GET HEARD SCOTLAND

The Lifetime Skills Offer

Participation of people with experience of poverty and equalities organisations in the development of the Scottish Government's Lifetime Skills Offer

October 2023

the POVERTY ALLIANCE

WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT POVERTY

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Get Heard Scotland: The Lifetime Skills Offer

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Scottish Government want to see a Scotland where people of all backgrounds can develop and expand their skillset throughout their life. To support this ambition, the Scottish Government are developing a lifetime skills offer which can support people to enter and progress in paid employment, enabling people to escape in-work poverty.

The Poverty Alliance were commissioned to hold a series of engagement sessions with equalities organisations alongside a citizen's panel of people with experience of living on a low income. The citizen's panel process was designed to support engagement of people on low incomes in the development of the Scottish Government's new lifetime skills offer, particularly people with experience of in-work poverty. The subsequent equalities sessions were designed to focus on particular groups who face barriers to upskilling and training (women, Black and minority ethnic people and older people) and how the lifetime skill offer can work better for these groups.

What we did

In March 2023, the Poverty Alliance were commissioned to recruit, support and facilitate a citizen's panel seeking their views on the Scottish Government's lifetime skills offer. 13 people with experience of poverty, with a focus on in-work poverty, were recruited and provided with an opportunity to learn about the aims of the lifetime skills offer.

We were subsequently commissioned by the Scottish Government to recruit and convene three discussion groups with equalities organisations to discuss lifetime skills. The three groups were to place focus on the equalities dimensions of the Lifetime Skills offer and would also seek to focus on issues for the six priority groups in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan and the intersections between these groups. The three groups were:

- Group one: Women and Lifetime Skills
- Group two: BME groups and Lifetime Skills
- Group three: Older people and Lifetime Skills

The three groups were convened across August and September 2023, with some organisations engaged on a one-to-one basis when needed. These sessions were an opportunity to 'test' the key messages with equalities organisations, ensuring that the recommendations of the citizen's panel reflected the needs of women, Black and

minority ethnic (BME) people, and older people and accounted for any structural inequalities in access to upskilling and reskilling support.

Who we spoke to

For the citizen's panel with people with lived experience of poverty, 13 participants with experience of in-work poverty were recruited to take part. Of the 13 participants: 10 were women, three were men; 11 were white, two were Black and minority ethnic; nine lived in urban settings and four lived in rural setting; and five identified as disabled.

For the equalities sessions, 16 organisations engaged in the process. For the BME session, we spoke to Radiant and Brighter; pRESPECT; Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights; and Project Esperanza. On gender, the session was attended by Close the Gap; Scottish Women's Budget Group; Dundee International Women's Centre; Challenges Group; Scottish Women's Convention; and One Parent Families Scotland. Finally, for older people, Grassmarket Community Project; Scottish Men's Shed Association; The Scottish Older People's Assembly; LEAP; CIPD; and National Intergenerational Network attended the session.

Key messages from participants with lived experience of poverty

1. **Individual Training Accounts need to be flexible and set at an amount that adequately supports people to access training.**
    o Scottish Government should introduce the option to roll-over Individual Training Accounts when the full £200 has not been used on the initial course or training.
    o Scottish Government should assess whether the level of £200 is sufficient to enable individuals to access training that supports them to escape in-work poverty.

2. **Cost remains the most critical barrier to accessing skills and training. To mitigate this, participants urge the Scottish Government to:**
    o Provide discounted digital devices so that everyone can access online training, regardless of their employment status or immigration status.
    o Introduce free broadband and devices to asylum seekers and those on the lowest incomes.
    o Increase the threshold for financial support and grants, including SAAS, so that more people can benefit from financial support.
    o Employers should have access to government grants to allow employees to access skills and training (E.G., social care employers and statutory training required by SSSC).

3. **People with caring responsibilities need greater access to affordable and flexible childcare. The Scottish Government should:**
   o Make childcare provision simpler to navigate, including how to access childcare at the time and location required.
   o Provide more wraparound childcare, including funded hours before and after the school day.
   o More childcare should be available within colleges and education settings.
   o Explore opportunities to utilise local schools as learning hubs over the weekend, combining learning with childcare requirements and improving accessibility to people in the community.

4. **People need more information, both online and offline, about where they go to access skills and training.**
   o Participants were positive about the My World of Work website and felt that it would be helpful for them. However, there were low levels of awareness of the site and the accompanying resources, with many participants hearing about the site for the first time during the sessions.
   o The Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland should do more promotion of the My World of Work website and should test this website with people with experience of poverty.
   o The Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland should promote available training and upskilling opportunities through a greater variety of modes such as:
     - Creating pamphlets for school leavers with advice on jobs and training.
     - Informing staff and volunteers in Community Centres, Citizens Advice Bureaus, and youth clubs so that they can connect people accessing these services to upskilling and reskilling opportunities.
     - Posters and leaflets in settings such as supermarkets and GP surgeries.
     - Utilising social media to highlight available training.
     - Developing an accessible online database detailing all training available in local areas.

5. **More clarity is required regarding how skills and training interacts with social security, and what recipients of social security are required to do when entering training.**
   o Advice on what people in receipt of social security need to do when entering employment or starting training should be clearer and written in simple terms, without jargon which can discourage training.
   o The DWP and Job Centre staff should respond more promptly when individuals enter questions or details on their online journal.

o There should be no negative financial consequences from entering skills and training. Social security entitlements should remain constant or increase while people are undertaking training.

6. **The affordability and reliability of public transport is a barrier to skills and training.**
    o Scottish Government concessionary travel schemes should be extended to people undertaking upskilling and reskilling support.
    o Scottish Government concessionary travel schemes should be extended to asylum seekers, in recognition of the particular barriers they face in accessing skills and training.
    o Transport connectivity should be improved to increase accessibility of in-person training, including considering transport availability to college campuses.

7. **Employers have a key role to play in giving people greater access to skills and training.**
    o To ensure employers are accountable for this provision, the Scottish Government should embed skills and training in fair work accreditation and guidance for employers. For example, to become accredited, employers should offer paid leave for skills and training or demonstrate how they are supporting progression opportunities for staff.
    o Employers should offer more 'on the job' training to help people to progress at work.
    o Increased transparency from employers around how to access training with formalized processes for access, including training provisions in employment contracts.

8. **The system of Modern Apprenticeships should be improved to be more accessible to people on low incomes.**
    o Adapt the funding structures and marketing of Modern Apprenticeships to ensure they are accessible to all age groups, rather than just targeting young people (16-24 year olds).
    o Offer guaranteed interviews at the end of a Modern Apprenticeship.
    o Improve rates of pay for Modern Apprentices, as low pay is a barrier to access.

9. **Improvements to delivery models will make skills and training more accessible to people living on low incomes.**
    o Skills and training should be delivered via a hybrid model (both in-person and online) to improve accessibility for disabled people; those with caring responsibilities; or with health conditions; reduce costs; and minimise travel requirements.

- o People should be able to split college hours between in-person and online to accommodate other commitments including school drop off and collection.
- o Consider the timing of college courses to ensure they do not prevent people with caring responsibilities from attending training.
- o More training support should be provided via community-based delivery, rather than just college campuses. Campus learning is not always accessible, especially for disabled people; people with health conditions; or those living in rural areas.

<u>Summary of key messages from equalities organisations</u>

Across the equalities groups, there was widespread agreement that the key messages reflected the barriers and experiences of BME people, women and older people. However, participants also highlighted the importance of ensuring that structural barriers which underpin the inequality these groups experience in the labour market are well-reflected within these key messages. The Lifetime Skills offer must also actively seek to address these structural inequalities and barriers to ensure that the offer is accessible to everyone, and enables people, whatever their age, gender or race, to enter and progress in employment.

When exploring how certain population groups face barriers to accessing upskilling and training opportunities, there were certain issues that were common hurdles. The first of these was the limited level of the Individual Training Accounts set at £200. Across organisations representing women, BME people and older people, this level was viewed as too low to make a meaningful difference to people's skillset to translate into employment and progression opportunities. This was especially true in the context of inflation and the cost of living crisis.

Another commonality was the need for strong public services that support people into good quality work. Childcare and transport were two services which were failing to support groups into upskilling and training opportunities. Childcare issues were particularly pertinent for women, who account for 90% of single parents and are more likely to be primary caregivers. However, there were also issues specific to the other equalities groups. BME people are more likely to have larger families which create barriers to affordable childcare and older people, particularly older women, can often be expected to pick up childcare responsibilities for grandchildren should suitable childcare be unavailable. Making good quality, accessible childcare is therefore central to their ability to access upskilling and training opportunities for all groups, but particularly women.

Fundamental to improving the Lifetime Skills offer is dealing with the lack of disaggregated and intersectional data for equalities groups. In particular, there is a lack of data about the experience of skills programmes, and the outcomes achieved

(e.g. progression or wage uplifts). All organisations emphasised that these data gaps are long-standing and well-established, but there has been a lack of action to address these gaps. It was highlighted, for example, that existing data relating to skills interventions would make it very difficult to measure how programmes are delivering for the priority family groups outlined in Best Start, Bright Futures. As a result, organisations questioned what evidence exists to measure the impact of skills interventions on poverty rates in Scotland.

The interaction with the social security system was also a cross-cutting issue across all sessions. Organisations echoed the findings of the citizen's panel that there was a lack of clarity as to how upskilling and reskilling support interacts with people's access to their social security entitlements. The fear of being sanctioned was a barrier to entering upskilling opportunities for many people across women, BME people and older people.

Finally, all groups felt there was a one size fits all assumption within the Lifetime Skills offer and noted that systemic issues and structural barriers (including sexism, racism and ageism and the intersecting nature of these inequalities) all played a role in preventing these groups from accessing upskilling and training. The Scottish Government must take targeted action to embed gender-sensitive, anti-racist and anti-ageist approaches in the Lifetime Skills offer in order to tackle this.

Key messages from Black and Minority Ethnic people's organisations

- Systemic racism is the most prominent barrier to BME people accessing upskilling and training opportunities which requires the Scottish Government and employers to design anti-racist interventions which target these structural inequalities.
- As well as embedding race equality into the lifetime skills offer, there is a need for targeted approaches to deliver labour market equality for BME people. There must be an explicit anti-racist approach in the design of the Lifetime Skills offer, building upon the incorporation of an anti-racist employment strategy in the Fair Work Action Plan.
- Childcare is a key barrier to the uptake of upskilling and reskilling support, with key considerations of BME families being the cultural sensitivity of provision (e.g. the lack of BME representation in the ELC workforce) and whether it is affordable and flexible enough for larger families.
- There is a lack of disaggregated data and evidence relating to skills programmes, in particular around the outcomes for BME people. This makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of current provision and to build evidence-based solutions.
- Too often, training needs for BME people focus almost solely on English language provision. This ignores the fact that language is not a skills gap for many BME people, particularly those who were born in Scotland.

Key messages from women's organisations

- The main barrier to women being able to upskill and reskill is structural gender inequality, including women's increased propensity to be primary caregivers and single parents, as well as their concentration in low-paid and part-time work. The Lifetime Skills offer must seek to challenge, rather than entrench, this inequality.
- There is a lack of policy coherence across No One Left Behind, Fair Work Policy and skills policy. Current skills policy was often seen as 'gender blind' and failing to take account of the particular needs of women. This also reflected the fact the public sector equality duty was not fulfilling its potential with regards to gender mainstreaming and data collection.
- Childcare provision is often the key determinant as to whether women have a job, the hours they work, or whether they can access upskilling and reskilling support. Improving access to affordable and flexible childcare is key to improving women's ability to undertake training.
- Women's concentration in low-paid, part-time and precarious work means that they often have less access to in-work training and upskilling support.
- Women's experience of men's violence against women can create a barrier to upskilling and reskilling support, but employment practice and skills provision does not yet take account of the needs of victim-survivors.
- Flexible working is key to tackling women's inequality in the labour market, but there is a perceived regression in the availability of flexibility in the aftermath of the pandemic. It is critical that employers are encouraged to offer flexible working as means of enabling women to enter upskilling and reskilling support, and to progress within paid work.
- There is a need to consider women's confidence and whether they have a requirement for formal upskilling support to address skills gaps, or whether women require more support to re-enter employment (e.g. returners programmes and confidence building). However, the emphasis on confidence must be coupled with provision which tackles structural barriers – as women's inequality in the labour market is a systemic, rather than individual, issue.
- The lack of opportunity to equate and convert international qualifications to Scottish/UK equivalents actively undermines the existing skillsets of migrant women who may be suitably qualified for any number of roles. This requires consideration to improve migrant women's experiences of the labour market in Scotland.
- The key message relating to transport was also supported by women's organisations, with the additional consideration of women's safety on public transport. The availability of transport is a particular barrier to rural women's ability to access employment or training. Public services such as transport and childcare must be strengthened to better support women's participation in skills and training programmes.

- Modern Apprenticeships (MA) were seen as continuing to be defined by gender segregation, mirroring occupational segregation in the wider labour market. Issues regarding MAs included the imbalance in funding allocated to male and female-dominated frameworks; the targeting of funding to younger age groups when evidence points to women doing MAs later in life; and the lack of positive outcomes in terms of wage uplift and progression in female-dominated frameworks. The issues should be addressed if MAs are to become a route for women to upskill and progress in paid work.

Key messages from older people's organisations

- Older people are seen as an afterthought in the design of upskilling and reskilling support, with implications for older people's ability to enter or progress in paid work, as well as impacts for their confidence.
- It is often assumed that older people do not need to access employment or to progress at work, and have no need to upskill due to previous labour market experience. As well as erecting a barrier to access, as older people's needs are not incorporated in the design of provision, this also means older people often reflect negatively on their own ability to upskill.
- There is a need to consider the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on older people's willingness and ability to travel to upskilling support, or to attend sessions in-person. While this points to the importance of hybrid provision, there is also a need to consider digital access among older people.
- This is compounded by a lack of accessible venues used in upskilling and reskilling support, which can prevent older disabled people or those with accessibility requirements from attending support. This was viewed as underscoring the importance of localised, community provision.
- The availability and safety of public transport remains a key barrier to older people accessing upskilling support.
- There is a lack of clarity as to the routes older people can take to learn more about upskilling or reskilling, or to access support to access these initiatives. MyWoW was not viewed as applicable to older people.
- The third sector, including Volunteer Managers, were viewed as a trusted source of support which can encourage older people to undertake upskilling and reskilling. The need for fair and sustainable third sector funding to support this critical role was seen as important.
- Childcare provision impacts the ability of older people to access training or employment, as they are often required to step-in to fill gaps in current provision for grandchildren or family members. Affordable and flexible childcare is therefore key for older people's ability to undertake upskilling and reskilling support.
- Access to training may not be a linear process, particularly for those with caring responsibilities or mental health issues, so there is a need for training that allows people to 'dip in and out'.

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Full Report

Introduction

The Scottish Government want to see a Scotland where people of all backgrounds can develop and grow their skillset throughout their life. For this reason, the Scottish Government are developing a new life time skills offer; one that works to life people out of poverty. These engagement session were designed to support engagement of people on low incomes in the development of the Scottish Government's new lifetime skills offer, particularly people with experience of in-work poverty. The subsequent equalities sessions were designed to focus on particular groups who face barriers to upskilling and training (women, Black and minority ethnic people and older people) and how the lifetime skill offer can work better for these groups.

What we did

In March 2023, the Poverty Alliance were commissioned to recruit, support and facilitate a citizens panel seeking their views on the Scottish Government's lifetime skills offer.

13 people with experience of poverty, with a focus on in-work poverty, were recruited and provided with an opportunity to learn about the aims of the lifetime skills offer.

Participants were invited to consider current policies and approaches and then to deliberate, prioritise, and make recommendations for how the lifetime skills offer can best be improved to work better for people living on a low income and support them into well-paid, secure jobs.

The Poverty Alliance designed panel meetings to focus on the following key areas:

- Who are the most in need of upskilling and retraining support?
- What would enable individuals to retrain or upskill?
- How do we make individuals aware of the offer of careers advice and skills support?

The Poverty Alliance were subsequently commissioned by the Scottish Government to recruit and convene three discussion groups with equalities organisations to discuss lifetime skills. The three groups were to place focus on the equalities dimensions of the Lifetime Skills offer and would also seek to focus on issues for the six priority groups in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan and the intersections between these groups. The three groups were:

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The three groups were convened across August and September 2023, with some organisations engaged on a one-to-one basis when needed. These sessions were an opportunity to 'test' the key messages with equalities organisations, ensuring that the recommendations of the citizen's panel reflected the needs of women, Black and minority ethnic (BME) people, and older people and accounted for any structural inequalities in access to upskilling and reskilling support.

Who we spoke to

13 participants were recruited and engaged with the process throughout. Of the 13 participants: 10 were women, three were men; 11 were white, two were Black and minority ethnic; nine lived in urban settings and four lived in rural setting; and five identified as disabled.

For the equalities sessions, 16 organisations were engaged in the process. For the BME session, we engaged with Radiant and Brighter; pRESPECT; Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights; and Project Esperanza. On gender, the session was attended by Close the Gap; Scottish Women's Budget Group; Dundee International Women's Centre; Challenges Group; Scottish Women's Convention; and One Parent Families Scotland. Finally, for older people, Grassmarket Community Project; Scottish Men's Shed Association; The Scottish Older People's Assembly; LEAP; CIPD; and National Intergenerational Network attended the session.

Recommendations for the lifetime skills offer

Recommendations from our citizen's panel

1. **Individual Training Accounts need to be flexible and set at an amount that adequately supports people to access training.**

Participants welcomed the financial support available to people seeking training, however they also noted concerns with limitation of the Individual Training Account (ITA) financial assistance level of £200. It was felt that £200 was not sufficient for supporting progression of skills building, particularly as this often requires attending more than one training course and this is not possible with ITA funding models. In the wider context of the on-going cost of living crisis, it was noted by those who had utilised the scheme before that the £200 level may no longer be adequate:

> "…the £200 has been at that level for quite some time. I think that needs to go up. Everything has gone up so I'm assuming training providers are asking for more for courses."

Participants called on the Scottish Government to assess whether the £200 allocated for Individual Training Accounts is sufficient to meet the needs of participants. In light of the ongoing cost of living crisis and potential increased costs for training providers, it is crucial for the Scottish Government to review the funding amount to ensure that it remains adequate and effectively supports individuals in their skill development journey.

There was also concern about the inability to roll over ITA funding for additional training where the full £200 is not used in the initial course. For example, if someone were to access the ITA programme to undertake £120 training, it would be beneficial to be able to use the remaining balance of £80 towards other training courses to encourage expansion of skills and continued development. This is particularly important for people living on low-incomes. To enhance the effectiveness of lifetime skills development, participants recommended that the Scottish Government should introduce the option to roll over unused ITA funds when the full £200 allocation has not been utilized on the initial course.

2. **Cost remains the most critical barrier to accessing skills and training.**

Access to the internet is an essential public service, and crucial for improving skills and accessing training opportunities. However, participants noted that the high cost of broadband, devices, and data can act as a barrier to people improving their skills.

To combat this, participants believed that the Scottish Government should provide discounted broadband for students, including those accessing upskilling and reskilling opportunities. This would enable individuals of different income backgrounds to engage in remote learning, access digital training materials, and find out about other training and upskilling opportunities.

It was important within this context that groups with particularly acute financial difficulties, such asylum seekers, were given additional support to engage with training and education digitally. Participants noted that the severely limited incomes faced by asylum seekers meant that they struggled to access data:

> "In this age where everything is digitalised, someone has to choose between even feeding or top up or even having internet on their phone which, the cheapest [data contract] is over £10 a month"

In response, participants felt that these groups should be provided with free broadband and digital devices to better support these groups to acquire new skills and knowledge which could help them enter higher paying jobs.

Participants noted the level of financial support to access education and upskilling, such as agencies like the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS), often did not go far enough to support people to meet their living costs whilst training. It was recommended that the Scottish Government should reassess the eligibility criteria across all financial support for people entering training and education. This was seen as particularly important during the cost of living crisis.

3. People with caring responsibilities need greater access to affordable and flexible childcare.

For parents, particularly mothers, expensive and inflexible childcare was a significant barrier to entering upskilling and training opportunities:

> "I was lucky my tutor allowed me to start half an hour late in the morning and let me get away early to look after the children."

Although the 1140 hours of funded childcare was welcomed, participants with children noted the need for the childcare system to be easier to navigate. In terms of the interaction with the social security system, participants noted the difficulty for low-income families having to initially pay for the childcare and then receive 80% back at a later date:

> "I know we get 80% back but it is paid in arrears so you must come up with that money and then you're only getting 80% back a month later. This is why I didn't use it- they needed £1000 and I didn't have it."

> "You're starting yourself in debt just to kick yourself off"

Relatedly, parents and carers need more information around how to find affordable childcare provision at the time and location they require. This is linked to the need for more wraparound childcare provision in Scotland. In particular, participants highlighted the need for there to be more funded hours available before and after the school day.

Participants also spoke of the need for childcare provision to be based in colleges and other education settings in order to streamline provision. This would also have the

added benefit of reducing travel time and cost for individuals accessing training in these settings. Relatedly, participants suggested that the Scottish Government should explore opportunities to utilise local schools as learning hubs over the weekend, combining learning with childcare requirements and improving accessibility to people in the community:

> "By the time I get my son away to school, by the time I travel to a place to learn or train by public transport- by the time you find a class that works for those times you have to get home for the school run. Schools could be opened for adults to train at weekends."

In line with the gendered patterns of caring responsibilities in Scotland, issues pertaining to childcare provision were particularly acute for female participants. There were also discussions about the difficulties in accessing suitable childcare for single parents, who have to manage training, employment and caring on one income.

4. People need more information, both online and offline, about where they go to access skills and training.

Participants were generally positive about resources such as My World of Work (MyWoW) and felt that it would be helpful for them. However, there were low levels of awareness of the site and the accompanying resources, with many participants hearing about the site for the first time during the sessions. One participant stated:

> "I like to think I keep my finger on the pulse and know what's going on – I've never heard of [My World of Work] before today. I'm quite shocked that I'd never heard of it. I could've made use of it."

This was a wider theme about lack of knowledge amongst the group about what training exists, where to find information about it and which organisations could be approached for advice on this. Awareness and support to access opportunities were considered a key barrier to people on low incomes accessing training. It was therefore important to participants that the Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland promote websites such as MyWoW, and accompanying resources, in a more concentrated and strategic way. Participants also recommended that the Scottish Government test MyWoW with people with experience of poverty to ensure that the site and accompanying resources and accessible and meet people's needs. This testing process was seen as critical to ensuring resources can be accessed by more people and to meeting the Scottish Government's ambition of supporting more people into training and work.

In recognition of the barriers to digital access, it was also felt that the Scottish Government should create pamphlets for school leavers with advice on jobs and training which should include information on support available to access training, Community Learning and Development workers and Citizen's Advice Bureaus.

There was a particular desire to ensure that information about these upskilling and training opportunities was made available outside of spaces like job centres, as participants noted struggling to get appointments to speak to job centre staff due to staff shortages. There was also a desire for upskilling information to be available in a range of spaces for example by ensuring that staff and volunteers in Community Centres, Citizen's Advice Bureaus, and youth clubs are aware of these resources to spread the word to those accessing their services.

Relatedly, information on skills and training resources should be put in places where people would normally go on a day-to-day basis such as supermarkets, GP surgeries, dental surgeries and swimming pools/leisure centres:

> "I think a good place to get info out to people would be supermarkets – who doesn't use supermarkets nowadays? Also, the footfall of supermarkets is bigger than any other places."

There was a need to ensure that people were able to find out what training was available to them within their local area. Contributing to this, participants highlighted the need to develop an accessible online database detailing all training available in local areas and to keep this up-to-date and promoted widely. Additionally, it was felt that social media could be better to utilised to highlight what training is available locally, including video and photo tutorials on how to access the training.

5. **More clarity is required regarding how skills and training interacts with social security, and what recipients of social security are required to do when entering training.**

Participants noted that a significant barrier to entering training or upskilling programmes is the lack of certainty as to whether it would impact their social security award:

> "…people are fearful or apprehensive to enter into training in the knowledge that if it doesn't work out for them there may be financial penalties – life's hard enough already."

Participants recalled often being unclear or confused due to the lack of clarity on what people need to do when entering training whilst receiving social security and how this may impact on their entitlement. Participants considered it necessary that the advice on what you need to do when you start training whilst receiving social security should be clearer and written in simple terms, without jargon. At present, unclear communications are discouraging people from taking on training opportunities.

In addition, participants felt that the Department of Work and Pensions and Job Centre staff should respond more promptly when individuals enter questions or details on their online journal. Participants recalled experiences when they had questions about the impact of training on entitlement and faced stress due to delays in responses confirming what the impact on entitlement would be. This delay, and

subsequent uncertainty, can prevent people from accessing training due to the fear of greater financial insecurity.

This lack of certainty extended to those who were in employment but wanted to access in-work training or upskilling. It was noted that there was often anxiety around attending on-the-job training in case there was a loss of wages for the duration of the training. This also speaks to wider poor employment practice whereby employers are not prioritising the upskilling and training of their staff.

More broadly, participants were clear that there should be no negative financial consequences from accessing training. As a minimum, social security entitlements should remain constant while people are undertaking training. Similarly, as highlighted in more detail below, employers also have a key role to play in improving access to training and ensuring in-work training does not impact people's wages.

6. The affordability and reliability of public transport is a barrier to skills and training.

Participants noted that expensive, unreliable, and inaccessible public transport can also act as a barrier to entering training and upskilling opportunities. Participants felt that the Scottish Government should extend concessionary travel schemes to support individuals into upskilling and reskilling initiatives. By expanding these schemes, the government can significantly reduce the financial burden associated with transportation making them more accessible to low income households.

The expansion of concessionary public transport was felt to be particularly beneficial to certain population groups, for example, asylum seekers. Asylum seekers often encounter significant barriers to education and training, including limited financial resources and No Recourse to Public Funds. Participants believe that access to free public transport would help facilitate their participation in upskilling and training opportunities, support their integration into society and help them to access work or voluntary opportunities:

> "If we could some travel cards for asylum seekers at least, if they're going to skills training for example that would be good".

As well as reducing the cost of transport, improving the reliability and accessibility of public transport in Scotland was considered to be central to improving access to upskilling and training opportunities. Participants recommended that the Scottish Government invest in infrastructure and transport networks, particularly in rural areas, that facilitate easier travel to college campuses and training centres without having to travel to central urban locations:

> "this method of going to hub and splitting from a hub – I don't understand that, you should have a direct route that takes you where you need to be."

This could involve expanding public transport routes, particularly in rural communities, ensuring frequent and reliable service, and establishing transportation

options tailored specifically to the needs of students and individuals participating in skills development programmes.

7. Employers have a key role to play in giving people greater access to skills and training.

Employers play a pivotal role in enabling individuals to access skills and training. However, there was a sense that employers were not yet meeting their responsibilities in this space, with skills and training not being prioritised:

> *"I feel like I'm fighting an uphill battle to even get time off to do training or even get in the job training. I just feel like – in my line of work – there's just like no real opportunities for progression"*

Participants felt there was a need to better embed skills and training in fair work guidance and accompanying accreditation for employers, in recognition of the fact access to skills should be a core aspect of realising fair work and in-work progression. For instance, the Scottish Government should encourage employers to offer paid leave for skills and training or demonstrating a commitment to supporting staff progression.

To facilitate skill development, employers should also offer more 'on the job' training opportunities. Providing training and development programmes within the workplace allows employees to acquire new skills while actively contributing to their current roles, allowing people in low paid work to progress in the labour market and boost their incomes. Participants recalled times where they were held back from progressing due to workplace politics or disengaged management:

> *"it's like going over the GP's head to go get a referral kinda thing…so that your boss doesn't have the last word to stop you progressing in your career as I know when I was a support worker and I didn't receive any relevant training for two years despite asking for it."*

By integrating training into the work environment, employers can support their employees to progress within their careers and adapt to evolving job requirements, without risk of financial loss to the individual.

There was a concern about the lack of transparency and accountability from employers around who gets access to training and upskilling opportunities. Participants therefore called for employers to be required to establish formalized processes and guidelines for employees to access training opportunities, clearly outlining the pathways and resources available. This information should be readily accessible and communicated to employees through various channels. In particular, it was felt that training opportunities should be written into employment contracts.

Lastly, participants felt that the Scottish Government should provide grants that allow certain employers to support their workforce's access to skills and training. For example, employers in sectors such as social care, where statutory training is

required by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC), should have access to government grants to support access to this statutory training.

   8. **The system of Modern Apprenticeships should be improved to be more accessible to people on low incomes.**

Participants felt that Modern Apprenticeships are a valuable and important option for people who want to enter the labour market. However low pay; lack of guaranteed employment at the end of the apprenticeship; and perceived restrictive eligibility criteria can prevent these schemes from being fully utilised. Participants felt that apprenticeships are often assumed to be solely an option for young people:

> *"I know younger people who have done apprenticeships and unfortunately there's nothing my age that would work for me or part time options, but I feel like if there was an apprenticeship I would definitely do something like that"*

It is therefore essential that the funding structures and marketing of Modern Apprenticeships ensure that this option is accessible to all age groups, rather than just targeting young people (16-24 year olds). This should include equalising the funding for different age groups. Participants felt that this would promote the notion that individuals at various stages of their careers can benefit from apprenticeships as a means to acquire new skills and embark on a different career path.

Participants noted that to improve the attractiveness and effectiveness of Modern Apprenticeships, there should be guaranteed job interviews at the end of an apprenticeship. Providing apprentices with the assurance of a job interview upon completion of their programme would motivate and incentivize people to fully engage in their training and reinforce the apprenticeship as a genuine pathway to employment and ensure that the skills acquired during the program are directly linked to career opportunities.

Addressing the issue of low pay is critical to ensuring access and fairness within the Modern Apprenticeship system. It is essential to improve the rates of pay for Modern Apprentices, as low wages can act as a significant barrier to participation, particularly for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds:

> *"…someone mentioned the pay for apprenticeships and yeah like it wouldn't be feasible for me to do that".*

By enhancing the remuneration for apprentices, the government can reduce financial burdens and create a more equitable system that attracts a diverse range of applicants. Adequate compensation for apprentices not only reflects the value of their contributions but also supports their financial stability and commitment to their training.

9. Improvements to delivery models will make skills and training more accessible to people living on low incomes.

Participants felt that the design of skills and training opportunities mean that they are only accessible or suitable for certain groups. For example, disabled people, single parents, and those living in rural settings face significant barriers to skills and education due to accessibility. Participants noted that it one means of improving accessibility is to adopt a hybrid delivery model that combines both in-person and online sessions.

This approach would improve accessibility for disabled people, people with caring responsibilities (particularly mothers or single parents), or health conditions who may face challenges in attending training sessions in-person:

> *"Fortunately, my course has been really good with that – I've been in hospital a couple of times this year and not been able to attend and I've been able to listen in online and that's been really helpful. It comes down to access for people with disabilities and illness being able to attend online as well."*

By providing online options, this would significantly reduce costs associated with transport and other expenses related to attending in-person sessions. This cost reduction is especially important for individuals living on low incomes.

Participants also raised the issue of restrictive timetabling as a barrier to those with caring responsibilities to accessing training and education. To accommodate individuals with various commitments, such as school drop-off and collection times, education providers should offer flexible scheduling options for hours. Linking to a provision of hybrid learning options, participants felt that allowing individuals to split their college hours between in-person and online sessions would enable them to balance their responsibilities effectively.

> *"You've got to go see about childcare, you've got to go see about money and benefits, you've got to find the courses that fit into the times when you've got a family...there's a lot of hoops to jump through before you even get into training, some kind of way of slim-lining everything before you get there".*

To ensure greater accessibility, it is important to expand community-based delivery models in addition to traditional education based campuses such as colleges. Not everyone can easily access or travel to college campuses, especially disabled people, those with health conditions, or those living in rural areas. By offering community-based training programmes in local facilities, community centres, or other accessible venues, this will bring skills and training opportunities closer to individuals.

Recommendations for the lifetime skills offer from equalities organisations

Across the equalities groups, there was widespread agreement that the key messages reflected the barriers and experiences of BME people, women and older people. However, participants also highlighted the importance of ensuring that structural barriers which underpin the inequality these groups experience in the labour market are well-reflected within these key messages. The Lifetime Skills offer must also actively seek to address these structural inequalities and barriers to ensure that the offer is accessible to everyone, and enables people, whatever their age, gender or race, to enter and progress in employment.

When exploring how certain population groups face barriers to accessing upskilling and training opportunities, there were certain issues that were common hurdles. The first of these was the limited level of the Individual Training Accounts set at £200. Across organisations representing women, BME people and older people, this level was viewed as too low to make a meaningful difference to people's skillset to translate into employment and progression opportunities. This was especially true in the context of inflation and the cost of living crisis.

Another commonality was the need for strong public services that support people into good quality work. Childcare and transport were two services which were failing to support groups into upskilling and training opportunities. Childcare issues were particularly pertinent for women, who account for 90% of single parents and are more likely to be primary caregivers. However, there were also issues specific to the other equalities groups. BME people are more likely to have larger families which create barriers to affordable childcare and older people, particularly older women, can often be expected to pick up childcare responsibilities for grandchildren should suitable childcare be unavailable. Making good quality, accessible childcare is therefore central to their ability to access upskilling and training opportunities for all groups, but particularly women.

Fundamental to improving the Lifetime Skills offer is dealing with the lack of disaggregated and intersectional data for equalities groups. In particular, there is a lack of data about the experience of skills programmes, and the outcomes achieved (e.g. progression or wage uplifts). All organisations emphasised that these data gaps are long-standing and well-established, but there has been a lack of action to address these gaps. It was highlighted, for example, that existing data relating to skills interventions would make it very difficult to measure how programmes are delivering for the priority family groups outlined in Best Start, Bright Futures. As a result, organisations questioned what evidence exists to measure the impact of skills interventions on poverty rates in Scotland.

The interaction with the social security system was also a cross-cutting issue across all sessions. Organisations echoed the findings of the citizen's panel that there was a lack of clarity as to how upskilling and reskilling support interacts with people's

access to their social security entitlements. The fear of being sanctioned was a barrier to entering upskilling opportunities for many people across women, BME people and older people.

Finally, all groups felt there was a one size fits all assumption within the Lifetime Skills offer and noted that systemic issues and structural barriers (including sexism, racism and ageism and the intersecting nature of these inequalities) all played a role in preventing these groups from accessing upskilling and training. The Scottish Government must take targeted action to embed gender-sensitive, anti-racist and anti-ageist approaches in the Lifetime Skills offer in order to tackle this.

Black and minority ethnic (BME) people

Central to addressing the skills gap for BME communities is being able to accurately identify the issues regarding access to and completion of upskilling and training. For example, data that only looks at participation rates, rather than the sectoral breakdown of the training accessed (e.g. MA framework); completion rates; or outcomes fails to gather a full picture of BME people's experience of skills and training. Illustrating this, one participant noted that trends show BME young people leaving school with higher on average grades compared to their white peers, yet this is not translating into employment outcomes.

Organisations also highlighted the importance of highlighting a distinction between the upskilling needs of BME groups who are migrants, and those who were raised in Scotland. Too often, skills interventions for BME groups are focused on English language skills, which does not meet the requirements of BME people who were born in Scotland.

Participants felt that there is a need to take a direct approach to hiring and upskilling people from BME backgrounds, with programmes tailored to specific needs and experiences. Underpinning this, representatives from organisations BME communities highlighted that systemic racism is the most prominent barrier to BME people accessing upskilling and training opportunities. This can manifest in numerous areas but in particular both direct and indirect prejudice and discrimination. For example, the discrimination BME people face in accessing and progressing in good quality employment also prevent these groups from accessing upskilling and training. This is particularly true when employees are reliant on their employers to access upskilling opportunities. Racist attitudes, bias or prejudice of line managers can mean that BME workers are held back from those opportunities. Coupled with skills interventions there is a need for training for employers on anti-racist employment practice.

Contextually, BME people are also more likely to be employed with zero hour contracts and therefore upskilling and training opportunities are expected to be completed on their own time without pay – or indeed taking unpaid time out of work to complete these. In order to tackle this, participants felt the Scottish Government

must take an anti-racist approach to the lifetime skills offer. This could replicate, and build upon, the model of the Fair Work Action Plan which incorporates an anti-racist employment strategy. Participants felt strongly that only by directly addressing structural racism will BME communities be able to access training and upskilling in a meaningful way. Additionally, better public transport routes and access to decent childcare provision was considered further areas for improvement.

Participants noted that BME communities are more likely to experience poverty and therefore the structural factors caused by poverty impact more people in BME communities. One example given was childcare which is a significant barrier for people experiencing poverty, but particularly BME parents who are more likely to have larger families. Participants highlighted that mainstream childcare provision may not always be culturally sensitive. From a practical perspective, training opportunities being based in college/university campuses may not work due to their location being far away from where people live and where childcare provision is placed.

Women

There was strong consensus that the current skills landscape does not work for women with the original key messages developed within the citizen's panel reflecting many of the issues facing women. Participants noted a range of areas to be developed or changed in order to better support women in upskilling and training opportunities. This covered a range of structural factors such as inadequate childcare provision, insecure and inflexible employment, and lack of policy coherence between the Lifetime Skills offer, the Fair Work agenda and wider work on reducing child poverty. It was highlighted by organisations that these issues are well-established and well-evidenced, but the issue is a lack of meaningful action by Scottish Government and employers to address these issues.

A recurring theme through discussions on the gendered access to upskilling and training was the factor of affordability. Poverty is gendered with women more likely to experience poverty. Women's experiences of poverty and the labour market are interlinked, with women being more likely to be in low-paid, part time and precarious employment. Women are also more likely to be single parents or primary caregivers which further impacts their ability to enter the labour market or progress in paid work. Women's increased likelihood of living on a lower income may impact digital access, reflecting the needs for greater provision of subsidized and free broadband and digital devices as called for in our key messages. This was seen as being particularly important for single parents, with research showing that single parents are especially likely to utilise mobile phones to access the internet due to a lack of access to devices such as laptops or tablets.

Participants strongly agreed with our third key message regarding childcare given that women are more likely to take responsibility for children in households and make up the vast majority of single parent households in Scotland (92%). This

makes women particularly reliant on good quality childcare that allows them to access upskilling and training, and latterly, work. Participants noted that childcare should not solely exist to support women into employment but must also support women into upskilling and training. This had reflected our key messages which identified childcare provisions as too restrictive to support people in upskilling due to a lack of childcare providers and, where provision was available, not taking place at locations and times when skills training may be on i.e., in the evenings. In this regard, the 1140 hours was seen as insufficient for women who need to use this entitlement to access paid work and training simultaneously.

This stemmed into wider conversations about gender roles and the societal expectation that women are - and should be - primary care givers in the home, and how this can hinder skills development. Participants highlighted that women are more likely to be 'time poor' through having to take responsibility for children, older relatives and family members with health conditions and/or disabilities. These other requirements mean women are more likely to take up part-time work, which is traditionally lower paid, more precarious, and relies heavily on zero hour contracts. This led to calls for the Lifetime Skills offer to explicitly mention women and women's experiences in future strategies noting that failure to do this can lead to policies being 'gender-blind' and thus failing to consider the acute needs to support women in this area.

Participants noted that employers are disincentivised from upskilling their low paid, part time workers because employers may have to increase wages as skill levels increase. Specifically on zero hour contracts, employers may expect employees to attend upskilling or training on their own time without pay which can be an impossibility for women in low paid jobs with caring responsibilities who already have to balance paid and unpaid labour. More broadly, participants felt that there were gaps in the key messages regarding flexibility from employers noting that employers are not aware of the new flexible working legislation and that enforcement of this could benefit women in particular.

Relatedly, maternity leave was identified as a significant risk to progression. The flexible approach to work during Covid-19 was seen to demonstrate that flexible working is possible without hindering productivity. Yet, there has been a regression in the availability of flexible and home working since the ending of covid restrictions. This lack of flexibility causes particular issues for women coming back from maternity leave and those with caring responsibilities who would benefit from increased flexibility. Finally, it was noted that a significant proportion of work that is moving online however the online/remote roles are often in male dominated sectors such as engineering, video games and technology. Female dominated sectors such as retail, social care and childcare do not have similar levels of flexibility and remain undervalued and underpaid.

Participants also highlighted the seeming lack of consideration for how equalities considerations could play out in the changing labour market. With the Just Transition

and Net Zero strategies proposing significant shifts in work to support the growth in green jobs, there seems to be a lack of acknowledgement that these new roles are concentrated in male dominated sectors. As a result, the drive for green jobs could entrench rather than tackle gender inequality. This led participants to make further calls for better policy coherence between the Lifetime Skills offer and the Fair Work agenda, noting the need to consider structural factors in order to tackle inequality.

One area identified as being central to supporting women in accessing the Lifetime Skills offer was building confidence. This was a considerable point both for women who have taken significant time off work (often due to having to look after children) and also women with experience of gender-based violence. Participants highlighted that women who have taken recent career breaks but have significant experience may not need upskilling. However, these women often do need support to re-enter work more broadly. It was felt there was also a big push on women in particular to learn new skills such as coding but noted that this may not be necessary for them to enter employment. Instead, support to transfer existing soft and hard skills into new work settings was seen as more important alongside dealing with structural factors (such as childcare) that may hinder re-entering employment. For women with experience of gender-based violence, participants highlighted that in these circumstances women may be dealing with a lack of confidence to partake in upskilling/training and latterly, that upskilling/training programmes may not be adequate to support women in these circumstances.

It is important to remember that strategies that are designed to improve the confidence of individual women must be accompanied by projects and programmes that tackle the well-evidenced structural barriers women continue to face in the labour market. Longstanding problems such as the gender pay gap are not a reflection of women's confidence, but the structural problems they continue to face at work and in skills provision.

Participants noted the acute difficulties faced by women who had No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). NRPF conditions means women seeking asylum are ineligible for financial support putting a significant barrier to accessing skills and training opportunities. As detailed earlier, cost was considered a central barrier to accessing skills and training and this is compounded by the considerable restrictions on funding imposed on asylum seekers and refugees. Similar restrictions are faced by women who enter the UK through spousal visas. One of the participants noted the need to clarify the position of those with NRPF in the key message relating to Government grants to support statutory training in social care jobs.

There were concerns raised around the particular needs of migrant women more generally. One key consideration was the lack opportunity to equate and convert international qualifications to Scottish/UK equivalents actively undermines the existing skill sets of migrant women who may be suitably qualified for any number of roles. In addition, this may interact with the lack of knowledge in the skills sector including misalignment in understanding of perceived language abilities of women

who have English as a second language (ESOL) and how this can be misconstrued as lacking skills to adequately perform in certain roles. Participants noted that when some migrant women arrive in the UK, they are keen to take employment and accept any role they can access. Therefore, this misalignment of qualifications combined with a lack of understanding of women who speak English as a second language leads migrant women to be forced into roles they are ultimately overqualified for.

Modern Apprenticeships (MA) were seen as continuing to be defined by gender segregation, mirroring occupational segregation in the wider labour market. Participants highlighted the significant pay discrepancies between various MA frameworks, noting that women continue to be concentrated in the lowest paid MAs. Moreover, some female-dominated MA frameworks fail to translate into increased earnings, including hairdressing and beauty frameworks. This is compounded by the fact that male-dominated frameworks (e.g. engineering and construction) are, on average, allocated additional funding by Skills Development Scotland compared to female-dominated frameworks such as childcare. Evidence was also highlighted that MA retention issues in sectors such as childcare point to modern apprentices being used as a form of cheap labour. Relatedly, participants echoed the original key message regarding the need for better funding and promotion of MA for older participants highlighting that women generally start MA when they are older . This linked back to earlier calls for lifetime skills to better link to the fair work agenda, the Best Start, Bright Futures, and No One Left Behind. Lastly, there is a need to ensure that we directly tackle gender segregation in MAs. This involves consideration of the structures of the MA, including flexibility, as well as the workplace culture in male-dominated sectors and roles. For example, participants gave some practical examples of women going into construction MA but there being no female toilets on site.

The key message relating to transport was also supported by women's organisations, with the additional consideration of women's safety on public transport. This echoes the findings of the Get Heard Scotland citizen's panel convened as part of the Fair Fares review. Safety concerns were seen as particularly pertinent for BME women. For women living in rural areas the key message of transport was particularly resonant, noting issues around safety and the lack of available public transport as a barrier to women taking upskilling and training opportunities. For women living on the islands, this causes issues when these opportunities are exclusively delivered on the mainland - again emphasising the need for greater provision of data and digital support for low income households and to embed more opportunities in community spaces for rural people living on low incomes.

Participants echoed that information needs to be brought to people rather than expecting people to know where to seek out information. MyWOW was given as an example of a resource that is useful when people are aware off it (particularly young people who learn about it in school) however there is a lack of push to promote this

in spaces such as foodbanks, or promoting the Lifetime Skills offer to a broader population through means like TikTok and other social media platforms. One organisation also highlighted the importance of increased awareness of upskilling support in the third sector, so that organisations can direct individuals to relevant opportunities when they are accessing other services.

There was also a call that the public sector equality duty (PSED) are not working to embed gender considerations into policymaking and service design. However, organisations noted that PSED could be transformational in regard to women accessing upskilling and training as it would encourage the public sector to mainstream gender equality considerations into services and employment practice, while also gathering gender disaggregated data. The forthcoming review of PSED should ensure that the reformed duties ensure compliance and best practice.

Older people

There was a strong consensus that older people are often forgotten in regard to the design of upskilling and training interventions. In addition to impacting the ability of older people to access good quality paid work, this also has direct impacts on confidence levels. This was felt to be linked a range of factors including:

- the assumed lack of connection between needing to access the labour market or indeed upskill to climb the ladder for older people,
- older people having significant career experience thus there is a perceived lack of need to upskill,
- ingrained biases by employers that feel there is no need to invest in older employees,
- and lastly, perhaps as a reflection of the previous points, older people themselves may believe that they are too old to learn new skills or feel they are simply unable too.

Participants emphasised that these factors demonstrate both a level of internalised ageism for older people themselves but also systemic prejudices against older people which work in tandem to prevent them from accessing and gaining from upskilling and training provision. This, again, reflects the barriers older people experience in accessing good quality paid work.

Confidence levels have also been impacted by the pandemic and wider structural issues related to public service provision. Participants noted that some older people they work with are scared to leave their homes and go into more densely populated spaces due to fears of contracting Covid-19. Participants noted having to work with older people to build their confidence to leave their home or having to enter their homes instead to provide training and upskilling services. Regrading public services, participants felt that inadequate public transport combined with a lack of confidence can mean that older people are too scared to attend upskilling or training during the evenings and especially during winter. This is due to fears around being alone after

dark and feeling vulnerable. The transport key message in particular therefore resonated with participants focusing on the needs of older people. Although they are entitled to concessionary travel (if over 60) this does not negate the issue of access, appropriate routes and safety.

As with other groups, there was a considerable lack of awareness of training opportunities or where to go to find this information. Participants noted that resources like MyWoW are great for young people and school leavers but for older people it does not work for them. This links into wider issues for older people not having as thorough digital skills or not having clear routes for support in accessing upskilling or reskilling support. There was agreement with the key messages around promotion of training and upskilling opportunities in a variety of spaces to cater to a wider audience, in particular through the third sector.

The need for greater support for the third sector to perform these training opportunities was a prominent theme. Participants made particular reference to positions such as Volunteer Managers who were identified as crucial to supporting older people in volunteer roles to upskill and potentially re-enter the labour market, but also in supporting older people who use their services to upskill. Participants were also keen to emphasise that it was important to have access to information relating to upskilling and training via routes not tied to DWP Work Coaches. In alignment with the key messages from the citizen's panel, older people's organisations felt that DWP staff were not always viewed as trustworthy or reliable. There was agreement that Volunteer Managers and similar roles in the third sector could be valuable to spreading information about training and upskilling opportunities and following that, supporting older people to enter and complete them. This however must be supported through funding, and participants were keen to link secure, sustainable funding to this end.

Participants were also keen to note the need for greater alignment between skills built up during a career and accredited qualifications. They noted that some older people may have significant career experience which would equate to an accredited qualification, yet no scheme currently exists to support that transferal. Relatedly, one organisation noted that skills can also be built up informally for example in woodwork/construction workshops however there is again a lack of options to transfer these to accredited qualifications that could aid entering or progressing in the labour market. Particularly for older people with significant work experience, there can be an understandable resistance to be expected to go back to 'square one' and seek training and accreditation for skills they demonstrably possess.

Organisations highlighted that older people should have access to MAs for retraining and changing career, but MAs should not be primary thing for older workers. This needs to be coupled with a broad range of other skills development, including, for example, the previous national transition training fund where older workers could access deeper training opportunities.

Participants felt it important to note the linkages between childcare and older people. A lack of access to affordable and appropriate childcare for parents often means that grandparents can be expected to step in to fill that gap, reducing their ability to take part in upskilling and employment. It was considered important to link the needs of older people to an adequate provision of childcare. In this way, available childcare provision may also impact older people, particularly older women's, working hours and availability. For some older people, they are also within the 'sandwich generation' of carers where they are simultaneously caring for grandchildren and their parents. This further limits their ability to undertake employment or training.

A lack of accessible venues for training and upskilling to take place causes significant barriers for older disabled people. Participants highlighted that this does not just concern entering venues but also navigating those venues internally. Participants gave examples of people who use wheelchairs not being able to fit through doors to certain rooms where training was taking place.

Participants highlighted that people with mental health issues and caring responsibilities require additional support to enter, sustain and complete training and upskilling. It was felt there needs to be a greater effort to respond to individual needs in this regard and not penalise people for being unable to consistently fully commit to training for these reasons. Access to training may not always be a linear process, and there may be occasions where people have to stop and start training support. More training opportunities where people were able to 'dip in and out' was considered an approach to better support people in this.

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