Aberdeen Local Employability Partnership

Note of Meeting

16 April 2025

Apologies: Gerry Lawie, NHS Grampian; Chris Smillie, Aberdeen Health and Social Care Partnership

Present: Fiona Daniel, NESCol; Gareth Smith, DWP; Nicola Graham, SDS; Anne Kain, ETPF; Maggie Hepburn, ACVO; Aimee Maitland, DYW-NE; Kirstie McLauglin, Business Gateway; Angela Taylor, ACC

Note of last meeting:

ACTION: All to notify Angela of any necessary changes to the note.

No One Left Behind Grant Offer Letter

Viewed and agreed by the LEP.

Annual Investment Plan

Members agreed the priority groups remain as detailed in the LEP Delivery Plan, with the subsequent addition of resettled people previously introduced, and specific mention of economically inactive people if not already expressly mentioned.

Procurement activity is complete and reflects the priorities.

Discussion on a number of potential areas for action, including seed fund, paid work experience placements, individual training pot, Denis Law Trust request, continuation of Grow, Save, Multiply project, care experienced young parents project, and doorstop/other exercise – ideally co-designed with young people – to support participation measure reporting.

Agreed that training allowance should remain at £60 per week meantime.

Re-stated agreement to creation of third sector role via ACVO and LEP co-ordinator role within ACC.

ACTION: Anne to share paid work experience budget sheet to aid calculations

ACTION: Maggie to share the ACVO development officer job description with LEP members for comment

ACTION: Angela to share some wording with Maggie to help encourage applications by stating the potential of extension to the post subject to grant funding

ACTION: Gareth and Kirstie - Joint session to be set up between DWP and Business Gateway to help business advisors understand benefits implications.

ACTION: Nicola to get information from colleagues in other areas who do doorknocks to establish value and potential cost.

ACTION: Nicola to speak with Brian Webb about how young people could be involved in co-designing activity to help identify destinations of young people.

ACTION: Angela to share the project report for Grow Save Multiply. Angela and Anne to discuss potential collaboration/avoidance of duplication between activities.

ACTION: Care experienced young parents proposal – look to extend to include more third sector agencies, such as Home Start and Befriend a Child. Initial conversation will take place between ACC Employability and Skills team and Social Work, before coming back to LEP with a view to broadening out and identifying network of potential support agencies.

Procurement Update

Angela updated on the outcome of this year's procurement activity and procurement sub-group ran through the contracts awarded/extended. Total value c£2m across NOLB/Child Poverty. List of contracts awarded will be shared (attached) with fuller details to be produced by training providers in due course.

On Green Skills – procurement sub-group has agreed that we should bring in employers, such as SSEN, to try to get more detailed information about the skills needed for upcoming/emerging green jobs. Members agreed that as part of this we should also be considering forestry/horticulture/rewilding type activities and retrofitting rather than just energy.

Maggie suggested contacting Just Transition recipients to find out who they used, what they did, and where they are based to get some guidance, but also to identify whether or not the organisations were locally based. All members agreed with this.

ACTION: Angela to share the contracts list

ACTION: Maggie to try to identify who and what was funded via the Just Transition Fund

ETPF Update

Interim Service Manager Stuart Bews attended to introduce himself to the group. Stuart told the ETPF what he would like from them as partners and would look to co-design the relevant actions in response to the IS report.

Discussed the commissioning process and will put together feedback on the process, pulled together into one paper to be shared with the LEP.

Discussed conference plans and the employer conference which will take place and what the ETPF would like from that.

Activity plans paused to see what comes from case conferencing, and keenness to ensure that non-NOLB funded activity can also be discussed in those sessions.

ACVO development officer post discussed.

Priorities for coming year – now that the commissioning process has concluded the ETPF will seek to map all other services available.

SES

SUSE has been appointed to do some advance work for us on supported employability to ensure we are well-placed to have a high quality offering which fully meets SES. That should be ready in July.

Feedback from providers has been that a lengthy lead-in time is required for the creation of a consortium and based on that, as well as approximately three months for the procurement process, very little time will be left this year to deliver a service and it is recognised that a long-term approach is required. Consortium building sessions led by the Supplier Development Programme are to take place this year to support the building of consortia for next year, and SES can be included in this.

Meantime we have a number of contracts and activities in place which will meet the requirements of Scottish Government. LEP members unanimously agreed that we should await the SUSE report and work towards an exceptional service next year, while covering the bases this year.

ACTION: Rebecca to invite David Cameron from SUSE to attend a LEP meeting.

ACTION: Angela to share details of consortium building sessions when they are available.

AOCB

May will be Gareth's last meeting with us. He will do a session on Stat Explore then.

Future Agenda Items

Homewards – links to employability and the LEP – (to be rescheduled following March meeting)

Report to Aberdeen Prospers

SES Report and discussion

Community Benefits

Developer Obligations

LEP position in Community Planning Aberdeen

Date of Next Meeting: 21 May

Cairncry Community Centre – four weeks

Inchgarth – four weeks

Disability confident employer/breakfast - end of June (22nd of June) - Ballroom waiting to come back (tbc) – to include providers which have been commissioned to provide training for people with learning disabilities.

October – Jobs Fare (to include sailors returning from Tall Ships event)

ABZWorks LEP conference – October

Homewards event – 23rd of May at Trinity Hall

SURVEY 2025

Demographic Overview

Age

In survey took part 127 respondents, with the youngest being 19 and the oldest 70. Most respondents (77%) are aged 30–50, with peaks at ages 40 and 43. This suggests that the respondents were mostly of working-age. Only 10% are under 30 and 13% are over 50.

- Respondents under 30: 13 people (about 10%)
- Respondents over 50: 16 people (about 13%)
- Respondents between 30–50: 97 people (around 77%)

Gender (worked out the gender from the names)

- Female: 107 respondents (around 85%)
- Male: 20 respondents (around 15%)

Entry into the UK and Moving to Aberdeen

Major wave of entry was in 2022 and most of them started living in Aberdeen the same year they arrived in the UK.

Entry into the UK

- 2001 – 1 person
- 2022 – 109 people
- 2023 – 10 people
- 2024 – 6 people
- 2025 – 1 person

Started Living in Aberdeen

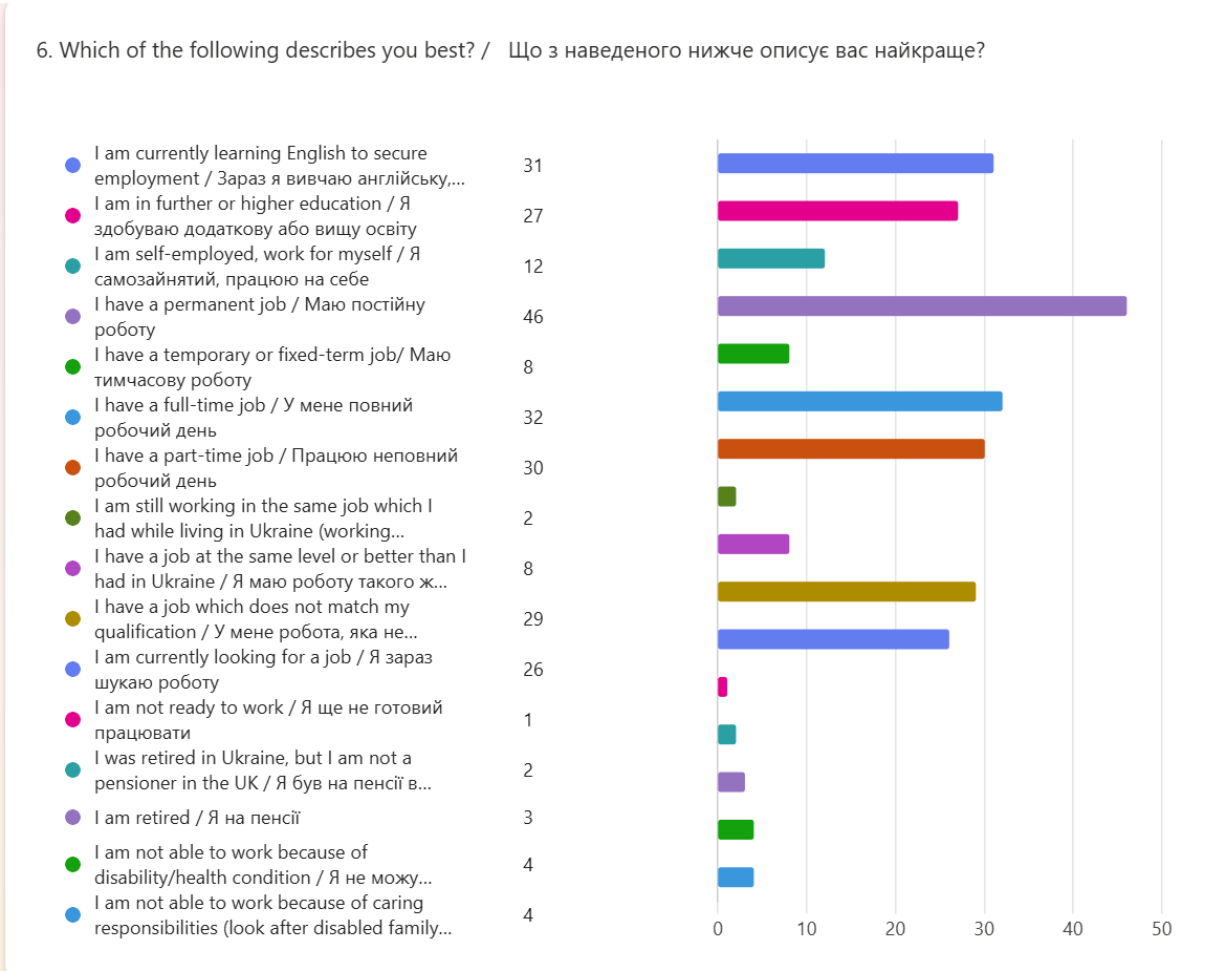
- 2022 – 86 people
- 2023 – 19 people
- 2024 – 11 people
- 2025 – 5 people

Visa Types

- 110 people – *Homes for Ukraine*
- 7 people – *Family Visa Scheme*
- 10 people – *Extended their visa through the UPE (Ukraine Permission Extension) scheme*

Employment & Education Status

A great portion of respondents have full-time or permanent jobs. Many are learning English or actively seeking work. 27 are in education. Shows motivation and engagement.



Around 37% are employed full-time or have permanent jobs (approx. 46 + 32 - overlap possible).

Nearly 25% are actively job-seeking or learning English to become employable.

A notable portion (27 people) are in education.

Underemployment exists: at least 29 people feel their job doesn't match their qualifications.

Vulnerable subgroups - those not ready to work, retired, or unable to work due to health or caregiving duties.

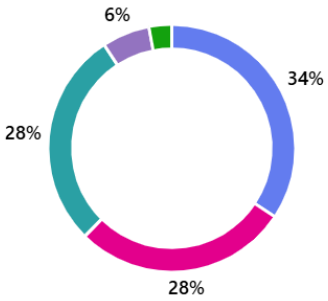
Languages and Literacy

All respondents speak Ukrainian (as expected), but a large portion also speak Russian and English (over 80% speak English).

Some speak Polish or other languages, which could also help with the employment in multilingual or international environments.

7. What languages do you speak? Якими мовами ви розмовляєте?

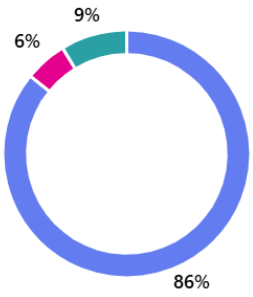
Ukrainian / Українською	127
Russian / Російською	104
English / Англійською	105
Polish / Польською	23
Other	11



Literacy

8. Can you read and/or write in all the selected languages? / Ви можете читати та/або писати всіма вибраними мовами?

Yes / Так	109
No / Hi	7
Maybe / Можливо	11

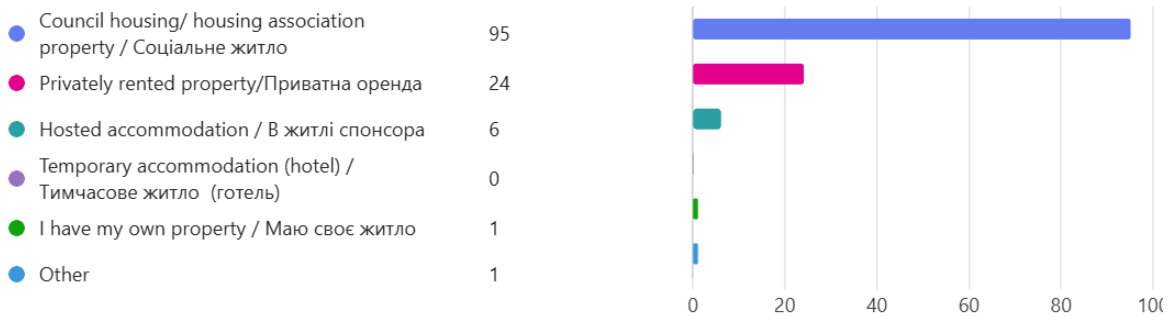


The vast majority, 109 respondents (87%), are literate in the languages they speak. Out of these, 91 respondents answered they can read and write in English. A small portion,7 respondents, might have limited literacy or feel unsure, which could be a barrier to employment, training, or navigating systems (e.g. online job applications, dealing with UC account).

Housing

The majority of respondents (approximately 75%) currently live in council or housing association property. A smaller proportion (around 19%) rent privately while only a few remain in hosted accommodation. One respondent has his/her own property.

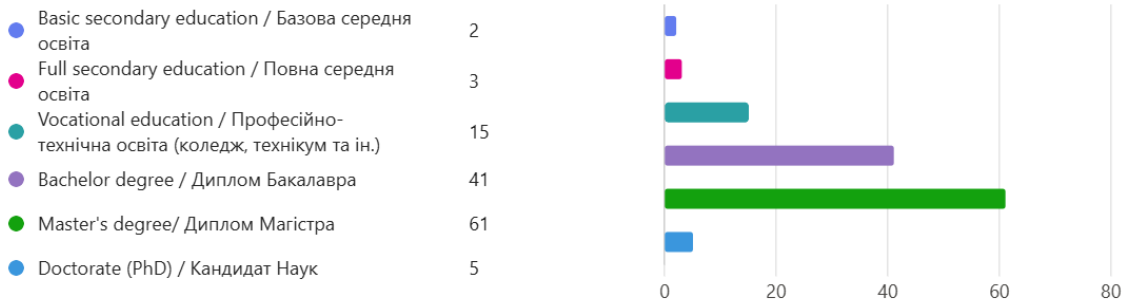
10. What type of accommodation are you currently staying in? / У якому типі житла ви зараз проживаєте?



Education and qualifications

Ukrainian Qualifications

11. What is your highest level of education from Ukraine? / Який у вас найвищий рівень освіти в Україні?



Over 80% have university-level education (Bachelor’s or above), more than a half of which have a Master’s degree.

Despite strong educational qualifications, earlier data shows some of them are underemployed or working below their qualification level.

UK qualifications

12. Have you achieved any qualification while living in the UK?/ Чи досягли ви якоїсь кваліфікації, проживаючи у Вели кій Британії?



Only 9% (12 out of 127) have completed a qualification in the UK so far.

Around 14% (18 out of 127) are currently pursuing qualifications, which shows engagement with reskilling/upskilling.

But 76% have not gained any UK qualifications, which may affect both their recognition by local employers and access to higher-skilled roles.

Types and Levels of the UK Qualifications (based on 30 responses **-** both those who have already achieved and those currently studying):

- Level 3 / SVQ 3 / National 6 / SCQF Level 5/6 – 10 people
- Level 4 – 3 people
- Level 5 – 3 people
- Level 6 / HND / Bachelor's level – 7 people
- Level 7 / Master's / Postgraduate – 2 people
- Professional Certifications – 2 people
- SCQF general (4–6) – 3 people

Fields of Study or Qualifications Earned/Pursued in the UK (Grouped by Themes)- 30 responses

Health & Social Care / Support Work (Most Popular Category) – 8

Education and Teaching – 3

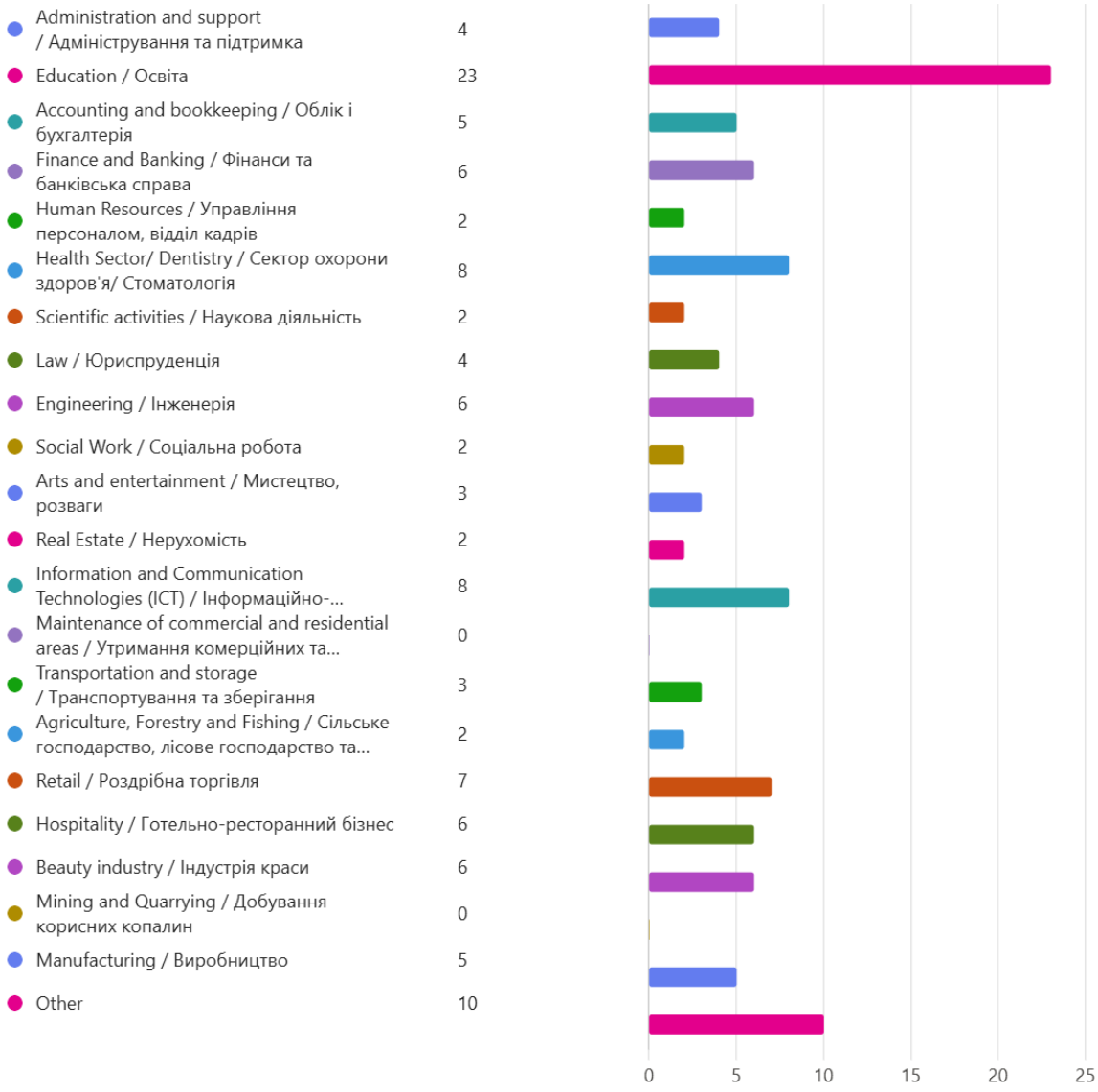
Business & Administration – 6

IT / Digital Skills – 3

Creative Fields, Journalism, Tourism, – 4

Other Entries – Beauty Therapist, Rhythmic Gymnastics Coach; Online courses, Master of Science, Bachelor - unspecified field

Previous Work Experience and Fields of Qualification in Ukraine:



The chart shows the previous work experience of 113 respondents from Ukraine.

Most respondents had previous work experience in Education (23 respondents), making it the most common field.

However, many also worked in other sectors such as Finance and Business sector (18 respondents), Engineering and Technical Fields (17 respondents), Retail and Hospitality (13 respondents), Health sector and Social Work (12 respondents).

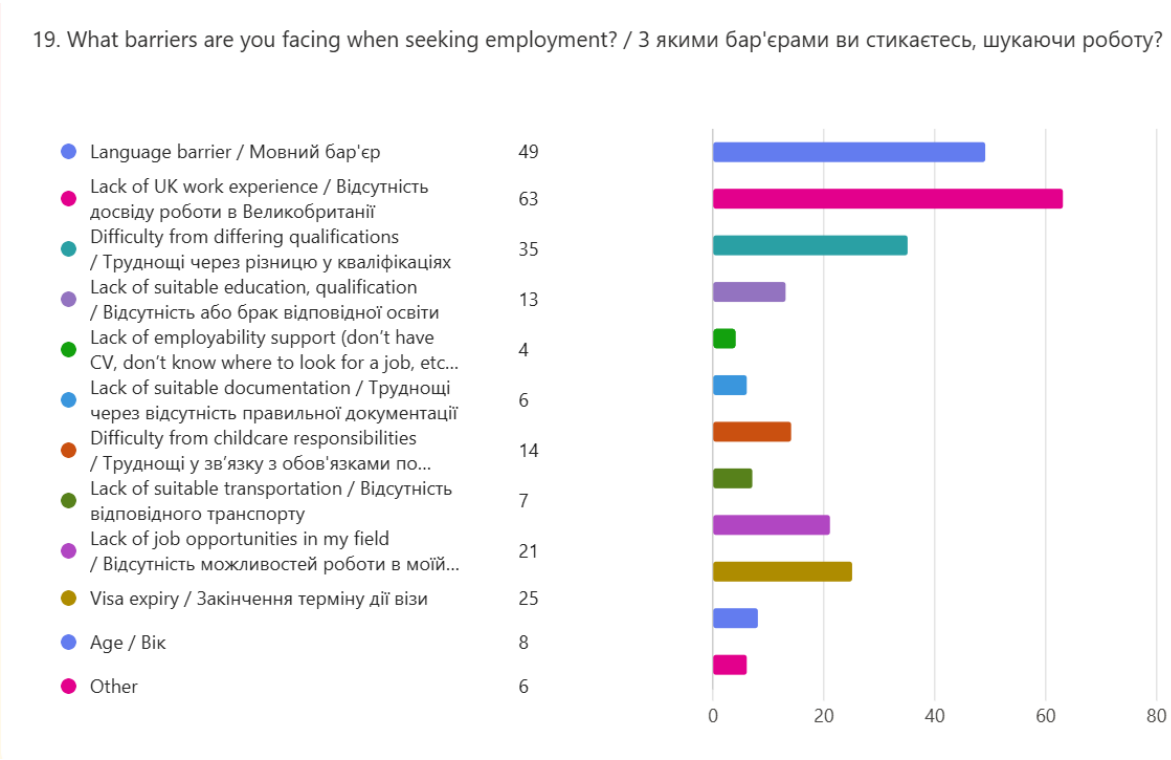
The chart shows a wide range of professional backgrounds among Ukrainians who took part in the survey.

Barriers

- Yes – 90 respondents
- No – 37 respondents

Around 79% of respondents face some type of barrier — a significant majority.

What specific barriers are you facing? *(Respondents could choose multiple)*



Top 3 Barriers:

1. Lack of UK work experience (70%)
2. Language barrier (54%)
3. Unrecognised or differing qualifications (39%)

The chart shows that lack of UK work experience is the top barrier, even above language.

However, language remains a major issue, despite over 100 saying they speak English (gap between conversational skills and workplace fluency).

Recognition of Ukrainian qualifications is a barrier for many, especially those from education, healthcare, law.

Visa uncertainty (28%) is also a strong concern, which may limit long-term employment options or discourage employers from hiring.

Grow, Save, Multiply! Report 2025

Empowering Parents through Numeracy and Budgeting Skills



ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

Funded by UK Government

Summary

The co-designed programme aimed to support 17 unemployed parents in developing their numeracy and budgeting skills, understanding bills, and making their money stretch. Three were unable to engage for personal reasons. Over nine weeks, the remaining 14 participants engaged in various activities, including financial inclusion presentations, cooking sessions, mental health workshops, budgeting and banking workshops, numeracy activities, and a final group project. The programme was designed to be flexible and accommodating, considering dietary needs, mobility concerns, and cultural observances such as Ramadan.

Outcomes included participants completing literacy and numeracy courses, obtaining food hygiene certificates, and participating in the National Numeracy Challenge. They were also introduced to local support services such as Children First, Grampian Credit Union, Family Learning, Love RaRa, Barclays, Breathing Space, Cfine Pantry, and the Financial Inclusion Team. Achievements included one participant volunteering with Grampian Credit Union, seven engaging in paid work experience opportunities, two progressing into education, and two exploring SEED fund business start-up opportunities.

Challenges faced during the programme included language barriers, which were addressed by spending extra time ensuring all participants understood the sessions and sending out clarifying emails. The diverse cohort also required flexibility around prayers and fasting during Ramadan, which was appreciated by the participants. Illness among participants' children affected attendance, but communication channels were kept open to ensure everyone stayed informed, included, and contributed to an average 85% attendance.

Overall, the programme successfully provided valuable skills, resources, and support to the participants, helping them improve their numeracy and budgeting abilities and enhancing their confidence and employability.

Prior to starting

Participants were recruited through various channels, including posters distributed to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), community centres, adult learning facilities, local libraries, and discussions with keyworker colleagues. The aim was to promote the programme in advance and encourage referrals from colleagues who identified suitable candidates. Prior to the programme's commencement, all potential participants were contacted by phone to introduce ourselves, provide detailed information about the programme, and outline our objectives. This ensured that participants were fully informed about what they were signing up for.

We sent out a survey to all participants to help understand their feelings about numeracy and budgeting. This helped us tailor the sessions to focus on topics that would be most valuable and relevant to the group.

The survey results highlighted a clear need for advice on home energy, identifying local support services, and general budgeting tips. We also considered dietary needs and mobility concerns, incorporating these into the proposal. To ensure there were no costs incurred by attending the course, bus tickets were provided throughout the weeks.

Weeks	Topic	Location	Time	Attended
Week 1 29-01-2025 & 31-01-2025	Welcome session	Marischal College	10:00-14:30	10
Week 2 5-02-2025 & 7-02-2025	Financial Inclusion Team presentation	1st group – Library 2nd group - Marischal College	10:00-14:30	13
Week 3 12-02-2025 & 14-02-2025	Supermarket Sweep!	Art Gallery/Marischal College	10:00-14:30	11
Week 4 19-02-2025 & 21-02-2025	Cfine Cooking Session/ Cooking on a budget	Cfine/Yoga Studio	10:00-14:30	6
Week 5 26-02-2025 & 28-02-2025	Mental Health / Yoga	Marischal College / Yoga studio	10:00-14:30	13

Week 6 5-03-2025 & 7-03-2025	Credit union/ Barclays Workshop	Marischal College	10:00-14:30	10
Week 7 12-03-2025 & 14-03-2025	Generational Finance/ Adult Learning visit/ Your okLove Rara	Marischal College	10:00-14:30	12
Week 8 19-03-2025 & 21-03-2025	Childrens first/Numeracy challenge and Numeracy Qualification	Marischal College	10:00- 14:30	11
Week 9 26-03-2025 & 28-03-2025	Group Project/ Feedback and Evaluation	Cinema and Splatter Riot	10:00- 14:30	11
Group Finale! 23-4-2025	Award of completion Certificate	Marischal College	11:00 – 13:00	TBD

Week 1: Introduction

This was the introductory week which saw two groups of unemployed parents come together for the first time as a group. Our work experience intern Jade had prepared some ice-breaker activities to help participants get to know the team and each other. These activities were very well received and generated good discussions and laughter.

A presentation was prepared which provided a clear outline of the planned activities and engaged in an open discussion on what activities participants were most looking forward to and those they felt they would not gain too much from. This allowed staff to make relevant changes to best suit both groups' needs. The two groups were very different in terms of needs and personality; however, they gelled well together, which was fantastic to see.

Claire from the financial inclusion team introduced the groups to the support available throughout the programme. Participants were encouraged to get in touch should they wish to access this support.

The presentation was shared with all for their own reference, and staff encouraged the participants to get in touch should they have any questions.

Week 2: Financial Inclusion Team Presentation

The second week began with a wellbeing check-in and an icebreaker to get the group interacting. The Financial Inclusion Team then presented their support and advice services, discussing benefits and debt, and what creditors can and cannot do. A quote from the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) was shown, highlighting the costs of raising a child as a single parent and in a family unit. This sparked a lively debate, with participants sharing their different views and feelings.

The session also covered expenditure, focusing on ways to reduce costs. Topics included mobile phones, utility providers, broadband packages, and shopping. Participants were encouraged to use comparison websites for savings on car insurance and other areas. Supermarket loyalty schemes were explored, with discussions on how rewards work and can be used.

The group then looked at ways to save on gas and electricity costs at home. An activity was conducted around appliances and their energy consumption, identifying "energy vampires" and the worst ones to watch out for. Support for fuel costs, such as the Warm Home Discount and winter heating payments, was highlighted. Participants were signposted to SCARF and Home Energy Scotland for expert advice.

The session concluded with a health and wellbeing activity provided by Lyn, focusing on Mandalas. Due to time constraints, participants were encouraged to try this activity at home to support stress relief.

Week 3: Supermarket Sweep

The third week of the programme focused on budgeting and understanding supermarket savings. The session began with an icebreaker activity to engage participants. Following this, participants were handed three recipes and assigned a supermarket. Using their phones, they found the costs of items for the meals and compared the results. This activity led to a discussion on supermarket club cards and how they can enhance savings.



Gift cards were provided to all participants for lunch, catering to the majority group's dietary requirements. Additionally, each participant received a £100 gift voucher to conduct their own supermarket sweep and prepare meals they love for their family. They were tasked with providing a full breakdown of costs for the meals and sharing a photograph with the group the following week. Bowls, utensils, and aprons were supplied to facilitate the meal preparation. Key themes covered during the session included budgeting, understanding supermarket savings, cost breakdowns, meal preparation, and sharing traditional cuisines. Jade led a part-planning activity where the group was tasked with planning a pretend party, taking into account all necessary elements. This served as a prelude to planning their own activity, helping them understand what they need to do.

Weeks 4 and 5: Mental Health and Cooking Skills

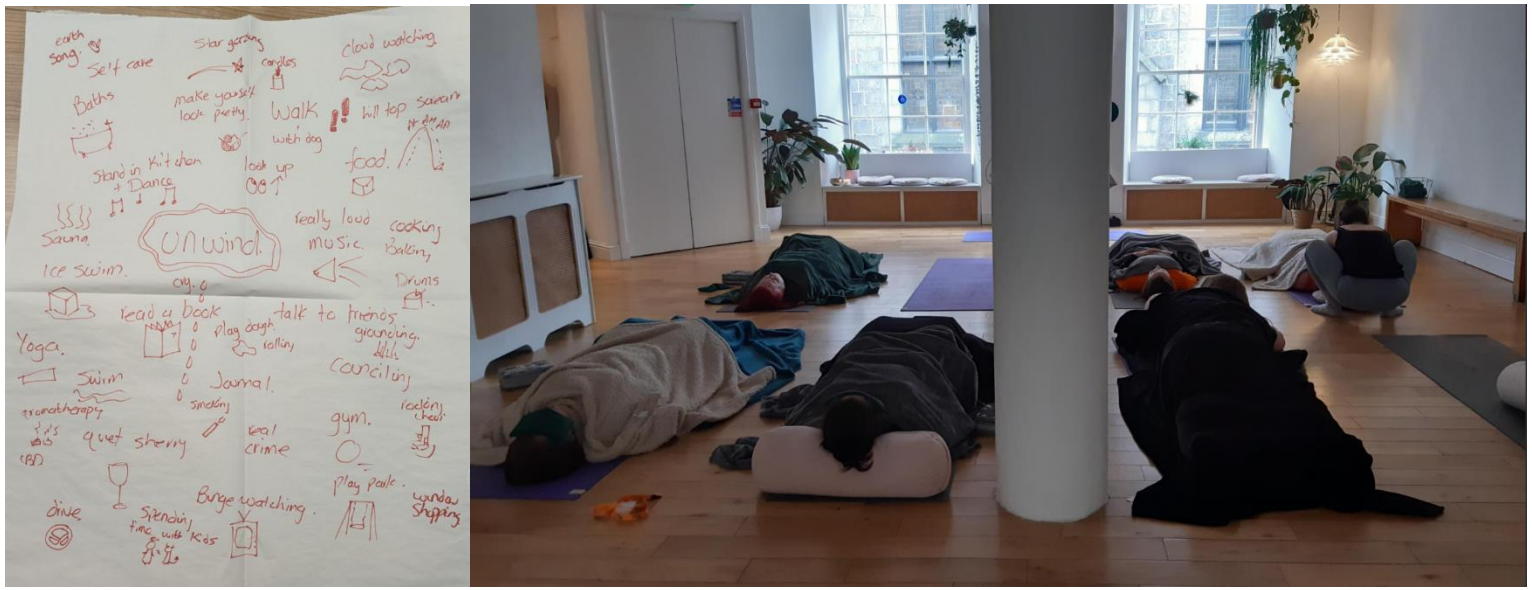
Due to the availability of the two groups after a school break, the planned activities were opened up to both groups, allowing participants to attend even if they missed the first week. This ensured that everyone had the opportunity to develop their cooking skills and knowledge.

During these two weeks, the groups crossed over due to venue availability, resulting in two visits to Cfine for cooking on a budget. Mike led sessions on homemade pizzas one week and fajitas the next, emphasising the importance of selecting the right ingredients and accurate measurements to ensure successful recipes. Participants learned how to make doughs rise correctly with yeast, ensuring their pizzas turned out well. While enjoying the meals they prepared, Cfine's SAFE and pantry team discussed the support available, leading to several participants utilising the service. Donald introduced a training opportunity with the warehouse, and one participant with dietary requirements expressed satisfaction with the accommodations made, noting that they are usually overlooked at group events. Participants were provided with scales and informed that they would receive a slow cooker and recipe book delivered to their homes.





The mental health sessions included two visits to Breathing Space for yoga with Laura, focusing on relaxation techniques and managing stress. Participants shared their methods for relaxation and were encouraged to take time for themselves. Information about local community centres and activities offering reduced prices for those receiving benefits was shared. Participants were also encouraged to think about activities for their final project and share their ideas the following week



Week 6: Budgeting and Banking

Budgeting and Banking had a significant impact on the participants. The wellbeing check-in at the beginning of the session allowed participants to share how they were feeling and provided a supportive environment for open discussions. The session led by Grampian Credit Union was particularly beneficial, as it introduced participants to the concept of credit unions, the support they offer, and volunteering opportunities. This information was well-received, and participants were given packs to take home for further reference.

The light-hearted game of bingo served as a mental health check-in and helped to break up the day, making the session more enjoyable and engaging. The external visit from Barclays was a highlight, providing a comprehensive workshop on budget planning, money management, and distinguishing between needs and wants. Participants were

equipped with calculators and laptops to support their home budgeting efforts, and staff printed workshop sheets to aid in calculating rent, percentages, and using calculators.

One of the most impactful aspects of Week 6 was the wrap-around support provided for a group member who required additional assistance. This support included their resettlement worker, Claire from the Financial Inclusion Team (FIT), Laura, and Katie M (Keyworker). This collaborative approach ensured that the participant received the necessary support to benefit fully from the programme.

Overall, this session provided valuable knowledge and practical tools for budgeting and banking, fostering a sense of empowerment and confidence among the participants.

Week 7: Numeracy and Generational Finance

Chris Dunhill (numeracy champion) led a discussion on feelings around mathematics and numeracy. Chris provided reassurance to participants, emphasising that many people share similar feelings and explaining the reasons why they might wish to improve their skills. This discussion helped participants feel more comfortable and motivated to engage with the activities.

Chris then led a beetle drive activity, which was fun, easy-going, and engaging. Participants were provided with dice and additional beetle drive sheets to try with their children at home. This activity not only helped participants improve their numeracy skills but also provided a way to involve their children in learning.



Laura led a session on the National Numeracy website and the Numeracy Challenge. She walked the group through the website, highlighting the supports available and how it develops skills at their own pace. Participants used their laptops to explore the website and take the initial assessment, encouraging them to participate in the National Numeracy Challenge to stay motivated. This session provided valuable resources for participants to continue improving their numeracy skills independently.

The group was provided with a children's book titled "Questions and Answers About Money," which is an informative and engaging way to get their children talking about money, budgeting, and numeracy early on in an accessible way. This resource helped participants introduce important financial concepts to their children.

The Family Learning Team visited the group, introducing themselves and explaining the support they offer. They work in partnership with schools and other agencies to provide opportunities for parents to become more involved in their children's learning. Examples of support include setting boundaries, sleep routines, building confidence in parenting skills, bonding with children, and communicating with children. They also offer an accredited numeracy course for supporting parents in helping their children with maths. This visit provided participants with valuable information on how to support their children's learning and development.

In the afternoon, Your Love RaRa visited the group and provided information on their support and services. Love RaRa offers opportunities for parents to volunteer while also providing childcare support through various children's groups, camps, and workshops. Zara discussed the volunteering opportunities currently available and the great work the organisation does for young people. This visit highlighted additional support and opportunities for participants to get involved in their community.

Overall, Week 7 had a significant impact on participants by providing them with valuable resources, engaging activities, and opportunities to support their children's learning and development.

Week 8: Home Energy and Training

This session began with a wellbeing check-in, where participants engaged in a general chat to see how everyone was keeping and getting on. This was followed by a presentation from Children First, who highlighted the services they provide, focusing on home energy. They encouraged them to check that they are on the correct tariffs, looked at any grants or funding available, and provided advice on energy debt. They also discussed options to address the debt going forward, such as contacting the provider to lower high weekly deductions.

Children First also have a helpline for discussing any issues, not just home energy, ranging from fears around children being bullied to parents' own wellbeing. This comprehensive support was well-received by the participants, providing them with valuable resources and reassurance.

Participants were then set up with their adult literacy and numeracy course, ensuring they could log in and begin. The course was discussed in detail, highlighting that once completed, participants could add it to their CVs, making their job applications more attractive and improving their numeracy skills. This opportunity was impactful, as it provided participants with a clear path to enhancing their employability.



Further numeracy skills were developed through activities such as multiplication bingo, which included adding, division, subtraction, and multiplication. Beetle drive was also played, making the learning process engaging and enjoyable. These activities helped participants improve their numeracy skills in a fun and interactive way.

Overall, Week 8 provided significant support and resources to participants, focusing on home energy advice, literacy and numeracy training, and engaging activities to enhance their skills and wellbeing.

Week 9: Group Project

Week 9 marked the culmination of all the weeks rolled into one, where the groups utilised their budgeting skills developed over the programme to plan and participate in an event of their choice within the given budget. This week was a practical application of the skills learned, demonstrating the participants' ability to manage finances, plan events, and collaborate effectively.

One group chose to visit the cinema and have a small gathering/party at Marischal College after the end of Ramadan. Many participants were fasting throughout the weeks of the programme, and they all agreed to make something from their own country for others to taste. This event required the group to use their budgeting skills to allocate funds for the cinema visit and the party, ensuring that all costs were covered within the budget. They also had to coordinate the preparation of dishes from different countries, showcasing their organisational and collaborative skills.



The second group decided to visit Splatter Riot, a new and fun way to spend a morning running around getting covered in paint, followed by food, all within the budget. This event required careful planning to ensure that the costs of the Splatter Riot activity and the subsequent meal were within the allocated budget. The group had to work together to organise the logistics of the event, including transportation, timing, and ensuring that everyone had a great time. Overall, Week 9 provided a practical and engaging way for participants to apply their budgeting and organisational skills, demonstrating their ability to plan and execute events successfully.

Grand Finale!

As part of the project, the group was assigned tasks to complete at home in order to earn certificates that would enhance both their CVs and their job skills and confidence. These tasks included obtaining a Food Hygiene Qualification and a Numeracy Qualification. We set a deadline for everyone to achieve these goals and provided support throughout the process. The Grand Finale will celebrate all their efforts and present the certificates.

Financial Inclusion Advisor

Claire played a pivotal role in supporting the team throughout the project, leveraging her extensive knowledge of benefits and the support available to participants. She became the friendly face of financial inclusion, making members feel comfortable approaching her for assistance. Claire provided invaluable support to members of the group with their benefit and debt concerns and delivered an in-depth presentation on all the support available to the wider group, ensuring they felt confident accessing it. Her ability to delve deeper into these topics than Keyworkers would have been comfortable with made her a valuable asset to the team.

Intern

An intern, who was an unemployed single parent, was brought on board to support this project, and their contributions were invaluable to the smooth running of each week. She was able to work round nursery drop offs and pickups and was able to work from home when needed. Their main responsibilities included organising weekly icebreakers for the group, sending out confirmation emails with times, dates, and locations to ensure everyone was where they needed to be. They also coordinated with both internal and external providers to speak to the groups on topics of interest, which was immensely helpful for the rest of the team.

Additionally, the intern personally delivered slow cookers to all participants, keeping with the theme of cooking on a budget, as they were too heavy to carry on the bus. This thoughtful gesture was greatly appreciated by everyone. They also compiled a cookbook featuring all the recipes made by the participants during the supermarket sweep, which was a fantastic addition for everyone to enjoy.

Lessons learned

Grow, Save, Multiply!						
What worked well?	**Why?**	**What did we do?**	**What have we learned?**	**What could we do differently?**	**Next steps**	**Owner**

Group dynamics	The two cohorts were formed from availability on the specific days. They both gelled well together and have made some strong friendships going forward.	Creative opportunity for the cohorts to hold open discussion between each other. They created what's app groups so they could interact out-with our sessions and meet up and support each other which worked well. The Team contributing our ideas/opinions making it a safe space to speak out helped to generate further discussion also.	Been open and honest with the groups helped to generate discussion and made the cohorts open up and talk freely about their experiences and what they wanted to get from each session and overall, by the end of the project.	Encouraged more group sharing, what's app groups, meeting outside the group meeting times.	Continue to check in and support the groups going forward either through ourselves or through the other keyworkers to keep the momentum going to the support already given.	All
Team dynamics	The Team of two keyworkers, an intern taken on especially for the project and a member of the FIT Team all worked well together from start to finish of the project.	We communicated on a regular basis and all members of the group were included in each session, so no one was left out at any stage. We also had a Teams chat for a place to ask questions and	Delegation has been essential in the smooth running of day-to-day events and in the work behind the scenes. Communication with all parties involved sharing things openly and honestly both	N/a	Continue collaborative working within the team environment.	All

		comments out with our meetings. Tasks were delegated fairly and equally utilising each other's strengths	positive and negatively is the only way to make things successful			
Group sessions	Everyone got involved. We listened to what they wanted and felt would benefit them and tried to deliver as close to what they had requested.	Provided feedback sheets at the start of the programme so identify specific needs and wants for the programme.	Listening and open communication was essential to ensure continued attendance throughout the weeks. we were very flexible with parents who were facing childcare challenges and sent details of sessions missed so they could still participate.	Additional information to those who wanted to further develop their skills learned at the sessions.	Compile resources for sharing at the end of sessions ready to be emailed out.	All

Numeracy/Food hygiene qualifications	Gaining a numeracy qualification would allow those who have either not completed or not engaged with numeracy in a while a chance to gain confidence with numbers and boost their skills. Completing a numeracy course would allow the participants to take charge of their own budgeting. Improving numeracy skills gives parents the confidence to talk to their children about money, budgeting, and numeracy.	Found a suitable numeracy course and encouraged participants to interact with the National Numeracy website. All participants were supported in getting their modules set up, so they were able to complete the task on their own. Additional support was offered to the group if required.	Participants were very appreciative of the qualification and feel they improved their employability.	Look more widely for more comprehensive numeracy course that suits the level of the groups we work with. Start looking earlier to explore all options available.	Regularly check in and see what courses are available.	All

Yoga	Yoga was a refreshing step away from hard numbers and discussions. It allowed the group to have some dedicated "me-time" in the middle of the course and ensured that they were in a good mental space to continue. Due to the nature of talking about budgeting and money this was a valuable addition to the course.	Christine sources a local yoga provider who was happy to discuss the specific needs of the group and tailored a session around them.	Mental health is incredibly important when discussing personal finance and budgeting. Taking a step back can be just as valuable as doing the hard focused work.	Imbed some more mental health pauses throughout the programme. While we did take fun focused breaks it would have been beneficial to break out of routine.	Keep positive relationships with the yoga studio for future events/groups/	All
Cfine	To look doing some cooking in a fun kitchen environment whilst looking at the theme of budget cooking and our supermarket sweep. We also got talks from all the different areas within Cfine and how they were available to support	We had two sessions within Cfine and both groups made something they could eat or take home i.e. pizzas and fajitas. They were guided through in a step-by-step fashion and all enjoyed the day. Cfine are an	All the different areas offered by Cfine, their food banks, pantry's, mobile pantries and how they could be accessed. Also to take away the stigma of using these services to ensure no one goes short and that they	Spend more time there and get a tour round the building to see everything in action. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to do this with either group.	Pantry membership was offered to all and forms issued for those who were interested.	All

	the groups going forward. The Safe Team, food bank, pantry and their warehouse courses.	integral part of the community, and everybody was impressed at the wealth of support they could offer.	are there to be utilised.			
External speakers	The group had identified knowledge of local support to be an area that they would like support with, and having a variety of external speakers coming in helped shake up the sessions and kept things fresh. It allowed the groups to meet someone face-to-face who they would deal with should they choose to engage with that service, breaking down that initial barrier. It also	Pulled in several relevant externals from a range of local services to come and deliver talks/ Q&A discussions from mental health to volunteering.	Spending the time to connect with external organisations to discuss the needs of the group prior to delivery allows for the best results for the participants. It is an activity well worth investing in.	Ensure that all externals will be able to deliver on the activities agreed upon during those 1:1 discussion. We could have benefited from pulling more externals in if the timeframe for the programme was longer.	Keep connected with externals that we will likely pull in for future events/groups.	All

	allowed the most accurate and relevant information to be relayed and allowed questions to be answered there and then. This opportunity opened doors for many on the programme					
Participants own project	This activity allowed the participants to take charge and utilise the budgeting, organisation and numeracy skills they have developed through the weeks. They took ownership of the activity and priced up different ideas that they shared with the group.	Facilitated this activity, providing support and guidance where required. We encouraged them to come to a session with ideas ready to share so the group could vote on their final activity.	It is great to allow people to share their ideas and work as a team and having a practical project to work towards kept the group engaged.	We ideally would have gotten their ideas in sooner to allow more time for discussion and planning.	Ensure we stick to the timetable where possible to allow ample time for activities.	All

Icebreakers	These activities got the individuals talking to each other and sharing experiences. Allowed them to connect with staff members and feel comfortable. These activities primed the group for discussions and participation in activities.	Consistently ran short, fun ice-breaker activities each week that were relevant to numeracy.	It was a great way individuals to begin talking and relax, made them all feel involved and more confident	Having some back up activities to pull from in case some activities ran quicker than expected.	Creating a file of icebreakers which is easy to access	All
Consistent communication	We ensured everyone was clear on when, where, and what topics would be covered each week. This prevented any absences due to misunderstandings and was particularly helpful for those with language barriers.	We communicated what topics were due to be covered the following week with Jade sending regular reminder emails to all.	Consistency and clear contact have a positive impact on attendance and reduces opportunity for confusion.	We could potentially use other methods of contact instead of relying on email. Some individuals may have preferred text etc.	Ensuring all contact preferences are collected and adhered to.	All

Wrap around support	Participants on the programme may be facing challenges and/or barriers which extend outside the programme but may impact their ability to engage. Providing wrap around support allowed them to continue attending the group while addressing a number of these challenges through additional 1:1 support	Provided 1:1 support when required both during the programme and outside of programme hours. Taking a collaborative approach to support by engaging with other teams across the council who are also supporting the individual	A solid support structure and open friendly communication allows individuals to express their concerns and work towards solutions	We could present the support available in a more accessible format such as a diagram which could be shared out at the start of the programme so participants know what they can always access.	Creation of a support diagram for sharing.	All
Travel support	To ensure all parents were not going out of pocket to attend the course as this could be a barrier for an individual attending who otherwise would participate. This allows for equal opportunities within the group.	Bus tickets provided each week	This put a lot of participants at ease and allowed all to continue to come week after week. Barrier removal supports engagement.	Ensure bus tickets are handed out at the beginning of the session as some needed to leave early for various reasons and ran the risk of missing out on tickets which were supplied at the end. This was rectified towards the	All staff to have bus ticket books to ensure at least one person both remembers and has access to supply tickets in case of illness.	All

				middle of the programme.		
Requirement sensitivity	During the initial survey it was identified that there were dietary and religious requirements for the groups	Once identified there were safe alternatives provided at group cooking sessions as well as gift cards for lunches.	Ensuring all are considered allows for inclusion of all and is greatly appreciated.	It would have been helpful to have this information sooner to allow for more provision in a timely manner.	Having a discussion regarding requirements a few weeks before programme starting to better prepare and prevent last minute run arounds.	All
Co-design following consultation	Assess what areas we need to give attention to ensured that information was relevant and helpful to the groups we supported. The groups shaped their own learning.	Conducted a survey at the start of the programme to assess current skill levels in specific areas and adjusted the schedule	Gathering this information is helpful to inform the course and ensure that all are engaged and can get the best out of the programme.	We could have an in-person interactive session with the group prior to the course start to gather more views and opinions on what they would like to see through open discussion to inform classes and topics.	Refine the survey questions to ensure they reflect the groups skill level and areas for improvement.	All

Financial Inclusion Team	We had Claire from the financial inclusion team support the planning, organisation and delivery of the programme. This allowed the group to interact with the service through someone they were familiar and comfortable with. This increased the number of individuals getting their benefits/debts checked.	Included Claire at all stages and sessions of the programme and created opportunity for individuals to meet privately for support.	Including the financial inclusion team is highly valuable for allowing people to access a service they may otherwise not be comfortable with.	Touch base with those who have not accessed the support throughout the programme to make sure they are aware the support is there.	Including other teams which may be of value in future projects for wrap around support and familiarity.	All
Budgeting Tools	Empowering the participants by giving them the tools to take charge of their personal finances and relieves the barriers that some may face. Tools such as the laptop also allows for family learning	We provided slow cookers, slow cooker book, bowls, utensils, scales, aprons, calculators, children's money book and laptops.	The tools gave the programme a practical feel, participants did not feel like they were just being lectured but given the support to take these skills home.	N/a	Create a recipe book from the meals shared at the group session so they have a tangible product from their participation.	All

	through the National Numeracy website, training and improves employability outcomes. The informative children's book helps parents create discussion with their children around maths and money.					
What didn't work well?	**Why?**	**What did we do?**	**What have we learned?**	**What could we do differently?**	**Next steps**	**Owner**
Gardening session	A gardening workshop was in talks as part of the mental wellbeing week as it would be a great way for participants to grow their own food	Laura arranged for a gardening session as part of the mental wellbeing week in the programme however once agreed the service got in touch to say it was no longer feasible due to spring workshops happening in a similar time- frame. Laura got in touch to look at alternative	While we managed to replace this activity with another, having back-up plans in case of short notice cancellations would be useful to avoid late reprogramming	Seek a range of activities and offer several weeks to externals to increase chances of engagement.	Get in touch with externals earlier to confirm and then double-check availability	All

		dates but there was no response.				
Bank	Staff had arranged for a bank to come in and deliver a 3-hour workshop on banking and bills to support parents who may be struggling understanding bills and budgeting.	Arranged a workshop which covered a range of banking activities. Unfortunately, on the day the bank team members noted they could only stay for an hour rather than the agreed times and underdelivered on agreed tasks. We politely declined the workshop for the second cohort as feedback from the group dictated that the session was not helpful. We created our own session and activities on banking which were well	Don't rely on external providers alone just in case they cannot deliver what is expected.	Prepare emergency resources and activities in case any externals pull out or don't deliver on expectation.	Create a document with resources to pull from in the event another programme goes ahead for quick access.	All

		received and reflected the needs of the group. Laura discussed feedback with the bank and responsible business.				
Energy Saving and Management	Multiple attempts to contact an energy saving advice and support charity were made at varying levels within the organisation however there was little response. It would have been beneficial for the groups to had contact with this organisation as home energy was highlighted as a key issue.	Emails were sent by Claire and Laura to the organisation on separate occasions. Claire connected with a worker from the organisation at an Instant Neighbour meeting and was signposted however again did not hear back. Claire made a final attempt via telephone but again got no response.	We learned to not lean too heavily on one organisation, we found alternatives for the group to engage with such as Family First.	Contact a range of organisations in a specific area from the get-go	Keep a log of externals for reference in another project and maintain good working relationships	All

Meetings prior to start	Dropouts from external organisations may be since they have no met any of the staff prior to jumping into a group.	Called/emailed those who did not attend and checked in for the first 3 absences. It was assumed due to non-response they no longer wished to engage with the programme.	Due to timescales there was little that could be adjusted at this time however we will take this with us for another group to ensure everyone is comfortable and able to get over that first hurdle.	We could have offered to meet these individuals face to face after the course had started in earlier weeks.	Take this on board when starting another programme	All

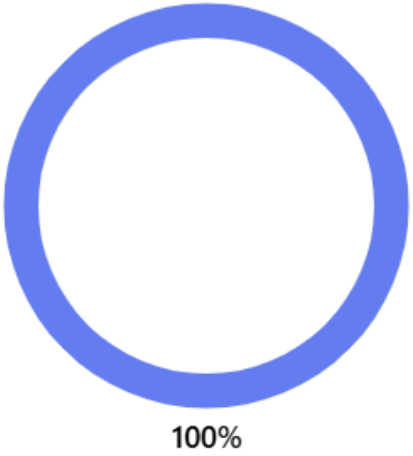
Participant feedback:

9. Do you feel attending this programme has helped further your budgeting confidence / skills ?



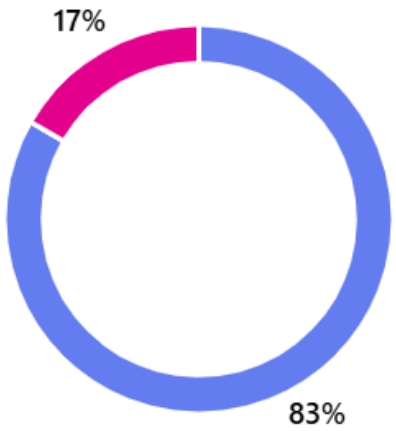
8. Do you feel like you have the tools to do your budgeting at home?

Yes	12
No	0

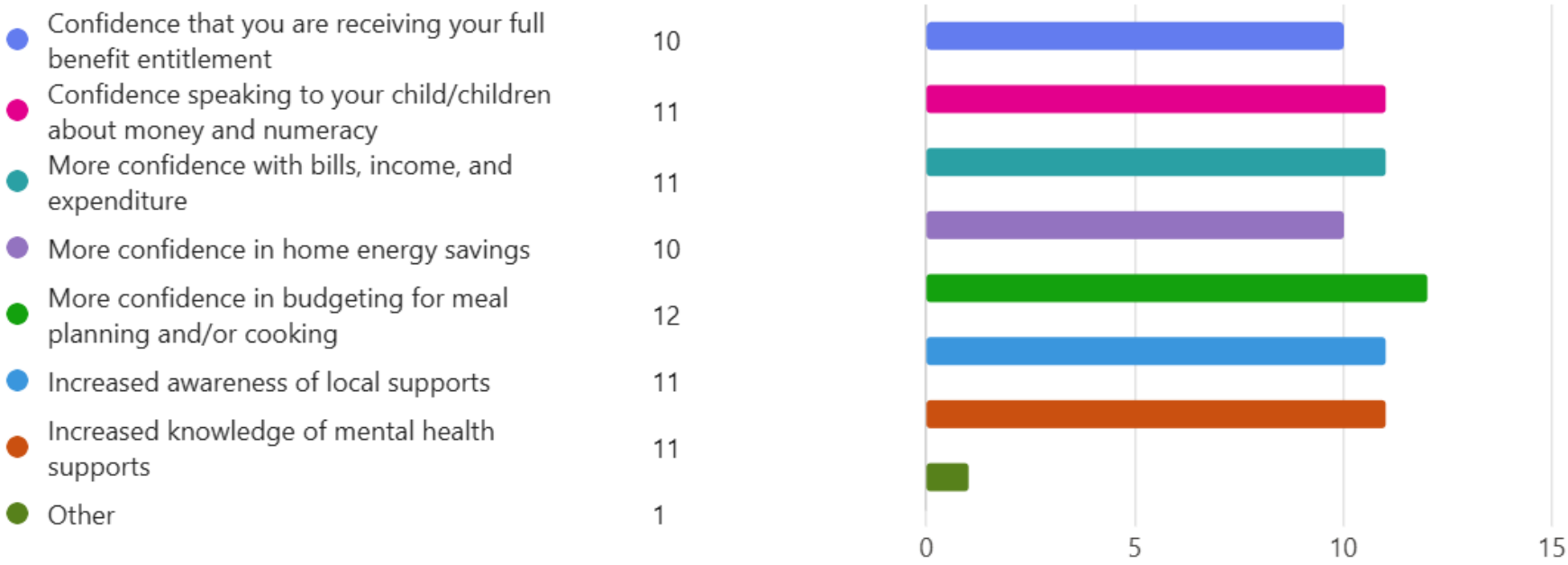


7. How friendly was the staff?

Extremely friendly	10
Very friendly	2
Somewhat friendly	0
Not so friendly	0
Not at all friendly	0

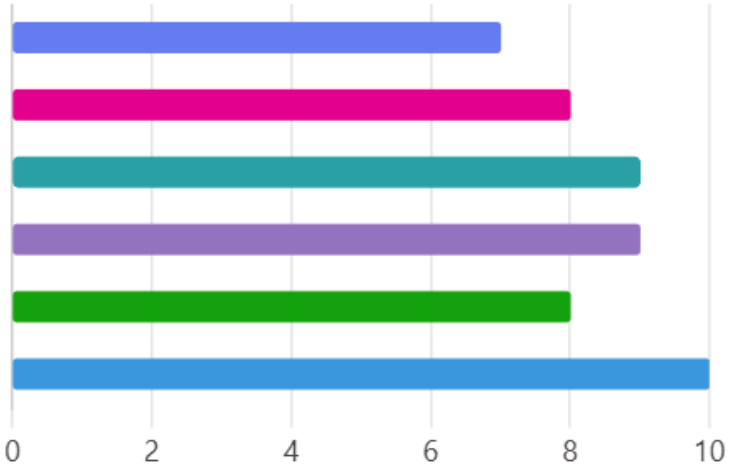


16. Do you feel attending the grow save multiply programme has allowed you to develop any of the following skills



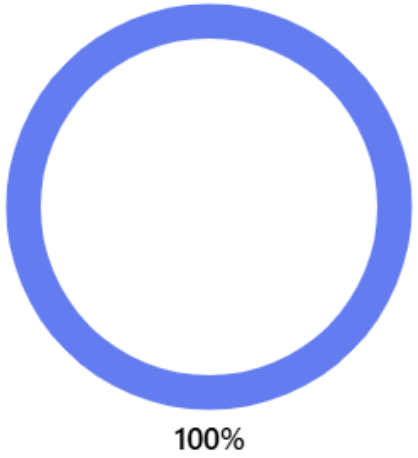
12. Please select the external visitor sessions that you found helpful

Yoga with Laura	7
Cfine	8
Grampian Credit Union	9
Family Learning	9
Love RaRa	8
Children First	10



3. Overall did you enjoy the Grow, Save, Multiply! Programme?

Yes	12
No	0
Sometimes	0



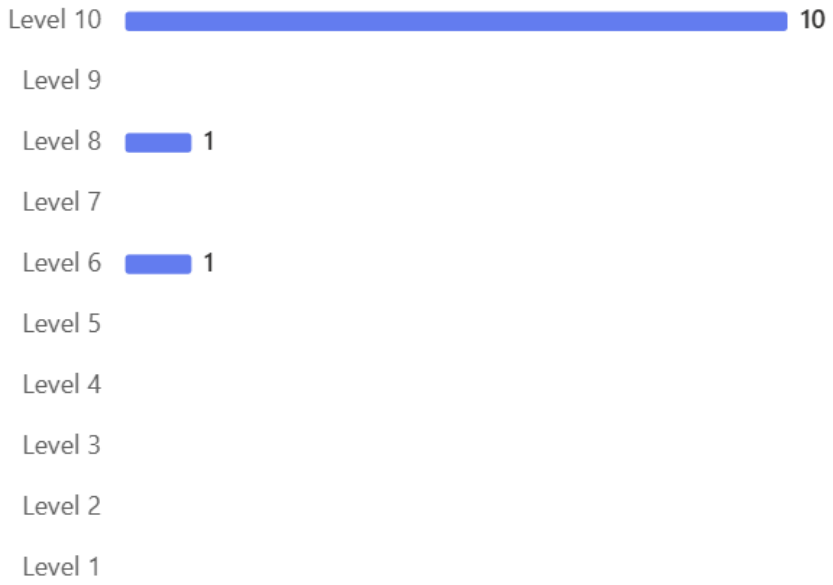
19. How helpful was the programme for informing you on local supports/opportunities available to you?

More details

9.50

Average Rating





20. How likely are you to recommend this event to a friend or colleague?

More details

Promoters	12
Passives	0
Detractors	0



Positive comments

25-02-2025 Sam M

"I felt like I was going off track, but this programme has helped me regain focus again."

"I really enjoyed the pizza session and the yoga; I am doing yoga every day now."

"I feel I can be open without being judged."

21-03-2025 Heather W

“Please can I get the beetle drive papers? I have been doing this with my child every night- she loves it”

21-03-2025 Sam P

“This course has given me confidence to look at other courses whereas before I would not have tried.”

28-03-2025 Ilhem D

“It was great to meet new people – I realised it is not just me that feels certain ways about things.”

“The information shared was exceptional, both from conversations with the ladies and the staff. The topics covered were highly relevant and engaging. I never felt like I was being lectured; I felt comfortable throughout.”

28-03-2025 Nazma A

"The knowledge I gained about saving money and energy was invaluable. The best part was that the entire programme was very enjoyable and significantly improved my mental health. Everyone was lovely and kind-hearted, and I made new friends."

28-03-2025 Heather W

“Just everything was fantastic I was given all the tools I needed and more and I feel supported more than I did before.”

Recommendations

Given the success and positive feedback from participants, it is highly recommended to continue offering the Grow, Save, Multiply! programme. The varied and flexible approach to numeracy and budgeting has proven to be engaging and valuable to participants. Incorporating interactive and practical activities, such as cooking sessions and budgeting workshops, can further enhance participants' skills and confidence. Maintaining strong communication channels and providing wrap-around support will ensure participants feel supported throughout their learning journey. Exploring partnerships with local organisations to offer a wider range of resources and support services will also be beneficial. Regularly checking in with participants and gathering feedback will help tailor future programmes to better meet their needs and preferences.

At the community level, the programme fosters a sense of unity and collaboration among participants, encouraging them to share their experiences and support each other. This collective effort can lead to stronger community bonds and a more resilient support network. The programme also introduces participants to local resources and services, such as Children First, Grampian Credit Union, Love Rara, and Cfine Pantry, which can provide ongoing support beyond the programme. By engaging with these organisations, participants can access valuable resources that address various aspects of their lives, from financial inclusion to mental health and wellbeing.

At the individual level, the programme empowers participants by equipping them with essential skills in numeracy and budgeting, boosting their confidence and employability. The practical activities, such as cooking sessions and budgeting workshops, provide hands-on experience that participants can apply in their daily lives. Additionally, the wrap-around support ensures that participants receive personalised assistance to overcome any challenges they may face. This holistic approach helps participants build a strong foundation for their future, enabling them to make informed decisions and manage their finances effectively.

Overall, the Grow, Save, Multiply! programme has the potential to create lasting positive impacts at both community and individual levels, fostering a supportive environment and empowering participants to achieve their goals.

ROCKET SCIENCE

Employability Study into Parents from Priority Family Groups

March 2024

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1. Introduction

Background to the study

Rocket Science were commissioned by ABZWorks in December 2023 to understand the additional barriers to employment faced by parents in Aberdeen, with the right to live and work in the UK. Specifically, ABZWorks were interested in additional barriers faced by parents with a disability; parents with a child who has a disability; and parents from a minority ethnic background.

Aberdeen City Council delivers a range of employability interventions for city residents. This includes No One Left Behind, for people with barriers to employment; and Parental Employability Support Fund for parents experiencing in-work poverty and unemployed parents experiencing poverty. These projects are funded by the Scottish Government to 31 March 2024, and will continue into 2024/25. Aberdeen City Council have identified that parents from the groups identified above were under-represented on ABZWorks' caseloads. This study aims to understand:

- The additional barriers to employment faced by these priority groups.
- How best to reach these priority groups with information on employability support.
- The types of employability support required.
- Any additional holistic support required.
- Other relevant information which could help better support people from these priority groups.

The intention was that the insights from this study will help to reduce inequality, support those further from the labour market and help to reduce levels of child poverty by supporting parents from priority family groups to increase their income.

Methodology

The study used a mixed methods approach to ensure that the research was as accessible as possible for parents. This included:

- One to one qualitative interviews with 18 stakeholders identified by ABZWorks.
- A workshop with key stakeholders, which took place at a conference and presented the initial findings to stakeholders on the 26 March 2024.

- Parent engagement, including:
    - An online survey for parents. This was circulated by Aberdeen City Council and their stakeholders. The survey was shared on social media by Aberdeen City Council and through a text message to all parents with a child in an Aberdeen City Council school and received 97 responses.
    - One to one qualitative interviews with 23 parents. Parents were identified via the online survey and were provided with a £20 voucher to thank them for their time and insights.
    - Informal interviews with five parents at a celebration event arranged by ABZWorks.

Limitations to the research

We recognise that there were some limitations to this study. These include:

- Sampling and accessing parents who aren't engaging in any services: The people responding to the survey were able to leave their details if they wanted to participate in the interviews. These details were used to reach interview participants, in addition to some contact details provided by stakeholders. The survey respondents were not representative of the population in Aberdeen. The survey primarily reached parents who are IT literate, had a higher level of education and parents over 30. It was also primarily completed by mothers.
- Limited budget and timeframe: The timeframe and budget of the project did not allow for other outreach activities, this meant that the sampling was not more proportionate to the population in Aberdeen.
- Stakeholder views: The ABZWorks team sent the request to a list of stakeholders asking them to participate in the study. It is likely that those who agreed to be interviewed had a more established relationship with ABZWorks, and other stakeholder views may have been missed in the study.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter two includes the findings from the study combining the insights from staff and stakeholders involved in working with parents, as well as views from parents that were captured in the survey and interviews.

- Chapter three provides discussion and conclusions from the study and summarises the barriers that the priority groups of parents are facing.
- Chapter four sets out some recommendations for consideration by ABZWorks.
- Appendix one includes the survey respondent's demographic data.

2. Findings from the study

The following section explores the findings from the study including the key barriers to accessing employability support and employment for parents. The findings consider the perspectives of parents interviewed and those that completed the online survey, as well as the views from stakeholders who were working with parents in Aberdeen.

2.1 Awareness of employability support

Most parents who responded to the survey had not taken part in employability support through ABZWorks or any other organisation, with only 15% (n=8) saying they had participated in employability support.

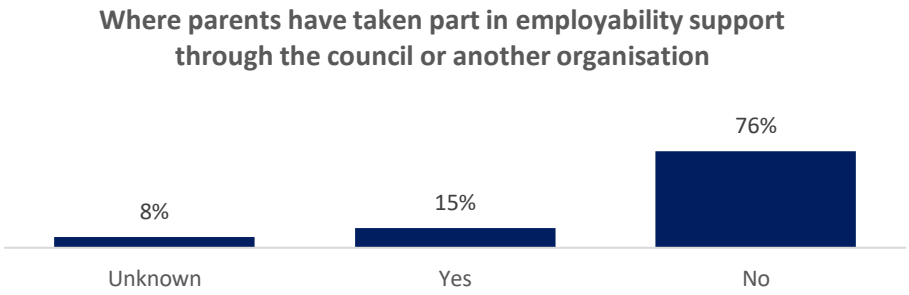


Figure 1. Whether parents have taken part in employability support. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

For those that had accessed support, the service provider they sought this support from differed. Of those who stated where they accessed support 33% (n=4) were doing so from ABZWorks, and 25% (n=3) through Aberdeen Foyer. As seen in Table 1, a small number who sought support were also accessing it through other services. However, 85 of the parents who completed the survey did not state a service they had accessed. Across the interviews, it also seemed that parents were currently not consistently accessing employability support through ABZWorks.

Some parents told us they had seen *"ads at bus stops for ABZWorks"* or on social media, while others had instead turned to organisations such as Citizens Advice, Skills Development Scotland, or JobCentre Plus for support. It is important to note that there may be crossover between support as services may refer individuals onto other services for best suitability. For example, ABZWorks may be providing support services via Aberdeen Foyer.

Where employability support is being accessed		
Service	Percentage	Number
ABZWorks	33%	4
Aberdeen Foyer	25%	3
MCR Pathway	8%	1
JobCentre Plus/Universal Credit	16%	2
Fairstart Scotland	8%	1
CAP – The Redeemed Christian Church Of God - Fountain of Love (Rccg Fol)	8%	1

Table 1. Where employability support is being accessed. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

Within the survey, parents said they were engaging in employability support to find a job with their current qualifications, or to find support due to their current situation, such as being a new UK resident or struggling with their mental health.

As seen in Figure 2 below, the most popular way for parents to access support was in person at the organisation's site. Parents also accessed support online (6%) or over the phone (4%).

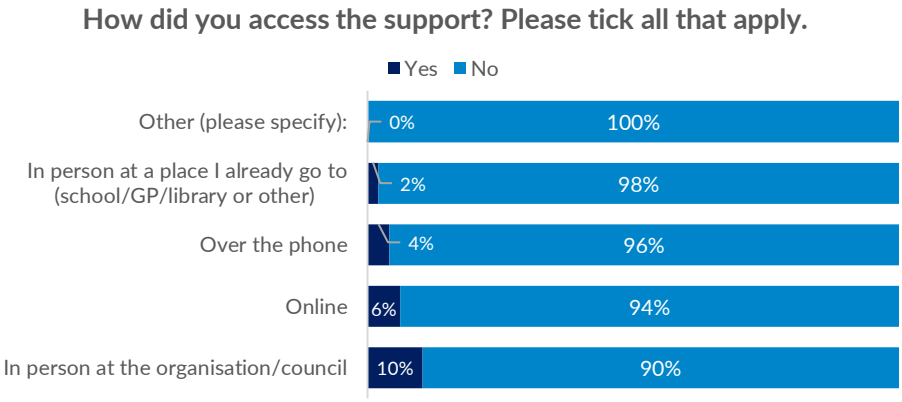


Figure 2. How parents are accessing employability support. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

A challenge for parents who were not accessing support, appears to be a lack of knowledge of where the support can be received, due to not having previously received information from services. This was evident from the survey responses, with 74% (n=72) saying they had not received any information on employability support in the past six months, and only 9% (n=9) saying they had.

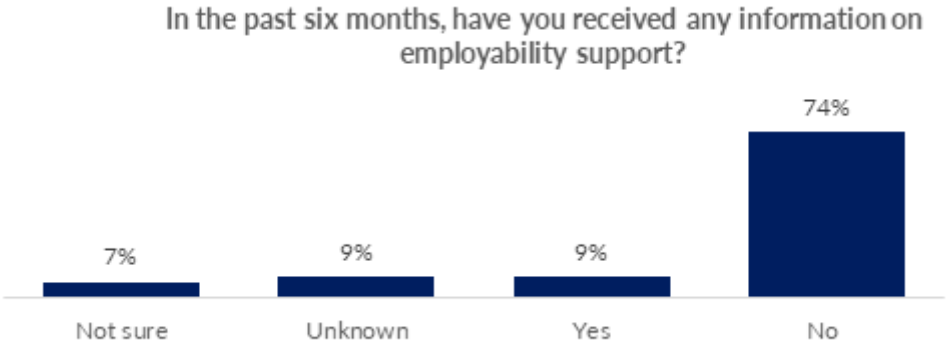


Figure 3. Whether parents have received information on employability support in the last six months. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

Whilst 26% (n=25) of those who responded said they had not accessed support as it was not needed, a higher percentage of 33% (n=32) said they had not accessed support because they were not sure if it could help them, or they were not aware of where to access support. Only 5% (n=5) of survey respondents told us they knew some or all of the information provided by services.

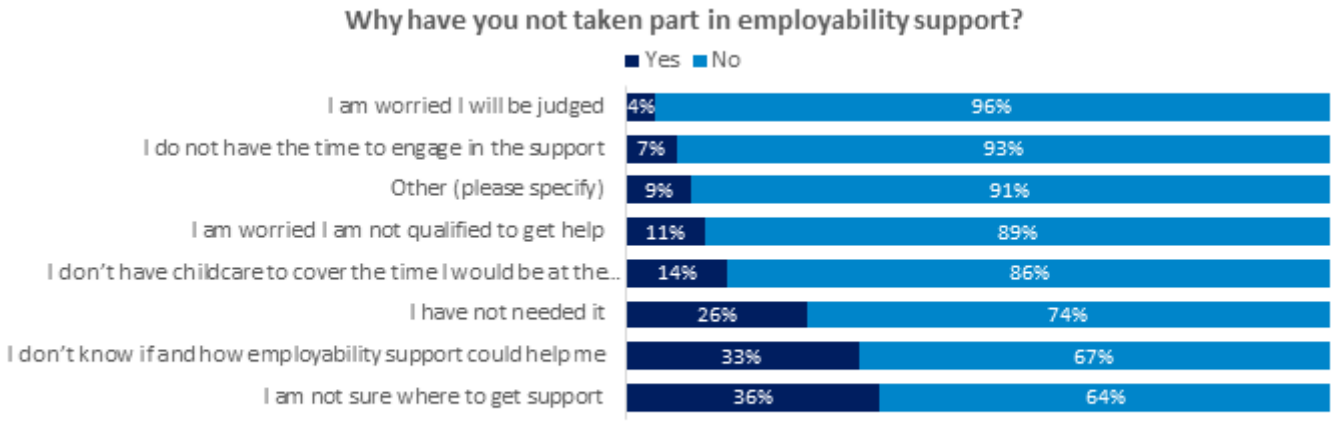


Figure 4. Why parents have not taken part in employability support. [Source: Parents survey 2024].

Some parents also noted specific reasons that had prevented them seeking support, such as severe mental health issues, chronic pain, or not having access to public funds.

Of the sixteen parents who said they had heard about the support available, 38% (n=6) said they had heard about it through a support worker, whereas 31% (n=5) had found out online or through social media, and 13% (n=2) found out through family or friends. However, only 13% (n=13) felt they had received enough, or more than enough, information they needed to access support. Furthermore, within the parent interviews, several parents said they were *"not aware of who to go to."* This indicates that parents had not received enough information about what support is available to them, and the benefits of taking part. Parents explained that often when they don't seek support, it is because they *"don't even know that there's that option"* available to them.

Stakeholders told us that more disadvantaged population groups face challenges in understanding what support is available to them, how to find it and how to access this. This lack of awareness means that these groups were less likely to find and engage in the support. The groups named by stakeholders as struggling to access information about support included:

- Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers: Not being familiar with the Scottish and UK welfare systems, legal and support landscapes might result in individuals not being aware of what support exists.
- Parents for whom English is not their primary language: These individuals were likely to access information that is only provided in English without translation or interpretation.

This includes people from different backgrounds, including people speaking British Sign Language (BSL) as the grammar and structure of BSL and English differs substantially.

- Parents in work: Parents who were in work were likely to have less time available to research and look into where and how to access support, training or other support.
- Parents with children with additional support needs and disabilities: Parents who have complex caring responsibilities were likely to have less time to research and access support.
- Young parents: Younger parents may face different challenges and may prefer accessing information in other ways. This means information might not be on platforms or in spaces they use regularly. This was also experienced through this study, as young parents were less likely to engage in the study.

2.2 Supporting parents to engage

2.2.1 Raising awareness about available support

As the findings suggested, some parents who could be accessing support were not accessing it due to lack of awareness. There is an opportunity to help them engage by increasing the accessibility of services. For example, some parents told us they struggled to know what is available, and providing them with regular information on what is available locally, and the how to access it can demystify the process, and remove barriers that some parents face. Simplifying the process and ensuring information is clear and easily accessible for all, including clarity on eligibility criteria, is key to increasing the number of parents who feel supported to access employability support within Aberdeen.

This was also evident in the survey, as 43% for respondents told us that having more information would make them more likely to engage in employability support. Similarly, 27% said they would be interested in more targeted support, suggesting employability services can look to engage parents in specific sectors or industries. Within the interviews, specific sectors that were of most interest were oil and gas, professional services, IT and technology, and healthcare. Equally, having targeted support for certain groups who may struggle to access support, such as those with no recourse to public funds, would be helpful. There was also a minority of parents who said that physical or mental health conditions limited their ability to engage in support, meaning some parents may require additional support to access services.

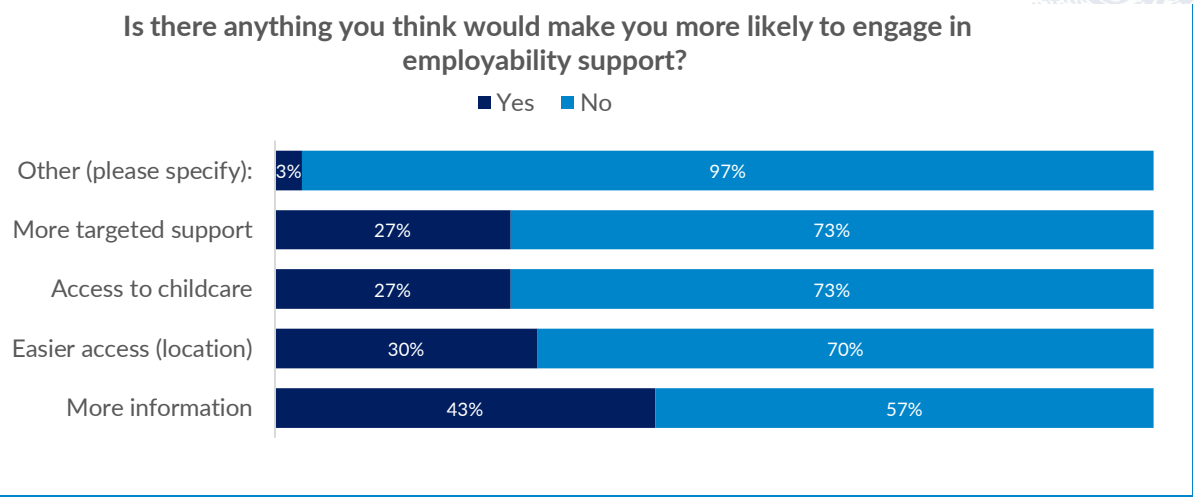


Figure 5. Factors that would make parents more likely to engage in employability support. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

Parents who replied to the survey would find it most helpful to receive information by email, with 70% (n=68) stating it would be most the most useful form of communication. Organisations' websites was also seen as a useful way to access information, as was hearing about it through word of mouth. Within the survey, using support groups to spread the word about the services available was a helpful approach. Conversely, parents felt that leaflets, flyers and letters were less useful forms of communication for them.

However, those parents who responded to the survey were likely to have higher IT literacy skills compared to other priority groups, so this finding should be interpreted with caution.

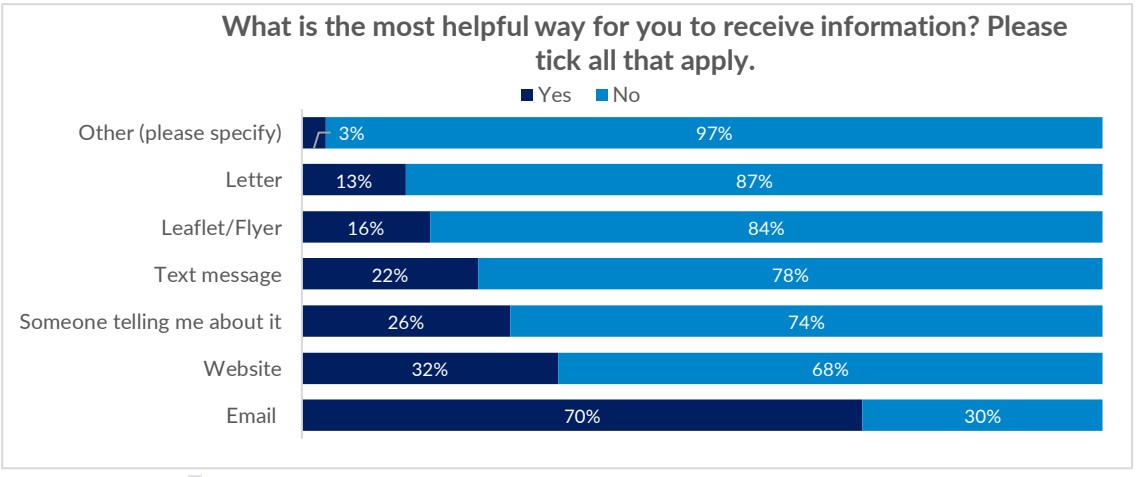


Figure 6. Most helpful way for parents to receive information. [Parent survey 2024].

These findings were consistent across both the survey and interviews, as parents noted that *"email is a good way to provide information"* as is *"through the council portal and website."* There is

therefore the opportunity for ABZWorks and services within Aberdeen to utilise online methods of reaching parents.

Some parents also said that there is a greater opportunity for services to reach them in person, by making information or access available at locations they already regularly attend, such as through schools or libraries. This was in line with the survey findings, that 30% of parents would be more likely to engage in support if the location was easier.

Stakeholder suggestions to improve the visibility and awareness of support services were to ensure services were present in places parents' access regularly. This includes via schools, GPs, health workers and other statutory services. Stakeholders also suggested to widen the engagement and collaboration with social or cultural groups for parents in Aberdeen. The reason for this is that parents already have established relationships with these groups which could facilitate engagement in support services.

"I think it is the building community links to ensure people have access…. engaging with people through existing relationships." - Stakeholder

2.2.2 Type of support

According to stakeholders, parents came to them with a range of support needs. A lot of the support needed and provided is around understanding financial support, employability and training support. The employability landscape is complex, and a lot of parents struggle to navigate it, so having help for this initial step of understanding what is needed and what is possible is crucial.

The type of support that stakeholders feel was most beneficial to parents was a holistic and person-centred approach. Through this, parents receive appropriate support tailored to them. Stakeholders engaging directly with individuals explained that the parents coming to see them were at different stages of their employability journey and have individual barriers to support meaning the support needs to be adapted to them. The holistic and person-centred approach was built on trust and relationships that support workers were able to build. This required an investment of time, but according to stakeholders, increased positive outcomes for the individuals.

"The support is very individual. We don't put them under any pressure, and we figure out what works for them. We meet them in their local area (i.e. a café or library) to make access easier and people are positively surprised as it reduces the burden on them." – Stakeholder

Two stakeholders specifically noted that there was currently not sufficient pre-employability support to ensure parents were ready to enter the labour market. This support focuses on parents being ready to engage long-term and meaningfully in work. This support might include confidence building, literacy and numeracy skills, IT literacy or ESOL classes. This support allows parents to build the skills and confidence to engage in more specific training and upskilling, as well as enter in to work at a later stage.

"A lot of parents need confidence building and it gets them mixing and socialising with other people. A lot of the people don't engage in employability support, but a lot of them really enjoy the groups." – Stakeholder

Once parents were ready to engage in job searching, there were different challenges relating to confidence and skills related to the job searching process. This includes CV writing, interview preparation and attendance. Stakeholders working directly with parents also highlighted that parents were often not aware of their transferable skills and how these can be used in future jobs. Stakeholders found that one of their key roles in supporting parents was to raise aspirations among parents. This was mentioned particularly in relation to two groups of parents:

- People from migrant backgrounds: Most commonly it was reported that people with low levels of English or qualifications not recognised in the UK were hoping to work in job roles that were likely to have more precarious work environments (i.e. cleaning jobs, hospitality), that may be seasonal or on zero hours contracts. Stakeholders explained that they work to raise aspirations of individuals by showing them how they can use their skills in jobs where there are progression opportunities and to have options for long-term financial security.
- Parents returning to work after a long time off: Parents who had taken time off to look after their children and returning to work or starting to work for the first time were often nervous and lack confidence in their skills and were aiming for low paid roles that do not require qualifications. Engaging parents and raising their aspirations can have a positive impact on their self-confidence and their long-term job prospects.

The survey also showed that parents would like services to provide a range of options in terms of length of support, as this varies widely depending on parents' individual needs. Almost a quarter, 24% (n=23), were seeking medium term support up to twelve weeks, whilst over one third, (n=38) were looking for short-term or one-off support, as shown in figure 7.

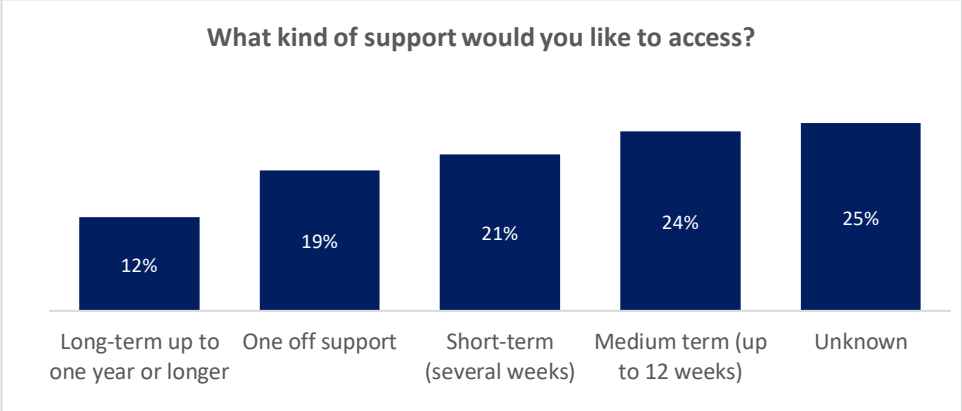


Figure 7. Support parents would like to access. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

According to stakeholders, it was likely that those who were further removed from the labour market need more long-term support to build up their confidence and to receive sufficient support to move into work. However, parents may want to initially engage in one off sessions or shorter-term support to *"dip their toes in"* before committing to engaging in more intensive or longer-term support.

2.2.3 Indirect employability support

Stakeholders believed that there were other types of support parents need based on their individual situations. This was because parents from the priority groups, as well as other parents with complex needs, were likely to face other challenges outside of employability. These might include:

- Housing
- Food insecurity
- Fuel poverty
- Immigration or visa issues
- Mental health challenges

"People were meant to get into work or training, but they had a lot of underlying issues which they needed to have support for first. People were often overwhelmed and struggled to engage so it is about making sure basic needs are met first." – Stakeholder

Challenges and issues in these areas were likely to hinder parents from engaging fully in employability support and employment. For parents, these challenges were likely to take priority over engaging with employability support, as they consider them essential to ensure their family's wellbeing. This means supporting parents to feel more secure in these other aspects of their lives can lead to better engagement in employability support.

Stakeholders note that there are currently challenges on accessing specialised support for visa and immigration issues in Aberdeen. Similarly, there are waiting lists for mental health support making it difficult for parents to access support. Due to the cost-of-living crisis, there were also challenges for parents to access support for other needs, often not knowing where to go.

2.3 Eligibility for employability support

One of the key themes that emerged from the research was parents experiencing barriers to employability support due to a perception from parents of a lack of eligibility for employability support. This theme came through in both the interviews and survey responses.

Several of the parents we spoke with noted that whilst they have attempted to access employability support, they have been told they were not eligible for certain kinds of support due to factors such as not having dependent children or their immigration status.

"I've come to council and had discussion with them, and they said I'm not eligible, I'm under citizenship." – Parent

Similarly, some parents were told they could not receive help because they *"have no recourse to public funds,"* which limits their ability to access services.

Other parents felt that they lacked clarity around the eligibility for different services, with one noting they were not sure that they were entitled to access support *"because I have a job."* Another parent also noted that they *"did try to apply… but the eligibility criteria said I didn't fit into it"* due to being in part-time employment.

It was evident that there needs to be greater public awareness about where support is available, what is available, and who can access it, for example, support available to individuals with no recourse to public funds.

In these cases, to ensure that they were still able to access some form of support, this may need to be funded through a charitable organisation or other funding source, as, for example United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) determines this eligibility criteria. This can increase the accessibility and awareness of support for a wider range of parents in Aberdeen.

For most stakeholders who engaged in the study, the main criteria to engage with the services was to be a resident in Aberdeen. While, as mentioned above, there were some services that were not eligible to individuals with no recourse to public funds, there were a list of services that were open to everyone. Despite this, the perception of many parents is different.

Some courses or groups have specific eligibility criteria. These criteria are mostly related to the type of support or course provided. These criteria include:

- Age: Some services are specific for young people/parents, others are for people from age 26 to 64.
- Nationality: There are some support services which target, for example, Ukrainian refugees.
- English language requirements: Some courses have a minimum English requirement. Individuals need to meet these requirements to take part. Similarly, some technical skills or employability programmes are only available in English with no interpretation or translation available.

This discrepancy in understanding of the eligibility for support between parents and the stakeholders highlights that there was more clarification and publicising of the eligibility criteria needed.

2.4 Impacts of employability support

The impacts that employability support had on parents varied, although due to the small number of survey participants who had received employability support and completed these questions, it was not possible to determine how far reaching the impact was across Aberdeen.

The survey findings do suggest that where parents were accessing support it can increase their confidence and approach to finding employment. Parents who responded to the survey said that it was helpful to have a sounding board to speak with about the issues they are facing, with several commenting that the staff were friendly and approachable. Others also said that they found it helpful to have a better understanding of their abilities and what opportunities around education and employment were available. Within the interviews, some parents spoke about how they have had support to access opportunities that will improve skills such as a *"two month IT course"* or an *"intensive English course."*

Others also said that they found it helpful to have a better understanding of their abilities and what opportunities around education and employment were available. Overall, 86% of people who rated their experience of engaging with employability services, rated it as a positive experience.

For parents attending the ABZWorks Celebration Event, the impact of the support they had received revolved primarily around the following:

- Advice and support navigating the employment landscape: Parents felt like they were able to better understand their options and were able to get advice on how to approach returning to work.
- Building confidence: Parents felt like they lacked confidence before and the support of having a key worker that they were able to build a relationship with, helped the parents believe in themselves more and this built their confidence.
- Support into self-employment: Parents who were struggling to find work that fits around their childcare obligations learned about the potential support to be self-employed and were able to access funding and support through this. They would not have considered this a possibility without the support they received.

"It was difficult to understand and get information about how benefits would be impacted by me setting up a business. Having support to navigate this made me feel more confident in setting up my business." – Parent

"It is helpful to have someone to talk through the different scenarios with and to better understand what options are available to me." – Parent

2.5 Barriers to accessing employability support

Parents encounter different barriers to engaging in employability support and in employment. This section explores three of the most commonly mentioned barriers by stakeholders and parents/carers, including childcare, transport and training/qualifications. In addition, it looks at other barriers primarily observed by the stakeholders.

2.5.1 Childcare

Childcare was the most common barrier to engage in both employability support and employment for both parents/carers and stakeholders.

Parents were struggling to find employment which meets their existing childcare needs, and others reported not being aware of what options were available to them. Of those who completed the survey, almost half (n=42) had two dependent children, with 34% (n=33) having three or more.

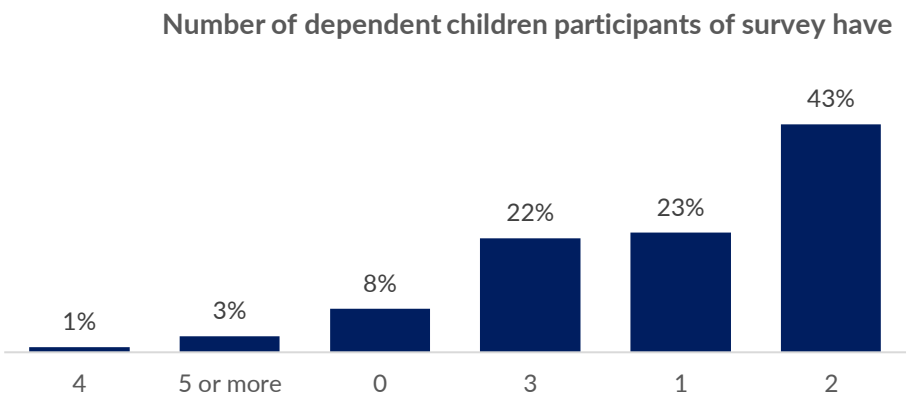


Figure 8. Number of dependent children participants of survey have. [Parent survey 2024].

Childcare was a barrier for some parents to access employability support or employment, with 27% (n=26) saying they would be more likely to engage if they have greater access to childcare.

One of the key factors impacting access was the affordability of childcare, such as nannies, childminders, after school clubs or nurseries. Parents noted that their ability to access childcare changes depending on their employment situation. Having to fully or partially fund the childcare costs often means a large percentage of their wages were spent on childcare, which makes their employment unsustainable. Stakeholders explained that financial support was, in some circumstances, provided to mitigate this from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Some stakeholders, as well as parents, did not seem to be aware of this, indicating that this support could be better promoted.

"It is difficult because before my partner worked and it was so expensive for him to pay for childcare. Now he doesn't work we get benefits, so our son can go to nursery but when we start work its expensive and (we will be) working to pay for nursery so that's a barrier." – Parent

The financial challenges also came through in the survey, with only 3% (n=3) of those who completed it saying they received any financial support (including grants, benefits and information) in addition to employability support. Whilst some parents were aware of benefits they may be entitled to around childcare, some noted that this was not an easy process for them currently as it *"can take some time"* and is *"not very straightforward."* This can mean that sometimes parents do not go through with applications for financial support they may be entitled to, as the process or time it takes is too complex. There is a need for clearer or simplified routes to financial support, or further support for parents to complete applications,

particularly if they have language barriers, learning difficulties or a disability that might make this process harder.

Additionally, accessibility of childcare can be challenging as some parents felt they were not able to access their preferred form of childcare due to lack of space.

> *"I have a friend whose daughter is 4 years old, she couldn't get her into a nursery."* – Parent

Several (n=3) parents referenced challenges accessing nurseries or before school clubs that were over capacity, with others also saying there was *"not enough space in afterschool care of childcare providers."* Stakeholders explained that for younger children there are limited options for full-time childcare. For older children, stakeholders explained that there are more limited options for after school clubs and that many clubs were operating waiting lists due to being oversubscribed.

As well as ensuring accessibility for all parents who need childcare to access employability services, there was also a need for appropriate childcare, that fits a wide range of times, location and needs. For example, one parent noted that childcare often isn't within employment times, so they would need to have flexible working or shorter working hours to ensure they can pick and drop off children from childcare. One said that *"even if there was just a breakfast club half an hour earlier"* this would allow them to meet standard work times of 9am to 5:30pm.

Other parents need later childcare, as they had been offered employment that included *"night shifts"* which was challenging for single parents. Similarly, for some parents there was not childcare available locally and having options that are *"close to me and flexible timing"* was therefore very important to them. Stakeholders also saw challenges around flexible childcare fitting round different working patterns. They believe that this was not only exacerbated for single parents but also for parents without local support networks. Parents who do not have a local support network of friends and family face additional challenges around access to ad hoc childcare or childcare out with standard opening hours of childcare providers, as they cannot rely on their support network to help them. Additionally, for a minority of parents, they said they were not able to seek employment because of their children having a disability, meaning they need full-time care, and 'traditional childcare' would not be suitable.

Some stakeholders further explained that the available childcare options can differ substantially across different localities. This means that childcare might be easily accessible in some areas of Aberdeen, but in other areas parents will not have any or very limited options available to them.

Additionally, as demonstrated in the survey, there were a significant number of parents who have a child with a mental or physical disability (n=33), which may require additional support or needs in terms of appropriate childcare.

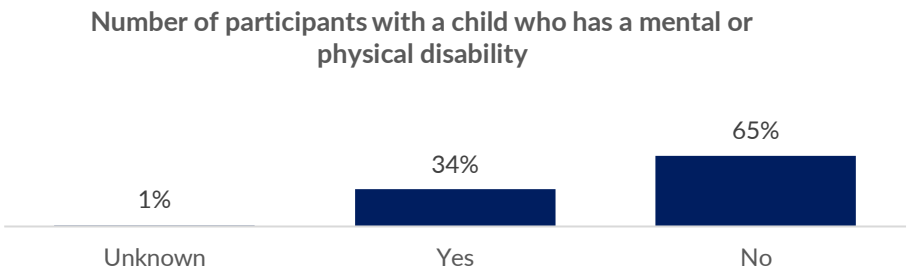


Figure 9. Number of participants with a child who has a mental or physical disability. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

For these children, traditional childcare options such as nursery may be less accessible. One parent noted they had asked school if there was *"anything in terms of childcare with specialist support"* but that it had been difficult to access this. To ensure parents are not limited in their access to employment, there needs to not only be affordable childcare, but also appropriate childcare that meets additional needs. These additional needs for childcare may include circumstances where English is not the children's first language, children who have disabilities, and will require further emotional support.

In addition, stakeholders explained that there are challenges to access this specialist support within childcare services without a formal diagnosis. At the same time, getting a diagnosis often includes long waiting lists through the NHS and private channels. This means that children may go without additional support in childcare, resulting in them needing to be picked up frequently and without prior notice, impacting parents' availability for work.

For all parents, stakeholders identified the school holidays as a major obstacle to work or to access training. School holidays mean that there is less or no childcare available to parents. At the same time, parents do not have as much annual leave as there are school holidays for

children. This challenge was exacerbated for single parents. There is some school holiday childcare provision available, but it is limited and often expensive, meaning that parents find it challenging to access this.

"Schools going on strike and service days, as well as school holidays are a challenge. We try to work around it but over the summer holidays there is no childcare." – Stakeholder

Overall, childcare was a widespread barrier for parents in Aberdeen, both in terms of accessing employability support or training, and accessing full-time or part-time employment. The key factors related to childcare include affordability, ensuring it is easily accessible for those with additional barriers, and is appropriate in terms of location and timings.

2.5.2 Transport

Stakeholders named transport as a key challenge for parents accessing employability support, training and employment. There were several challenges that parents encountered around this:

- Cost of public transport: Accessing public transport and using it can be a substantial financial barrier to parents. Stakeholders who offer services where transport is subsidised or funded see this as a much lower issue compared to stakeholders that do not have funding to support this.
- Availability of public transport: There are limited routes available for public transport meaning that public transport was not always a viable option for parents to get to different places either because the public transport was not available close to their home or close to where they need to go. This includes, for example, accessing worksites outside the city centre.
- Time of public transport: For parents, the time it takes to get where they need by public transport creates limits as to when parents are available for employability support, training or employment. Some stakeholders were trying to reduce this by meeting parents in their local communities or offering support in local community centres. When parents need to drop children off at childcare, and then travel on to work, using public transport, this presents an additional logistical barrier.
- Confidence using and navigating public transport: Some parents might not feel comfortable or confident to navigate the public transport system. This was an issue for

parents as individuals, but even more so if they were using public transport with their child.

- Cost of driving: The costs to get a driving license, as well as subsequent costs of owning a car, including insurance and fuel costs, could be a barrier for parents to access employment. This means that driving to mitigate the challenges around public transport was not always feasible. There was some funding available to support the costs of getting a driving license.

In interviews with parents, transport was discussed as a barrier but only six parents mentioned it as an issue when accessing employment or employability support. Where transport was mentioned, it was in relation to the cost and reliability of public transport in Aberdeen and the impacts of a lack of access to a car.

The cost of public transport in the city was sometimes seen as a potential barrier to transport for work. Indeed, a couple of parents mentioned choosing to walk, in part due to the public transport being too expensive.

"I have no issue related to that because I like to walk, I can use public transport but usually I don't because it is so expensive." – Parent

"From my home to the college, it costs me around £2 for a single trip, so by day I spend minimum £4. Yes [it could be a barrier] and it can take a lot of time and especially money if it's part-time work and you need to go from one house to another like support work." - Parent

While travel concessions exist for disabled children, their parents may still struggle to pay for themselves. A parent with a disabled child explained that accessing work and education was *"complicated"* as although she travels for free with her daughter, she must pay when travelling alone which *"can take a lot of time and especially money"*.

Lack of access to a car was a barrier for some parents, including where driving was a requirement for some jobs. Parents trying to balance being available and on-time for childcare and work responsibilities find not using a car to be a particular barrier. Public transport was seen as an insufficient alternative.

"The only option will be bus because I don't drive. [...] My work search is usually not too far from me, either walkable or if I could take a bus within 30 minutes, because I can't be too far

away from kids. I have to consider all that in case I need to come back and pick them up." – Parent

"The last [job opportunity] was in Aldi as a cleaner, and the woman was so nice. But I would have to come by bus, but sometimes they are cancelled. How do I get there if it's cancelled? I'm ready to work but I don't have a car." – Parent

"Public transport is not very good here, we hardly use it." – Parent

Importantly, a couple of parents mentioned negative experiences in public spaces as a reason for avoiding public transport. This was an additional barrier on top of existing issues with the cost and reliability of public transport.

"When we are going somewhere and I need to carry my son a lot, I don't normally go out because people get angry when my son is making a disturbance." – Parent

Hybrid and remote working opportunities may benefit parents who otherwise face barriers to accessing appropriate transport. Some parents were specifically looking for remote working opportunities as these make employment more accessible not only in terms of transport, but also health conditions and childcare.

"Transport has not been an issue because I work from home now." – Parent

"Due to my health conditions, I look for remote or hybrid work and there is no last-minute childcare available in Aberdeen." – Parent

Stakeholders also explained that since Covid-19, they have more flexible ways to provide employability services and at times were allowing parents to join sessions remotely, in case of challenges with transport or childcare so that they wouldn't miss out on support.

2.5.3 Training and qualifications

There were several barriers' parents and stakeholders reported relating to training and qualifications.

Parents noted that there was a need to upskill themselves to secure employment. This was particularly voiced by parents who have emigrated to Scotland and have international qualifications. Parents spoke about finding this to be a barrier with accessing employment because often they will be told they need UK based experience for the role they are applying for. This can decrease the accessibility of employment for parents, as can the long waiting periods when applying for UK citizenship. The motivation of parents to enter education or training with the aim of strengthening their employment prospects was clear. This aligned with what was heard within the interviews, that parents were actively seeking education and training opportunities that are sector specific or relevant to particular employment opportunities. For example, parents who were interested in working within IT require specialist training in relation to software.

For parents with international qualifications, there were substantial challenges around having their qualifications recognised in the UK. This was noted by all stakeholders who engaged with parents of a migrant or refugee background. Not having their qualifications recognised means that they were not able to work in the fields that they were trained in, even if the skills were transferrable to the UK labour market. There was a perception that getting qualifications recognised takes a long time, as well as requiring evidence of the qualifications. To obtain or have this available was particularly challenging for parents of a refugee background.

"Many parents are very well educated but don't have the knowledge here. Converting degrees can be difficult. It often depends on where they got their qualification and they need all the transcripts and the documentation, but people are not always sure what they need. This means applications get dismissed." – Stakeholder

Another barrier to access relevant training or qualifications was language, especially for parents of ethnic minorities having the needed level of English and the right vocabulary for the field they want to work in being difficult to achieve. While there are some ESOL courses available and these aim to be within childcare hours, the time spent in those classes was often not sufficient for parents to learn the level of English needed. There are, however, not many other options where parents can practice their English more frequently. Additionally, one parent noted they felt they faced discrimination when applying for jobs, and that there needed to be fairer treatment of those from minority ethnic groups in application processes.

In addition, most courses which allow parents to gain relevant skills or qualifications for specific sectors or jobs were only available in English and require parents to have a B2 level of English to take part in them. The most frequent example given by stakeholders for this included Health and Safety certificates and other certificates required to work in the food, construction, or hospitality industries. There were jobs, which according to stakeholders, would not require high levels of English but these certificates were inaccessible, meaning parents cannot move into these jobs. Stakeholders suggested allowing tests around these certificates to be conducted with interpreters or offering the courses in other languages to facilitate easier access.

"The main barrier is the language barrier, and we advise them to learn English and take additional language classes. People are really qualified but with the language barrier people are struggling to find positions." – Stakeholder

According to stakeholders, limited literacy and numeracy skills poses a challenge for parents not only to access employment but also to access support, including further training. Parents who struggle with literacy or numeracy were likely to find other upskilling and training courses challenging or inaccessible. This was not an issue exclusive to parents, as the National Literacy Trust has found that 1 in 4 adults in Scotland experience challenges due to their lack of literacy skills.[1] This suggests improvement of literacy skills could have a significant impact for adults, including parents in Aberdeen. There was limited awareness among stakeholders where this support was available within Aberdeen.

Another challenge stakeholders noticed for parents was their digital literacy. They explained that some of the parents they engage with could use basic communication tools, including mobile phones, but struggled with other digital skills including using computers or other digital tools. This means that the parents face significant barriers when it comes to moving into work, such as:

- Finding information about support: A lot of information about employability support was shared online or people need to register online. Parents might also not be able to use a search engine or look for specific support online. This means there was less awareness about the support available.

[1] National Literacy Trust. (2009). Adult Literacy Information. Adult literacy | National Literacy Trust. [Accessed 19th April 2024].

- Accessing job advertisement websites: Most jobs are now advertised online and can be found through different portals and search engines. For parents with limited digital skills, navigating these portals and uploading applications in this way could be a barrier to applying for work.
- Not having access to IT equipment: While there are more websites and tools that are now accessible on mobile phones or tablets, there are some aspects for job applications that are not available or accessible on a phone or tablet. Therefore, lack of access to a laptop or computer could become a barrier. In the past, accessing broadband connectivity has often been mentioned as a barrier, however this was not raised in this study as one of the main barriers.
- Digital skills: Parents may lack the digital skills required in jobs. This might be operating digital systems at work, including software to sign in and out of work, or computer software such as the Microsoft Office suite. Linked to this, parents who have been out of work for a long time may lack confidence in their digital skills, which may create a barrier for them.

When asked what employability support they would be most interested in, 41% of parents (n=40) felt training and qualifications were a high priority, and an even greater percentage (44%) wanted support learning specialist skills that would help them to find employment within a particular industry. This aligns with what we heard from parents within the survey about wanting more targeted employment support. In the interviews parents referenced specific sectors that they would like more employment support for the oil and gas industry, IT and technology industry, professional services industry, and the healthcare sector. These survey results were likely a reflection of the demographic groups who were able to complete the survey but might not be fully representative of the population in Aberdeen.

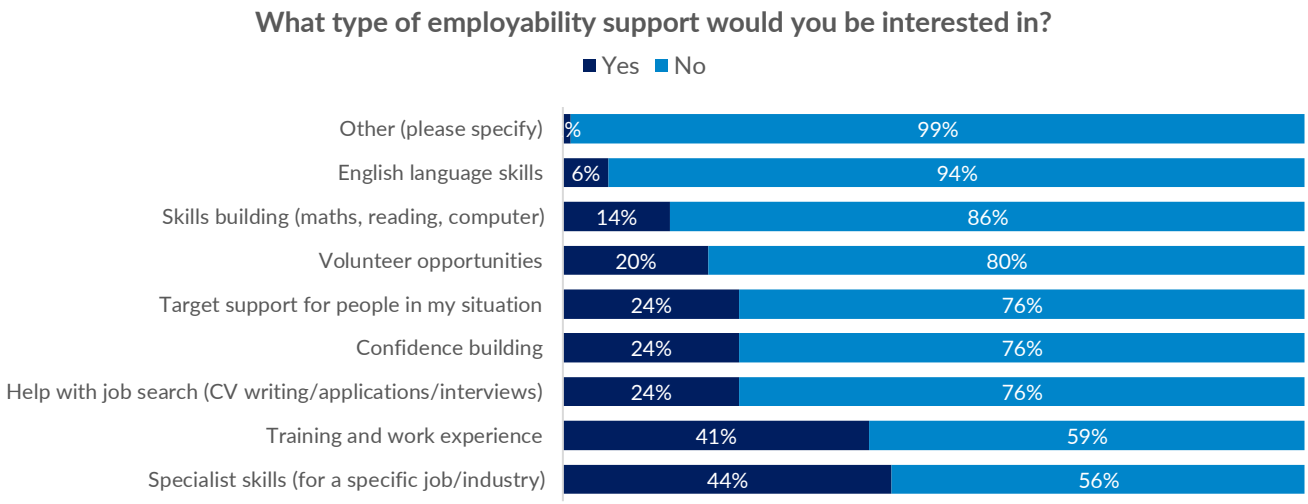


Figure 10. Type of employability support parents would be interested in. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

It was evident from both the survey and interviews that where parents were seeking training, this was because they believe a lack of qualifications was a barrier to them gaining employment. 31% (n=30) of those who completed the survey said they wanted further training to improve their employability. Some parents felt it would be useful for them to have *"more information at the right time"* from employability services about what training was available for them and how it will benefit their career. Available 'at the right time' particularly included mothers who were thinking about returning to work after having children.

Parents who were already in work but experiencing in-work poverty were also named by stakeholders as struggling to access upskilling or other training opportunities. Being in employment and looking after their children means that the parents likely have limited time to engage in training or to access support. This means parents remain in lower paid positions with few opportunities for progression.

"Parents experiencing in-work poverty are hard to reach. They have time constraints and working hours can make engagement very difficult for them. Employers are not always supportive of us reaching their staff as there are concerns about losing employees." - Stakeholder

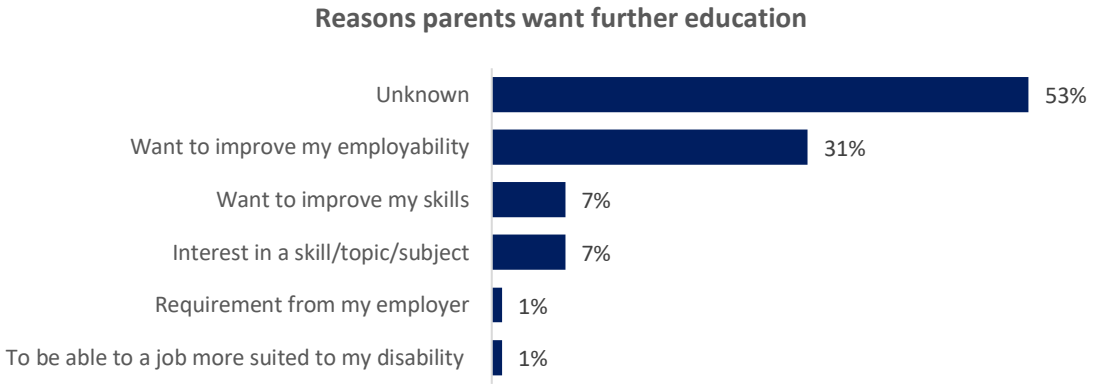


Figure 11. Reasons parents want further education. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

According to stakeholders, parents of children with additional needs and single parents face additional challenges to access training or skills which allow them to progress further in their careers. Their caring responsibilities mean that they do not have time to find opportunities to increase their skills or to access training. Stakeholders gave examples of parents of children with additional needs who attended training while their children were in childcare but had to drop out or did not complete courses because they missed too many classes due to ad hoc childcare responsibilities.

Some stakeholders try to reduce that barrier by enabling online participation, but this is not always possible. Having restricted access to training and skills building was likely to lead to parents being under-employed as they were unable to access the courses needed to progress in their careers.

Generally, location was less of an issue in terms of training, with some parents expressing a preference for online courses, whilst some preferred in-person provision, to have face-to-face connection. However, accessing qualifications and training can be challenging for parents due to the cost, with funding having an impact on accessibility. Almost all parents who said they were interested in further training said that financing it would be hard with one saying that *"cost is the main barrier to pursuing the career that I really want."*

For many parents, they would be dependent on government funding or grants that would allow them to access the support, but few appear to have information about eligibility or how they can access these.

"The problem is my financial situation; I wouldn't be able to afford them at the moment… I haven't got money in the bank to pay for a course, and probably wouldn't get credit to pay for course, so would have to be grants." – Parent

With employment, attending employability support, or training, it can be difficult for parents to ensure they have childcare in place. The additional care needs of a disabled child can be a further barrier, as expressed in the quote below, by one parent who had tried to access college courses.

"I would choose an apprenticeship programme, the main barrier to getting an apprenticeship is the timing with childcare." – Parent

"I did look into college to see if I can do stuff there, but I need to know the hours way before because of care needs of my daughter with a disability." – Parent

Parents noted within the interviews that generally *"things need to be within school hours"* for those with school age children, and that typically if *"you don't have access to childcare anyway, you don't have the full range of options"* at your disposal. This demonstrates how the barriers parents face intersect, as they were not able to upskill themselves due to a lack of childcare available. For those that are in part-time employment, it can also be difficult to upskill themselves through education whilst maintaining their work schedule due to a lack of flexibility. One parent noted that there needs to be *"more availability and flexibility in the kinds of training that can be offered"* to work around parents' needs.

Overall, training and qualifications were a barrier for parents in two ways. The need to upskill, and the lack of transferability of international qualifications can mean qualifications were a barrier to employment. However, parents also faced a number of challenges around getting UK qualifications meaning parents can be prevented from upskilling or accessing employability support. The challenges around training and qualifications work in conjunction with the barriers faced around travel, language barriers, lack of access to public funds, and childcare.

2.6 Other challenges

In addition to these main barriers, parents faced other challenges according to stakeholders to access employability support and to move into employment.

2.6.1 Readiness for support

As previously mentioned, stakeholders believed there was a need for more pre-employability support. There was the understanding among stakeholders that not everyone who was being referred to their services were ready to engage in employment and there were a number of reasons for this. These reasons include:

- Lack of confidence: Many parents might worry about going or returning to work and do not believe they were able or qualified to go into work.
- Lack of trust in services: Parents may have had previous negative experiences engaging with support or statutory services and feel reluctant to open up or engage with services. A couple of parents within the survey and interviews noted having not been helped in the way they needed by services, meaning there may be a need for services to ensure their support was more person-centred and tailored to the individual.
- Duration of support: Stakeholders believed that in some services' the period of time that additional support was offered was too short for parents to get the support they need. For example, one stakeholder spoke about the referral to short-term psychological support, but that this was often not a long-term offer.
- Fear of judgment: Stakeholders explained that some parents were concerned about being judged for being out of work or not having the right skills. There was also fear around them asking for support reflecting negatively on their parenting abilities.

"Getting back into work is daunting because I hadn't worked in about 12 years and have been looking after my children. I didn't know where to start to apply for jobs." – Parent

Services tried to circumvent these challenges by providing a holistic, person-centred and relational approach. Stakeholders explained that building trust and relationships can not only help them support parents better, but it means that there was more space for open conversations to identify additional needs and underlying issues that were barriers to accessing employment, such as childcare or transport.

Another common challenge around readiness for work was raising aspirations for parents. There were three groups which stakeholders primarily mentioned for this:

- Parents with a family history of being out of work: Parents who themselves grew up in communities or families that were primarily unemployed and receiving benefits and have seen this as the norm throughout their lives might lack awareness of employment opportunities. This means that support workers have to work to raise aspirations and change cultural norms and show parents what they can achieve and what opportunities they could have.
- Parents returning to work: Stakeholders gave examples of parents who were returning to work after years, sometimes decades, of childcare or kinship care. These parents often lacked an understanding of the skills they have and how these applied to the current job market. They had low aspirations and were often asking or looking for low paid jobs thinking they were not qualified for other roles. Sometimes this also meant parents spoke about being in roles that they knew they were overqualified for, feeling that their time out of employment had stunted career progression. One parent noted they felt that, as a mother, they would face discrimination within the hiring process due to their time out of employment or their additional childcare and flexibility needs. Additionally, some parents spoke about how they had been out of employment for long periods of time due to caring for children with additional needs. This can mean they can also lack recent work experience and therefore feel that they will be unsuccessful when applying for employment or seeking support. As a result, returning to work can seem daunting or unfeasible, and these parents may require further knowledge around what support options were available to them.
- Parents with a migrant background or parents from an ethnic minority background: Stakeholders working with migrant communities explained that these parents were just looking for any job and often specifically asked for cleaning jobs, even if they had higher qualifications in their country of origin. Parents had concerns about not being qualified for anything else due to their lack of English. Support services try to encourage and work with parents in these situations to increase their aspirations.

"It is about making the goals realistic to the parents and trying to start small and to go from there. Trying to get them on your side and believe in you as a person can help." – Stakeholder

Stakeholders noted that there was a lack of support to help parents transition into work, also known as 'in-work support'. The challenges and barriers parents faced to become ready for work were often still present when moving into the workplace, but there was less support available to navigate how these challenges impacted their lives once in work. Historically this

may be due to funding streams, such as European Social Fund (ESF), which would not fund in-work support.

2.6.2 Mental health challenges

Stakeholders commonly mentioned mental health challenges as a barrier to accessing employability support and employment. This issue included the following scenarios:

- Parents with mental health conditions or additional support needs: There was limited access to support services for parents with mental health conditions or additional support needs. This ranges from access to a diagnosis, to support for the daily management of their mental health. Additionally, where parents have been out of work due to mental health, this can impact their self-confidence and belief, meaning they do not feel that they can be successful when seeking employment.
- Trauma support: Stakeholders noted that since the Covid-19 pandemic they were seeing increasing numbers of parents with mental health issues and a lack of support for these parents who might be dealing with mental health issues for the first time, as trauma they previously were able to navigate became more obvious and challenging over the pandemic. Similarly, refugees, displaced people and asylum seeker parents were likely to have experienced traumatic events in their country of origin and were dealing with relocating to a different country, often with family still in their country of origin. There was no or very limited mental health support available in their own languages.
- Need for respite: For parents of children with disabilities or additional support needs, there was often no or limited respite support available. Stakeholders gave examples of parents needing to provide intensive care and support for their children 24/7 without getting a chance to take a break, leading to mental health challenges. Respite support might help parents engage in other activities, including employability support or employment.

"Mental health ever since Covid is a huge issue for the parents and children. This is going to impact employment, health and wellbeing, so we need to work on this. Mental health challenges mean engagement in support may be inconsistent." – Stakeholder

Mental health was also a significant issue raised by stakeholders. For example, they shared concerns of a perception felt by some parents that disclosing mental health issues could result in their children being taken away. As a result, some parents may require more reassurance from services about their situation and mental health issues, to ensure they feel comfortable accessing support. There were also concerns around children's needs being met if were not being "met in school, and parents are isolated and struggle to leave the house." These families may need access to services that take more of a whole-family approach, and work with the parents, but also with schools, to ensure both parent and child's needs were met.

2.6.3 Challenges with employment opportunities

Stakeholders acknowledged that parents also face several structural and societal challenges, especially around the available job opportunities. Stakeholders believe that there was a need to work more closely with employers to enable more opportunities for parents to enter the workforce in a way that is conducive to their other responsibilities and needs. The stakeholders have seen some employers who were doing well in making more flexible opportunities available but that there is substantial work needed to work with employers to make this more common.

The requirements parents have of their potential future workplaces include:

- Flexible timings: Stakeholders explained that parents need the possibility of flexible times that work around their childcare obligations. This might be starting later or finishing earlier or reducing the number of hours they work. There are often set working patterns that employers have but these were not always possible for parents.
- Understanding of ad hoc childcare needs: Parents were, at times, required to take ad hoc time off to look after their child. This is especially relevant for parents with children with additional support needs who might need to be picked up from childcare or school at different times or at short notice. Single parents with no or fragile support networks were particularly impacted by this as they might not have another person they can share these childcare responsibilities with.
- Support for school holidays: As mentioned above, school holidays were a significant challenge for parents in Aberdeen and having flexible employment structures around this or supportive employers to adjust working patterns to term-time only or similar would be helpful for parents.

- Flexible workplace: While this is not possible for all jobs, having the option or flexibility to work remotely and to work from home, when needed, can help parents manage their workload and childcare obligations better. This could enable someone to work more hours per day, as the time travelling to the workplace would be reduced.

"Parents are trying to find jobs that are within school drop off or pick up time. So they might only be available for 2-4 hrs a day and a lot of employers are not willing to employ them." - Stakeholder

A number of parents have expressed an interest in self-employment and were aware of support mechanisms to achieve this.

Stakeholders also suggested that support services could potentially work more closely with employers to advocate on behalf of the parents they work with, as well as trying to find reasonable solutions for both employers and parents.

3. Conclusion and discussion

In this section we summarise the key themes that emerged from the study and make recommendations for further consideration.

From the research, it is evident that many parents faced additional challenges accessing both employment and employability support, but that there was a desire to find out more about what is available locally and how they could access it.

The evidence from this study suggests that common barriers faced by parents include:

- Childcare responsibilities, and the cost or lack of childcare facilities, particularly if the parent has a child with a disability.
- Limited flexibility to support parents in jobs, or a perception by parents that there will be limited flexibility from employers.
- Difficulties in re-entering the workforce because of outdated skills or qualifications, especially after returning from caring responsibilities.
- Challenges completing application processes and paperwork to access employability support, particularly to apply for financial support through the welfare system.

- Awareness of employability support and opportunities locally available to them, and the eligibility requirements to access these.

Evidence[2] has shown that parents of disabled children are declining promotions, accepting lower skilled work, reducing hours of work or opting out of the labour market altogether to care for their children. This group of parents face more labour market challenges. While finding suitable and affordable childcare is seen by parents as the main barrier to paid work, there are many other obstacles for parents of disabled children, including:

- Taking time off to deal with hospital appointments, health issues and incidents at school.
- Inflexible access to health, care and education services.
- The lack of part-time and flexible work options.
- The complexity of the benefits system and the perceived lack of financial incentives to take on paid work.
- The perceived lack of focused services to support those who wish to return to work.

Research[3] highlights the economic and social consequences of unemployment and under-employment, with families of disabled children being at greater risk of experiencing poverty, poor housing, social isolation and family break ups. Often statutory services focus on the needs of disabled children and don't address the wider family context. These children's services may provide important touchpoints where referrals to specialist employability services could be made for the parents.

Employability services could seek to reach parents through different communication channels, such as email, word of mouth and social media. Often the support parents require is sector specific or relates to their individual needs which can differ. Taking a person-centred approach to the support, which focuses on the needs of the parents and their dependents, can ensure it is more accessible and appropriate for long-term impact. In summary:

- There is a need to ensure the information is concise and comprehensive as parents might find different information in different places. A unified message about a 'no

[2] https://workingfamilies.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/FindingFlexibility-parentsofdisabledchildrenandpaidwork.pdf
[3] Ibid

wrong door approach' would ensure parents could access support and are not discouraged or overwhelmed by the volume of information.

- Increasingly complex needs might require more support in different areas to better support parents. Parents with intersecting barriers are more likely to have complex needs and need targeted support, e.g. single parents from ethnic minority backgrounds or those with children who have a disability or additional needs.
- Meeting parents where they are: this means meeting parents both in a location that works for them and ensuring services are appropriate, based on the readiness for individuals to return to the labour market.
- There is a need for basic skills, language and digital skills, for parents furthest removed from the labour market.
- There is a need for training and in work support for some parents to help them progress in the workplace.

This study suggests a lack of awareness of employability services intended to help parents back into work and that lone parents in particular may face barriers in accessing services.

4. Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations to be considered to improve access to employability support for parents. These include:

- Increase awareness of employability services using online and offline communications, and signposting: The majority of parents across the interviews and survey felt that they did not have sufficient information about what support is available to them as a parent in Aberdeen. One option is to provide information to parents using a variety of different channels, for example:
  - Social media could be used to advertise the availability of services, through Facebook adverts, or Instagram pages.
  - Additionally, some parents found out about services through in person adverts in public places, such as at bus stops. Increasing both online and physical adverts, which signpost individuals to websites or local services they can access could help increase awareness of what is available to them.

- Email is the preferred method of communication for many parents, so capturing email addresses and communicating by email should be a default option. Linked to this, follow-up emails offering more information may be helpful in encouraging parents to access services, if they have made an initial enquiry but not yet progressed into accessing support.
- Signposting from, and information provided by other organisations, either via staff or on their websites, may be a valuable way to communicate the range of support available and may increase engagement with parents who are not currently accessing employability support. This would also apply to other staff within the local authority who may be able to have initial discussions with parents.

- Ensure childcare options are meeting needs of parents in terms of location, capacity and appropriateness: In addition to affordability, childcare can be a barrier for parents as often there is not capacity for their children within an area that is local to them. Similarly, specialist support is needed for parents of children with additional support needs to ensure childcare is available so parents can access employability services. Having good, up to date, reliable information on the availability and location of a range of childcare services and ways to access them would support employability providers to connect parents to opportunities.

- Increase opportunities for easier access to specialist training and qualifications: Holding non-UK qualifications has been identified as a particular barrier to parents employing equivalent positions in Aberdeen as these are often not recognised by UK employers. As such, many are seeking further training opportunities to increase their employability in their chosen fields. Additional support to gain formal equivalencies of qualifications may be required for some groups. It is likely that this support requirement does not specifically relate to parents.

- Holistic support: Continue to ensure there is a holistic and relational approach to employability support services to identify and help reduce underlying barriers parents might have to access employability support. This includes recognition that parents with no recourse to public funds cannot access some publicly funded support. They may need to be redirected to support they can access. In addition, many parents who are out of work are female, and there may be a case for gender-specific employability support. Gender specific employability support does not only relate to support being delivered in a women's

only space – which may be culturally appropriate as well as preferred by some women - but also relates to the content of the support. Often parents, and particularly mothers, who have had a break from employment require more support to build confidence and self-esteem.

- Co-design services: Co-designing services with parents may help to improve accessibility, particularly in terms of not only the type of services available, but also the locations and delivery times. One note of caution is that people generally speak from their own perspective, rather than on behalf of a cohort as a whole, so any co-design of services needs to be carefully managed and tested with operational staff.

- Increased support for employers: additional support for employers, and in particular SMEs, may be beneficial in building their confidence in employing parents. This could include an awareness raising campaign, practical support with recruitment and guides to support smaller employers to understand good practice in flexible working.

Appendix 1: Survey respondents' demographic data

The majority of parents who responded to the survey were between the ages of 36 and 45 (n=46) with a smaller number being over 46 (n=34). Very few were under the age of 31 (n=5), meaning the findings are skewed to an older demographic.

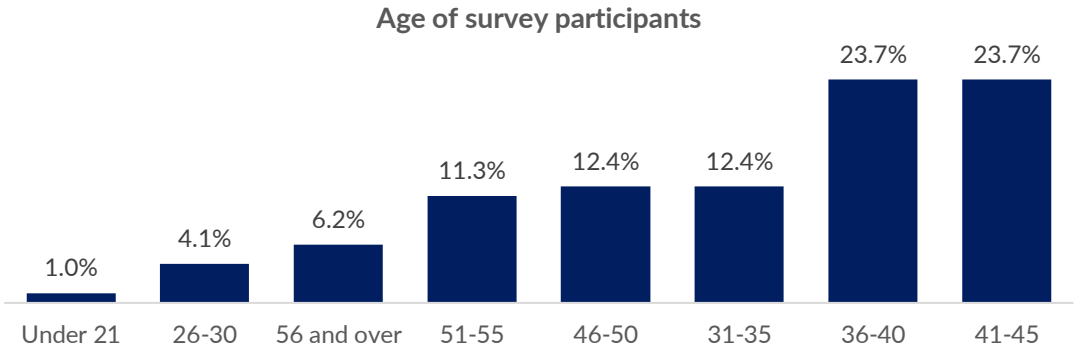


Figure 12. Age of survey participants. [Source: Parent survey 2024]

Similarly, 63% (n=62) of respondents to the survey identified as White Scottish, or another White background. Only 8% (n=14) identified as being African British or another African background, and 6% (n=6) were Indian, Indian Scottish, Indian British, meaning the survey results are not necessarily representative of parents from all backgrounds across Aberdeen.

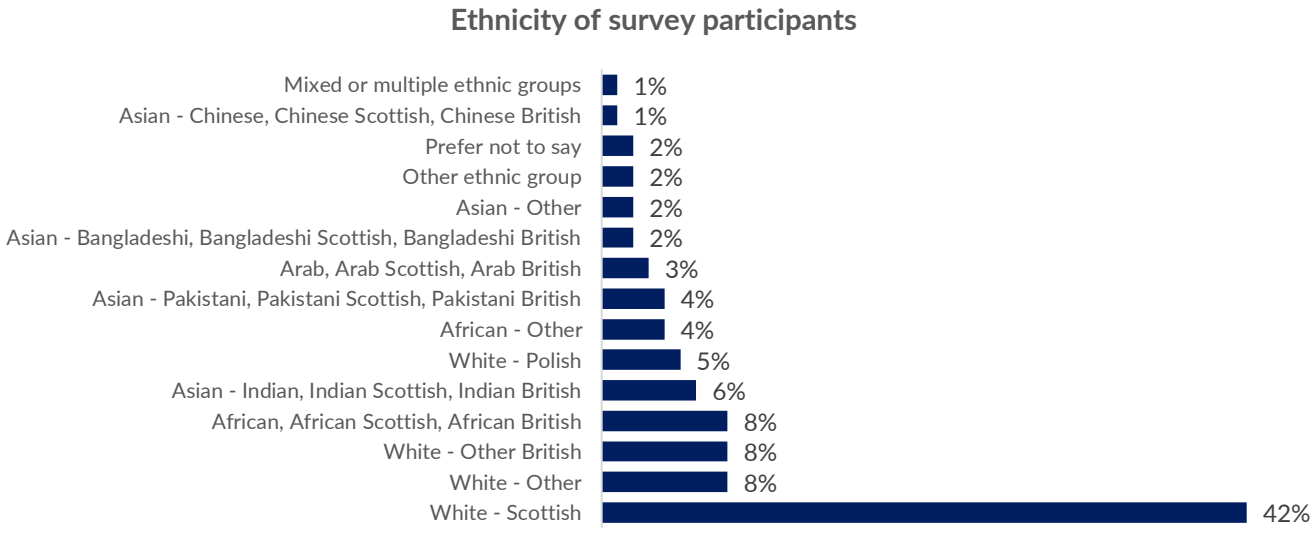


Figure 13. Ethnicity of survey participants. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

Of those who completed the survey, a quarter of parents (n=24) were employed full time, with a further 34% (n=33) being employed part time. 33% (n=32) were not currently in employment, with 18% (n=17) of these individuals currently seeking work. Those who said they were not seeking work largely said that was due to their caring responsibilities (n=4), or a disability or long-term sickness (n=5) which prevented them seeking work.

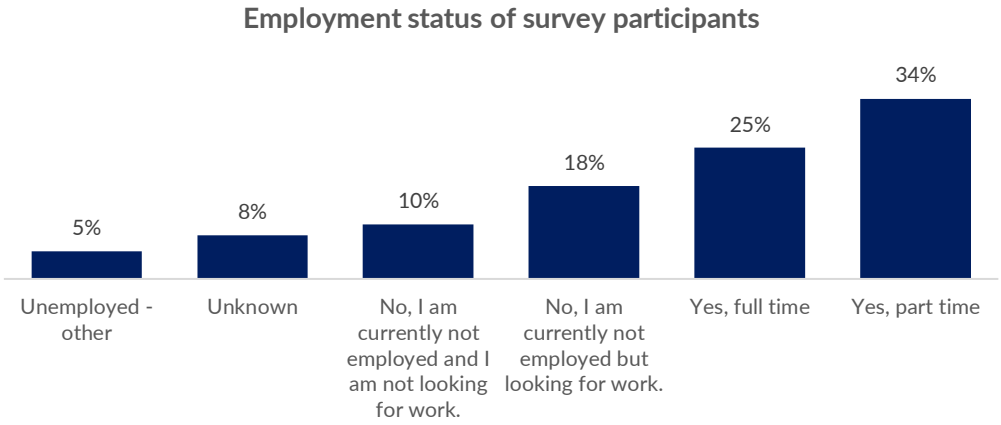


Figure 14. Employment status of survey participants. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

51% (n=49) who took part in the survey said they were educated to bachelors or masters degree level. The desire to take part in more education, training and qualifications was also evident within the survey as 47% said they were interested in further education, as can be seen below.

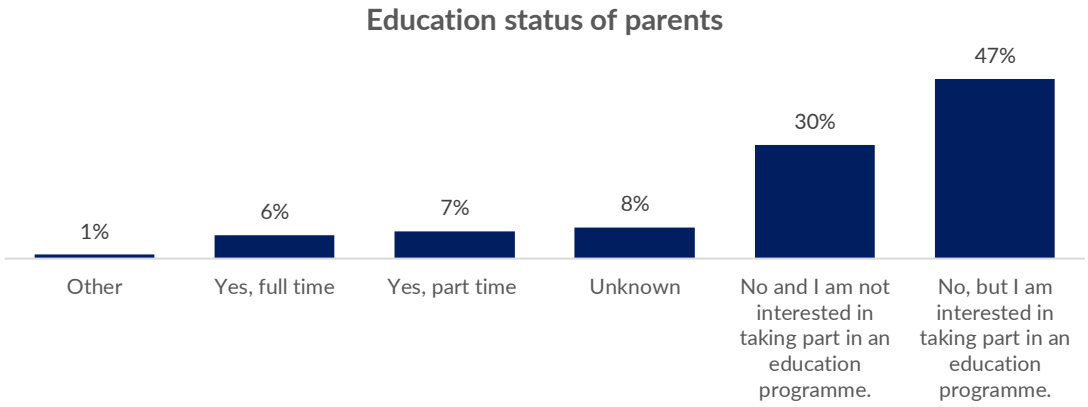


Figure 15. Education status of survey participants. [Source: Parent survey 2024].

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Rocket Science UK Limited 2024

Lot	Contract Name	Provider	Funding Stream	No. of Places
1	**16-24 1-2-1 Support**	Foyer	NOLB/TCP	50
1	**25+ 1-2-1 Support**	Foyer	NOLB/TCP	30
3	**Hospitality 16-24**	Tre-Life	NOLB/TCP	36
3	**Hospitality/customer service 25+**	Foyer	NOLB/TCP	40
3	**ELC (YP & Parents)**	Barnardo's	NOLB/TCP	40
3	**Warehouse Skills**	CFINE	NOLB/TCP	32
3	**Construction Training**	Foyer	NOLB/TCP	64
3	**Sector Specific IT Skills**	NESCOL	NOLB/TCP	100
4	**CV Workshops**	Pathways	NOLB/TCP	36 workshops
6	**Digital/Media Skills**	SHMU	NOLB/TCP	40
6	**ESOL**	Pitman	NOLB/TCP	168
6	**Multi Stage YP**	Tre-Life	NOLB	60
6	**Multi Stage YP**	Foyer	NOLB	50
6	**Multi Stage YP**	WorkingRite	NOLB	22
6	**Multi Stage YP**	Barnardo's	NOLB	18
6	**Multi-stage lot (25+)**	Tre-Life	NOLB/TCP	100
6	**Multi Stage Parent**	Foyer	TCP	150
6	**Multi Stage Justice Support**	Foyer	NOLB/TCP	50
6	**Multi Stage CEYP**	WorkingRite	NOLB/TCP	25
6	**Basic IT Skills**	NESCOL	NOLB/TCP	200
7	**Disabilities Support**	SHMU	NOLB/TCP	20
7	**Disabilities Support**	Values into Action	NOLB/TCP	40
7	**Health Barriers**	SAMH	NOLB/TCP	150
9	**Creative Activities**	Tre-Life	NOLB/TCP	32
9	**Creative Activities**	Foyer	NOLB/TCP	28
9	**Adventurous Outdoor Activities**	Foyer	NOLB/TCP	24
9	**Volunteering Lot**	Tre-Life	NOLB/TCP	40
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