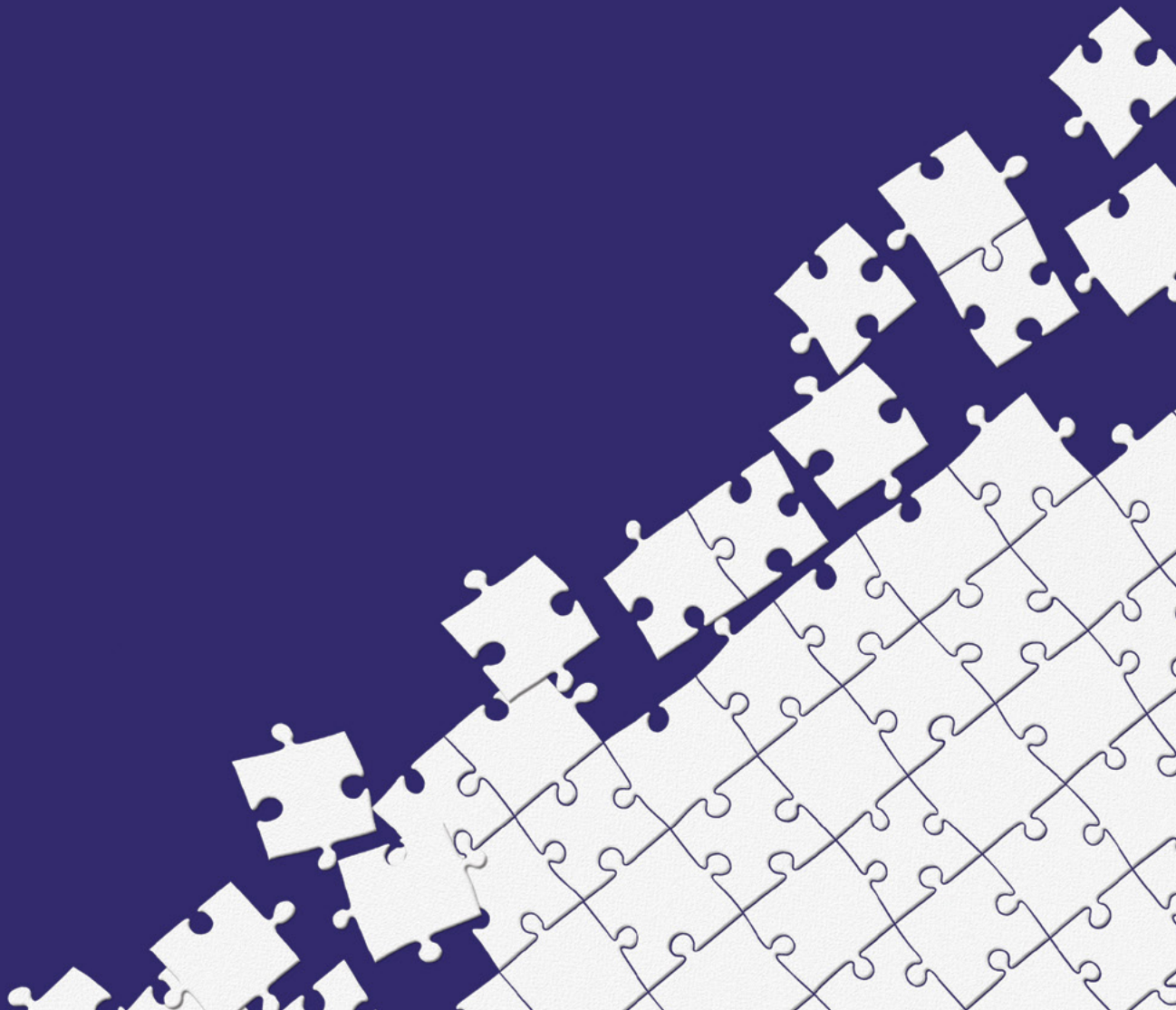




# Working for Fife 2025

Third sector employability provision; a key contribution to Fife's services to the public



# Introduction

The third sector in Scotland, working in collaboration with public and private partners, is providing considerable support and a sizeable contribution to the delivery of services to the public across all areas of life and work.

Over 46,500 third sector organisations, employing more than 136,000 paid staff and working with over 800,000 volunteers, are active in Scotland<sup>1</sup>.

In Fife there are over 3,600 paid employees and 80,000 volunteers, supporting more than 3,000 organisations across the local authority.

From community, economic and social development to health and social care, housing, environment, education and research, culture and sport, advocacy, grant making and more, third sector paid staff and volunteers are actively participating in community wealth building and inclusive growth across Scotland.

Fife Voluntary Action (FVA), the third sector interface in Fife, is working closely with local and national partners to ensure that shared ambitions and responsibilities are supported for the benefit of the people in Fife.

This includes a well-developed and successful collaboration within the Opportunities Fife Partnership (OFP - our Local Employability Partnership (LEP)), with FVA being funded to provide a range of activities and resources aimed at capacity building support for third sector employability services in the area.

This effective collaboration exemplifies how “working across boundaries”<sup>2</sup> and “leveraging expertise across sectors through a mixed economy of provision remains crucial” and “makes a lasting impact for those who face inequalities and remain furthest from Scotland’s labour market” as highlighted in the No One Left Behind Strategic Plan 2024-2027.

The 2025 Working for Fife report captures the range, scope and impact of the third sector employability services in Fife. The report focuses on the key contribution that these services make to the Fife employability pathway funded by the Opportunities Fife Partnership.

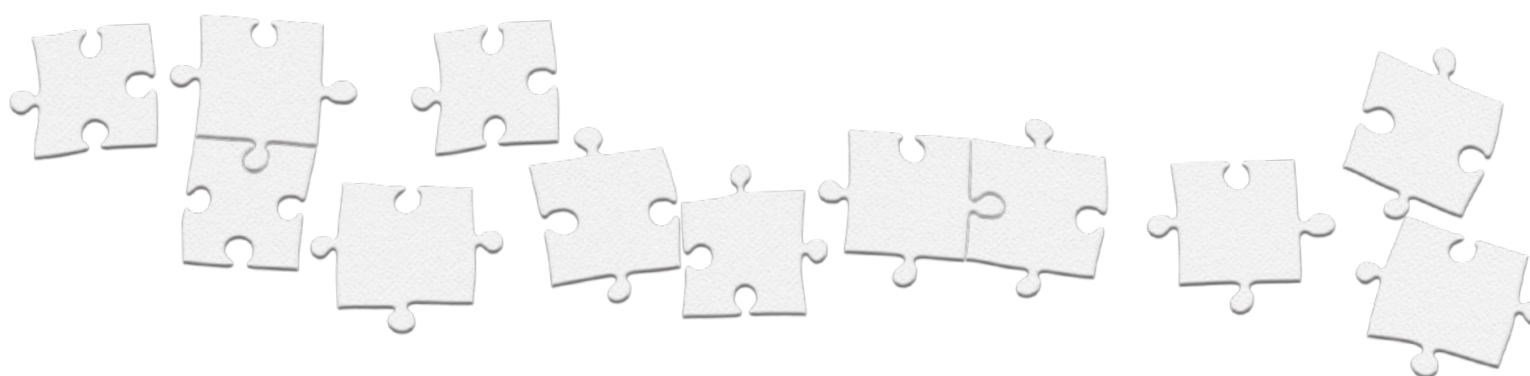
This is the fifth edition of our Working for Fife report. Copies of the previous reports for 2013, 2015, 2018 and 2021 are available on the FVA website.



1. State of the sector - Size and shape - SCVO  
2. No One Left Behind - Employability Strategic Plan 2024-2027

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# Employability in Fife

## National Context

Employability in Fife sits within a complex UK wide, Scottish, regional and local context.

Across these levels, Fife's employability system aims to provide person centred support; it considers individual and structural barriers, fosters existing skills and abilities while establishing clear priorities based on socio-economic data and on effective partnerships with employers.

Fife's employability services do not work in isolation; they operate on a well-established partnership model, interacting closely with other key policy areas and supporting the four key priorities set within the current powers of the Scottish Parliament: eradicating child poverty, growing the economy, tackling the climate emergency, and ensuring high quality and sustainable public services<sup>3</sup>. This model places Fife well in the emerging Whole Family Support policy drive at Scottish Government level, which is filtering through a wide range of policy directives, underpinned by a growing emphasis on Public Service Reform<sup>4</sup>.

Employability services are about reducing inequalities, tackling poverty and building a fairer, more inclusive economy where individuals and communities can thrive.

### UK priorities, the wider context

While the Scotland Act 2016 transferred new powers to Scotland to provide employment support for disabled people and those at risk of long-term unemployment with effect from April 2017, employment law itself remains a reserved matter in the UK, with limited policy scope devolved to the nations.

The Get Britain Working White Paper published in November 2024 and backed by a £240m investment, outlines the new UK long-term ambition of an 80% employment rate against the current rate of 74.8%<sup>5</sup>. The white paper sets out details of reforms to employment support to help tackle rising economic inactivity<sup>6</sup> levels, support people into good work, and create an inclusive labour market in which everybody can participate and progress in work. All UK regions, including Scotland's local authorities, are expected to develop appropriate plans aligned to their economic growth strategy and focused on their local circumstances. The paper states, "This requires a full UK and devolved government, public sector, third sector, and business effort."

There remains a concern regarding rising levels of economic inactivity in the post-pandemic landscape.

Fife's employability services  
do not work in isolation - they operate  
on a well-established partnership model

3. Programme for Government 2024-25: Serving Scotland - gov. scot

4. Public Service Reform strategy launched, June 2025

5. UK Labour market March 2025

6. People not in employment who have not been seeking work within the last 4 weeks and/or are unable to start work within the next 2 weeks.

FIGURE 1: Economic inactivity rate, UK 1994-2024, 16-64



Margin of error for these figures are +/- 0.8% and ± 331,000  
 Source: Labour Force Survey, seasonally adjusted

As expressed by Rt Hon Alan Milburn in the Get Britain Working paper and regarding the Pathways to Work Commission in Barnsley calling for a radical new approach:

*Built on a new national ambition to build a more inclusive economy where people have a right to work, and an expectation that those who can, should be helped to do so. Tackling economic inactivity must become the national mission shaping welfare and employment policy over the next decade. That will require action across government but also by employers, local authorities, charities, communities and, of course, citizens themselves. P29*

This overarching goal is supported by three pillars:

1. Invest 2035:  
The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy<sup>7</sup> and Local Growth Plans
2. Improving Quality and Security of Work through the 'Plan to Make Work Pay'<sup>8</sup>
3. Reforms to Employment Support  
- as outlined in the Get Britain Working White Paper

7. Invest 2035: the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy

8. Next Steps to Make Work Pay (web accessible version) - GOV.UK

Expectations are that regional (City Region Deals' areas) and local planning (Local Authority) should aim to tackle six key issues:

- 1 People excluded from the labour market, including those with health conditions, caring responsibilities and lower skills
- 2 Young people leaving school without essential skills or access to further learning
- 3 Insecure, poor-quality and low-paying work which contributes to weaker economy and affects health and wellbeing
- 4 Women with family responsibilities experiencing challenges to staying and progressing in work
- 5 Employers struggling to fill vacancies due to labour and skills shortages
- 6 Labour market outcome disparity by geography or community

In addition to changes in UK employment law and flexible working policies<sup>9</sup> applicable in Scotland, other initiatives are underway to help reducing economic inactivity. They include initiatives such as:

- 'Trailblazer' areas will get funding to trial new interventions and increase engagement - Fife will be a trailblazer area<sup>10</sup>
- Funding focussed on economic inactivity at local level through 'Connect to Work' and a new Get Britain Working Fund
- An independent review of the role of UK Employers in promoting healthy and inclusive workplaces. This review is running until summer 2025 and focuses on:
  - Increasing recruitment and retention of disabled people and those with a health condition
  - Preventing people becoming unwell at work through promoting good and healthy workplaces
  - Early intervention for sickness absence and improving return to work ratios

The first stage of the review was a 'discovery phase', with the Keep Britain Working Review: Discovery report published 20 March 2025. This review aimed to identify drivers of inactivity and where there is the greatest potential for employers and government to make a difference from the UK's point of view.

## Employability in Scotland, the national landscape

The challenges and priorities identified at UK level are reflected in Scotland and addressed at national, regional and local level under the Fair Start Scotland<sup>11</sup> and No One Left Behind<sup>12</sup> policy frameworks and associated local employability partnerships work at local authority level.

October 2024 statistics<sup>13</sup> show 137,663 starts on either Fair Start Scotland (FSS) or No One Left Behind from April 2018 to June 2024.

Of the participants being supported through No One Left Behind, the highest proportion (13%) are being supported in Glasgow City, which is also the most populated local authority area. Fife supports the next highest proportion of participants (7%).

Overall, most participants being supported through No One Left Behind are aged under 25 (56%). However, this does vary by local authority area. Aberdeen City (61%), Inverclyde (56%), West Dunbartonshire (54%), Aberdeenshire (54%) and Fife (51%) have a higher proportion of participants aged 25 and over.

Overall, 20% of participants supported through No One Left Behind have a disability. This varies by local authority. North Ayrshire have the highest proportion (32%), followed by Clackmannanshire (30%), Fife (29%) and Scottish Borders (29%).

There have been 70,513 starts to FSS since April 2018, including 6,999 re-joins which has been possible since April 2021.

Overall, there have been 26,038 job starts since FSS launched.

9. What employment laws are changing from April 2024?

10. UK Government announces 25 Trailblazer Neighbourhoods, June 2025

11. Fair Start Scotland was Scotland's first fully devolved employment support service commencing in April 2018 with the closing of new referrals to the service in March 2024. Fair Start Scotland was the first step towards the delivery of a tailored, person-centred employability support system in Scotland.

12. No One Left Behind - Policy | Employability in Scotland

13. Scotland's Devolved Employment Services: statistical summary July 2023

Official statistics<sup>14</sup> published in February 2025 for No One Left Behind show a total of 73,470 starts from April 2019 to September 2024. The number of people starting to receive support has increased each year from 2,642 in year 1 (2019/20) to 21,919 in year 5 (2023/24). 22,782 (31%) of them have entered employment, 10,519 (14%) entered further education or training, with over 25,000 further people also achieving other positive outcomes, such as gaining a qualification, starting work experience or volunteering. It is to be noted that 14,957 (20%) of participants were economically inactive when starting to receive support on No One Left Behind.

Addressing economic inactivity through the provision of appropriate person-centred employability support as per the 2022 Fair Work Action Plan remains a key priority in tackling poverty in Scotland.

The economic inactivity rate for people aged 16 to 64 years in Scotland based on the March 2025 ONS Labour Force Survey was estimated at 22.9% in November-January 2025, while the employment and unemployment rates sat respectively at 74.1% and 4.5% unemployment for the same period. The Scotland’s economic inactivity rate remains above the UK rate of 21.5%.

This follows a period during which Scotland’s levels of economic inactivity have remained high or increased as pictured below<sup>15</sup>.

**FIGURE 2: Economic inactivity rate: Scotland: Aged 16-64**

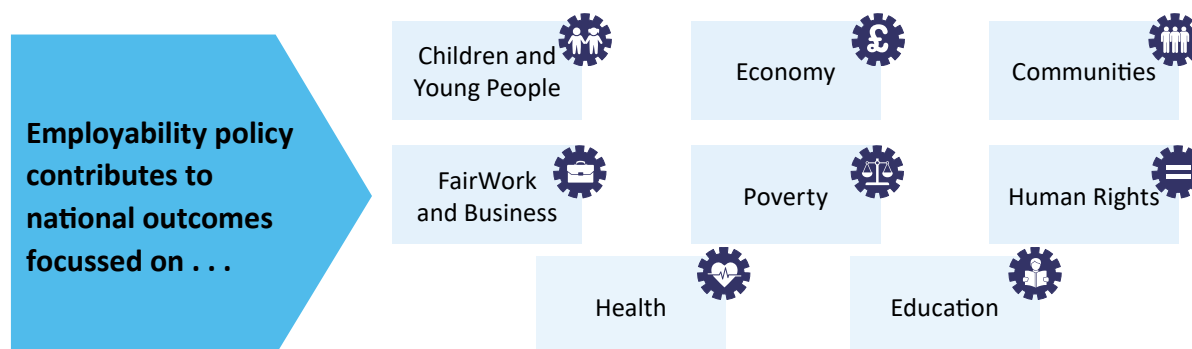


The 22.9% inactivity rate is averaged by gender; the rate is higher for women at 25.9% compared with men at 19.0%

14 Scotland’s Devolved Employment Services: No One Left Behind Statistical Summary February 2025 - gov.scot  
 15. LFS: Economic inactivity rate: Scotland: Aged 16-64: All: %: SA - Office for National Statistics

The No One Left Behind Employability Strategic Plan 2024-2027 published in September 2004 outlines the continued ambitions and key drivers for employability in Scotland. These include working across policy areas

to tackle a broad range of barriers affecting employment prospects for individuals in Scotland and impacting on opportunities and positive outcomes for all as described in the plan:



### Strategic Context

National Strategy for Economic Transformation; Fair Work Action plan; Best Start, Bright Futures; Verity House Agreement and COSLA Plan

### Our Policy Vision

To deliver an employability system that tackles Inequalities in Scotland's labour market, creating a responsive and aligned approach that helps people of all ages who face the greatest barriers to progress towards, into and to sustain work.

### Our strategic priorities

- Continuing to improve the employability system
- Tackling child poverty by increasing parental income from employment
- Supporting disabled people and those with a long-term health condition
- Delivering jointly with wider public services
- Working with employers to improve outcomes
- Supporting a just transition and net zero

### Outcomes

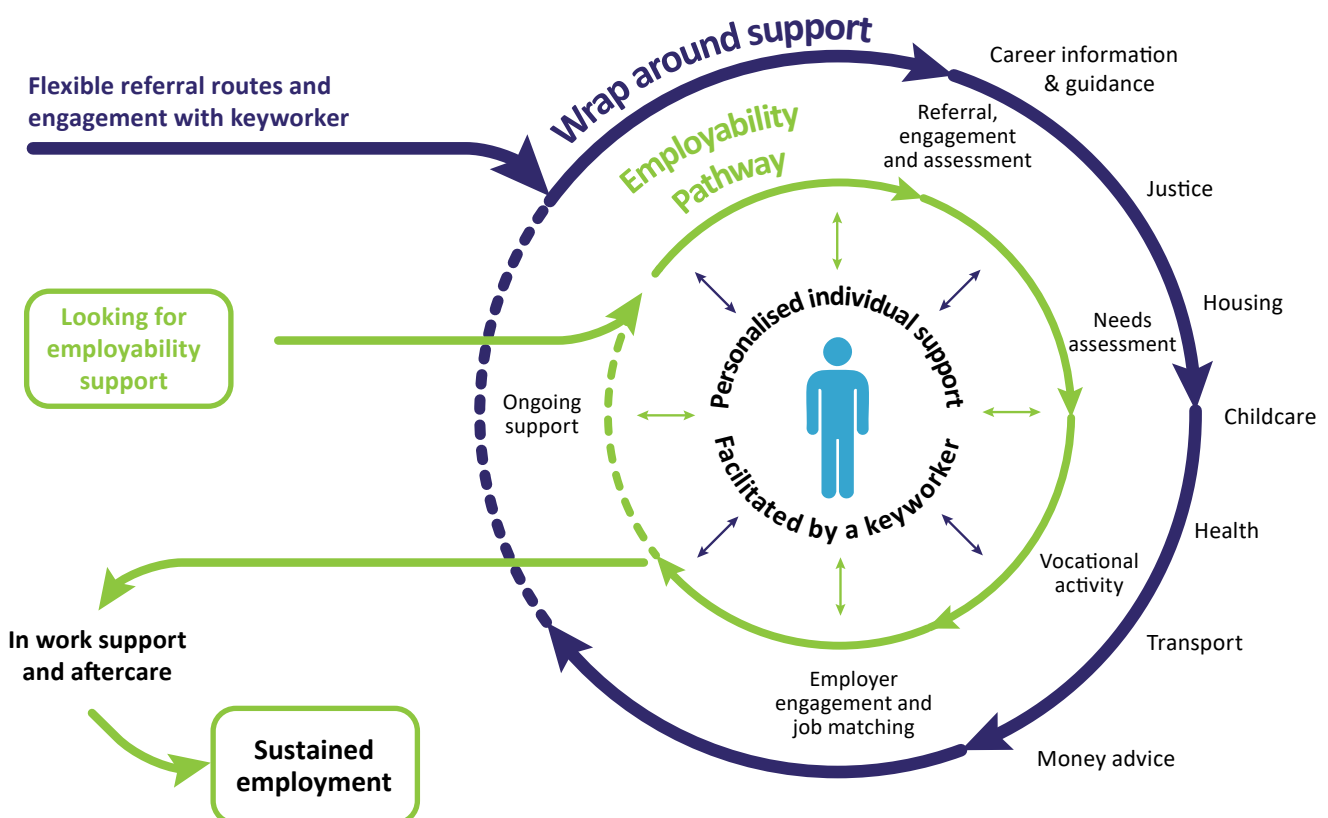
- Supporting the creation of a labour market that is fair, inclusive and provides sustainable and well-paid jobs
- Enabling equal access to an increased range of opportunities whilst challenging bias, structural and personal barriers
- Helping people into fair and sustainable jobs to deliver inclusive growth, tackle child poverty and support better health
- Providing person-centred support to people who wish to work but face barriers to do so

The new No One Left Behind plan also reiterates and reinforces the values and principles at the heart of Scottish Government employability policy, namely:



These principles are applied through a holistic approach to individual journeys, defined as:

**The Employability Customer Journey Model**



The Minister for Employment and Investment, Tom Arthur MSP also announced in September 2024, that disabled people are to be offered help from a dedicated employability adviser by summer 2025. This decision was agreed jointly with local government following the reviews of Individual Placement and Support and Supported Employment provision in Scotland.

At national level, this represents a sustained investment of more than £32.5m for 2024-2025, complemented by £40.1m in Parental Employability Support and £2.49m

in General Revenue Grant<sup>16</sup>. The 2025-2026 allocations were confirmed at the beginning of April this year, with a total of £90 million in devolved employability support.

These allocations were supplemented by UK Shared Prosperity Funding<sup>17</sup> 2022-2025 (under the People and Skills and including a ringfenced element for the Multiply allocation to local authorities). The UK Shared Prosperity allocation for 2025-2026 was confirmed in December 2024, with an average reduction of 40% across the country.

## Local and Regional Context

### Fife social and economic context

The latest Fife Strategic Assessment<sup>18</sup> published in July 2024, shows that Fife continues to face persistent issues which are causing social, economic and environmental harm to people and communities. Following the 2021-24 post pandemic update of the 2017-27 Plan for Fife<sup>19</sup>, focused on recovery and renewal through a community wealth building approach, the position was reviewed again to retain focussed commitments for 2024-2027. While no revised plan has been published for the 2024-27 period, ambitions and objectives are still fully articulated in the original 10-year plan and the 2021 update.

The strategic drivers for 2024-2027 are:

- **Tackling the root cause of poverty and inequality**
- **Growing the local economy and building community wealth**
- **Addressing the impacts of climate change**

These ambitions are supported by the Fife's Economic Strategy 2023-30<sup>20</sup>. One of the three priorities of the strategy being: "Delivering Skills, Training & Fair Employment", with the following stated outcomes:

*And by 2030, achieve the following outcomes:*

- *Higher rates of employment and reduced levels of economic inactivity*
- *Fewer people claiming out-of-work benefits and suffering the greatest levels of deprivation*
- *At least 95% of our school leavers go to and are still in a positive destination after six months*
- *An increase in average wages and the percentage of employee jobs which are paid above the Real Living Wage*
- *More employers are accredited as Real Living Wage employers . . .*

Economic inactivity for Fife residents aged 16-64, as recorded by the SDS Data Matrix for 2024, shows an average percentage of 21.2%, below the Scotland figure of 23.4%. However, figures for long-term sick remain considerably higher as shown below.

16. 2024-2025-funding-allocations.pdf

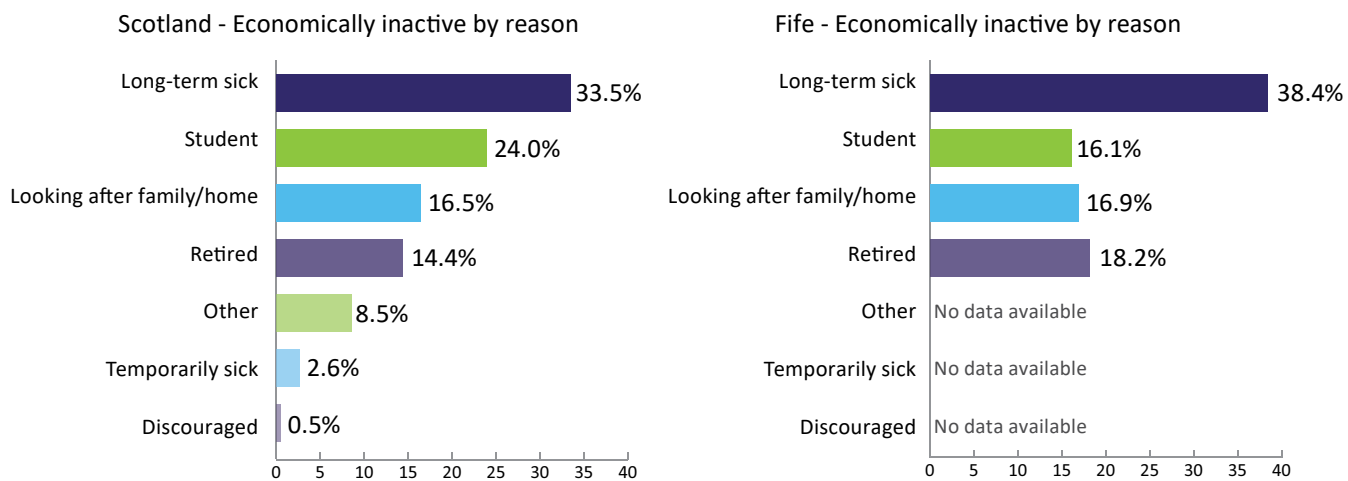
17. UKSPF allocations (2022-2025) - GOV.UK

18. Fife-Strategic-Assessment-2024-Final.pdf

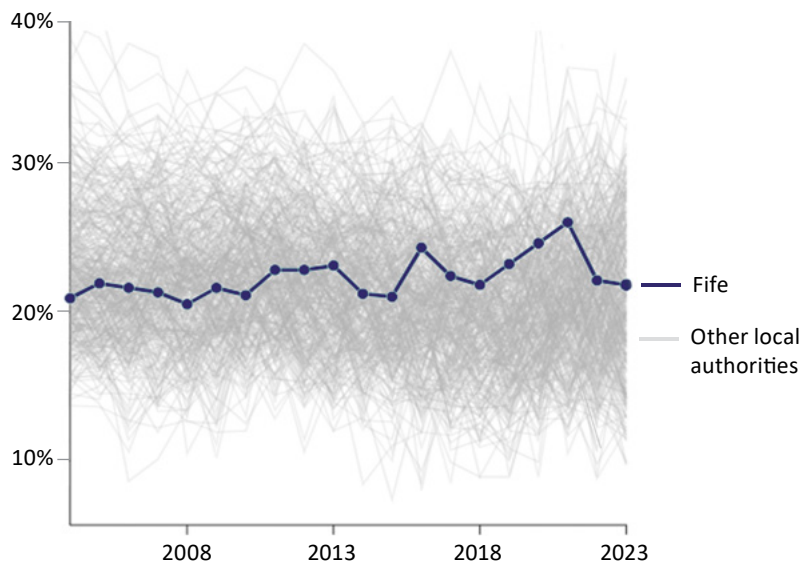
19. A Plan for Fife | Our Fife - Creating a successful, confident and fairer Fife

20. FIFE-ECONOMIC-STRATEGY-2023-30-AUG.pdf

**FIGURE 3: Economic inactivity, Fife and Scotland, residents aged 16-64**

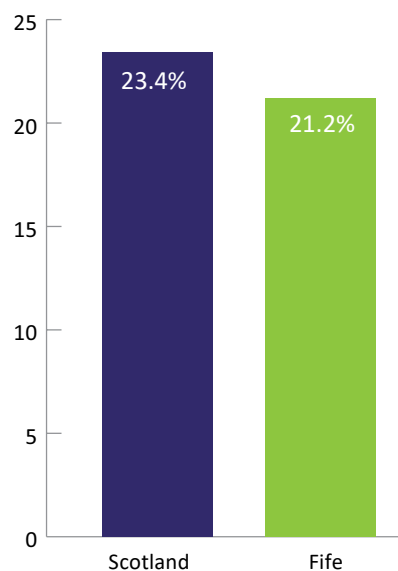


**Economic inactivity rate (Great Britain)**  
- percentage of people aged 16 - 64 not employed or actively seeking work 2004 - 2023



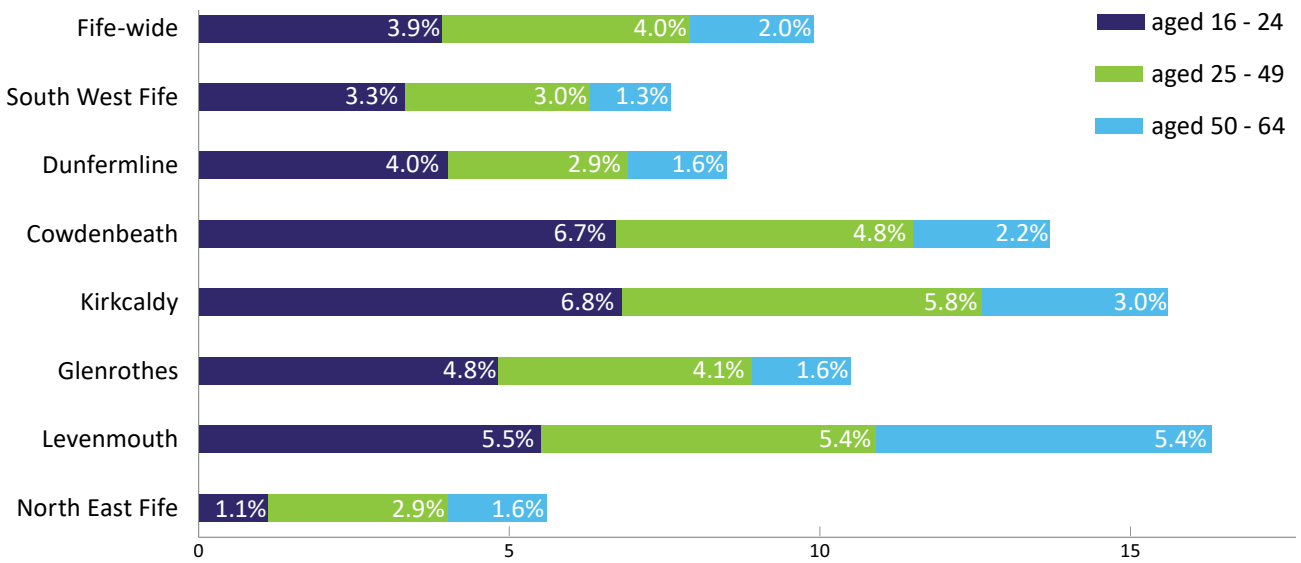
Source: Office for National Statistics

**Economic inactivity ages 16 - 64 national and local**



Fife Council’s labour market update as of March 2025<sup>21</sup>, while showing an improvement of 0.9% in the employment rate between October 2023 and September 2024 and a 0.6% reduction in unemployment for people aged 16 and over, also highlights a small increase in the number of long-term sick inactive people (18,300 vs 18,100), with rates for Fife residents claiming out of work benefits sitting at 3.3% in January 2025, slightly above the 3.1% Scotland rate. The breakdown by age and local committee areas highlights some marked differences as shown below:

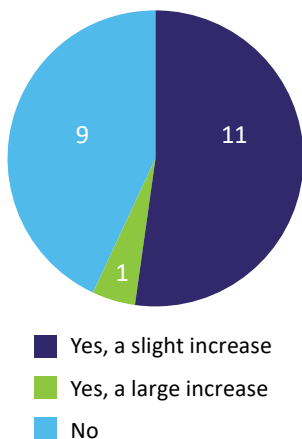
**FIGURE 4: Fife average claimant rates by age group, Nov 2024 - Jan 2025**



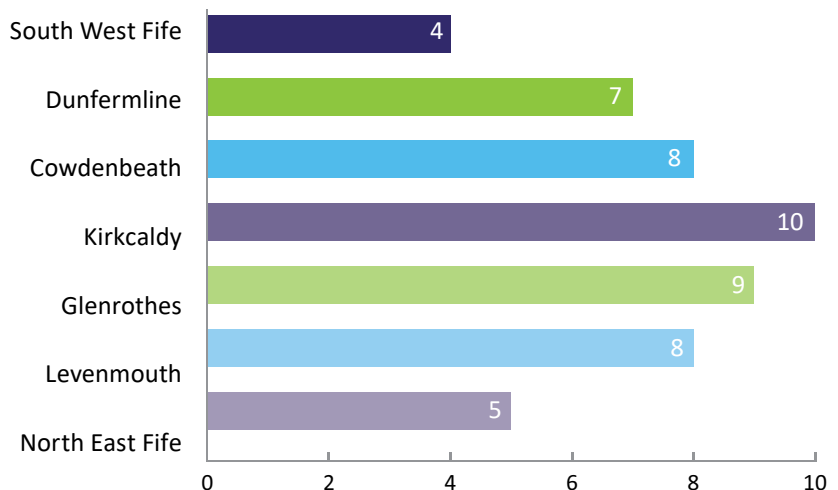
This is reflected by the third sector employability providers surveyed, who, when asked about clients who are economically inactive, recorded an increase in numbers in 48% of their answers, with the mid-Fife and Levenmouth areas reflecting the claimant rates described above.

**FIGURE 5: Increase in economically inactive third sector employability clients**

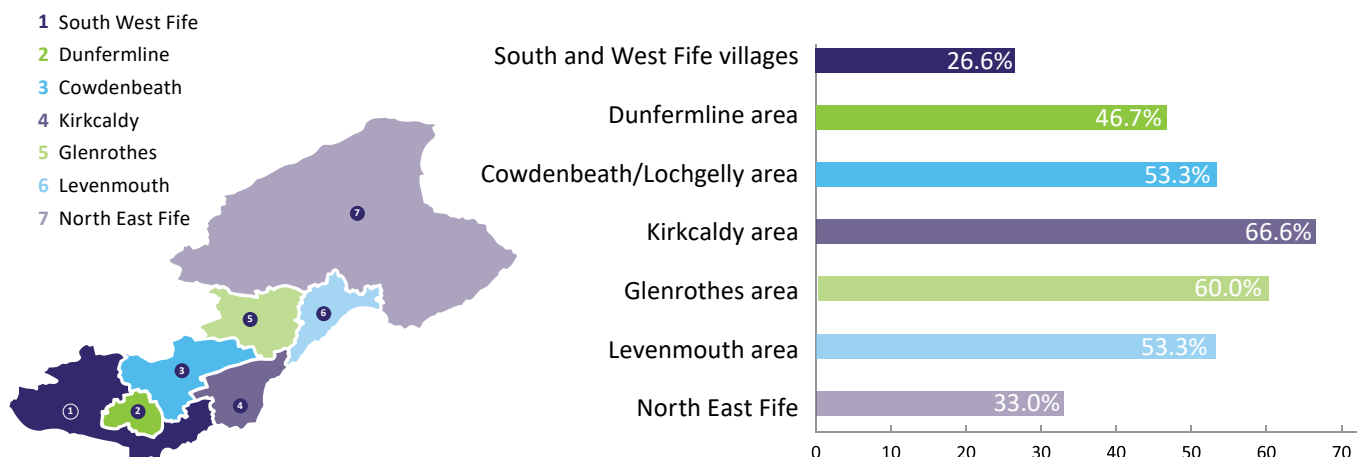
Number of organisations reporting increased economic inactivity



Number of surveyed organisations reporting increased economic inactivity by area



21. Fife-Labour-Market-Update-Mar-25.pdf

**FIGURE 6: Proportion of surveyed third sector organisations reporting increased economic inactivity****RECOMMENDATION 1**

Continue to prioritise resources allocation to identified target groups and localities, based on statistical evidence.

Some of the key suggestions made by employability providers as to how to help those who are economically inactive engage with employment opportunities included:

- Gain experience and increase vocational skills and qualifications through volunteer opportunities or longer-term funded work placements
- Raise awareness of the support available for those who experience poor mental health as a barrier
- Reverse benefits budgeting e.g., create a partnership with local councils or charities to provide bonus funds or matched savings accounts for every pound participants earn through training or placements
- Provide transport and increase digital inclusion
- Increase direct employer engagement e.g., in new and emerging sector
- Create more flexible working opportunities
- Better support employers in recognising and supporting those with mental health issues or from diverse cultural backgrounds

From an economic development perspective, Fife Council<sup>22</sup> is part of two City Deal programmes - one to the South of Scotland and one to the North of Scotland.

The Scottish and UK Governments have committed to investing £600 million in the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal. This, alongside partner contributions and private sector investment, creates a package of investment in the City Region worth £1.3 billion.

Tay Cities Region Deal investment has the potential to secure over 6,000 jobs and lever in over £400 million in investment over the next 10-15 years, decisively reducing the economic inequality gap as part of the drive to boost productivity.

The skills element of these City Deals is supporting regional employability projects such as the Integrated Regional Employability and Skills (IRES) programme<sup>23</sup> or the Data Driven Innovation (DDI)<sup>24</sup> and Housing Construction and Infrastructure (HCI)<sup>25</sup> Skills Gateway programme under the Edinburgh and South-East Scotland City Region Deal, which employability clients benefit from.

The Opportunities Fife Partnership (OFP) Employability Pathway 2023-24 - Annual Performance Update notes that

*“As partners in the Edinburgh and South East of Scotland City Region, Fife’s Employability Services have benefited from the investment in the Integrated Employability & Skills (IRES) Programme. From a third sector perspective, Fife Gingerbread has led on the delivery of the Intensive Family Support project in Fife. During 2025/26, Fife’s Employability Services are scheduled to migrate to the regional Integrated Knowledge System (HELIX), which has been developed and implemented through IRES. Four Local Authorities already use the system. With Fife’s inclusion, it will enable unparalleled analysis of the regional labour market and the opportunities to tailor provision across the city region. The Local Employability Partnerships will be better equipped to tackle poverty and support their citizens to enhance their skills and progress in employment.”*

Similarly, the Tay Cities Region Deal<sup>26</sup>, with its focus on Clean Growth, Life Sciences, Health, Agri-Tech, Tourism and Culture, Creative, Digital, Cyber and Games economy, will continue to provide opportunities for employability clients in North East Fife.

Third sector employability services in Fife are participating actively in the implementation of these improved tools with, for example, a super-users third sector group supporting the HELIX project.



## RECOMMENDATION 2

Ensure that opportunities linked to city deal projects and job creation are inclusive and made accessible to employability clients.

23. Integrated Regional Employability and Skills Programme - The Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal

24. DDI — The Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal

25. HCI — The Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal

26. Microsoft PowerPoint - Item 4 - JC Tay Cities Region Prospectus for Regional Growth (2)

## Fife employability strategy

The Opportunities Fife Partnership (OFP) is Fife’s Local Employability Partnership (LEP), part of the Fife Partnership. Since 2018 and the Scottish and Local Government Partnership Working Agreement for Employability, it has been responsible for the delivery of Fife’s Employability Pathway. It is also the oversight body for Fife’s No One Left Behind Delivery Plan and

the People & Skills Investment Priority within Fife’s UK Shared Prosperity Investment Plan.

The Opportunities Fife Partnership (OFP) is reporting directly to the Tackling Poverty Preventing Crisis Board, to the Economy and Community Wealth Building Board and to the Fife Partnership Board. It is responsible for delivering part of the Plan for Fife’s “Inclusive Jobs and Growth” priority theme.

**FIGURE 7: OFP’s purpose, mission and five key priorities**



The OFP’s detailed remit is reflective of the national and local socio-economic priorities and focuses on the key challenges detailed earlier in this report. Third sector organisations and other partners funded by the OFP to deliver employability services focus on:

- **Increasing employment opportunities for young people (aged 16 - 24 years old)**
- **Increasing access to employment for people with health and disability issues**
- **Supporting unemployed adults (aged 25+) and those facing multiple barriers to employment,**
- **Supporting lone parent, low income and workless families**

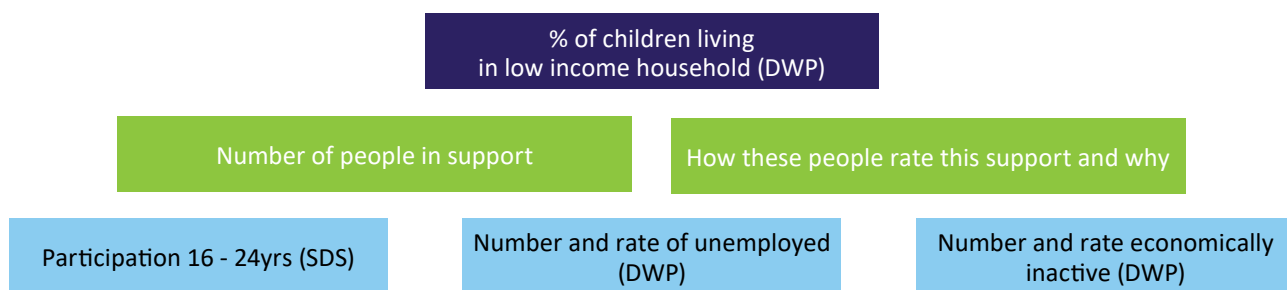
Third sector projects cover all areas of the commissioned delivery from Adult Provision to Provision for Young People 16-24 and Specialist Provision, which includes a ringfenced allocation for family specific support.

The OFP Board reviews and approves high-level strategic updates and recommendations on the agreed priorities for skills and employability on a quarterly basis. The

Board is supported by an Executive Group, whose role it is to drive forward the Partnership and its activities in discharging the remit for the OFP.

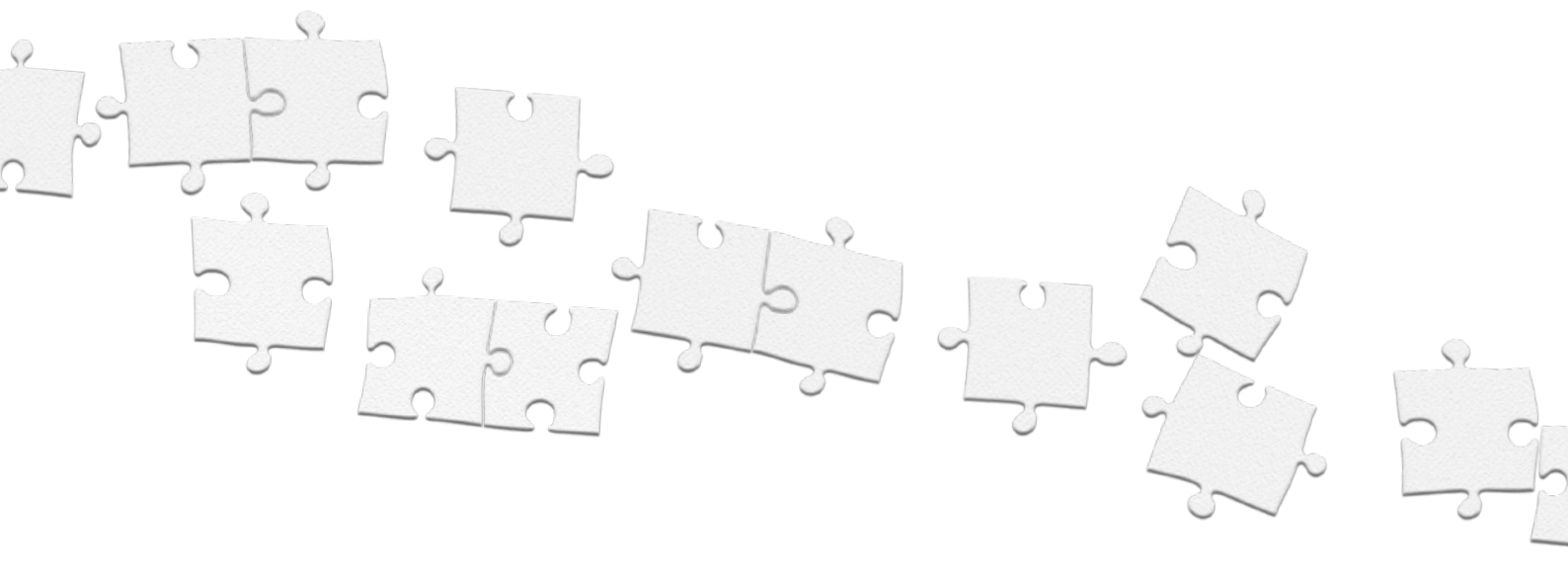
This includes advising on funding allocations, based on vital signs and on planning measures aligned to strategic imperatives and used to determine where interventions need to be targeted as detailed below.

### Vital signs and planning measures



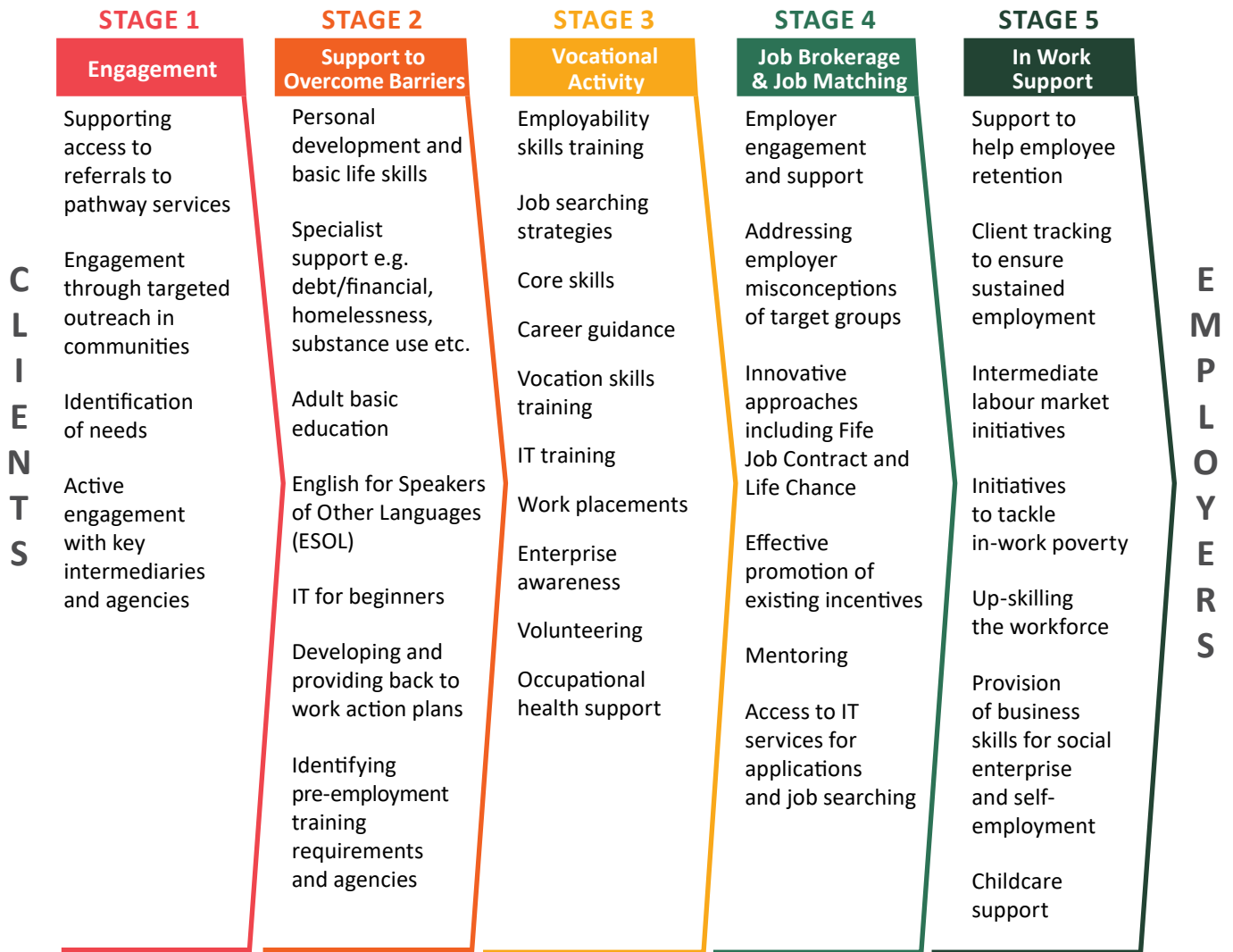
The Executive Group comprises of membership from; Fife College, Skills Development Scotland, DWP, Fife Voluntary Action and Fife Council. Both the OFP Executive Group and the OFP Board are currently chaired by a third sector representative.

The OFP fulfils its mission through the commissioning of a range of person-centred employability projects. These projects sit on the Fife employability pathway and their delivery may involve third, public and private sector partners.



**FIGURE 8: Fife Employability Pathway**

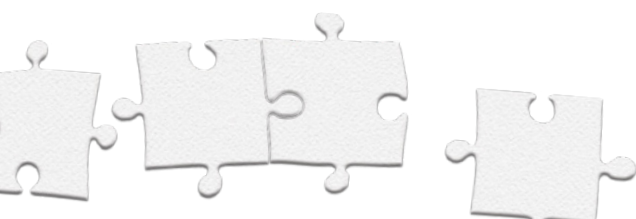
**Employability is the combination of factors and processes which enable people to progress toward or get into employment, to stay in employment and to move on in the workplace**



Effective case management and use of FORT (Fife Online Referral Tracking) to measure progression

Third sector (and other) employability providers bid for all service delivery under the OFP commissioning framework, which was created in 2020 using the Scottish Approach to Service Design. All projects must demonstrate the OFP principles of service delivery,

which were developed through the process of establishing our local No One Left Behind delivery and adopted by the OFP as the basis for all employability service delivery.



**OFP principles for employment service delivery**

<b>Equal and Fair</b>	People accessing the service will be treated as equals, they will feel <b>respected, trust-ed and listened to</b>
<b>Strength Based</b>	Provision will focus on helping people to identify and grow their own strengths rather than solving problems for them. This also means giving people responsibility and allowing them to make mistakes and take risks
<b>Non-Judgemental</b>	People will feel able to open-up without risk of judgement, staff will bring <b>humility</b> and an open mind to understand people's individual situation and challenges
<b>Discreet</b>	Services will be provided in a way that respects people's need for privacy and the vulnerability associated with accessing support services
<b>Collaborative</b>	Services will work together to ensure people get the support they need when they need it. This includes warm handovers of working alongside one another, with clearly identified progression options and support pathways.
<b>Time Unlimited</b>	Services will balance consistency and dependability with energy, momentum and challenge at a pace that works for the individual and which maintains momentum towards improved employability
<b>Continuously Improving</b>	Services will actively gather feedback from people who use the services reflect on delivery and demonstrate a willingness to adapt and learn
<b>Hopeful</b>	Provision will hold the hope for everyone who comes through the door, (and those who don't), <i>and support people to recognise, voice and progress their individual hopes. Knowing that the right work is out there for them, and we are all on a journey</i>

Third sector partners were instrumental in the design of these principles as detailed in our 2021 Working for Fife report.

In June 2023 the Fife Council Cabinet Committee approved the Opportunities Fife Partnership's commissioning approach for the Employability Pathway 2022-2025. This included the People & Skills Investment Priority within Fife's UK Shared Prosperity Investment Plan 2022-2025, in addition to the Scottish Government's annual allocation of No One Left Behind Delivery Plan funding, which had previously been approved in June 2022.

## Opportunities Fife provision

An allocation of £5.244m for Fife's No One Left Behind Delivery Plan was confirmed by Scottish Government for the period 2024-2025. This compares with £5.094m for 2023-2024. The allocation was split between:

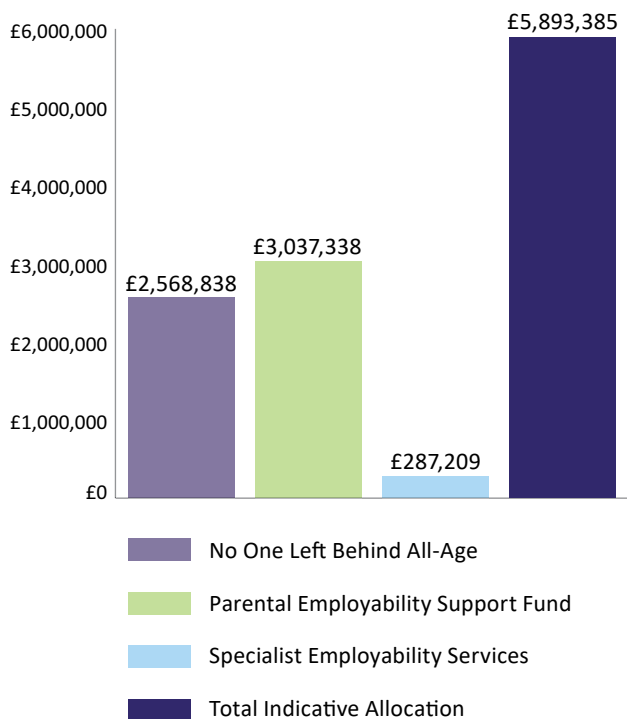
- All-Age Employability Support  
- £2.648 vs £2.080m for 2023-24
- Tackling Child Poverty  
(previously Parental Employability Support Fund)  
- £2.594m vs £3.014m for 2023-24

A further allocation of £2.596m, vs £1.704m for 2023-2024, was provided by the UK Government through Fife’s UK Shared Prosperity Investment Plan for the People & Skills Investment Priority for 2024-2025. This was matched by £0.500m from Opportunities Fife’s Budget, vs £0.200m for 2023-2024.

Third sector projects, working collaboratively with public and private sector partners, accounted for 64% of the services delivered in 2024-25 (vs 68% in 2023-2024).

For 2025-2026, the total budget confirmed to support employability activities is £7.167m.

**Scottish Government employability funding 2025-2026**



The UK Shared Prosperity Fund dedicated to the People and Skills investment priority has been reduced to £1.274m (vs £2.596 for 2024-2025).

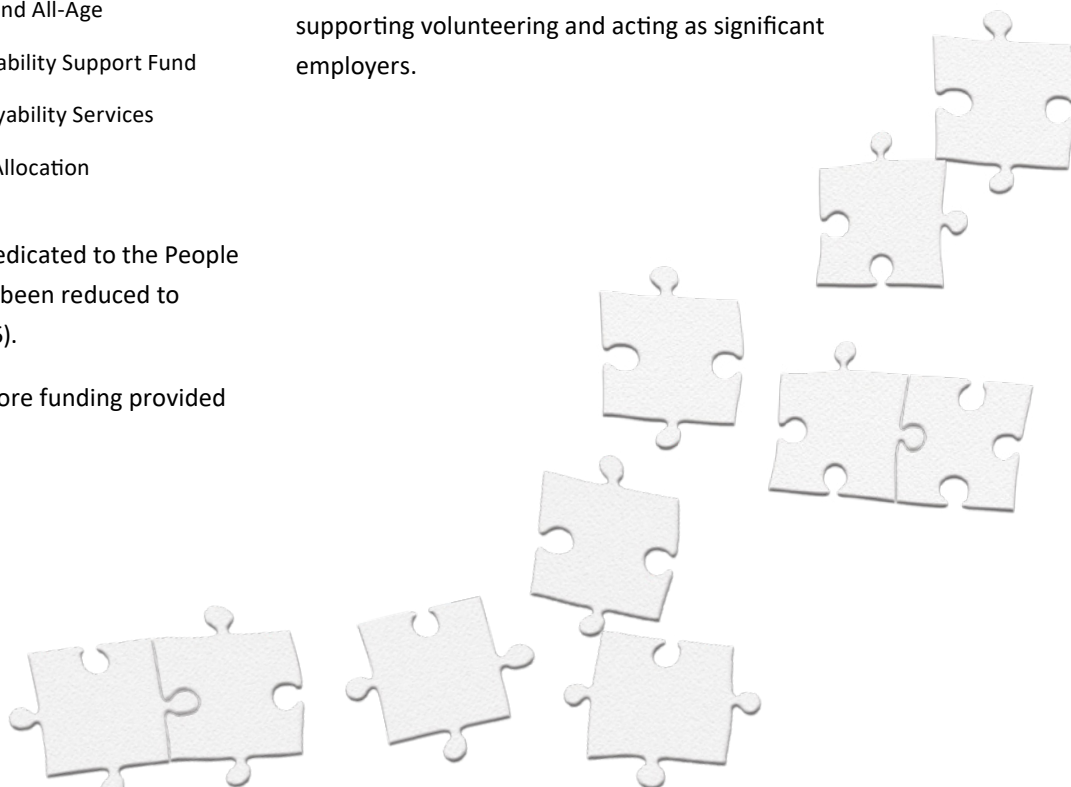
This is complemented by £0.6m core funding provided by Fife Council.

**Methodology**

Working for Fife 2025 is based on a combination of:

- Desk-based research
- An online survey circulated to 38 local and national partners.
- Individual conversations with OFP funded partners, September 2024 - January 2025
- Reflective discussions at Fife Employability Forum held September 2024 and February 2025.
- Feedback from Know Your Network 2024 discussions and evaluations
- Reflective discussions and recommendations made at the OFP People and Skills community of practice - January 2025 and April 2025
- Conversations with third sector, public and private partners at local, regional and national levels.

It is important to note that whilst Working for Fife focuses on the role of third sector as a provider of employability services, many third sector organisations play an equally important role in employability through engaging with harder to reach communities, supporting children and families, promoting health and social care, supporting volunteering and acting as significant employers.



# Third Sector Employability Services

The strength of the Opportunities Fife Partnership work rests in no small measure in the collaborative approach fostered by the OFP Board as described earlier.

The conclusions of the Opportunities Fife Partnership (OFP) Employability Pathway 2023-24 - Annual Performance Update highlights that:

- The delivery approach developed through the OFP's Commissioning process represents a targeted and innovative approach to delivery of outcomes for clients.
- The programme is delivering outcomes across Fife, with a particular emphasis on delivery in areas of greatest disadvantage. Projects provide greater choice for Fife's adults with health and disability issues, addictions, migrants, and isolated young people who did not sustain a positive destination when leaving school.
- The activity commissioned across the Employability Pathway is delivering a high level of success as well as a quality service.

In 2023-2024 the Employability Pathway was made up of 24 projects, four of which were led by Fife Council. In terms of funding allocation, the Fife Council led projects accounted for 31% of the total allocation for the year. 1% of the allocation supported a private sector project.

Third sector-led employability projects accounted for 68% of the total commissioned provision with a similar figure of 64% (or £5.004m) in 2024-25.

The third sector contribution in designing and delivering a range of these employability services in Fife is considerable and very effective, with 96% actual registrations (vs 90% employability pathway average) and 130% actual job outcomes (vs 106% employability pathway average) for 2024-25. The latter includes a successful new collaboration between third sector organisations and the Fife Council led project, Life Chances.

The performance of third sector led employability services for the period of 2022-2025 is excellent with 94% actual registrations (vs 92% employability pathway average) and 127% actual job outcomes (vs 109% employability pathway average) against agreed targets.

For the 2025-2026 transition year, the employability pathway services comprise 16 projects:

- 12 third sector projects (63% of the funding allocation)
- 3 public sector projects (35% of the funding allocation)
- 1 private sector project (2% of the funding allocation)

This should ensure continuity of service for existing clients and support new registrations through locally designed and person-centred provision across Fife's communities.



## RECOMMENDATION 3

Maintain a strong level of mixed economy in the commissioning of Fife's future employability provision to support continued performance.

# Support for Third Sector Employability Providers

The OFP Board understands the critical role that the third sector plays in delivering employability services in Fife. In line with the Board’s advice and recommendations, Fife Council has funded FVA since 2013 to support and grow this work.

FVA’s Employability Team has four key aims:

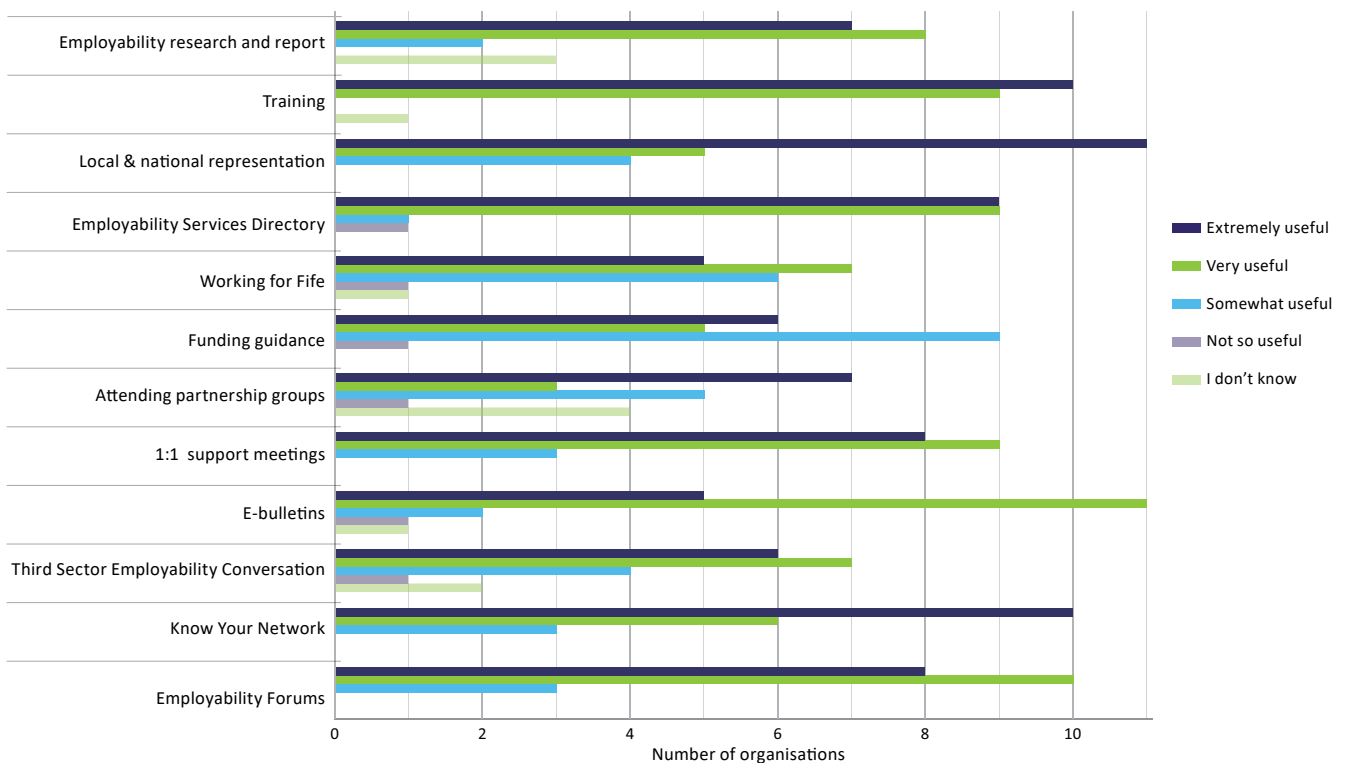
- 1 **Improving the quality and scope of third sector employability services in Fife**
- 2 **Raising the profile of the third sector as a key partner in delivering employment outcomes**
- 3 **Increasing third sector influence and understanding of policy development at national, regional and local levels**
- 4 **Improving awareness of the role volunteering can play in helping people build employability**

The Employability team, working closely with third and public sector partners, at local, regional and national level, has established a suite of activities to support local delivery partners, together with robust strategic relationships. All of FVA’s teams work closely with their dedicated employability team to ensure that cross policy work and maximisation of resources are effective.

The range of activities developed and supported by FVA include events, meetings, funding and other guidance, training, e-bulletins and other communications, publication and updating of reference documents, representation at local, regional and national level, as well as participation in national research and development projects.

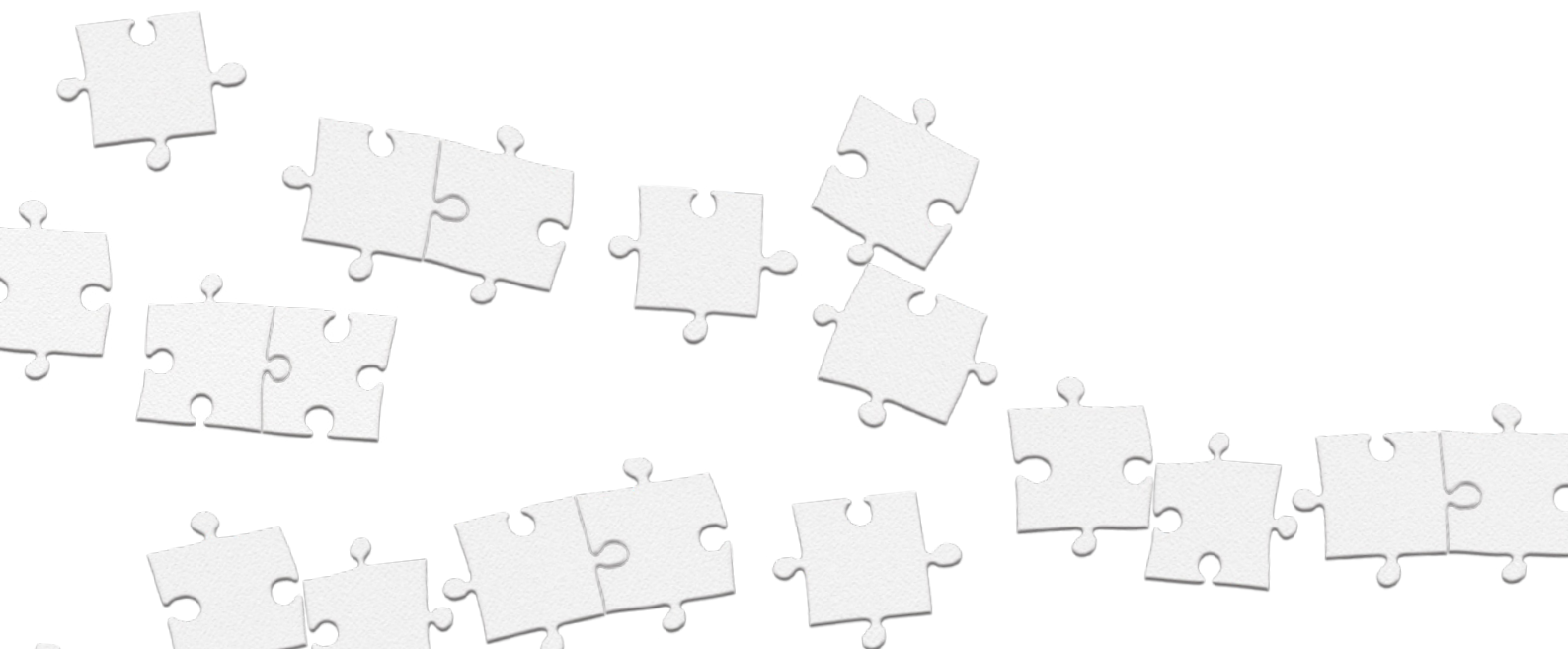
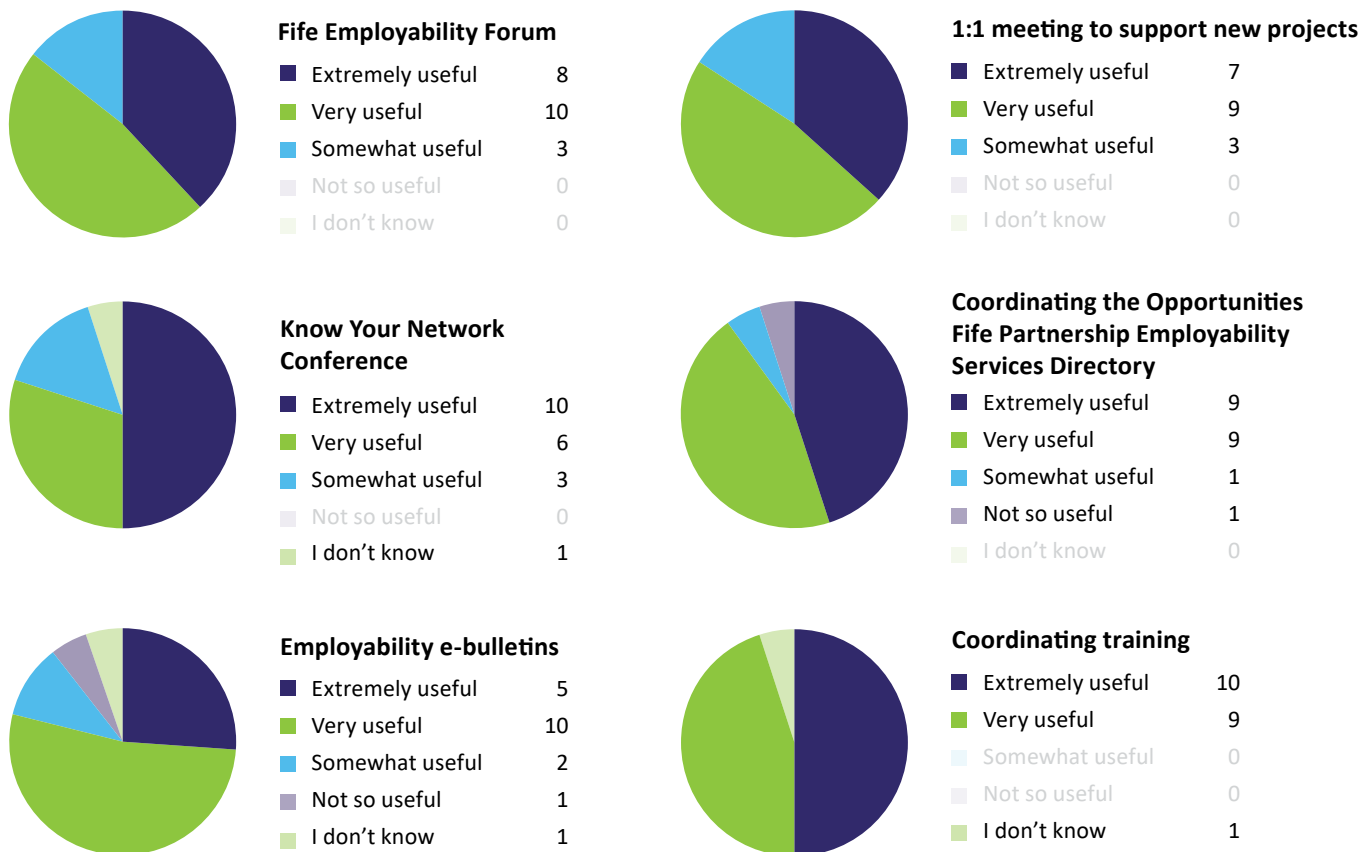
When asked how useful they found this support, the 23 survey respondents provided a very positive picture across the board, with networking events, training, support meetings and the publication of reference documents showing the highest scores.

**FIGURE 9: FVA support to third sector employability providers**



Overall, 87% of the respondents of our 2025 Working for Fife survey found all activities either extremely or very useful. Some detailed analysis is provided in the charts below:

**FIGURE 10: FVA activities - rated by respondents' numbers**



Comments from third sector organisations and public sector partners on the usefulness of employability team activities included:

*“An extremely beneficial organisation that brings partners together”*

(Fife Employability Forum attendee May 2025)

*“Fife Voluntary Action (FVA) plays a crucial role in supporting the Opportunities Fife Partnership (OFP) by strengthening the delivery of employability services across Fife. Through strategic collaboration, FVA ensures that third sector organisations are effectively engaged, bringing valuable insights and innovative approaches to employability programmes. Their support in capacity building, partnership development, and knowledge sharing has been instrumental in enhancing outcomes for individuals seeking employment and skills development within Fife.”*

(Opportunities Fife Partnership Manager, Fife Council)

*“Working in partnership with FVA is a great opportunity to support all partners across the network, though Lunchtime Learning deliveries. It is also a great opportunity to network and build strong relationships across stakeholders”*

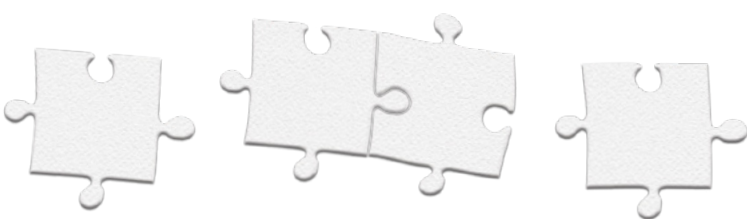
Work and health service,  
Department for Work and Pensions

*“As a new organisation coming to Fife this was extremely useful and helpful to build networks”*

(Know Your Network 2024 delegate)

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

Capitalise on the expertise and reach provided to the partnership by FVA to enhance cross policy support to employability in Fife.



# Services Available

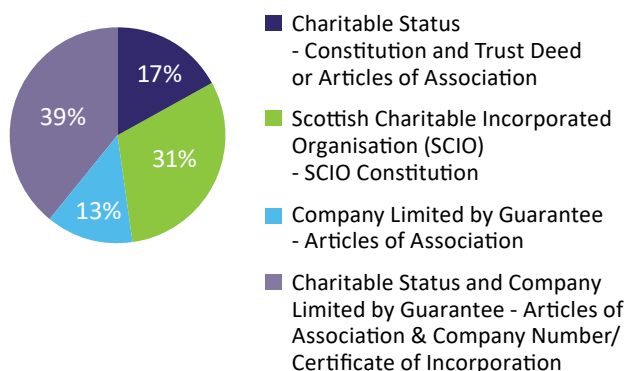
23 third sector organisations responded to the survey. This compares with 25 in 2021, with 15 of these organisations completing the survey both in 2021 and in 2025. This is reflective of the evolving total number of organisations operating in this field and within a challenging funding environment. These 23 organisations provided information on 27 Fife based projects. This compares with 36 projects reported on in 2021.

Some of these organisations deliver in specific localities, while others operate across the whole of Fife. They are all listed in the 2025 OFP directory of services, which comprises 38 organisations and 82 projects or services in total.

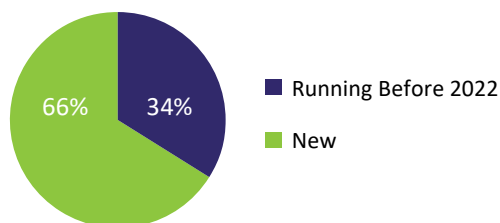
Some organisations did not reply to the survey but asked to be included in the OFP Employability Services Directory in 2025. Six of the organisations listed in 2021 are no longer part of the OFP directory of services. They are the Fife Community Trade Hub, Enable, Re-Employ, Tayport Community Trust, Coalfields Regeneration Trust, DEAP and SCVO with the last two removed from the directory due to closure of funding for Fife-based projects. Three projects were removed from the 2025 directory due to the ending of their funding, while one organisation, Access to Industry, was added. Enable and CR Smith have projects currently on hold and that may be included.

Survey responses show that over 1/3 of the projects currently running did not exist three years ago. The 2025 respondents include local and national employability organisations or services operating in Fife and their legal status falls under four different categories. Of these 23 organisations, seven are national organisations, two are regional organisations operating in two or more local authorities and 14 are local organisations operating in Fife.

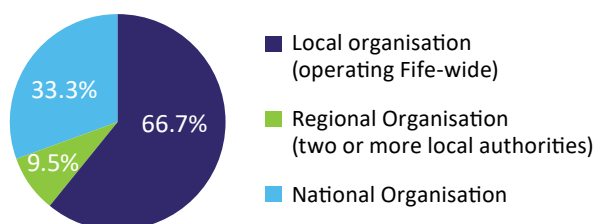
**FIGURE 11: Organisation Forums**



**FIGURE 12: Existing and New Projects**



**FIGURE 13: Proportion of Local, Regional or National Organisations**



**RECOMMENDATION 5**

Maintain an appropriate range of providers to serve local community needs.

# Organisational Overview

For 2024-2025, 18 third sector projects identified themselves as being part of formal partnership arrangements governed by the signing of service level agreements.

The largest of these partnerships remain the Fife Employment & Training Consortium (Fife-ETC).

This consortium of third sector partners, established in Fife by FVA in 2021, delivers No-One Left Behind (NOLB) and UKSPF funded projects targeting the long-term unemployed and those with multiple barriers to employment. Fife-ETC is delivered by Brag Enterprises, CARF, Clued Up, FVA, Frontline Fife, Kingdom Works and workshops from FEAT.

Other formal partnerships continue to include:

- Making it Work for lone parents, a partnership project led by Fife Gingerbread and delivered in partnership with Citizens Advice & Rights Fife.
- Square Start Fife, a fully inclusive service for families including lone parents across Fife. The project is led by Brag Enterprises and supported by the Fife Employment Access Trust (FEAT) and by Youth 1st.
- The Fife International Forum (FIF) pre-academy with FIF acting as an interface with partner agencies.

Several projects also highlighted informal partnership arrangements and an increasing number of links with

other third sector organisations and services, as well as with public and private sector partners. These include:

- **Progression for employability clients onto the Fife Council employability service led Life Chances project, with 30 work placements successfully supported by third sector organisations in 2024-25. Projected numbers for the Life Chances Plus second phase of the project sit at 49 for the third sector.**
- **Collaboration of third sector partners with the Fife Council supported employment EASYP project**
- **Collaboration with local private sector partners (e.g., Raeburn Training) to support vocational training**
- **Collaboration with Education partners e.g., within volunteering or green skills projects**
- **Collaboration between third sector partners to ensure that clients' mental health needs are appropriately supported e.g., through IPS intervention**



## RECOMMENDATION 6

Foster collaborative approaches and recognise specialisms to promote excellence in standards of delivery.

## Overview of projects

All funded projects sit on the Fife Employability Pathway, with most of them straddling more than one stage of the pathway. This represents a positive indication of a person-centred approach supportive of continuity and of a scaffolded progression for clients.

For projects commissioned for 2023-2026, a visual representation is available below.

**FIGURE 14: Projects and Providers by pathway stage and period**

Project	Organisation	Pathway stage	Period
Fife-ETC	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2023–24
Fife-ETC	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife	4	2023–24
Fife-ETC	Clued Up Projects	1 2	2023–24
Fife-ETC	Fife Voluntary Action	1 2 3 4	2023–24
Fife-ETC	Frontline Fife	1 2 3 4	2023–24
Fife-ETC	Kingdom Works	3 4 5	2023–24
Making it Work for Families	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife	1	2023–24
Making it Work for Families	Fife Gingerbread	1 2	2023–24
Making it Work for Lone parents	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife	1	2023–24
Making it Work for Lone parents	Fife Gingerbread	1 2 3 4 5	2023–24
NOLB Bright Futures	Greener Kirkcaldy	1 2	2023–24
NOLB Bright Futures	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2023–24
NOLB Spring Forward	Kingdom Works	2 3 4 5	2023–24
NOLB Spring Forward	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2023–24
NOLB Square Start	Youth 1st	1 2 3 4 5	2023–24
NOLB Square Start	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2023–24
NOLB	The Princes Trust	1 2 3	2023–24
NOLB	Venture Trust	1 2 3	2023–24
NOLB - Pre academy	Fife International Forum	1 2 3 4 5	2023–24
NOLB - IPS	Fife Employment Access Trust	1 2 3 4 5	2023–24
NOLB - Forward for Families	Venture Trust	1 2 3 4 5	2023–24

Project - continued	Organisation	Pathway stage	Period
UKSPF Specialist IPS for Addictions	SAMH	1 2 3 4 5	2023–24
UKSPF Heart, Mind & Soul	Fife Employment Access Trust	1 2 3 4 5	2023–24
UKSPF Volunteering into Work	Fife Voluntary Action	1 2 3	2023–24
UKSPF Person Centred Employability	Ecology Centre	1 2 3	2023–24
UKSPF Working For You	Kingdom Works	2 3 4 5	2023–24
Grounds for Growth	Rural Skills Scotland	3 4	2023–24
Step On	Link Living	1 2 3	2023–24
Fife-ETC	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2024–25
Fife-ETC	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife	4	2024–25
Fife-ETC	Clued Up Projects	1 2	2024–25
Fife-ETC	Fife Voluntary Action	1 2 3 4	2024–25
Fife-ETC	Frontline Fife	1 2 3 4	2024–25
Fife-ETC	Kingdom Works	3 4 5	2024–25
Making it Work for Families	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife	1	2024–25
Making it Work for Families	Fife Gingerbread	1 2	2024–25
Making it Work for Lone parents	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife	1	2024–25
Making it Work for Lone parents	Fife Gingerbread	1 2 3 4 5	2024–25
NOLB Bright Futures	Greener Kirkcaldy	1 2	2024–25
NOLB Bright Futures	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2024–25
NOLB Spring Forward	Kingdom Works	2 3 4 5	2024–25
NOLB Spring Forward	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2024–25
NOLB Square Start	Youth 1st	1 2 3 4 5	2024–25
NOLB Square Start	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2024–25
NOLB	The Princes Trust	1 2 3	2024–25
NOLB	Venture Trust	1 2 3	2024–25
NOLB - Pre academy	Fife International Forum	1 2 3 4 5	2024–25

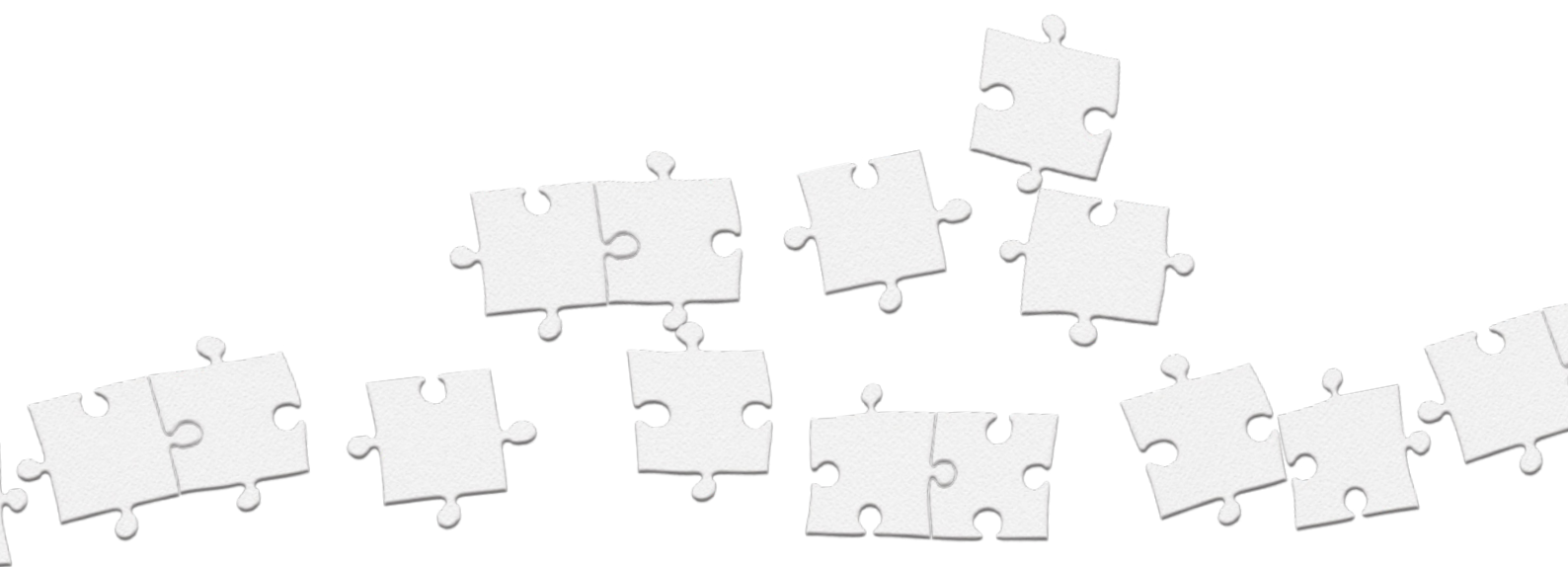
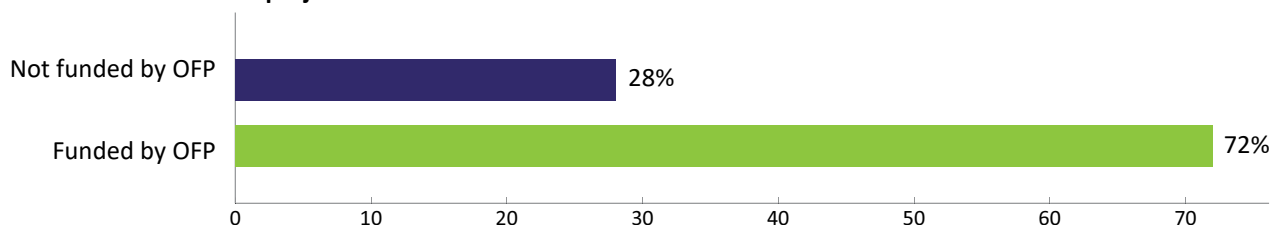
Project - continued	Organisation	Pathway stage	Period
NOLB - IPS	Fife Employment Access Trust	1 2 3 4 5	2024–25
NOLB - Forward for Families	Venture Trust	1 2 3 4 5	2024–25
UKSPF Specialist IPS for Addictions	SAMH	1 2 3 4 5	2024–25
UKSPF Heart, Mind & Soul	Fife Employment Access Trust	1 2 3 4 5	2024–25
UKSPF Volunteering into Work	Fife Voluntary Action	1 2 3	2024–25
UKSPF Person Centred Employability	Ecology Centre	1 2 3	2024–25
UKSPF Working For You	Kingdom Works	2 3 4 5	2024–25
Grounds for Growth	Rural Skills Scotland	3 4	2024–25
Step On	Link Living	1 2 3	2024–25
Fife-ETC	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
Fife-ETC	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife	4	2025–26 (est.)
Fife-ETC	Clued Up Projects	1 2	2025–26 (est.)
Fife-ETC	Fife Voluntary Action	1 2 3 4	2025–26 (est.)
Fife-ETC	Frontline Fife	1 2 3 4	2025–26 (est.)
Fife-ETC	Kingdom Works	3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
Making it Work for Families	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife	1	2025–26 (est.)
Making it Work for Families	Fife Gingerbread	1 2	2025–26 (est.)
Making it Work for Lone parents	Citizens Advice and Rights Fife	1	2025–26 (est.)
Making it Work for Lone parents	Fife Gingerbread	1 2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
NOLB Bright Futures	Greener Kirkcaldy	1 2	2025–26 (est.)
NOLB Bright Futures	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
NOLB Spring Forward	Kingdom Works	2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
NOLB Spring Forward	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
NOLB Square Start	Youth 1st	1 2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
NOLB Square Start	Brag Enterprises Ltd	1 2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
NOLB - Inspiring Futures	Venture Trust	1 2 3	2025–26 (est.)



Project - continued	Organisation	Pathway stage	Period
NOLB - Pre academy	Fife International Forum	1 2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
NOLB - IPS	Fife Employment Access Trust	1 2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
NOLB - Forward for Families	Venture Trust	1 2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
UKSPF Specialist IPS for Addictions	SAMH	1 2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
UKSPF Heart, Mind & Soul	Fife Employment Access Trust	1 2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
UKSPF Volunteering into Work	Fife Voluntary Action	1 2 3	2025–26 (est.)
UKSPF Working For You	Kingdom Works	2 3 4 5	2025–26 (est.)
Grounds for Growth	Rural Skills Scotland	3 4	2025–26 (est.)
Step On	Link Living	1 2 3	2025–26 (est.)

Overall, a large proportion but not all the employability projects reported on in this report were OFP funded as shown below.

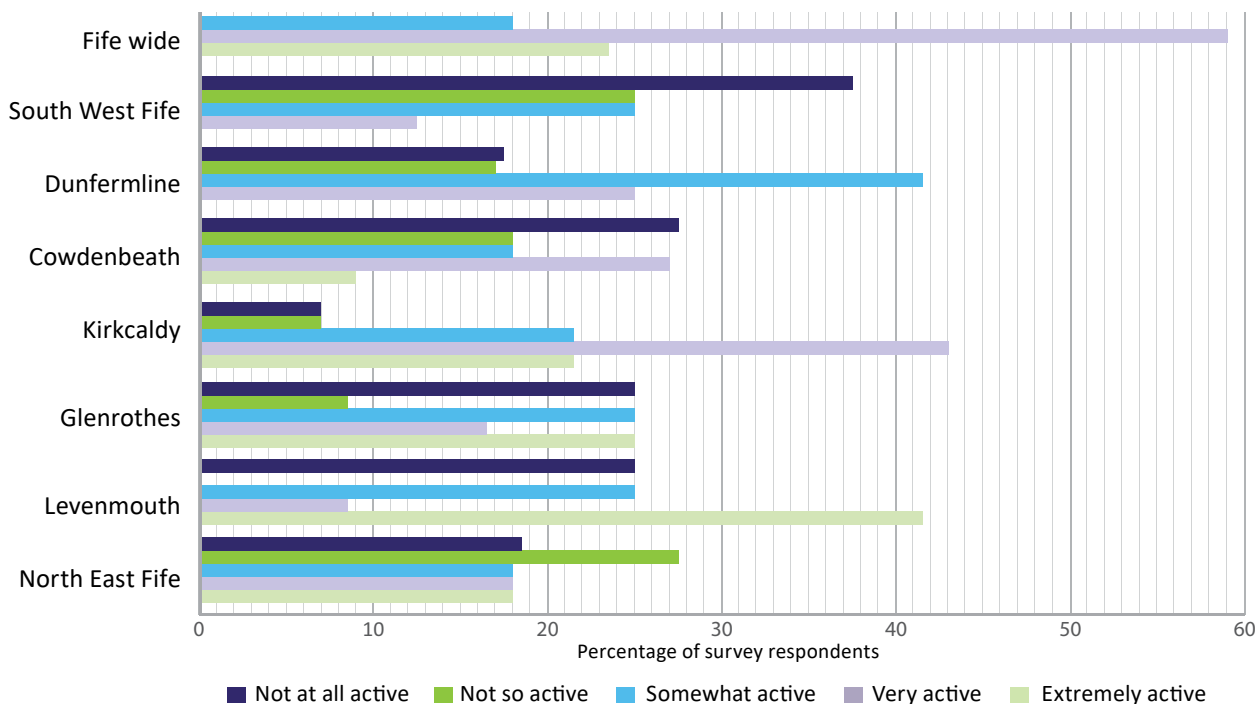
**FIGURE 14: OFP funded projects**



## Geographical coverage

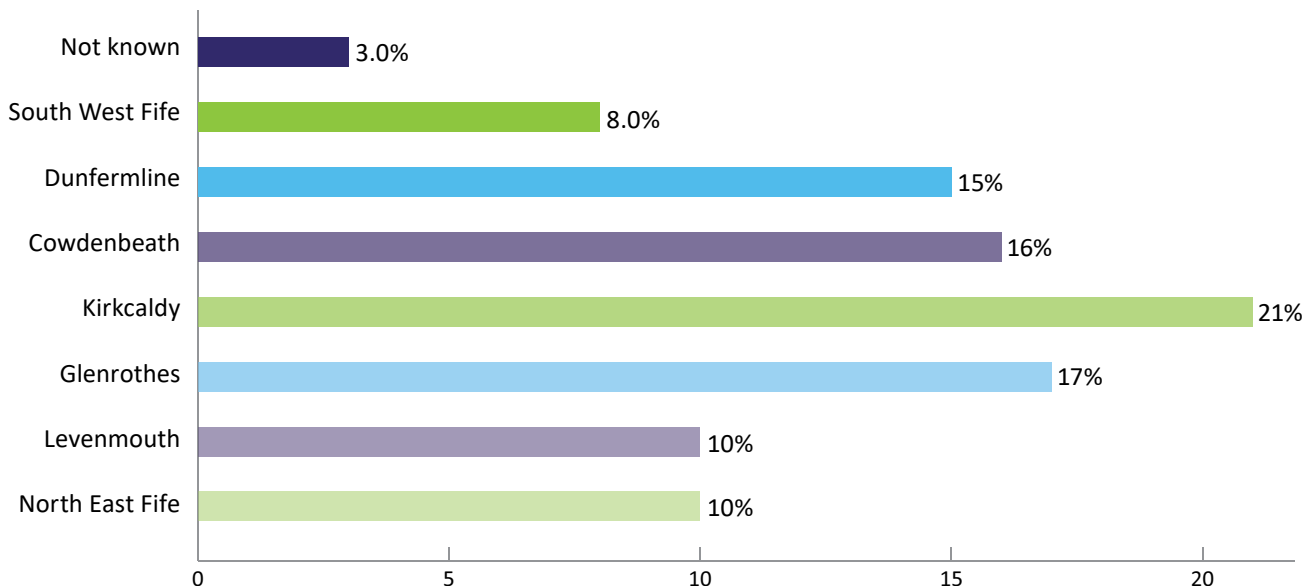
Many of the projects described operated in the localities of Kirkcaldy, Glenrothes, Cowdenbeath and Levenmouth with fewer projects focused on Dunfermline, South West Fife and North East Fife. While several projects continue to support local ambitions to address inequalities and to foster growth across the region as shown below, survey responses show that the areas identified predominantly as mid-Fife and Levenmouth by the Fife strategic assessments have been prioritised for employability services delivery by third sector organisations.

**FIGURE 15: Employability activity across Fife**



This is also evidenced by FORT<sup>27</sup> registration trends, with over 65% of these concentrated on mid-Fife and Levenmouth over the past three years.

**FIGURE 16: Third sector FORT registrations by local area committee 2022-2025**



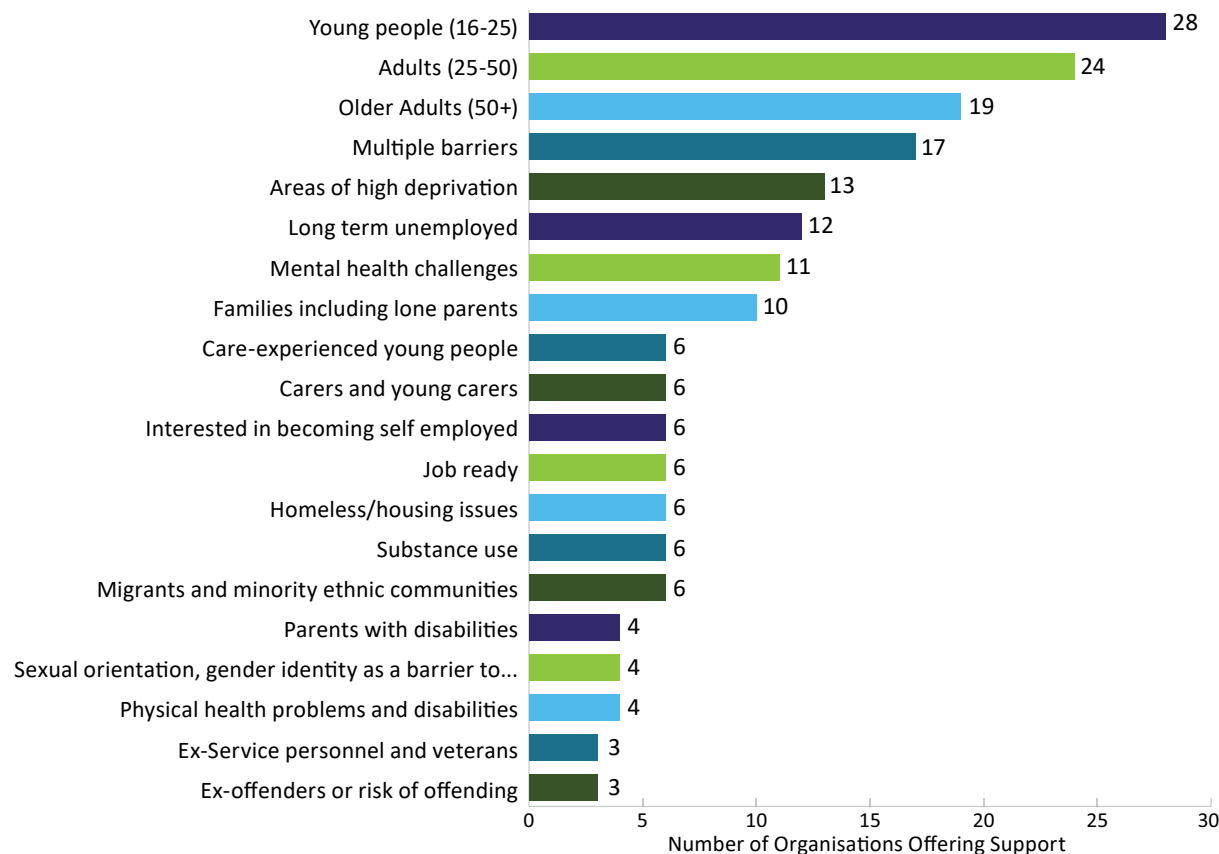
27. FORT: Fife Online Referral Tracking system used to monitor and report targets and outcomes

## Client groups

The Opportunities Fife delivery plan and commissioning framework is organised into Adult Provision, Provision for Young People 16 - 24 and Specialist Provision, which includes a ringfenced allocation for family specific support.

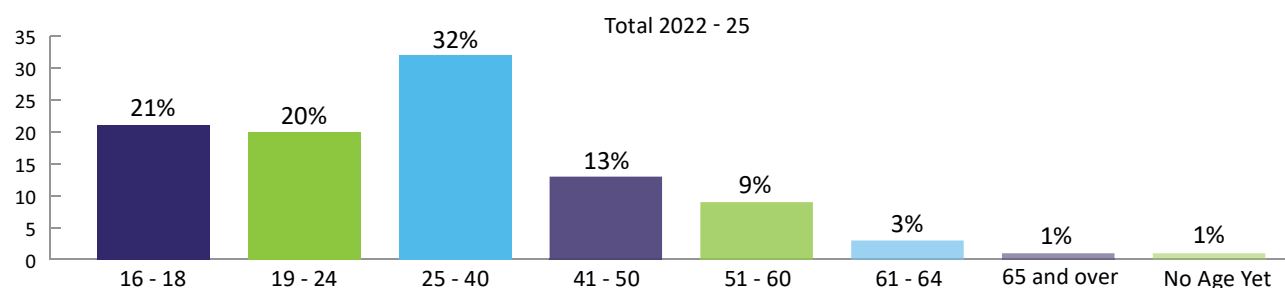
We asked providers to let us know who their services are mainly aiming to support. Providers were able to tick as many categories as they felt were relevant. Aggregated figures show that young people aged 16-25 are the largest target client groups for third sector employability services, with 28 projects directly aimed at them. However, 24 projects are also targeting adults between 25-50 and 19 projects aim to support older adults (50+). In comparison, only four projects were aimed at older adults in 2021. This reflects the long-lasting effects of the pandemic, with larger numbers of older adults currently not in employment. Many projects continue to deal with multiple barriers, mental health challenges and long-term unemployment.

**FIGURE 17: Client groups receiving support**



The participation rates recorded in FORT, confirm these findings and show that third sector services are targeting the correct priority groups.

**FIGURE 18: FORT third sector registration by client groups**

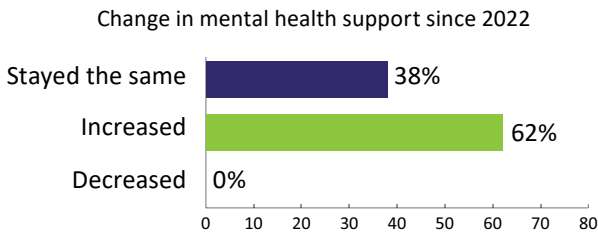


# Mental Health

Mental health support remains a key component of employability services, and it is embedded in the provision.

In 2025, 62% of survey respondents indicated that they had increased their mental health and wellbeing provision for staff and service users since 2021. This is in line with the growing needs recorded across age groups since the Covid pandemic.

**FIGURE 19: Provision of mental health support**



It is to be noted that mental health support consisted of a variety of approaches and that it was also provided by the organisations to their staff and not only to their clients, as per the figures provided below. It is important to note that the support requirements for staff are proportionally high, reflecting the demands of the roles fulfilled by front line delivery staff.

**FIGURE 20: Approaches to mental health support**



The Fife Pathway to Wellbeing and Work 2025, published by FVA, provides a guide to what good service provision and the pathway should look like.

The NOLB Employability Strategic Plan introduces a new offer of specialist employability support (SES), to be implemented across Scotland from summer 2025<sup>28</sup>.

As agreed with local government, all areas across Scotland will have a specialist service offer in place to support disabled people and those with long term health conditions. This will be a pan-disability approach, tailored to the needs of users. Local Employability Partnerships will retain the flexibility to deliver models which best meet the needs of users in their area, and that reflect the delivery already underway given many already have support employment provision in place.

A specific SES funding stream as identified within the funding section, has been confirmed. In Fife, three specialist employability support projects (including supported employment and IPS) are already commissioned by the OFP, with the allocated £287,000 confirmed for 2025-26 funding two of these projects. Conversations are ongoing at national level, supported by an SES implementation group, to ensure that consistency in service standards is achieved.

A client supported by a third sector led IPS service said:

*“Working on the IPS programme has been really helpful for me. In the beginning I was extremely anxious, even unable to answer phone calls. I am now at the point I have a job interview lined up and I am keen to get back into the world of work.*

*Without the support, the steps to get to this point were too overwhelming but by consistently meeting up and having the necessary discussions I have made progress towards finding sustainable work that suits my life as a single parent. My key worker helps me believe it is doable and knowing I will have his continued support throughout the process keeps me hopeful for the future. . .”*

Fife third sector representatives are actively contributing to this work via the Third Sector Employability Forum and associated sub-groups.



#### **RECOMMENDATION 7**

Maintain and expand existing commissioned services through specialist employability services and core funding to ensure that clients’ needs are met.



#### **RECOMMENDATION 8**

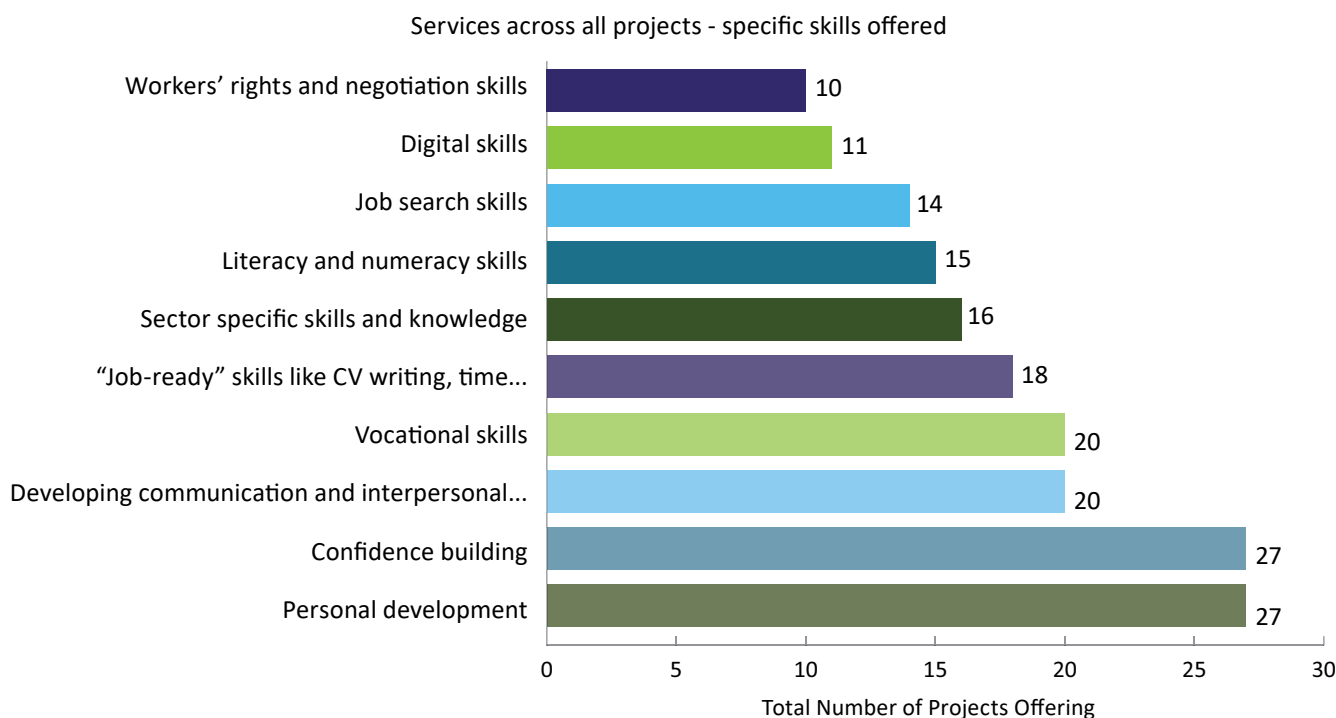
Resource upskilling and mental health and wellbeing support across the employability pathway.

# Skills Developed

The OFP’s mission is: “To shape and drive responsive, sustainable approaches to skills and employability services that reflect current and future aspirations of individuals and employers”.

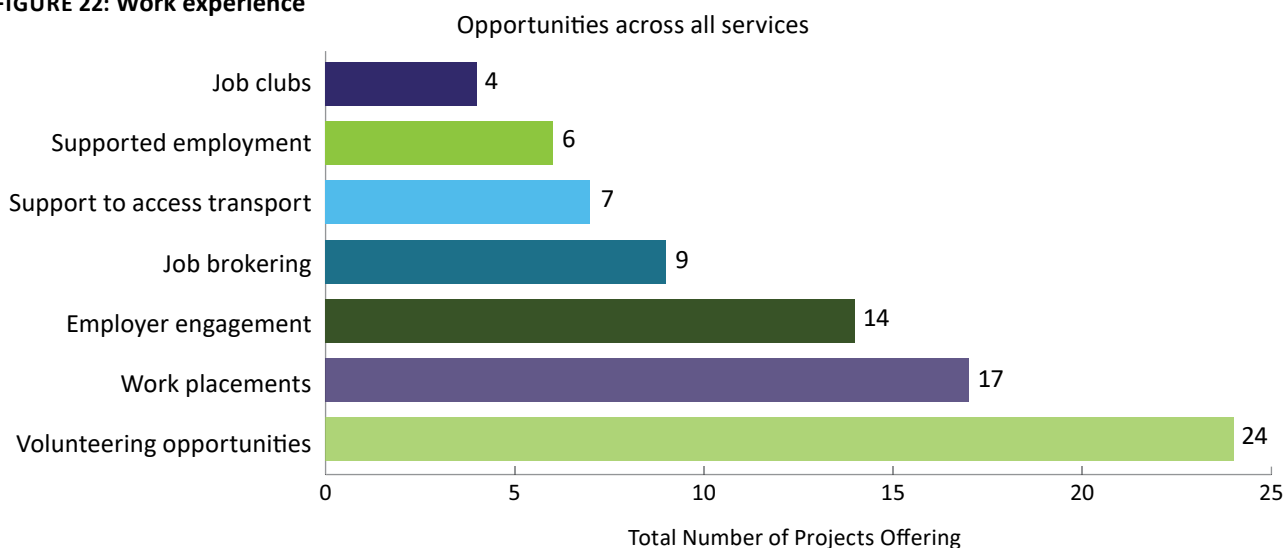
Therefore, funded service providers are asked to outline the skills and aptitudes their projects aim to deliver. Survey responses by OFP and non OFP funded third sector employability providers demonstrated that the most common skills developed were very person centred and providing a good balance of soft, essential and vocational skills.

**FIGURE 21: Skills Developed**



In relation to reflecting aspirations of employers, providers were asked to identify the work experience opportunities that their project/service delivers. They were able to select all that apply. Their responses show that most of them provide these opportunities.

**FIGURE 22: Work experience**



In line with the suggestions made by employability providers (and mentioned earlier in this report) as to how to help those who are economically inactive engage with employment opportunities, there remains a need to increase direct engagement with employers and support for employability clients to access job opportunities through a more systematic approach.



**RECOMMENDATION 9**

Foster employer influence and engagement in the design and delivery of commissioned employability services to support sustained employment outcomes.



# Services Design and Delivery

The OFP’s Employability Pathway delivery model uses a human rights-based approach to ensure that delivery is inclusive of all groups with protected characteristics and those at greater disadvantage in the labour market.

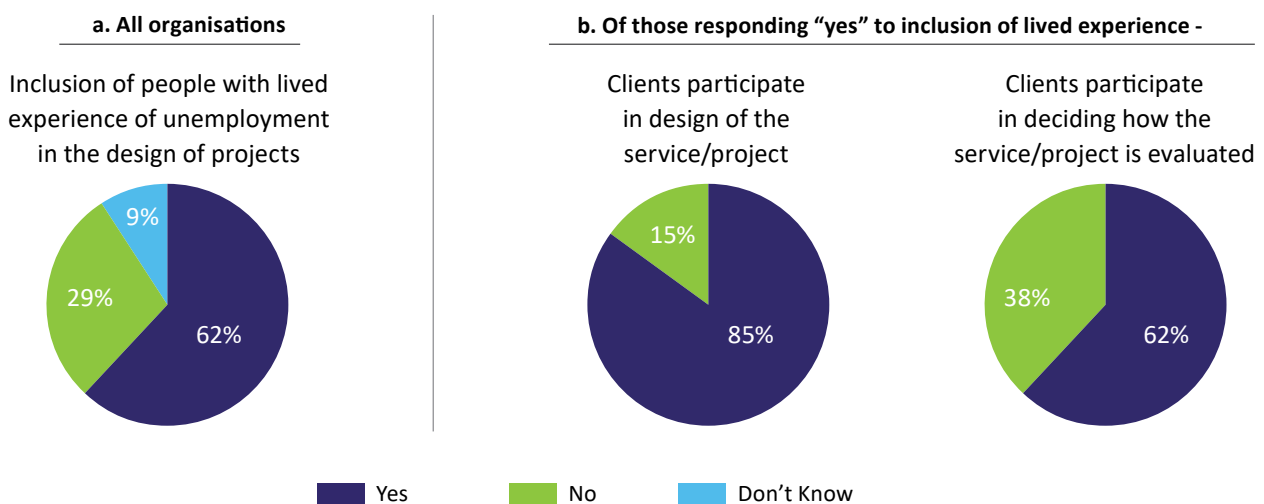
The voice of lived experience, led by third sector services and projects, has been key in developing services in Fife. By involving people who use the services, frontline staff and employers in service planning, design, and delivery, the OFP partners have developed services that are responsive and relevant.

The work led by FVA and supported by local public partners has developed further within employability and families and children services through the Together for Change<sup>29</sup> project, with co-production continuing to be a focus in the design and delivery of services. When asked how well they were involving people with lived experience, more than 60% of survey respondents confirmed that their provision is:

- Based on local need/demand, on participant (past, present and potential) feedback and surveys, community consultations and local advisory group
- Led by service users and based on what we know will work to improve wellbeing and life chances
- Informed by the voice of lived experience and by feedback from young people
- Created in co-production with the families they support

The figures below show that the percentage increases or remains stable when the same question is asked specifically about the clients involved in the design and evaluation of the projects.

**FIGURE 23: Involvement of lived experience in employability services**



29. Together for Change (FVA webpage)

While these figures are very encouraging and seem to have established Fife as a leader in this field, it is important that capacity building across providers remains a priority to support this strategic driver.



### RECOMMENDATION 10

Ensure that service design principles continue to be central to the Fife NOLB provision of services by effectively fostering and resourcing participation of people with lived experience.

## Impact and evaluation

In addition to quarterly reporting through the CRM system (FORT), projects are monitored by the OFP Delivery and Oversight group with representatives from the Opportunities Fife Partners, including DWP, Skills Development Scotland, Fife Council, Fife College, Fife Voluntary Action, and NHS Fife. This oversight group, created in 2023, evolved from the No One Left Behind Oversight and Scrutiny Group that developed the framework of support which forms the basis for commissioning since 2021.

## Outcomes data

The mixed economy model in place to deliver employability services in Fife is resulting in an excellent performance of the Fife employability pathway.

In terms of annual reporting at local authority level, the most recent data publicly available relates to 2023-2024, when the Employability Pathway was made up of 24 projects. Four of these were led by Fife Council and they accounted for 23% of the total allocation for the year. This included a large Supported Employment project. Third sector led projects accounted for 75% of the annual allocation, while private sector represented 2%.

In 2023-24, with the introduction of additional activity funded through UKSFP, 2,445 clients were registered, against a target of 2,632 (93% achieved). These were the new clients registered in the year. Due to the nature of the services, many clients registered in 2022-23 also required continued support into 2023-24. Of the 3,794 clients registered during the two years, 37% (1,385) were able to access employment.

For 2024-2025, the total number of clients supported amounted to 2,467, including 2,087 for third sector led projects.

The outcomes recorded for these registered clients as employment, education and training, or volunteering were respectively 873, 125 and 156. It should be noted that this is reflecting the fact that more than 400 of these clients achieved more than one of these positive outcomes.

It is important to understand that, where projects sit at earlier stages of the employability pathway, positive outcomes other than employment, education and training, or volunteering are expected as part of the individual clients' journeys. This is monitored on a quarterly basis and recorded as personal outcomes where tracked. 1,374 personal outcomes were recorded for third sector employability clients in 2024-25.

For 2024-2025, new registrations for people accessing support via third sector projects reached 95% of the overall target (vs 93% in 2023-2024), which is normal as the project enters its last stages. The overall employability pathway achieved 90% over the same period. The percentage of third sector employability clients entering employment exceeded the 2024-2025 agreed target by 33% (vs by 15% in 2023-2024). The overall employability pathway exceeded this target by 6% over the same period. This is a high level of performance, considering the client groups have significant challenges to overcome.

For the whole Fife Employability Pathway, between 2022-25:

- 6,321 clients have been registered, against a target of 6,404 (98.5%)
- 2,395 clients have entered employment, against a target of 2,061 (116%)
- 34% of people registered have accessed employment

34% reflects that the Employability Pathway is targeted at those further from the job market i.e. clients that are currently economically inactive, with health or disability issues, with mental health as a barrier, from migrant, refugee communities and lone parent, low income, and workless families.

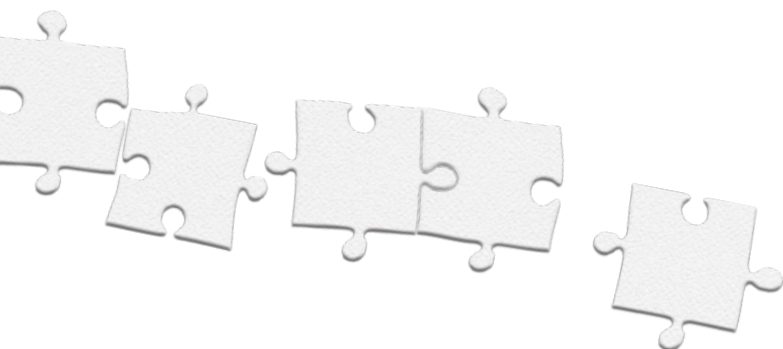
These client groups require the type of services provided by many third sector organisations: longer term, more intensive and person-centred activity tailored for their needs.

For 2025-2026, it is projected that 1,695 clients will be supported by third sector led projects



#### **RECOMMENDATION 11**

Advocate for - and deploy - multi-year funding to support sustainable provision and continuity for employability clients.



## Positive outcomes and distance travelled

Third sector projects capture clients’ outcomes and distance travelled using a variety of tools, such as the Outcomes Star<sup>30</sup> or other templates. While these work very well for individual clients and projects, the consistent meaningful recording of the positive impact of employability services at every stage of the client journey, remains a challenge for service commissioners. The value of these tools for those using services is entirely personal and often comes at an additional cost for the service provider.

When asked to quantify employment and other positive outcomes for their clients for the period between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, the third

sector employability providers surveyed were able to provide a very detailed and robust set of outcomes, showing the considerable role that their services play in improving work and life outcomes in Fife.

The responses have been split between employment and other positive outcomes to reflect current funding measures applied.

Out of a total of 5,107 individuals considered, many of whom being supported by other partners in addition to the project they were registered on, 1,252 accessed employment or training while another 2,073 moved to another positive destination.

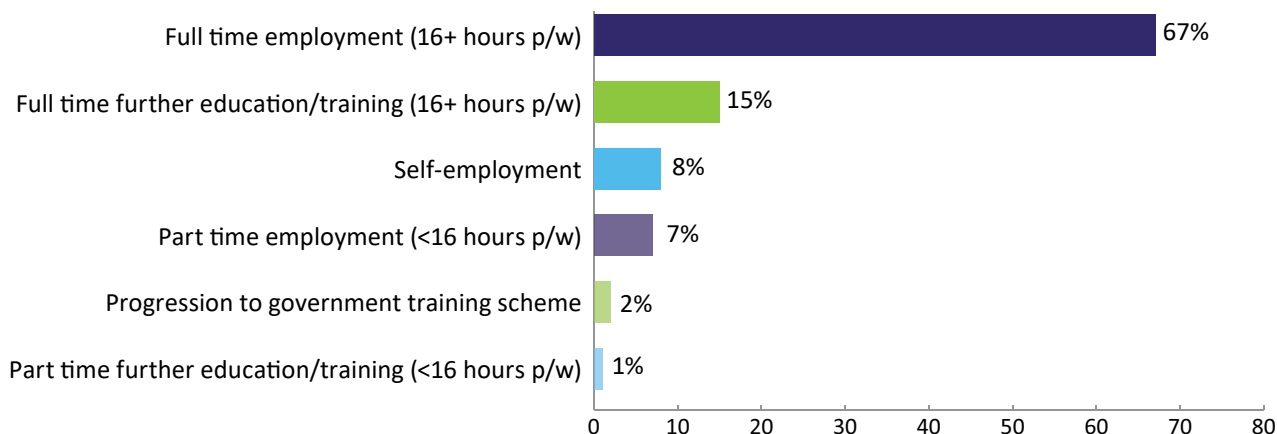
Figures 24 and 25 provide a proportional representation of these outcomes.



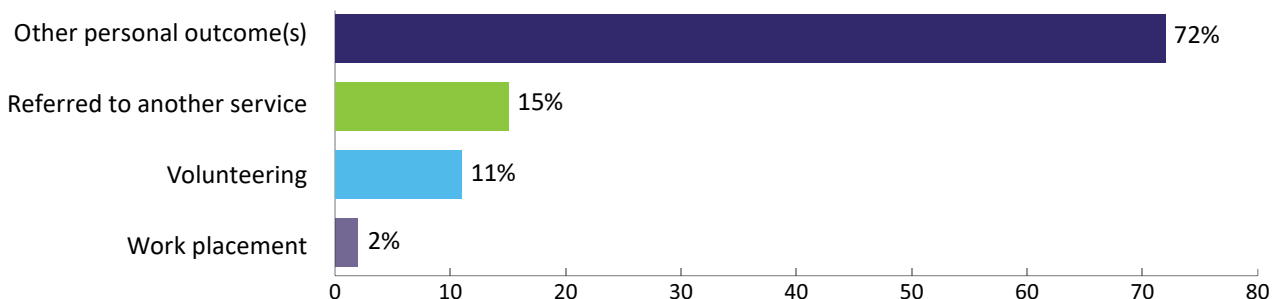
### RECOMMENDATION 12

Continue to support and resource monitoring arrangements and evaluation of distance travelled to improve consistency and equity for employability clients.

FIGURE 24: Clients entering employment or training



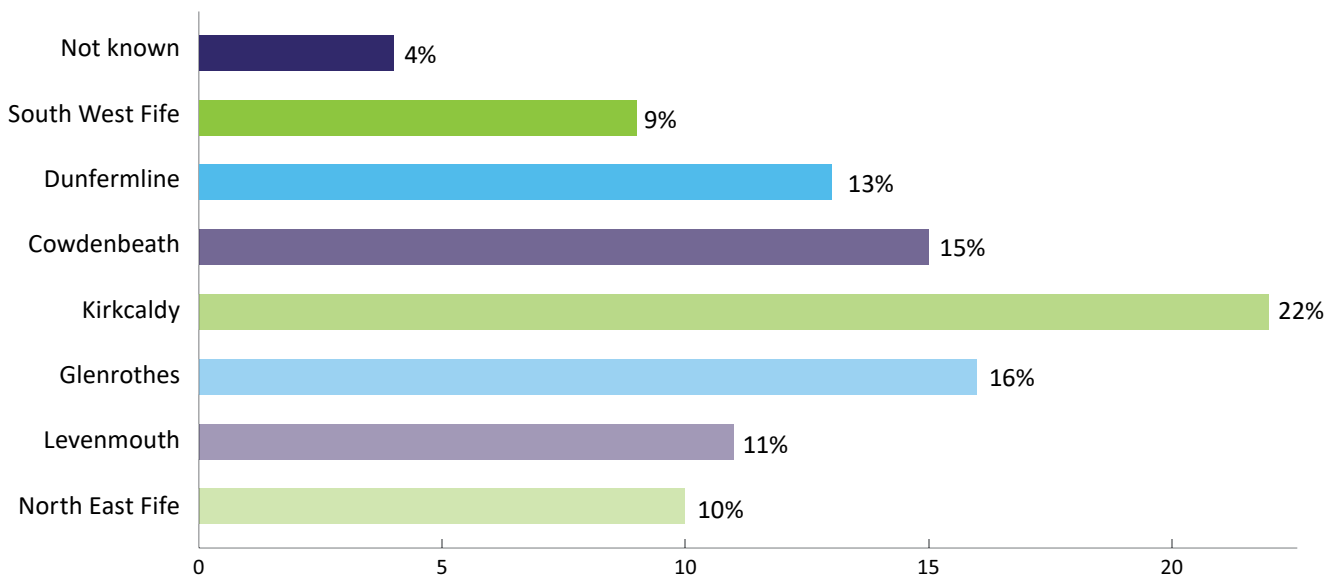
**FIGURE 25: Clients Moving to Other Outcomes**



1,782 other clients (mostly new in year registrations) did not have a confirmed progression route yet and they would continue to be supported during the 2024-25 period. This reflects the overall pathway analysis as described in local authority annual reporting.

The data extracted from FORT on the location of jobs by the seven area committees in Fife also evidences that the third sector provision focused on the areas of higher deprivation is having a considerable impact in terms of employment outcomes.

**FIGURE 26: Third sector job outcomes by area committee**



## Successes and challenges

Organisations were asked to outline the key challenges affecting their ability to support people into work in Fife, in 2024.

### Responses show that common themes include:

- Short-term funding creating challenging recruitment, retention and limited capacity to support professional development.
- Reporting requirements and measures ill-suited to some client groups (e.g., for young people)
- Limited funding against a landscape of rising costs, impacting on staffing capacity
- Structural barriers for clients, such as childcare, housing, transport, household additional support needs (ASN).
- Geographical spread, rurality and associated staff capacity and costs.
- A sharp rise in mental health support needs (as highlighted earlier in this report), with an increase of social anxiety and social isolation.
- Disconnect between employers' expectations and the needs and aspirations of families to gain Fair Work, including:
  - flexible work arrangements
  - health and wellbeing support
  - adaptations for people with neurodivergent conditions
  - Insufficient digital infrastructure and skills (particularly in specific locations or among specific client groups)
  - Language and cultural barriers affecting a growing number of employability clients

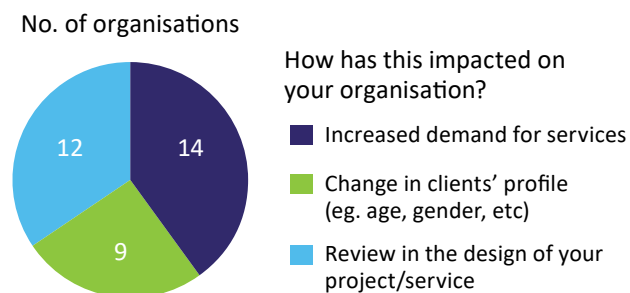
These concerns were widely supported by clients who reported facing increased challenges in accessing basic healthcare, such as dental treatment and GP appointments. This impacts their ability to manage ongoing health issues, which in turn affects their confidence and capacity to engage in employability programmes or attend interviews organised by employability providers.

### Other barriers highlighted were:

- Hours of work, especially part-time work unsuitable for people with caring responsibilities, disabilities, health conditions, and/or living in areas with a lack of suitable public transport.
- Cost of living crisis with rising costs for essentials leaving clients focused on day-to-day survival and unable to prioritise employability services or long-term career goals.
- Significant lack of confidence moving off benefits.
- Digital exclusion with a lack of access to technology and digital skills to access, job applications, training programmes, and service delivery (particularly for older clients or those in rural areas).

When asked how these challenges had impacted their organisations, respondents identified three key areas as described below.

**FIGURE 27: Impact of clients' barriers on organisations**



The most common comments provided referred to an increased demand from education services to support young people, a need for third sector organisations to increase staff capacity, difficulties reaching and recruiting some harder to reach client groups, and increased waiting times.

Frontline staff emphasised that the needs of families are greater and that it takes a more significant time and level of resource to start seeing progression for clients.

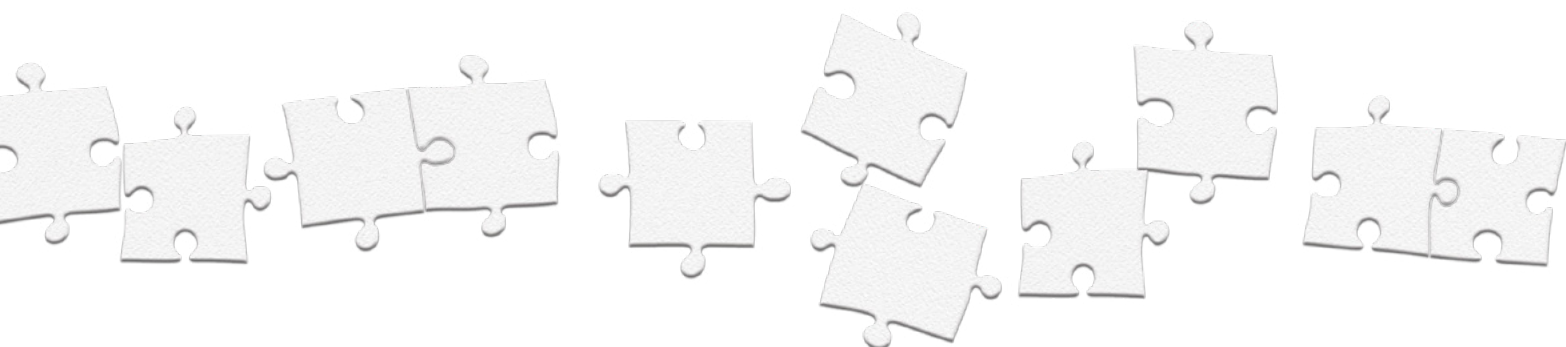


**RECOMMENDATION 13**

Advocate for and prioritise cross portfolio planning of services to support priority groups, maximise resources available and alleviate barriers to employability through effective commissioning approaches.

On a positive note, the recently conducted LEP maturity assessment which aimed to collate perspective from all partners across all LEPs, to review progress on the development of each LEP and support continuous improvement in the oversight and delivery of the

Scottish and Local Government No One Left Behind ambitions, reported a very positive picture for Fife. This includes the strong collaboration between third and public sector partners at strategic and operational levels.



The Fife Local Employability Partnership Maturity Assessment Report 2024<sup>31</sup> highlighted the following strengths:

- LEP members work together with shared aims and purpose.
- The LEP has a vision and strategic direction to which all are committed.
- Members share information from their own organisations to support effective decision making.
- Most members agree that the LEP has access to relevant data, and all agree that members share data and local knowledge to help plan activity.
- Most agree that the LEP engages with other relevant public services.
- Most members confirmed that they know what resources are available and share these to improve outcomes and strengthen delivery.

However, some comments suggest that there is room for improvement in areas including co-production and better sharing of information across other services and some are unsure whether investment decisions are ensuring value for money. Other comments suggest that further review of data and evidence would help drive improvement.

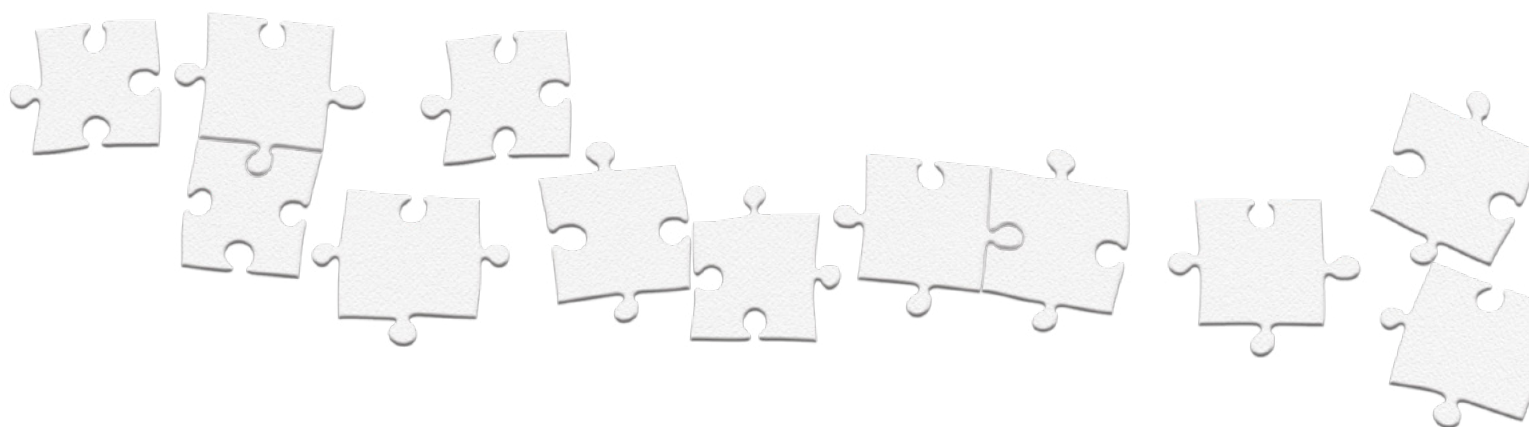
The Fife LEP has been highlighted as a leader in the effective implementation of the mixed economy of provision advocated by the Scottish Government's No One Left Behind Employability Strategic Plan 2024-2027.

Good practice to date and a strong role played by third sector organisations have yielded positive outcomes for the people of Fife. However, enduring and new challenges show that a more holistic planning approach is required to further improve employment outcomes and to tackle identified gaps and barriers.



#### **RECOMMENDATION 14**

Foster enhanced data driven planning and resourcing across agencies, including performance monitoring across services to support employability clients.



# Innovation and Ambitions

Beside the planning and delivery of frontline services and support to individual clients, Fife's third sector organisations also strive to develop innovative and wide-ranging activity.

They include externally funded research projects such as:

- Academic research reflecting on our collaborative practice and on using a co-design approach to achieve a variety of positive outcomes as reflected in the paper<sup>32</sup> published by Andrew Reid, a professor from Abertay University and whom BRAG worked with to develop the award-winning Games Design Programme.
- Partnership projects such as the Lone Parent Positive Workplaces project, an initiative funded by The Robertson Trust to be delivered in partnership with Fife Gingerbread, One Parent Families Scotland and Strathclyde Business School, with additional input from The Collective Scotland.

These exemplify the level of capability, and, at times, untapped potential held within third sector employability organisations in Fife to further advance quality and efficacy of employability services at local and national level. There is also no shortage of forward thinking and of local initiatives to foster effective and productive collaboration. A few examples are:

- Employability drop-in (Dunfermline Community Support Hub).
- Creation by the FVA employability team of a green skills in employability group to develop of a contextualised programme, working with Climate Action Fife and specialist partner organisations.

- Creation and leadership of a People and Skills Community of Practice (incl. third and public sector partners) by the FVA employability team.
- Participation in and support to the Fife's commitment to Community Wealth Building (FVA was the first anchor organisation to Fife's charter).
- Engagement in new projects in line with national imperatives and social justice e.g. the Turnaround pilot project, working with the Scottish Prison Service.
- Active involvement in local progressive recruitment activity with employability providers supporting the Life Chances programme led by Fife Council though 30 work placements to date and 49 planned for employability clients.
- Creation and management of a Fife-wide reference database of services (employability and others) by FVA.
- Engagement with and support to key strategic public sector initiatives such as the No Wrong Door pilot project in the Cowdenbeath area.

In this respect, providing a more stable and financially secure operating environment would be of great benefit to all concerned.



## RECOMMENDATION 15

Ensure organisations have sufficient time to develop funding proposals, are resourced to develop their people/service and are paid in a timely manner to support recruitment, training, marketing and the creation of project resources.

# Strategic Imperatives

Similarly, there are identified areas for development where the pace of change needs to increase, meaning more focus for third sector providers and associated tailored support required.

These include:

## National priorities

- Funding with the uncertainty linked to the transitional UKSPF and the new local growth fund<sup>33</sup>, the evolving conversations on multi-annual funding, the impact of reduced Health and Social Care budgets, the increase in NI for third sector organisations, not to mention the SES review and pan-disability commitment from summer 2025
- Labour market and priority groups e.g. NEET and LTU
- Emerging priorities (NOLB strategic plan): Working with business - Just transition

## Local and regional priorities

The No Wrong Door ambitions at the centre of local authority planning in Fife are based on the 2024 review as described below:

*“We reviewed the position again and decided to retain those focussed commitments for 2024-2027. The pandemic has passed, but its legacy, and the increased cost of living, are part of everyday life. The latest Strategic Assessment shows that Fife continues to face persistent issues which are causing social, economic and environmental harm to people and communities.”*

This sits within the Fife overarching priorities highlighted for the period 2024-2027

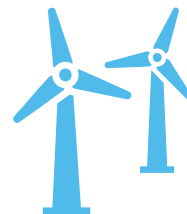
Tackling the root causes of poverty and inequality



Growing the local economy and building community wealth



Addressing the impacts of climate change



## Impact on services offered

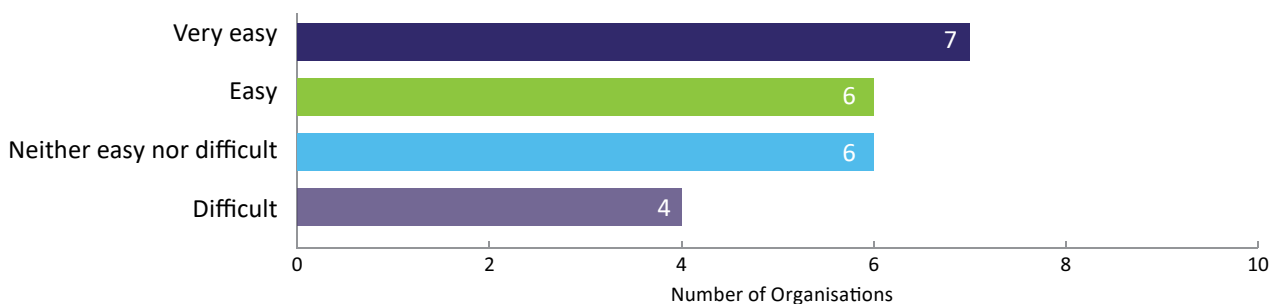
Geographical inequalities (mid Fife) and challenges linked to the demographic curve are well documented for Fife and supported by the Stat-Xplore statistics available online. While these are routinely used for strategic planning at regional and local level, it is also important that delivery partners are supported in understanding and translating these as part of the design and delivery of their offer.

This calls for an appropriate level of information and professional development opportunities for partner organisations. As described throughout the report, the third sector is an essential component of the successful performance and positive impact of services provided to the people in Fife. The realisation of the future aspirations listed above will be heavily reliant on third sector expertise, reach and capacity. Therefore, careful consideration should continue to be given to resourcing opportunities for training and development within third sector organisations.

When asked about their ability to provide professional development opportunities for their staff over the past three years, survey respondents provided a reasonably positive picture in relation to their opportunities as shown below.

**FIGURE 28: Professional development opportunities**

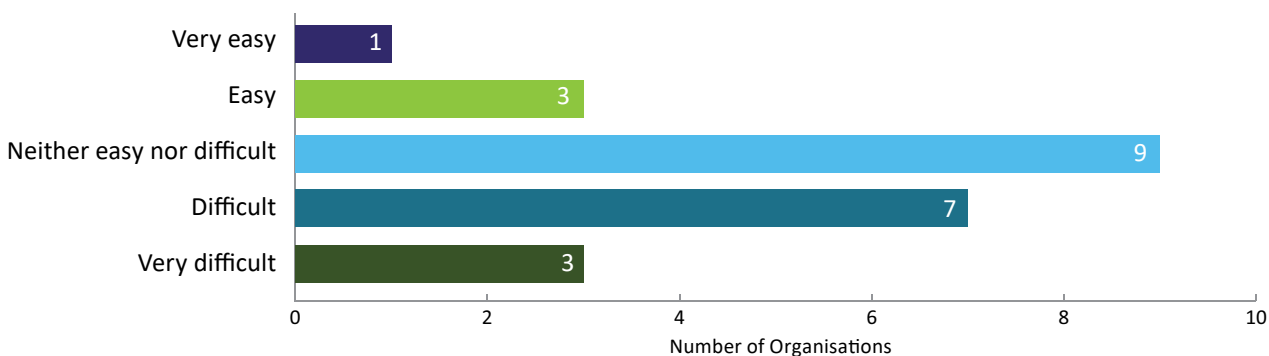
How easy has it been for your organisation to provide professional development for your staff over the past three years?



However, responses related to recruitment tended to counterbalance or to make this more difficult from a sustainability angle and when third sector employees leave organisations.

**FIGURE 29: Recruitment**

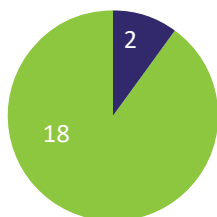
How easy has it been for your organisation to recruit staff over the past 12 months?



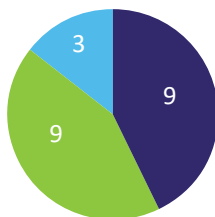
When asked about how well their services were able to support the skills agenda and for example the green skills required to support the Just transition and net zero strategic objective, few respondents appeared to be sufficiently well equipped. While this is not a surprise, as this emerging priority only dates from September 2024, this goes to show that supporting continuous staff development is critical in preparing employability to gain and sustain work.

**FIGURE 30: Green skills**

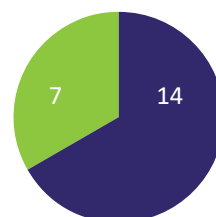
Is there enough training available to support the green skills agenda within employability provision?



Is there enough knowledge in your organisation about the type of green skills required for future work opportunities?



Is the Climate Action agenda part of the design and delivery of your projects/services?



■ Yes  
 ■ No  
 ■ Don't know

Moving forward, there are clear opportunities to capitalise on existing knowledge and expertise to mainstream this across the employability network by asking third sector specialist providers for support and by enabling them to do so.

**Survey respondents said:**

*“Our volunteering and employability programmes allow people to develop skills in a range of green jobs, and we include climate literacy as part of our offer. The people we work with want to take an active role in tackling the climate emergency and we would welcome the roll out of similar awareness raising and training in other organisations and workplaces so that the people we support can be confident that there are green job and training opportunities available to move into.”*

*“Offering placements with local green businesses or engaging clients in community-led environmental projects could inspire interest and demonstrate real-world applications of these skills.”*

*“Specific training sessions and information to show what is meant by ‘green skills’ and how they are/will be relevant in everyday life going forward. Engagement from employers where emerging green skills is relevant.”*

*“By embedding green practices into employability training, we can empower clients to explore new career pathways while contributing positively to the environment.”*



**RECOMMENDATION 16**

Support the development and resourcing of green skills in employability through commissioning of tailored specialist provision to ensure that employability clients are not disadvantaged in the evolving labour market.

# Conclusions

The Fife employability pathway, underpinned and bolstered by the huge contributions made by third sector partners, continue to lead the way as a successful and well recognised example of a mixed economy of services.

The OFP commissioning approach is fostering true collaboration and the sharing of good practice across organisations and third and public services. Annual reports at local authority level, together with national evaluations, evidence positive performance and continued progress, despite the challenging circumstances that we operate within. Fife third sector employability providers are providing a highly effective response to local needs and an unrivalled level of support at community-based level.

Projects designed and delivered by the third sector organisations commissioned to provide employability services in Fife are fully aligned to the OFP key objectives and priority client groups. Their strength rests on person-centred and dynamic approaches, supported by meaningful and robust partnerships with public sector partners. Transparency and collaboration at planning, decision making, delivery and monitoring stages are key features of this well-established model of good practice.

However, and in line with the regional and national pictures, statistical evidence shows that further targeting and sharing of resources in support of evidence-based

decision making would contribute to accelerating the pace and to better support some existing or emerging priority groups on their employment journey. There is also a need for employability providers to ensure that their services remain in tune with existing and emerging clients' needs and aspirations, including changes in labour market conditions and specific professional development requirements for their staff.

Within a challenging and, at times, fragmented funding landscape at national and local levels, employability services cannot resolve all structural and/or individual barriers to employment if working in isolation. There is a clear role for all partners to advocate for a more joined up approach at strategic level. While strong links and some short or medium term, formal or informal partnership arrangements already exist between third sector organisations and public services in particular, a more systematic commissioning approach across policy areas would allow for a truly holistic approach, maximise the use of resources available across portfolios and lead to a reduction of duplication and overlaps, and earlier interventions and preventative support in line with Fife Council's No Wrong Door ambitions.

# Summary of Recommendations

Most recommendations will have a bearing on the work conducted by the various partners involved in the Fife employability landscape. However, the respective spheres of influence and decision-making powers of individual organisations may define roles and responsibilities to implement these more specifically.

This would be aligned to the ongoing review of the LEP framework at national level.

The table below aims to provide a reference as to how these recommendations apply to partners concerned.

	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Main Delivery Agents</b>
1	Continue to prioritise resources allocation to identified target groups and localities, based on statistical evidence.	OFP	Fife Council
2	Ensure that opportunities linked to city deals projects and job creation are inclusive and made accessible to employability clients.	Fife Council	Tay Cities Deal ESESCRD
3	Maintain a strong level of mixed economy in the commissioning of Fife's future employability provision to support continued performance.	OFP	Fife Council
4	Capitalise on the expertise and reach provided to the partnership by FVA to enhance cross policy support to employability in Fife.	OFP	Fife Council
5	Maintain an appropriate range of providers to serve local community needs.	OFP	Third sector providers
6	Foster collaborative approaches and recognise specialisms to promote excellence in standards of delivery.	OFP	Third sector providers
7	Maintain and expand existing commissioned services through specialist employability services and core funding to ensure that clients' needs are met.	OFP	Fife Council

	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Lead Responsibility</b>	<b>Main Delivery Agents</b>
8	Resource upskilling and mental health and wellbeing support across the employability pathway.	OFP	Fife Council
9	Foster employer influence and engagement in the design and delivery of commissioned employability services to support sustained employment outcomes.	OFP	Fife Council Third sector providers
10	Ensure that service design principles continue to be central to the Fife NOLB provision of services by effectively fostering and resourcing participation of people with lived experience.	OFP	Third sector providers
11	Advocate for and deploy multi-year funding to support sustainable provision and continuity for employability clients.	OFP	Fife Council
12	Continue to support and resource monitoring arrangements and evaluation of distance travelled to improve consistency and equity for employability clients.	OFP	Fife Council Third sector providers
13	Advocate for and prioritise cross portfolio planning of services to support priority groups, maximise resources available and alleviate barriers to employability through effective commissioning approaches.	Fife Council	Scottish Government
14	Foster enhanced data driven planning and resourcing across agencies, including performance monitoring across services to support employability clients.	OFP	Fife Council Scottish Government
15	Ensure organisations have sufficient time to develop funding proposals, are resourced to develop their people / services and are paid in a timely manner to support recruitment, training, marketing and the creation of project resources.	OFP	Fife Council Third sector providers
16	Support the development and resourcing of green skills in employability through commissioning of tailored specialist provision to ensure that employability clients are not disadvantaged in the evolving labour market.	OFP	Fife Council Third sector providers

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# Glossary

<b>BRAG</b>	Benarty Regeneration Action Group	<b>LEP</b>	Local Employability Partnership
<b>CARF</b>	Citizens Advice Rights and Fife	<b>LTU</b>	Long Term Unemployed
<b>CRM</b>	Customer Relationship Management	<b>NEET</b>	Not in Education Employment or Training
<b>DDI</b>	Data Driven Innovation	<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>DEAP</b>	Dundee Employment and Aftercare Project	<b>NI</b>	National Insurance
<b>DWP</b>	Department for Work and Pensions	<b>NOLB</b>	No One Left Behind
<b>ESESCRD</b>	Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal	<b>OPF</b>	Opportunities Fife Partnership
<b>ETC</b>	Employment Training Consortium	<b>ONS</b>	Office for National Statistics
<b>FEAT</b>	Fife Employment Access Trust	<b>SAMH</b>	Scottish Action for Mental Health
<b>FIF</b>	Fife International Forum	<b>SCVO</b>	Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
<b>FORT</b>	Fife Online Referrals Tracking	<b>SDS</b>	Skills Development Scotland
<b>FSS</b>	Fair Start Scotland	<b>SE</b>	Supported Employment
<b>FVA</b>	Fife Voluntary Action	<b>SES</b>	Specialist Employability Support
<b>HCI</b>	Housing, Construction and Infrastructure	<b>TSI</b>	Third Sector Interface
<b>IPS</b>	Individual Placement and Support	<b>TSOs</b>	Third Sector Organisations
<b>IRES</b>	Integrated Regional Employability and Skills	<b>UKSPF</b>	United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund



The Fife employability pathway, underpinned and bolstered by the huge contributions made by third sector partners, continue to lead the way as a successful and well recognised example of a mixed economy of services.

The OFP commissioning approach is fostering true collaboration and the sharing of good practice across organisations and third and public services. Annual reports at local authority level, together with national evaluations, evidence positive performance and continued progress, despite the challenging circumstances that we operate within. Fife third sector employability providers are providing a highly effective response to local needs and an unrivalled level of support at community-based level.



[www.fva.org](http://www.fva.org)