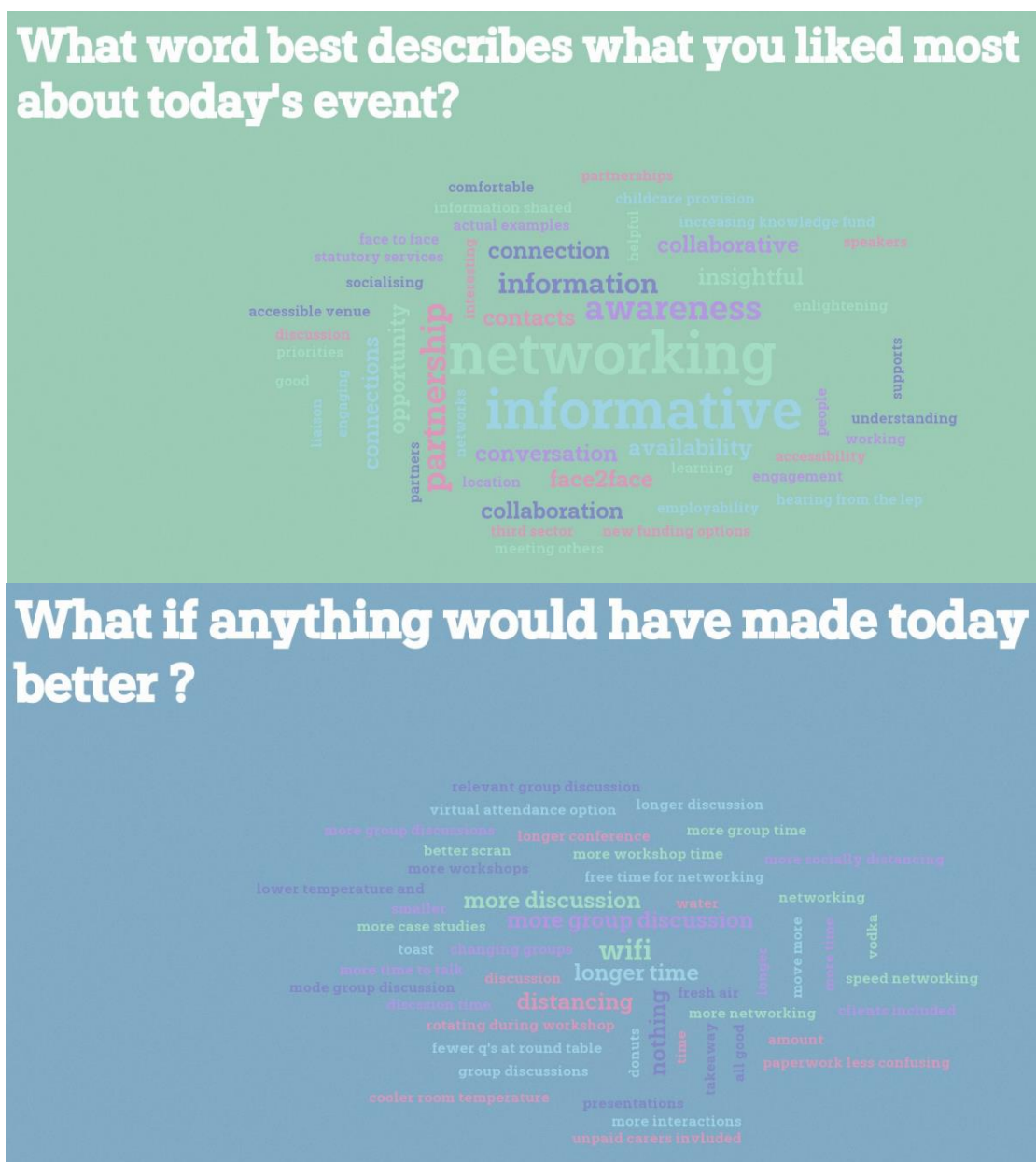
## **5. Conference Evaluation**

Mentimeter was used at the end of the conference to identify what attendees enjoyed the most and what they felt could be improved.

Word clouds were formed with responses with the text increasing in size with repeat responses.

As can be seen from the graphics below, attendees found the event informative and appreciated the opportunity to network and collaborate.

In terms of what we could have done better Wi-Fi was an issue which particularly impacted on the mentimeter interactive elements. Some people felt the event should have been longer and could have benefitted from more time for discussions.







## Appendix 1. Renfrewshire Local Employability Partnership (LEP) Employability Conference June 2022 – Action Plan

Actions – Brief outline	Partners involved	Lead partner	What is the desired outcome of doing this/what will success look like if?
<p><b>Improve engagement with the public and with practitioners through effective communication -</b></p> <p>Develop a LEP Communication Strategy/Plan including :</p> <p>Establish single point of contact for employability support</p> <p>Or at least clear messaging around who to go to when.....</p> <p>Produce simple flow chart to show customer journeys.</p> <p>Use of case studies to inspire and support engagement, including those showing better off in work calculations.</p> <p>All partners to advocate work is good - consistent messaging.</p> <p>Improve use of Social Media including content.</p> <p>Produce a directory of employability support services accessible to all – maybe in a digital format? Invest Portal and RLEP web pages should be a starting point.</p>	<p>LEP and partners</p>	<p>LEP /Renfrewshire Council</p>	<p>Smooth transition to employment</p> <p>Less stressful for clients</p> <p>Increased customer confidence</p> <p>Increased engagement</p> <p>Practitioners across all sectors aware of employability services and vice versa.</p> <p>Myth busting.</p>

<p>Establish Customer Forums - regular- real time feedback (Could be linked to Customer Charter)</p> <p>Build the awareness and membership of the Practitioners Forum</p> <p>Continue to provide conferences and networking events to ensure staff are fully informed</p>			
<p><b>Improve engagement through Outreach</b></p> <p><b>Young People</b> Develop an informal outreach engagement programme. Engage with YP in their communities, engaging with their support network also. Build trust and relationship and then introduce employability support and appointments in offices etc.</p> <p><b>Parents</b> More outreach work in schools/nurseries/childcare facilities/ children's clubs/ community organisations working closely with families/mother and toddlers/ baby massage classes. Make use of school and nursery communication systems and events such as parents' evenings, transition from primary to secondary schools, nursery graduations.</p> <p><b>All Target Groups -</b></p>	<p>Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Invest, DWP; Education; Youth Services and projects; Young Persons Guarantee Youth Panel; Community Youth Projects; Barnardo's (Community Animation Team).</p> <p>Education, Community Organisations; DWP, Invest/Renfrewshire Council</p>	<p>LEP/Barnardo's Community Animation Team</p> <p>Renfrewshire Council – Education and Invest</p>	<p>Raised awareness of support available.</p> <p>Increased engagement across all ages and priority groups.</p> <p>More residents of all ages with barriers progressing towards work.</p>

<p>Road show for residents – myth busting – using case studies.</p> <p>Outreach programme as per young people above.</p> <p>LEP Employment Advisor based in other services e.g. social work/housing/health.</p>	<p>LEP members in partnership with relevant community organisations and public services</p> <p>As above</p>	<p>LEP</p> <p>As above</p>	
<p><b>Improve engagement through Service Integration -</b></p> <p>Consider/establish One-stop shop (pilot?) which anyone looking for support in Renfrewshire can access. May be able to have these in all of the main towns in Renfrewshire.</p> <p>Develop stronger links between employability services and education (early years upwards) and more joined up thinking and delivery. E.g. in relation to tackling the childcare challenge including reviewing nursery admissions policy to enable more flexibility.</p> <p>Develop stronger links between all services and employability – ‘Make every contact count’</p> <p>Create an Employability Champion in services who could disseminate information and keep staff updated on</p>	<p>All Partners</p> <p>Education - nurseries, schools, other childcare provider’s .Invest and other LEP partners.</p> <p>All Partners</p>	<p>Renfrewshire Council/Engage Renfrewshire (voluntary Sector)</p> <p>Education Invest/Renfrewshire Council</p> <p>LEP</p>	<p>May be able to break down barriers if people have anxiety about coming into service offices. This could reduce the fail to attends that we are seeing at the moment.</p> <p>Increased parental engagement in employability. Childcare provision more aligned to parents needs.</p> <p>Increased engagement and improved outcomes for residents.</p>

relevant programmes, grants, incentives etc. – possibly a Carers Champion too who would have specialist knowledge of the particular barriers/challenges facing carers			
<b>Tackle the language and cultural barriers that ethnic minority parents/adults may face -</b>  Provision of ESOL support  Provision of marketing materials in different languages; providing translators; target local Facebook groups.	Engage (In Ren Network); DWP; Third Sector; REEM?  CLD, West College Scotland	CLD LEP	Raised awareness of support available.  Increased engagement by ethnic minority residents,
<b>Tackle the transport challenges –</b>  including providing transport to less accessible work places including the airport	LEP/ partners	Invest/DWP/SDS/Chamber	Improved access to jobs
<b>Ensure customers can get access to mental health support</b> when required	All	RAMH	Positive mental health leads to positive outcomes  Increased customer confidence.
<b>Identify solutions to tackling debt as a barrier to work –</b>  For example rent arrears.  Could focus on specific vulnerable groups e.g. care experienced	Housing agencies; LEP members; Renfrewshire Citizens Advice	Housing	Accessing work becomes feasible for those with debt issues.
<b>Increase service user/lived experience engagement -</b>	LEP including LEP operational groups.	LEP	Services reflect the needs of those requiring support.

Ask people what support they want/need.	Other delivery partners and services		Service users/communities have more trust in services through being listened to.
<p><b>Work with and raise awareness amongst employers -</b></p> <p>How they can create the conditions for parents and carers and others with barriers to work – e.g. through the incentive programme/shorter working hours/greater flexibility/workplace carers policies etc.)</p> <p>Work with employers on the recruitment of people with significant barriers such as those with convictions or homeless.</p> <p>Consider the viability of introducing a generic form for any vacancy within Renfrewshire rather than individual company application forms.</p> <p>Provide more digital support to enable clients to complete applications.</p> <p>ID requirements for applications – need a bigger turnaround time to allow clients to get these sorted. Not everyone from the furthest removed group has these readily to hand.</p> <p>Work with employers to raise awareness of health conditions and disability and inclusive employment approaches.</p>	<p>All partners</p> <p>LEP working groups.</p>	<p>Lead partner - DWP/Invest/Chamber of Commerce (for disseminating info to local businesses)/Carers Scotland (can deliver a Carer Positive session)</p>	<p>More residents would be able to take up and sustain employment opportunities</p> <p>Increase the pool of potential employees, particularly given employers are struggling to recruit.</p>

<p><b>More focus on carers as a priority group –</b></p> <p>Looking at the particular targeted support they may need –perhaps looking at similar incentives to the Transition to Work fund to help with practical costs (e.g. a falls monitor/sensor to enable peace of mind for the person they care for if returning to work), or if there's a shortfall in paying for a care service before they get paid. The same issues that they face in working may also affect their ability to participate in employability programmes so this may need to be addressed as well in terms of flexibility?</p>	<p>All partners</p>	<p>Lead partner Invest/with support from Carers centre/Carers Scotland</p>	<p>Employability support is more targeted to meet the particular needs of carers as a client group More carers are able to access employability opportunities and therefore able to progress to work as a result</p>
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