



UNIVERSITY of STRATHCLYDE
**FRASER OF ALLANDER
INSTITUTE**

Evaluating the Wise Group and partners Fair Start Scotland service

August 2025

Fraser of Allander Institute
University of Strathclyde Business School
199 Cathedral Street
Glasgow, G4 0QU
Scotland, UK
www.strath.ac.uk/fraser



Executive Summary

The Wise Group, alongside its partners Enable and The Lennox Partnership, delivered the Fair Start Scotland programme across Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, East and West Dunbartonshire.

Between 2018 and 2024, 5,171 people enrolled in the programme.

This included individuals with more complex barriers to employment, including high proportions of participants with disabilities and long-term health conditions.

Key achievements of the programme included:

- **39% started a job** - above the national average of 37%.
- Among participants with disabilities¹, **40% started a job**, compared to 32% nationally.
- **31% of participants with disabilities** achieved sustained employment for 13 weeks - outperforming the national average of 23%.
- **63%** of all job starters sustained employment for 26 weeks; **46%** sustained employment for a full year.

¹ Demographic analysis was conducted only for those starting on the programme between October 2020 and March 2024.

THE WISE GROUP AND PARTNERS FAIR START SCOTLAND

The Wise Group and partners supported **5,171 individuals** between **April 2018 and March 2024**



For those enrolling on the programme, **39%** started a job, compared to **37% nationally**



Between **October 2020 and March 2024**, The Wise Group and partners supported **2,233 individuals with a disability**

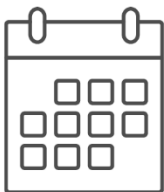
For those starting with the service with a disability, **40% started a job** through the Wise Group service compared to **32% nationally**



Of those starting a job, **74%** had sustained this employment after **13 weeks**



65% of those starting a job sustained this for **26 weeks**, with **50%** sustaining employment **for a full year**



Of those starting a job with a disability, **77%** achieved sustained **13-week employment** compared to **69% nationally**

67% of individuals starting a job with a disability **sustained employment for 26 weeks** with **46%** having a job after **one year**



1. Introduction

Fair Start Scotland was a voluntary employment support service provided in Scotland that was designed to help people who face challenges in finding and sustaining work.

Referrals to the programme ran between April 2018 and March 2024, with referrals ceasing in March 2024 and the programme succeeded by the No One Left Behind initiative.

Despite this, the service is still ongoing and providing support to remaining participants before it reaches its natural conclusion in 2026.

The Wise Group, alongside its partners Enable and The Lennox Partnership, delivered the programme across Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, East and West Dunbartonshire.

In February 2025, The Wise Group commissioned the Fraser of Allander Institute to undertake an evaluation of the specific part of the programme delivered by them.

This included an evaluation of the number of individuals participating in the programme, the number of them achieving the set of related outcomes and the value for money element of the service.

Our report is outlined as below:

- Section 1 outlines our approach to this analysis, highlighting the issues surrounding robust evaluation of programmes of this nature.
- Section 2 provides an overview of the part of Fair Start Scotland delivered by The Wise Group and partners, including insight on who was eligible and participated in the programme.
- Section 3 provides the core of our analysis and an overview of those achieving outcomes as part of FSS programme.
- Section 4 provides our benchmarking analysis, comparing the part of the FSS programme delivered by The Wise Group and partners to the overall national programme.
- Section 5 provides analysis of the value for money element of the service, outlining the costs to deliver and support individuals during their job placements.

2. Data and Methodology

The Wise Group provided data on those who participated in the Fair Start Scotland Programme delivered by The Wise Group taken from their administrative records. No identifying data was included, however.

Data was provided for individuals starting on the programme between April 2018 and April 2024.

These estimates are also available for the national Fair Start Scotland programme, and our method follows the FSS economic evaluation published by The Scottish Government. This allows us to benchmark the specific part of the programme administered by The Wise Group against the national programme.

Given inconsistencies in data tracking and recording, where we provide analysis of sub-groups we only evaluate the cohort who started with the service between October 2020 and April 2024.

Despite this, it is important to highlight that our approach to evaluation only provides a partial understanding of the impact of the programme given that establishing a counterfactual group is not possible. This means that establishing what scenario would have prevailed i.e. how many individuals would have found employment without the scheme, is difficult to achieve.

This research, therefore, does not seek to provide an estimate of the causal impact of the programme on employability, given differing characteristics of those participating and the lack of control group.

Adopting a benchmarking approach, however, helps to provide additional understanding of the success of the programme in comparison to the overall national scheme.

Box: A more robust approach to evaluating Fair Start Scotland

The findings presented throughout this report provide insight into the part of Fair Start Scotland delivered by The Wise Group and partners, however, cannot be interpreted as a robust approach to estimating the causal nature of the programme.

In order to fully estimate the causal effect of the programme, we would be required to establish a control group of individuals with similar characteristics to those who participated in FSS, but did not receive support from the programme.

By establishing a control group, best practise evaluation allows for a comparison of outcomes between these two groups to determine what outcomes might have occurred had our treatment group not received FSS support.

Put simply this means that in order to determine the true causal impact of the programme, we would determine what outcomes prevailed for the control group, to understand what would likely occur for the treatment group had they not received support. The difference in these outcomes would then provide a robust causal impact of the programme.

Another approach could be taken if Fair Start Scotland was implemented on a phased basis, meaning different cohorts of individuals were provided support at different time periods. The staggered rollout would allow for evaluation of outcomes for each of these cohorts to test whether these were directly attributable to the programme.

Despite this, benchmarking does provide robust information if there is good information on comparator groups.

In essence, in order to strengthen the robustness of both this evaluation and future evaluations of similar programmes, consideration of outcomes before and after support on the programme for groups of individuals with similar characteristics is required. This would allow for a better evaluation of the direct causal impact of the programme on outcomes for individuals supported.

3. Overview of Fair Start Scotland and The Wise Group

Fair Start Scotland was a voluntary employment support service provided in Scotland that was designed to help people who face challenges in finding and sustaining work.

The programme was funded by the Scottish Government and provided individuals with up to 18 months of pre-employment assistance and 12 months of in-work support.

The main aims of the programme² were to:

- Provide a mentor that helps to understand business and employability needs of those providing support through the programme.
- Deliver a free employability service including advertisement, pre-screening, recommendations on applicants for interview and coordinating interview schedules, inductions and training.
- Highlight potential funding that may help support employees.
- Providing up to 12 months in-work support; offering a tailored package of support for the employer and their new employee; aiding with job retention.
- Provide the opportunity for businesses to demonstrate their social responsibility by showcasing commitment to a diverse workforce.

The Wise Group, alongside its partners Enable and The Lennox Partnership, delivered the programme across Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, East and West Dunbartonshire.

The Wise Group are a social enterprise in Scotland with the core aim of lifting people out of poverty.

Fair Start Scotland sought to match employer partners with some of the following groups of individuals:

- Care leavers or those with care experience
- People with convictions
- Disabled people, including those with a long-term health condition to last 12 months or more.
- Lone Parents
- Refugees with an immigration status that allows them to take on employment
- Ethnic minority groups

Individuals were primarily referred to the programme via the Jobcentre Plus, however, the Wise Group were also responsible for sourcing their own referrals via third party organisations or self-referrals, with 30% of participants referred through this route.

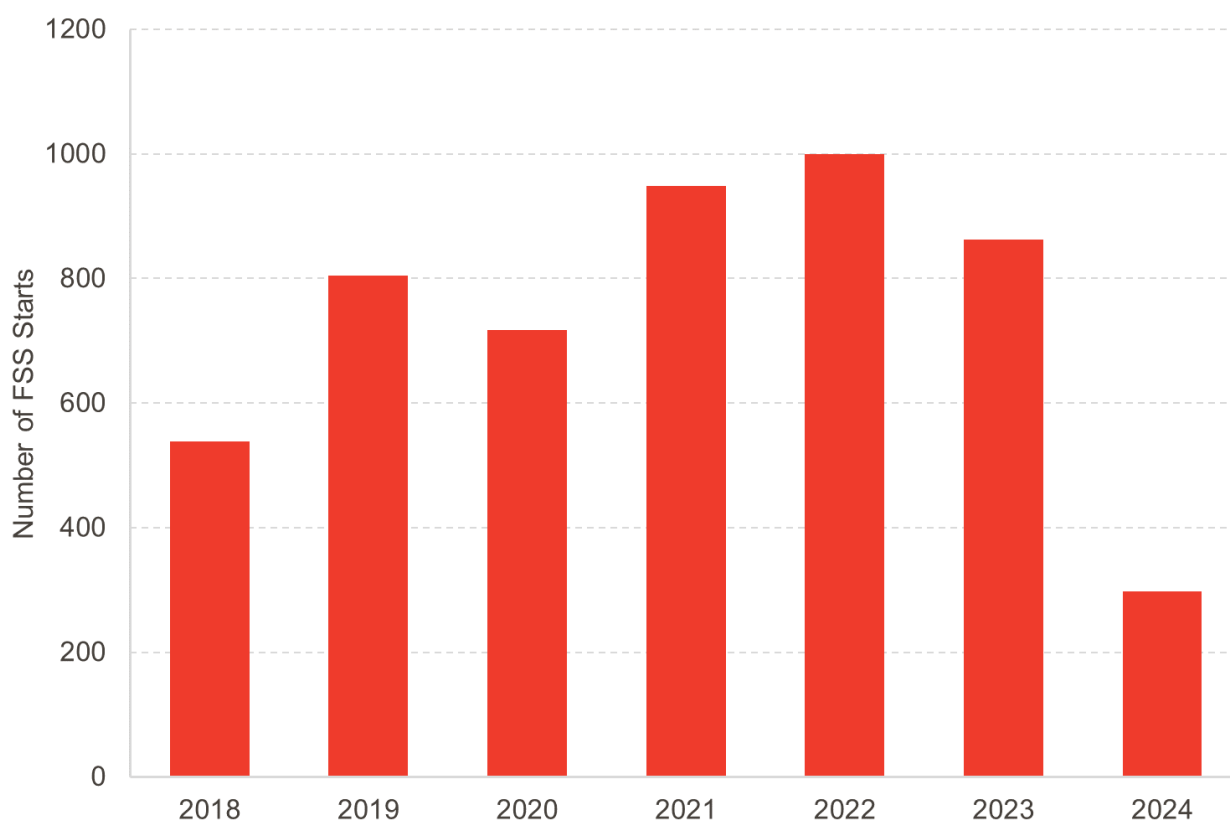
Referrals to the programme ceased in March 2024, with the programme replaced by the No One Left Behind Initiative.

² See [Fair Start Scotland](#)

Who used the programme?

Between April 2018 and April 2024, 5,171 individuals started on the Fair Start Scotland programme across Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, East and West Dunbartonshire, shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1: Number of individuals enrolling in Wise Group Fair Start Scotland Service, 2018 – 2024



Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection

Local Authority	Number of FSS Starts
East Dunbartonshire	835
East Renfrewshire	531
Inverclyde	715
Renfrewshire	1686
West Dunbartonshire	1402

**Numbers may not sum to total given some local authority identifiers are not available.*

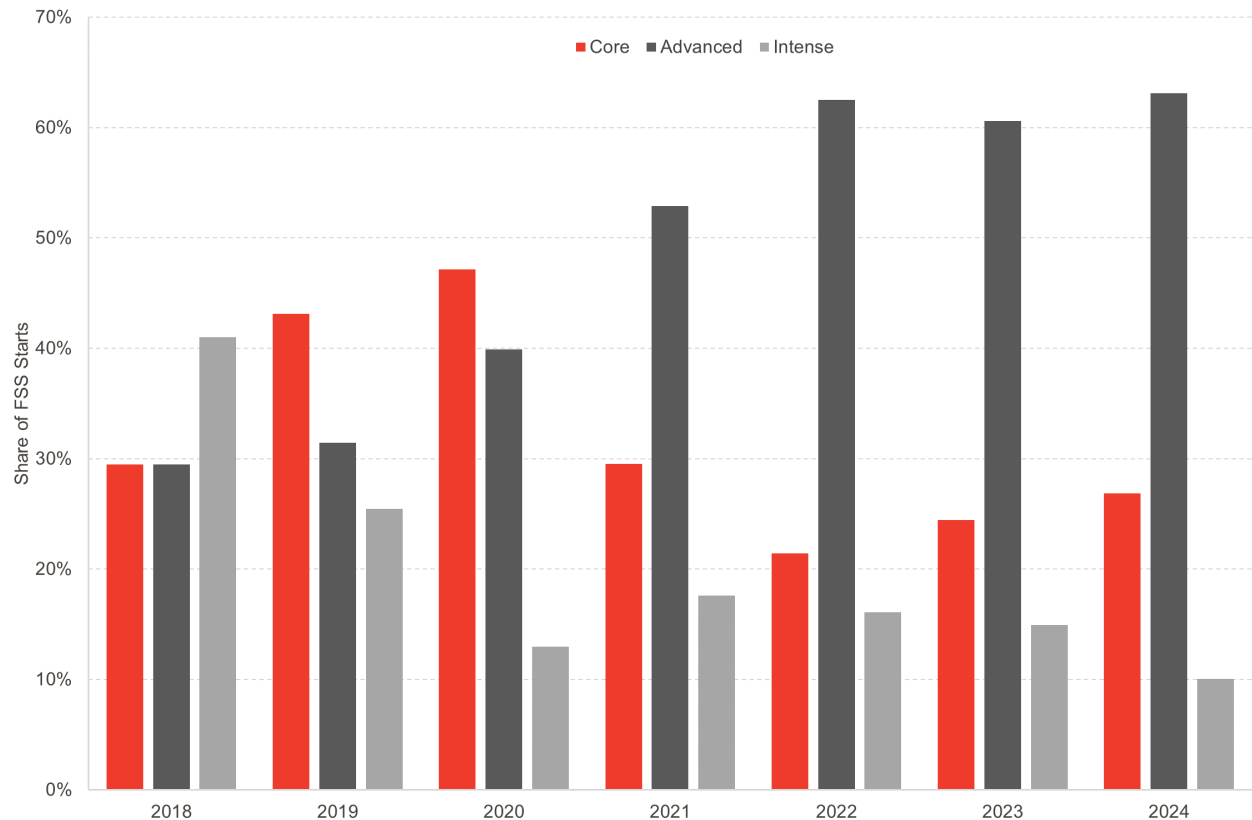
Individuals enrolling in the programme were assigned across three broad groups depending on the level of support they require.

The Core group offers the most basic level of assistance, the Advanced group offers more specialised support for those with more barriers to employment, with the Intense group providing a high level of tailored support for those with the most complex needs.

Chart 2 highlights that in 2018 through 2020, there was a far more equal spread of individuals across the assigned support groups.

However, since then, assignment in the advanced group has become far more common, with the majority of individuals enrolling in the programme assigned to this group. This was also matched with fewer individuals requiring basic or intense levels of support.

Chart 2: Share of FSS Starts by assigned support group, 2018 – 2024



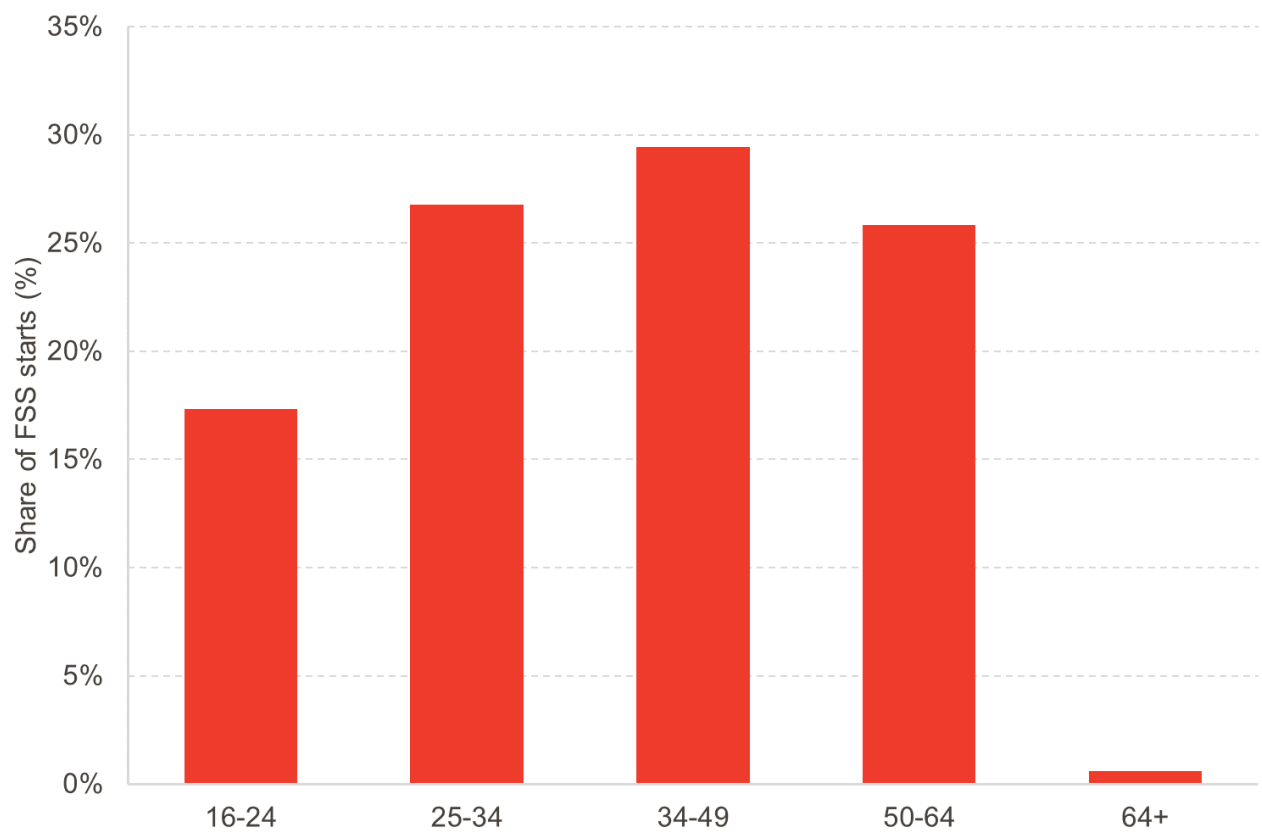
Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection

Barriers to employment can also differ across age groups, therefore the FSS programme helped to support individuals of all ages.

The highest share of individuals in the programme were aged between 34 and 49, around 29%, however there were similar shares of individuals aged 25-34 (27%) and 50-64 (26%).

As well as this, the programme also sought to support younger individuals with around 17% aged between 16 and 24, as shown in Chart 4.

Chart 4: Share of FSS Starts by Age, 2020-2024



**Age indicators were only available between 2020-2024.*

Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection

4. The Wise Group Outcomes

During their time on the programme, individuals are assessed against the following outcomes:

- Outcome 1 - must work for 13 weeks in a 16-week period (i.e. they can fall out of work and get a new job or change jobs but as long as they work for 13 weeks in that 16-week period they gain outcome 1).
- Outcome 2 – must work for 26 weeks in 30-week period.
- Outcome 3 – must work for 52 weeks in 60-week period.

Of the 5,171 individuals enrolling in the programme, 2,029, or 39%, started employment during their time engaging with the programme.

For those starting employment, 1,507 of those had worked in a paid job for 13 weeks within 16 weeks of starting employment. Chart 4 and Table 1 highlights the breakdown of this per year.

It is important to note that these estimates only account for those starting with the service within our given time period, with the data still maturing as existing participants continue their support on the programme up to its natural conclusion in 2026.

As of today, there are still 65 participants being supported by the service as part of the wind down process, therefore further outcomes may be achieved beyond what is highlighted throughout this section.

Chart 4: Wise Group FSS Starts, Job Start and Share of FSS starts achieving job outcome 1, 2018 - 2024

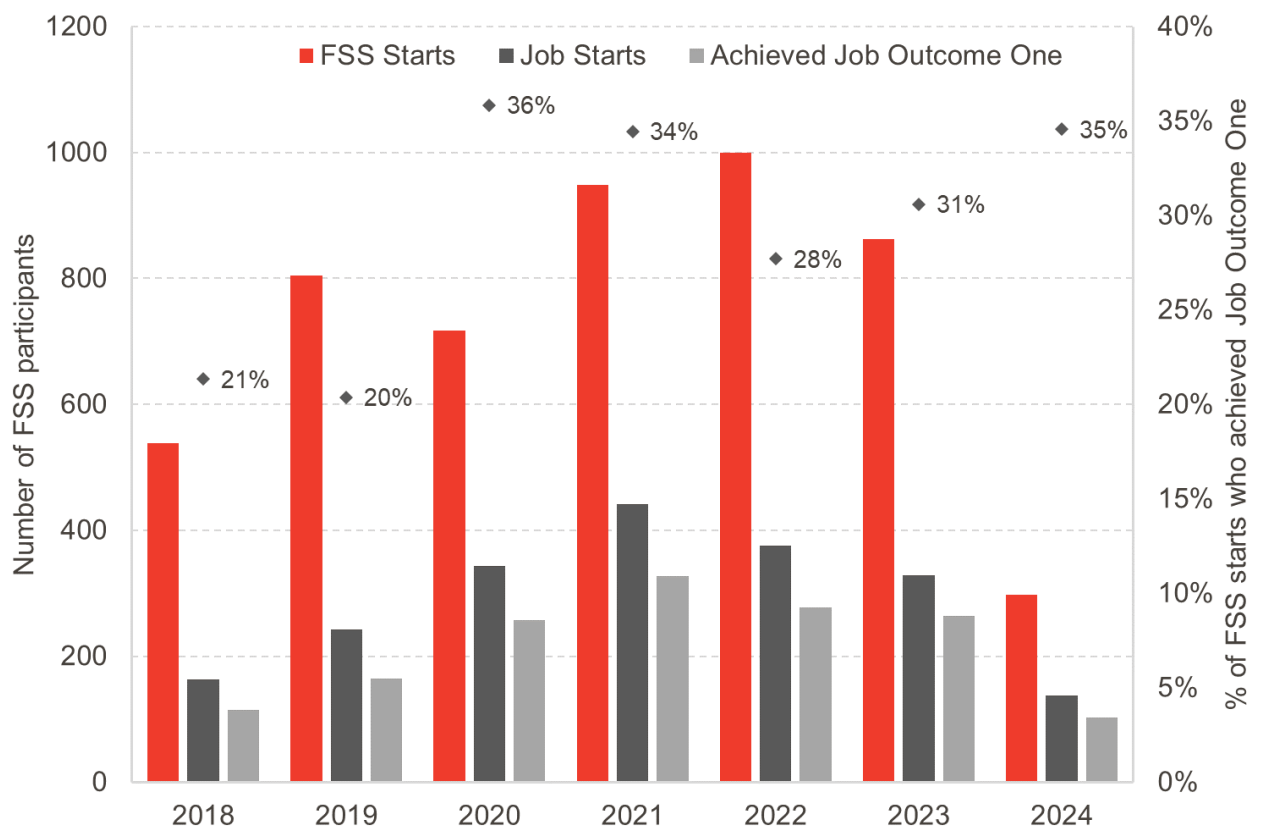


Table 1: Number of Job Starts on Fair Start Scotland and Share of those starting job that achieved Job Outcome 1, 2018 - 2024

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Job Starts	163	242	343	441	375	328	137
% achieved Job Outcome 1	71%	68%	75%	74%	74%	80%	75%

Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection

When looking at the same group of individuals who started employment and had achieved Job Outcome 1, 1,311 achieved Outcome 2 i.e. had sustained employment for 26 weeks in a 30-week period, as shown in Chart 5 and Table 2.

Of those, 1,012 individuals then achieved Job Outcome 3 and had sustained employment for 52 weeks, or 1 year, in a 60-week period.

Chart 5: Wise Group FSS Starts, Job Start and Share of FSS starts achieving job outcome 2, 2018 - 2024

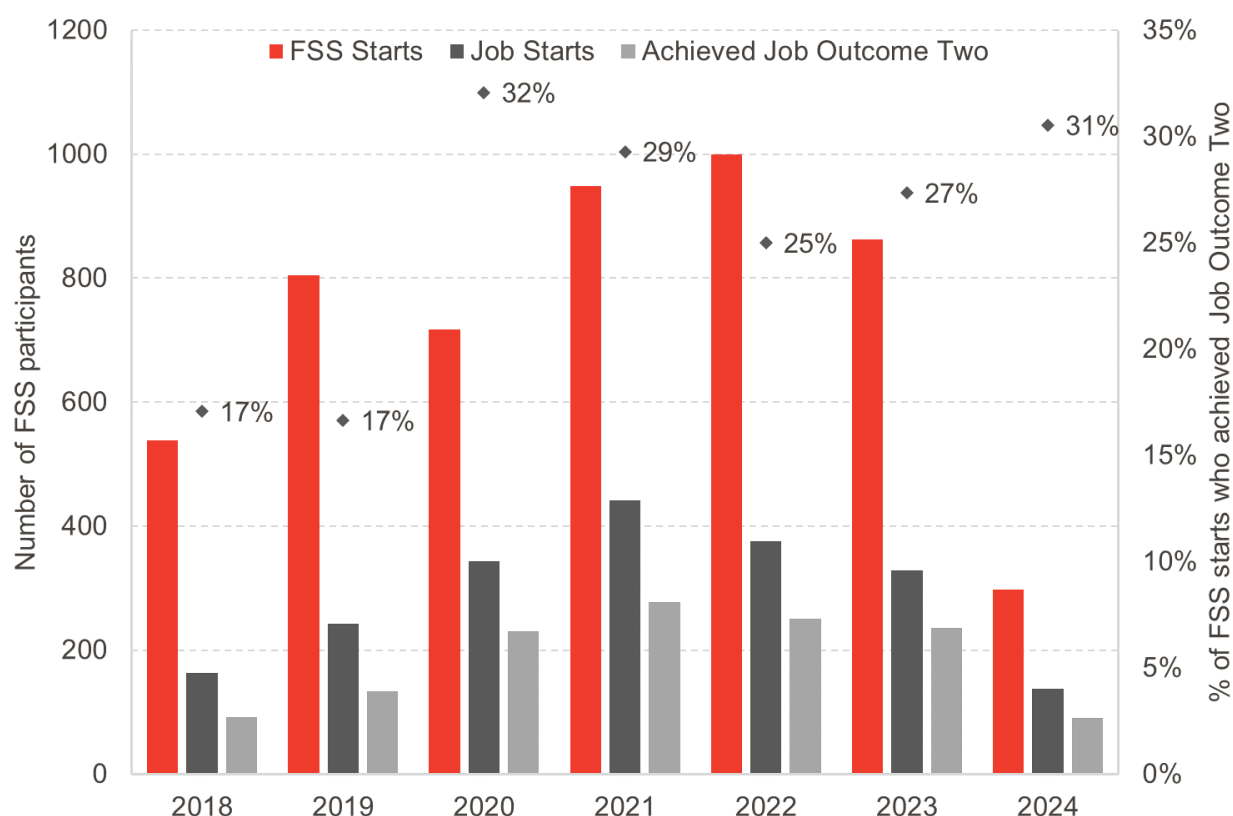


Table 2: Number of Job Starts on Fair Start Scotland and Share of those starting job that achieved Job Outcome 2, 2018 - 2024

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Job Starts	163	242	343	441	375	328	137
% achieved Job Outcome 2	56%	55%	67%	63%	67%	72%	66%

Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection

Chart 6: Wise Group FSS Starts, Job Start and Job Outcome 3 Achievements, 2018 - 2024

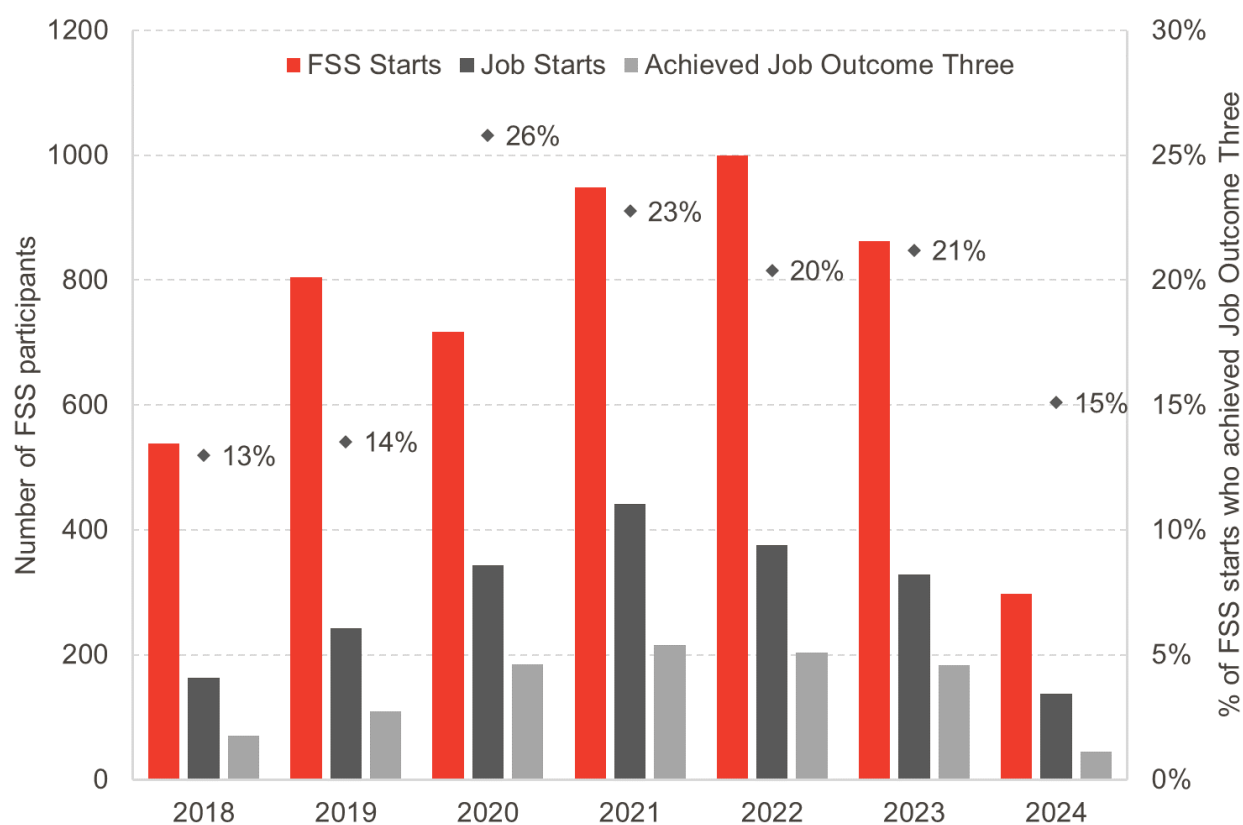


Table 3: Number of Job Starts on Fair Start Scotland and Share of those starting job that achieved Job Outcome 3, 2018 - 2024

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Job Starts	163	242	343	441	375	328	137
% achieved Job Outcome 3	43%	45%	54%	49%	54%	56%	33%

Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection

People with a disability

When Fair Start Scotland was first incepted, one of the key groups of focus for support was individuals with a disability, given the more significant barriers faced by these individuals when entering the labour market.

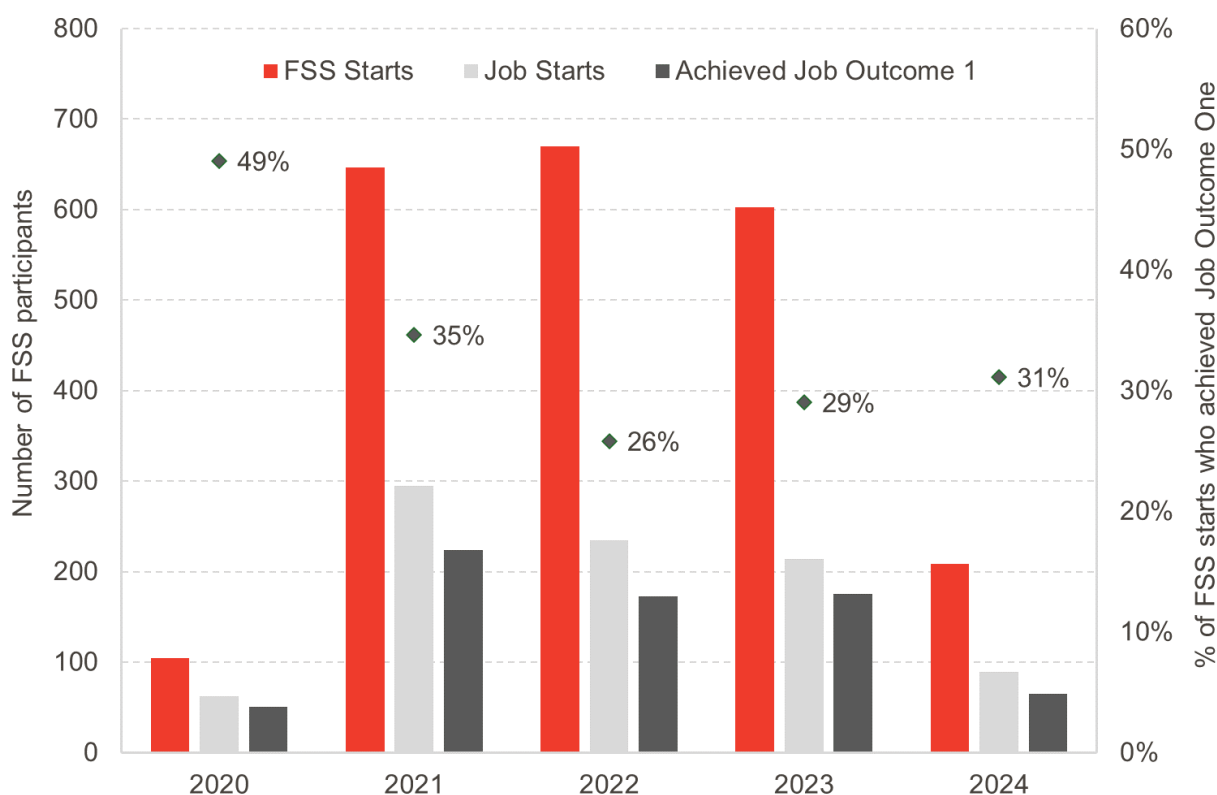
Given differences in how data was collected during the period of analysis, this part of our research focuses the cohort of individuals participating between October 2020 and April 2024.

During our period of analysis, 3,281 individuals started on Fair Start Scotland via The Wise Group and partners.

Of these individuals, 2,233 individuals, or 68% of the cohort, started on FSS with a disability. This includes presenting with a physical or mental health condition or an illness that is expected to last 12 months.

Of those 2,233 individuals starting on Fair Start Scotland with The Wise Group, 895 started with an FSS employer. Of those, 688 achieved Job Outcome 1 and had sustained employment for 13 weeks within a 16-week period.

Chart 7: Wise Group FSS Starts, Jobs Starts and Job Outcome 1 Achievements, disabled people, October 2020 – March 2024



Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection

Further insight into the range of impairments and health conditions is highlighted in Table 4.

Table 4 : Fair Start Scotland and Job Outcome 1 Achievements where a health condition or disability is reported, October 2020 – April 2024

	FSS Start	Job Starts	Job Outcome 1 Achieved
Sensory Impairment	643	255	197
% of FSS Starts		40%	31%
Developmental Disorder	107	28	20
% of FSS Starts		26%	19%
Physical Disability	322	125	90
% of FSS Starts		39%	28%
Learning Disability	36	14	12
% of FSS Starts		39%	33%
Mental Health Condition	1200	491	365
% of FSS Starts		41%	30%
Long-term illness, disease or condition	612	242	186
% of FSS Starts		40%	30%

Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection

Whilst those participating in the programme with a disability made up a significant share of the overall cohort supported by The Wise Group and partners, achievement of outcomes was comparable to the overall cohort.

This includes similar shares of individuals starting a job placement on the programme and achieving each of the three job outcomes, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Number of Individuals and Share of those starting FSS achieving outcomes, October 2020 – March 2024

	Whole Cohort	Individuals with Disability
FSS Starts	3,281	2,233
Job Starts	1,367	895
% of FSS Starts	42%	40%
Job Outcome 1	1,031	688
% of FSS Starts	31%	31%
Job Outcome 2	894	604
% of FSS Starts	27%	27%
Job Outcome 3	618	409
% of FSS Starts	18%	18%

Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection

Other eligibility criteria

Beyond those with a disability, support from Fair Start Scotland was also available to other groups. This includes those with criminal convictions, care experienced individuals, lone parents and those with refugee status who are allowed to work.

Table 6 highlights the number of these individuals enrolling in Fair Start Scotland and their associated outcomes.

Table 6: Fair Start Scotland and Job Outcome 1 Achievements by other eligibility criteria, October 2020 – April 2024

	FSS Starts	Job Starts	Job Outcome 1 Achieved
Conviction	359	126	75
% of FSS Starts		35%	21%
Care Experienced	119	42	29
% of FSS Starts		35%	24%
Lone Parent	435	182	137
% of FSS Starts		42%	31%
Refugee	90	44	27
% of FSS Starts		49%	30%

Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection

Those from ethnic minority groups were also eligible for and an identified group for support. Table 7 shows those outcomes for those for these groups.

Table 7: Fair Start Scotland and Job Outcome 1 Achievements by ethnic group, October 2020 – April 2024

	FSS Starts	Job Starts	Job Outcome 1 Achieved
White	2882	1186	898
		41%	31%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	21	11	5
		52%	24%
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British	80	28	25
		35%	31%
African	83	46	39
		55%	47%
Other ethnic group	42	15	14
		38%	35%
Not Recorded	173	67	42
		39%	24%

Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection

5. Comparison with National Fair Start Scotland Programme

To better contextualise our results, we have looked at the national evaluations of the Fair Start Scotland programme in order to benchmark the success of the Wise Group's specific service relative to the national programme.

Comparing to the national programme also allows for a better understanding of how the specific element of the programme delivered by the Wise Group sits within the overall national evaluation.

To allow for a consistent period of analysis, for the whole cohort analysis, we consider the time between April 2018 and March 2024. For other groups of analysis, we consider October 2020 to March 2024.

Table 8 highlights that around 7% of Fair Start Scotland participants in Scotland did so via the Wise Group and partners.

The Wise Group programme marginally outperformed the national programme, with higher shares of individuals both starting a job through the Wise Group and partners programme and achieving each of the identified outcomes.

Table 8: Wise Group FSS service compared to national FSS programme.

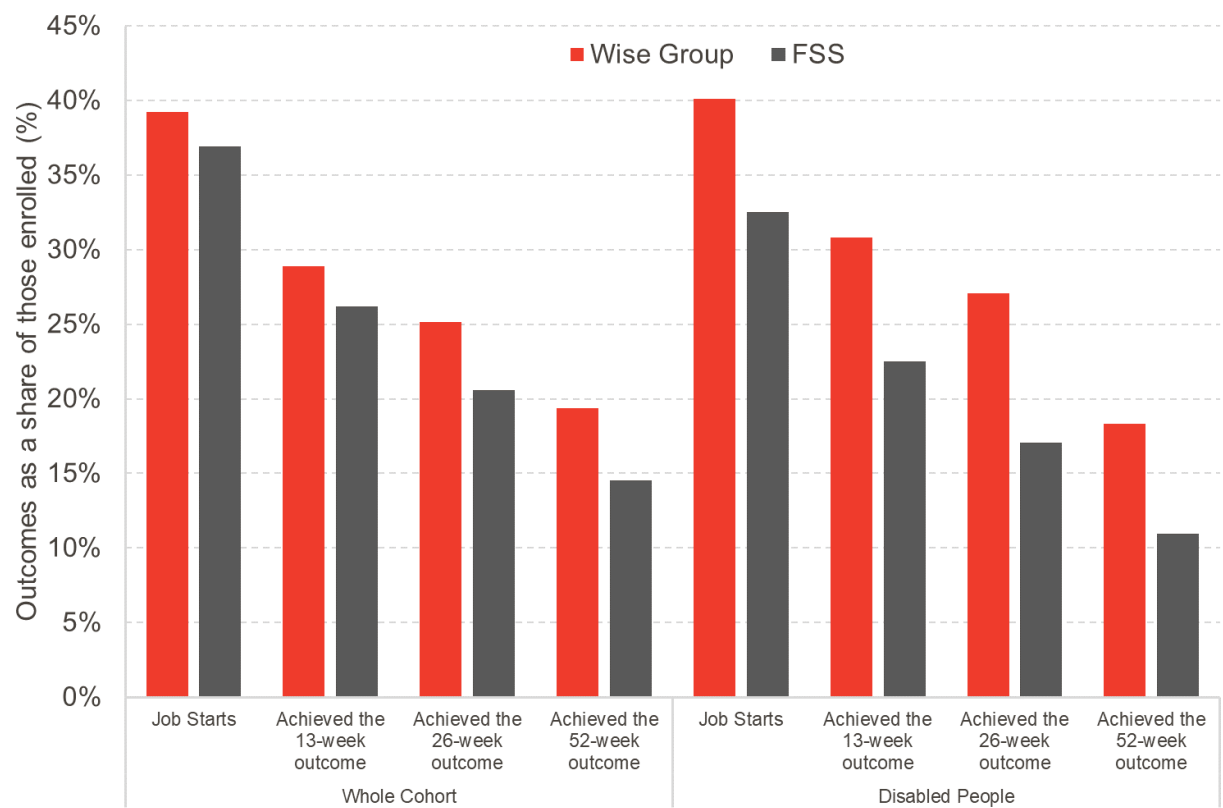
	National FSS	Wise Group FSS
Number of participants that started on the service	70,513	5,171
Number of participants that started on the service per year:		
2018/19	10,063	732
2019/20	12,085	828
2020/21	10,359	728
2021/22	12,533	997
2022/23	12,563	1,012
2023/24	12,910	874
Percentage of enrolments who started job	37%	39%
Percentage of enrolments who achieved the 13-week outcome	26%	29%
Percentage of enrolments who achieved the 26-week outcome	21%	25%
Percentage of enrolments who achieved the 52-week outcome	15%	19%

Source: Wise Group FSS Data Collection, [Scottish Government](#)

When looking at the key group of focus, those with a disability, the part of FSS provided by the Wise Group and partners also performed better.

This included a higher share of individuals with a disability starting a job via support from The Wise Group (40% compared to 32% nationally), and higher shares of individuals achieving each of the three job outcomes, Chart 8.

Chart 8: Wise Group Fair Start Scotland and National Programme Outcomes, 2018 - 2024



Source: The Wise Group, Scottish Government

6. Cost Effectiveness

Beyond the number of individuals participating in the programme and the outcomes achieved, another way to evaluate a programme of this nature is to understand the value for money component.

In particular, it is important to explore costs and benefits of a project to highlight the value for money or cost effectiveness of it. Cost-effectiveness is a key factor for policymakers when setting policy, and it is important to understand what a programme costs relative to the benefits that it delivers. This helps to identify the best value for money of policies within the wider context of limited public investment.

The national economic evaluation of Fair Scotland highlighted the cost effectiveness of Fair Start Scotland compared to two schemes that operated previously in Scotland, Working for Families and the New Futures Fund.

These programmes had similar aims to Fair Start Scotland, despite differences in the client groups they were aimed at. As well as this, we include replicated estimates from [our report on Community Jobs Scotland \(CJS\) published in February 2022](#), another employability programme that ran in Scotland over a similar period.

Table 9 replicates the analysis provided in the national Fair Start Scotland economic evaluation and highlights the costs to the Wise Group and Partners for delivering their part of the programme.

This analysis is available in the Economic Evaluation of Fair Start Scotland³, and relates to the 2018 cohort of the programme, which we have presented in more current day prices.

This highlights that on average, Fair Start Scotland is comparable to the other employability programmes in terms of cost per participant, particularly the Working for Families and New Futures Fund programmes.

When looking at the cost per delivered outcome, Fair Start Scotland performed better than the New Futures Fund but performed poorer per outcome than the Working For Families programme, in terms of cost effectiveness.

This analysis also highlights that Fair Start Scotland was a far more cost-effective programme than the Community Jobs Scotland initiative.

³ See [FSS Economic Evaluation, Page 27](#)

Table 9: Comparison of average Fair Start Scotland costs, relative to Community Jobs Scotland, Working for Families Fund and New Futures Fund, 2023/2024 prices

	Cost per participant	Cost per job start	Cost per job outcome (13 weeks)
Fair Start Scotland – National (original)	£2,472	£6,381	£11,241
Fair Start Scotland – National (revised*)	£2,478	£7,655	£10,610
Community Jobs Scotland: Wage subsidy + training budget	£14,341	-	£35,168
Community Jobs Scotland: Total amount paid to SCVO by Scottish Government	£16,997	-	£41,681
Working for Families	£2,754	£5,672	-
New Futures Fund	£3,848	£23,915	-

*In March 2022, the Scottish Government revised its cost figures on Fair Start Scotland.

Source: [Scottish Government](#), Fraser of Allander Institute

Whilst the largest cohort of support for Fair Start Scotland was those individuals with a disability, specific breakdown of costs for this group are not provided as part of the national economic evaluation.

Despite this, as aforementioned, individuals are assigned across three main groups depending on the level of support required. The Core group is the most basic level of assistance, the Advanced group offers more specialised support for those with more barriers to employment, with the Intense group provides a high level of tailored support for those with the most complex needs.

Whilst there are no figures available on the cost by client group for those achieving Job Outcome 1, we can infer that the cost of the Fair Start Scotland service delivered by the Wise Group is likely higher than the average, given the high share of individuals participating with a disability.

Table 10: Cost and cost-effectiveness by client group, Fair Start Scotland

	Average	Core	Advanced	Intense
Share of individuals	-	32%	49%	19%
Average Cost per job start (£)	£6,381	£5,480	£7,247	£9,183
Revised average cost per job start (£)	£7,655	£5,496	£9,552	£11,630

Source: Scottish Government, The Wise Group

Whilst these estimates only relate to the cost of delivering the programme and its associated outcomes, the national evaluation of Fair Start Scotland estimates that even in the most pessimistic scenario, the financial benefits to society of FSS were around £1.10 for every £1 in cost⁴.

⁴ See [FSS Economic Evaluation, Page 18](#)

Despite these estimates relating to the programme as a whole, this highlights that the high number of individuals supported by the Wise Group, detailed throughout this report, have likely contributed to the success of the national Fair Start Scotland programme, particularly in terms of cost effectiveness.

7. Conclusions

This report has highlighted the important role that the Fair Start Scotland employment programme, and in particular, the service provided by The Wise Group and partners, played in breaking down barriers for individuals excluded from the labour market.

Our results have highlighted that:

- 39% of the 5,171 individuals who start started on the programme started a job placement whilst supported by Fair Start Scotland.
- Of those starting a job placement through The Wise Group, 74% had sustained employment for 13 weeks within a 16-week period, or 29% of those who enrolled on the programme.
- 65% of those starting a job placement had sustained this employment after 26 weeks, or 25% of all that enrolled.
- For those sustaining employment for 52 weeks within a 60-week period, 50% of those starting a job placement had done so, or 20% of all that enrolled on the programme.
- The programme also helped to support one of the key groups of focus, those with a disability, with 40% of these individuals starting a job placement and 31% sustaining 13 weeks of employment within a 16-week period.
- When compared to the national Fair Start Scotland programme, the Wise Group and partners' service performed comparably in terms of the outcomes achieved.
- This includes 39% of individuals starting a job via The Wise Group, compared to 37% nationally.

As referrals to Fair Start Scotland have come to an end, and replaced by the No One Left Behind service, our results highlight that programmes of this nature can help break down barriers for those excluded from the labour market to gain and sustain employment.

Despite this, our research has highlighted that in order to fully evaluate the causal impact of Fair Start Scotland, and other employability programmes, the need for better data is crucial. Implementing the appropriate data collection on individuals supported by the programme before and after the programme would allow for a more robust evaluation of the causal impact of the programme.

With value for money a key factor in policy-setting decisions, the need to better understand the cost-effectiveness of employability programmes is key, particularly as providers continue to take their learnings from Fair Start Scotland into delivery of No One Left Behind.

Fraser of Allander Institute

University of Strathclyde
199 Cathedral Street
Glasgow G4 0QU
Scotland, UK

Telephone: 0141 548 3958

Email: fraser@strath.ac.uk

Website: fraserofallander.org

Follow us on Twitter via @Strath_FAi

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