

2026



Apt: Making It Work

A Fair Work
Economic Inactivity
Project

Final Report

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Employment**

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SUSE



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Part One

Executive Summary

The Apt Making It Work project was delivered by the Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE) and funded by the Scottish Government to improve retention in employment for people at risk of economic inactivity, particularly disabled people and those with long-term health conditions. Apt is the brand name of the projects SUSE carries out with employers to build their capacity to create more inclusive, accessible and supportive workplaces. Apt was originally developed in the Disability Employment Gap Public Social Partnership¹ led by SUSE between 2020-24.

Working in partnership with private and voluntary sector employers, delivery partners and the SUSE Experience Network this project explored four key workstreams: Equitable Induction and In-Work Support; Positive Workplace Conversations; Digital Access Reviews and Action Planning, and Improving Workplace Consultations. These workstreams were used to test practical approaches, generate learning and develop employer-focused guides: [Resources | Apt Scotland | Disability Employment Gap PSP](#)

Despite a compressed delivery timeframe, the project achieved positive outcomes. Employers reported increased confidence in recruiting, supporting and retaining disabled staff, with Quality Assurance data showing an average improvement of over 2 points (on a 10 point scale) across key inclusion measures. Strong gains were seen in employers' confidence in inclusive recruitment practices, digital accessibility awareness and supporting disabled employees at work.

The project demonstrated that employers are willing to make meaningful changes when support is practical, proportionate and clearly relevant to their business. Practical tools such as induction checklists, wellbeing passports, conversation frameworks and digital accessibility guidance were particularly well received. Lived experience involvement strengthened the relevance and credibility of all project activity.

However, the project also highlighted ongoing challenges. Employer recruitment takes time, and shorter engagement periods limit the ability to embed change and measure long-term impact. Employers vary widely in readiness, capacity and confidence, and areas such as workplace consultation require longer-term support to be fully realised.

Overall, Making It Work shows that sustained employer engagement, sufficient delivery timescales and practical, lived-experience-led resources are critical to achieving lasting change. The four employer guides produced through the project can provide a strong foundation for future capacity-building work and wider adoption across Scotland.

¹ [Apt Public Sector Partnership Report and Evaluation 2023](#)

Part Two

Introduction to the Making It Work Project

The Making It Work project has been delivered by the Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE) with the aim of improving retention rates for people at risk of becoming economically inactive, particularly disabled people and those with long-term health conditions in Scotland and to help to tackle child poverty. The project had a focus on building employer capacity in the voluntary and private sector to support these individuals, thereby reducing economic inactivity.

Project delivery had significant contributions from a range of partners and stakeholders and the SUSE Experience Network of people with lived experience of disability.

The project had 4 key elements which were taken forward as workstreams:

- **Equitable Induction & In-Work Support:** Developing bespoke strategies for employers to support new employees.
- **Positive Workplace Conversations:** Encouraging disability disclosure through positive conversations including utilising the SUSE Why You Askin' campaign.
- **Digital Access Review & Action Plan:** Assessing and improving the accessibility of employers' eLearning resources and information systems.
- **Improving Workplace Consultation:** Creating mechanisms for employers to improve communications and consultations with disabled employees. This may include developing groups within workplaces to enable disabled employees to contribute to policy development.

Project Outputs

The project has produced resources and guides for employers, aiming for long-term changes in workplace culture and practices. A guide has been developed from each workstream:

- An Employer's Guide to Equitable Workplace Induction & In-Work Support
- An Employer's Guide to Positive Workplace Conversations (including an introduction to the Why You Askin' campaign)
- An Employer's Guide to Workplace Digital Accessibility. how to make eLearning & Intranets accessible for all employees
- An Employer's Guide on improve workplace consultations including establishing employee groups.

Later in this report we have described the resources. These will be online documents but hard copies can be produced as required.

Launch and Early Actions

The project was discussed with the Scottish Government for several months and was given the go ahead in June 2025. It was officially launched by then Minister for Business and Employment, Richard Lochhead on 19 August. In the first months of the project our main actions were:

- Defining the approach to the 4 workstreams – The activities we carried out with the employers to test our ideas and generate the evidence required to develop the final 4 products, the employer resources. For example, how to test what employers do when they induct and recruit new workers.
- Recruiting partners for the workstreams and getting those underway. We have been keen to avoid an overly formal approach – with lots of meetings and paperwork – but the workstreams are key to generating ideas and getting input from experts on the correct approaches to take for each activity. We put out a call to stakeholders and made some direct approaches to partners that we knew could make a contribution. For example, Alliance for Inclusion who we knew had carried out positive activities in the BBC and BT to promote inclusion.
- Developing action plans for each of the workstreams to detail the actions we will take to ensure steady and rapid progress towards the project's objectives. We found that these had to be regularly reviewed and updated as many of our assumptions were not accurate. For example, the very diverse approaches to communications within businesses, therefore the need to adapt the positive conversations activities.
- Reviewing and updating the Employer Assessment and Quality Assurance processes to be used in the project. Small changes to existing resources were made to ensure they were appropriate for Making It Work.
- Employer recruitment, which was the main activity in the first months of the project with the whole SUSE team working on this intensively. As we have reported consistently it is challenging to recruit employers from a standing start and for the Making It Work project we needed to engage new employers rather than ones we have worked with before. It takes several months to get an organisation on board (particularly private sector employers), therefore we were satisfied to get sufficient numbers and variety of employers in a short period of time. We've provided some narrative on this activity in the next section.
- Promotion in the sector and to our range of stakeholders. This was important to help us recruit employers but we also wanted to attract new partners who could work with us and generally promote the aims of the project in the voluntary sector. This was aimed at creating an audience and users for the resources the project has created as our stakeholders will be key to raising awareness of the resources with employers.
- We met regularly with colleagues at the Scottish Government to report on progress and get support when this was required. We established a productive and effective relationship that helped the project to make progress. Regular meetings continued through to the end of the project.

Action Plan

The SUSE team developed a project action plan to ensure all of the intended activities could be scheduled and the appropriate resources identified. Specifically, we included the stakeholders and partners that we intended to approach to work with us and their role in project delivery and the production of the resources we needed.

The action plan was necessarily flexible as the timescales were dependant on employer recruitment and the timing of this was not in our control. We had agreed four workstreams for the project, therefore we had to recruit employers who were interested in these activities and saw a benefit for their business in participating. We hoped to make progress with employers from August 2025, but this had to be put back on several occasions and we were not able to start work with some of the employers until October. This meant that in many cases we only had six months to work with an employer with the Christmas break during that time.

Workstreams

An early priority, as we worked to recruit employers, was to establish the Workstreams and invite stakeholders to participate. We put out a general call to SUSE members and partners and selected participants that had an interest in the subject area and who were able to make a contribution – specifically, able to work directly with employers. As well as partner organisations, several members of the SUSE Experience Network also joined the Workstreams and their contribution proved to be very valuable. SUSE staff co-ordinated and chaired the Workstream meetings.

The Workstreams met from w/c 22nd September 2025 onwards, at intervals of about four weeks, with a break for Christmas. The groups helped us to develop ideas for each of the employers with potential activities to carry out and they supported us to recruit delivery partners. For example, from an early stage, for the Equitable Induction Workstream, we decided we wanted to review the induction and onboarding materials from several employers to allow us to get an idea of current practices. The Workstream group was able to suggest a number of appropriate partners to carry out these reviews and the approach to be used to ensure consistency. Similarly, the Digital Access Workstream helped us to identify and recruit people with lived experience to carry out the testing with our IT partner, Cole AD. Members of the SUSE Experience Network who participated in the workstream meetings were paid for their time and for any subsequent project delivery they were involved in.

It was agreed at an early stage that the outputs from the project would be employer guides – one for each of the workstreams we had proposed to the Scottish Government. These were central to our thinking at all stages of the activity from early employer recruitment, employer assessments, workstream meetings and training and consultancy activities. We were conscious at all points that our actions should support the development of the guides and this provided a structure – ensuring we did not set out on activities that were unlikely to give us learning that could be used in the documents.

Workstream Partners

Equitable Induction and In-work Support

Alliance for Inclusion: Strives to empower companies and individuals to create a culture that values and supports disability and neurodivergence.

The Lennox Partnership: Helps businesses provide employment opportunities and staff to help them meet their objectives.

DFN Project Search: Their supported internship programme provides young adults with structured in-work job coaching to help them transition from education into employment.

Visibility Scotland: offers a wide range of evidence-based training programmes that equip employers with the skills and knowledge to confidently support people with sensory loss.

Positive Workplace Conversations

Changing the Chemistry: are committed to building inclusive leadership and employment pathways, particularly for underrepresented groups through peer-support, practical applications and fostering positive conversations.

Cope Ltd: social enterprise and charity which provides employment and skill development for adults with learning disabilities or autism.

Values Into Action Scotland: charity offering numerous employability services across Scotland for people with learning disabilities ensuring they have the same opportunities as everyone else to achieve their goals.

Alliance for Inclusion: Strives to empower companies and individuals to create a culture that values and supports disability and neurodivergence.

Digital Access Review & Action Plan

Cole AD: Support SUSE with digital expertise for our Digital Access Reviews and Digital Recruitment Reviews, as well as offering accessible products across animation, branding, graphic design and media buying.

Passion4Social: A social enterprise offering creative marketing solutions including accessibility audits, graphic design, web design, app development, content creation and management and digital marketing.

Alliance for Inclusion: Strives to empower companies and individuals to create a culture that values and supports disability and neurodivergence.

Improving Workplace Consultation

Into Work: helps disabled and neurodivergent people and those with long-term health conditions find, build and maintain great jobs. Into Work also offer a variety of bespoke training courses for employers.

CSL Training, Evaluation and Development: independent consultant who is regularly commissioned to offer advice and support to voluntary sector organisations.

Your Options Understood: Lived Experience consultant, and chair of SUSE's Experience Network, who provides a range of training and educational packages, including consultancy services such as accessibility audits for employers.

Alliance for Inclusion: Strives to empower companies and individuals to create a culture that values and supports disability and neurodivergence.

Several members of the SUSE Experience Network. We've described the network below.

Comments from Workstream Stakeholders

'The topic covered as part of the digital access workstream is essential to ensure employers have the digital capability to allow disabled staff to play a full and active part in working life. The work so far has been well managed by the SUSE team - allowing all contributors the opportunity to have an input. The workstream was a good start; but does require more time to both reach out to more employers and provide those companies involved with the necessary skills to ensure their products area fully accessible, particularly for users of assistive technology.'

Allan Mackillop, Alliance for Inclusion

'We see digital access as fundamental to equity. Without it, people risk being excluded from work, learning and progression. We recognise that many employers are making positive strides, but our involvement in the Digital Access workstream shows there is still more to do to address the less visible barriers within intranets and e-learning. This is not just a technical challenge; it is a matter of fairness and inclusive growth. We hope this work supports Scottish Government and employers to build on that progress by embedding accessibility as standard practice, so no one is left behind in an increasingly digital workplace.'

Karalyn Becker, Passion 4 Social CIC

'Digital accessibility in the workplace should not require disabled staff to repeatedly explain barriers or justify their specific needs. Digital accessibility in the workplace should be viewed as a fundamental quality standard rather than an optional addition, comparable to cybersecurity, data protection, and health and safety. Working with a mixed group of disabled users face-to-face helps us build a better understanding of the barriers they encounter daily. User feedback is critical because it offers an intuitive solution to issues they have lived with all their working lives. You can't beat lived experience, especially in a working environment.'

Garry McCann, Cole AD

SUSE Experience Network

The SUSE Experience Network is a group of people who have lived experience of disability who support SUSE to develop and deliver projects and services. There are about 20 members of the group currently with half playing an active role as consultants or trainers within projects.

The group includes people with a range of disabilities and long term health conditions. They come together regularly and are self facilitated with administration support provided by SUSE. Within the Making It Work project members of the Experience Network carried out various roles including delivering training to employers, consultancy activities such as reviewing employers' induction materials and testers in the Digital Access Reviews workstream. They also supported the development of the employer guides. These were paid roles within the project.

Project Budget and Spend

The total project budget was £98,736.91. This includes costs for staffing, operations, marketing, IT support, product development, partner training delivery and partner employer consultancy. The budget was designed to ensure effective project delivery and the development of resources and guides for employers. The project was delivered to the agreed budget with a very small underspend.

Budget Heading	Budget	Spend
Staff Salaries	£52,128.91	£58,343.83
Operations	£3,908.00	£3,471.70
Digital & Media	£3,100.00	£1,410.00
Resources / Product Development	£12,200.00	£12,519.60
Apt Partner Training Costs	£6,300.00	£4,332.40
Apt Partner Consultancy Costs	£24,200.00	£18,653.37
Totals	£98,736.91	£98,720.90

The budget we submitted was an accurate reflection of the costs as it was based on past experience of operating projects of this kind. We spend more on staff salaries and less on consultants. This was due to project staff carrying out more of the face-to-face work with the employers as the time constraints made this necessary and we found that some elements such as action planning with employers were more effectively carried out by SUSE staff.

Part Three

Project Marketing and Communications Activity

Aim

The materials and activity were designed to raise awareness of the project and encourage engagement with targeted employers, specifically looking to recruit up to 20 medium to large employers from the private or third sectors who were based and/or operating in Scotland. As the project had a delayed start the marketing activities had to be carried out quickly but we are broadly satisfied with the results as we were able to recruit a sufficient number of employers with a variety that allowed us to carry out activities and test ideas.

We have used this section of the report to highlight the resources we developed with some narrative on how they were used.

Branding and Website

Prior to any marketing activity the brand style was developed and the Apt website content was over-hauled to bring it up to date – specifically the creation of a Making It Work landing page for future communications.

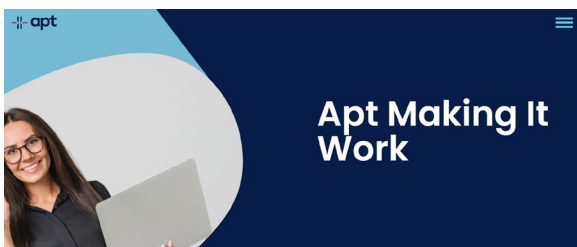
Project Logo:



Campaign Landing Page:

[Campaign landing page on the Apt website.](#)

Example campaign landing page:



Marketing and Communication Methods

As the project was not to be announced ahead of the official Scottish Government launch, the materials created were designed to be support tools to be used in direct communications between the Apt Project Coordinators and the targeted employers.

Examples: Digital leaflet



Leaflet text: “We’re offering fully funded advice, support and training to medium-large employers in Scotland to help you make your workplace more inclusive for disabled people. Boost your employee satisfaction, productivity and reputation. Get Started www.apr.suse.org.uk.”

Additionally, a Communications Pack with ready-to-use messages and alternative graphics was developed in preparation for the communications embargo being lifted.

Following the official launch, the project was announced and scheduled post went out across the SUSE and Apt Scotland Facebook, LinkedIn and X pages from August 2025.

We’ve included examples of the message content below at each stage of the campaign:

- 1: Example project announcement message
- 2: Example recruiting employers message
- 3: Example sharing facts/recruiting employers message

The project was announced in the September SUSE e-bulletin and the Communications Pack was issued to all comms contacts in October 2025.

Feedback on Communications Pack:

“Thanks for sending this on. Your comms packs are always so well laid out and user-friendly – and the project sounds extremely worthwhile.” DYW North East.

Example Social Media posts from August 2025

1: Example project announcement message

“We’re excited to announce a new Apt Scotland project. Apt Making It Work, led by SUSE and funded by the Scottish Government, helps employers across Scotland build inclusive workplaces for disabled people and those with long-term health conditions – boosting retention, confidence, innovation and economic inclusion.

We are funded to offer practical support and training for up to 20 employers in Scotland. Ultimately reducing economic inactivity and contributing to reducing the #DisabilityEmploymentGap.

Each participating business will receive bespoke recommendations, training and practical support. The range of activities will ensure employers expand their knowledge, gain confidence and create workplaces that work for everyone.”

2: Example recruiting employers message

“Are you a medium or large employer in Scotland?
Apt Making It Work, led by SUSE, is here to help you create an inclusive and innovative workplace.

Fully funded by the Scottish Government – receive practical support and training.
Let’s work together to close the #DisabilityEmploymentGap.”

3. Example sharing facts/recruiting employers message

“Did you know?

Only 50% of disabled people in Scotland are in employment.

SUSE is helping employers change that with Apt Making It Work.

It’s fully funded and tailored for your business.

Expand you knowledge, gain confidence and create workplaces that are truly inclusive for disabled workers.”

The SUSE e-bulletin is distributed on a monthly basis to 400 stakeholders. We also maintain an Open CRM database of 1400 contacts.

We presented on the project to a wide range of audiences and used our contacts in Local Employability Partnerships and SLAED to promote the project and recruit employers. We estimate that 16 presentations were delivered. We also had 1-to-1 meetings with 14 LEPs that allowed us to promote the project.

Employer recruitment for this type of project is very labour intensive. Following an initial contact and enquiry it typically required several meetings over a number of months to get an employer to sign up. This is particularly the case in the private sector where there are usually several layers of management to navigate to get the go-ahead. We had fed this back to Scottish Government after the completion of the Apt Disability Employment Gap Public Social Partnership ([PSP](#)), a government funded project we delivered with an extensive group of partners between 2020 and 2024. Apt Public Sector Partnership Report and Evaluation 2023:

While we recognise that the delays to the commencement of the Making It Work project may have been unavoidable this undoubtedly hampered our ability to recruit new employers in the timescale available and restricted the time we could work with them from 12 months to 6 months.

Part Four

Making It Work Employers

This table lists the employers that agreed to work with us on the Making It Work project.

The breakdown of employers by sector was:

Private Sector: 7

Voluntary Sector: 9

Social Enterprise: 3

Employer	Location	Number of Employees	Description of Business	Sector
1	Edinburgh	less than 50	Social Innovation.	Social Enterprise
2	Glasgow City	between 50 and 250	Research, Development and Manufacturing, offering services across drug development spectrum	Private Sector
3	Fife	less than 50	Community Enterprise Centre & support for start-ups and social enterprises	Social Enterprise
4	Edinburgh	between 50 and 250	Tourism, arts, entertainment and recreation	Private Sector
5	Aberdeen City	500+	International energy logistics and support chain solutions	Private Sector
6	Moray	500+	Construction and property group	Private Sector
7	Glasgow City	500+	Global law firm offering legal services, risk advisory solutions and insights	Private Sector
8	Clackmannanshire	less than 50	Charity focused on Economic inclusion, development & regeneration of Clackmannanshire	Voluntary Sector
9	Glasgow City	less than 50	Housing provider in north west Glasgow.	Voluntary Sector
10	Edinburgh	between 50 and 250	Charity supporting for families and single parents	Voluntary Sector
11	Glasgow City	between 50 and 250	Education centre, library services & events	Voluntary Sector
12	Aberdeen	less than 50	Not-for-profit luxury mattress manufacturer	Social Enterprise

13	Glasgow City	500+	Specialised social care provider	Voluntary Sector
14	North Lanarkshire	between 50 and 250	Employability service in North Lanarkshire	Voluntary Sector
15	Edinburgh	between 50 and 250	Charity supporting older people in Scotland	Voluntary Sector
16	Glasgow City	less than 50	Boutique consultancy & training organisation	Voluntary Sector
17	Glasgow City	less than 50	Not-for-profit focusing on reducing food waste, improving access to affordable healthy food	Voluntary Sector
18	Renfrewshire	between 50 and 250	Transportation and Storage, self-storage, training centre, commercial workshop and warehousing	Private Sector
19	Glasgow City	between 50 and 250	Recruitment services in the Renewable Energy sector	Private Sector

Not all of the 19 employers were able to participate extensively in the workstreams and carry out substantial activities. This was largely due to time constraints and the limited time we had to work with them. For example, one of the employers (a recruitment consultancy) wanted to undertake a Digital Access Review but it took too much time to get approval from senior management, and we could not schedule it by the end of the project.

All the employers did participate in some project activities such as completing the self-assessment or sending staff to some of the training courses we had organised.

Part Five

Project Delivery

Our Process for working with Employers

Employer Recruitment

Recruitment of employers has been the most significant challenge for the Making It Work project. Delays to confirming the project meant the early promotion was limited, but we were able to develop materials and resources (including social media messaging) during the period before we were able to formally announce the project.

Realistically it is a 4-6 month process to get employers on board, particularly private sector businesses who are likely to require approval at several management levels before they can commit. We're therefore satisfied with the cohort we were able to recruit in a short period and we started work with them optimistic that the workstream activities would prove fruitful.

However, the time required for recruitment meant that we were only able to proceed to the assessment and action planning process for employers in September or October 2025, leaving only 6 months to work with them. We feel it is important to emphasise that this has limited what could be achieved, specifically time for the changes to bed in and show results. We are confident that the employers that participated in Making It Work will find a long term benefit and were we to review them a year from now this would be reflected in the findings and their feedback.

SUSE has always found success when working with our large network stakeholders to market opportunities – our partners, members and trusted contacts who can encourage employers to consider working with us and hopefully give us a warm introduction to establish a relationship.

The early successes in recruiting employers were as a result of a cold calls, warm introductions and employers seeking us out for support because of social media advertising. The benefits of warm introductions have become more apparent in the last few months particularly from our partners at Changing the Chemistry. They are a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) with experience of supporting businesses to become more inclusive. Their extensive list of employer contacts led to multiple productive conversations, with several coming on board.

After the initial contacts were established, we found that in-person meetings were the most effective marketing tool. We were able to give an overview of the project and then detailed descriptions of the activities that employers could undertake, with lots of opportunities for them to ask questions.

A major element of our employer recruitment activities was the large number of presentations we made to groups and networks across Scotland, including several Local Employability Partnerships. These were well received but in reality, it was a significant investment of time for a limited return. However, it was helpful in promoting the project, good for the profile of SUSE and it will mean that the Employer Guides we produce are

more likely to attract an audience as these stakeholders are aware of the project and will be interested to see its outputs.

Employer Induction and Agreement

Apt Making It Work has built on the unique approach developed during the Apt Public Social Partnership to attract and partner with Scottish businesses. Apt Public Sector Partnership Report and Evaluation 2023 ([PSP](#))

Once partner employers have been identified and onboarded, time was spent developing a relationship by meeting regularly to discuss the project and how employers can benefit. The amount of time devoted to this is dependent on the employer but overall, we found that they were willing to give us the time we needed.

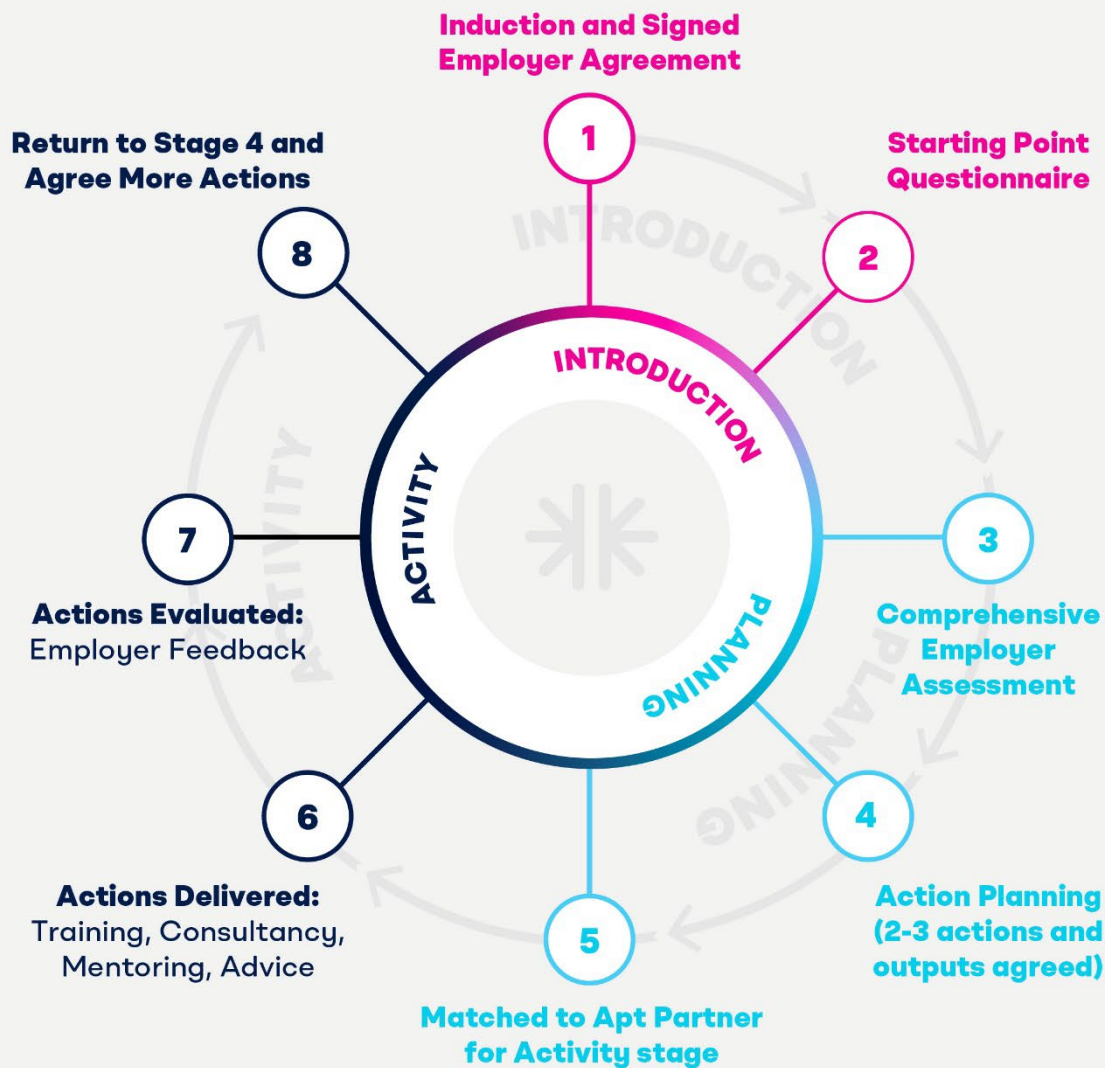
Each of the employers was asked to sign our Apt Employer Agreement. We have updated this in the past year to better explain the responsibilities of each party. This outlines our expectations of the employer and helps the employer understand what to expect from SUSE and our partners. There is no real enforcement mechanism for the agreement as we are dependent on goodwill, but we have found that the signed agreement is helpful as it increases the commitment of each employer.

As part of Apt Making it Work we have refined our employer collaboration model to streamline the process for employers, maximising the time spent on training and services and including the Quality Assurance processes for the first time. This is described on the Apt Employer Collaboration Map.

We also hoped that the new Apt Employer Collaboration Map (on the next page) would support partner employers to promote Apt internally to senior figures, who may not have been involved in initial discussions, but have an overall say in whether they should take part in a project. It is a simple visual representation of what is involved in the project and the work we will carry out.

The Apt Employer Collaboration Map

Apt Employer Collaboration Map



The Apt Employer Collaboration Process:

Introduction

1. Induction and signed employer agreement
2. Starting Point questionnaire

Planning

3. Comprehensive employer assessment
4. Action Planning (2-3 actions and outputs agreed)
5. Match to Apt Partner for Activity stage

Activity

6. Actions Delivered: Training, Consultancy, Mentoring, Advice
7. Actions Evaluated: Employer feedback
8. Return to Stage 4 and agree more actions

Employer Self-Assessment and Report & Recommendations

The Disability Inclusion at Work Assessment Tool is intended to give us a comprehensive picture of the current position in each of the businesses that have agreed to work with us on the project. The assessment process is intended to capture the employer's strengths in this area and deficits that they wish to address.

To make the process more efficient we have moved to a first stage self-assessment. The employer is given time and support to complete the document and we then schedule follow up meeting with them to fill in additional information and discuss their findings.

The assessment document was designed in the PSP and has been revised and updated on a couple of occasions since then, including before we started the Making It Work project.

The main sections of the assessment are:

- Employer Information inc. main operations, sector, location and number of employees
- Baseline Data (if available)
- Key Roles in the business
- Current Recruitment Processes inc. adjustments
- Reasonable Adjustments in the workplace
- Workplace culture
- Performance management processes
- Workforce development activities
- Management approaches
- Exit activities
- Retention and attrition
- Ideas for employer action plan

We also take the opportunity to gather the resources that are available such as example job adverts, job descriptions, training schedules, employee handbooks and policies.

The findings of the assessment process and meetings are gathered together in a bespoke Report & Recommendations for each employer.

This includes a narrative on the employer, their history and function and information on their workforce.

The final section is a list of objectives that have been agreed and, if necessary, priority actions to be taken forward with a note of the resources required and an intended outcome.

Making It Work Quality Assurance Process for Employers

The Making It Work project used the Apt Quality Assurance system to gather data on the employers' progress. Ideally the survey responses should be gathered three times in a 12 month period – before work starts, at the mid-way point and on completion.

Due to the truncated project deliver timescale we issued the questionnaires in November 2025 and again in April 2026.

Employers were asked to score each statement from 1 to 10 (from 1 fully disagree to 10 fully agree). At the outset of the project we set a target of achieving an average and median increase of 2 points on the 10-point scale against each of the measures. These are the 14 survey questions:

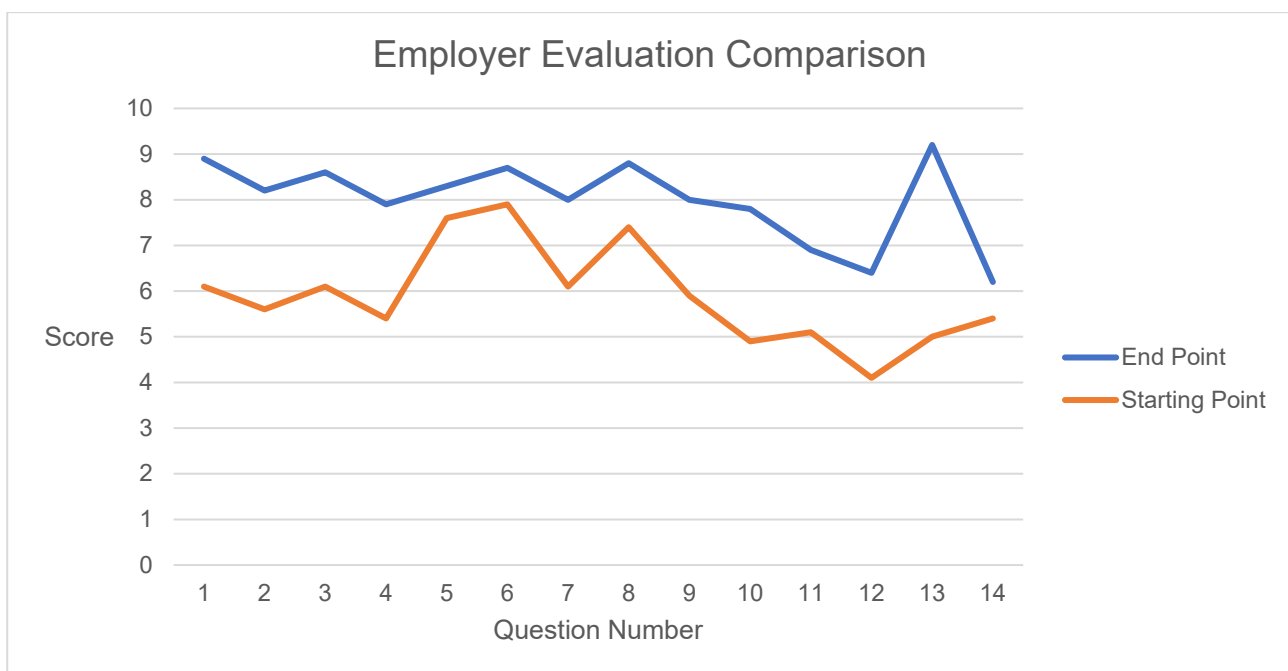
1. We feel confident about providing employment opportunities to disabled people. 16 employers will report an increased score.
2. We have a good awareness of how to meet disabled employees' requirements. 14 employers will report an increased score.
3. We are confident we understand the range of disabilities or long-term health conditions referred to by the term disabled people. 16 employers will report an increased score.
4. We are aware of how to record and monitor data relating to disabled applicants and employees e.g. numbers applying for our vacancies, numbers selected for interview. 8 employers will report an increased score.
5. We believe that our employees would be confident to declare a disability or long-term health condition. 12 employers will report an increased score.
6. We are confident in our ability to offer support to disabled employees or those with long-term health conditions specific to their requirements. 14 employers will report an increased score.
7. We are confident our employees would know how to support a disabled colleague. 12 employers will report an increased score.
8. We are confident about having positive workplace conversations with disabled employees. 16 employers will report an increased score.
9. We have confidence in our organisation's policies and procedures around recruiting and employing disabled people. 14 employers will report an increased score.
10. We are satisfied that we offer good opportunities to disabled people including work placements, paid jobs, and career development opportunities. 14 employers will report an increased score.
11. We are aware of support organisations who can assist us to recruit and retain disabled employees or those with long-term health conditions. 12 employers will report an increased score.

12. We are satisfied with the number of disabled people applying for jobs/placements, attending interviews and securing and sustaining employment with our organisation. 10 employers will report an increased score.
13. We understand the need for and utilise inclusive recruitment processes and accessible digital recruitment platforms. 8 employers will report an increased score.
14. We expect that there will be an increase in the number of disabled people we employ in the next year. 12 employers will report an increased score.

Delays with employer recruitment impacted on our evaluation and quality assurance processes due to the time available. We should have issued our QA questionnaires at Month 1, Month 6 and Month 12. Instead, these were issued twice in October 2025 and March/April 2026.

Findings from the Quality Assurance Activities

This graph is a visual representation of the changes in employers' median scores from the start to the end of the project against the 14 survey questions. the orange line is the employer scores in October 2025 and the blue line is the scores in March 2026:



The lists and graphs above highlight the continued success of the Apt model to improving the outcomes for disabled staff and those with long term health conditions. On average, we can demonstrate an increase of 2.1 for each question.

The largest increase was for question 13: an increase of 4.2 points showing employers have a much great understanding of the need to use inclusive recruitment process particularly digitally. These scores are reinforced by the positive feedback received from employers who contributed to our Digital Access Reviews.

The purpose of Making It Work was not only to support employers with areas they are struggling in but to also highlight the areas in which they are excelling when it comes to supporting disabled staff. The average increase of 2.9 of question 10 shows employers are more satisfied that they are offering good quality opportunities and support to disabled workers.

Throughout Apt, it has been clear employers lack confidence to advertise their inclusive practices, which in turn limits the talent pool they are attracting to roles. By being confident and vocal in their commitment to inclusivity, employers will see an increase in the diversity of talent applying for roles. They will also retain talent, who can see on a daily basis, the efforts being made by the employer to support all staff.

Another key metric to assess is an employer's confidence in hiring disabled staff, effectively their confidence in working with and support disabled people in the workplace. We are able to show a 2.8 average increase in confidence from 6.1 to 8.9. This is a crucial increase as it shows employers are more willing and able to work with disabled people and confidently support them in the workplace. All factors that will determine whether the Scottish Government's target of halving the Disability Employment Gap by 2038 is met or not.

The smaller increase of 0.7 for question 5 highlights the challenge of positively changing cultural and societal views on disability disclosure. We are delighted to see that our employers feel their staff would be more likely to disclose a disability, but it will take time and regular support and advice from organisations like SUSE and its partners to see a wider cultural shift around disability disclosure. This feedback also reinforces the importance of workstreams like Positive Workplace Conversations and campaigns like Why You Askin'? to help employees and employers make that shift. If we are to continue this positive shift, ensuring employers understand the range of disabilities and long-term health conditions referred to by the Equalities Act 2010 definition is vital. We can show an above average increase of 2.5 points with employers feeling they have a broader understanding of the definition of disability.

Quotes from Making It Work Employers:

"I liked the simple ways that changes can be made to the application process to make it easier for disabled people to apply to our organisation."

"The training facilitator was great and very knowledgeable. I'm grateful for their honest insights."

"[SUSE] were complimentary of what we've done but felt they made it easy to achieve [our targets], they were very pragmatic and tailored the action plan to our organisations needs. The project felt really collaborative. Everyone at SUSE was very approachable."

"Cole AD's session covered all the key areas for my role and was relaxed and informative. I also enjoyed the exercise at the end as it made us look out for things we'd been shown earlier in the session when pretending to apply for a job on another website. I am going to apply what I have learnt from this to our own website."

"So many areas to consider to enable those with disabilities or long-term health conditions the same access to our services via our website. Also, for staff to access forms, internal communications, etc. Will discuss this further with our marketing team and Corporate Manager to ensure these learnings are implemented as much as possible throughout."

"[Digital Access Review report] is really helpful and easy to understand. The report reflects our thinking and in many cases what we found when we did an internal review, so it's good to confirm the points to improve. We know there is room for improvement. The scores are

reassuring as we didn't set out to design the modules with disability in mind but we are set on making those changes."

"The Disability Awareness training was thought provoking. It was particularly interesting to hear from someone with lived experience and the discriminations that people face on a daily basis. The training also provided honest insights into the difficulties faced when starting a new role."

"[We were] happy working with Apt – the process was clear, helpful and focused on real user issues."

Workstream Activities

This section described the activities that took place in each of the 4 workstreams. Specifically, the work that was carried out with a group of employers who were assigned to each workstream after completing the Employer Self-Assessment and Report & Recommendations process. These activities allowed us to draw some conclusions on the appropriate tools that would successfully enable employers to develop their skills and knowledge in the subject area and that would be included in the employer guides as examples of interventions that could be successfully used by a wider audience.

Workstream 1: Equitable Induction & In-Work Support

Rationale for the Workstream

If we are to reduce the likelihood of people becoming economically inactive, a key element of the support we provide must be to set them up for success when they enter paid work. Experience has taught us that people who have been economically inactive, particularly disabled recruits are most likely to fall out of employment very soon after taking up a job. If we can support the new employee to sustain employment for 3 months, they are more likely to retain their job longer-term and their support needs will steadily diminish over time as workplace supports are put in place. To achieve this induction and onboarding processes need to be equitable and able to flex to meet the needs of diverse groups and individuals. Employers also need to have a strong understanding of reasonable adjustments and how to address challenges when they arise to ensure that people do not lose their jobs when this could have been avoided if the correct support and problem solving had been in place.

SUSE promotes the 5 Stage Supported Employment model and works closely with providers across Scotland who use this model to move disabled people into sustained work, including 20 Local Authorities. We believe that Supported Employment is cost effective and that it compares favourably with other models, including the standard No One Left Behind services. In our view this is because of the unique elements of Supported Employment including the approach taken to inducting and onboarding new employees and the in-work support that is provided.

This workstream offered the opportunity to learn about employers' current practices and to support them to improve the materials, processes and interventions they are using. We intended that this may include some Supported Employment elements, and this turned out to be the case, but the assessment process with employers and the inputs from our Workstream partners also resulted in us testing some new approaches.

Aims

The Workstream sought to understand what employers are currently doing when new employees start, beyond the bureaucratic processes such as HR forms and payroll. We wanted to review the materials that employers issue and how these are used – are employees expected to navigate these by themselves or are they supported to understand them. To make this worthwhile it was necessary to identify a variety of types of employers in terms of size and sectors. As would be expected the amount of formal processes used was closely linked to the resources the employers had at their disposal and whether they had a dedicated HR team.

SUSE's delivery partners and people with lived experience played a significant role in project delivery, specifically working 1-to-1 with employers. We wanted to get a clear sense of how appropriate the materials and approaches employers are using for the intended audience. Our partners were able to provide constructive feedback and allowed us to arrive at recommendations that have a practical application, real world examples that employers can use or adapt as necessary. All of the workstreams have cross overs and this is particularly the case with this workstream. If the employer uses IT systems (and almost everyone does) there is a clear connection to the Digital Access workstream which was looking at eLearning materials and in-house systems. We asked all of the employers in this workstream to complete the Digital Access Questionnaire, and this proved to be a very worthwhile exercise.

Workstream Employers

Four employers agreed to participate in this workstream following the Employer Assessment & Action Plan process.

Workstream 1 Activities

Induction and Onboarding

Reviews of Employers' Induction Materials

Each employer, when undergoing the Self-Assessment and Report & Recommendations process identified inductions as an area they would like to investigate further. SUSE developed a brief detailing the process we and our partners would follow to complete a review of each induction process to ensure this was done consistently across employers.

This explained how the materials should be reviewed and what detail should be included in the report and feedback. Members of the SUSE Experience Network, representing a range of disabilities including Sensory Loss, Autism and Cerebral Palsy, led on the review of each employer's documents. Their lived experience of as a disabled person meant they were able to develop a range of recommendations for employers which they could use to improve the accessibility of their documents.

Reviews varied according to the employer – determined by their needs and current resources. Some focused on adapting their current induction processes and company handbooks to be more accessible, others needed an induction process with a checklist to ensure consistency, while one employer chose to focus on developing an accessible Health & Wellbeing Passport for employees, as they had not used this tool before. We have described below.

A wide variety of employer documents were reviewed and recommendations were developed to make them more accessible and appropriate for disabled employees. We have used the findings of this exercise to arrive at recommendation in the Employer Guidance that addresses the most common issues we found. Examples of documents we reviewed include:

- HR policy documents
- New staff induction checklist
- New induction plans
- Employee handbooks
- Recruitment policies – relating to induction and in-work support
- New staff welcome PowerPoint presentations
- Learning & Development policies
- Standard Induction Booklets
- Retention policies

Given the limited time available to complete these reviews we have not been able to gather appropriate data on how successful to implementation of changes has been for the individual employers, as they will be used for new recruits and there were few examples of new staff starting in the final stages of the project and completing the induction process.

However, each employer now has a range of resources in place, developed in partnership with SUSE and using our accessibility guidance documents which gives easy to follow advice on how to write documents to make them appropriate for all staff.

Induction Checklist

When delivering the workstream we also found that some employers did not have any materials relating to inducting or onboarding new staff. SUSE supported these employers by offering training courses with a focus on induction and onboarding in an accessible way e.g. Mental Health and Wellbeing and Reverse Mentoring. We also worked with them to produce a template of an Induction Checklist. This would help them identify the key areas relevant to their organisation and develop their own internal checklist of topics that should be covered in a new employee's induction.

We broke this down in sections:

- Personal - Information and Contacts, Contract of Employment, Payroll
- Reasonable Adjustments
- Essential Training - (e.g. First Aid, Health & Safety, GDPR) Communications Preferences
- Role Specific Training
- Team - Key Colleagues, Line Manager, Organisation Chart
- Key Policies and Procedures

In-Work Support

Health & Wellbeing Passport – Case Study

Significant work was completed with a manufacturing employer, who worked with our partner Alliance for Inclusion to introduce a Health and Wellbeing Passport as a tool to review and improve their in-work support for all staff. This employer has a large cohort of disabled employees (70%) and while the disabled workforce was stable, they had a higher turnover of operations managers who were struggling to understand the needs of all employees. Therefore, a health & wellbeing passport was suggested as a method for managers to learn and stay up to date on the needs of their staff.

A Health and Wellbeing Passport is a document that provides detail for an employer and/or manager relating to both the impact of any health condition(s) and any workplace adjustment(s) that have been made for an employee. The passport can then be used by the employee to discuss any changes in circumstances with current or managers, either in their existing role or new roles.

A Passport can make it much easier for an employee to have a positive conversation with a new manager about their individual needs. It can reduce the burden on what can be a daunting prospect and supplement any manager specific disability awareness training. Furthermore, it can facilitate a smooth transition if a manager is replaced, or an employee is moved to a new department within an organisation.

Alliance for Inclusion met with the employer several times to upskill their Operations Manager on how to implement a Passport. This involved discussions on the following topics:

- Ownership & Privacy
- Initial Setup & agreement
- Implementation and Storage
- Review Process
- Management Action
- Best practices
- Data Protection

Alliance for Inclusion was able to provide guidance and examples of what a passport document may look like and how it could be customised to suit the needs of the employees. The employer felt this helped a great deal with employee buy-in as it gave assurances on how the information would be used to support individuals.

The employer was encouraged to include employees in the design of the passport to ensure their needs were met and the aims of the passport were understood.

Early feedback shows a real enthusiasm for this method of gathering employee data and a true alignment of values between the employer and what the passport aims to achieve.

The next step is to roll out the Passport to all staff as a pilot. This will enable them to collect valuable data and insights into how their staff feel about the Passport and if it is fully accessible for their needs. Alliance for Inclusion has continued to offer advice on how to gather the feedback and use this to make any necessary changes to the Passport before the final layout is agreed.

The Health & Wellbeing Passport we have developed has the following sections:

- Introduction and rationale for passport - this should give assurances to staff about how information is handled and who it is shared with going forward
- Adjustment holder's personal details - this is a confidential document and should be stored securely
- Description of condition/impairment and impact on work role - staff can describe how their disability/health condition affects them both in-work and outside work
- Fluctuating Conditions - how does the condition affect them on a good day and on a bad day
- Agreed Adjustments - signed off by staff member and line manager – any future changes need to be agreed by both parties

- Additional Advice i.e. has an application to Access to Work been sent and accepted? Is occupational health involved?
- Workplace Adjustments FAQs
- Adjustment review record
- Useful links and resources - this should include internal and external resources staff can access for support and advice such as company policy documents, diversity and inclusion strategies and occupational health information

In-Work Support Plan

The In-Work Support Plan is a structured framework used within Supported Employment services to help a disabled employees settle into their role, learn job tasks, and build confidence and independence at work. It sets out how managers, job coaches, and the employee work together to provide consistent, accessible, and bespoke support. The plan is underpinned by principles of accessibility and inclusion, using clear communication, predictable routines, and practical task breakdowns to remove barriers and support successful employment.

The plan also explains how support should gradually reduce over time so the employee becomes increasingly independent and relies on standard workplace supports rather than long-term external help (from a job coach). It provides clear guidance for induction, skill development, reasonable adjustments, ongoing review, and wellbeing, ensuring support is tailored to individual needs while maintaining fair job expectations and promoting sustainable employment.

SUSE has used an adaptation of a plan with a Making It Work employer to test if it will benefit some of their employees. The employer is continuing to develop the plan with two of their employees.

The key elements of the plan are:

- Purpose and principles of in-work support, including accessibility, consistency, and independence, tailored to the individual employee
- Defined roles and responsibilities for line managers, job coaches (if available), workplace mentors and the employee to deliver the plan
- Structured support stages from induction through to independent working and ongoing support including details of how these will be delivered
- Use of SMART goals to track learning, progress, and confidence
- Reasonable adjustments and support strategies to be implemented
- A manager checklist to support inclusive supervision and review progress effectively

Reverse Mentoring

Our partners at Alliance for Inclusion supported the employers in this workstream by hosting introductory sessions on Reverse Mentoring and some follow up 1-to-1 sessions. These gave an overview of the objectives, structure and aims of the programme as well as thoughts on its implementation in real workplace situations. This activity is more fully described in the later section on Workstream 4: Improving Workplace Consultations and is included in the Employer Guide to Equitable Induction & In-Work Support.

Training that Supported the Activity

Employers were offered training to support their activities following the Employer Self-Assessment and Report & Recommendations process and as needs emerged during the activity.

Workstream employers had the opportunity to participate in the following:

- Disability Awareness Training
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Improving Workplace Consultation
- Reverse Mentoring

As part of their action plan, one of the employers, a voluntary sector regeneration agency, was interested in attending Mental Health and Wellbeing training with a focus on induction processes and practices. We were able to organise a session with a delivery partner and promote it across the Making it Work project. The employer promoted this to businesses they have a relationship with in the Forth Valley area to support SUSE with broadening our contacts in the area. A number of private and third sector businesses took part in the training and five of the businesses indicated they would be interested in hearing more about SUSE and its projects.

Findings & Conclusions from Workstream 1

- Employers typically have not considered if their materials are accessible for disabled employees
- There is significant scope for more widespread use of Wellbeing Passports
- In-Work support plans can be a useful tool for disabled employees during their first year in work
- There is limited knowledge of Supported Employment tools that can be beneficial for both employee and employer
- Mentoring activities can be very beneficial for both induction and in-work support. This can be peer mentoring carried out by colleagues for new workers or Reverse Mentoring that can build capacity with supervisors and managers

Output

A guide to Equitable Induction & In-Work Support with example resources has been developed.

Workstream 2: Positive Workplace Conversations (including the Why You Askin'? Campaign)

Rationale for the Workstream

We have learned that some of the key elements in achieving culture change in workplaces are positive and honest conversations about disability, encouraging transparency and openness, and supporting employers to overcome their fears and mistaken beliefs. If disabled people can freely discuss their support needs, they are more likely to succeed in their jobs and sustain paid employment. This also creates space to discuss and introduce reasonable adjustments that will work for a diverse workforce, including disabled people, that make it more likely that employees will thrive in their roles and be less likely to lose their jobs and become economically inactive.

Why You Askin'? is a campaign that is delivered inside workplaces to encourage disabled people to disclose to their employer by creating an environment where they can have open conversations about their support needs and feel confident that the employer will be empathetic and supportive. Disability disclosure can be a significant issue in some businesses as there is often under-reporting and employers therefore do not understand the support needs of their employees.

This initiative was devised in the final stages of the PSP, with the Experience Network playing a leading role in developing the materials and messages. However, the activity has not been tested with employers beyond distributing some materials they could use. This intervention has now been significantly improved by adding an employer induction, training and support to embed the campaign in businesses over an extended period so that it can demonstrate its worth in changing workplace cultures. We believe this can now be used to have significant impact and produce a model that can be applied extensively in the Scottish business community.

Aim

The workstream was intended to encourage disability disclosure through positive workplace conversations, reducing the fears and barriers that prevent these conversations taking place.

The early intended output of the workstream was to produce a Why You Askin'? Campaign Plan and resources that can be used by employers going forward. This has now developed into the production of an Employer Guide that includes the Why You Askin' campaign as an example of a workplace campaign that employers can use or they may choose to develop their own resources, using Why You Askin' as a template. The Guide will also include the key steps on the Turning Insight Into Actions programme.

Workstream Employers

Four employers agreed to participate in this workstream following the Employer Assessment & Action Plan process.

Workstream 2 Activities

The Why You Askin'? Workplace Campaign

The Positive Conversations workstream was intended to build on previous activity carried out by SUSE – the development of the Why You Askin'? resources in 2024 during the Apt Public Social Partnership, that we have been testing with a range of employers. This is a workplace campaign that employers are supported to roll out in their business.

We were aware that the campaign induction and resources by themselves were not enough to achieve real change in workplaces. Therefore the Positive Conversations workstream combined Why You Askin' with a major additional element – a structured programme of support delivered by our partner, Changing the Chemistry titled Turning Insight Into Action. We have detailed those activities later in this report.

Why You Askin'? encourages disabled people and people with long term conditions to have confidence to disclose to their employer and supports the employer to engage in conversations without fear of getting it wrong or causing offence.

The 4 workstream employers were taken through the Why You Askin' induction and supported during the life of the project. SUSE supplies materials for the workplaces including leaflets and posters.

We are still gathering feedback from the employers but some early feedback from two Making It Work employers suggest that the Why You Askin' resources (when combined with the Inclusive Turning Insights Into Actions programme, described below) are encouraging important conversations, making accommodations and support more likely, fostering a greater understanding of disability and its implications and contributing to positive changes in attitudes.

The Why You Askin' campaign takes time to show measurable results, therefore we cannot point to a clear outcome for the Making It Work project at this time but an employer we inducted in early 2025 told us, “Our disclosure rates for disabilities have increased and the feedback from staff is that people now feel more comfortable discussing their disability, workplace adjustments and are encouraged by the work which this been supported by the Why You Askin campaign.” (NHS 24)

The Why You Askin' Induction is a presentation to the employer with follow up meetings.

Example of the Why You Askin campaign:



Turning Insights Into Actions

The Turning Insights Into Action programme supported employers in the Positive Conversations workstream to build confidence and practical capability in holding inclusive conversations about disability and long-term health in the workplace. It combined workshops, peer learning and real-world application to move beyond awareness and support behavioural change. SUSE commissioned Changing The Chemistry to deliver a series of workshops for our employers with a complimentary workbook with structured activities to be carried out.

Ideally the programme would have been delivered over a 12 month period, but the late start to the project required us to truncate it and we were able to deliver it in 5 months.

Participants engaged positively throughout, with consistently strong feedback and sustained participation across sessions. Confidence developed progressively over time, supported by structured opportunities for practice and reflection. Participants reported increased confidence and provided consistent examples of applying the model in real workplace situations, indicating that learning is translating into everyday workplace interactions.

There is early evidence of behaviour change, including more proactive conversations, more inclusive use of language, and a shift from problem-solving to collaborative exploration of support. These changes represent important foundations for more inclusive workplace practices. Alongside these positive outcomes, the programme also highlighted areas for further development that will help strengthen engagement and impact in future delivery.

Overall, the programme demonstrates a strong and credible progression from awareness to application, with emerging evidence of sustained behavioural change and a solid foundation for ongoing cultural development.

SUSE commissioned this activity to compliment the Why You Askin'? campaign that the workstream employers had agreed to undertake. It was recognised that a structured programme of support was needed if employers and their staff were to gain the confidence and skills to have properly inclusion conversations which ensure disabled people feel able to discuss their needs and employers are open to addressing them.

The programme was delivered in partnership by SUSE and Changing the Chemistry to address a common gap between awareness and practice. While many organisations recognise the importance of inclusion, participants often report uncertainty about how to approach conversations in practice. We aimed to build the confidence and capability to act in real workplace situations.

Specifically, our goals were to:

- Build confidence in initiating and responding to inclusive conversations
- Develop practical skills that can be applied in everyday interactions
- Support behaviours that contribute to trust, openness and psychological safety
- Strengthen the link between campaign messaging and day-to-day workplace practice

The programme adopted a structured and applied development approach. It was intentionally designed as a multi-stage development journey rather than a standalone

training intervention. It combined learning, application and reflection to support sustained behaviour change over time. This approach reflects the understanding that confidence in inclusive conversations develops through practice and experience, not through one-off training alone.

We hosted two core workshops for the employers - Workshop 1 introduced the Inclusive Conversations Model, established shared understanding, and created a foundation for practice and Workshop 2 focused on application, reflection, consolidation and forward planning. A supplementary Workshop 1 Recap session was added which ensured that new participants could engage fully, while reinforcing learning for the existing employers.

We also held Peer Learning Sets for the employers to come together to discuss the issues that were coming up in their workplaces and share experiences. SUSE staff provided regular support, mentoring and advice to the employers between each of the planned sessions. This helped to keep the employers engaged and supported the transition from understanding the model to applying it in practice.

Programme Workbook

Following the first Workshop the employers were given a workbook to work through in their business. The aim of the workbook was to encourage employers to reflect on the conversations they were having with their staff, support the steady development of new skills, reinforce the 5 stage Inclusive Conversations Model (see below) and enable the employers to track their progress.

The employers were also offered the opportunity to practise conversations with individuals with lived experience of disability. This intended to provide additional depth by increasing realism, building empathy and strengthening their confidence in navigating sensitive conversations

Our learning from the Turning Insights Into Actions programme will be included in the Positive Workplace Conversation Employer Guide. Specifically we will provide an introduction to the principles of the Inclusive Conversation Model we have tested.

The Inclusive Conversations Model (delivered in the Turning Insights Into Actions programme):



- Step 1: Empathy, purpose and learning mindset.
- Step 2: Share observations not assumptions.
- Step 3: Ask open, respectful questions.
- Step 4: Explore support and adjustments together.
- Step 5: Next steps and follow-up.

Each of the stages included exercise for employers to carry out, guidance on how to do so and an opportunity for reflection.

Employer Feedback

SUSE and Changing the Chemistry regularly gathered feedback from the employers. It was noted that the shortened timescale was challenging but nevertheless the employers reported that:

- The 5-Step Model was clear and practical
- There were good opportunities to practise and reflect on real conversations
- The programme provided supportive and psychologically safe learning environment

Specifically, the employers found that the opportunity to have open and honest conversations with peers about the challenges they faced was of great value. This was a shared learning experience and getting input from others was very helpful. Applying the resources in practical settings was difficult for some of the employers due to the nature of their operations or workforce. In particular, this workstream highlighted the difference between applying new strategies in professional office based environment where staff typically have structured supervision processes and 'shop-floor' such as light manufacturing. The group worked together to arrive at adaptations to the approach to make it work in these very different settings. We took this into account in the employer guide which should be appropriate for employers of different size and settings.

Training that Supported the Activity

Employers were offered training to support their activities following the Employer Self-Assessment and Report & Recommendations process and as needs emerged during the activity.

Workstream employers participated in the following:

- Reasonable Adjustments and Access to Work
- Introduction to Sensory Awareness
- Disability Awareness
- Communication For All

Findings & Conclusions from Workstream 2

- Employers are keen to engage in positive conversations but are wary of doing so
- There is enthusiasm among employers to develop these skills
- A structured programme of learning and support can be effective but must include flexibility for diverse workplaces
- Peer learning among employers is particularly effective
- Employers responded positively to the Why You Askin' materials and induction and were expected them to produce good results

Output

An Employer's Guide to Positive Workplace Conversations has been developed. This includes an introduction to the Why You Askin' campaign as an example that employers can use or use as a template for their own campaign.

Workstream 3: Digital Access Review

Rationale for the Workstream

In the PSP, SUSE piloted Digital Recruitment Reviews that were intended to assess the accessibility of employers' online recruitment platforms and make recommendations to make them fairer for disabled applicants.

For the Making It Work project we decided to move onto the next stage. When considering why people become economically inactive, we got feedback from the SUSE Experience Network that people can be left behind in the workplace. New systems and processes are introduced that are not tested with disabled people and they are unable to cope, employers do not know how to respond and they are at risk of dropping out of the workforce.

Therefore, we devised a model to test the in-house digital systems employers are using to learn if these are accessible for disabled people and make recommendations to tackle the issues we discover.

This is a huge topic – employers use a great many IT systems and workplaces are becoming increasingly dependent on technology. To make the process manageable and achieve a result within the timescale, we decided to focus on employers' e-learning platforms.

The Digital Access Review (DAR) sessions were organised by SUSE with expert support and analysis conducted by our partner organisation, Cole AD. Their experienced staff and SUSE staff observed the testers and took detailed records on the accessibility of the platform being tested and any difficulties encountered.

Our Experience Network of colleagues with lived experience of disability supported us to carry out the reviews as paid testers. To make this more effective we recruited testers with diverse disabilities including people who have sight loss and/or hearing loss, people who have learning disabilities, and people who have physical disabilities.

Aim

The workstream set out to conduct a comprehensive assessment of employers' eLearning resources and information systems used by staff, carried out by people who have lived experience with support from IT experts. The focus was on the in-work experience of disabled people and people who have long term conditions, to ensure they have equal access to information, resources and learning.

The findings of the DARs (and the DAR questionnaire we have reported on later) have been used to produce a guidance document for employers on how to make sites accessible and reasonable adjustments they can consider implementing; as well as how they can support their own disabled staff to test sites as they are in development and best practice if they are buying an 'off the shelf' product to use in their business, such as the questions they should ask and how to involve disabled employees (such as a Workplace Inclusion Group) in the process of introducing a system to their business.

Workstream Employers

Four employers agreed to participate in this workstream following the Employer Assessment & Action Plan process. We also carried out a less formal review of the e-learning videos developed by a voluntary sector partner for their staff.

Workstream 3 Activities

Digital Access Reviews

The Digital Access Review element of the Apt Making It Work project is a comprehensive assessment of employers' eLearning resources and information systems used by staff. This focuses on the in-work experience of disabled people and people who have long term health conditions, to ensure they have equal access to information, resources and learning.

We've provided a detailed description of the findings from the testing carried out with each employer, this provides an insight to the unique circumstances that exist in each business.

Testing Results

Following their DAR testing and having time to review their bespoke reports, we asked each employer:

- How much they agree or disagree with the points raised in the reviews.
- How easy or difficult they anticipate implementing the recommendations.
- How effective they believe these reports and recommendations will be in encouraging change in their digital accessibility.
- How effective they believe the reports will be in contributing to ongoing development and accessibility awareness raising in their organisation.

Key - Average Scores

Our lived experience testers rated each of the digital tasks in the e-learning modules. Here are the average scores across the four employers we reviewed:

74% of tasks were rated as Easy or Ok to Complete

8% of tasks were rated as Unable to Complete

81% of testers would choose to take another course on that platform

Employer A

Industry: Energy (Oil and Gas/Renewables)

Numbers of Employees: 500

Summary:

Overall, a great result, with 54% of tasks being rated as easy to complete. All testers would use this e-learning platform again – except for one module as this had the most accessibility issues. Of the technical issues highlighted, most were found by users with assistive technology, specifically JAWS (which is the most commonly used screen reading software worldwide).

76% of tasks were rated as easy or ok to complete (above average) - Good

11% of tasks were unable to be completed (above average) - Poor

100% of testers would choose to complete another module (excludes one module which 75% would take it again) - Good

Employer Feedback:

“Really helpful and easy to understand. The report reflects our thinking and in many cases what we found when we did an internal review, so it’s good to confirm the points to improve. We know there is room for improvement. The scores are reassuring as we didn’t set out to design the modules with disability in mind but we are set on making those changes. It should be easy to make the changes as the modules are built in-house by our Learning and Development Advisor. However, we will definitely take up the offer of support. I will be speaking to my Manager about the reports.”

- Employer agrees with the findings
- It should be straightforward to make changes
- Employer is set on making the changes
- It’s helpful to understand how screen readers work and how to make changes to improve accessibility for those users.

Employer B

Industry: Social Housing

Number of Employees: 51-200

Summary:

Great result with 100% of testers saying they would be happy to use the e-learning modules again. Impressive as the testing was also carried out on 2 different screen readers (JAWS and SmartVision 3).

72% of tasks were rated as easy or ok to complete (around average) - Good

3% of tasks were unable to be completed (below average) - Good

100% of testers would choose to complete another module on that platform - Good

Employer Feedback:

Very pleased with the results – they will take a detailed look before getting back to us.

Employer C

Industry: Employability
Number of Employees: 51-200

Summary:

The results are mostly positive with 40% of tasks being rated as easy to complete, however there were a few issues found which have been highlighted in the reports:

14% of tasks were rated as unable to complete, which is comparatively high.
63% of tasks were rated as easy or ok to complete (below average) - Satisfactory
14% of tasks were unable to be completed (above average) - Poor
50% would choose to complete another course on that platform (below average) - Poor

Employer Feedback:

The Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Team Leader met on 11th March 2026 to discuss the reports and create a plan to implement the recommendations.

“The report clearly explained the main problems and what to fix first. The process was clear, helpful, and focused on real user issues. We hope to look at the issues in the near future as we look at our recruitment process in full.”

Employer D

Industry: Voluntary
Number of Employees: 50-250

Summary:

87% of tasks were rated as easy or ok to complete (above average) - Good
6% of tasks were unable to be completed (below average) - Good
75% would choose to take another course on this platform (below average) – Satisfactory

This employer opted out of further engagement in the project. No feedback available and did not complete a Digital Access Questionnaire. There was no reason given.

Evaluation of Long-term Change

Due to the restricted time to work with the employers we are unable to gather further data on what recommendations have been implemented or the long-term implications of those changes. Had there been more time to work individually with the employers we are confident Employer D would not have disengaged.

Key Themes

We asked the employers taking part in the Digital Access Review to complete a short questionnaire to help us build a picture of common workplace themes in:

Software usage:

- Software types used and essential platforms -
The most essential software to daily operations are industry specific platforms, followed by file storing and sharing (e.g. SharePoint)
- Decision factors/priorities for implementing new software -
The most common decision factor or priorities for adopting new or replacing current software is cost effectiveness and integration with existing systems.

Onboarding and integration of new staff:

- How new staff are onboarded (training methods) -
Shadowing experienced colleagues is the most common method for onboarding new employees successfully. This is followed by formal training sessions back up with written manuals and self-paced learning with guidance.
- The timeframe for new employees to become proficient with software -
These employers agree that it takes 3-4 weeks or longer for new staff to be proficient in the organisations' software tools.
- Factors to make onboarding a smoother process -
 - a. More approachable ways of inviting people to come forward with individual needs.
 - b. Flexible approach which takes account of needs and learning styles.

Access and Assistive Technology:

- Accessibility challenges -
The employers did not have any common patterns in accessibility challenges reported by employees with 33% stating no challenges were reported.

The employers did report positively in how they would handle any highlighted accessibility barriers. One employer noted, "We work with Access to Work and Occupational Health – we implement whatever is recommended or what the person identifies during the recruitment or onboarding process."
- Assistive Tech (ATech) -
67% of employers said they hadn't encountered any assistive technology in the recruitment or onboarding process. Of the ATech that had been encountered screen readers, speech recognition, screen magnifiers, and text captioning were mentioned.

Ongoing Training and Learning:

- Whether ongoing software training is provided -
All employers stated they would provide further training “Occasionally, as needed” and part of this provision would be online learning.
- How CPD and ongoing training is delivered -
All employers use eLearning, with most (67%) providing a mix of webinars and mobile learning (allowing employees to learn as they work).

Digital Access Review Employer Survey

We were sceptical that the Digital Access Reviews to be carried out with the four employers that volunteered for this workstream would produce sufficient learning or data to allow the development of our Employer Guide. Therefore we decided to carry out a survey with a larger group of employers, some of whom had joined other workstreams and others from our large pool of stakeholders. Overall 32 employers completed a questionnaire we had developed in partnership with Cole AD. The questions we asked were:

- What is the size of your company?
- What industry does your company primarily operate in?
- Which of the following types of software does your company use regularly?
- Which software platforms are most essential to your daily operations?
- How do you decide which software to adopt or replace?
- When a new staff member joins, how do you introduce them to the software and tools they’ll need?
- How long does it typically take a new staff member to become proficient with your software tools?
- As part of the onboarding process which (if any) assistive technology solutions have you encountered?
- Do you provide ongoing software training for existing staff?
- What challenges do new staff usually face when integrating into your company’s workflow?
- What tools or methods have you found most effective in helping new staff adapt quickly?
- Are there any software tools you’re considering adopting in the near future?
- In your opinion, what would make the onboarding process smoother for new employees in your organisation?
- Do you provide general training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) learning online and how is this delivered?

The key findings of the survey are set out below. These have been compiled in a separate report that has been shared with the Scottish Government.

Common challenges experienced

- Too many systems, insufficient integration
- Training focused on basics, not real workflows, this may be a time limitation factor
- Assistive tech separated from training
- Lack of protected time for learning
- Managers potentially under-prepared to support IT or accessibility needs

Effective ways to support staff – suggested by employers

- Learning from experienced colleagues with structure
- Ongoing mentoring
- Clear, accessible reference materials
- Blended learning approaches
- Individualised support when needs emerge

Training that Supported the Activity

Employers were offered training to support their activities following the Employer Self-Assessment and Report & Recommendations process and as needs emerged during the activity.

Workstream employers participated in the following:

- Website Accessibility
- Accessible Information
- Communication for All

Findings & Conclusions from Workstream 3

- Size of an organisation doesn't affect the pace at which staff learn how to use the software
- Industry specific software typically requires a longer learning period for new staff
- When assistive technology is used in a business it is rarely embedded in training strategy
- Ongoing training tends to be reactive, not proactive
- Webinars typically dominate CPD delivery, but this may limit what people learn
- Disability-focused charities model best practice - even when small (based on our small sample)
- Businesses are often aware of what would help make onboarding for new staff a smoother process but lack the time, funding or internal capability to implement it

Specific Findings from the DAR Questionnaire Responses

- The time it takes staff to learn could be reduced by:
 - Role-specific, accessible learning journeys
 - Earlier integration of assistive technology into onboarding
 - Short, ongoing refreshers rather than "as needed"
- There is a clear gap in:
 - Inclusive digital training that bridges assistive technology and core systems
 - Support tools designed for large, complex software environments

47% of respondents have recently adopted or actively looking to replace or add new software. Of those employers, 16% of respondents stated that they actively looking to **make more use of AI** in recruitment and generally in their daily operations.

Only 3% noted that they would like to make more use of the tools available in MS Office 365. While they did not specify what tools they were referring to, we are aware that many organisations do not make use of the in-built accessibility features.

Across sectors and sizes, the data points to a systemic gap: organisations invest in software, but often under-invest in how people learn to use it confidently and accessibly over time.

Output

An Employer's Guide on digital workplace accessibility has been developed. This provides advice on how to make e-learning & intranets accessible for all employees.

Workstream 4: Improving Workplace Consultations

Rationale for the Workstream

Our work with people with lived experience has often highlighted the need for greater consultation with disabled people and the lack of opportunities for disabled employees to share their views and have influence in the workplace. This is particularly the case during change processes with employers neglecting to consult with employees who may need reasonable adjustments or who are particularly impacted by new work processes, equipment or structures. This is a clear disadvantage for disabled people and increasing the likelihood of them dropping out of work and becoming economically inactive.

From the outset we sought to have a strong lived experience input in this workstream. Members of our Experience Network were enthusiastic about working with us and the employers and wanted to shape the activities carried out and the tools we used.

This proved to be the most challenging of the four workstreams. We had less engagement from employers than the other activities. This suggests that the activities were less attractive to employers either because they did not see them as valuable, or they may have been concerned that the activities were likely to be disruptive or requiring too great a commitment during the life of the project and on an ongoing basis.

Aim

We set out to work with employers to review their current processes for consultation, communication and feedback from disabled employees with a view to sharing some tools and approaches they may not be aware of, and that can be easily adopted without creating a great deal of extra work and costs.

The main element of the workstream was to encourage employers to create in-house groups of employees with lived experience of disability or long-term health conditions. These forums have value in allowing staff to discuss the reasonable adjustments that are in place and suggest new ones; how in-house communications are working and access to new opportunities such as promoted posts. They are also a forum to address issues before they become critical.

We recognised however that this offer may not be attractive to all employers, or their employees. Therefore we looked at other options such Pulse Surveys and informal opportunities for staff to feed in their views.

Workstream Employers

Three employers agreed to participate in this workstream following the Employer Assessment & Action Plan process. These were: two organisations from the Social Enterprise Sector; two from the Private Sector and one from the Voluntary Sector. This was a disappointing number but we were able to carry out some elements with employers in other workstreams and there was a natural crossover with Workstream 2: Positive Workplace Conversations.

Workstream 4 Activities

The workstream had two major activities, Improving Workplace Consultations and Reverse Mentoring, both of these activities involved training and mentoring sessions for the employers as a group and with 1-to-1 follow ups.

Engagement with employers was challenging, we found that they were less likely to make time available to participate in this workstream compared to the other three.

Improving Workplace Consultation

The activities in this part of the workstream were intended to explore what employers are currently doing, share practice and approaches and explore the range of options for effective consultation. These included:

- Employee consultation groups such as Employee Resource Groups and/or Disability Inclusion Groups
- Employee Advocates/Peer Supporters
- Workplace Champions
- Peer Support Networks
- Regular listening sessions, focus groups or roundtables either led by HR, management or employees
- Anonymous feedback platforms for all staff which can be an annual survey or online form.
- Quick pulse surveys to capture emerging issues (A pulse survey is a short, frequent questionnaire, usually under 20 questions, used gather employee opinion) engagement, or specific workplace topics. Conducted monthly or quarterly, these
- Accessible suggestion boxes which can be digital or physical, often anonymous
- Inclusive intranet spaces for sharing updates and inviting feedback

Overview

The activity focussed on effective staff engagement and consultation, including key principles, benefits, and practical approaches. Employers were encouraged to reflect on current practice and their own experiences.

Staff Engagement

We explored the employers' willingness to contribute beyond core role requirements, including initiative, collaboration, and participation in improvement activities. This led on to how this can influence day-to-day processes (rather than a one-off exercise), encompassing both formal mechanisms (e.g. supervision, team meetings) and informal interactions.

Benefits

We asked employers to identify the benefits for themselves and their staff. Findings included: improved staff retention; enhanced performance and productivity; stronger team cohesion and reduced reactive workload management, for the employers.

Staff benefits were identified to include an increased sense of value and recognition, greater confidence and enhanced opportunities for learning and development

Core Principles of Effective Engagement

We worked with the employers to agree some core principles for future activities. Examples of what the employers identified include:

- Engagement is primarily built through positive working relationships, including trust and open communication
- Clarity of roles, expectations, and decision-making processes reduces uncertainty and supports performance
- Effective engagement requires visible follow-up on feedback, reinforcing that staff contributions are valued
- Managers play a key role as emotional leaders, influencing team culture through their responses to challenges and change
- Engagement is largely locally determined, with direct line management having the greatest impact

The final point was of particular interest as it indicates that this cannot be a top down initiative – it must have buy-in from front line managers and ideally be led by them.

Staff Consultation

The next stage of activity was focussed on approaches to staff consultation. This is a structured, two-way process through which organisations seek and consider staff views on specific issues or proposed changes. It is distinct from engagement in that it is typically time-limited and issue-specific. We covered Benefits, Good Practice, Challenges, Accessibility & Inclusion. This led onto a review and consideration of potential consultation methods they could use including employee groups, surveys and focus groups and how these may work in practice. We've summarised those in the next section.

a. Benefits

- Supports more robust and informed decision-making
- Encourages diverse perspectives and innovation
- Builds trust and strengthens organisational relationships
- Increases likelihood of staff support for change

b. Good Practice in Consultation

- Initiate consultation at an early stage, prior to decisions being finalised
- Clearly define the purpose, scope, and intended outcomes
- Ensure appropriate and inclusive representation of staff groups
- Select consultation methods suited to both the objectives and workforce needs
- Maintain transparency regarding decision-making processes and levels of influence
- Provide timely and meaningful feedback to participants, ensuring the process is closed appropriately

c. Accessibility and Inclusion

- Importance of adopting inclusive communication practices
- Ensuring information is accessible to all staff, taking account of diverse needs
- Proactively identifying and planning for reasonable adjustments
- Avoiding assumptions and supporting equitable participation

d. Common Challenges

- Perceptions of consultation as tokenistic where decisions appear predetermined
- Insufficient time allocated for meaningful participation
- Inadequate communication or follow-up
- Limited representation of diverse staff perspectives
- Impact of previous negative experiences on staff willingness to engage

Key Learning

We asked the employers and workstream leaders to reflect on the key learning for the work that was carried out: They identified that effective staff engagement and consultation need to be underpinned by:

- Clear and consistent communication
- Trust and transparency
- Early and meaningful involvement
- Demonstrable follow-up and accountability

Also, the role of managers is critical in embedding these practices and fostering a positive organisational culture.

Reverse Mentoring

This activity was offered to the employers in the Consultations workstream and two of them decided to participate. It was delivered in partnership with Alliance for Inclusion.

This activity involved workshops and mentoring to start the process of introducing a Reverse Mentoring programme aimed at strengthening disability inclusion and supporting cultural change within Making It Work employers. The programme took employers through the key principles of Reverse Mentoring, the objectives, how it is done effectively and the intended impact; alongside reflections on implementation in each of the businesses and the employer's early experience.

The programme was designed to provide senior staff with insight into the lived experience of disabled people in the workplace, while increasing awareness, understanding, and ultimately leadership capability. It also sought to create a sustainable legacy through demonstrable organisational impact that would be in place after the project completed. The model draws on a previously successful approach implemented within large employers in the finance sector. The time constraints on the project mean that we have only carried out the earliest stages of the programme but this has nevertheless given us some valuable insights for our Employer Guide and the employers are able and willing to continue to make progress after the completion of the Making It Work project.

The Reverse Mentoring model pairs senior leaders (the mentees) and employees with lived experience of disability (the mentors). This approach ensured that the programme was both representative and aligned with its objectives.

To support consistency and effectiveness, a clear framework of commitments was established. Each mentoring partnership is expected to run over a 12-month period, including a minimum of five one-hour sessions, with at least three conducted face-to-face where possible. Mentees are also required to undertake a period of shadowing to gain a deeper understanding of their mentor's experience, and to share their learning within their teams to promote wider awareness.

The roles of mentors and mentees must be clearly defined. Mentors provide guidance, share their experiences, and offer constructive challenge to support new ways of thinking. Mentees are expected to actively engage in the process, reflect on their learning, apply insights in their roles, and contribute to addressing barriers within the organisation.

A key feature of the programme is the expectation that each mentoring pair will work collaboratively to develop an idea or initiative that contributes to improving inclusion, accessibility, or representation within the organisation. This ensures that learning is translated into practical outcomes and supports longer-term change.

The sessions we delivered to our employers also acknowledged the wider organisational context, including post-pandemic working arrangements, economic pressures, and shifting priorities, which may impact the consistency of mentoring relationships. Participants were encouraged to integrate learning into their day-to-day practice and to use the mentoring relationship as a tool to inform leadership and decision-making.

To further support the programme, an informal peer network was established, enabling participants to share experiences, reflect on progress, and address challenges collectively. This has supported ongoing engagement and strengthened the overall effectiveness of the initiative. This has only met on a couple of occasions but we are optimistic it will continue.

An introduction to the Reverse Mentoring model is included in the Employer's Guide on Improving Workplace Consultations. We strongly believe it is an attractive initiative for employers that can provide a structured and practical approach to advancing disability inclusion by fostering open dialogue, building understanding, and linking learning to practical actions which promote positive changes for both individuals and organisations.

Findings & Conclusions from Workstream 4

- There is some appetite for expanding consultation activities, but many employers are wary of the time and resource commitments required, often due to misconceptions
- As there is a greater interest among employers to undertake positive workplace conversations activities it may be advisable to start there before progressing to work on consultations
- Among the employers who were more enthusiastic there was a willingness to look at a range of options and a recognition that these need to be tailored to their organisation
- Reverse Mentoring appeared to be an attractive option for employers, but more time is needed to test it, ideally over a 12 month period

Training that Supported the Activity

Employer were offered training to support their activities following the Employer Self-Assessment and Report & Recommendations process and as needs emerged during the activity.

Workstream employers participated in the following:

- Improving Workplace Consultation
- Reverse Mentoring
- Disability Awareness and Reasonable Adjustments
- Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace
- Sensory Loss Awareness

Output

An Employer's Guide on Improving Workplace Consultations including Establishing Employee Groups has been developed.

Part Six

Project Outputs: Employer Guides

The project has produced employer guides for each of the workstreams. These give employers a number of recommendations and practical tips.

Each guide includes some generic sections that cover topics we feel employers should be familiar with. Examples that appear in the guides include:

- Why Inclusion matters
- Setting the scene and getting buy in across the organisation
- Baseline Data & Measuring Progress
- Celebrating Success and Achievements
- Including people with lived experience
- Recommended Core Training for Employers
- Inclusive Communication & Accessible Information
- Reasonable Adjustments
- Self Advocacy Skills & Employee Capacity Building
- Fair Work Principles
- Local Employability Partnerships (LEPs) and local support
- Supported Employment
- Links to resources

Implications of AI Use in Recruitment and Training

In addition to the employer guides, Scottish Government asked us to consider the implications of employers adopting more AI processes and the impact that may have on disabled employees.

We have addressed this in the Workplace Digital Accessibility Guide, which outlines potential barriers and biases in using AI in recruitment and training and top tips on how to remove and reduce those barriers. Additionally, we have created an example HR policy on AI Use and an example statement of how employers can use AI in recruitment and training fairly and responsibly. Links to these are available in the employer guide.

Outline of Employer Guides

a. An Employer's Guide to Equitable Workplace Induction & In-Work Support

Includes:

- Review of current materials & approaches
- Accessibility
- A guide on review process
- Getting feedback from inductees
- Recommendations on in-house testing of training courses
- Processes and models that can work for smaller employers
- Example of materials e.g. induction checklist, Wellbeing Passport, In-Work Support Plan, Pulse Survey, Reasonable Adjustments form

b. An Employer's Guide to Positive Workplace Conversations (including an introduction to the Why You Askin'? campaign)

Includes:

- Positive conversation principles
- Successful approaches for employers including examples questions
- Description of Why You Askin' campaign and resources for employers
- Examples of questions for appraisal and supervision documents

c. An Employer's Guide to Workplace Digital Accessibility and how to make eLearning & Intranets accessible for all employees.

Includes:

- What accessibility is and why it matters
- Difference between accessibility and reasonable adjustments
- Everyday accessibility principles
- Guide to improving in-house systems and eLearning
- Online accessibility including meetings and training
- Making documents accessible including Word, PDF and PowerPoint
- Employer Responsibilities and what disabled staff should expect

d. An Employer's Guide on Improving Workplace Consultations including Establishing Employee Groups.

Includes:

- Overview of potential consultation approaches and tools
- Principles of effective employee consultation
- Introduction to Reverse Mentoring and some resources
- Processes and models that can work for smaller employers
- Guide to establishing employee groups

The Employer Guides can be found on the Apt website: [Apt Resources – Employer Guides](#)

Part Seven

Challenges

Challenges for SUSE in Delivering the Making It Work Project

Employer recruitment and engagement

- Recruiting employers was the most significant challenge, particularly in the private sector, where 4–6 months is typically required to secure organisational approval and commitment
- Delays to project confirmation reduced the available delivery time, limiting the number of employers that could fully engage in workstreams
- Reliance on cold outreach and large-scale presentations required substantial staff time for limited return; warm introductions via trusted partners proved more effective

Compressed delivery timescales

- Late employer recruitment meant SUSE typically had only 4–6 months to work with employers rather than the intended 12 months.
- This restricted the ability to:
 - Embed changes
 - Test long-term impact
 - Gather meaningful post-implementation evaluation data

Employer variability

- Employers differed significantly in:
 - Size, sector and operational context
 - HR capacity and formality of processes
 - Readiness to engage with disability inclusion work
- This required ongoing adaptation of approaches, increasing delivery complexity

Sustaining engagement across workstreams

- Engagement was uneven across workstreams
- Improving Workplace Consultation saw the lowest uptake, suggesting a perceived time burden, uncertainty about value, or fear of disruption by employers

Challenges for Employers Implementing the Four Workstreams

Cross-cutting challenges

- Limited time and competing operational priorities of employers
- Lack of internal expertise in disability inclusion and accessibility within employers
- Difficulty translating learning into sustained organisational change to due time challenges
- Concern about cost, disruption, or “getting it wrong” by employers

Workstream 1: Equitable Induction & In-Work Support

- Induction processes often focused on compliance rather than employee experience
- Many employers had not previously considered the accessibility of their induction materials
- Smaller employers lacked structured induction tools or HR capacity for inclusive induction processes
- Limited awareness of Supported Employment tools (e.g. in-work support plans)

Workstream 2: Positive Workplace Conversations

- Employers and managers were wary of initiating conversations about disability, despite recognising their importance
- Fear of saying the wrong thing or causing offence reduced confidence
- Cultural change around disclosure requires time; short project timescales limited measurable outcomes
- Applying conversation models was more challenging in non-office-based or shift-based environments

Workstream 3: Digital Access Review & Action Plan

- Digital accessibility was often overlooked in workplace systems, particularly eLearning
- Assistive technology was rarely integrated into onboarding or training strategies
- Employers often lacked internal capacity or ownership to implement technical recommendations
- Reliance on third-party or legacy systems limited employers' control over accessibility improvements
- Training tended to be reactive and focused on basic functions rather than real workflows

Workstream 4: Improving Workplace Consultation

- Employers showed low appetite for establishing formal employee groups
- Common concerns included:
 - Time and resource commitments
 - Fear of ongoing obligations
 - Perception that consultation could be disruptive or tokenistic
- Engagement was stronger with informal or lighter-touch mechanisms (e.g. surveys, 1-to-1 feedback)
- Reverse Mentoring was attractive and potential advantageous but requires longer timescales to be effective

Part Eight

Conclusions

Summary

The Making It Work project demonstrated that employers are willing to act on inclusion when support is practical, proportionate and clearly relevant to their circumstances. The main barrier is not intent but time, confidence and capacity. Future success depends on longer delivery periods, phased engagement, strong partnerships and sustained employer support that moves learning into everyday practice and demonstrable results for the business.

Conclusions

1. **Employers are willing to improve inclusion when supported appropriately**

The project demonstrated strong willingness among employers to become more inclusive, particularly when changes are practical, proportionate and aligned with business needs. Employers responded best to clear guidance, real-world examples and tailored support rather than theoretical models.

2. **Time is the single most critical factor in achieving sustainable change**

Short delivery timescales limited employers' ability to embed changes, particularly those requiring cultural or behavioural shifts. Evidence suggests that longer engagement periods would allow for deeper implementation, reflection and measurable impact.

3. **Practical tools drive engagement and confidence**

Employers consistently valued tangible resources such as induction checklists, wellbeing passports, digital accessibility recommendations and conversation frameworks. These tools increased confidence and made inclusive practice feel achievable.

4. **Confidence, not intent, is the primary barrier to inclusion**

Many employers recognised the importance of inclusive practice but lacked confidence or knowledge on how to act. Structured support, peer learning and lived-experience input proved effective in bridging the gap between awareness and action.

5. **Positive workplace conversations are a strong entry point for change**

Work on Positive Workplace Conversations generated high levels of engagement and should be seen as a foundational activity. Normalising conversations about disability can create momentum for wider organisational changes, including consultation and system redesign.

6. Digital accessibility remains a significant and often hidden barrier

The Digital Access Reviews confirmed that inaccessible internal systems can unintentionally exclude disabled staff. While employers were often unaware of these barriers, they were receptive to feedback and motivated to improve when issues were clearly evidenced and alternatives available.

7. Assistive technology and accessibility are not yet embedded strategically

Employers typically address accessibility reactively rather than building it into onboarding, training and procurement. This points to a systemic gap that requires earlier planning and clearer organisational ownership within businesses.

8. Consultation mechanisms are least developed and least understood

Employers showed limited appetite for formal consultation structures, often due to misconceptions around complexity and resource demands. Lighter-touch approaches and clear examples of value are more likely to gain traction and take up.

9. Lived experience input strengthens relevance and credibility

Meaningful involvement of people with lived experience was central to the success of the project. Their contributions improved the quality, relevance and credibility of recommendations and the employer tools we used.

10. One-size-fits-all approaches do not work

Variation in employer size, sector and operating environment requires flexible, adaptable models. The project confirmed the importance of tailoring interventions while maintaining consistent inclusion principles regardless of the business we were working with.

Part Nine

Recommendations

Recommendations for future employer capacity building projects:

1. Allow longer delivery and embedding periods:
Build in at least 12 months of engagement per employer, plus post-project evaluation
2. Prioritise warm employer introductions:
Work more closely with trusted intermediaries (partners, employer networks, sector bodies)
3. Phase engagement and progression:
Start with higher-engagement (more popular) topics (e.g. Positive Workplace Conversations) before progressing to more complex areas (e.g. consultation structures)
4. Strengthen post-project sustainability:
Include follow-up support, peer networks or light-touch check-ins to embed learning and achieve lasting results
5. Align with national systems and incentives:
Coordinate with employability provision, CPD accreditation systems and national employer bodies and approaches to increase reach and motivation
6. Continue lived-experience-led delivery:
Maintain meaningful, paid involvement of people with lived experience to ensure solutions remain practical and credible for the employer partners

Recommendations for Employers Implementing the Workstreams

Equitable Induction & In-Work Support

- Review induction materials with staff feedback, including lived experience; focusing on accessibility and clarity
- Introduce tools such as Induction Checklists, Wellbeing Passports and In-Work Support Plans
- Embed ongoing check-ins beyond initial onboarding to improve the employee experience
- Increase awareness of Supported Employment approaches and links to available support

Positive Workplace Conversations

- Use structured tools such as the Why You Askin'? campaign to normalise conversations
- Provide managers with practical models, examples and opportunities to practise and learn from
- Recognise that confidence develops over time through repeated, supported use of the learning tools
- Embed peer learning and reflective practice to sustain the activity in the business

Digital Access Review & Action Plan

- Treat digital accessibility as a core quality standard, not an optional adjustment
- Involve disabled staff in testing systems during development and procurement
- Integrate assistive technology into onboarding and training from the outset
- Allocate clear responsibility and time for implementing accessibility recommendations
- Build understanding of accessible and fair AI use in recruitment and training

Improving Workplace Consultation

- Start with proportionate, manageable consultation mechanisms (e.g. pulse surveys, informal focus groups)
- Be clear about purpose, influence and feedback loops to avoid perceptions of tokenism
- Where appropriate, pilot Reverse Mentoring over longer periods to embed learning
- Ensure managers are equipped to lead engagement locally, by training them to do so

Overall Conclusion

The Making It Work project shows that employers can and will make meaningful changes to support disabled people when given the time, tools and support to do so. Sustained progress depends on longer delivery timescales, practical resources, confidence-building interventions and embedding lived-experience insight at each stage. Future success lies in moving from short-term projects to longer-term partnerships that support lasting cultural and systemic change, with a clear benefit to the employer in terms of absence, recruitment and retention.