



Improving Workplace Consultation Guide

**Developing sustainable workplace groups,
strengthening communication and promoting
employee self advocacy.**

Guide contents

The Purpose of this Workplace Guide is to introduce good practice in staff consultation and engagement along with some practical tools to support implementation.

This guide was developed in conjunction with input from the SUSE Experience Network and CSL - Training, Evaluation and Development.

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Workplace Consultation

Staff Consultation

A structured, two-way process where organisations seek and listen to staff views on specific topics or proposed changes. It is generally a time-limited exercise.

Staff Engagement

An employee's willingness to contribute beyond the basic requirements of their role. This includes things like showing initiative, collaborating with other team members or partners and participation in improvement activities. It's an ongoing process rather than a one-off exercise that includes formal mechanisms, for example supervision and team meetings and informal interactions.

Effective staff engagement is primarily built through positive working relationships including trust and open communication.



Direct line managers play a key role as emotional leaders, influencing team culture through their responses to challenges and change.



What good staff consultation and engagement looks like

1. Define the purpose for each consultation.
2. Identify stakeholders –who needs to take part in the consultation.
3. Choose appropriate consultation methods. You will have a note of all staff’s communication methods from your conversations about reasonable adjustments in the workplace.
4. Plan accessibility and reasonable adjustments; involve disabled and non-disabled staff in the process.
5. Deliver the consultation.
6. Analyse and interpret feedback.
7. Communicate outcomes (“You said / We did”) in inclusive and accessible ways.
8. Monitor impact and review; use a follow-up consultation method to review impact and progress.

What good staff consultation and engagement looks like



Why does effective staff consultation and engagement matter?

Done well, staff consultation and engagement can produce significant benefits for both employees and organisations including:

Staff Consultation



Benefits to staff

- Feeling their views and opinions are valued and they can influence change.
- Opportunities to contribute their experience and problem-solving skills.
- Increased trust in the senior management team.



Benefits to organisations

- Supports more robust decision making.
- Encourages diverse perspectives and improvements.
- Builds trust and strengthens organisational relationships.
- Increases the likelihood of staff support for changes that need to take place.



Staff Engagement



Benefits to staff

- Increased sense of value and recognition.
- Greater confidence.
- Enhanced opportunities for learning and development.
- Improved wellbeing.



Benefits to organisations

- Improved staff retention.
- Enhanced performance and productivity.
- Stronger team cohesion.
- Reduction in reactive workload management (solving problems).

Common challenges of consultation and engagement

There are some **common challenges** that can have a negative impact on the process and outcomes of staff consultation.

- Staff perception that the consultation is tokenistic and that key decisions have already been made.
- Not allowing enough time for meaningful participation.
- Inadequate communication or follow up about the consultation outcomes.
- Limited representation of different staff perspectives.
- Impact of previous negative experiences on staff willingness to engage on a new consultation.
- A lack of resources to make all consultation methods you want to use accessible and inclusive of all staff.

Principles and good practice that underpin staff consultation and engagement



Core principles for effective staff engagement

- Staff engagement is developed through relationships not programmes.
- Being open about the processes of engagement means that staff are more likely to become involved.
- Without feedback and follow-up, your staff do not feel they are being listened to which reduces their willingness to engage.

When you focus on what really encourages and engages people, it can make a big difference in how things turn out.

- **Purpose** – understanding the value and difference work makes.
- **Autonomy** – having appropriate levels of control and responsibility.
- **Growth** – access to learning and development opportunities.
- **Connection** – a sense of people belonging within the team and organisation.



Good Practice for Staff Consultation

- You should start early – as soon as the issue or need for change is identified and before key decisions are made.
- Make sure you know about what you're consulting on and why.
- You should be honest about how the final decisions will be made and how much influence staff will have.
- You need to decide on what consultation methods you will use. These should be suitable for both the consultation objectives and staff needs.
- Allow enough time for meaningful participation.
- You should build feedback to staff into the process which is meaningful and given in a suitable time frame.



Improving Accessibility and Inclusion

- Adopt inclusive communication methods.
- Make sure the information used is accessible to all staff, taking account of different needs.
- Be proactive in identifying and planning for any reasonable adjustments staff may need to participate fully.
- Engage directly with staff and avoid making assumptions about individual staff members' abilities or the support they may need to participate.

Different types of workplace consultation



Good practice consultation:

When you, as the employer might be thinking about whether to introduce a new way of managing performance or to change a policy to make it more inclusive and accessible – for example, looking at flexible working for office staff. This can be collective consultation as well as gathering the opinions of individual members of staff.



Consultation under the law:

This would be, for example, on health and safety changes to the workplace.



Collective consultation:

For example, when an employer is looking to make more than 20 employees in one workplace redundant at a time. This is a legally binding type of consultation and the law requires an employer to take all reasonable steps to consult with employee representatives/trade union representatives. This is part of the Information and Consultation of Employees regulations.



More information on Information and Consultation of Employees regulations.

See our Further Guidance and Resources at the end of this guide.

Examples of workplace consultation



Examples of workplace consultation

- Employee Resource Groups – see Examples 1 and 2 later in this guide.
- Disability Inclusion Groups – see Examples 1 and 2 later in this guide.
- Reverse Mentoring – see Example 3 later in this guide.
- Workplace Champions – for example, mental health champions or accessibility champions who promote good mental health practices or accessibility across the workplace and who are available to listen to colleagues and take any issues back to management.
- Peer Support Networks – that provide emotional and wellbeing support, and shared problem solving. These can be informal or semi structured groups that can support disabled staff who are facing barriers at work and are unsure what the solutions are.
- Trade union meetings where there is a trade union recognition agreement in place – staff representatives meet with their colleagues and feedback to managers collectively.





Other forms of workplace consultation are:

- Regular listening sessions, focus groups or roundtables either led by HR, management or employees who have received training in leading group discussion.
- Anonymous feedback platforms for all staff which can be an annual survey or online form.
- Quick pulse surveys to capture developing issues. A pulse survey is a short, frequent questionnaire, usually under 20 questions, used to measure real-time employee opinion, engagement, or specific workplace topics. Conducted monthly or quarterly, these surveys provide immediate feedback, which allows managers to track trends and act fast on issues. See Example 4 later in this guide.
- Accessible suggestion boxes which can be digital or physical and can be anonymous as long as the purpose is clearly explained.
- Inclusive intranet spaces for sharing updates and inviting feedback.



More information on Digital Accessibility can be found in the SUSE Workplace Digital Accessibility Guide.

See our Further Guidance and Resources at the end of this guide.

Consultation should be built into decision-making processes, not added after the fact and all methods should be accessible for all employees.

It is important to remember that not all employees will be comfortable contributing in a group setting and some will prefer surveys and anonymous feedback.



There are pros and cons to all types of consultation mechanisms and the ones you use should be tailored to your business and workplaces.

For example, in an SME it might be appropriate to have one consultation group that is fully inclusive of all employees rather than several across protected characteristics; along with an annual pulse survey to gather views.

In a large organisation, where there is a dedicated HR Department, it may be possible to have a number of different forms of consultation - Employee Resource Groups, Disability Inclusion Groups and Workplace Champions as well as pulse surveys and intranet facilities.

Setting up consultation or networking groups

When setting up groups, including those for disabled employees, remember to:

- Support the group to put in place Terms of Reference that shows what group members can expect to discuss, how issues will be fed back to management and how the group will work. These should also cover how management will feedback to employees.
- Make sure the group has the resources it needs to be successful – time, accessible information, a communication support budget if this is needed, and an accessible venue if it will take place face-to-face.
- Make sure that the group members can perform the tasks needed to keep the group running, for example, do employees need training in how to chair meetings, how to keep a record of what is discussed and what needs to be fed back to management?

It is important to remember that “**one size does not fit all**”. As companies move towards hybrid working for at least some of their staff, there are **things to remember** when setting up digital and remote consultations.

These are:

- 1.** Making sure that digital meetings and remote consultations are inclusive of everyone taking part.
 - a.** Booking Electronic Notetakers to provide live captions if you do not have bespoke auto-generated captions.
 - b.** Providing support for staff in remote settings to take part in online consultations.

- 2.** Providing flexible participation options so that staff taking part in online consultations can work at their own pace. This might include
 - a.** Looking at a longer lead-in period or a later closing date for responses.
 - b.** Holding short online meetings to explain the consultation and the process so that staff have a chance to ask questions and for you to answer queries and concerns.

- 3.** Making sure online meetings are inclusive and accessible by
 - a.** Scheduling breaks in the meetings so that people do not get digital fatigue.
 - b.** Holding a series of short meetings rather than a longer meeting so that staff have a chance to process the information given and think about how they will take part.



Disability disclosure

Positive workplace conversations can encourage employees to disclose if they are disabled and lets the employer put in place the support they need.

You can't address what you don't know – so it is better to find out what is needed and do something positive about it.

Once a disability is disclosed a plan can be developed that works for everyone – including reasonable adjustments that allow the person to do their job well and thrive in their role.



More information on positive workplace conversations can be found in the SUSE Positive Workplace Conversations Guide.

See our Further Guidance and Resources at the end of this guide.

Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are changes an employer makes to remove or reduce a barrier when someone is disabled. They are specific to the individual employee and can be for any disability or long-term health condition. For example:

- Finding a different way to do something.
- Making changes to the workplace if it's economical to do so.
- Changing how you communicate with employees.
- Providing equipment, services or support.



Some examples of reasonable adjustments:

- Giving written instructions, manuals and policies in plain language.
- Providing some extra support for workplace consultation.
- Making sure information is screen reader compatible, written in plain language, and available in multiple formats – for example, word documents, Easy Read ™, on video with closed captions.
- Providing specialist equipment or software for someone to do their job and to take part in workplace consultation (Access to Work can help).



Further Guidance and Resources:

See our comprehensive list at the end of this guide.

Inclusive Communication and Accessible Information

Inclusive Communication is how you think about communicating with your audience.

- Before you communicate – think about how you are doing it.
- Will everyone understand what you are trying to put across?
- Is there a better way of doing it to reach everyone, and not exclude people?

Accessible Information is how you make sure the information and services that you provide can be used by everyone who need the information (e.g. employees or customers). Accessible information is the tools that you use to make communication accessible and inclusive.



Five things to start with:

1. Can you produce documents and forms in a variety of formats?
2. Are you using plain language and avoiding jargon?
3. Are there people with lived experience in your business that could look at the information and give you feedback?
4. Can you provide communication support for people who need it?
5. Are your sites, venues and online meeting spaces accessible for disabled people?

Practical examples of staff consultation activities

A key point to bear in mind is that a one size fits all approach is unlikely to be effective or successful.

For example, some people will prefer the anonymity of a survey or suggestion box, whilst others find interaction vital to clarifying their thoughts and ideas.

Skills for Effective Consultation

You should ensure that the staff members leading an in-person or online consultation exercise have the necessary skills and training so that the consultation is inclusive and accessible and everyone can have their say.



These are:

1. The ability to facilitate discussion to include people who may have communication support needs at the time.
2. Active listening skills.
3. The ability to manage power dynamics especially if there are different levels of staff taking part.
4. The understanding of how to keep individual staff members safe in a setting that may be new to them, and for staff members who may disclose highly personal and sensitive information.
5. Are your sites, venues and online meeting spaces accessible for disabled people?



Workplace accessibility (physical and digital)

Background

A medium-sized organisation wants to improve accessibility after recognising that disabled staff may face barriers in the workplace.

Step 1: Communicate the aim

- HR announces a review of workplace accessibility:
 - Office layout (ramps, lighting, quiet spaces).
 - Digital systems (meeting captions, screen reader access).



Make sure that all staff know their opinions are welcome, not just those who identify as disabled

Step 2: Gather experiences

Use consultation types that will work with your staff:

For example,

- Anonymous survey asking:
 - “What barriers do you experience at work?”
 - “What changes would improve your day-to-day work?”
- Optional confidential 1:1 discussions for disabled staff.



- Accessibility audit walk-through with staff who want to take part.

This is important because disabled employees have different individual needs and experiences, so direct feedback is essential.

Step 3: Focus groups

A discussion with a small group of employees that gathers in-depth feedback on specific workplace issues. You engage with staff in a safe environment to discuss topics like organisational change, wellbeing, or policy.



Make sure those leading focus groups have appropriate training in how to facilitate a meeting and include everyone.

Run small group discussions:

- Neurodiverse employees.
- Staff with physical disabilities.
- Staff with sensory loss.
- Managers (to understand possible challenges).

Encourage discussion of real issues like:

- Difficulty attending meetings.
- Lack of accessible equipment.
- Challenges with office noise or lighting.



Step 4: Review and co-design solutions

Management reviews feedback and works with staff to design solutions, such as:

- Hybrid working options.
- Quiet working zones.
- Captioned meetings or assistive technology.

Best practice is to treat inclusion as an ongoing conversation, not a one-off fix.

Step 5: Feedback and implementation

- Share what changes will be made and why.
- Be transparent about what cannot be changed (and reasons).
- Set a review date (e.g. 6 months).

Why this works

- Focusses on the lived experiences of disabled staff.
- Uses multiple consultation methods.
- Leads to practical, tailored adjustments.



Reviewing reasonable adjustments processes

Background

Employees have reported delays and inconsistency in getting reasonable adjustments in place. The organisation opens a consultation to improve the process.

This is important because timely and appropriate adjustments are key to inclusion and good work practice.

Step 1: Define the issue

HR gives information to staff on:

- The current process for requesting adjustments.
- Known concerns (e.g. delays, unclear communication).

Step 2: Collect feedback

- Anonymous survey:
 - “Have you requested adjustments?”
 - “How easy was the process?”
 - “What could be improved?”

You ask for written case studies from staff members. This should be optional and all personal information should be kept confidential.

Step 3: Consultation meetings

Make sure those managing the consultation meetings have appropriate training in facilitating meetings and including everyone involved.



Hold sessions with:

- Disabled employees. No member of staff should have to take part if they do not want to.
- Line managers.
- HR and occupational health.

Discuss:

- What are the possible barriers to asking for support (e.g. fear of stigma).
- Why there are delays in decision-making.
- What can be done about the lack of knowledge on what is available.

These concerns are common - many disabled employees worry about disclosing needs or asking for support.

Step 4: Working with disabled staff to make improvements

Based on feedback, propose changes such as:

- Writing an accessible adjustment request policy.
- Having a named HR contact for support.
- Putting realistic times in place for adjustments to be made.
- “Adjustment passports” (record of agreed support).

Step 5: Close the loop

- Publish outcomes:
 - “You said / We did” summary.
- Train managers on new process.
- Monitor uptake and satisfaction.

Why this works

- Addresses real structural barriers.
- Encourages honest feedback (including anonymous input).
- Links consultation directly to policy change.



Reverse Mentoring

Reverse mentoring is a new approach to staff engagement that emphasises the valuable and critical role people with lived experience can play in providing information to employers so they can provide high quality, Supported Employment opportunities for disabled people.

It pairs senior leaders (the mentees) with employees with lived experience of being disabled (the mentors). Job shadowing helps mentees gain a deeper understanding of the mentor's experience in the workplace including any challenges and barriers they may be facing.

Clear roles are important

- **Mentees** – actively engage in the process, reflect on their learning, apply insights in their roles and play an active role in addressing barriers in the organisation.
- **Mentors** – provide guidance, share their experiences and offer constructive challenge to support new ways of thinking.

A consistent approach is also important with a clear framework for the minimum time commitment needed e.g. meeting for at least 5 one hour sessions over a 12-month period.

The pair work together to develop an idea or proposal to improve inclusion, accessibility or representation in their workplace.

Reverse mentoring provides a structured, practical approach to advancing disability inclusion by creating open dialogue, building understanding and linking learning to practical actions which promote positive changes for both individuals and organisations.



For more information

[See Further Guidance and Resources at the end of this guide.](#)



Pulse Surveys

A pulse survey is a short, frequent questionnaire, usually scored on a scale and typically under 20 questions - used to measure real-time employee attitudes, engagement, or specific workplace topics (e.g. wellbeing, new processes). Conducted monthly or quarterly, these surveys provide immediate, actionable feedback, allowing leaders to track trends and act fast on issues.

Key Aspects of Pulse Surveys:

- **Purpose:** Measures the immediate “pulse” of the organisation, focusing on specific, targeted topics rather than broad, annual reviews.
- **Frequency & Length:** They are brief and frequent (for example, weekly, monthly, quarterly) to avoid survey fatigue.
- **Actionable Data:** Because they provide real-time insights, they enable rapid, actionable responses to emerging issues, such as declining morale or training needs.
- **Complementary Tool:** While often used in conjunction with annual engagement surveys, they allow for a continuous, “always-on” feedback loop.
- **Topics Covered:** They often cover specific areas like work-life balance, leadership effectiveness, or specific company changes.

Examples of pulse survey questions are:

General Survey Questions

I am proud to work for [Company].

I am satisfied with my career and its growth at [Company].

Leadership Survey Questions

The leaders at [Company] keep employees informed about what is happening in the company.

I feel connected to the direction of the [Company].

I have a good sense of [Company] priorities and my role in them.



Inclusion and Well-being Survey Questions

I feel a sense of belonging at [Company].

[Company] supports a healthy work-life balance.

[Company] encourages active listening and open communication.

Enablement Survey Questions

I can easily access the things I need to do my job well.

I feel supported to pursue training and development opportunities.

I have the tools and technology I need to perform my job well.

There's a place for me to ask questions on a regular basis.

Company Confidence Survey Questions

I believe that [Company] effectively directs resources (funding, people and effort) towards company goals.

[Company] makes change feel manageable and meaningful.

Open Response Survey Questions (Optional)

What's one thing [Company] does really well?

What's one thing [Company] could do better?

Anything else you'd like to share about your experience working at [Company]?

When planning to carry out Pulse Surveys, it may be pertinent to look at your evaluation frameworks and strategy documents, especially those that you use for reporting to stakeholders. Questions can then be tailored to KPIs and post outcomes.

An evaluation and review of the process/questionnaires should also be built in at the planning stages. This should be an ongoing process so that you can tailor your Pulse Surveys to gather the information you require as an organisation.



For more information

See Further Guidance and Resources at the end of this guide.



Further Guidance and Resources

These resources provide further guidance on inclusive workplace practices.

1

Workplace Consultation

- **Why You Askin’?** Resources:
<https://apt.suse.org.uk/work-with-us/apt-campaign/>
- **Information and Consultation of Employees regulations** (ICE Regulations)
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-information-and-consultation-regulations>
- **ACAS:** Workplace consultation
<https://www.acas.org.uk/consultation>
- **Sage:** What is an employee pulse survey
<https://www.sage.com/en-gb/blog/glossary/what-is-an-employee-pulse-survey/>
- **EHRC Guidance on Employing people:** workplace adjustments
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/business/employing-people-workplace-adjustments>

2 Reverse Mentoring

- Alliance for Inclusion can provide more information and training on Reverse Mentoring
<https://www.allianceforinclusion.com/>
- The Reverse Mentoring Programme
<https://reversementoring.com/>

3 To promote inclusion in the workplace SUSE provides training on:

- General disability awareness.
- Sensory awareness (people who are blind or deaf or have an impairment).
- Neurodiversity awareness.
- Reasonable adjustments and the recruitment process.
- Accessible communication.
<https://www.suse.org.uk/what-we-do/inclusive-workplace-training>

4 Apt Making It Work – Employer Guides

- Employer's Guide to **Equitable Workplace Induction and In-Work Support**.
- Employer's Guide to **Workplace Digital Accessibility**.
- Employer's Guide to **Positive Workplace Conversations**.
<https://apt.suse.org.uk/resources/>

5 General Resources

- **Fair Work** - The Scottish Government's Fair Work policy aims to improve the working lives of people in Scotland and boost economic growth. It outlines what employers can do to build fairer working practices into their organisations.
<https://www.mygov.scot/browse/business/fair-work>
- **Good Practice Guides** – Top Tips for employers on topics such as writing inclusive job adverts, hosting accessible online events, and making digital recruitment fair.
<https://apt.suse.org.uk/resources>
- **Local Employability Partnerships** - a network of partners who deliver services for unemployed people and employers.
<https://www.employabilityinscotland.com/local-employability-services>
- **Supported Employment** - There are Supported Employment services in all parts of Scotland. Find out more about Supported Employment at <https://www.suse.org.uk/what-is-supported-employment/>
- **ACAS:** Talking about disability – Supporting disabled people at work
<https://www.acas.org.uk/supporting-disabled-people>
- **Disability Confident** employer scheme
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/disability-confident-campaign>



You can access further support from SUSE by going to their website

<https://www.suse.org.uk>



If you need support please
contact SUSE for assistance.

www.suse.org.uk

