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An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

## SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE

**16th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Thursday  
15 June 2023**

### **Child Poverty and Parental Employment Inquiry: Education, training**

#### **Introduction**

This is the third evidence session of the Committee's inquiry into how to address child poverty through improving parental employment. Members attended a focus group in Glasgow and visits have been held in North Ayrshire and South Uist. A call for views attracted 108 responses. Notes of this work and individual responses are [available here](#). [A summary of the call for views' responses is available here](#).

The fact-finding work and call for views have been used to shape the themes for oral evidence taking. Today the Committee will hear from two panels, the first on education and training and the second on employability programmes. The Committee has already held two sessions on childcare. The two remaining themes to be addressed in future meetings are:

- Fair and family friendly working
- Transport

The first panel today is on access to education and training for low income parents seeking to improve their employment prospects. The Committee will hear from:

- Kenny Anderson, Director of CIAG, [Scottish Wider Access Programme \(SWAP\)](#). [Their written submission is available here](#).
- Jackie Galbraith, Principal and CEO of [West Lothian College](#), representing [Colleges Scotland](#)
- Sharon McIntyre, Head of Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) Operations, [Skills Development Scotland \(SDS\)](#)

- Keith Robson, Senior Public Affairs and Communications Officer, the [Open University](#), representing [Universities Scotland](#)

At time of writing a submission from SWAP had been received. Links to submissions received later by Colleges Scotland, Universities Scotland and SDS are available in the clerk cover note.

This paper provides context on education and skills policy, particularly within the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, before suggesting **6 themes for discussion from page 10 onwards**.

A separate paper provides background for today's second panel on employability.

## Context

In both the visits and the call for views, lack of access to education and training was a common theme.

The call for views asked respondents if there was enough education and training in their area for parents looking to enter or progress in work. Most of the organisations (19 of 33 responding) said there wasn't, as did many of the individuals (24 of the 56 responding).

Suggestions for improvements tended to focus on structural barriers to access, particularly:

- Childcare provision
- Social security rules.
- Course structures
- Lack of local provision / lack of transport to attend further away
- Lack of knowledge about what's available
- Lack of options for those unable to work due to being an unpaid carer and/or disabled

The annex to this paper is an extract from the call for views summary, focusing on education and training.

In our visits to employability projects in North Ayrshire and South Uist and the focus group we attended in Glasgow, we heard how parents are supported to apply for education and training. Childcare was a key issue. Social security and travel were also often mentioned as barriers.

## Education and Training in 'Best Start Bright Futures'

[Best Start Bright Futures](#) (BSBF) recognises that:

"Access to training support can help individuals transition to higher paid jobs, lifting them out of household poverty. We will target our support for upskilling

and reskilling on those who need it most including the six priority family types.”

Commitments are:

- “We will make **child poverty a central pillar of our Lifetime Skills Offer**”;
- Publish a new [Adult Learning Strategy](#) in spring 2022;
- Following evaluation of the Individual Training Allowance (ITA) and Flexible Workforce Development fund (FWDF) programmes “we will set out our plans for **strengthening our adult upskilling and reskilling offer**, including how this will support parents experiencing household poverty. This will include considering changes to eligibility and funding available to priority families.

The following provides some background on the policies referenced in these commitments.

### **Lifetime skills offer**

The National Strategy for Economic Transformation [delivery plans \(October 2022\)](#) stated that an initial **lifetime skills offer** would be developed by December 2023. This offer would “help address in-work poverty”.

The Scottish Government has told SPICe that while the focus of the Lifetime Skills Offer will likely be upskilling and retraining for adults in work and/or at risk of redundancy, other groups are also being considered. These include: working age adults in poverty or at risk of poverty, people on zero hour contracts or insecure employment, and self-employed people.

Support will align with the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, focusing on the six family groups in or at risk of poverty. Consideration is also being given to how best to help people move out of in-work poverty, for example by taking account of caring responsibilities where daytime learning may not be possible. The evidence gathering stage is due to be completed by the autumn. [A literature review published in April](#) found that “limited evidence was found on the role of skills and training in alleviating poverty and child poverty.”

### **Adult Learning Strategy**

The [Adult Learning Strategy 2022- 2027](#) was published in May 2022. One of its aims is to connect adult learning opportunities linking communities with colleges, universities, local authorities and third sector organisations. The strategy acknowledges that current adult learning provision is unclear, it can be difficult to navigate and there is lack of clarity about available support.

It set up an Adult Learners Advisory Group and set out 23 actions largely focused on data gathering, sharing and research. One of the actions is to connect the adult learning journey so that adult learners are part of a more coherent education system.

Colleges also have an identified role in providing learning and training opportunities for community-based adult learning practitioners.

Other actions included: increasing community learning and development membership on local employability partnerships, exploring how to embed the No-one Left Behind approach within adult learning and evaluating the suitability and level of funding arrangements for adult learning.

**Individual Training Accounts** (ITA) provided up to £200 for a training course and were administered by Skills Development Scotland. They are currently 'paused'. The [ITA Evaluation \(2023\)](#) found they were helpful in finding work or better paid work:

“Over half of those surveyed agreed that their ITA had helped them find a new job and over half of those unemployed before applying for their ITA were in work after training. Two in five people who were working full-time reported that their ITA had helped them find a better paying job.”

The **Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF)** was introduced in 2017-18 and is run by the Scottish Funding Council. Employers can apply for [up to £15,000](#) to help retrain and upskill their workforce. [An evaluation \(January 2023\)](#) found that: FWDF was “largely working well”:

- A majority of those enrolled on courses supported by the FWDF have been on short, bite-sized courses of up to ten hours;
- Less than one-fifth of FWDF enrolments live in the 20% most deprived data zones in Scotland;
- Employer satisfaction with their engagement with the Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF) is high;
- Leadership and Management training was the most common (38%). Women and older workers are well represented.

The evaluations did not specifically address impact on poverty.

### **Local child poverty action plans**

The [review of year 4 \(2021-22\) of local child poverty action plans](#) included reference to using education and training to address barriers to employment, often through using PESF funding (Parental Employability Support Fund).

“Common approaches to improving income from employment taken by local authorities included focusing on in-work poverty, barriers to work and low wages. This was often achieved by focusing on improving technical, vocational and educational attainment to reduce child poverty.”

[...]

Dumfries and Galloway offered a case study detailing how it used its access to the PESF to support an unemployed mother of three children. After meeting with workers from the No One Left Behind team, she chose a training course offered by Dumfries and Galloway college. She was awarded funding, was able to pass her course and also completed 100 hours of work placement in a local primary school. She was in secure work by the time the report was finished.

## Other relevant strategies and reviews

There is a wide range of policy relevant to tackling child poverty, and there is a number of reviews taking place in education policy. The following takes a brief look at the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and SDS Career Review.

### National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET)

NSET (March 2022) referenced child poverty in its first sentence, but its reach is much broader, pulling together policy actions across a wide range of areas.

“Our ambition for 2032 is for Scotland to be successful. Success means a strong economy where good, secure and well-paid jobs and growing businesses have driven a significant reduction in poverty and, in particular, child poverty.”

NSET references some of the same policies as BSBF. Of particular relevance to education and training is the ‘lifetime skills offer’ and targeting skills investment to those in poverty. NSET delivery plans (October 2022) included two particularly relevant projects for linking anti-poverty work with education and training. Programme 4 had the theme of “skilled workforce” and included:

**Project 11: Adapt the education and skills system to make it more agile and responsive to our economic needs and ambitions.** This referenced:

- **Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape.** This was published on 7 June 2023. [Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system to fuel economic transformation](#) made 15 recommendations. It noted that: “lack of consensus in the system means that change will not be easy. It will be uncomfortable for many people.” Recommendations included that the Scottish Government must take a clearer leadership role in post-school learning. Organisational changes include moving responsibility for national skills planning from SDS to the Scottish Government. Operational changes include a new model of funding for post-school learning and exploring more in-work learning opportunities.
- The Scottish Funding Council’s [Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability](#) was published in 2021. The review was wide-ranging but includes consideration of lifelong learning. One of the seven ‘ambitions’ for system change was to: “**find better ways to support learning throughout life.**”

- Entrench sustainability and **green skills** into apprenticeships
- Evaluate **graduate apprenticeships**

**Project 12: Support and incentivise people, and their employers, to invest in skills and training throughout their working lives.** This included:

**“Target more skills investment and support to working age people in poverty (particularly the six priority family types).** Ensuring that access to training for more marginalised groups is made as easy as possible, we will work with learners and delivery partners to better understand the steps we must take to improve provision, including in areas such as training at times that suit people with caring responsibilities, with additional support needs or that fit around current jobs.”

It also referenced:

- “developing a stronger, simplified lifelong learning system, including support targeted at those who need it most”
- “development of a **lifetime skills offer**” following evaluation of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund and Individual Training Accounts (see above).

## The Career Review

[The Career Review](#), a comprehensive review of careers services by Skills Development Scotland was launched in February 2022. [The final report](#) was published in March 2023. Although the initial focus was young people, it is an ‘all-age’ review. [Actions for SDS include:](#)

- Co-develop a careers information advice and guidance (CIAG) service offer for those in work/returning to work to upskill/re-skill
- Develop approaches to provide support to those economically inactive but ready to return to work

Since then, the [skills review](#) (June 2023) recommended: substantively reform SDS to focus on the development of a national careers service.”

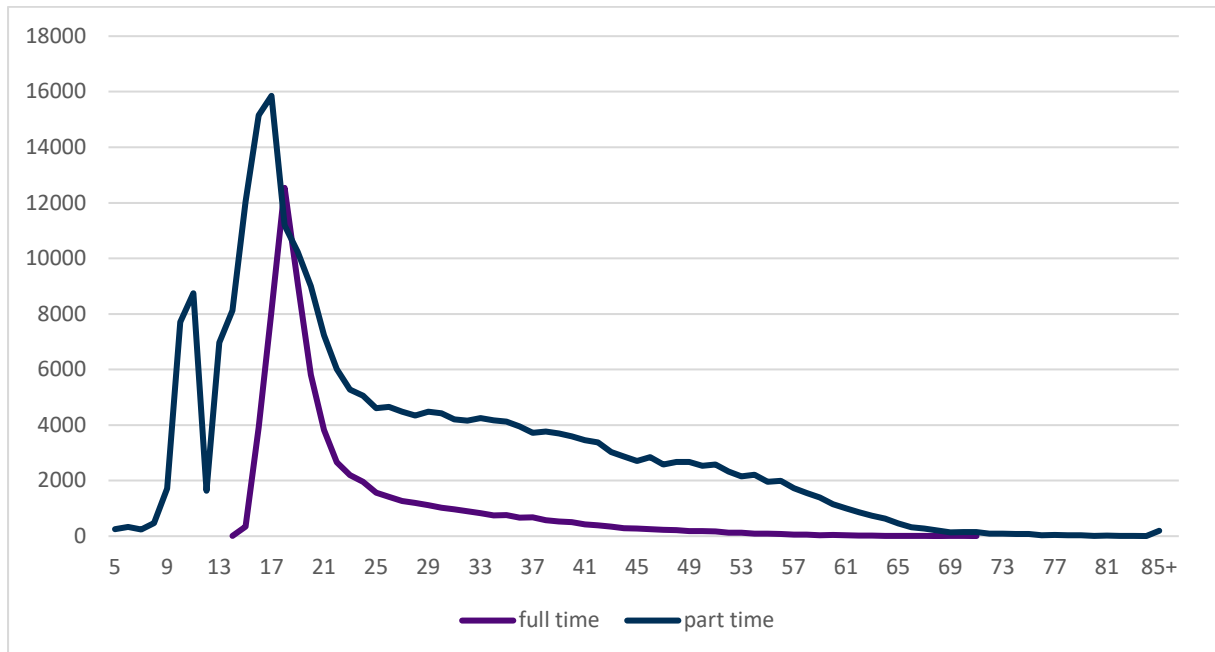
## How many students are parents?

From published statistics it’s not possible to tell how many college and university students are low-income parents. However, it’s likely that a high proportion of students aged 25 to 55 have dependent children.

In colleges, in 2021-22, 37% of enrolments were by people aged between 25 and 55. Older students were more likely to be part-time. They make up 26% of full-time college enrolments (18,132 enrolments) and 42% of part-time enrolments (106,587) (chart 1, below).

In higher education, 42% (76,035) of Scottish students at Scottish institutions were aged 25 or older. Of these older students, 29,715 were studying full time and 46,320 were studying part-time. Narrowing down to just undergraduates: there were 27,335 part-time undergraduates aged 25+ and 11,635 full-time undergraduates aged 25+.

**Chart 1: College enrolment by age 2021-22**



Source: Scottish Funding Council college statistics 2021-22

### SWAP courses

The Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP) works in partnership with colleges and universities to support adults returning to education with few or no qualifications. Their submission describes their programmes.

The majority of students on wider access courses are parents. The submission from SWAP states that 55% have children and 29% are single parents. Total enrolments in 2021-22 were 2,348, of which 827 were from SIMD 1 (10% most deprived areas).

## Student support for parents

### Higher Education Lone Parent Grant

SAAS provide a lone parent grant. This is an income assessed grant of up to £1,305 per year. There were 3,030 lone parent grants issued in 2021-22. ([HESA, 2021-22](#)). Numbers have remained between 2,500 and 3,200 over the last eight years (table 1)

**Table 1: Number of students receiving Lone Parents' Grant and total amount distributed 2014/15 to 2021/22**

Type of bursary/ grant	Statistic	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21*	2021-22
<b>Lone Parents' Grant</b>	Number of students	2,590	2,495	2,650	3,185	3,210	3,230	3,505	3,030
<b>Lone Parents' Grant</b>	Amount (£ million)	3.1	3.0	3.2	3.8	3.8	3.8	4.3	3.6

Source: [SAAS 2021/22 data tables](#)

\*SAAS notes 2020/21 figures will have been impacted by the COVID pandemic

### Discretionary support via colleges and universities

Students can apply for discretionary support for childcare costs through their institution.

- **The Lone Parents Childcare Grant (LPCG):** A non-income assessed payment of up to £1,215 per year to eligible students who are lone parents and have formal registered childcare expenses while studying.
- **The Discretionary Childcare Funds:** All students can apply for financial help with registered childcare costs. Payments are made at the discretion of institutions and based on assessment of need.

### University

The latest available figures on childcare funding provided to university students can be found in [SAAS's Higher Education Student Support in Scotland 2021-22 publication](#). This states:

There were 650 instances of support in 2020/21 through this fund, providing £2.1 million of support at an average of £3,180 per instance.

**Table 2** shows Discretionary Childcare Funding distributed from 2011/12 to 2020/21. The 2020/21 figures are lower than previous years, likely due to childcare providers being closed at points during the COVID lockdowns.

**Table 2: University Discretionary Childcare Fund distribution 2011/12 to 2020/21**

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Number of instances of assistance	840	1,015	865	895	990	870	950	1,085	1,080	650
Amount issued (£m)	£2.3	£2.6	£2.8	£2.8	£3.3	£3.6	£3.7	£3.5	£3.2	£2.1
Average per assistance (£)	£2,790	£2,540	£3,260	£3,150	£3,360	£4,080	£3,870	£3,190	£2,970	£3,180

Source: [Higher Education Student Support in Scotland 2021/22 \(SAAS\)](#)



## College

The Scottish Fiscal Commission (SFC)'s [2022/23 National Policy: Childcare Funds for College Students](#) provides guidance for colleges on discretionary childcare funds.

SFC have provided SPICe with figures in **Table 3 and Table 4** for 2017/18 to 2021/22. Please note, the data is not directly comparable with the SAAS data in Table 1 as SFC did not provide an average amount issued per assistance.

**Table 3: College sector Discretionary Childcare Award Fund value and number of recipients, 2017/18 to 2021/22**

Academic Year	Discretionary Childcare Fund Amount (£m)	No. of Discretionary Childcare Recipients
2017-18	£10,745,781	3,464
2018-19	£11,022,823	3,506
2019-20	£7,622,096	2,738
2020-21	£4,881,120	1,451
2021-22	£4,206,474	1,313

Source: SFC/FES

**Table 4: College sector Lone Parent Childcare Award value and number of recipients, 2017/18 to 2021/22**

Academic Year	Childcare Lone Parent Award Fund Amount (£m)	No. of Lone Parent Childcare Recipients
2017-18	£5,845,833	2,472
2018-19	£6,146,087	2,648
2019-20	£6,238,285	2,474
2020-21	£4,253,443	1,350
2021-22	£4,709,389	1,511

Source: SFC/FES

## Suggested themes

### Theme 1: Role of lifelong learning

The role of lifelong learning is recognised across a range of policy including in Best Start Bright Futures, the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and the SFC review of coherence.

In the SFC review one of seven ambitions was to; “find better ways to support learning throughout life.” The NSET stated that the Scottish Government would develop a ‘lifetime skills offer’ and Best Start Bright Futures made a commitment that child poverty would form a central pillar of this.

The submission from SWAP highlights how their programmes have always had a high proportion of parents studying.

“Our target areas also focus on parents who reside in areas of economic deprivation. From that we have a high rate of single parents, parents on benefits and refugees.”

The [review of the skills landscape](#) did not reference Best Start Bright Futures but did make the broader point that:

“If an individual has equitable access to learning, reaches a destination in the workplace that feels right for them, is fairly rewarded in a role which contributes to them living a fulfilled life, then I think that Scotland's post-school learning system will have succeeded. “

That review highlighted the need to prioritise learner needs, but that current structures could make that difficult.

“Prioritisation should also take account of learners, and courses, most in need of government support. In the context of optimising the system for upskilling and reskilling a number of responses called for a more learner-centred approach to funding, for example via a 'skills wallet' which learners could access throughout their working lives. This is the approach being adopted by the UK Government with its Lifelong Loan Entitlement.<sup>[22]</sup> Yet it is difficult to imagine, within the context of the current funding arrangements, how the Scottish Government, were it minded to develop similar, might begin to explore the costs, feasibility and policy implications of such an approach.”

As noted, Project 12 in NSET includes: “developing a stronger, simplified lifelong learning system, including support targeted at those who need it most.” The [Delivery Plans, published in October 2022](#) stated that, following an evidence gathering phase:

“We will be considering a number of options for simplifying and enhancing our investment in adult upskilling and reskilling. “

Developing life-long learning cuts across a number of policy areas, as does action to tackle child poverty. The ability of parents – particularly low-income parents to

engage in lifelong learning is impacted by a range of broader policies. For example, the submission from SWAP states that:

“One aspect of policy which did have an impact on SWAP student enrolment was the increase of childcare for 3 year olds. We noticed a corresponding increase that that time of adults returning in the 3 – 5 age range.”

### Members may wish to discuss

1. **What is the role of lifelong learning in addressing child poverty? Is there an overlap with a ‘just transition to net zero’ and training people for ‘green jobs’?**
2. **Which Scottish Government policies (including those outwith education policy) make it easier to provide education and training to low-income parents? Are there policies which make it more difficult?**
3. **Project 12 in the National Strategy for Economic Transformation includes:** “developing a stronger, simplified lifelong learning system, including support targeted at those who need it most”. **To what extent do you expect low-income parents will be the main focus?**
4. **How can we ensure that a diverse range of education and training is available to low income parents?**

## Theme 2. Work based learning

An important element of work-based training is apprenticeships which can be for all ages. Best Start Bright Futures refers to creating “**up to 500 apprenticeship opportunities** in 2022-23.”

Other workbased learning can be accessed through the Flexible Workforce Development Fund (which takes applications from employers) and Individual Training Accounts (ITA). Both have recently been evaluated and Best Start Bright Futures made a commitment to “**strengthening our adult upskilling and reskilling offer**, including how this will support parents experiencing household poverty. This will include considering changes to eligibility and funding available to priority families.” A similar commitment is made in NSET.

### Apprenticeships

Statistics on apprenticeships don’t identify whether participants are parents, but they do include information on age, gender and SIMD. Both graduate apprenticeship and modern apprenticeships tend to be male dominated. Both schemes have substantial proportions of people likely to be of an age to have young children (25 to 49). Modern apprentices are slightly more likely to be from more deprived areas whereas graduate apprentices tend to be from less deprived areas.

### Graduate apprenticeship 2022

Graduate apprenticeships are available up to Masters level. Numbers are small but growing – from 277 people in 2017/18 to 1,166 in 2021-22. A third of all enrolments are in business management (377 starts | 2021-22). Participants tend to be from less deprived areas – only 6.8% of enrolments (82 people) were from the 10% most deprived areas.

Over half of enrolments are aged 25 to 49:

- 31% aged 25 to 34 (360 people)
- 23% aged 35 to 49 (264 people)

Like modern apprenticeships it is male dominated - in 2021-22 just 32% of enrolments were by women, down from 35% the previous year.

Sixteen HEIs provide graduate apprenticeships. Around a fifth of all enrolments are at Glasgow Caledonian University (249 out of 1,166 in 2021-22).

### **Modern apprenticeships**

41.1% of people starting a Modern Apprenticeship are 25 or older, and an increasing proportion of older starts are female. In 2014-15 just 25% of starts aged over 25 were female (1,275 people) compare to 39.6% in 2022-23 (4,137 people).

For women (all ages) around a third do social services and healthcare (1,420 out of 4,137 starts, 34%).

### **Members may wish to discuss:**

5. **How can we develop apprenticeships and other work-based learning for low-income parents?**
6. **Should we start to measure participation of parents in apprenticeships?**
7. **Why is the ITA ([Individual Training Account](#)) 'paused' and when will it be re-instated. What impact is its absence having?**
8. **Should there be specific workplace training and upskilling funds targeted at low-income parents?**

## **Theme 3: Course structures and delivery models**

One issue raised in the Call for views and the visits was that course timetabling was a barrier for parents trying to access education and training. Some individuals suggested that online learning would be more accessible, particularly in rural areas. Another noted that evening classes would work better for people with a family.

“More parents could participate in training opportunities if there was a flexible approach to the options offered regarding working hours.” (West Lothian Council)

A recommendation in the submission from OPFS was:

“Education and training providers should offer more flexible course times and locations such as community-based learning hubs and online courses which can be accessed at different times.”

This issue was recognised in NSET. Under 'Project 12', it stated that:

“Ensuring that access to training for more marginalised groups is made as easy as possible, we will work with learners and delivery partners to better understand the steps we must take to improve provision, including in areas such as training at times that suit people with caring responsibilities, with additional support needs or that fit around current jobs.”

The submission from SWAP states they have part-time programme, online and mixed online and campus programmes. In addition they provide:

“Flexibility in terms of start and end points of the college day to allow for children collection at school and nursery.”

**Members may wish to discuss:**

- 9. To what extent can course timetabling and structures be made more flexible in order to accommodate a more diverse range of students?**
- 10. The majority of SWAP students are parents. Which aspects of their approach could be incorporated into university and college provision more generally in order to better support student parents across the further and higher education sector?**
- 11. Are witnesses aware of any progress on flexible provision since it was highlighted in the 2022 National Strategy for Economic Transformation?**

## **Theme 4: Student funding and social security**

In the call for views the interactions between student funding and social security was cited as a barrier to accessing education.

In further education, the main available funds for self-supporting students are:

- [Maintenance bursary](#) of £28 per week for those on Universal Credit (Up to £113 per week otherwise). The lower amount is because the bursary counts as income in Universal Credit.
- Lone parent childcare grant up to £1,215.
- College discretionary funds.

In higher education, the main available funds for undergraduate study are:

- Student loan – maximum amount £8,100 available to households with income under £21,000. This includes the £1,000 independent student bursary.
- Lone parent grant – up to £1,305
- Lone parent discretionary childcare grant – up to £1,215
- Discretionary funds

Unlike most students, student parents are eligible for Universal Credit. However, most student funding is counted as income, which in practice can mean a low or nil award of Universal Credit. This in turn can mean the loss of ‘passported’ provision such as Scottish Child Payment, free school meals etc. [Information on students and benefits is available from Child Poverty Action Group](#). Further written evidence on this topic has been requested from them. (The Scottish Government has [consulted](#) on changing the legislative basis of Scottish Child Payment, this would provide the opportunity to ‘de-couple’ this from Universal Credit).

In the Call for Views one individual described how social security rules prevented her from progressing to a higher level course.

“I’m at college doing an access course, but told if I go onto hn level it will impact on my universal credit.”

The submission from Glasgow City Council states that:

“The student funding system needs to be reviewed to support parents living in poverty to access FE and HE and increase life chances and opportunity. “

The submission from SWAP highlights that the challenges for parents when studying:

“mainly relate to juggling finance, with a combination of benefits/employment/college bursary during studies. Successful students will tell us of their strong support mechanisms to allow them to study. Support from partners, extended family and friends. Main factors in not being successful is where multiple issues can happen at once. For example, unexpected child illness, additional funding pressure if something breaks or goes wrong, homelessness and moving house.”

As throughout this inquiry, paying for and accessing childcare was a barrier for many. Colleges and universities have discretionary funds and students who get Universal Credit can get 85% of childcare costs paid up to a certain limit. From 28 June these costs are paid upfront. Where students can’t get Universal Credit (perhaps due to student loan income) then they also lose access to this subsidy. Nor will they be eligible for the two year old funded childcare, as that [generally requires someone to be getting social security benefits](#). We do not yet know what the eligibility will be for any expanded provision.

More broadly, the [review of the skills landscape](#) recommended a single, national funding body be created and that:

“The Scottish Government, should ensure that there is provision in the system for those undertaking part-time learning or pursuing certain approved accelerated retraining programmes to receive the same pro-rata level of funding support for living costs as those in full time education.”  
(Recommendation 6)

**Members may wish to discuss:**

- 12. Should there be additional, specific bursaries or student funds for low income parents?**
- 13. SWAP’s submission says that unexpected crises are a reason for students not being successful. How can we improve crisis support for parent students? For example would better links to money advice or Scottish Welfare Fund be helpful?**
- 14. How can childcare provision for student parents be improved?**

## Theme 5: Information and advice

In the call for views several respondents said that opportunities for training and education were not well publicised. For example one said;

“It’s not well signposted, it took until my 3rd time unemployed to find any support to help me build the confidence to return to work.”

Another was of the view that:

“There are many programmes targeted towards young people and while this is much needed, it can often feel like women over the age of 30 are forgotten about”

The submission from OPFS also commented that parents often do not know what options are available;

“Some of the key issues raised with us by single parents about barriers to education and training are a lack of knowledge and information about where to start, funding available, choosing the correct course, and the financial impacts that entering education will have for them, including the impact on benefits.”

The final report of the SDS Career Review (March 2023) made ten recommendations. These included: that career services should be delivered within communities, enhancing digital services and online tools. A Career Services Collaborative has been set up to ensure implementation.

The lifetime skills review commented on the complexity of the ‘skills system’. One recommendation was that SDS be “substantively reformed and recast as the national body for careers education and promotion with a focus on providing impartial advice, guidance and information to people in Scotland of all ages about careers, jobs and learning and training pathways and available support.” ([Lifetime skills recommendation 11](#)).

**Members may wish to discuss:**

- 15. What is needed to ensure that parents, particularly low-income parents, who are looking for education and training can easily find the information and advice they need?**
- 16. What do parents need to support them at college or university – both making the decision to enrol and support once enrolled on a course?**

## Theme 6: 2023-24 budget

In May this year, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills Jenny Gilruth [wrote to the Scottish Funding Council \(SFC\)](#) to announce that a planned 2023/24 budget uplift of £26m and £20m for college and university resource budgets respectively would not go ahead.

...funding for colleges and universities in the current year will return to the previously announced Resource Spending Review flat cash settlement. – [Scottish Government letter to SFC, 2/05/23](#)

Responding to the announcement, Colleges Scotland highlighted the role of colleges in tackling poverty and providing opportunity:

Ministers are relying on colleges to provide hundreds of thousands of students with training and education each year but with less and less funding - it simply can't be done any more. Colleges are needed more than ever to mitigate poverty in communities across the country, provide life-changing opportunities for people, and create the future workforce which will tackle the climate emergency. Removing funding previously planned for colleges is the wrong approach in delivering any of these ambitions. – [Colleges Scotland Media Release 2/05/23](#)

[Universities Scotland responded](#) to the decision to reverse the budget uplift stating that while the £20m was “far from what was required to meet students’ increasingly complex needs, or to sustain Scotland as a powerhouse of research and innovation” it had been a step in the right direction.

Universities Scotland said that the cut will “compromise our capacity to contribute to the nation’s recovery”, adding: “The Scottish Government needs a plan for universities, staff, and students.”

**Members may wish to discuss:**

**17. What will the impact be of tightening college and university budgets on provision for adult returners and student parents – particularly low income parents?**

Camilla Kidner  
SPICe  
June 2023



## Annex: Summary of call for views: education and training

The Call for Views asked about changes needed to education and training in Scotland if more parents were to return to work or increase their working hours. This is an extract of the 'Call for views' summary already provided to members.

The Call for Views asked if there was enough education and training in their area for parents looking to enter or progress in work. Almost all the organisations who answered said there wasn't, as did most of the individuals.

**Table : Is there sufficient access to education and training for parents who want to improve their employment options?**

	Individuals	Organisations
Yes	17	5
No	24	19
Unsure	15	9

Suggestions for what can be improved tended to focus on structural barriers to access, particularly:

- Childcare provision
- Social security rules.
- Course structures
- Lack of local provision / lack of transport to attend further away (eg South Lanarkshire)
- Lack of knowledge about what's available (eg OPFS)
- Lack of options for those unable to work due to being an unpaid carer and/or disabled (individual submission)

### **Social security and student funding rules can be a barrier:**

One individual described how social security rules prevented her from progressing to a higher level course.

"I'm at college doing an access course, but told if I go onto hn level it will impact on my universal credit."

Another respondent noted that she could get no further funding as she already had a degree.

### **Course structures**

As well as cost, the **timetabling** and structure of courses can be a barrier, as illustrated by one respondent's experience:

"During my maternity period with my second child, I was able to use that time to upskill by getting my MSc. However, I was only able to do this because the MSc programme was designed in blocks instead of having to go to university

weekly. It was the only programme that did that and has now been withdrawn because it didn't fit the "traditional" model of PGT courses."

Some individuals suggested that online learning would be more accessible.

### **Courses need to be available at all skills levels**

While some referenced basic skills (eg funding to get driving licence, ESOL) others said there should be **more support for 'higher level' courses**: One individual said:

"Only training I have seen that is easily available is low quality and designed around filling low paid jobs with poor working conditions that have huge number of vacancies, unsurprisingly. ""

Dumfries and Galloway Council (among others) emphasise **lifelong learning**, saying:

"We therefore call for the rapid realisation of the ambitions of lifetime skills laid out in the [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#). We would welcome a dual approach to providing skills and education for those looking for work alongside serious investment in upskilling and reskilling for those in the workforce. These must be delivered in a flexible and accessible way."

### **Need better links between training and employers**

South Lanarkshire Council advocated closer links between training and work, saying:

"There remains a need to increase the scope and availability of in-work training and upskilling to support low paid / underemployed parents to progress to better paid work.

Link between college courses/vocational courses with a guaranteed job on completion, at a reasonable level of pay that is better than being on benefits – not minimum wage."

Dumfries and Galloway Council also recommend improved business links:

"Given the nature of our business base we would like the skills system better engage with smaller businesses in the design of skills and work-based learning."

Close the Gap discuss the need to take a gender sensitive approach.