



Social Justice and Social Security Committee
Thursday 05 March 2026
8th Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

Job Start Payment and Youth Employability

The Committee will hear from:

- Karyn Dunning, Interim Chief Operating Officer, Social Security Scotland
- Graeme Hendry, Head of Government, Parliamentary and Stakeholder Engagement Skills Development Scotland
- Jo Derrick, CEO, Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum
- Zara Kitson, Senior Head of Government Partnerships, King's Trust

Introduction

The Committee agreed to hold a round table to explore issues relating to the Job Start Payment in the context of broader support for youth employment. This paper gives background context on eligibility, take-up and client survey before suggesting broad themes for discussion.

Background

Committee correspondence

The Committee [wrote to the Scottish Government](#) in November 2025 about Job Start Payment. In their reply they acknowledged low take-up, and highlighted changes made to try to improve this including promotional work and changes to requirements such as ignoring 'trial shifts' when considering if someone has been unemployed for six months.

Written submissions were received from Social Security Scotland and The King's Trust. Social Security Scotland highlighted the promotional work they do, in partnership with stakeholders. King's Trust highlighted the importance of the payment, noting views of young people that it could be better promoted.

Legislative basis

Job Start Payment is provided as a form of employability support, under Scottish Ministers' executive powers to arrange assistance under s2 of the [Employment and Training Act 1973](#). Unlike other Social Security Scotland payments, entitlement is not set out in regulations.

The submission from Social Security Scotland notes that changes would require an Order in Council to be approved by UK and Scottish Parliaments which:

“significantly limits the degree to which the Scottish Government can respond quickly or flexibly to operational evidence or stakeholder feedback on JSP as it stands.”

Eligibility and payment

[Job Start Payment](#) (JSP) was introduced in 2020 and is only available in Scotland. It provides a one-off payment to young people when they move into a job after having been on unemployment benefits. It is intended to help with the costs of starting a new job. The payment rate in 2026-27 is:

- £331.95, or
- £531.10 for those who are the main carer for any children

Eligibility

JSP is available to:

- 16 to 24 year olds who have been out of paid work for at least 6 months
- 16 to 25 year old care leavers who are out of paid work. Care leaver only includes those who stopped being ‘looked after’ by local authority on or after their 16th birthday. Care leavers will not be required to have been out of paid work for six months and will be eligible for a year longer – until their 26th birthday. 8% of Job Start Payment applicants are care leavers.

Applicants must be getting Universal Credit or legacy benefits. (The transfer from legacy benefits to Universal Credit is due to be complete by the [end of March 2026](#)).

Applications must be made within 6 months of getting the job offer.

They must not have made an application in the previous two years.

The job offer must be an average of 12 hours per week over a four-week period.

Information required

The client must provide Social Security Scotland with the following information about the job offer:

- the company name
- the name of a contact person
- a phone number
- their employer’s postcode (if the job is within the UK)

- their employer's address if the job offer is outside the UK

They must also send supporting evidence confirming the job offer. This should include:

- at least one piece of personal information, like the client's name, address, email address or phone number.
- at least one piece of information about the employer, like the name of the company, the employer's address, email address or phone number.
- the date of the job offer.

If the client is vulnerable, e.g. a care leaver, Social Security Scotland can ask them for permission to contact the employer directly to confirm the job offer.

Further detail is set out in [Social Security Scotland guidance](#). It includes examples of acceptable and unacceptable proof of job offers.

Changes made

The letter from the Scottish Government and the submission from Social Security Scotland highlight the following changes made since introduction of the payment in 2020, in response to feedback and evaluation.

- Extending the application window from 3 months to 6 months.
- Simplifying the job offer evidence requirements.
- Disregarding one-off 'trial shifts' when considering whether a young person has been unemployed for 6 months.
- Introducing contact by text message.

The 2022 evaluation (discussed below) also notes further changes:

- Applicants given a further 7 days to provide supporting evidence.
- If the date of the job-offer on the application form and supporting evidence are within 14 days of each other, the information will be accepted.
- Applicants who are contacted by phone are sent a letter as a follow-up.

The Scottish Government's letter states that: "The Scottish Government is continuing to explore ways to make it easier for young people to apply for this benefit."

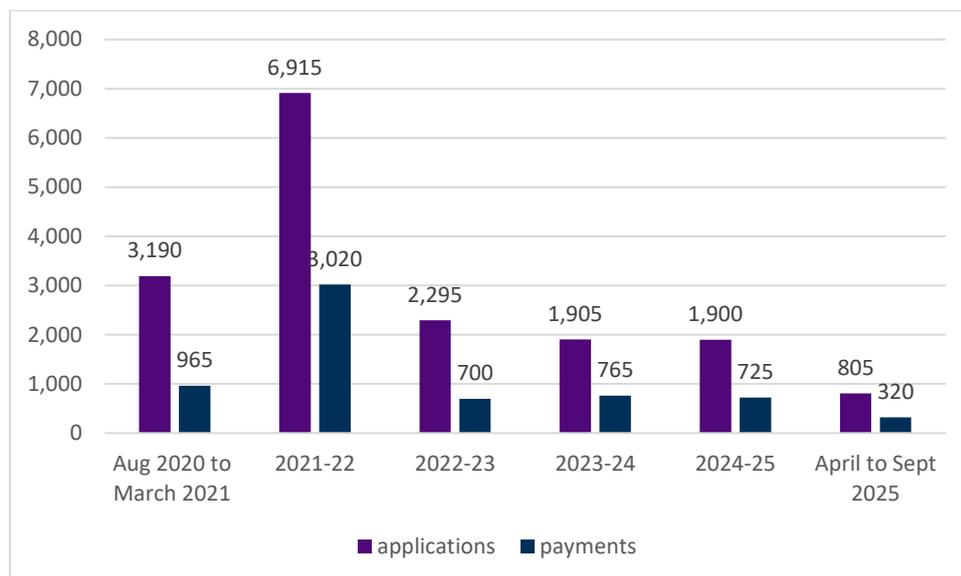
Payments made

Around 2,000 applications are received each year for JSP and around 700 payments are issued. In total, £1.9m was paid out in Job Start Payment in 2024-25 to 725 people. It is therefore one of the smallest devolved benefits in terms of spending and client numbers. Median processing time in 2025-26 is 20 working days.

Take-up, authorisation rates and payments made

The chart below shows that the peak in applications and payments was in 2021-22.

Chart 1: Applications and payments, August 2020 to September 2025



Source: [Social Security Scotland administrative statistics to end September 2025](#).

Job Start Payment has the lowest take-up rate of any devolved benefit. Table 1 below shows that the latest estimate is 19%, considerably lower than the 30% estimated when the benefit first launched in 2020.

When people do apply, they are unlikely to succeed in getting the payment. The authorisation rate (i.e. the proportion of processed applications that are authorised) has ranged between 32% and 46% in the years since 2020.

Table 1: Take-up, applications, authorisation rate and clients paid. 2020 – 2025.

Year	Take-up Estimate	Applications received	Authorisation rate	Clients paid
2020-21	30%	3,190	33%	965
2021-22	29%	6,915	46%	3,020
2022-23	15%	2,295	30%	700
2023-24	21%	1,905	32%	765
2024-25	19%	1,900	38%	725
2025-26	n/a	805	37%	320

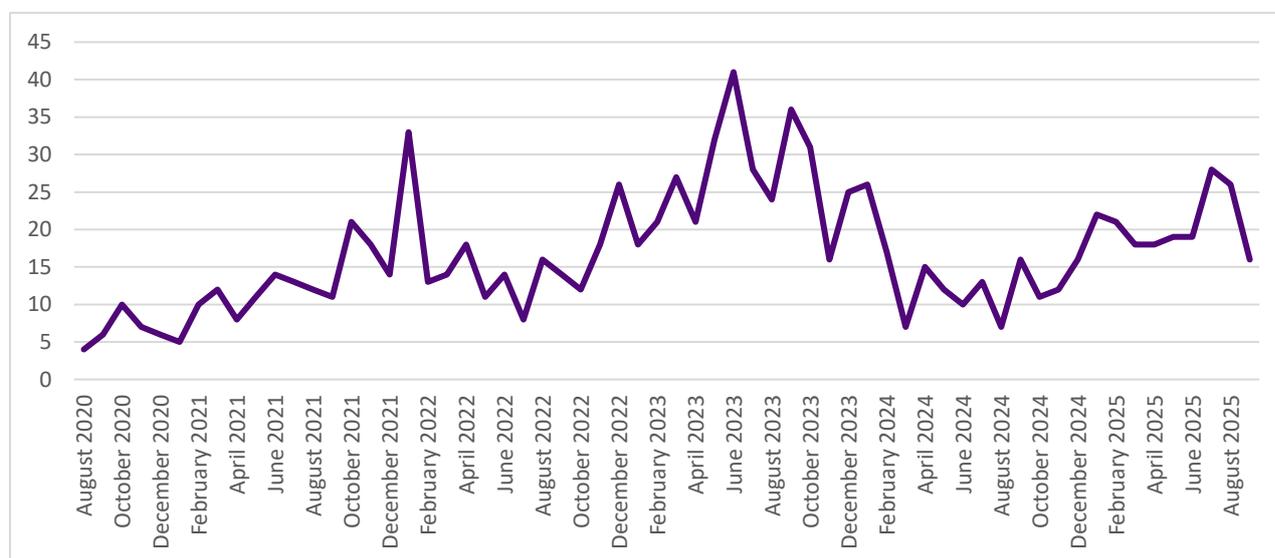
n.b: 2025-26 is April to September only. 2020-21 is August to March only. Source: Scottish Government take-up estimates, Social Security Scotland Job Start Payment statistics to end September 2025.

The take-up estimates are based on the number of young people who have been getting Universal Credit for at least six months and who have no earnings. It is an estimate of the number of young people who would be eligible if they were offered a job. Low take-up estimates may, in some part, reflect the youth labour market as well as issues around promotion of Job Start Payment.

Processing times

Processing times for Job Start Payment have fluctuated over time, as shown in the chart below. They reached a peak in June 2023 of 41 working days, but the latest figures show processing times of 16 working days in September 2025.

Chart 2: Job Start Payment median processing times (working days)



Source; [Social Security Scotland. Job Start Payment statistics to September 2025.](#)

Client Satisfaction Survey and evaluation

Job Start Payment was [evaluated in 2022](#). In addition, Social Security Scotland issue a survey to everyone who gets a decision on a benefit application. In 2024-25 there were 41 returns from people who had received JSP. Findings from both the evaluation and most recent client survey are summarised below:

In 2024/25 68% of JSP recipients rated their overall experience as good or very good and 71% agreed that Social Security Scotland treated them with dignity, fairness and respect. These and other results are summarised in table 2 below. The results are lower than those for other benefits. For example, on average across all benefits 77% of Social Security Scotland clients rated their experience as good or very good compared to 68% of Job Start Payment clients.

The low number of responses, (see final column) suggests the findings for Job Start Payment should be treated with caution.

Table 2: Client Survey 2024/25 results for Job Start Payment. % respondents who agreed or agreed strongly that:

Agreed or agreed strongly that:	%	n
processing times are reasonable	48%	40
The decision was explained clearly	58%	36
I received the right level of communication from Social Security Scotland	59%	38
the website made it clear if I was eligible	59%	19
application process was good or very good	68%	40
application process was clear	71%	41
treated me with dignity, fairly, with respect	71%	41
I can trust Social Security Scotland	71%	41
I got the support, information or advice I needed	72%	38
I was treated fairly and respectfully throughout	73%	41
I had enough choice about Social Security Scotland communicated with me	76%	38
I had enough choice about how I communicated with Social Security Scotland	76%	38
only asked relevant questions	78%	41
eligibility criteria was clear before I applied	80%	41

Source: [Social Security Scotland Client Survey. 2024-25.](#)

The Client Survey noted that:

“Comments specific to Job Start Payment concerned issues with supplying contact information for employers. Respondents said it could be difficult to provide this in the way set out in the application form, especially phone numbers. Respondents said there should be more flexibility to provide details relative to their circumstances” (Client Survey, 2024-25, p.110).

Comments from Job Start Payment clients included:

“I understand that for security it is good to [have] a phone number for the employer however some people won’t have that...maybe saying in that part of the application if you don’t have a phone number for your employer put in your own. As long you have either an email address or phone number I don’t think one should be optional and the other not.” (Client Survey 2024-25 p. 110)

“Don’t know why you ask for employer’s details but never contacted them for confirmation about an employee, I actually think i gave 2 bits of information which were technically the same information/Evidence i provided when I started my job.” (Client Survey, 2024-25, p.115)

Evaluation findings, 2022

The 2022 evaluation found issues with low awareness of the payment and challenges getting the required evidence.

The evaluation was based on a survey of 159 young people and discussions with 26 JSP recipients, 6 unsuccessful applicants, 7 Social Security Scotland staff, 2 third sector representatives and 6 employability and skills professionals. It also looked at administrative statistics and client survey results. Findings focused on promotion, evidence requirements, eligibility and processing times.

- **Promotion:** Awareness of the payment was low amongst young people, employability organisations and networks. Some commented that the information on eligibility is not clear enough.
- **Evidence:** Providing required evidence could be challenging, with young people having difficulty obtaining details from employers and Social Security Scotland staff having difficulty contacting young people about their application. Some suggested that evidence requirements were 'excessive' for a one-off payment. Factors preventing authorisation included date information that was either missing from supporting information or didn't match the date given in application form. (This requirement has changed and is now that the two dates are within 14 days of each other).
- **Eligibility:** stakeholders said the following two rules were unfair:
 - Short, paid placements interrupt the requirement to have had no work for six months. (This requirement has changed so that these placements are now ignored).
 - Few 16 and 17 year olds are likely to have been getting qualifying benefits for six months, but would still need assistance when starting a job
- **Processing times:** can result in payment not being made until after first pay cheque is received, undermining the policy intention of helping with initial costs.

The evaluation reported that young people spent the payment on a range of work-related expenses such as clothes, travel passes, equipment and childcare, which some felt they could not have otherwise afforded.

Policy recommendations from the evaluation included:

- Further promotional work and engagement with stakeholder organisations.
- Clarify eligibility rules, and take steps to reduce ineligible applications
- Revise eligibility to address short paid placements and lack of benefit history disqualifying some young people
- Review procedures for providing supporting evidence
- Review the application decision-making process to see if it can be expedited
- Consider increasing the payment for parents, to reflect high childcare costs.

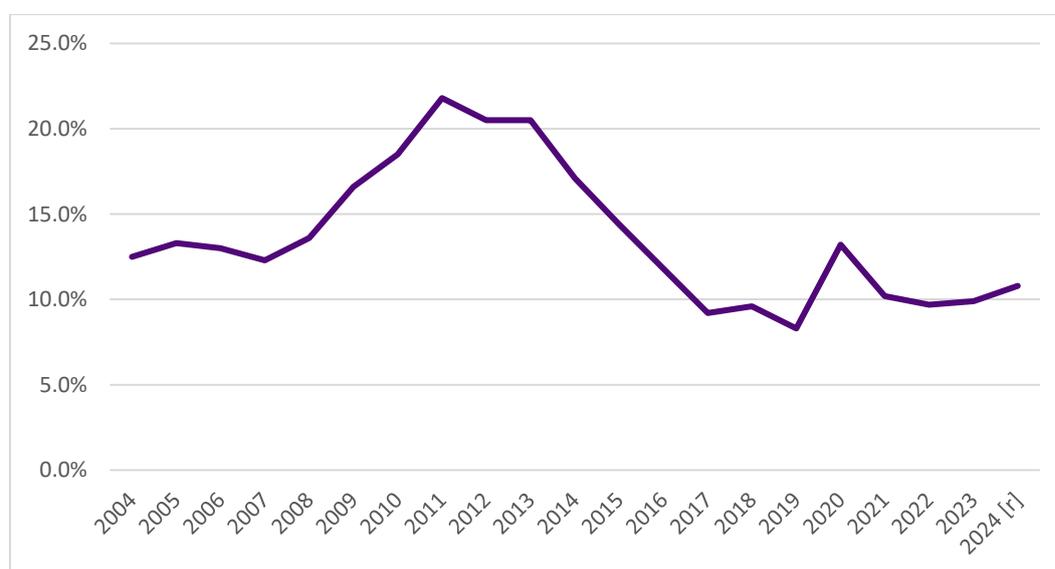
Youth unemployment

The estimated unemployment rate of 16 to 24 year olds in Scotland was 12.6% in the year to September 2025 (NOMIS/Annual Population Survey).

The chart below shows how the unemployment rate rose considerably in years following the 2008 financial crisis. It then fell back, reaching a low in 2019. In the last couple of years it has been slowly increasing again.

(More recent GB wide figures for October to December 2025 report youth unemployment at 16% but in Scotland the [sample size was too low](#) to give a robust estimate).

Chart 3: Unemployment rate, 16 to 24 year olds, Scotland.



Source: Scottish Government (2025) [Labour Market Statistics 16 to 24 year olds](#). Percentage of economically active 16-24 year olds that are unemployed.

Universal Credit

In December 2025 there were 46,796 young people in Scotland who were unemployed and getting Universal Credit. Of these:

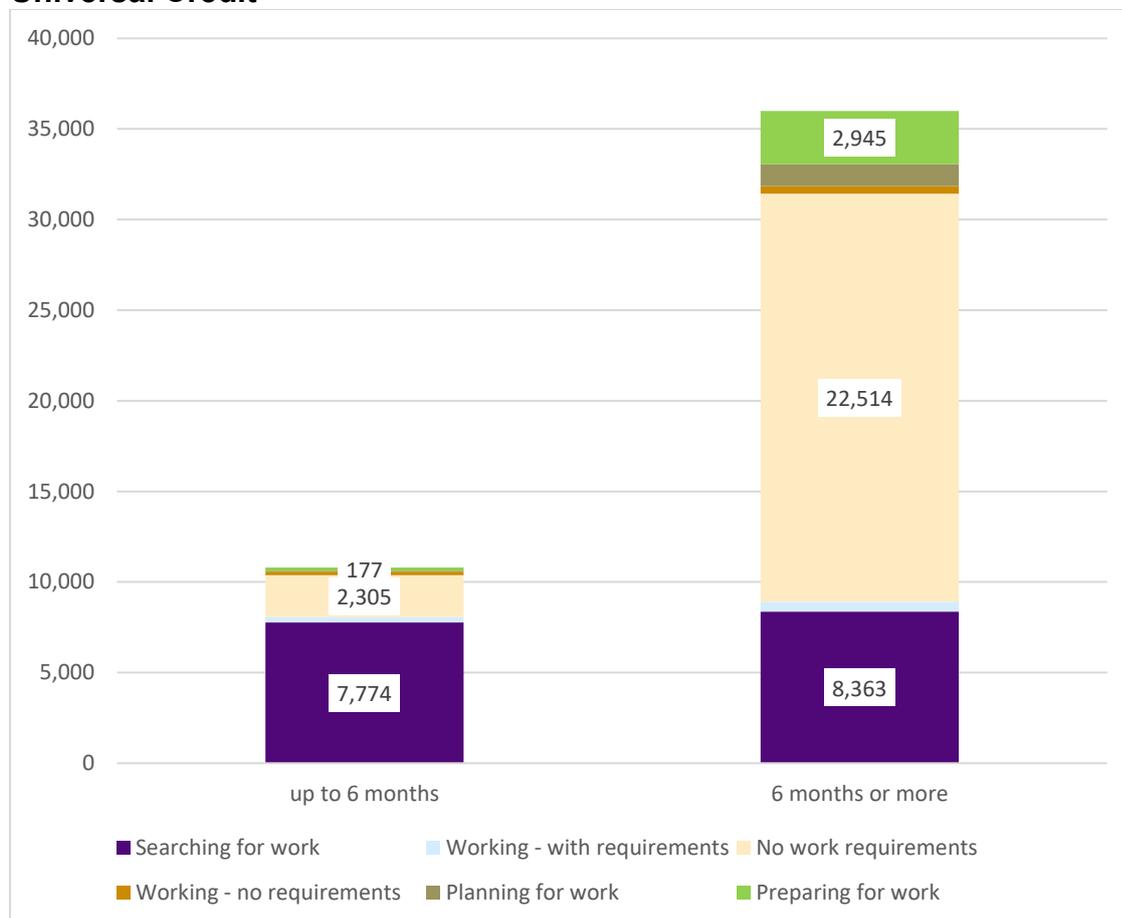
- 36,004 had been getting Universal Credit for six months or more (so potentially eligible for Job Start Payment). Of these:
 - 8,363 were in the 'searching for work' conditionality regime, and
 - 22,514 were in the 'no work requirements' conditionality regime.

'Searching for work' means being required to take action to secure work. They get a 'work coach' to help with things like applying for jobs, accessing training or looking for work in the local area.

'No work requirements' means not being expected to work at present. This could be due to ill-health or caring responsibilities.

The chart below shows that most young people who have been unemployed for 6 months of more have ‘no work requirements.’

Chart 4: Unemployed young people by conditionality regime and time getting Universal Credit



Source: StatXplore. Data for December 2025, Scotland, 16 to 24 year olds, not employed.

There is considerable local variation in the proportion of young people who are claiming Universal Credit and either in ‘work search’ regime or with ‘no work requirements with a health condition’. The table below, from ‘Get Britain Working – labour market insights’ shows higher proportions of young people in these categories in North Ayrshire and West Dunbartonshire than in East Renfrewshire and Edinburgh.

Table 3: % population aged 16 to 24 who are getting Universal Credit and in certain conditionality regimes. November 2024 to October 2025.

Local authority	Searching for work	No work requirements - health condition
North Ayrshire	5.2	4.4
West Dunbartonshire	5.0	5.0
Inverclyde	4.9	4.5
East Ayrshire	4.8	3.7
Clackmannanshire	4.6	4.5
Angus	4.6	4.5
Falkirk	4.2	3.8
South Ayrshire	4.2	3.2
Glasgow City	4.0	2.4
Dumfries and Galloway	3.8	4.2
Dundee City	3.8	3.1
North Lanarkshire	3.7	3.8
Fife	3.6	3.1
Aberdeen City	3.5	2.0
Renfrewshire	3.5	2.7
West Lothian	3.4	4.3
Midlothian	3.3	4.3
South Lanarkshire	3.3	3.4
Scottish Borders	3.2	3.8
Perth and Kinross	2.8	3.3
East Lothian	2.7	3.8
Moray	2.6	3.6
Aberdeenshire	2.5	2.7
Na h-Eileanan Siar	2.4	2.9
Highland	2.3	3.7
Stirling	2.3	1.7
Orkney Islands	2.2	2.8
Argyll and Bute	2.2	3.2
Shetland Islands	2.1	3.2
East Dunbartonshire	2.1	2.1
East Renfrewshire	2.0	2.0
City of Edinburgh	1.7	1.4

Source: DWP [Get Britain Working labour market insights, January 2026](#).

Reserved devolved policy split

Responsibility for employability is split between the Scottish and UK Government. The UK Government provide support mainly through Universal Credit and Job Centre Plus, who can also refer people to devolved employability support.

Scottish Government support is delivered primarily through:

- Skills training and career guidance via Skills Development Scotland
- Employability support in partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders through 'No-one Left Behind'

Reserved policy: Work search for Universal Credit claimants aged 16 to 24

After signing a 'claimant commitment' young people have an employment and Skills Review with a [work coach](#), to discuss issues such as identifying work related training, consider work based opportunities and establish barriers to taking work-based opportunities.

The [DWP 'Youth Offer'](#) has 3 different types of support:

- Youth Employment Programme – including the employability services offered in Scotland through No-one Left Behind and Skills Development Scotland.
- Youth Hubs – extra support for up to six months to help develop skills including CV writing and interview skills.
- Youth Employability Coaches – for those with additional barriers to finding work. Provide support for up to six months and for a further six weeks on starting employment.

Devolved skills, careers guidance and employability provision

Skills Development Scotland

SDS work with employers and employer groups on a national, sectoral, regional, local and individual basis; supporting them to recognise and articulate their current and future skills needs, and to engage with the skills system to help ensure it better meets those needs in the short, medium and longer term. They deliver careers' guidance (with an expectation they will reach 85% of S1 to S3 pupils and 80% of S4 to S6 pupils) and manage the apprenticeships programme (with an expectation of delivering around 25,500 Modern Apprenticeship starts). ([SDS, Operating Plan 2025-26](#)).

Developing the Young Workforce

Established in 2014, [Developing the Young Workforce](#) (DYW) was created to bridge the gap between employers and young people. It is employer-led and designed make it easier for employers to connect with young people in schools and colleges across Scotland. Activity organised through the programme ranges from school talks to work placements. There are 20 regional groups across all local authorities, and every secondary school has a DYW co-ordinator.

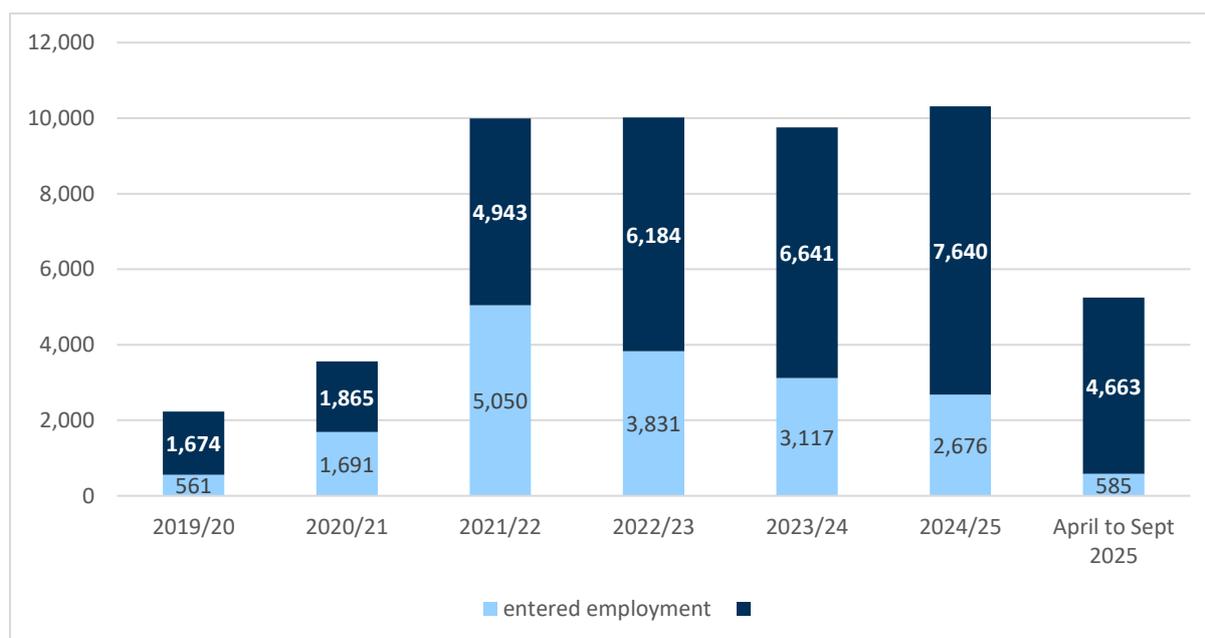
No-one Left Behind

[No-one Left Behind](#) is the main route through which the Scottish Government and local authorities deliver employability support acting in partnership with other stakeholders. Local Employability Partnerships take the lead in design and delivery of services in local areas.

There has been increased focus on supporting parents in recent years, but No One Left Behind participants are still most likely to be male, white and under 20. Most people supported through No One Left Behind since 2019 have been aged under 25 (52%; 51,121). Of these, 37,340 (73%) were aged 15 to 19 and 13,781 (27%) were aged 20 to 24. In the most recent quarter, 381 people (6%) reported being care experienced.

Since 2019, 17,511 (34%) of young people engaged with NOLB entered employment. Figures for each financial year are given in chart 5 below. On average, they took 141 days to reach employment (around five months).

Chart 5: No-one Left Behind participants aged under 25, by whether entered employment.



Source: Scottish Government [No-one Left Behind statistical summary, February 2026](#).

The No-One Left Behind strategic plan explains:

“Our offer to participants is clear: regardless of personal circumstances or characteristics, people will receive support tailored to their needs, including access to wider public services as required, on their journey towards employment.”

Suggested themes for discussion

The following suggests three broad themes for discussion.

Theme 1: Support for young people seeking employment

This first theme sets the context for Job Start Payment by looking more broadly at support for young people getting into employment.

As set out in the background section, young people getting Universal Credit have the ['Youth Offer'](#) which involves:

- Youth employment programme
- Youth hubs: include CV advice, skills training, mental health support, housing advice, and careers guidance
- Youth employability coaches

Participation in employment schemes for young people getting Universal Credit may be a 'work requirement' set out in their 'claimant commitment.'

The UK Government's current plans include a [Jobs Guarantee for 18 to 21-year-olds](#) who have been searching for work whilst in receipt of Universal Credit for 18 months. The initiative will provide 25 hours/week of fully subsidised six-month paid work. The scheme is due to start in certain regions in the spring, including central and east Scotland, before being rolled out nationally later in the year.

Devolved employability support is voluntary and mainly provided through No-one Left Behind which [Employability in Scotland](#) describes as:

"Scottish & Local Government work together with public, third and private sector partners to identify local needs and make informed, evidence-based decisions, flexing these to meet emerging labour market demands."

The website explains that support includes:

Support from an Employability Key Worker, and work on an individual plan to help the individual to reach their goals.

The agreement could include activities specifically designed to prepare participants for progression, such as taster sessions at college, time with training providers, mentoring, peer mentoring opportunities and innovative group projects.

Since 2019, 51,121 young people have been supported through No One Left Behind and 34% of them entered employment. The [No-one Left Behind Strategic Plan 2024-27](#) sets out the following priorities:

- Continuing to improve the employability system

- Increasing awareness and uptake of employability support
- Tackling child poverty by increasing parental income from employment
- Supporting disabled people and those with a long term health condition
- Delivering jointly with wider public services

In their written submission, the King's Trust state that, although financial support, such as the Job Start Payment is essential, young people also need: "confidence, skills, work experience and someone in their corner."

Members may wish to discuss:

- 1. The adequacy and coherence of current support for young people seeking employment, and suggestions for improvements.**

Theme 2: Job Start Payment: Improving application rates

Job Start Payment has the lowest take-up of any devolved benefit. [Take-up was estimated at 19% in 2024-25](#). This compares to over 80% take-up for the 'Five Family Payments'.

It's worth noting that this is a broad estimate, based on the number of young people getting Universal Credit who haven't been working for at least six months. It doesn't estimate the proportion likely to be offered a job and therefore be eligible for Job Start Payment.

The Scottish Government published its current [benefit take-up strategy in 2021](#). This was before the take-up rate for JSP was estimated. The 2021 strategy stated that:

"As with all benefits delivered through Social Security Scotland, there is a proactive communications and marketing approach. Research carried out in August 2021 showed that young people who had seen promotion of this thought the appeal was instant and universal – that the proposition was rewarding a positive step towards the future. This evidences that campaigns are achieving some success in removing any stigma around benefits. However, more work is required to make eligibility criteria clear through these campaigns."

The next iteration of the strategy will be published in October.

The DWP is a key stakeholder in signposting eligible young people to apply for JSP. Most (54%) of clients heard about the Job Start Payment from the DWP, and 15% heard about it by 'word of mouth'. (Client Survey 2024-25)

The letters from the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland highlight action taken to promote Job Start Payment including:

- Targeted engagement sessions with DWP and SDS ensuring front-line advisors are equipped to share accurate and up to date information with the young people they support.

- Materials such as leaflets and posters distributed to venues including job centres, schools, colleges, Skills Development Scotland and Developing Young Workforce partners.
- Promotion through Young Scot, and through various social media.
- Attending career fairs and hosting events for Skills Development Scotland
- JSP materials are distributed to; Job Centres, schools, colleges, Skills Development Scotland offices and Developing Young Workforce partners.

In their written submission, the King's Trust state that:

“Where accessed, colleagues reported the most common uses [of the payment] were transport, clothes and advance payment on childcare fees.

When asked about barriers to take-up, a lack of awareness amongst young people about the Job Start Payment and difficulty understanding eligibility and/or the application process was highlighted by those working with young people.”

Members may wish to discuss:

- 2. Awareness of Job Start Payment, any other reasons for low application numbers and suggestions for improving this.**

Theme 3: Job Start Payment: Improving authorisation rates

A large number of people who do apply for Job Start Payment do not qualify for the payment. In 2025-26 (up to the end of September) only 37% of applications were approved (see table 1, above).

The 2022 evaluation found some clients found it challenging to provide all the supporting information required, and others found the guidance unclear.

Changes were made to address low authorisation rates have included;

- Disregarding one-off trial shifts when establishing at least 6 months unemployment.
- Clients can be contacted by text
- Application window extended from 3 to 6 months
- Allowing longer to provide supporting evidence
- Job offer date stated on application form and supporting documentation is accepted if they are within 14 days of each other, rather than having to be an exact match.

In the 2021/22 client survey, before these changes were made, 84% of 97 respondents had said the application process for Job Start Payment was good or very good ([client survey figure 8.2](#)). Three years later, the 2024/25 client survey found that 68% said the application process was good or every good (out of 40 respondents, [client survey figure 6.1](#)). However, low numbers of survey respondents mean it's unclear how much weight to give this result.

The letter from the Scottish Government stated that:

“The Scottish Government is continuing to explore ways to make it easier for young people to apply for this benefit.”

Similarly, the submission from Social Security Scotland stated that:

“Social Security Scotland, working with colleagues in the Scottish Government Social Security Policy Directorate, remains committed to strengthening partnerships, improving communications, and refining the application process to ensure Job Start Payment is as accessible and effective as possible for the young people it aims to support.”

Members may wish to discuss

- 3. Reasons for low authorisation rates for Job Start Payment, the effectiveness of measures taken to address this and any further measures required.**

Camilla Kidner, Senior Researcher, SPICe

Date: 26 February 2026

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