

No-One Left Behind Fife

A Formative Evaluation



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SHORT SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This report presents the methods and findings of an evaluation of No One Left Behind Fife. The evaluation was carried out by PHIRST Fusion. We conducted an evaluability assessment (EA) to engage stakeholders in Fife and others involved in employability policy making in the development of an evaluation plan. Based on the recommendations of the EA, we interviewed stakeholders involved in the commissioning process, managers and staff involved in delivering NOLB services, and recipients of those services. We used the information from the interviews to understand how far NOLB services were being commissioned and delivered in accordance with the design principles set out in the Scottish Approach to Service Design (SAtSD) and adapted for the provision of inclusive, flexible, person-centred employability services in Fife.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

POLICY

The NOLB principles set out by the Scottish Government and adapted in the process of commissioning services in Fife are a strong basis for providing flexible, person-centred services that are highly valued by recipients, both for the way they are delivered and the benefits that result in terms of improved confidence and wellbeing. Some improvements could be made to commissioning procedures to improve accessibility for bidders, especially those from small organisations or with less experience of bidding for public contracts, and for lived experience panel members. It is important that monitoring and evaluation procedures also reflect the NOLB principles. Too close a focus on employment outcomes will overlook the wider benefits that NOLB services can deliver for participants.

PRACTICE

NOLB funding was primarily seen by providers as a way of enabling them to continue working in ways they were accustomed to, with some advantages in terms of flexibility. The need for longer funding cycles, identified by bidders in the Phase 1 interviews, was also keenly felt by the providers we interviewed in Phase 2. Short contracts were seen as an obstacle to staff retention, service development and the provision of long term support for clients. Given the complexity and diversity of many clients' needs, discretion to support them in flexible ways was seen as critical to providing person-centred support emphasised by the NOLB principles. Users of services were extremely positive about the help they received. Those we spoke to felt that services were accessible, friendly and discreet, and that the support they received had helped them to become more confident and optimistic about the future.

RESEARCH

Service recipients' challenging personal circumstances and characteristics meant that online interviews were far from ideal. Interviewing service recipients in familiar settings where they felt more comfortable was ruled out by COVID restrictions but would be the preferred approach in any further evaluation. Service providers are small organisations operating under considerable pressure, so although managers and staff were keen to engage with the research, finding times at which they could join a focus group was not straightforward. Adequate time needs to be allowed in research plans to engage recipients and providers in ways that allow them to participate fully.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No One Left Behind (NOLB) Fife is an implementation of the Scottish Government's NOLB policy that aims to meet the specific needs of the local population in Fife. The approach in Fife is underpinned by the Scottish Approach to Service Design (SAtdSD) to help partners understand what type of employability services they should be commissioning under NOLB.

This report summarises an evaluation of the No One Left Behind Fife employability services. An evaluability assessment (EA) was conducted to inform the design and planning of the evaluation. Based on the recommendations of the EA, the evaluation was undertaken in two phases. Phase 1 involved a process evaluation of how the commissioning design process in Fife is working in practice and how it reflected national and local design principles. A full report of Phase 1 is available separately, but key details of the methods, findings and implication are included here. Phase 2 involved a formative process evaluation that employed semi-structured interviews, focus groups and participatory methods to understand service delivery from the perspective of both those delivering the services and the recipients of the services. The evaluation was undertaken between March 2021 and May 2022 by researchers from the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, working as part of the PHIRST Fusion team funded by the National Institute of Health Research.

METHODS

PHASE 1. Evaluated the commissioning process and was informed by information gathered from a series of online 'Collaborative Conversations' undertaken by Fife Voluntary Action and Fife Centre for Equalities on behalf of Fife Council to explore how well existing employability services were working, plus interviews with people belonging to the following groups:

- Stakeholders - not directly involved in the selection and decision-making process, but able to offer background support and information.
- Members of the commissioning panel – those in professional roles, and lived experience panel members, all of whom were directly involved in scoring of the submitted bids, and the decision-making process to select those bids which were successful.
- Bidders for the NOLB work – including those who bid successfully, those who were unsuccessful, and those who registered interest but did not proceed with their bid.

The evaluation aimed to consider whether the commissioning process reflected the principles underpinning the Fife NOLB approach, which features were key to its success (or otherwise), whether the process was considered fair and efficient by participants, and how it could be improved

PHASE 2. Evaluated the service provision and experiences of recipients of the services by interviewing both service providers and recipients of services and addressed the following research questions:

- Are services being delivered in a way that reflects Scottish Approach to Service Design principles, as set out in the commissioning brief?
- Are providers receiving an appropriate stream of referrals? Are they working with one another to ensure that people reach the most appropriate services?
- Are providers able to engage recipients of services and sustain engagement long enough to achieve good outcomes?
- Are providers able to use equalities monitoring and other forms of routinely collected data to evaluate and improve their own processes?

- How are providers using NOLB infrastructure support? Do they find it helpful? What additional support would they find useful?
- What other barriers or enablers do providers identify as important?
- Are providers able to adapt their delivery of services to improve engagement and outcomes for service users?
- Do the experiences of recipients of services reflect the principles underpinning the commissioning framework?
- Do recipients of services remain engaged with services, and what events or experiences encourage or discourage continued engagement?
- Do recipients of services who remain engaged feel they are progressing towards employment? What do they see as the main factors hindering or helping them to make progress?

FINDINGS: PHASE 1

Analysis of the evidence provided by participants who took part in interviews (12 participants, who took part in 14 recorded interviews) and earlier Collaborative Conversations, resulted in several areas for consideration and potential action being identified (a number of which were subsequently reflected in the commissioning process for 2022/23 services):

The application process

- Addressing issues with timescales and registration with Public Contracts Scotland
- Providing further information on whole budget spend
- Ensuring that smaller, newer and less experienced organisations are not disadvantaged by the application process
- Bidders should be clear about the 'added value' of their services
- Bidders should present their information clearly and with the knowledge that it will be read and assessed by a range of people (e.g., lived experience members)

The panel and decision-making process

- Further training and preparation for lived experience panel members
- Ensuring focus is on services to address equality issues and poverty/deprivation

Service delivery

- Creating more time between being notified of award and expected start of service delivery
- As only one year of service provision is guaranteed, needs to be realism about what can be achieved, and consideration of whether future funding could be for a longer duration

FINDINGS PHASE 2

Providers of services

- Service providers had many years' experience of delivering flexible, person-centred, and holistic employability services. As such, their core values were already very similar to those underpinning NOLB.
- Service providers were very aware of the NOLB principles and clearly implemented them in working with clients. There were many examples of providers identifying needs and adapting services to help clients with barriers in almost any area of life.
- Providers reported that NOLB had expanded the range of eligible clients, facilitated more collaborative partnership working, and allowed clients to receive support from more than one service or funding stream. This facilitated more joined up and holistic service delivery

- A number of respondents felt there was a lack of understanding by policy makers of the challenges faced by many of their clients, and consequently unrealistic expectations of the types of outcomes clients could be expected to achieve.
- The Fife Online Referral Tracking (FORT) system appeared to be the principal means of reporting to funders. Some (though not all) providers expressed frustration that FORT was overly focused on hard employability outcomes and overlooked progress in areas such as self-confidence, group participation, or independent travel.
- Aspects of NOLB's infrastructure generated uncertainty. Short funding cycles hindered the delivery of time unlimited services and service planning. Delays in receiving funding decisions, guidance, and other documentation undermined job security and efficient service delivery

Recipients of services

- Recipients of services are typically experiencing challenging personal situations and recognise that their journey towards employability may be slow.
- Recipients of services highlighted a wide range of benefits from their involvement with NOLB providers e.g., building confidence, motivation, access to training and activities to support their personal development.
- Access was described as dependent on referral from other organisations, whilst this was described as easy, there may be scope to consider in more detail how people find out about the services on offer, how awareness of services can be improved, and whether there are opportunities for self-referral.
- A person-centred approach to delivery of services, including a range of options for how users engage with activities and services is important to meet the individual needs of different service users.
- Feedback from recipients of services was very positive. This was particularly linked to the non-judgemental and person-centred approach that recipients of services described, and how this had enabled them to feel listened to, to gain confidence, and to feel hopeful about their future.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Policy

The NOLB principles set out by the Scottish Government and adapted in the process of commissioning services in Fife are a strong basis for providing flexible, person-centred services that are highly valued by recipients, both for the way they are delivered and the benefits that result in terms of improved confidence and wellbeing. On the basis of experiences of the first round of commissioning in 2021, some improvements could be made to commissioning procedures to improve accessibility for bidders, especially those from small organisations or with less experience of bidding for public contracts, and for lived experience panel members. Service providers would also welcome a speedier decision-making process and greater clarity about when decisions could be conveyed to their staff. It is important that monitoring and evaluation procedures reflect the NOLB principles. Too close a focus on employment outcomes will overlook the wider benefits that NOLB services can deliver for participants.

Practice

NOLB funding was primarily seen by providers as a way of enabling them to continue working in ways they were accustomed to, with some advantages in terms of flexibility. The need for longer funding cycles, identified by bidders in the Phase 1 interviews, was also keenly felt by the providers we interviewed in Phase 2. Short contracts were seen as an obstacle to staff retention, service development and the provision of long term support for clients. Given the complexity and diversity of many clients' needs, discretion to support them in flexible ways was seen as critical to the kind of providing person-centred support emphasised by the NOLB principles. Users of services were extremely positive about the help they received. Those we spoke to felt that services were accessible, friendly and discreet, and that the support they received had helped them to become more confident and optimistic about the future.

Research

Service recipients' challenging personal circumstances and characteristics meant that online interviews were far from ideal. Interviewing service recipients in familiar settings where they felt more comfortable was ruled out by COVID restrictions but would be the preferred approach in any further evaluation. Service providers are small organisations operating under considerable pressure, so although managers and staff were keen to engage with the research, finding times at which they could join a focus group was not straightforward. Adequate time needs to be allowed in research plans to engage recipients and providers in ways that allow them to participate fully.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

On a wide range of markers of socio-economic advantage or disadvantage, Fife is disadvantaged relative to Scotland as a whole (Fife Centre for Equalities, 2021). The proportion of the working age population claiming unemployment benefits is similar to the Scottish and UK, but the unemployment rate is markedly higher (5.4% in Fife compared with 3.6% for Scotland and 4.25% for the UK) (Fife Partnership, 2021). No One Left Behind (NOLB) Fife is an implementation of the Scottish Government's NOLB policy (Scottish Government, 2020a) that aims to meet the specific employability needs of the local population in Fife. The approach in Fife is underpinned by the Scottish Approach to Service Design (Scottish Government, 2019) to help partners understand what type of employability services they should be commissioning under NOLB. It recognises that a) employability services may have previously failed to meet the needs of some recipients of services who are furthest from the labour market, and b) the need for services to emphasise and strengthen their adaptable and responsive ability.

Commissioning services which aim to support people (as opposed to commissioning for the provision of supplies or built structures), and a selection process that focusses more on service provider experience than cost, can help to identify services that offer the optimum experience and skills for the role (Neumann, 2019). While the quality/cost ratio evaluation criterion is considered to be fundamental to many tender evaluations, the weighting given to quality for person-centred services needs to be taken into greater consideration. Therefore, while tenders still need to be assessed on the value for money they offer the authority through the whole-life cost of the contract, those benefits that meet service user requirements may need to be given greater priority. In addition, the Public Services (Social Value) Act (2012) requires those who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits. The Act encourages commissioners to talk to local providers to encourage the design of better services and new or innovative solutions to difficult problems, and for potential suppliers to deliver services that enhance the area and people with whom they will be working.

1.2 THE NOLB COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK

NOLB Fife sought to commission employability provision in a way which champions the unique needs of individuals at risk of being 'left behind', as well as acknowledging the dynamic and rapidly changing economic and employment context in which employability services operate. The approach aimed to be collaborative, equalities driven, and to involve recipients of services at every stage of the development and evaluation of NOLB services, as per the Scottish Approach to Service Design principles. The Fife approach is summarised in Appendix 1 (Section 8.1)

The Fife NOLB Working Group started meeting in July 2019, with representatives from key partners. The working group was supported by sub-groups leading on key strands of work such as consultation and communication. The voice of experience was key to developing new provision in Fife, to ensure commissioned services will be responsive and relevant. Respondents therefore included: frontline staff, those who had used or were currently using employment services, and those who had never used an employment service before. There were also targeted efforts to engage people protected under the Equalities Act (2010), in line with the Scottish Human Rights PANEL principles of:

Participation, Non- Discrimination, Engagement, and Legality (Scottish Human Rights Commission, 2021). The resultant co-produced Commissioning Framework set out a series of principles for service delivery; NOLB Fife services should seek to be:

Equal and fair: people accessing the service will be treated as equals, they will feel respected, trusted and listened to

Strengths-based: provision will focus on helping people to identify and grow their own strengths rather than solving problems for them

Non-judgemental: people will feel able to open-up without risk of judgment, staff will bring humility and an open mind to understand peoples' individual situation and challenges

Discreet: services will be provided in a way that respects people's need for privacy and the vulnerability associated with accessing support services

Collaborative: services will work together to ensure people get the support they need when they need it

Time unlimited and progressive: 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

Continuously improving: services will actively gather feedback from people who use their services, reflect on delivery and demonstrate a willingness to adapt and learn

Hopeful: provision will hold the hope for everyone who comes through the door (and those who don't), and support people to recognise, voice and progress their individual hopes.

1.3 IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The health, social and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic were still evolving as the Framework was being developed. It is expected that there will be unprecedented levels of unemployment and slow economic growth in certain sector and supply chains in Fife for several years to come. Evidence from previous recessions suggests people affected by protected characteristics will be disproportionately negatively affected. The resultant impact this will have on No One Left Behind employability services has been acknowledged, and it will be imperative that services remain flexible to the on- going situation, particularly if employability services and certain jobs need to operate remotely.

In further relation to this, the issues created by digital poverty across Fife have been significant, having severe impacts on people's ability to access and interact with a wide range of services, including employability services and jobs. The national Connecting Scotland (Connecting Scotland, 2021) programme aims to address elements of this, but nevertheless it will be critical for No One Left Behind provision to factor this into service delivery.

A number of national and local strategies and funding streams are being developed to try and address this including: the Scottish Government Economic Recovery Implementation Plan, Coronavirus: Measures to mitigate labour market impacts (Scottish Government, 2020b); Towards a Robust,

Resilient Wellbeing Economy for Scotland (Scottish Government, 2020c); Young Person Guarantee (Scottish Government, 2020d); Inclusion Health: Principles and Practice (Public Health Scotland, 2020), and locally: Fife's Economic Recovery Plan (Fife Partnership, 2021).

2 THE EVALUATION

Evaluation of NOLB was undertaken by researchers from one of the Public Health Intervention Responsive Studies Team (PHIRST Fusion) with input from members of the Fife NOLB team. The PHIRST teams are funded by the National Institute for Health Research and undertake responsive research with a focus on local government across the UK. The researchers for this project are based in the Universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Newcastle.

2.1 EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT

We used evaluability assessment methods (Leviton, 2010; Craig and Campbell, 2015) to develop the evaluation design. Evaluability assessment is a rapid, systematic, and collaborative way of deciding whether and how a programme or policy can be evaluated, and at what potential cost. We conducted four evaluability assessment workshops with NOLB Fife stakeholders to ascertain their understanding of how NOLB Fife will deliver better employability services for people who might otherwise find it difficult to find good jobs, what are the most important goals of the intervention, and what information is needed to best inform future service development.

Workshop participants included people with lived experience of using employment services, local government, NHS and voluntary sector stakeholders, and observers from the Department of Work and Pensions and the Scottish Government. We allowed the workshop format to evolve to take account of feedback from preceding workshops, and to enable stakeholders to shape the approach to evaluation.

The Evaluability Assessment process identified that two distinct phases would be needed in the evaluation. Phase 1 involved a process evaluation of how the commissioning design process in Fife is working in practice and how it reflected national and local design principles. Phase 2 involved a formative evaluation that employed semi-structured interviews and focus to understand service delivery from the perspective of both providers and recipients of services. The evaluation is underpinned by the principle of understanding change from diverse perspectives. The approach provides opportunities for co-production and knowledge mobilisation, which emerged or were clarified in the evaluability assessment workshops and in discussion with the embedded practitioner in Fife. They relate to four of the six NIHR School for Public Health Research knowledge-sharing principles (School for Public Health Research, 2018).

2.1.1 PRINCIPLE 1: CLARIFY PURPOSE AND KNOWLEDGE-SHARING GOALS

We aimed to share knowledge by working co-productively to provide evidence and insight for a range of stakeholders about how recipients of services are experiencing NOLB services in Fife and how delivery of services influences user experience. The focus on the service experience of users will supplement existing service monitoring systems in Fife. The evaluation will support work by local commissioners to develop NOLB services as additional funding resources come into scope. It also has potential to inform implementation of NOLB elsewhere in Scotland and to be of interest to service providing organisations and the Scottish Government.

2.1.2 PRINCIPLE 2: IDENTIFY KNOWLEDGE USERS

The people who would use NOLB services were among those identified by workshop participants as a key audience for the outputs from the evaluation. People who use services will be a key informant

group and active participants in the research process. When workshop participants were asked about the importance of taking account of the perspectives of different stakeholders in the evaluation, all responded it was extremely important to include those of NOLB service users. Other key knowledge users identified in the workshops were NOLB staff and service providing organisations, along with the Scottish Government, funders, and other local authorities.

2.1.3 PRINCIPLE 3: DESIGN THE RESEARCH TO INCORPORATE THE EXPERTISE OF KNOWLEDGE USERS

The research design (semi-structured interviews, focus groups and participatory methods to engage diverse perspectives) was agreed with local stakeholders. The focus on the service experience of users included what they do, think, feel and what and with whom they interact. During the Evaluability Assessment process (see separate document), local stakeholders pointed to the importance of involving recipients of services in co-producing this phase of the research, by acting as peer researchers, working alongside the research team and conducting additional interviews. A participatory approach, involving ordinary members of the community to generate in-depth and contextual data has potential to include 'hard-to-reach' participants and is most consistent with NOLB principles. The proposed approach provided evidence of user experience, and supplementing existing service monitoring systems in Fife. It also included exploration of how services are delivered by front-line staff in service providing organisations, taking account of the perspectives of this key group of knowledge users.

2.1.4 PRINCIPLE 4: AGREE EXPECTATIONS

Given the diversity of proposed participants, we anticipated that recipients of services and service providing organisations would have different viewpoints. This range of views is important to capture and report in this phase, and local stakeholders are aware and supportive of the approach. The evaluation was undertaken in two phases. The aim of the first phase was to ascertain the views of those involved in the commissioning process on whether the process followed the Scottish Approach to Service Design (SAtSD), and whether it had led to the commissioning of Services that reflect the principles set out in the NOLB Fife Commissioning Brief. The aim of the second phase was to explore service providers' and recipients' perceptions and experiences of how the commissioned services are being delivered, and whether delivery matches the principles set out in the commissioning brief.

2.2 AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2.2.1 PHASE 1 AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Phase 1 aimed to ascertain the views of those involved in the commissioning process on whether the process followed the Scottish Approach to Service Design, and whether it resulted in the commissioning of services that reflect the principles set out in the NOLB Fife Commissioning Brief. This information was used, in conjunction with data from Phase 2 of the evaluation, to answer the following research questions:

1. Do those involved in developing and implementing the commissioning process for NOLB-Fife services believe that the process was successful in commissioning services that reflect the principles underpinning the Fife approach?
2. What features of the commissioning process do stakeholders believe were key to its success or otherwise? How do they believe it could be improved?

3. Do bidders perceive the commissioning process to be fair and efficient? How do they believe it could be improved?
4. What can future commissioning exercises for employability and related services learn from the experience of NOLB Fife?

In order to include as much information as possible from personal perspectives, those involved in the process were invited to take part in semi-structured video or telephone interviews. This report focusses on analysis of these interviews.

2.2.2 PHASE 2 AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Phase 2 aimed to answer the following research questions:

Service providers

1. Are services being delivered in a way that reflects Scottish Approach to Service Design design principles, as set out in the commissioning brief?
2. Are providers receiving an appropriate stream of referrals? Are they working with one another to ensure that people reach the most appropriate services?
3. Are providers able to engage recipients of services and sustain engagement long enough to achieve good outcomes?
4. Are providers able to use equalities monitoring and other forms of routinely collected data to evaluate and improve their own processes?
5. How are providers using NOLB infrastructure support? Do they find it helpful? What additional support would they find useful?
6. What other barriers or enablers do providers identify as important?
7. Are providers able to adapt their delivery of services to improve engagement and outcomes for service recipients?

Service recipients

8. Do the experiences of recipients of services reflect the principles underpinning the commissioning framework?
9. Do recipients of services remain engaged with services, and what events or experiences encourage or discourage continued engagement?
10. Do recipients of services who remain engaged feel they are progressing towards employment? What do they see as the main factors hindering or helping them to make progress?

3 METHODS

Both Phase 1 and Phase 2 used primarily qualitative methods (interviews and focus groups) as sources of data.

3.1 PHASE 1 DATA COLLECTION

The interviews took place in March-April 2021, to coincide with the commissioning panel decision-making timeline. We aimed to gain feedback from a selection of panel members (both those in a professional role, and lived experience panel members), and people who had submitted bids. In addition to interview data from lived experience panel members, we were given access to the comments they made to accompany their selection panel scoring sheet. This information was

incorporated into the analysis to augment interview data (Bowen 2009). In addition to those bidders who already knew the outcome of their bid, we sought to interview a small selection of bidders both before and after they knew the outcome of their bid. We also sought to speak with potential bidders who had not submitted bids, in order to gain information about why they did not proceed. In total, we interviewed five panel members, four bidders (two of whom were interviewed before and after they knew the outcome), and one potential bidder. In addition to these sources of data, we interviewed two stakeholders who had been closely involved in the commissioning process, but who had not been part of the selection panel. Interview templates can be found in Appendix 2 (Section 8.2.1). In addition to the interview data we drew on information from a series of online ‘Collaborative Conversations’ undertaken by Fife Voluntary Action and Fife Centre for Equalities on behalf of Fife Council to explore how well existing employability services were working. Over 120 people took part in these conversations in June/July 2020.

3.2 PHASE 2 DATA COLLECTION

3.2.1 SERVICE PROVIDERS

We conducted online semi-structured interviews and focus groups, with managers and staff in provider organisations at two time points. The balance between the two methods of data collection was based on the practicality of convening focus groups. Interviews and focus groups were conducted using MS Teams, recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The research plan had to be adapted as recruitment proved challenging, particularly in follow-up interviews. Staff were exceptionally busy and operating under considerable pressure, and service delivery was obviously their priority. This also required some respondents to join meetings whilst in transit, and at times the signal was not good enough and they were unable to participate. As a result, in some cases we conducted individual interviews rather than focus groups. Most of these were with service managers, which proved complementary to the focus groups, as they provided more in-depth insights into NOLB operations from the perspective of those dealing directly with funding and monitoring/reporting.

The first round of data gathering comprised three focus groups of staff and managers, and two individual interviews with service managers. Two focus groups included staff, and one was managers only. One interview was with a staff member, and one was with a manager. In the follow up, there were two focus groups and three individual interviews. Data collection was conducted between December 2021 and May 2022.

TABLE 1 NOLB FIFE SERVICE PROVIDERS' DATA COLLECTION

Service provider	First data collection	Follow-up
Provider 1	Focus group	Focus group
Provider 2	2 interviews (managers)	Focus group
Provider 3	Focus group (mixed)	2 interviews (mixed)
Provider 4	Focus group	1 interview (manager)

The topic guide for the first interviews was based closely on the aims and research questions (see Section 2.2.2). The follow-up topic guide built on these questions to further explore areas of interest which emerged in the first interviews, such as NOLB eligibility criteria and reporting requirements, and

structural issues impacting service delivery. The topic guides can be found in Appendix 2 (Section 8.2.2). Chapter 5 describes the findings of the interviews and focus groups, organised around the key themes arising from the research questions. Further illustrative quotes relating to each theme are provided in Appendix 4 (Section 8.2.4).

3.2.2 RECIPIENTS OF SERVICES

We interviewed service recipients at two time points, Between December 2021 and May 2022, we talked to thirty people that were using the services of organisations funded through Fife’s NOLB employability programme. We conducted one-to-one interviews with 20 service users, and two focus groups with a further five recipients of services in each group. Table 1 provides a summary of the people we spoke to. All one-to-one interviews were conducted over the telephone, one focus group was conducted over Zoom and the other was facilitated face-to-face as part of the group’s normal meeting in their own setting.

We conducted follow up interviews with five service users, between 2-3 months after we first spoke to them initial interview to find out how they were progressing and to see if they had any additional feedback. Informed by visual elicitation methods, we also invited all those we spoke with to share images, drawing or photos, that they felt represented their experiences and thoughts about their situations and the services they were engaged with. Only three people in one of the focus groups wanted to share drawings with us.

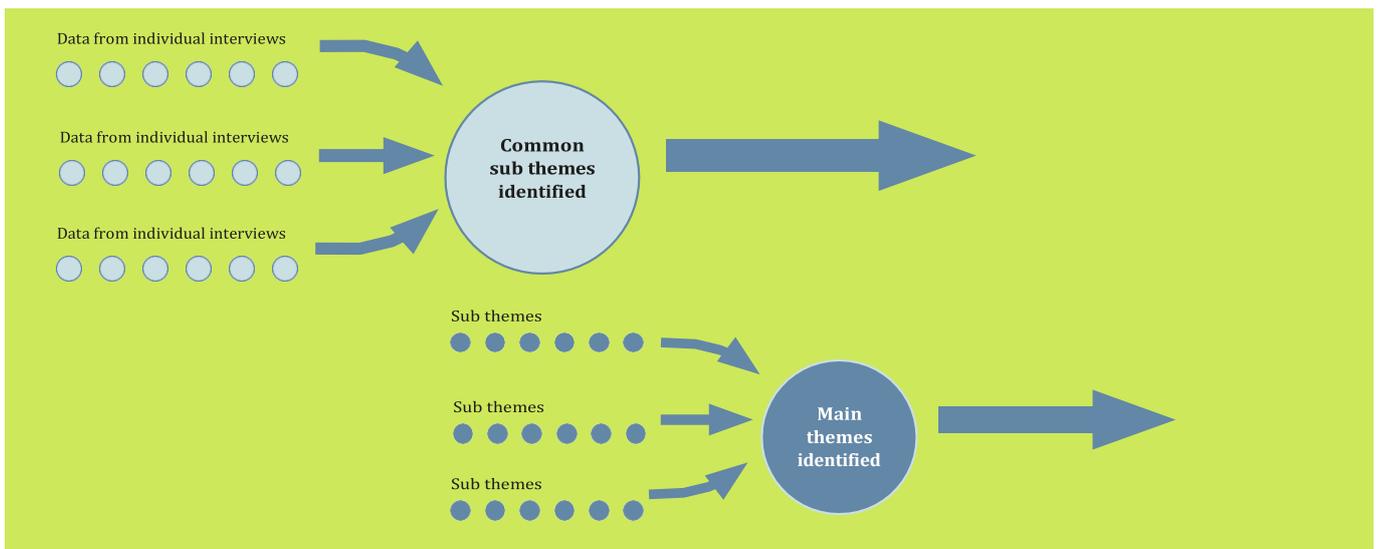
TABLE 2 NOLB FIFE SERVICE USERS' DATA COLLECTION

Service Provider Organisation	Recipients of services
Provider 1	4 one-to-one interviews (1 follow up)
Provider 2	16 one-to-one interviews (4 follow up)
Provider 3	5 recipients of services in one online focus group
Provider 4	5 recipients of services in one face to face focus group

3.3 ANALYSIS

For Phase 1, we used a mind-mapping approach to assist with the analysis (Burgess-Allen & Owen Smith, 2010; Buzan, 1974; Jackson & Trochim, 2002). The information gained from the interviews was summarised and grouped into main themes (which identified the overall concepts) and sub-themes (which explained the main themes in greater detail). The process of identifying sub-themes and main themes is outlined in Figure 1 below.

FIGURE 1: AMALGAMATING EVIDENCE INTO SUB-THEMES AND MAIN THEMES



Service provider and recipient interviews were analysed using NVivo. We coded responses using a pre-defined set of research themes related to the research questions, but added additional codes for themes that emerged during analysis...

3.4 DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

The University of Edinburgh was responsible for data management and data protection processes for Phase 1 and for the interviews with recipients in Phase 2. A Data Protection Impact Assessment was submitted with the application for ethical approval. Contact details of respondents were collected to facilitate follow-up interviews. Interview data was collected using password protected encrypted recording devices and uploaded to the University of Edinburgh's DataSync server.

Data will be offered to the UK Data Service at the end of the study. Contact details will be deleted at the end of the funded study period. Consent forms and pre-pseudonymised recordings and transcripts will be stored in the DataSync server for as long as the pseudonymised data are available from the archive.

Data protection and management processes for Phase 2 data collection with service providers were undertaken by the University of Glasgow. A Data Protection Impact Assessment was approved by the Data Protection Office. All data were collected via the UoG's secure Teams platform and are stored in secure drives. Contact details and consent forms are stored separately. Contact details and recordings will be deleted at the end of the study period. Consent forms and de-identified transcripts will be stored securely for at least 10 years.

3.5 ETHICS AND GOVERNANCE

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Edinburgh, School of Health in Social Science, Research Ethics Committee for the Phase 1 fieldwork and the interviews with service recipients in phase 2, and from the University of Glasgow, College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee for the fieldwork with service providers in phase 2.

4 PHASE 1 FINDINGS

A total of 12 people interviewed. Two bidders were interviewed both before and after they knew the outcome of their bid; 14 interviews were therefore included in the analysis, which was divided according to participants' role in the process. The themes that came out of the Collaborative Conversations and interview data are summarised in Table 3 and discussed in more detail in subsequent sections.

TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Participants	Main Themes	Sub Themes	Summary
Stakeholders	Knowledge of wider employability picture	Changing cultures at strategic level Simplifying the landscape Context of the pandemic	Stakeholders acknowledged the need to develop the concept of employability as part of a larger personal and societal ecosystem. Funding/admin processes needed to be simplified.
	Maximising service delivery	Reactive to proactive Person centric Co-production at all levels	Service delivery needed to be person-centred within a co-production ethos. The wider impact of the pandemic on employment was recognised
Panel members	Recognition of service need	Gaining insight Appropriate outcomes Appropriate bids	Panel members gained understanding through participation; lived experience panel members added vital input, although found
	Planning and preparation	Information overload Emotional impact	the process demanding. Services needed to provide employability and pre-employment benefits as/when needed
Bidders	Design and process	Transparency Process frustrations Co-production	Bidders appreciated the transparency of the bidding process, but timeframes/admin were challenging. Smaller, less experienced organisations

Participants	Main Themes	Sub Themes	Summary
	Effective service delivery	Understanding and commitment Changing attitudes	were felt to be disadvantaged. Bidders had a strong commitment to the people they aimed to help, and recognised the need to change attitudes

4.1 THEMES IDENTIFIED FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders were primarily experts who sat outside the decision-making process and offered support informed by their expertise and experience. Themes and subthemes resulting from their accounts are detailed below.

TABLE 4. STAKEHOLDER THEMES

Participants	Main Themes	Sub Themes
Stakeholders	Knowledge of wider employability picture	Context of the pandemic Changing cultures at strategic level Simplifying the landscape
	Maximising service delivery	Reactive to proactive Person centric Co-production at all levels

These themes and subthemes are discussed in more detail below.

4.1.1 KNOWLEDGE OF WIDER PICTURE OF EMPLOYABILITY

Context of the pandemic and the impact on people and delivery was seen as a very current problem and one that had materialised ‘live’ as the NOLB service and delivery plan was being developed. This resulted in ‘not necessarily having a small number of people who can’t access work but a large number of people who need work’. This was seen as complicating the landscape and potentially making employment for those furthest from the job market more challenging.

Changing cultures at strategic level for the design and delivery of employability services was seen as important to the stakeholders. It was considered that those who worked at policy level needed to understand that ‘employability is not a stand-alone function’ and that people’s (un) employment situation was part of a larger personal and societal ecosystem. With regard to Simplifying the landscape, funding allocation and provision was felt to be better as a single stream, rather than differing allocations that lacked flexibility of use (e.g., in the current system, youth funding provision needed to be spent on services for young people, rather than to meet a local need that might be different). There was acknowledgement that the administration processes that currently existed were

a ‘nightmare’. For clarity it was felt that there was a need for an independent team within the local authority to receive and regulate funding provision and management.

4.1.2 IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY

‘Reactive to proactive’ was a theme that echoed the need to change, not just a policy level, but also for delivery ‘on the ground’, and to encourage people to ‘think differently about what they are doing’ and engage in ‘reflection on current practice’. Person centric provision was at the core of moving from a solution-focussed approach to a person-centred approach, with a pro-human-rights, anti-stigma, and anti- discriminatory emphasis Co-production at all levels was considered vital - within the selection panel, within the bidding process, and in service delivery.

An equal balance of control and influence between service deliverers and people who use employability services was felt to facilitate co-production. It was considered that the inclusion of people with lived experience assisted everyone to understand context and needs to a greater extent and was consistent with the Scottish Approach to Service Design. However, it was also acknowledged that those with lived experience could find being part of the bidding selection process difficult. Further support and training was felt to be needed, perhaps involving ‘examples of good and bad bids’.

4.2 THEMES IDENTIFIED FROM PANEL MEMBER INTERVIEWS

Panel members included those working in a professional capacity, and those with lived experience of employability services. In addition to interview data from lived experience panel members, the research team were given access to the comments they made to accompany their selection panel scoring sheet. Many of these comments were repeated in their individual interviews; across all the panel member accounts

TABLE 5 PANEL MEMBER THEMES

Participants	Main Themes	Sub Themes
Panel members	Recognition of service need	Gaining insight Appropriate outcomes Appropriate bids
	Planning and preparation	Information overload Emotional impact

These themes and subthemes are expanded upon below, with quotes:

4.2.1 RECOGNITION OF SERVICE NEED

Gaining insight involved a greater understanding of the employment market, the bidding process, and the type of services that might be available to assist employability; this was described as ‘eye-opening’ and ‘quite exciting’, especially in relation to the support for previously marginalised groups provided by some smaller organisations. The input from the lived experience panel members was valued by the other panel members, who felt this added to their understanding. Appropriate outcomes involved recognition of the aims and purpose of employability services, and the fact that direct employment

was not the only valuable outcome: 'employment wasn't an end game'. Outcomes relating to the 'added value' that services could provide was felt necessary to evaluate the potential benefits appropriately.

Appropriate bids related to the fact that proposed services needed to meet the needs of the people who would use them. Lived experience participants particularly felt that out-of-hours provision and lack of access to technology for people who used employability services were not recognised sufficiently by bidders: 'where they did it was piecemeal'.

Bidders were also felt not to champion their own unique selling points sufficiently or emphasise what they could offer over and above existing council provision. Other bidders who were more familiar with the landscape and application process were felt to be 'resting on their laurels' or using a 'cut and paste' approach to their bid and were successful 'in spite of themselves'.

4.2.2 PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Information overload was described by the lived experience panel members in particular, who found the duration of meetings and level of information burdensome: 'people who are giving their time freely, you don't expect them to spend 8hrs on one document'. Greater training and preparation around what to expect would have been appreciated by these panel members.

The information in applications was not considered to be well organised, and it was difficult to understand or locate some of the material provided by bidders: 'information was everywhere' and this was described as a 'nightmare'.

Emotional impact of the selection process was described by a participant as 'hard, sometimes, to be honest. Some days you feel emotionally drained'. One participant had to withdraw, stating 'I thought I just cannot do this, so I just emailed saying I'm sorry this is too much for me, it's affecting my mental health'.

Some lived experience participants felt the bidders should have been more aware they were taking part in the selection panel and altered the information accordingly. Other lived experience participants found the process to be a valuable learning opportunity which some looked forward to and would do again. The pandemic restrictions were felt to be detrimental to the process, for example through not being able to be in the same room to discuss decision making and gain support.

4.3 THEMES IDENTIFIED FROM BIDDER INTERVIEWS

Data from the bidders (or potential bidders) yielded seven different feedback interviews, one of which was given via email, rather than verbally. As stated above, this was due to two bidders giving interviews before and after knowing the outcome of their bid. All the other bidders already knew their bid outcome at the time of their interview. Themes and subthemes from bidders are summarised below:

TABLE 6. BIDDER THEMES

Participants	Main Themes	Sub Themes
Bidders	Design and process	Transparency Process frustrations Co-production
	Effective service delivery	Understanding and commitment Changing attitudes

4.3.1 DESIGN AND PROCESS

Transparency was felt by bidders to be evident in the design and application process, with clear links to The Scottish Approach to Service Design (Scottish Government, 2019) and NOLB guiding principles (Scottish Government, 2020a), which were described as ‘spot on’, and having a ‘more substantive barrier resolution’ focus than other frameworks. Information was appreciated by bidders, especially that stemming from Fife Voluntary Action, which provided a great deal of background understanding to potential bidders, as well as information about service design criteria. However, there were concerns about lack of transparency in other areas, as detailed below.

Process frustrations related to administration procedures, especially registration with Public Contracts Scotland; this was described as a ‘minefield’ and ‘very arduous’ by participants. Of particular concern to some bidders was the short notice and time they were given to complete this registration process and the fact that it took place around the Christmas period, when many services were closed and people were unavailable. It was therefore difficult if bidders needed to contact others for additional information associated with their bid.

Other concerns related to the lack of time between finding out that they were a successful bidder, and having to start service provision, giving ‘very little time to recruit’. Funding security was an issue, with organisations expressing concern about initial funding only being given for one year, and then open for review.

Bidders felt that services needed to be disability driven and poverty/deprivation driven, due to the economic hardships being experienced by some Fife communities. Further frustrations surrounded the possibility of the same services as previously being delivered under a new name, and that the process might favour existing providers, and disadvantage smaller, newer, and less experienced organisations; this was described as ‘disheartening’ by one potential bidder who did not proceed with the process.

Smaller organisations were felt to be less able to compete, especially if they did not have prior experience of the process and were lacking in staff to format and submit bids. While they felt they were doing good work at ground level, and had excellent local knowledge in their field, these smaller

organisations expressed the need to be taken under the umbrella of a larger body, in order to learn and participate in service delivery as part of a more formal, experienced structure.

Finally, dissatisfaction was expressed about whole budget transparency, with bidders feeling that ‘all the money allocated to Fife Council for employability services doesn’t all go to services via the tendering process’. Further information around whole budget spend would have been appreciated.

Co-production was evident through the Collaborative Conversations that took place during earlier consultation processes, and many bidders felt supported by this. However, some felt that the initial collaboration didn’t then translate into a (successful) bid: ‘in the collaboration process it seemed the participants worked fine together but then it seemed that they could not handle the bid’. However, the understanding and recognition of the amount of time and resources needed to work with those furthest from the job market was appreciated. It was felt this would help a move away from resources being targeted towards those who were easier to place in jobs, which was perceived as being to the continued detriment of those in more challenging circumstances.

4.3.2 EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

Understanding and commitment was evident in the bidding process, with a strong sense of responsibility towards the communities or individuals who were at risk of being left behind: ‘those who are difficult to place (in employment) – that’s what we’re all about’.

Smaller, speciality organisations felt the need to be a champion for their particular groups, who might need ‘lower-level, pre-employment, social skills training’.

Changing attitudes related to the need for change at all levels – policy level, provider level, and for individuals accessing services. For example: ‘it wasn’t previously a partnership, although it was called that. We were told what to do, and almost how to do it’. It was felt attitudes towards the voluntary or third sector needed to change to give this sector a ‘much stronger voice’.

The research team discussed these findings, and recommendations for the commissioning process, with local stakeholder forums in May and July 2021. A number of the recommendations were reflected in the process for commissioning services for 2022/23.

5 PHASE 2 FINDINGS

5.1 SERVICE PROVIDERS

5.1.1 BACKGROUND

Services funded by NOLB Fife are delivered within a complex landscape involving multiple funding streams and service providers. Each service provider delivers a range of services, often funded via a patchwork of funding sources and delivered in partnership with other service providers. However, few if any of the service providers (staff and organisations) were new to service provision in this sector. There was a collective, accumulated wealth of experience among the staff and organisations delivering NOLB funded services. The commitment, dedication, and creativity both staff and managers brought to delivering flexible, person-centred services was evident in every interview and focus group. The pandemic had posed exceptional challenges for engaging clients and delivering services, but the providers had responded to these innovatively and creatively.

5.1.2 HOW DOES NOLB INFLUENCE SERVICE DELIVERY?

Respondents were asked whether service delivery was influenced by the SATSD, but few if any were aware of the SATSD, suggesting that the terminology is not in common use at the level of service delivery. However, all staff were very aware of the NOLB principles¹, therefore discussion focused on their influence on service delivery. It was clear that the services had been operating with a very similar set of core values prior to receiving NOLB funding. A holistic, person-centred, flexible, and non-judgemental approach was fundamental to many of the service providers and their staff. Thus services were being delivered in accordance with NOLB principles, but this was not necessarily as a result of receiving NOLB funding.

“we’re not just talking the talk...’cause I would say that [service] have always been quite collaborative, have always been client focussed, have always done...not always done bottom up approach but are pretty good at it.”

Although the NOLB principles were closely aligned with existing values, NOLB did influence service development and delivery in important ways. Some reported that it had caused them to reflect on whether their services were sufficiently person-centred, and to fine-tune or further improve their approach. Others noted that the criteria for eligible clients had widened, allowing them to help more people (discussed further below). Some aspects of the NOLB infrastructure enhanced providers’ ability to deliver services in accordance with NOLB principles. The NOLB funding framework facilitated a greater degree of partnership working, which broadened the range of services and support that could be offered through signposting to partners. It also allowed clients to receive services from multiple service providers, where previously they could only access support via a single funding stream. Together, these changes facilitated the delivery of more flexible, ‘joined up’ and holistic services compared to some previous funding streams.

¹ Discussions did not go into detail about the specifics of the NOLB principles. Rather, it was clear there is a shared understanding of the principles in a general sense, focusing primarily on flexible, person-centred, and holistic service provision, but also including practice that is strengths-based, time unlimited, collaborative, continuously improving, non-judgemental, and hopeful.

“And the No One Left Behind funding allows me to be able to see those, whereas sometimes our funding streams before would have meant that that would have, kind of, been funded in a...you know, a different way. They wouldn’t have necessarily allowed me to...or the client to have that funding from both sources.”

“I think that’s one of the things that’s really good now, is the flexibility that people can go round all parts of the service and be involved almost in all parts of the service ... And it’s lovely now that we can all work together in that sense, all input in our own bit towards what that person needs to move them forwards.”

5.1.3 ARE PROVIDERS ABLE TO ADAPT SERVICES?

Many respondents referred explicitly to the NOLB principles and how they are implemented when engaging with clients. It was clear that individual staff are accustomed to building relationships with a view to understanding the specific challenges faced by individuals and identifying any support or assistance needed by them at that time. Many clients’ circumstances were such that formal employment was not a realistic short-term goal until other barriers were addressed, and this was a process requiring holistic support which could span health, financial and benefits issues, wellbeing, confidence, basic skills, and housing, as well as more traditional ‘employability’ goals such as training and job-seeking skills.

“So ours is a lot more focussed on, like, their digital skills, their travel training, their confidence building. So actually not really thinking about getting them to work just yet, but getting all the little basic things done first. So the youth project’s done outdoor courses to get the younger ones, kind of, just meeting up in a team, getting them on the bus, which is sometimes a really big step for some of them.”

Respondents frequently used terms such as ‘person-centred’, ‘time unlimited’, ‘non-judgemental’, and ‘collaborative’ to describe their approach to service delivery. A number of people also discussed the importance of providing support which built on clients’ strengths and enabled them to move on when ready, in part to avoid fostering dependence on services. There are many examples of how these principles manifested in their work with clients. Several respondents mentioned that many clients lacked basic skills such as using public transport independently, or attending and participating in group-based activities. Staff supported clients by obtaining the formal ID required for a bus pass (such as a passport) and accompanying them on journeys from home until they were able to travel and attend activities independently. This could take some months and involved a slow and careful process of building trust with the client. Others discussed assisting clients by paying for one-off childcare expenses so they could return to work, helping to rehouse victims of domestic violence, and providing equipment and training to facilitate digital engagement. In many cases, adaptations of this sort require available funding to purchase any essential items.

“We also obviously have a Citizens Advice worker works with us. She did work with her round the benefits and things, round her housing ‘cause we’re trying to get her moved so that the ex can’t find her. But what we did recently was, she had arrears of £195 for the private nursery. And they contacted her and said if she paid it, she could get...her daughter turns three and her daughter would get free nursery care in January.”

“We work with them for six months and help them with, kind of, sort of, maybe recognising their values, their strengths, weaknesses, what they’d like to improve on, where they want to go in life, what they want to do with themselves, what things they need to improve. We’d also be working with them on, sort of, employability skills as well, so maybe job applications, writing CVs, stuff like that.”

5.1.4 REFERRALS, ENGAGEMENT, AND RELATIONSHIPS

Service providers described a range of referral routes for clients, including youth workers, schools, social workers, Job Centre Plus, employment specialists working in other services, and NHS staff. All services had clients who were prompted to self-refer by seeing promotional material on social media or in venues such as JCPs and community centres, or chatting with outreach workers. Some reported that inter- and intra-service referral had been facilitated by more collaborative working within NOLB. One provider noted that JCP referrals were still coming via the ESF funding stream, but these often over-estimated the job-readiness of clients, who staff then routed to NOLB. It seemed that it was rare for providers to feel that clients were not suitable for their services, but in cases where they simply did not fit the service’s criteria (e.g. they were not lone parents) or were not quite ready to engage, clients were signposted to more appropriate services.

Some providers reported that the pandemic had reduced the number of referrals and increased the challenges involved in engaging clients. In addition to concerns about contracting Covid-19, for clients who may have struggled with face-to-face interactions prior to the pandemic, a prolonged period of isolation and confinement to the home had increased these difficulties substantially. Providers had responded innovatively by developing new approaches to outreach and adapting both modes of engagement and delivery formats. Increased use of digital engagement and developing new courses with smaller numbers were examples of how this was achieved.

“So a lot of texting. Phone calls, I think initially... I think what we’ve found certainly, and again it’s not obviously for all young people, but for a lot of them it’s been they’ll have that initial telephone call and then actually struggle to not speak again on the phone or they’ll not entertain Teams. So there’s been a level of maybe just a couple of weeks’ worth of kicks back and forth before it’s well, what about next week, do you want to have a chat, and it’s kind of taken that wee bit...it’s just been a different way of trying to build that relationship I suppose.”

In addition to referrals from other agencies, providers use various promotion and outreach approaches. Promotional materials were sited in JCPs and community venues, and on social media. Providers worked with schools, key workers, parents, and the DWP to initiate relationships with people depending on the remit of the provider. Establishing relationships could involve painstaking work to establish sufficient trust, and some staff described communicating by phone or text for some time before clients were willing to engage with specific projects or services. Sensitivity to issues clients were dealing with was key, particularly for those coping with mental health issues or who had completely disengaged from school. By adapting approaches to individual clients’ needs, service providers seemed successful in establishing and maintaining relationships over the longer term.

“I was going to say it takes us a long of building up trust and a relationship with our clients to get them to engage. And particularly some people, to get to engage online and things as well because that can take longer to build up that some, kind of, face-to-face relationship. So there’s lots of people, the idea of being thrown in with a stranger to talk about anything to do with their experiences or that, it is a big ask for our client group.”

“So sometimes it’s actually getting to talk to them. Once you get them, it’s building...it’s about building a relationship and a trust. You know, they need to trust you. They need to like you and to want to talk to you because a lot of them don’t want people in...you know, they don’t want people they don’t know in their homes. So you need to build a relationship with them. And you need to be careful that you don’t launch paperwork at them too quickly or...”

5.1.5 CLIENT ELIGIBILITY AND CHARACTERISTICS

Some service providers reported that NOLB client criteria were less restrictive than other funding streams, allowing them to engage with a wider variety of clients. The ability to work with clients who were already in employment was welcomed by several, while others noted that they were now able to help people who were further from the labour market. Several staff respondents commented that they would provide assistance to anyone they felt needed help, as if they did not receive timely support ‘everyone is at risk of being left behind’.

“But we have support workers in there that can help a [client] to be able to sustain or to improve the employment they already have. So that has been wonderful, additional funding that we managed to get through No One Left Behind.”

However, others reported that they felt the criteria were somewhat vague, leading to anxiety about the nature of the information they were required to collect on each client, and the possibility that a retrospective audit some years hence could lead to censure from the Scottish Government if clients did not meet the criteria. Several also reported that they had been awaiting clearer guidance for some time, but it had not yet been provided.

“I would say coming down to us very little guidance from Scottish government as to what that should look like. So again, it’s been fine, we’ve done what we could now, but I am concerned possibly going forward when that comes around to auditing that they’re going to start saying well, there’s nothing on the system to show this or that or you’ve not loaded this ... So we’ve done that from what we’ve had from other external funders, but that may be wrong.”

A number of respondents felt there was a lack of understanding of the extent of the challenges faced by many clients. For instance, it is not unusual for young people to have some years of non-attendance at school prior to official leaving age, and to lack both confidence and basic life skills. Adult clients can be experiencing mental health issues, domestic violence, or find leaving the house extremely difficult. This means that it can take three months or more to achieve something seemingly straightforward, like attending or participating in a group event. For the individual this is a huge step forward, but a number of people reported that such signs of progress are insufficiently recognised in monitoring systems and targets are overly focused on employability outcomes. This was not universal however, as other providers felt that individual progress could be recorded and was given sufficient weight in monitoring.

“if a kid has not been in school for four years, that is not going to be resolved in 52 weeks and the youth work is a process and a journey and we are skilled in that and we know what we’re up to and to take the foot off kinda to try and jump through our outcome or can tick box off they’re applying for further education, they’ve done a volunteering placement, they’ve done this, they’ve done that, it can take three months for them to take their hood down and talk to you and that sometimes is very difficult to explain to a partner.”

5.1.6 EVALUATION, MONITORING, AND REPORTING

Services reported using many tools and approaches to evaluate both clients' progress and their own service delivery. Some providers actively seek clients' views of services through evaluation tools, or through service user forums, and utilise these to inform further improvements. At key points, clients were encouraged to reflect on their own progress, using tools such as Outcomes Star, and data collected through that process were also used for the services' self-evaluation and for reporting to funders. Some providers reported that this was approached quite informally, as some clients may find a formal evaluation of their progress overly bureaucratic. A culture of continuous improvement was the norm, with services devoting considerable effort to self-reflection.

"but we also look at a lot of reflective practice, what works well, what could we be doing better. And hearing it from our clients' mouths ... and listening to what their feedback is..."

"another way of actually finding out the progressional steps is we'll ask our [clients], can I get statements of, "what did this mean to you", "what did this mean to your family", "do you feel"...in progression terms or...we wouldn't use such words, that's just...that's job talk. And you get back that feedback of, do you know, how they're feeling about X, Y and Z."

"we have a ISO accreditation, so we have a quality management system, and part of that is around continual improvement and looking at practice and stuff. So we meet as a management team every four weeks and we look at any suggestions or ideas that's come in from staff."

A variety of methods were used for reporting to funders, including case studies and the Fife Online Referral Tracking (FORT) system. Some service providers voiced frustration about the inability of FORT and other formal reporting tools to recognise types of progress that were most relevant to their clients, such as being able to leave the house independently, or incremental improvements in self-confidence. It was noted that while it was possible to record these 'soft' outcomes in FORT at the individual level, aggregated data from FORT focused on traditional employability outcomes such as volunteer placements, training, or jobs. This could be a cause of frustration for some, who felt it reflected a lack of recognition of the scale of the challenges faced by their clients, and a continuing focus on 'hard' outcomes such as training or employment. However, other service providers felt that traditional employability was not the sole focus and people assessing their services were aware that progress in soft outcomes could represent substantial progress for their clients. It is unclear why experiences appeared to vary so widely.

"And I think there's a huge emphasis on outcomes, which is fine, that's okay, but I think, for me, the outcomes are very employability driven. And I think there's a slight lack of appreciation that some of these young people are just not quite employment ready, they've got a few steps to go, you know, given that actually, if you look at their school career, et cetera, they're quite a wee bit behind a lot of other young people."

"Right now, I would say yes, it is being recognised for the small progressional events. Even...I was speaking to one of the guys who reads all the reports that are sent in and you could...it was very obvious that he had read them and it hadn't just been brushed past and he appreciated the differences in the small progressional steps. Hey, every quarter I always put in a...an employment one or an education one. Always. You've got to show that. But it is the smaller ones I find more important."

5.1.7 NOLB INFRASTRUCTURE

As discussed above, aspects of NOLB infrastructure support the delivery of services, such as a greater ability to collaborate with partners across employability and other services, more flexible eligibility criteria, and the ability to provide services to individual clients from a combination of funding streams and providers. These features of the NOLB infrastructure seem to facilitate a more joined up and holistic approach, which was welcomed by many.

However, there are also some aspects of how NOLB is run which appear to generate a good deal of uncertainty. The impact of the yearly funding cycle on service planning and on the ability to deliver time-unlimited services was a recurrent theme. Although this impacted on job security, many staff are accustomed to yearly contract renewals and seem to accept it as normal in that sector. Added to this however, providers often did not seem to be informed of the outcome of funding decisions until very late in the day, sometimes after existing staff contracts had ended. This meant in some cases providers had to continue providing or even roll out new services without knowing whether funding would be available to support them on an ongoing basis. Some providers could not give staff any assurances as to whether their contracts would be extended beyond the current funding window, and even reported being explicitly prevented from discussing contract renewals with staff. This put them in a very difficult position, and at least one provider reported losing good staff as a result.

“Yes, there is a lot of misinformation and there is a lot of no information and it’s really hard to then decide what is best. We’re running programmes now. We don’t know if they’re funded. That’ll probably be continued anyway. We’ll probably get another email saying it’s gonna continue ’til next year, taking into account the pandemic but again, the Scottish government have not said they’ve given the funding to Fife Council yet...”

“So my staff’s contracts ended on 31 March. I’ve not checked the system to see if they’ve been renewed. When I checked before the Easter holidays they hadn’t been, hadn’t been extended past 31 March.”

This uncertainty also extended to documentation, reporting requirements, and in some cases the level of funding available for individual clients. As noted earlier, some felt there was a lack of clear guidance regarding client eligibility, recording requirements for client characteristics, and outcome reporting requirements. It was reported that items such as client registration forms had not been provided at the time of the interviews and focus groups. Managers attempted to reduce uncertainty for their staff, sometimes by adopting systems used for other funding streams, but there was a level of discomfort with the lack of clarity this caused.

“I think we’re used to a lot of red tape with certain projects where you know what you can get the client, you know how much money that you can give the client for stuff, but with No One Left Behind there is not even any red tape. We just don’t know if what we’re doing is right or...but we’re just going with our experiences.”

“For me as a manager it’s been quite tricky because I’ve got staff coming to me saying you need to tell me what I need to get, I’m worried I missed stuff, and I’m like just get everything... If folk are asking me a question I should be able to give it, I should be able to show a guidance note that says this is exactly what you need.”

Other issues with infrastructure and the operation of NOLB were noted by some. Several respondents commented that the amount of paperwork and evidence gathering required to engage with a programme could present a barrier to disengaged young people or people with mental illness-related cognitive deficits. There could be pressure on staff to move people on before they were ready in order to free space for new clients, clearly hindering the delivery of time unlimited services.

5.1.8 BARRIERS TO DELIVERING NOLB SERVICES

As noted above, the ability of providers to respond flexibly to clients' needs often required funds to pay for activities or for items such as IT equipment, passports, or childcare fees. The availability of sufficient funding in the first year of operation was described as an important positive by a number of respondents. However, by Wave 2 of data collection, a number of providers had been informed that their funding for the following year would be lower than before, in some cases substantially². Several noted that the new funding award was sufficient to cover staffing costs, but did not leave any room for the discretionary spending which was crucial to delivering NOLB effectively. Others explained that key partners had lost all funding, leaving important gaps in services it was possible to refer clients on to.

"You have the ability to take them out to practice travel training, to take them to places that they're...even, you know, to be able to take them on college visits, or whatever, which all has a cost implication. And I think where we're at at the moment, we're not 100 per cent sure that that's going to be possible, going forward, which is a bit of a shame, because it sort of hollowed out some of the bones of the programme."

"discretionary funding for travel, for equipment, all these things we've been talking about, we're not going to have that because of the reduction in funding going forward, and I think that will be a huge challenge for us because that has been absolutely categorically what has allowed us to engage with some of these young people that are in these situations I spoke about earlier."

A number of wider structural issues which could act as barriers to effective service delivery, and/or to client groups gaining employment emerged during discussions. These included poor transport connections, particularly in rural or semi-rural areas, the building of high-quality social housing in isolated areas where there are few jobs, and school teachers lacking the capacity to support disengaged young people. It was noted that a high prevalence of mental health issues is not surprising given the context of poverty and deprivation. People in temporary accommodation struggle to return to work because above the earnings threshold they lose the housing element of their Universal Credit, leaving them liable for rents of up to £1000 pcm.

Interestingly however, a number of service providers reported that there was not a shortage of decent, sustainable 'fair work', and several were involved in local labour market policy at a more strategic level. This aimed at working with employers both to increase the availability of good quality jobs, and to adapt to the needs of employees who are lone parents or have mental health issues.

Some other barriers were mentioned by only one or two providers. These included the following:

² Although the funding changes were not strictly speaking cuts, providers referred to them as 'cuts' or 'reductions', and reported that in effect they now have fewer resources than previously.

While there is substantial provision for young people aged 16-18, there are few appropriate services in place for the 18+ group served by NOLB-funded providers. There was a sense of frustration that progress made during the 16-18 period could be lost because there was nothing suitable for very disengaged young people to move onto thereafter.

“We actually spoke to the young people themselves and said, what do you think? They were like, they won’t go to the adult education classes because they’re the youngest but they would go to another peer age group.”

One provider reported that there was a perception of their service as a ‘last resort’, hindering engagement with young people and their parents at an earlier stage, which would facilitate more effective services by ensuring young people were ready to start a programme by the time they left school.

5.1.9 STAFF CONSULTATION

A further barrier identified by some service providers was that decision makers were too far removed from the reality of service delivery on the ground. They expressed a desire for greater consultation with practitioners and clients in decision-making processes.

“If we’re gonna have a bottom up kinda approach then actually we really need to get these people that are writing policies to come and actually spend a day where they actually engage with young people and speak to young people and find out what it is that they’re doing and then people will understand what kind of things these young people are up against and why there is such a need.”

Related to the above point, in nearly every group or interview when asked if they had any questions, respondents wanted to know about the purpose of the research, and whether it was likely to have any impact. Some expressed surprise and pleasure that their views on service delivery were being sought, and many were curious about the end product.

“What I would say is I think it’s quite proactive from a funder’s perspective. I’ve never been asked to engage in a conversation like this at this stage of a funding programme, so I feel like that’s good.”

5.2 PHASE 2: RECIPIENTS OF SERVICES

5.2.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICE USERS

All the recipients of services we spoke to described having challenging personal situations, such as having or recovering from poor physical and/or mental health, caring for family members, being unemployed because of difficult circumstances and needing to change direction, and/or needing additional support to get back to employment. Three had now found employment. Others were looking for work; volunteering or engaging in activities that would move them towards work; applying for jobs, apprenticeships, or to start a training course; whilst others reported that they were unable to work due to personal circumstances, such as ill health or caring responsibilities, and reflected that their journey to employment may be longer. The length of time recipients of services had been using the services varied between two weeks to around 12 months. Although we did not collect demographic information, they varied in age, reflecting the target populations of the different groups within the four provider services.

5.3 KEY THEMES FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH SERVICE USERS

The findings and insights from the conversations with recipients of services are described below grouped into five themes. A summary is provided in Appendix 3 (Section 8.3).

5.3.1 ACCESSING & USING SERVICES

All the recipients of services we spoke to had accessed the services following a referral from other organisations. These included schools, other unemployment services such as DWP, and various health care services (health visitors, occupational therapists, clinical support workers). Several commented on how easy it was to access and engage with the services once they had been referred. Many participants commented on the prompt and proactive way service providers contacted them, and the friendly and welcoming approach that helped ease anxieties about accessing and using the services. For example, participants commented:

“She passed my telephone number on to somebody else and within an hour I hear from the lady, so you know they were quite efficient.” (Participant 1)

“I would say I found it really quite easy to access, aside from like Wi-Fi difficulties on my part and stuff like that that can't be helped. But I would say the communications been really good, and there's been a lot of reminder emails and updates with links ..., so I've found it quite easy.” (Participant 2)

“I thought that once I had been referred it was really, really easy. It was a really easy transition to just working with my occupational therapist to then working with my occupational therapist and [name]. And then once I got to know [name] a little bit is when I went into the group.” (Participant 3)

Others mentioned that using the services was eased because of the accessibility of the venues as well as staff:

“We always meet at a local place; everything has been fine. I am usually quite an anxious person, but I've not been too worried at all.” (Participant 4)

Two people mentioned that they would have liked to have been told or heard of the services sooner and felt that awareness of the services may be a barrier to access.

TABLE 7 KEY FINDINGS RELATING TO ACCESS

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Description	Key findings
Accessing Service	Facilitators to using services	Aspects described as making using the services easy and accessible	Referral from other services Venues close to home Online access to services Friendly & approachable staff Welcoming/positive experience
	Barriers to using services	Barriers and challenges in accessing the services	Lack of knowledge/awareness of services Lack of confidence or anxiety

5.3.2 MODES OF DELIVERY

Most recipients of services had been involved with the provider during and since the period in which there were restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and had experienced delivery in a range of formats, including one-to-one meetings in outside venues, fully online, and face-to-face group meetings.

Recipients of services commented on their own preferences, for example, some felt online sessions enabled them to participate when their personal circumstances meant travelling and/or joining a session in person would be prohibitive; others felt they needed the physical social contact with other people that group sessions gave. One person mentioned that they thought face-to face contact was important to help prepare them for further study or employment situations, and that online was not challenging their anxieties sufficiently to provide a staged progression. This suggests that a range of options for delivery methods may be important to facilitate access and engagement.

5.3.3 SERVICES AND SUPPORT RECEIVED

Recipients of services identified a range of benefits and support they felt they gained from NOLB service providers. These are summarised in Table 8.

TABLE 8. RECIPIENTS OF SERVICES DESCRIBED A RANGE OF SUPPORT AND BENEFITS THEY FELT THEY RECEIVED

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Description	Key Findings
Services & Support	Practical Support	Practical support to gain employment	Advice and guidance to access job-related training courses Support to find work Support to write CVs and job applications Practice for interviews
	Wider Personal Development & Support	Descriptions of services providing support for wider personal development and support beyond skills specific to employment	Confidence building Mental health support Family support Building wider skills & experience, e.g. cooking & food waste, physical activity, financial management, English, maths and IT skills Access to other support and advice from other organisations

All the people we spoke to emphasised the wider benefits they felt they received, such as having a friendly person to talk to and ask for advice, meeting others in similar situations, finding someone that would listen and not judge. Gaining confidence and being more motivated were key themes in the experiences shared with us. For example, one person commented:

“I would describe as being very motivating. Very engaging and also very fun. Just being able to interact with different people and really a reason to like get up and properly wake up. Once I'm up and getting my brain working and moving and I feel a lot better after the group and I tend to do more on days where I'm starting off attending the group so very, very motivating and engaging.” (Participant 2)

Recipients of services described how approachable and knowledgeable the staff are, and how they made them feel comfortable and able to talk and seek advice. Some people also described how they felt the services brought benefits not just to them but their families as well:

“... it's kept me going and I honestly don't know if I would be back in hospital or just in a really bad mindset if I didn't have [service name], ... I really think it's been beneficial for me and the people around me as well, the people that support me.” (Participant 3)

“And it's good as well because when we go to the family nights the kids get to socialise with other children as well. ... And they do the mental health groups as well, there's just loads of different things. Like I say they offer support as a family but then you can also take every family's individual needs and they try and help as well.” (Participant 7)

5.3.4 NO ONE LEFT BEHIND PRINCIPLES

As part of the coding and analysis we appraised how the service users' experiences aligned to the NOLB principles. The key findings are summarised in Table 9.

Figure 2 presents a sample of quotes from the service users' descriptions of their experiences. These illustrate how the NOLB principles of Equal and fair, Strengths based, Non-judgemental, Time unlimited, and Hopeful were central to the experiences and stories shared with us.

Recipients of services told us less about how services were Discreet. They did acknowledge confidentiality and privacy when specifically asked; this may be simply because it is something that is inherent and less explicit. Many recipients of services seemed less sure about how the services sought feedback to continuously improve, suggesting this may be conducted in a more informal or less explicit/transparent way, although three people did mention ways they thought this had been done.

Evidence of Collaboration related primarily to the referral process, which was mostly described as easy. One participant suggested that from their experience more communication was needed between the providers and their specific referring organisation. Other ways recipients of services described organisations working together to ensure people get the support they need when they need included accessing specific activities or advice as part of the provision on offer through the NOLB service provider, e.g. Youth First, Adult Basic Education, Cosy Kingdom and community groups; being referred on to other organisations for advice or support, e.g. Citizens Advice, Universal Credit Advisors, Health Services, Job Entry Targeted Support; and where the service provider may support them in having conversations with others in specific circumstances, e.g. schools.

TABLE 9 KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO THE NOLB PRINCIPLES

NOLB Principles	Description	Key Findings
Equal & Fair	People accessing the service will be treated as equals, they will feel respected, trusted and listened to	Recipients of services described: Feeling listened to How services adapt to their own needs and challenging circumstances to enable them to access activities and support
Strengths based	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 & allowing them to make mistakes & take risks.	Recipients of services described how they: had gained confidence had gained employment or training courses through the help they had received to recognise their own strengths had been given encouragement and feedback that helped them feel that they had opportunities
Non-judgemental	People will feel able to open-up without risk of judgment, staff will bring humility and an open mind to understand peoples' individual situation and challenges.	Recipients of services felt that: Providers recognised their individual needs Providers tailored their support and approach to meet their needs Providers had a person-centred approach They felt comfortable to be open and honest, and that they felt that they were not-judged
Discreet	Services will be provided in a way that respects people's need for privacy and the vulnerability associated with accessing support services	Information is kept confidential If they needed privacy within a group context this was given
Collaborative	Services will work together to ensure people get the support they need when they need it. This includes warm handovers or working alongside one another, with clearly identified progression options and support pathways.	Recipients of services identified collaboration through: referral to the services referral to other services access to other support, training, or activities through the service provision support with conversations with others in specific circumstances Communication between service providers and referring services is important to ensure services are accessible to all, and that the right support is given when needed.
Time unlimited & progressive	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.	Recipients of services described: - an ongoing level of support with the providers - that they felt able to stay in contact in the future - that they felt comfortable to get in touch with staff from the service providers at any time if they needed advice or support -that they were comfortable with the pace at which they were gaining confidence, and moving towards employment
Continuously improving	Services will actively gather feedback from people who use their services, reflect on delivery and demonstrate a willingness to adapt and learn.	Recipients of services described providing feedback through: completing a feedback form casual conversations completing paperwork about progress
Hopeful	Provision will hold the hope for everyone who comes through the door, (and those who don't), 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	Many recipients of services emphasised how the service had motivated them and helped build their confidence about themselves and the future. Several commented that since accessing the service they felt hopeful

5.3.5 SATISFACTION AND SUGGESTIONS

As the following quotes and those in Figure 2 illustrate, recipients of services were very positive in their feedback. When asked if there was anything they would change or suggest most indicated there was nothing they would change, other than one who mentioned that they felt the services deserved more funding, and another who mentioned access to physical activity sessions as a suggested activity.

“And my worker, well she sort of helped me with techniques and things like that. Just basically emotional support as well if I needed someone to talk to and things like that. But I felt like, well I really liked the service.” (Participant 8)

“They are really friendly and warm. When I first went, and before I went in, I was quite anxious, but yes, they are absolutely tremendous. (Participant 9)

“All the staff are really nice and friendly as well, so it’s nice and welcoming and that is what I like about it.” (Participant 10)

“I think the groups great, it's been really good for me, it's been like really, really helpful. The people that do it, the coaches are so understanding and lovely. And yeah, I've just found it overall really helpful and I would recommend it to anybody.” (Participant 11)



FIGURE 2. SERVICE USERS' EXPERIENCES AND STORIES RELATED TO THE NOLB PRINCIPLES

6 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS EVALUATION

We conducted a formative evaluation based on interviews with participants in the commissioning process, providers and recipients of services. Our aim was to gather information that could be used to assess how far NOLB services reflected the values set out in the SATSD, as they have been adapted to guide the commissioning and delivery of NOLB services in Fife, in order to inform the way services were commissioned and delivered in future. We used purposive samples drawn from a wide range of participants in the commissioning process and managers, staff and recipients from a spread of provider organisations. Our results, while reflecting a range of views and experiences, are not necessarily representative of the whole range of commissioners, providers and recipients of services. The focus of the research reflected the information needs of stakeholders elicited through an evaluability assessment. Stakeholders' priorities were to obtain information that would help improve the delivery of services in Fife, rather than to evaluate the effectiveness of services in terms of improving employment outcomes, which would require very different methods.

As a formative evaluation our study has some limitations. Continuing restrictions associated with COVID19 pandemic meant that most of the data gathering was conducted using online interviews and focus groups. Such methods are not conducive to the participatory approach we planned to use with service recipients so we largely relied on conventional topic guide-based interviews and focus groups. The time taken to arrange interviews and focus groups meant that the first and second timepoints for Phase 2 were closer together than planned. We therefore used the second round of data gathering to further explore themes that had emerged in the first round, rather than try to assess how circumstances had changed or services had evolved in the meantime.

7 IMPLICATIONS

Our evaluation has identified many features of the current structure and process that are working well and that clearly express the principle and values of NOLB Fife. We have also identified some areas where improvements might be made.

We summarise more detailed implications for each key group of stakeholders below.

7.1 POLICY MAKERS

There was a feeling among service providers that policy-makers did not fully understand the day-to-day reality of providing services to a diverse client group, many of whom would need very extensive, long term support to gain the confidence and life skills to be able to return to employment. Providers would welcome closer engagement with policy-makers to encourage a shared understanding of the characteristics and needs of their clients and the context in which the providers are operating. Providers recognised the need for monitoring and evaluation, so long as outcomes were relevant, clear and realistic, and recognised the diversity of the client group and the value of capturing outcomes other than employability, narrowly defined.

7.2 SERVICE COMMISSIONERS

The pre-commissioning work that was carried out with potential providers by Fife Voluntary Action, and the inclusion of people with lived experience as selection panel members, helped to deliver a

commissioning process that was consistent with the principles of the Scottish Approach to Service Design (Scottish Government, 2019). There were some aspects of the process that could be improved to optimise inclusiveness, from the point of view of both panel members and potential bidders.

Although the overall process was seen as fair, some potential bidders, particularly smaller organisations and those with less experience of bidding for public contracts, require more support to be able to bid effectively alongside large or more experienced organisations. Bidders also felt that one year contracts were too short, given the nature of the services they were expected to provide. While recognising the need for reviews of progress, they felt that short contracts would make it difficult to retain a skilled, engaged and stable workforce, or to provide the kind of long term support that many of their clients would need. Longer term contracts would enable more investment in staff training and service development and greater continuity of support for their clients. They would also be consistent with Scottish Government guidance (2016) stipulating that contract duration should take into account the needs of the people who use the service.

Including people with lived experience on the commissioning panel is clearly a strength of the commissioning process and is consistent with Scottish Government guidelines (2021), but lived experience panel members found some aspects of the process daunting. They would have welcomed more training before being asked to evaluate complex documents, and a greater appreciation on the part of bidders that documents should be accessible to non-specialists, with jargon and acronyms kept to a minimum,

Figure 4 summarises aspects of good practice and areas for further consideration in the commissioning process.

FIGURE 3: BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS IN THE COMMISSIONING PROCESS

<p>Facilitators: prior information, transparency, co-production</p>	<p>Good practice examples: Pre-bid support and information from Fife Voluntary Action Clear links to policy and NOLB principles within or prior to application process Links to The Scottish Approach to Service Design Involvement with, and value placed on ground level experience of 3rd sector organisations Acknowledgement of level of resources needed to support those furthest behind</p>
<p>Barriers: admin processes timescales funding allocation, organisation size/ experience</p>	<p>Areas for consideration/action: Application process, including registration with Public Contracts Scotland, timescales for bidding and recruitment/set up of service provision following successful bid Longer term funding security/contract duration Whole budget transparency Support and inclusion of small organisations Further training and preparation for lived experience panel members</p>

7.3 SERVICE PROVIDERS

NOLB funding was primarily seen by providers as a way of enabling them to continue working in ways they were accustomed to, with some advantages in terms of flexibility. The need for longer funding cycles, identified by bidders in the Phase 1 interviews, was also keenly felt by the providers we interviewed in Phase 2. Short contracts were seen as an obstacle to staff retention, service development and the provision of long term support for clients. Given the complexity and diversity of many clients' needs, discretion to support them in flexible ways was seen as critical to the kind of providing person-centred support emphasised by the NOLB principles.

7.4 PARTICIPANTS

The experiences of participants are the acid test of whether services are being delivered in ways that meet the principles and value of NOLB Fife. It is important to note therefore that users of services were extremely positive about the help they received. Those we spoke to felt that services were accessible, friendly and discreet, and that the support they received had helped them to become more confident and optimistic about the future. Their descriptions underline the benefits that flexible

person-centred support can provide in terms of improved wellbeing, that may not be captured by purely employment-focused outcomes.

7.5 RESEARCHERS

Service recipients' challenging personal circumstances and characteristics meant that online interviews were far from ideal. Interviewing service recipients in familiar settings where they felt more comfortable was ruled out by COVID restrictions but would be the preferred approach in any further evaluation. Service providers are small organisations operating under considerable pressure, so although managers and staff were keen to engage with the research, finding times at which they could join a focus group was not straightforward. Adequate time needs to be allowed in research plans to engage recipients and providers in ways that allow them to participate fully.

8 APPENDICES

8.1 APPENDIX 1 THE SCOTTISH APPROACH TO SERVICE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION FOR NOLB FIFE

8.1.1 APPROACH AND AIM

NOLB Fife implemented the Scottish Approach to Service Design (SAAtSD) principles to:

- Explore the problem before designing solutions
- Ensure services would be designed around people
- Involve the local community in participation from Day 1
- Use inclusive and collaborative research methods

The overall aim was ‘to make sure Fife has on offer the best range of services to help people on their journey towards sustainable employment (within NOLB funding and beyond)’. An equalities approach was taken, which was designed around people, included groups and individuals who might have previously been ‘easy to ignore’. This involved close partnership working between Fife Voluntary Action (who coordinated the SAAtSD approach in Fife) and the Fife Centre for Equalities – who helped facilitate volunteer training, helped broker focused conversations with key equalities groups,

and undertook equalities data monitoring of both volunteers and participants to ensure that a broad demographic of people were involved. Recipients of services were included - current, previous, and people intending to use services in the future (lived experience was valued). Staff (frontline workers and managers) were also involved. Facilitation and consultation was prioritised, as was recruiting and training of a diverse NOLB volunteer team, in the spirit of collaboration.

8.1.2 CONTEXT OF THE PANDEMIC

It became necessary to adapt to the Covid pandemic as the resultant implications and restrictions unfolded. Partnership work was undertaken with anchor organisations and local area workshops, with IT/online platforms facilitated as tools for inclusion. An online (public) survey was developed, and conversations encouraged via Let’s Talk About #OurFife.

8.1.3 PARTICIPANTS IN COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATIONS AND ONLINE SURVEY

Over 120 people took part in the online Collaborative Conversations with a close match in the conversation participants’ demographics to the population of Fife for age, disability, sex/gender ratio, caring responsibilities, race, religion and belief.

There was clear evidence of diversity/ fair representation across participants for gender reassignment, sexual orientation, and life situations. However, there was low or no representation from some minority ethnic groups, such as White-Welsh, Gypsy/Traveller, Roma, White-Polish, Asian Bangladeshi, Asian Indian, African, African Caribbean, Arab, Jewish, and Sikh. There was also low or no representation from some religions and beliefs, such as Hinduism, Sikhism, and Judaism.

124 people responded to the online survey with a good balance of those who deliver employability services, those who use them and those who may wish to use them in the future. Equalities data for this group was less well collected. This may be because it was collected through a separate, optional,

link at the end of the core survey. There was some overlap between Conversation participants and those who responded to the survey.

The findings from the Conversations and survey were discussed by the NOLB volunteer team, presented at a public meeting and finally shared with the local employability partnership for comment. These were then distilled and used to shape the resultant approach to commissioning NOLB services in Fife for 2021/22 (below) including a set of shared NOLB Fife Principles for delivery. Comments on data gathering were also shared with Scottish Government to inform discussions around the creation of a national Shared Measurement Framework.

8.1.4 COMMISSIONING SERVICES

The goal of the commissioning exercise was to commission employability services in a way which supports them to adapt to the unique needs of each individual with a specific focus on those who tend to be 'left behind' AND which supports services to adapt to the dynamic and rapidly changing economic and employment context in Fife and beyond.

A 'principles-based' approach to commissioning was taken, which promotes adaptation and reflective practice in a fluid and changing context (e.g. data is for learning not for accountability). There will be involvement of people from key equalities groups, staff, and employers in development of proposals and delivery, as well as in the commissioning assessment process. No time limits to service availability are envisaged, but reflective practice will encourage individual employability progression. A 'keyworker' model involving core skill development and a menu of specialist support and courses will be used, with a potential geographical 'hub' approach for each area, collaboration as key, and investment in infrastructure to support all of the above.

8.1.5 INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Further work with regard to investing in infrastructure aims to include:

- Core skills for staff: e.g. active listening, emotional resilience, conducting good conversations, and knowledge of employment pathways
- Digital infrastructure: tools and training
- Tackling stigma & discrimination: e.g. equalities data, advice, training for employers
- Marketing services: accessible information directory, online, active promotion
- Supporting collaboration: e.g. network events, shared training, shared data
- Service provision
- Services that are commissioned should aim to include:
 - Digital skills training, tools and access to internet
 - Standard employability skills (CV, interview, personal presentation, timekeeping etc)
 - Accurate and easy to understand financial advice and support
 - Volunteering and work placements
 - Access to basic literacy and numeracy support
 - Industry specific training
 - Peer mentoring
 - Information on growing community connections
 - Training on how to talk to your employer and knowing your rights
 - Emotional awareness (resilience) training

Ideally services should be provided locally (e.g. one bus journey away), or with the possibility for local hubs. They should aim to be relevant and relatable to the geography and work area, and provide a friendly, private and welcoming space. If on-line provision is necessary, this should use whatever platform works for the individual. Out of hours provision will be necessary, especially for parents and for when people go back into work.

Specialist provision should match the needs of specific groups, which may include: care experienced young people, those over

55 years of age, long-term unemployed, people with a history of offending or drugs/ alcohol misuse, people experiencing homelessness, lone parents/families with childcare responsibilities, LGBTI orientation, people with mental or physical health problems or disabilities, carers and young carers, ethnic minorities, people with experience of trauma, women returning to work, and young people with limited experience or qualifications.

Good communication will be essential to success, and should emphasise:

- The role of TRUST
- The rule of once (not having to repeat the same information)
- Clarity on why information is sought/ needed
- Simplification of registration forms and language
- Checking back to ensure mutual understanding
- Taking time
- Equalities data is secure and separate

Ideally, people who access services should be able to own their own data, with CVs, courses, certificates and useful contacts all in one place; they should be able to grant permission to others to access this information, and can update their equalities and other personal information if needed.

8.1.6 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, embedding equalities and using the Scottish Approach to Service Design leads to helpful answers to complex problems. 'How' services are delivered is just as important as 'what'. It is acknowledged that Fife needs better pathways between employment services and connecting supports such as housing, criminal justice, social work and family support services - investment in shared skills will naturally support this. Growing Fife's digital infrastructure and capacity is a top priority for future work readiness in the region. There is a strong value in building on a locality approach to planning and coordination, with local links to contiguous authorities. Finally, good transport links are essential to ensure everything works together.

8.2 APPENDIX 2 INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDES

8.2.1 PHASE 1

8.2.1.1 QUESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL NOLB ASSESSMENT PANEL MEMBERS

We are interested in your experience of being a panel member, and will be asking a few questions about that. As indicated in the Participant Information Sheet and consent form, would you be agreeable to having this interview recorded, so we have a record of your responses? Your name/identity will not be used in any recordings or transcripts we make. (If not agreeable to being recorded, ask permission to take written notes of responses)

Firstly, could you tell me how you came to be a panel member?

Were you involved in the development of the NOLB commissioning process in Fife? (If yes, probe if informed by Scottish

Approach to Service Design, and whether this was helpful)

What were your thoughts about the applicants, for example, in terms of numbers/suitability/choice?

Did the profile of the successful candidate(s) meet your expectations (skills, experience etc)?

Is there anything you would change about the design and commissioning or selection process?

What (if any) difference did the contributions from the Lived Experience Panel make to your discussions and decisions?

Overall, how did you find the experience of being on the panel? How does this compare with your experience in being on other panels if you've participated in other commissioning processes before?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

8.2.1.2 QUESTIONS FOR LIVED EXPERIENCE PANEL MEMBERS

Firstly, could you tell me how you came to be a panel member?

Were you involved in the development of the NOLB commissioning process in Fife? (If yes, probe if informed by Scottish

Approach to Service Design, and whether this was helpful)

What were your thoughts about the applicants, for example, in terms of numbers/suitability/choice?

Did the profile of the successful candidate(s) meet your expectations (skills, experience etc)?

Is there anything you would change about the design and commissioning or selection process?

Overall, how did you find the experience of being on the panel? Have you participated in other commissioning processes before, and if so, how did this experience compare?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

8.2.1.3 QUESTIONS FOR PEOPLE/SERVICES WHO TOOK PART IN THE TENDERING PROCESS

Firstly, could you tell me how you became aware of the call for tenders?

What made you decide to tender?

Can you tell me your thoughts on

The design and content of the Commissioning Framework?

The NOLB Fife Principles?

The investment that has been made to the infrastructure

Overall, how did you find the experience of applying and the selection process? How does this compare with your other tendering experiences?

Is there anything you would change about the application or selection process?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

If outcome known at time of interview:

a) If successful: What are your thoughts about being selected?

b) If unsuccessful: What are your thoughts about not being selected?

8.2.1.4 QUESTIONS FOR PEOPLE/SERVICES WHO WERE INTERESTED IN TENDERING, BUT DID NOT PROCEED

Firstly, could you tell me how you became aware of the call for tenders?

Could you tell me about why you decided not to tender?

What were your thoughts about the application process, if you had decided to proceed?

Can you tell me your thoughts on the design and content of the Commissioning Framework?

The NOLB Fife Principles?

The investment that has been made to the infrastructure?

Is there anything you would change about the tendering process?

How does this compare with your other tendering experiences?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

8.2.2 PHASE 2

8.2.2.1 INTERVIEWS WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

Wave 1

We are interested in your experience of being service providers, and will be asking a few questions about that. As indicated in the Participant Information Sheet and consent form, would you be agreeable to having this focus group recorded, so we have a record of your responses? Names/identities will not be used in any recordings or transcripts we make.

(If not agreeable to being recorded, ask permission to take written notes of responses)

1. Firstly, could you tell me about your role? (Probe for length of time in post, previous experience)
2. Could you tell me a bit about the people you aim to help (for example, their life events/problems they want to solve) and how you try to support them?
3. Are you aware of the Scottish Approach to Service Design? (If yes, do you feel this influences the service you offer?)
4. What were your thoughts about the people who are currently being referred to your service? For example, in terms of numbers/suitability.
5. If a person is not appropriate for the type of service you offer, what happens then?
6. How is the experience of engaging with people who are referred? For example, making initial contact, remaining in regular touch, building relationships etc.
7. Do you feel there are ways in which you are able to adapt the service you provide to individual service users?
8. Have you received any specific training for your role? (Probe for more detail - e.g., equalities training etc. - if necessary)
9. Can you tell me how you evaluate your own (and the service) processes and progress?
10. How do you find the overall or external support for NOLB? Is there any other support that might be useful, or anything else that might make your job easier?

11. a) **For service managers:** Can you tell me how the staff recruitment process and service set-up has been? (Probe for more information if necessary).
12. b) **For frontline staff:** Can you tell me how you found the recruitment process, and support offered? (Probe for more information if necessary). Is there anything else you would like to add?

Wave 2

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to take part in our evaluation of the No-One Left Behind (NOLB) service delivery in Fife. My name is....., and I am part of the research team based at

We are interested in your experience of being service providers, and will be asking a few questions about that. We'd like to find out how things are going now that the new funding arrangements are in place, and there are also some things from the last group we'd like to find out a bit more about.

I know you will have read the participant documents some time ago, I just want to check that you are aware that we can't guarantee total anonymity, as you are working in quite a specialised sector with a limited number of colleagues and thus may be identifiable to some people. Are you happy to proceed with the group on that basis?

1. Firstly, I know that many/all of you shared this information at the first group, but just so we're totally clear about what each of you do, could you remind us of your specific roles within NOLB?
2. We discussed how NOLB influences the services you deliver at the last group. We'd like to ask about that in a bit more detail. Compared to other funding streams you have experienced, would you say NOLB makes a difference to the type of services you offer, or the type of client you can assist?

IF YES – can you give us any specific examples of how this works in practice?

How would you say these reflect the NOLB principles?

3. Have you heard about your funding arrangements for this year? Have there been any changes?

IF YES – have these changes impacted on your ability to deliver services according to NOLB principles? In what way has this changed?

4. Is your funding secure? Do you know how long for? Does this influence your job security/thinking about remaining in this sector?
5. Do changes in your funding arrangements affect your ability to develop relationships with partner providers/organisations?
5. We noticed quite a few people felt that the criteria for NOLB clients were not as clearly specified as for other funding streams. Do you have a specific list of criteria, or is just down to your judgement about whether people are at risk of being left behind?

PROBE – do you see this as an advantage? Is it good to have this flexibility? How do you handle it?

5. We asked a bit about how clients' progress is monitored during the first wave, and it seems that there are quite different approaches in different organisations. We just wanted to find out a bit more detail about this.

PROBE – do you record ‘hard’ outcomes? Is it difficult to capture progress in softer outcomes such as ability to attend an event independently or similar? Do you have any specific examples of this?

6. We have had some indication that the government may be shifting the emphasis of NOLB back to hard outcomes such as gaining employment. In your experience, do you feel that type of shift is occurring?
7. Finally, we’d like to ask a bit more about the wider context NOLB is delivered in. We picked up in Wave 1 that in some cases, there are structural barriers to people getting in to work. For instance, the loss of housing benefit for people in expensive temporary accommodation makes it very hard for some to get into work, as they cannot cover the cost of the rent. Do you think there are other structural barriers like this?

PROBE – would you say there are sufficient good, secure jobs for the people you work with?

8. Do you have any questions for us?

8.2.2.2 INTERVIEWS WITH PARTICIPANTS

We are interested in your experience of employment services, and will be asking a few questions about that. As indicated in the Participant Information Sheet and consent form, would you be agreeable to having this focus group recorded, so we have a record of your responses? Your names/identities will not be used in any recordings or transcripts we make.

(If not agreeable to being recorded, ask permission to take written notes of responses)

1. Firstly, could you tell me a bit about your situation, and how you found accessing the service? For example, finding your way around the system or processes involved?
2. Did you feel able to be open and honest when you spoke with employment service staff? (If not, probe for more information about why not)
3. Can you tell me your thoughts on how you were treated? For example, being recognised as an individual, with unique needs
4. If relevant, did the service link up with or acknowledge other services you might be in contact with (for example, housing support, health services, justice services)?
5. What are your thoughts about whether the service will help you find fair and stable work?
6. Is there anything else that might help you make progress?
7. Are you still in contact with the service? (If not, probe for more information)
8. Overall, how did you find the experience of the service?
9. Is there anything you would change about the service?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Follow up interview guidelines for people who access employment services

Thank you for letting us call you again and to talking with us. We would love to know more about the progress you have made since we spoke to you before.

(For those who agreed on doing the visual activity, ask the following question: Would you give us permission to use your drawings and/or photographs in any kind of publication?)

1. Firstly, please can you tell me a little bit about your situation now, for example if you are still using the service regularly, or still in contact with them? If you have been able to find fair and stable work?

2. How long have you been using the service? Overall, how would you describe your experience?

**** For those who have shared a visual add questions (a-f) and then continue with question 3 to 10****

1. What do you feel have been the benefits to you and your family from using the service?

2. Do you feel you have gained any skills or learnt anything about your strengths through using the service? ..any examples you can share?

3. How has the service treated you in respect of your needs, for example your specific needs and your privacy?

4. How hopeful do you feel about the future, and your own situation?

5. Did the way you engaged with the service change due to the changes in Covid restrictions? How do you feel about these different ways of working?

6. Is there anything about the service that you would like to change?

7. How has the service asked for feedback from you, other than us getting in touch with you?

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about?

**** For those who have shared a visual add in the questions below:**

a. Please can you tell me what you see here, what is in the picture?

b. Can you tell me more about what is happening in the picture?

c. Why is this important to you?

d. How does this relate to your experience of using the NOLB services?

e. Why do you think this concern, situation or strength exists?

f. How could this image help to improve service delivery

8.3 APPENDIX 3 KEY THEMES, DESCRIPTIONS AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH SERVICE USERS

Theme	Sub theme	Description	Summary Findings
Participant Characteristics	Time using service	Length of time recipients of services have been involved with the service provider	Ranged from less than 1 month to over 12 months depending on needs of service user and/or type of provision
	Challenging Personal Situations	Descriptions of personal situations and challenges	All participants described challenging personal circumstances which impacted their ability to gain employment
	Current employment situation	Description of people's employment situation	Three participants had recently gained employment. Others were: applying for jobs, training, or apprenticeships volunteering or working towards activities that would move them towards work unable to work due to personal situations
Accessing Service	Facilitators to using services	Aspects described as making using the services easy and accessible	Referral from other services Venues close to home Online access to services Friendly & approachable staff Welcoming/positive experience
	Barriers to using services	Barriers and challenges in accessing the services	Lack of knowledge/awareness of services Lack of confidence or anxiety
Experience of service	Practical Support	Practical support to gain employment	Training & education Support to find work, write CVs and job applications, practice for interviews
	Wider Personal Development & Support	Descriptions of services providing support for wider personal development and	Confidence building Mental health support Family support

Theme	Sub theme	Description	Summary Findings
		support beyond skills specific to employment	Building skills & experience in cooking, physical activity, financial management
	Modes of delivery (including impacts of Covid restrictions)	Impacts of different modes of delivery e.g. face to face, online, group, or 1 to 1, including changes specific to covid restrictions	Different recipients of services expressed different preferences for the ways they engaged with the services There needs to be a range of options that reflects these individual needs and preferences
NOLB Principles	Equal & Fair	People accessing the service will be treated as equals, they will feel respected, trusted and listened to	Recipients of services described: Feeling listened to How services adapt to their own needs and challenging circumstances to enable them to access activities and support
	Strengths based	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	Recipients of services described how they: had gained confidence had gained employment or training courses through the help they had received to recognise their own strengths had been given encouragement and feedback that helped them feel that they had opportunities
	Non-judgemental	People will feel able to open-up without risk of judgment, staff will bring humility and an open mind to understand peoples' individual situation and challenges	Recipients of services felt that: Providers recognised their individual needs Providers tailored their support and approach to meet their needs Providers had a person-centred approach They felt comfortable to be open and honest, and that they felt that they were not-judged

Theme	Sub theme	Description	Summary Findings
	Discreet	Services will be provided in a way that respects people's need for privacy and the vulnerability associated with accessing support services	Information is kept confidential If they needed privacy within a group context this was given
	Collaborative	Services will work together to ensure people get the support they need when they need it. This includes warm handovers or working alongside one another, with clearly identified progression options and support pathways	Recipients of services identified collaboration through: referral to the services referral to other services access to other support, training, or activities through the service provision support with conversations with others in specific circumstances Communication between service providers and referring services is important to ensure services are accessible to all, and that the right support is given when needed.
	Time unlimited & progressive	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.	Recipients of services described: - an ongoing level of support with the providers - that they felt able to stay in contact in the future - that they felt comfortable to get in touch with staff from the service providers at any time if they needed advice or support -that they were comfortable with the pace at which they were gaining confidence, and moving towards employment

Theme	Sub theme	Description	Summary Findings
	Continuously improving	Services will actively gather feedback from people who use their services, reflect on delivery and demonstrate a willingness to adapt and learn.	Recipients of services described providing feedback through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> completing a feedback form casual conversations completing paperwork about progress
	Hopeful	Provision will hold the hope for everyone who comes through the door, (and those who don't), 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	Many recipients of services emphasised how the service had motivated them and helped build their confidence about themselves and the future. Several commented that since accessing the service they felt hopeful
Satisfaction	Satisfaction	Descriptions of positive experiences, aspects that users like, lack of suggestions for change	Recipients of services were provided positive feedback, including mention of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> approachable, friendly & welcoming staff knowledgeable and understanding staff practical and emotional support helpful experience
	Suggestions	Recommendations for change or improvements	Recipients of services found it hard to suggest any changes One referred to services deserving more resource or funding

8.4 APPENDIX 4 QUOTES FROM SERVICE PROVIDERS

Theme	Quote
<p>NOLB influence on services</p>	<p>our service as a whole partnership is about supporting people with disabilities and health conditions to move into work. So a lot of the values and principles that end up in the No One Left Behind is kind of what we do as a day to day service anyway in terms of because of the clients we're working with, ensuring equality in the workplace and they're being treated fairly and respectfully and all these kind of things. All these things in terms of the in the way we deliver the person-centred service kind of mirrors what those principles are anyway. So I think it wasn't a far stretch for us to be able to show how we would do that because it is part of what we do anyway.</p> <p>it's more flexible in terms of where I can have those referrals from and how I can support and where I can support on an ongoing basis. Whereas before I might have had to discharge someone because they weren't supported from a particular other team or anything like that. Now I can potentially continue to see them if they're...they have a need or, you know, my input would be useful for them.</p> <p>We were having a bit of an open day the other day about this, and I think actually that [service] meet a lot of the principles already of No One Left Behind. It has helped us focus, I suppose, on some areas. So, there is a big push to go the Good Conversations training across employability services, and putting more of the onus back on the individual using the services, rather than us saying, right, this is what we're going to do to you to help you get a job.</p> <p>But I think the, kind of...the collaborative working and, sort of, double input of having our services involved as well as theirs has really moved her on so much more quickly than she would have been otherwise. She's had a chance to actually look at things that are going on in terms of her anxiety and what's causing that and how to manage that and things like that, that it's made a difference in terms of her progression.</p> <p>So...whereas before all my clients would have, kind of, had somebody overseeing them or they've been part of another programme within [programme]. That's now not always the case. They're sometimes part of other external programmes. And the No One Left Behind funding allows me to be able to see those, whereas sometimes our funding streams before would have meant that that would have, kind of, been funded in a...you know, a different way. They wouldn't have necessarily allowed me to...or the client to have that funding from both sources.</p>
<p>Ability to adapt services</p>	<p>...because I suppose the areas we've covered and things as well, there's been that kind of digital deprivation. So there's been a lot of not having equipment or not having data, not having Wi-Fi and stuff. So we've tapped into different funding routes and stuff trying to equip young people as much as possible.</p> <p>So we created, kind of, mini academies for the young people, so only groups of six. We, kind of...in previous years we've run big academies that are, like, two weeks long and then they do two weeks' work placement. And we realised that maybe that was a wee bit heavy coming off the back of, kind of, isolation for two years for a lot of people. So for the young people, we did it for five days and it was just a few wee courses. They were all in the one place, so it</p>

	<p>wasn't like, oh you're on this day and you're going to meet this new person. It was the same group of people. We made sure we met them on the first day to, kind of, settle them in. Met them at the end.</p> <p>So ours is a lot more focussed on, like, their digital skills, their travel training, their confidence building. So actually not really thinking about getting them to work just yet, but getting all the little basic things done first. So the youth project's done outdoor courses to get the younger ones, kind of, just meeting up in a team, getting them on the bus, which is sometimes a really big step for some of them.</p> <p>So the stress really got on top of her. So we get a support worker in there to help her. And we put a buddy in there to help her as well. And through that support and also referring her in to some bereavement counselling for her and her son who's suffering really badly as well, she's, kind of, pushed through that now and she's in a far better place. And she's back to work now. She's managed to get herself sorted for Christmas. I think the support worker put in for a Turn2us grant. She's managed to get that and she's managed to get herself sorted for Christmas.</p> <p>We have always looked at strengths-based approach that we look to empower [clients], that we're not looking to have them become dependent on a service, which can often happen. And I've noticed through the COVID time where there's been so much thrown at people because of necessity or because of the situation, and you're seeing how that has created a dependency and how we're trying to change that to let people be the rulers of their own world.</p>
<p>Referrals and relationships</p>	<p>So a lot of texting. Phone calls, I think initially... I think what we've found certainly, and again it's not obviously for all young people, but for a lot of them it's been they'll have that initial telephone call and then actually struggle to not speak again on the phone or they'll not entertain Teams. So there's been a level of maybe just a couple of weeks' worth of kicks back and forth before it's well, what about next week, do you want to have a chat, and it's kind of taken that wee bit...it's just been a different way of trying to build that relationship I suppose.</p> <p>But some of them at the moment, if you mention work to them, you have to be very careful about how you word things. So we do a mental health at work indicator with them. You have to be really careful about how you put that across to them because if you use the word 'employment' or 'work', you can almost see them shutting down. So you need to word it differently. And I always say, look, I'm going to use the word, employment, I am not here to get you a job. That's not why I'm here. I'm here to remove barriers and to start moving you forward. So, yeah, a lot of people aren't leaving the house is what I would say.</p> <p>So it is actually...I feel like...very much depends on the people. I do feel like the trust is built up quite quickly between ourselves initially when you first go in to see a parent, but it's just working on that and building that up to make sure we get the right person in with them to support them because we need to get the right person linked up with them. You know, we need to be very careful with</p>

	<p>the matching, who we...what buddies we put in with what parents to support them, to make sure there's not going to be a clash.</p> <p>The staff worked hard to do that sort of individual part, if required. Staff were extremely patient, didn't give up, you know, just because it didn't work one week, then they kept going back, trying to engage with parents, other people, whoever it was that was there that could perhaps support the young person. Sometimes they were left for a period of a few weeks, and then it would be revisited,</p>
<p>Client characteristics</p>	<p>So we're going...the [name] project has now gone further back, if you know...if that makes sense, further away from the job market again to access the people that are furthest away from working.</p> <p>But we have support workers in there that can help a [client] to be able to sustain or to improve the employment they already have. So that has been wonderful, additional funding that we managed to get through No One Left Behind.</p> <p>I would say this time I think we've struggled with in terms of how we support staff to deliver the services. We haven't had a huge level I feel come down to us in terms of expectations on evidence and eligibility and stuff for the programme. So certainly it's down to us to deliver to staff is about what evidence do we need for this young person to show they're eligible for the programme.</p> <p>I feel until I've got that until I've got it in front of me on a screen confirming that I wouldn't feel comfortable not doing that. So yes, for the last year no, it hasn't necessarily given us more flexibility because we're still waiting on the premise that at some point they're going ask for it.</p> <p>I would say coming down to us very little guidance from Scottish government as to what that should look like. So again, it's been fine, we've done what we could now, but I am concerned possibly going forward when that comes around to auditing that they're going to start saying well, there's nothing on the system to show this or that or you've not loaded this ... So we've done that from what we've had from other external funders, but that may be wrong.</p> <p>we've never been given any paperwork or evidence criteria that we need to give to the Scottish government. So I've been...which is a little bit frustrating...well it's very frustrating but you just have to get on with it. I've been asking for additional evidence from any parent that we have as they engage with us just because we know the Scottish government will come back and say, oh we need to make sure that a person's able to work and live in Scotland.</p> <p>I've got quite a few [clients] that are really struggling to literally get out of the house on their own. They have no confidence, they're suffering from anxiety, they're suffering from poor mental health or physical health issues.</p> <p>... we've got a high number of kids who've lost a parent or they're looked after or they're additional support needs or they've just...bullying in school, they've</p>

	<p>not been in school for two, three, four years, that is not going to be resolved in 52 weeks of kinda employability work or whatever. It really needs a long time of personal development, trusting adults, getting into a routine, getting yourself there on time at ten o'clock in the morning, making yourself a cup of tea when you...actually they're very, very...and it's very much it's like that scared kinda horse thing, you can see it, they're scared of you. They're scared.</p> <p>Some of the things that other young people might have got whilst they were at school, and kind of purely engaging, and these young people haven't had. And this is what they need to kind of...it's not really going to work if you say to them, there's an open evening at the college, off you go</p>
<p>Evaluation, monitoring, and reporting</p>	<p>How do you measure the sort of outcomes that you achieve with people? Yes, you can count bums on seats, but how do you really measure somebody's confidence, or somebody's self-worth or stuff like...? It's very, very difficult, isn't it?</p> <p>So, when we've got targets, which are perhaps unrealistic, about the numbers of young people that will go into employment, et cetera, and we'll get pulled up on that. We'll be criticised for not meeting these targets, because the staff will be busy supporting the young people to achieve what the young people want to achieve. So, that's where the difficulty is. And I think we've had a few tensions and conversations about that.</p> <p>I think that's the big question with me anyway, I'm sure it is with [name], in that we work with a distinct type of client group and the young people that we work with I feel that NOLB partners don't have a grasp of where they're coming from, the outcomes that these young people are hoping to achieve and I think that's played a big part in regards to measuring the principles that the NOLB programmes go for and what youth work offers and how we then engage with those young people as well</p> <p>Part of the reality is that, in this last...it's not been a year from when the funding started, we've not been working in this way for a full year. But at the moment, we're being measured on a year's targets in order to get the next round of funding. But actually, we've not had a year. We've also had a very difficult year, because it's been on the back of COVID. And one of the things I would say is that in certain areas, they are very much finding that young people are even less engaged than what they were.</p> <p>it's there, on the system, but the reporting is...the numbers that have registered, the numbers that have gone into employment, the numbers that have gone on to college. And with the system that's there, you evidence one personal outcome. But for us, there's a whole host of personal outcomes. So, that would be things like attendance at the programme, having a CV, the travel training, money advice, whatever, a whole variety of different things that are relevant to the young people. But actually, when they're reporting back, they're only reporting back that they've achieved that one outcome. So, you're not really getting that picture of the young person's journey, unless you can go into the system and look at individual cases, which is a bit of a downfall of the reporting.</p>

	<p>Right now, I would say yes it is being recognised for the small progressional events. Even...I was speaking to one of the guys who reads all the reports that are sent in and you could...it was very obvious that he had read them and it hadn't just been brushed passed and he appreciated the differences in the small progressional steps. Hey, every quarter I always put in a...an employment one or an education one. Always. You've got to show that. But it is the smaller ones I find more important.</p> <p>You used to think, well employability means getting a job. Really? It's...that is the end result. It is not the journey that a parent goes on. And I think that the principles and what No One Left Behind look at...I think they understand that.</p> <p>in No One Left Behind was there wasn't so much pressure to try and get an outcome as quickly as you possibly can for an individual. So it allowed you to maybe, you know, touch on some wellbeing stuff that might be going on, some, like, financial issues that might be...housing issues, so to me it felt it was more a softly, softly approach to trying to deliver employability project which, you know, is probably beneficial to a lot of people that have probably been out of the workplace for a longer period of time.</p>
<p>NOLB infrastructure</p>	<p>we don't know where we stand with what's going to happen going forward. And even when we looked at bits of the bid and stuff and how it's all laid out and where you bid, there's no an awful lot of information as to say what we're going to be doing going forward. We know we...the clientele we're going to be working with, we know what kind of activity we might be able to do. But we don't know how...whether we're going to have a training budget, whether...in which case, that massively changes what we're able to offer a lot of clients massively.</p> <p>Yes, there is a lot of misinformation and there is a lot of no information and it's really hard to then decide what is best. We're running programmes now. We don't know if they're funded. That'll probably be continued anyway. We'll probably get another email saying it's gonna continue 'til next year, taking into account the pandemic but again, the Scottish government have not said they've given the funding to Fife Council yet... So my staff's contracts ended on 31 March. I've not checked the system to see if they've been renewed. When I checked before the Easter holidays they hadn't been, hadn't been extended past 31 March.</p> <p>But we have lost good staff because of the uncertainty, yeah.</p> <p>For me as a manager it's been quite tricky because I've got staff coming to me saying you need to tell me what I need to get, I'm worried I missed stuff, and I'm like just get everything... If folk are asking me a question I should be able to give it, I should be able to show a guidance note that says this is exactly what you need.</p> <p>we've never been given any paperwork or evidence criteria that we need to give to the Scottish government. So I've been...which is a little bit frustrating...well it's very frustrating but you just have to get on with it. I've been asking for additional evidence from any parent that we have as they engage with us just because we know the Scottish government will come back</p>

	<p>and say, oh we need to make sure that a person's able to work and live in Scotland.</p> <p>I think we're used to a lot of red tape with certain projects where you know what you can get the client, you know how much money that you can give the client for stuff, but with No One Left Behind there is not even any red tape. We just don't know if what we're doing is right or...but we're just going with our experiences.</p>
<p>NOLB barriers</p>	<p>these particular programmes, with this cohort of young people, work well when alongside having, you know, decent staff who are interested and who've got lots of skills and tools at their fingertips. You can actually kind of offer some kind of concrete activities. So, you have the ability to buy some resources, or buy in some other people to come and do little bits of your sessions and things. You have the ability to take them out to practice travel training, to take them to places that they're...even, you know, to be able to take them on college visits, or whatever, which all has a cost implication. And I think where we're at at the moment, we're not 100 per cent sure that that's going to be possible, going forward, which is a bit of a shame, because it sort of hollowed out some of the bones of the programme.</p> <p>I think probably for us our biggest challenge...like this year's been fine, our biggest challenge going into next year is people have seen a reduction in funding, so that means that in order to still deliver the level of outcomes and targets that we need to get and the amount of clients we need to work with we're going to have to retain...not quite exact, but we're going to have to retain fairly the same level of staff and we're expected to work with the same amount of young people. So that is then obviously going to have filtered down to other things that we might have built in last year like discretionary funding for travel, for equipment, all these things we've been talking about, we're not going to have that because of the reduction in funding going forward, and I think that will be a huge challenge for us because that has been absolutely categorically what has allowed us to engage with some of these young people that are in these situations I spoke about earlier.</p> <p>So some of these young people that we have had on our [programme], I have now got back at 19-year-old because they have went along the journey, went to college, triage wherever and then came right down, it's like snakes and ladders, they've went all the way up and then they've come right back down to the bottom and there is nowhere for them to go.</p> <p>It feels like this opportunity's never actually up there on an equal footing with others that are out there for young people. So sometimes, it's quite last minute, it's, you know, actually, once a young person's totally ready to leave school, or kind of, you know, whatever. I think if there was a longer leading time to some of these conversations as well, we would have an opportunity, whilst they were still supposed to be at school, to be working with the young people.</p>
<p>Staff consultation</p>	<p>What I would say is I think it's quite proactive from a funder's perspective. I've never been asked to engage in a conversation like this at this stage of a funding programme, so I feel like that's good. I think quite often we see a lot of these</p>

evaluations but they're done almost as something's coming to an end. Which makes sense in terms of the term evaluation, but actually it's almost too late to do something about it.

whether it's of value or not remains to be seen, but that's why we're quite happy to be involved, because I was like no, actually, I've kind of done a pilot here, but this is rolling into something that's potentially going to go on for the next year, so actually it's very reassuring to see something like this done at this stage rather than waiting till a year left of a programme and you think well, there's not much point in changing it now.

Yeah, I think it's that awareness of what we're doing, it is, it's just, please, have these lead partners aware of what we're doing. It's quite easy we've done it. We've gave them presentations. We've attended meetings but when it comes to decision making, it's just forgotten about, it seems so, yeah.

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