

Parental Employment Inquiry call for views

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Introduction and summary

This paper summarises the main themes in the 102 responses received by the time the Call for Views closed. 57 were from individuals and 45 from organisations. Further information about respondents is included in the annex.

There were some very clear themes across all the responses.

- Lack of affordable, flexible **childcare is the major barrier** to improving income through employment and is the main priority for improvement.
- Most favoured expansion on a **universal** basis. Many individual responses (but not organisation responses) favoured a focus on **working parents**. Only a few favoured focusing expansion on low-income families.
- More **family friendly and flexible jobs** were needed in order to accommodate school hours and childcare responsibilities. Government should do more to promote family friendly working and support businesses to implement it. Suggestions included a badge/recognition scheme for employers and using procurement rules to influence employment practices.
- For individual respondents, **training and education** was the next most common priority after childcare for helping parents into work and better paid jobs. However, student funding rules, social security rules, lack of childcare and course structures can be barriers. For organisations nothing else came close to childcare as the priority.
- Other barriers to accessing employment or better jobs include:
 - **Social security rules** – which can be a disincentive, particularly as benefits reduce as wages increase
 - **Transport availability and cost**
 - **Low wages**
- Organisations also discussed **employability programmes**, supporting a person centred approach, but this was not discussed to the same extent by individuals.
- Recognising that the barrier to better employment is a **gender issue** was a key theme for some organisations, but not mentioned as often as an explicit issue by individuals.

The Call for Views asked: What could the **Scottish Government prioritise** to help parents into work and better paid jobs? The table below summarises the themes raised clearly showing childcare is the main priority.

Table 1: Summary of priorities for Scottish Government action

Theme	Individuals	Organisation
Childcare	17	27
Training and education	12	8
Employability	5	9
Flexible working	5	7
Social security	5	5
Transport	0	5

Other issues raised specifically under the question asking about priorities included:

- **Legislate** against poor working conditions (2 individuals)
- **Increase wages** (2 individuals, but many others referred to ‘fair work’)
- Recognise **equalities** issues. For example Close the Gap discussed gendered barriers and the under valuation of women’s work
- Integrate into **economic policy** (For example: South Ayrshire Council said “support local economic growth” and Inclusion Scotland said: “Involve Third Sector and anti-poverty groups in developing economic policy.”)

No single policy can solve this

A large range of policy areas were referenced throughout the responses, highlighting the multiple factors relevant to addressing barriers to improving family friendly employment. Dumfries and Galloway Council observed that no single policy priority can address this issue:

“There is no single thing which could be prioritised, for example, improved access to transport without access to childcare will not work, similarly increasing higher paid roles without support upskilling and reskilling will still exclude some people from opportunities. The approach must be considered as whole system approach not separate policies or interventions”

Childcare

The Call for Views asked about changes needed to childcare in Scotland if more parents were to return to work or increase their working hours.

The one over-arching theme of nearly all of the responses was **how critical affordable, flexible and appropriate childcare** is to enabling parents to return to the workforce:

“Childcare is critical to enabling parents to enter and progress within paid employment. This is particularly true for mothers and single parents, over 90% of whom are women. The provision of affordable and flexible childcare often determines whether women have a job, what hours they work, and their earnings. The high cost of childcare

means that paid work is simply unviable for many parents, particularly single mothers. In addition to paid work, childcare provision is also critical to enabling parents to access education or training opportunities which may improve their employment prospects in the longer term. (The Poverty Alliance)

Finding childcare is particularly challenging for those who need specialised childcare, who need childcare outwith standard hours or who need to move relatively frequently. For example the RAF Families Federation said:

“The mobility associated with military life may exacerbate this challenge as one family highlighted to us: ‘We are due to move to an area where the nursery connected to the station has a 20-month waiting list. This is longer than our average tour length!’

The particular difficulties for military families are also discussed by Forces Children Scotland.

Expanding free or subsidised childcare

Over a third of respondents felt that **any expansion of childcare should be offered to all families in Scotland** (16 organisations, 26 individuals). Prioritising working families was favoured by 18 individuals but only 2 organisations. Only a few said it should be focused on low-income families (5 individuals, 4 organisations).

Table 2: Which families should be the focus for any future childcare expansion?

	Individuals	Organisations
All families	26	16
Working families	18	2
Low income families	5	4
Parents on employability programmes	1	1
Other	6	13

The **need for increased hours of subsidised childcare for working parents** for children of all ages was a recurring theme. Examples included:

- “More hours for those who work fulltime would allow parents to go back to work fulltime.” (Individual)
- “Copy England, ensure that everybody gets a minimum of 15 hours childcare a week and those who work get 40 hours of free childcare (in England it is 30 hours).” (Individual)
- Providing childcare for more hours and with greater flexibility may allow all parents – including those in poverty – to better increase the number of hours they work.” (Fraser of Allander Institute)

For organisations there was more of an emphasis on **universal provision**. Comments included:

- the Scottish Government should be working towards a universal funded childcare entitlement of fifty hours per week.” (The Poverty Alliance)
- “All children and families should receive some level of subsidised childcare.” (Perth & Kinross Local Employability Partnership)

Priority age-groups

Respondents were asked to prioritise any expansion of childcare by age, Results were mixed, with priority being both 1 to 2 years and ‘over 3 years’.

Table 3: Which age should be the focus for any future childcare expansion?

	Individuals	Organisations
0 to 1 year	9	5
1 to 2 years	17	10
2 to 3 years	8	4
Over 3 years	18	8

Many organisations felt that **wholesale change was required**, rather than targeted expansion:

“In order for child poverty to be addressed through parental employment, largescale investment in childcare will be required. Provision must be expanded to cover all children from 6 months old so they have access to up to 50 hours free, accessible, flexible, high-quality child-centred care. Flexibility is key to ensure those parents with untypical working patterns can access childcare.” (GMB Scotland)

A strong theme was the need to extend this to **after-school or ‘wrap-around’ childcare**. For example one individual said:

“Any extension of free or subsidised childcare needs now to be focused on school age childcare rather than early years... There is little point in encouraging parents, particularly mothers, back to work, training, studying because they can access early years childcare if when the child gets to primary school there is no sustainable or affordable childcare in place.”

However, **extending childcare to younger children** was also a priority. Save the Children noted that: “There is currently a disconnect between the end of statutory maternity pay and the Scottish Government funded hours.”

There were also a couple of respondents who felt that the system needed to be reformed so that **parents with young children could choose to stay home** for a longer period without financial or career detriment:

"For parents of the youngest children, up to 24 months, we believe they should have a choice, taking an example from Finland, parents there are paid an allowance if they wish to stay at home to care for their child, or they can access state subsidised nursery care at the end of parental leave." (Scottish Out of School Care Network)

Types of childcare

The Call for Views asked which types of childcare best served the needs of parents seeking to return to work. Rather than a particular type of setting, the most common theme was the need for flexibility. Comments included:

- "Flexible childcare, this would accommodate irregular work schedules, allowing parents to drop off and pick up their children at any time of the day or night." (individual)
- "Funded places at nursery, breakfast club, after school club and provisions in the evenings and weekends as well as school holidays." (Individual)

Bellbank Project described their service:

"We offer a drop in/flexible system where parents choose the times they need dependent on their family circumstances which works really well for the parents. We also open throughout school holidays because not everyone works term time."

Another recurring theme was the need to fund wrap-around childcare for those of school age. Many types of childcare setting were mentioned by respondents, but none predominated. Longstone After School and Breakfast Club reflect the views of many in their suggestion that the priority for childcare was:

"Providing support to families that follows the child through their childhood and education journey until they are old enough to be able to be safely left unattended by their parents. Key to this is creating a network of childcare options for families that allow parents to work normal work hours right through to secondary school. More support is required for out of school childcare provision i.e. breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday clubs. This needs to be affordable and accessible to all and cover from 7.30am to 6pm." (Longstone After School and Breakfast Club)

There were also several comments relating to the **difficulties in finding appropriate childcare for children with additional needs**. The submission from Carers Scotland highlighted:

"The lack of available childcare can mean loss of employment with research indicating that nearly a third (30%) of parents of disabled children are not working, with 40% having been out of work for more than five years."

Childcare Providers

The other themes brought out across the questions which relate to childcare settings were the need to appropriately fund all types of childcare setting, and the concern that there were not enough providers of childcare, particularly in rural areas.

Several submissions focussed on changes required to childcare providers. Suggestions made included:

- "Provide funding specifically for childcare workers' wage costs. We are full to capacity all the time with a waiting list but are now finding it extremely hard to secure grant funding for staff wages." (Bellsbank Project)
- "Early years educators should be paid the same as primary school teachers." (Pregnant Then Screwed)
- "Where we have more need than places available, we can't recruit or retain staff to expand. Where there has been a change in working status for some families, we have vacant places and at risk of having to close services. The school aged childcare sector needs to be funded by government payments for childcare at a realistic level, a level of funding that supports the workforce and the infrastructure." (First 4 Kids)

One respondent summarised the views of the majority when they stated that the following points would have the greatest impact on child poverty in Scotland:

"Extension of hours that childcare is provided. Parents who work shifts, early in the morning, later in the evening or overnight cannot access affordable, flexible, accessible childcare.
Provision of more free childcare to parents to enable them to work.
Enhance the terms and conditions of the childcare workforce and increase the number of people working in it.
Increase the number and locations of high quality childcare establishments." (Individual)

Employment

The Call for Views asked about the role of the Scottish Government and employers in relation to:

- Supply of good jobs (i.e economic policy)
- Support to move into work
- Access to education and training
- Flexible and family-friendly working

- Supporting those who want to work more hours

The points made were similar across all these questions so the analysis groups them together. Although childcare was mentioned frequently, it isn't discussed in this section as it repeats points already made. However it is important to note that many respondents thought that childcare provision was the key to unlocking increased employment opportunities. For example, RAF Families Federation said:

“The RAFFF have evidence to suggest that in certain areas, including around RAF Lossiemouth, the availability of childcare spaces (both Early Years and school-age childcare) is impacting the ability of spouses / partners of Service personnel to seek and maintain employment.”

Improving the supply of good quality jobs

The Call for Views asked what the Scottish Government could do to increase the supply of good quality, family friendly jobs. For most this was an issue of furthering fair work and better childcare rather than a question of economic development, although a couple of individual responses referred to supporting SMEs and investing in deprived areas outwith large urban areas. Many organisation responses discussed the equalities aspect of employment – particularly the gendered nature of poor pay and undervaluing ‘women’s work’ (See for example Close the Gap).

Engaging the private sector

JRF were unusual in discussing in detail the importance of engaging with the private sector stating:

“You cannot transition an advanced consumer economy to a wellbeing one if the people (employers) for whom the change is most challenging are at best disengaged and, more commonly, fearful of your agenda.”

They note the higher poverty rate for private sector staff (13%) compared to public sector staff (6%). They recommend a focus on small businesses which account for 43.2% of private sector employment. They consider that:

“Scottish Government can play a significant role in highlighting, promoting and incentivising best practice and working on areas of aligned self-interest for the benefit for all.”

South Ayrshire Council noted the difficulties faced by employers:

“Employers are facing multiple economic challenges which impact on their business from fuel costs, supply chain issues and increases to staff costs without an increase to their income.”

Public and Third Sector Jobs

Inclusion Scotland note that: “**longer-term funding and support for the third sector** can assist in improving access to secure employment within this sector.”

A few submissions recommended funded **job placements**. (eg Salvesen Mindroom Centre, Aberdeen City Council, JRF). JRF recommend scaling up schemes like the NHS Demonstrator Project proposed in [Best Start Bright Futures](#).

“We look forward to hearing what the next steps will be for the project and how that the evaluation will highlight similar success to those seen in NHS Lanarkshire .”

Just Transition – green jobs and ‘wellbeing economy’

Several submissions raised the potential of ‘green jobs’ to increase the supply of high-quality jobs but were concerned that this may not be realised. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation referred to:

“clear gender and age divides already appearing within the ‘green jobs market ’”

The Poverty Alliance recommend that:

“the Scottish Government should explore financial support for parents to access training, including upfront costs for travel and childcare; how upskilling and reskilling support designed to support the just transition will tackle poverty; and how skills programmes will meet the needs of the priority family groups.”

Employability

The Call for Views asked about how to support those looking for work. Again, childcare, flexible working and fair work were the key themes, along with discussion of existing programmes such as:

- [No-one Left Behind](#)
- [Fair Start Scotland](#)
- [Parental Employability Support Fund](#)

Several organisations describe employability programmes that they offer, including:

- The Challenges Group describe their person-centred programme for women returners - [Making Work Work](#)
- OPFS Integrated Employability and Family Support Model
- Inclusion Scotland “Individual Placement Support Model”
- CPAG’s “Your work your way”

Volunteer Scotland discuss the value of volunteering.

JRF discuss the employability commitment in **Best Start Bright Futures**, and are sceptical of the likely impact saying that the proposed:

“5 fold increase in engagement with parents can clearly not be met with existing programmes.”

They recommend:

- User centred design
- Stronger evaluation and monitoring
- Working with employers
- Replicating successful local projects
- Providing the ‘support around the support’ (eg childcare, transport etc)

Employability support was mentioned by a minority (18) of individual respondents, across a range of questions. They suggested the types of support that would be helpful including;

- CVs, support to apply for jobs
- Taster sessions
- Face to face support
- Back to work grants – both for for parents and employers who employ a ‘parent returner’
- Apprentice type schemes
- More employment support staff (with specific reference to Dundee)
- Paid placements in different kinds of jobs
- Tailored employability support
- Voluntary programmes
- Job coaches incentivised to sustain employment, not just get a job.

Person Centred Approaches

Several organisations commented on the [No-one Left Behind](#) (NOLB), supporting its’ local, person centred, ‘key worker’ approach (eg South Lanarkshire). OPFS support a person-centred approach, but caution:

“we fear that a very individualised model risks losing sight of the structural and systemic barriers particular groups, including single parents encounter in the labour market.”

The [Parental Employability Support Fund](#) (PESF) supports “personalised support for parents who face barriers to progressing their careers”. The Poverty Alliance would like to see this fund more thoroughly evaluated. JRF comment that:

“While the strategy behind the policy at a national level is sound and it makes sense that delivery is carried out at local authority level, this means that there exists wide inconsistency in delivery and a lack of reported outcomes.”

Avoiding Deficit models

While some organisations discuss how employability programmes can help individual parents (often single parents) get closer to the job market (eg OPFS), JRF make the broader point that employers also need to change:

“While many parents will want new tools and techniques to get them ready for work this is often this is not the case. Rather it is the **environment or work culture that needs to change.**”

Inclusion Scotland discuss the need to work with employers as well as those seeking work when seeking to narrow the **disability employment gap**. They discuss their “Individual Placement Support Model,” and consider that programmes run by disabled people’s organisations achieve better results than government programmes.

A couple of individual responses referred to the need to build confidence and skills. However, another commented: “Not more resiliency classes that shift the blame from social factors onto the individual.” Suggesting instead “Higher taxes to support public sector job creation.”

Fair Start Scotland and UK employment programmes

[Fair Start Scotland](#) was criticised for having a poor rate of job outcomes for disabled people (Inclusion Scotland) and single parents (OPFS).

The UK government’s focus on ‘work first’ was criticised by Public Health Scotland (and many other submissions emphasised that jobs needed to be good quality, flexible jobs).

Funding and commissioning

Several organisations ask for more flexible, multi-year funding for employability programmes (eg Glasgow City Council). More specifically, OPFS recommend PESF funding is increased and Poverty Alliance and JRF regret the in-year cuts to employability funding made in September 2022. (The Committee has discussed this previously).

OPFS criticised commissioning approaches, especially the focus on ‘work first’ approaches and the approach to tendering for Fair Start Scotland which, they say, prevents smaller organisations from benefiting.

The Challenges Group note that their Making Work Work programme is no longer funded by the Scottish Government. They state that:

“The landscape of piecemeal funding by local authorities is difficult to navigate for new and innovative providers in this field such as The Challenges Group and contributes to discrepancies of coverage across the regions.”

Programmes need to take account of caring responsibilities

Some felt that mainstream employability programmes do not take account of caring responsibilities. More broadly, there is a need for targeted support for equalities groups. (Poverty Alliance, OPFS) OPFS recommend a Scotland wide employability pathway specifically for single parents. They describe their “Integrated employability and family support model” for single parents wishing to improve skills and qualifications but not ready for a structured programme

OPFS propose that an “intersectional and gendered lens should inform Scotland’s employability framework.”

Advice

People need advice on how benefits will be affected by working, (West Lothian Council, Advice Direct, Scottish Women’s Convention, Renfrewshire LEP) and to make sure they know their employment rights (CIPD).

Parents also need careers advice - OPFS proposed that those getting Scottish Child Payment “should be proactively support to access parental employment support, should they need it.”

OPFS also recommended creating an equivalent of Youth Guarantee for priority family groups – offer a guarantee of work, funded training or further education.

Education and Training

The Call for Views asked if there was enough education and training in their area for parents looking to enter or progress in work. Almost all the organisations who answered said there wasn’t, as did most of the individuals.

Table 4: Is there sufficient access to education and training for parents who want to improve their employment options?

	Individuals	Organisations
Yes	17	5
No	24	19
Unsure	15	9

Suggestions for what can be improved tended to focus on structural barriers to access, particularly:

- Childcare provision
- Social security rules.
- Course structures
- Lack of local provision / lack of transport to attend further away (eg South Lanarkshire)
- Lack of knowledge about what’s available (eg OPFS)
- Lack of options for those unable to work due to being an unpaid carer and/or disabled (individual submission)

Social security and student funding rules can be a barrier:

One individual described how social security rules prevented her from progressing to a higher level course.

“I’m at college doing an access course, but told if I go onto hn level it will impact on my universal credit.”

Another respondent noted that she could get no further funding as she already had a degree.

Course structures

As well as cost, the **timetabling** and structure of courses can be a barrier, as illustrated by one respondent’s experience:

“During my maternity period with my second child, I was able to use that time to upskill by getting my MSc. However, I was only able to do this because the MSc programme was designed in blocks instead of having to go to university weekly. It was the only programme that did that and has now been withdrawn because it didn't fit the "traditional" model of PGT courses.”

Some individuals suggested that online learning would be more accessible.

Courses need to be available at all skills levels

While some referenced basic skills (eg funding to get driving licence, ESOL) others said there should be **more support for ‘higher level’ courses**: One individual said:

“Only training I have seen that is easily available is low quality and designed around filling low paid jobs with poor working conditions that have huge number of vacancies, unsurprisingly. ””

Dumfries and Galloway Council (among others) emphasise **lifelong learning**, saying:

“We therefore call for the rapid realisation of the ambitions of lifetime skills laid out in the [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#). We would welcome a dual approach to providing skills and education for those looking for work alongside serious investment in upskilling and reskilling for those in the workforce. These must be delivered in a flexible and accessible way.”

Need better links between training and employers

South Lanarkshire Council advocated closer links between training and work, saying:

“There remains a need to increase the scope and availability of in-work training and upskilling to support low paid / underemployed parents to progress to better paid work.

Link between college courses/vocational courses with a guaranteed job on completion, at a reasonable level of pay that is better than being on benefits – not minimum wage.”

Dumfries and Galloway Council also recommend improved business links:

“Given the nature of our business base we would like the skills system better engage with smaller businesses in the design of skills and work-based learning.”

Close the Gap discuss the need to take a gender sensitive approach.

Fair and Flexible Working

The call for views asked what employers and the Scottish government could do to increase flexible and family friendly working.

Flexible Working Scotland set the gender context:

“Flexible working should not only be something for working parents, but it is a key enabler of parents accessing work, particularly mums, who experience the Motherhood Penalty. [...] In the UK, by the time a woman’s first child is 12 years old, her pay is 33% less than a man in an equivalent role.”

The most common types of flexible working suggested were:

- Flexible hours to fit round school
- Working from home/hybrid working

Other types of flexibility suggested were:

- Time off when children are sick
- Offer job share as standard
- Four day week without loss of pay
- Compressed hours
- More flexible annual leave arrangements
- Commitment to ‘living hours’ (an extension of the ‘living wage’)
- No ‘zero hours’ contracts

Availability of and attitudes to flexible working

CIPD state that 28% of employers promote flexible working options such as job-share, term-time working and part-time hours.

Part time jobs tend to be paid at lower hourly rates than full time jobs. Close the Gap state there aren’t as many term-time jobs as there used to be and lower paid jobs are also less likely to allow flexible working.

Advice Direct Scotland have a four-day week without loss of pay. They say:

“This has increased employee satisfaction and wellbeing, retention rates & productivity but has also served to decrease staff turnover and absenteeism. It also provides parents with additional flexibility in meeting the balance between work and caring for their children.”

How to increase flexible working

For individuals the most common answer (7 mentions) was **legislation**, organisations tended to favour **advice, guidance and encouragement**. One individual said:

“There needs to be more repercussion to businesses who don't adapt to more flexible working practices. There also needs to be more incentives to businesses to take on parents.” (individual)

Others suggested ways to encourage change, such as:

“marketing businesses that are willing to offer flexi working”

“Training from organisations such as Flexibility Works for managers.”

“Understanding that this can be a positive to their business”

Dumfries and Galloway council said that:

“More support for employers who want to trial flexibility should be provided; this could be through business organisations such as Chambers of Commerce or enterprise agencies. A resourced campaign to increase employer understanding of parent’s needs and the ability to offer flexibility through sharing of good practice and case studies alongside practical support to implement.”

Flexible Working Scotland were one of many who proposed the public sector model fair work, use public procurement to spread its use and/or create a ‘badge scheme’:

“the Scottish Government can incentivise fair, flexible work by making it a genuine requirement of **public procurement** (rather than the currently onerous tick box system in relation to grant requests and tenders); by being a **model flexible** and fair employer alongside local authorities and making more of the fact that they are "open to flexible working" and by instigating a voluntary flexible working code and **badge scheme** (like the Living Wage Employer programme or Investors in People).”

JRF state that the existing **Scottish Business Pledge seems to have stalled**:

“the initiative seems to be on hiatus, the Pledges website’s news page has not been updated since 2020. This will be frustrating for the 800 employers that signed up to it and possibly vindication for those that chose not to sign up.”

Several respondents suggested that the Scottish Government and public sector generally should be a ‘**model employer**’ (CIPD, Flexible Working Scotland, JRF, GMB)

Public Health Scotland referred the role of ‘**anchor institutions**’ (large public sector employers such as hospitals) in both exemplifying fair work and influencing suppliers and contractors through procurement. (See also: GMB, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde).

Using **procurement** and grant giving to influence employment policy was a common thread (CIPD, Flexible Working Scotland, OPFS, JRF, CPAG, Public Health Scotland, GMB). JRF comment that:

“Procurement is not a silver bullet solution, but fair work aspects procurement must have more strength.”

Financial support or incentives to help businesses implement family friendly working was another suggestion across organisations and individuals. Examples included: tax breaks, funding for training and paying employers to take people on. For example, The Poverty Alliance suggested a ‘low pay levy’ to fund a bonus for those providing the real living wage and Glasgow City Council proposed financial incentives to employ parents on part time/flexible contracts.

Some suggested **subsidies and grants** for those providing flexible working (eg West Lothian Council, Glasgow City Council, South Ayrshire Council, Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar – Employability).

Dumfries and Galloway Council suggested that the Scottish Government fund 4 day working week trials.

As throughout all the responses, **childcare provision is** highlighted as a means to improve family friendly employment, particularly childcare at or near the workplace.

Culture and attitudes are also important. The Scottish Women’s Convention state that if there were more women in senior roles this would help promote family friendly working. OPFS and Public Health Scotland refer to the importance of a flexible and understanding manager.

Flexible Working Scotland consider that: “Those employers who offer flexible working need to shout about it. Only 3 in 10 job ads mention flexibility.” Pregnant then Screwed suggest it should be a requirement to include information about flexible working in job adverts.

Employment rights

Although a reserved matter, several responses recommended the need for further legislation and regulation. This included:

- **improvements to parental leave**, by for example, increasing state funded parental leave. Pregnant then Screwed refer to: “a dad shaped hole in our parental leave system” effectively embedding the gender pay gap.
- They also propose a right to **flexible working** from day 1 and a right to appeal a rejected request for flexible working (Pregnant then Screwed),
- Ban **zero hours** contracts (eg Perth and Kinross Local Employability Partnership and several individual responses)
- **higher wages** and/or increasing the minimum wage

Underemployment - support for those who want to work more hours

The Call for Views asked how to support parents who wanted to work more hours.

CIPD noted that: “those in part-time roles and the self-employed are more likely to be underemployed – 29% and 18% respectively would like to work more hours”. Women are more likely to work part-time and part-time roles generally attract lower wages.

The main suggestions for supporting those who want to work more hours were:

- More **childcare** (14 mentions)
- Make work pay – through removing disincentives in **social security**, supporting the transition into work (7 mentions) and promoting the real **living wage** (4 mentions).
- Promoting **flexible work** (4 mentions) (see section on flexible working)
- **Training/skill developments** (3 mentions) (see section on education and training).

Childcare is discussed extensively elsewhere. Advice Direct Scotland said that:

“A recent survey, undertaken by The Centre of Progressive Policy, evidenced from 2000 mums that, 46% were prevented from taking on more hours at work due to lack of childcare”

A common theme was that **people aren't always better off if they increase their working hours**. One individual said:

“I currently work full time but am better off if I only work 3/4 time plus I would have time with my kids. I am currently considering cutting down my hours because the pain of juggling employment with caring for kids is just not worth it.”

One described her own situation where a £7,000 pay rise resulted in less than £2,100 actual increase income due to the combined effect of getting less Universal Credit and paying more tax and national insurance. She commented:

“This is the reason most people don't take additional hours on. From the money that you're left over with, you need to pay all of the above and the additional childcare. If I didn't have a career, I'm not sure I would be working.”

A few people proposed ‘**back to work**’ grants, or other assistance with the transition from benefits to work.

Conditionality, (eg. the requirements to do job-search in order to receive benefits) was generally considered detrimental, although one individual response thought it wasn't strict enough.

A couple of responses discussed **childcare costs in universal credit** – with one suggesting that parents should be able to reclaim 100% rather than 85% of costs and another requesting that childcare costs be paid upfront rather than in arrears ([From summer 2023, parents will be able to access childcare costs upfront and the amount that can be claimed has been increased](#)).

The CIPD discussed the mismatch between underemployment and hard to fill vacancies, noting that the **tight labour market should lead to better employment conditions**:

“a tight labour market has the effect of employers seeking to improve job quality measures in a bid to attract candidates. This includes better pay and benefits, but also improved career and skills development opportunities and flexible working. Improving employer and employee understanding of flexible working options, coupled with advice and guidance on implementation, can alleviate the mismatch between underemployment and hard-to-fill vacancies.”

Transport

The Call for Views asked what improvements to public transport could support parents, and there were 24 responses from organisations and 46 from individuals. Nearly every response (21 organisations and 22 individuals) mentioned the **cost of public transport**. Suggestions for improvement included:

- “Free transport passes for people looking for work and in the first 6 months of employment.” (individual)

- “Free or integrated public transport for no more than £4 a day, this would save parents money ... and make opportunities less restrictive.” (individual)
- “The same monthly card passes for all companies and routes” rather than needing a separate pass for each bus company that you may need to use. (individual)
- “Realistic and affordable options especially with train services. [...] Support for localised and subsidised community transport that can respond to the needs of people from rural areas (all age).” (South Ayrshire Council)
- “Build on the current free transport for children and young people to include low income working parents/kinship carers or parents engaged in education or employability provision.” (Renfrewshire Local Employability Partnership)

Service provision was also a recurring concern, particularly the **need for more services, especially in rural areas** (11 organisations and 15 individuals) **and more reliable services** (11 organisation and 10 individual responses). Concerns included: the frequency and timing of services; especially for those working later shifts; and existing routes not connecting areas of housing, childcare and work efficiently. There were concerns that routes existed on a ‘hub and spokes’ system which meant that it was possible to travel into a major hub, but impossible to cross rural areas

Another theme in the responses related to a **lack of accessibility** in current service provision. Organisations highlighted the problem that buses had either limited, or no, spaces for prams and wheelchairs, meaning that passengers were often left at bus stops and subsequently late for work.

There were also a number of mentions of the particular **challenges experienced by women using public transport**. Comments included:

“Women on low incomes are particularly likely to rely on public transport to travel around and commute to work. Because women are more likely to have a childcare role or multiple caring responsibilities, they tend to make more complex, frequent and multi-purpose journeys...These issues are particularly pertinent for women in rural areas [...] This significantly restricts women’s options when seeking employment, and accessing employability services...Safety when travelling to and from work is a further concern for women working in sectors such as retail, care and hospitality, who may finish work late at night.”(Close the Gap)

Population Change

The Call for Views asked if local population changes were affecting the availability of job opportunities. Most were unsure. Answers were;

- Yes (14 organisations, 12 individuals)

- No (4 organisations, 8 individuals)
- Unsure (1 organisation, 36 individuals)
- Not answered (18 organisations, 1 individual)

Issues for organisations included:

- An ageing population (10 respondents) means **more social care jobs**, but these roles were often **unsuitable for parents** due to shift patterns and low pay (eg West Lothian Council).
- Young people leave the area due to lack of jobs, and affordable housing, leading to skills gaps. The Scottish Women's Convention noted that: " The ultimate result of depopulation is fewer businesses and organisations choose these regions as viable options, and the cycle of depopulation continues."

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) was hopeful that an increase in homeworking may start to slow rural depopulation.

For individuals, some were concerned about significant numbers of new **houses putting pressure on local services**. Other people commented that **employers had left their area** due to a combination of local authority closures, businesses failing over the pandemic, and technology replacing traditional roles (4 individuals). Others felt that there were vacancies locally but that there were **not enough workers willing to apply**. Some put this down to a fall in migrant workers after Brexit, others to the work, such as care jobs, not paying enough to encourage applicants (6 individuals).

Annex: Respondent demographics

Of the 102 responses to the call for views, 45 were from organisations and 57 were from individuals.

An additional **XX** responses were received after the deadline. These are not included in the summary, but the broad themes raised were similar.

Of the 45 organisations completing the Call for Views:

- 27 third Sector
- 17 public sector
- 1 not answered
- 0 private sector

Nearly half were based in either Glasgow City Council (10 responses) or City of Edinburgh Council (9 responses). Of the remainder, 9 did not provide an answer to question 11, and no other area had more than 2 responding organisations.

Question 13 asked about the types of area that the organisations worked in. Respondents could select more than one option. The survey answers showed that:

- 26 organisations operate nationally, while 18 operate only in a specific local authority area.
- 9 organisations operate in both rural and urban areas, 2 operate only in rural areas, and none said they worked only in urban areas.

Most of the organisations worked with at least one of the 'priority groups' identified in 'Best Start Bright Future.

- 29 worked with lone parents
- 29 worked with parents from ethnic minority backgrounds
- 29 worked with families that have either a disabled adult or child
- 28 worked with young mothers (under age 25)
- 28 worked with families who have children under the age of 1
- 29 work with families who have at least 3 children

There were 15 organisations that did not select any of the options.

Individual Respondents

The highest number of respondents lived in Falkirk Council (7), with similar response numbers in other areas of the central belt, including City of Edinburgh Council (5) and Glasgow City Council (5). Nine Council areas had no individual respondents complete the call for views, including The Highland Council, Shetland Islands Council, Orkney Islands Council and Scottish Borders Council.

The majority of respondents are a parent of a child under the age of 16 (53), with 1 individual identifying as an employer. The other respondents did not answer the question (4 responses).

When asked for further details regarding their families, respondents indicated that:

- 15 of them are a lone parent
- 18 have three, or more, children
- 17 are part of a family with a disabled adult or child
- 6 have a child under the age of 1
- 3 are from an ethnic minority background
- 3 are a mother under the age of 25

Respondents were able to select more than one response from the list. There were 15 individuals who did not select any of the responses.