



Scottish Union of Supported Employment

## Fair Chance Project Review and Learning



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# SECTION 1

## INTRODUCTION AND REPORT PURPOSE

Smart Consultancy was commissioned by SUSE in late 2018 to provide review support to the Fair Chance project and identify key learning. This was a short-term pilot to research whether the widespread increase in digital recruitment was creating a further barrier to people with disabilities to enter the labour market. It was funded by the Scottish Government's Workplace Equality Fund, administered by Impact Funding, and operated between November 2018 and June 2019.

The review and learning process was short and focused and included:

- set up and inception discussion with project partners.
- ongoing discussions with the SUSE project manager.
- a review of all background documentation prepared during the project including: initial project development papers; Cole ADs testing reports; participant employer Action Plans and reviews; and case studies.
- workshops with supported employment practitioners on wider issues linked to the growth of digital recruitment – this included a session with 11 participants from 9 SUSE member organisations and round tables with 24 practitioners from the All in Edinburgh Consortium.
- preparation of this draft report and finalisation after feedback from SUSE.

# SECTION 2

## FAIR CHANCE PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Fair Chance project was devised by SUSE to address concerns raised by its members that the move to digital recruitment platforms was creating an additional barrier to people with disabilities who wish to enter employment.

SUSE's is the national representative body for supported employment providers and anyone interested in ensuring that disadvantaged people across our country have the opportunity of a working life. This includes bringing organisations together to campaign, network, improve how they work and share experiences.

SUSE's overall aim is to support people with disadvantages to find and retain paid work by increasing the availability, quality and impact of supported employment services in Scotland.

From this SUSE:

- Lobbies on behalf of its members to ensure that supported employment is part of the conversation when new strategies are developed.
- Promotes members' individual campaigns and works with partners to campaign on issues members care about.
- Highlights the achievements of members and the impact of supported employment in our communities.
- Provides advice and information to members on a daily basis and brings organisations together who wish to pilot new approaches or conduct research.

## 2.1 Disability Employment Gap

SUSE is supporting the Scottish Government's commitment to halve the Disability Employment Gap by 2038, outlined in the *Fairer Scotland: Employment Action Plan*. At present only 43% of disabled people of working age are in work compared to 80% of their non-disabled peers. For many excluded groups the problem is even greater. Less than 10% of people who have learning disabilities are in work, only 20% of people who experience mental ill health and 25% of people with a visual disability have the opportunity of employment.

To make a meaningful impact on the Disability Employment Gap there is a recognised need to create an environment where people who are able to do so can move into jobs with limited support. Many people with disabilities or long term conditions are quite close to the labour market but do not get jobs because of structural barriers that are put in their way, often unintentionally. Improving the recruitment practices of employers (and their general awareness of diversity issues) may be a cost effective way of increasing job starts for people with disabilities without the need for substantial interventions from specialist agencies.

## 2.2 The Growth of Digital Recruitment

***91% of employers now use digital recruitment to hire workers***

Within this wider context, SUSE members and the people they support have repeatedly reported that the recruitment practices of employers are discriminating against people with disabilities. Between 2015 and 2018 the Peer Support Hubs that SUSE operated in 6 locations gave disabled jobseekers an opportunity to come together and share their experiences. A consistent theme for discussion at these groups was the unnecessary barriers the jobseekers faced when applying for jobs, with digital recruitment practices regularly cited as a particular problem.

At members' events and the SUSE annual conference providers regularly raised these concerns – suggesting digital recruitment is a time consuming and challenging new process, which makes life easier for employers but not applicants.

Wider research indicated that 91% of employers are now using digital sources to hire workers, often to the exclusion of other routes (source: LinkedIn). Even the platforms used were noted as influential – 87% of recruiters use LinkedIn but only 55% use Facebook, where disabled people are more likely to have an account (source: Talent Works International).

SUSE also searched extensively online but could find no free-to-use employer support that audited recruitment practices and provided ongoing guidance. There appeared to be little evidence that equality audits were happening, apart from a few isolated cases.

## **2.3 Values and Principles of Supported Employment**

SUSE is committed to promoting supported employment as the most effective model for moving people with disabilities into sustained jobs. Supported employment has a set of key values and principles that govern how practitioners should work with their clients on a day to day basis. The organisation was keen to assess employers' recruitment practices in the context of these values and principles.

### **2.3.1 Supported Employment Values**

- People are entitled to support to get a job and retain a job.
- All people have the capacity to be employed.
- Supported Employment must be person centred.
- Clients have the same rights as any other jobseeker or employee.
- Supported Employment workers should treat all clients fairly, not discriminating on grounds of ability.
- People should be supported to get real jobs for real pay in the open labour market.

### **2.3.2 Supported Employment Principles**

- Individuality – each client gets a service that meets their unique needs
- Respect – we value clients and ensure they are treated with dignity at all times.
- Self-determination – we support each client's right to make their own decisions about the support and the service they receive.
- Informed choice – clients should have access to high quality information that allows them to make informed decisions.
- Empowerment – we should build the capacity of clients, supporting them to learn and develop.
- Confidentiality – we only share information when it is necessary to do so and always with the consent of the client.
- Flexibility – we adapt the service we provide to give each client the opportunity to be successful.
- Accessibility – service are open and available to every client who wants to progress towards employment.

# SECTION 3

## FAIR CHANCE: AIMS, PROJECT CONTENT AND DELIVERY

### 3.1 Fair Chance Project Aims

The project's aims were detailed at the outset to:

- increase the employment opportunities of people who have disabilities or long-term conditions by improving the recruitment processes used by 6 private sector employers.
- improve the accessibility of the digital recruitment platforms used by 6 private sector employers.
- increase the knowledge of recruitment managers within these 6 employers on how to make reasonable adjustments which create a level playing field for people with disabilities or long-term condition to compete for available jobs.
- improve the on-going and long term support these employers provide for their staff who have a disability or long term condition.
- gather learning and case studies on how employers can make their digital recruitment platforms more accessible.
- collate the project findings and disseminate the learning to employers, the employability sector and policy makers.

The project sought to improve the recruitment practices used by the 6 employer partners and ultimately the wider employer community by gathering the learning from these activities. There was a particular focus on digital recruitment as feedback to SUSE indicated this may have created a new barrier to work for disabled jobseekers. Digital recruitment works well for many employers as it enables them to quickly sift applications, reduces the time and labour required and is a cost-effective method of filling vacancies.



However, that does not mean it is fair or it is enabling talented applicants to get through the processes. Ironically this may be preventing employers from diversifying their workforce just at the moment when this is becoming more important as the labour market tightens and there is greater focus on employers' attitudes and behaviours with regard to equalities issues.

## **3.2 Anticipated Outcomes**

4 areas of project outcomes were identified:

- Employer adjustments and increased confidence.
- Increased employer knowledge of digital recruitment processes, and their potential impact on people with disabilities.
- Increased employers' skills and knowledge supporting a positive influence on workplace culture.
- Evaluation and dissemination activities on project learning and legacy.

Progress against these outcomes is detailed and considered further in Section 4.

### 3.3 Project Activities



The project consisted of 6 connected elements. These were mixed between necessarily sequential activities, alongside work which ran concurrently throughout the project.

1. Conduct of a disability equality review with the Employer Group of 6 private sector employers to review: the digital platforms they use to recruit new staff and how they select staff for interview and the interview process. This included a full review of their recruitment process from start to finish including any steps they typically take to make reasonable adjustments for jobseekers who have a disability or long-term health condition and an assessment of their recruiting managers' knowledge of the barriers which these jobseekers may face and how they would address these.

The review included the tools and processes the employers use, an analysis of available data and interviews and questionnaires with recruitment managers.

2. Following this, recommendations and an action plan were developed with each employer and they were supported to implement the action plan. 3 project workers were recruited from SUSE members to support 2 employers each throughout the pilot. The project workers worked alongside SUSE staff. The supporting organisations were Momentum Scotland, Hansel Alliance and Values into Action Scotland.

3. User testing of the digital recruitment processes used by the Employer Group. This was carried out at the premises of Deafblind Scotland by Cole AD, a digital company who designed the SUSE website and have extensive experience of supporting disabled people to test digital platforms. 12 volunteers were recruited to carry out these tests. All of the recruitment platforms were tested by people who have a range of disabilities including people who have learning disabilities, people who are on the autism spectrum, people who have a visual disability and people who have a physical disability which affects their co-ordination and mobility. This enabled a comprehensive assessment of each of the platforms used by the 6 businesses in the Employer Group.
4. Inclusive Workplace training was delivered to managers in the Employer Group. This gives employers an insight into how to create workplaces where people who have disabilities or long-term conditions can succeed and thrive. The training was tailored to the needs of the specific employers and built their capacity in areas such as legislation, reasonable adjustments, workplace support, anti-discrimination practices, and partnership building with support services that can assist them on an ongoing basis.
5. The gathering of intelligence and case studies on the impact of digital recruitment on people with disabilities who are using supported employment services. These assessed whether this is making the process easier or more difficult; if it is creating additional costs; and whether staff had been trained to support job applicants in this area.
6. Wide dissemination of the project's findings and learning based on this review. This will continue beyond the life of the project and will use social media and the SUSE website to publicise findings as well as presenting these at appropriate events. SUSE will also work with member organisations to disseminate the findings to the employers they are working with and will seek further partnerships with employers' bodies to share what has been learned.

# SECTION 4

## WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS

### 4.1 Employer Profiles

The Fair Chance project aimed to effect positive changes in the employers who participated while recognising that achievements would be limited by the short timescale that was available. In order to have a broader and more lasting impact SUSE also set out to test a range of assumptions and capture learning from the project for wider application going forward.

The project largely operated as anticipated and described in Section 3. 5 of the 6 employers participated in all aspects of the process. It was agreed that for this paper information on the employers would be anonymised, but in this section we can provide some basic profiles of the businesses who worked with SUSE:

**Employer 1** is a private call centre that works for a range of well-known UK retailers and service providers. People employed provide customer service support and process orders for goods. They employ 400-500 staff in Irvine, North Ayrshire. We worked with managers who are based at this location. They have previously worked with Hansel Alliance to create job opportunities for their clients.

**Employer 2** operate internationally in the hospitality and hotels sector. We worked with their site at Cumnock in Ayrshire. Their managers worked with us on the employer review and action plans. They employ 250 people within the site and are part of a much larger group. They have previously worked with Hansel Alliance.

**Employer 3** is a major UK retailer with high street stores across the country. We worked with the stores in the Aberdeen area. 1,000 staff are employed within the region that engaged with the Fair Chance project. We worked with the local area manager, store managers and some team leaders. The employer

participated in all parts of the project. They have worked with a supported employment provider (Momentum Scotland) for several years and have a strong history of creating employment opportunities for disadvantaged jobseekers.

**Employer 4** is part of an international hotel group, operating in the hospitality sector. They are based at Glasgow Airport and employ 120 permanent staff on site and many thousands more across Scotland and the UK in the wider group. We worked principally with the Hotel Manager and deputies on this project. They have previously worked with Values into Action Scotland and have an ongoing relationship with them.

**Employer 5** is a cleaning company which is based in Leeds but operates across sites in Scotland. We worked with their small management team in Glasgow who deliver their services on behalf of a leading supermarket chain. They employ around 80 permanent staff and offer sessional positions at various locations. They have worked for some time with Momentum Scotland to place jobseekers into their live vacancies.

**Employer 6** is a boutique hotel in Glasgow which provides high end hospitality and function services including an exclusive spa. The hotel employs 120 staff on a permanent basis and offers a range of sessional opportunities also. They have worked with Project Search to support people with learning disabilities to pursue paid employment. They were unable to participate in the project after the initial user testing sessions.

Five of these employers fully supported and dedicated time to supporting all aspects of the project; this was clearly essential to project operation and their commitment was hugely valued.

This next section reports on our activities and the findings of each element of the project and then outlines some key messages from collectively assessing these.

## 4.2 Employer Reviews

social media    third party recruitment    pre-employment tests  
reasonable adjustments    accessible formats  
disability confident    essential criteria    disclosure  
supported employment    coaching and mentoring

An early stage of the Fair Chance project included a review of the recruitment practices of each participating employer – 5 of these reviews were completed. This included

questions on: recruitment processes; disability awareness, commitment and perceptions of disability employment issues; data capture; policies and practices; and perceived strengths and weaknesses on this agenda. The reviews were carried out 1-to-1 with local managers or their teams usually over several sessions.

This was instructive as it gave an insight into the limited ability of local managers to influence policy and practice in larger organisations and the slow process of achieving change. Project staff found that many managers did not have details about current diversity achievements although they were aware of CSR policies. Generally, they did not know if there were targets or if these were being achieved. However, they were very committed at a local level of affecting change and sharing the good practice they had championed locally with the wider organisations.

Key findings from these reviews included:

1. 4 of 5 employers used social media platforms to advertise jobs including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
2. 4 of 5 regularly used an applicant tracking system.
3. Online assessments or interviews were not common practice for these employers.

4. 4 of 5 employers used digital recruitment sites for applications including S1 Jobs and Indeed.
5. 3 employers used pre-employment tests.
6. Only 1 employer used video interviewing software.
7. Some traditional recruitment sources were still used by all employers – most common were word of mouth; shortlisting of applicants; traditional style interviews and group interviews.
8. Digital recruitment accounts for the vast majority of job vacancies filled, with one employer estimating this as 95% of all jobs they recruit for.
9. All employers were aware of the Disability Confident Scheme and Access to Work.
10. All employers had a regular training programme in mentoring and/or coaching and training for managers on how to make reasonable adjustments.
11. Some of the employers had a regular programme of disability awareness training for staff and/or managers – others did not. Similarly only some of them supplied information to job applicants in accessible formats.
12. There was no awareness of the SUSE Inclusive Workplace Award.
13. 4 employers 'strongly agreed' they were confident in applying the Equality Act, the other 'agreed'
14. Most employers were aware that their business has a corporate commitment to recruit a more diverse workforce.
15. 3 employers 'strongly agreed' that they communicated their commitment to achieve a diverse workforce to their employees
16. All employers tracked the number of candidates matching essential criteria; the cost and time taken to fill each vacancy; and the referral source of applicants. Most tracked the offer acceptance rate and the number of applicants with a disability.
17. The employers did not have available data on the number of their employees who have a disability or declared health condition.
18. 4 employers 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' their policies and practices were fit for purpose in recruiting and retaining disabled people – the other was neutral.
19. All employers 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they made adjustments to meet the needs of disabled people

- 20. All employers stated that their employees are encouraged to disclose a disability, and they make reasonable efforts to accommodate the needs of a person with disabilities or a long-term condition.
- 21. The provision of information to employees in accessible formats was mixed – only 2 employers make this available.
- 22. 4 employers regularly engaged with supported employment agencies
- 23. All employers offered coaching/mentoring, reasonable adjustments, and bespoke training to new workers with a disability, 3 offered job carving/sharing or enhancement.

In addition, the initial employer reviews invited employers to highlight any adjustments they made to support the employment of people with disabilities. Examples included:

<b>Employer 1 – Call Centre</b>
Phased returns are available for people absent for an extended period.
<b>Employer 2 – Hotel Chain</b>
An employee who has Asperger’s was moved from customer facing role to a porter position.
<b>Employer 3 – Large Retailer</b>
They have recruited employees who have Autism through Momentum Scotland in the past and have made adjustments to facilitate this. They adjusted the interview and selection process – making questions more concise and changing role play task to ensure applicants understand the objectives and can have an equal opportunity to score well.



#### Employer 4 – Hotel Chain

People are invited to suggest any required accommodations prior to interview. For example using the conference room instead of the bistro area for someone with a hearing impairment as the Bistro would have too much background noise.

Having Project SEARCH interns on work experience prior to applying for posts

#### Employer 5 – Cleaning Company

Employer is flexible in relation to shift coverage for appointments that need to be attended for ongoing health conditions and support.

Employer can also allow late starting times and shift carving depending on individual needs.

All parties are made aware of employees specific needs including other colleagues i.e. if one of the members of staff experiences anxiety they adjust support and supervision processes. They also authorise additional breaks if required.

### 4.3 Website Testing

Cole AD were commissioned to undertake practical testing of the Employer Group websites and any other recruitment websites used.

This was carried out at the Deafblind Scotland offices in Kirkintilloch over 3 sessions with each site tested by 5 people. The project recruited 12 volunteers who are people with a range of disabilities including autism, learning disability, sensory disabilities and physical disabilities. Each person was supported 1-to-1 to test 2 websites in each session by an IT professional who also observed their progress and took notes of each session.

The observer noted the actual experiences and reflections of the volunteers while they applied for each job. The vacancies the volunteers were applying for had been created by Cole AD but in every other respect the process was the same as it would have been on the real site.

A separate report was prepared for all 6 employers summarising: the observers' role; the profile of site testers; the hardware and software used and the tester outcomes. They found good and bad practice for each employer - however, the main take away is that none of the participants was able to complete 100% of the application process. Therefore, they could not apply for the job.

In addition, the testing process also reviewed a range of third party sites used by the employer group and commented on: site layout; language; text and fonts used and the application process. Unsurprisingly comments varied, and split between very positive observations, and many experiences of testing the sites that were less positive. Cole AD found that the use of third party sites (e.g. Indeed) was not necessarily an additional barrier but it was confusing and required additional support – suggesting greater staff time would be required for employment workers to assist this process.

- Hardware and software used included: PC desktops; Macbooks; iPad; Apple Voice Assistant and JAWS.
- Browsers used included: Internet Explorer; Chrome; Edge and Safari.

In summary, key quantitative findings by employer sites were:

Employer	1	2	3	4	5	6
Number of testers	5	5	5	5	5	5
Average time to submit application	35m	27m	53m	67m	37m	52m
Number of tasks performed	20	10	23	26	14	17
Tasks deemed 'OK or easy'	80%	80%	91%	88%	86%	75%
Tasks deemed 'difficult'	15%	10%	0%	8%	0%	15%
Tasks deemed 'not achievable'	5%	10%	9%	4%	14%	10%
Testers who would apply on this site again	100%	60%	80%	60%	100%	0%

## 4.4 Feedback on Employers' Recruitment Platforms

Detailed reports were collated on each of the employers' digital recruitment platforms. This table summarises the positive features and areas for improvements that employers can learn from:

Employer 1 – Call Centre
<p><b>Positive Features:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Testers liked the map on the homepage and thought the information was clear and well laid.</li><li>▪ Descriptions of job roles within the company were clearly laid out. The content has clear headers and bullet points to break up the information.</li><li>▪ No issues with language or text or fonts used.</li><li>▪ The CV upload/online form was quick and easy to fill out.</li></ul>
<p><b>Areas for Improvement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ None of the videos on the home page were working.</li><li>▪ The majority of testers struggled to find information about job vacancies on the site, most went straight to the recruitment process in 'About Us' and did not click on the Opportunities section.</li><li>▪ The testers didn't feel it was clear these pages were about job roles within the company.</li><li>▪ The majority were unsure about what to put in the comment section of the application and there was no indication about what it should contain.</li><li>▪ There is no search function on the site.</li><li>▪ No email confirmations were received.</li></ul>

## Employer 2 – Hotel Chain

### Positive Features:

- Overall most testers (but not all – see below) found the application process quick and easy and liked the length of the process. The application form worked well for most people – they liked the short form, it was easy to understand and it didn't ask for lots of information.
- Most people liked the simple and minimalistic layout of the site – it had good navigation and was not overloaded with content or information.

### Areas for Improvement:

- Some testers found the font style and font size used on the website was not accessible and some struggled to read grey text on a white background (it should be black on white to make it accessible).
- Some people felt that the job descriptions could have been broken up using clearer, bold headings and possibly images to make it easier to read and some had problems with the language and terminology used in the job description – too much jargon and confusion created by complicated phrases and the vocabulary used.
- Most testers encountered a problem with the CV/Cover letter upload function.
- No confirmation email was received and the confirmation page was not clear.
- No search function on the website.
- The location of the jobs available was not clear.
- There was no option to add details about disability.

## Employer 3 – Large Retailer

### Positive Features:

- Overall testers thought the site was very straightforward and clear to use. The language used throughout the process was easy to understand.
- Testers found no issues with the job search function on the site, however some did miss the browse by category section at the bottom of the page.
- Job descriptions were well laid out, with clear headings to break up the information - admin roles featured bullet points within the job description which users found very helpful.
- Majority of testers applying for sales floor roles easily found the disability and learning difficulties assistance information paragraph, and would use this service to call for help.
- When completing the Online Form the tester using voice assistance on iPad was unable to complete this stage as pages kept crashing and drop down menus were not working but the rest of the testers filled this in with no issues - they felt it was straightforward and easy to understand.
- Those applying for sales floor roles liked that there was an option to supply details about your disability.
- Overall testers liked the Interactive Quiz for salesfloor roles.

### Areas for Improvement:

- Although there was mention of the site not working on mobile devices users would still expect the site to work on an iPad/tablet devices.
- Those applying for admin roles found no information within the job description on how to get assistance with their application, if they have a disability or learning difficulty.
- Those applying for sale floor roles took longer to find information about skills required for the job, with one tester unable to find any information at all on skills or experience required.
- There were inconsistencies with information supplied in job descriptions depending on the type of role applied for.
- The majority of users could not find or missed the information within the job description about what the recruitment process involved as it was not under a clear heading. This information was missing completely from the admin role job description.
- Most of the testers felt the text was too small in some sections.
- Not all users received a confirmation email of their application - those that did felt it took too long to come through.

## Employer 4 – Hotel Chain

### Positive Features:

- When looking for a vacancy, testers easily navigated through job filters and the job search function.
- Overall testers seemed to enjoy the questionnaire and they liked that the application was broken down into sections/headings.
- Testers felt the job description was laid out well and had a logical structure but the screen reader didn't work as expected.
- There were no issues with the text or fonts used.
- The deafblind user found all buttons on the website were labelled well and allowed the screen reader software to be easily navigated.
- All users received email confirmation when they expected to.

### Areas for Improvement:

- Multiple testers did not like that the entire application process took them between up to 5 different websites.
- Testers who made use of screen reader technology found the layout of job descriptions to be confusing and frustrating.
- Some testers felt the application was too lengthy and asked too many irrelevant questions. There were three to four site changes from the start to end process which all testers felt was excessive.
- The majority of the users did not find the accessibility assistance information. Only one user found it, and said it wasn't obvious how it would help him.
- For the tester using screen reader software, the site was inaccessible as they could not actually access the Job Qualifications section.
- During the application process, the tester using screen reader software encountered a fundamental issue which resulted in the inability to continue with the application.
- Some users easily missed form fields which resulted in error messages.
- The education section had various issues which included American qualifications.
- The visual representation was poor as the font and images were too small. There were double scroll bars so some content was hidden and therefore missed by testers.
- Users found that audio switched to Spanish and then back to English.
- Overall, users felt the statement sliders questions were silly. They did not take them seriously as there was no neutral option.

## Employer 5 – Cleaning Business

### Positive Features:

- Most testers recognised that they were on a third party site (Indeed).
- Testers felt that there was a clear layout throughout the whole process.
- There were no issues with the language used, text or font sizes.
- Testers found the application process very quick and easy to complete.

### Areas for Improvement:

- The split screen style was very difficult for the deafblind tester who was using screen reader software. This user also found a blank header tag.
- The screen reader software had difficulty with the staged pop up process.
- There was a mixed review of the careers landing page. Some found it easy to identify it as a careers page but others did not.
- The majority of testers did not know that this page was scrollable and therefore could not find where to upload their CV.
- Internet Explorer displays this site differently to other browsers and testers using this browser found more it difficult to use.
- The testers found inconsistencies across job descriptions and the company name was displayed differently.
- The process failed as none of the testers could upload their CV due to being unable to upload Word Documents. However, they did still manage to submit their applications even though they did not complete the form.
- There was no option to add details about disability.



## Employer 6 – Boutique Hotel

### Positive Features:

- Testers found the application process on Caterer.com quick and easy to complete and were then re-directed to the employer's own site.

### Areas for Improvement:

- Overall testers were frustrated by the application process as they were directed through third party websites to apply. The third party websites used in this instance were Goggle Jobs and Caterer.com.
- Testers found inconsistencies in job descriptions across all third party sites. Layout of job descriptions varied vastly between vacancies, some were paragraphs and other were bulleted lists.
- Testers did not like that they had to sign up for an account with Caterer.com in order to proceed with their application.
- They disliked that the form featured small pre-checked boxes (which may be against GDPR guidelines).
- All users agreed they would have preferred to see a bulleted job description.
- Some testers found the language used to be vague and confusing.
- Upon completion of the Caterer.com form testers were directed to the employer's own website. Testers encountered multiple problems completing the application processes when re-directed to the employer's own site - at this stage 80% of testers said they would have stopped the application process.

Finally, the test reports provided some observer comments on technical details for potential future use by web developers. These are site specific and have been shared by SUSE with the employers.

## 4.5 Employer Action Plans

Following the initial reviews and the site testing, the project workers supported their employers to identify future actions that could further improve their processes to employ and then support people with disabilities. 5 Action Plans were completed. These identified 3 or 4 actions per employer as detailed in the table below. Project staff worked with the employer to implement these through to the end of the project.

Most actions were completed with some still ongoing at project close.

<b>Employer 1 (Call Centre)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduce feedback on the recruitment process for employees with a disability ensuring this is positive and constructive.</li> <li>▪ Issue a training brief to all staff on Diversity Awareness and agree to work with SUSE to improve the quality of information provided on an ongoing basis.</li> <li>▪ Address travel issues for disabled employees by learning about and applying for Access to Work for assistance/funding.</li> </ul>
<b>Employer 2 (Hotel Chain)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Add a statement to the recruitment site: <i>'If you have a disability/require support or would like the application in a different format please contact HR'</i>. The Recruitment Manager will instruct their website developers to make these changes.</li> <li>▪ Managers and Human Resources team members will attend in-house training on fairer recruitment. They will feed back to SUSE on the outcome of this.</li> <li>▪ Inclusive recruitment practices/reasonable adjustments/aids have been routinely added to agendas for managers' meetings.</li> </ul>
<b>Employer 3 (Large Retailer)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Customer Assistant Recruiter (CAR) to feedback to Cluster Manager on the findings from the Fair Chance user testing. Findings to be raised regionally with all front line hiring managers who facilitate recruitment throughout the region.</li> <li>▪ Adjustments to be made to online process (specifically some of the questions asked in the application). The manager will discuss with IT technicians and feedback findings.</li> <li>▪ Develop guidance materials and case studies on supporting disabled individuals into employment and share with managers.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Employer 4 (Hotel Chain)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All applicants now have the option of completing a video application in place of a paper one. Share this innovation at regional meetings and training.</li> <li>▪ Information on “hidden disabilities” added to in-house disability awareness training.</li> <li>▪ Commitment to recruit further workers via Project Search. Support Project Search’s marketing to other local businesses by promoting this in the in-house magazine.</li> <li>▪ Use social media pages – the hotel FB page and Linked-In to post good news stories and successes, and promote the benefits of a diverse workforce on social media. SUSE to provide ongoing support for this.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Employer 5 (Cleaning Company)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Share CSR policy with Fair Chance project for feedback with a view to improving practices. Momentum to provide ongoing support for this.</li> <li>▪ Campaign for HR department to capture workforce diversity stats more effectively.</li> <li>▪ Regional Manager has shared information with Store Cleaning Managers to improve their awareness of barriers digital applications can present to potential candidates and they will agree potential solutions or alternative recruitment routes.</li> </ul>

## 4.6 General Observations on our Work with Employers

Candidate feedback   **manager training**   Access to Work  
**positive statements**   share learning and best practice  
video applications   **good news stories**  
**hidden disabilities**   **diversity stats**   CSR policies

Based on these findings and wider discussions for this review the project arrived at a number of general observations on employers' current practices. Many are made with a recognition that the employers participating in the process were generally supportive of employ people with disabilities: in this respect they cannot be considered 'average' or typical of the wider labour market:

1. A variety of mainstream social media vehicles and third party sites are now used by employers in recruitment. This raises the question of who should be targeted in terms of making any digital improvements: employers as the 'commissioners' of this work, or the third party sites (e.g. Indeed) directly. This is not an either/or option, but there is a need to recognise that some company HR staff are not fully aware of the detail of their own digital recruitment practices.
2. Use of traditional recruitment mechanisms has reduced significantly, but it has not disappeared completely and many employers may still offer some alternative options. However, these may need to be negotiated on a case by case basis. This will be time consuming and labour intensive for clients and employment workers.
3. The employer reviews highlight significant positive work and commitments to supporting people with disabilities. There is much good practice recorded and good will that suggests employers want to be inclusive and non-discriminatory if they can.

4. A lack of any initial knowledge of the SUSE Inclusive Workplace Award is a specific finding SUSE needs to further reflect upon.
5. The managers we spoke to did not have much knowledge of particular CSR policies their employer had committed to and seemed unsure of their particular role in achieving the ambitions the business had set.
6. Managers appear to be strong in tracking and monitoring diversity and inclusion in their recruitment process but this did not follow through to knowledge about their existing workforce. They did not have accurate data on the number of people with disabilities currently in their workforce. This is an important knowledge gap.
7. A range of reasonable adjustments and positive work with disabled employees was apparent in this employer group. It should be noted however that most of these employers have an active relationship with a supported employment agency.
8. The websites testing process highlighted both positives and negatives from the perspective of people with disabilities. The main finding, however, is that in *100% of cases the testers were not able to complete the online application process without assistance, therefore they could not apply for the job.*
9. The employer reviews highlight the benefit these employers gained by working with Hansel, VIAS or Momentum Scotland. SUSE should highlight that good practice and the results that are possible when relationships are established with appropriate agencies – SUSE members have solutions and ideas employers can use.
10. The employer action plans produced a range of positive results. Some are very specific to helping particular individuals, but most are focused on how to disseminate key messages wider within company structures.

11. The findings from the pilot's work with employers are not exclusive to people with disabilities – many relate to the wider incidence of digital exclusion. In this context, capacity building support is important – if employers can make this work for people with disabilities it is likely that it will work for everyone.

***In 100% of cases our volunteer testers were not able to complete the online application process***

# SECTION 5

## WORKING WITH PRACTITIONERS

### 5.1 Consultations with Practitioners

big challenges and some opportunities    unintentional barriers  
easy read and accessible layouts    Skype    digital awareness  
jargon    online tests    lack of testing or feedback  
time commitment    stress    frustration    poor job descriptions  
practitioner training    ethical issues

Various consultations events were held with employability practitioners to gather their views on digital recruitment and its impact on the job that they do and the clients they support.

David Smart of Smart Consultancy led a guided discussion for 11 practitioners and David Cameron and Michelle Ramsay of SUSE held 4 sessions with staff from the All in Edinburgh consortium that delivers the supported employment service on behalf of the City of Edinburgh Council. A total of 35 practitioners from the following organisations participated in these sessions: Values into Action Scotland, ENABLE Scotland, Scottish Association for Mental Health, Action on Hearing Loss, Falkirk Council, Momentum Scotland, Hansel 3E, Lanark Association for Mental Health, Into Work, The Action Group and Forth Sector (Shaw Trust).

These sessions were immensely valuable and greatly increased our knowledge of the issue at hand. Much of what practitioners told us has influenced our recommendations.

## **5.2 General Observations of our Consultations with Practitioners**

The massive growth of digital recruitment was confirmed as a major change in recruitment processes which had implications for people with disabilities entering the labour market. This is presenting challenges for people with disabilities, but there are also some opportunities. It was noted that digital recruitment must be accessible - avoiding many of the weaknesses in practice, and the unintentional barriers we have noted in this report. The degree to which each person needs support to work through digital recruitment processes also needs to be carefully considered when devising action plans for jobseekers.

## **5.3 Digital Recruitment – Positive Developments and Potential**

In some situations, digital recruitment developments had the potential to be positive for people with disabilities. This linked to 2 key points (a) that the nature of the disability is often central e.g. distinct differences between physical and learning disabilities, and (b) if the person is being supported through the process and the quality of the support they receive.

The practitioners highlighted some positive aspects of digital recruitment. These included:

1. Some people with disabilities are exceptionally good at using digital technology – this may enable them to apply for jobs online without support.
2. For people with physical disabilities and mobility issues, digital recruitment offers the potential to avoid or limit travel to interviews.
3. There are some good examples of easy read documents online and accessible layouts on some websites.
4. Some sites had good processes to store key information such as CVs and could thereby reduce repetition compared with traditional recruitment processes. Public sector recruitment (though not the focus of the Fair Chance project)



was noted as challenging, but some of the sites allow information to be saved and therefore reduces time when a future application is made.

5. Digital recruitment offers potentially better and/or fairer access to recruitment opportunities for people living in remote and rural areas.
6. Digital tools can be useful – for example some employers use Skype to conduct interviews and this has worked well for some applicants.

## 5.4 Digital Recruitment – Challenges

Across all of the sessions there was recognition that this is part of a much wider digital exclusion/inclusion debate. Many of the issues identified are not solely of concern to people with disabilities and those who support them, and they do not apply to every jobseeker who has a disability.

A key distinction throughout the discussions was whether the person applying digitally was receiving direct support to complete applications. In these circumstances, many challenges could be overcome. But realistically this would never be a universal offer. To achieve the targets outlined in the *Fairer Scotland: Employment Action Plan* tens of thousands of people with disabilities will have to move into employment. There is no prospect that the funding will be made available to support each of them through a project or programme. To achieve the Scottish Government's ambitions many people are going to have to get a job under their own steam – if digital recruitment models are actively discriminating against people with disabilities that is a major cause for concern.

There is a fundamental issue of whether the digital recruitment process fits with the supported employment model – it is mainly impersonal and process driven, and does not allow the use of tools such as job matching, onsite coaching and profiling. On the whole, it is not consistent with the values and principles of supported employment.

The practitioners we consulted raised a number of concerns that require consideration by employers and present significant barriers for disabled jobseekers:

1. It was often difficult to find where in the digital process it is possible to raise disability issues and the options for reasonable adjustments. Practitioners reported that there are not always opportunities for clients to state that they have a disability and it can be difficult to find support to make the process more accessible.
2. All processes tended to rely on an expectation the applicant is digitally confident and has access to appropriate hardware. In reality many clients do not have access to digital equipment at home. It is assumed that jobseekers will have PCs or laptops and broadband and an email address. Alternative locations can be used on occasion such as libraries, but these are not always available and may not afford the level of privacy that would be necessary.
3. Many of the recruitment sites are confusing, there was often too much jargon, and the next steps on the recruitment journey were often unclear.
4. This issue is not only about applications – there were digital implications throughout the recruitment phases. Online tests were seen as a particular barrier. Several in use include psychometric elements that are difficult for people to understand. Practitioners also reported that some questions are confusing and difficult to explain to the jobseeker.
5. A key overall observation was the disengagement of some HR staff from the details of how their business is now recruiting online. It was often apparent that they had not tested their own websites. There was often a simple lack of knowledge of the issues in play here, rather than anything deliberate. This linked to the proliferation in the use of third party sites. Practitioners had never come across any evidence that the recruiting managers or HR professionals they worked with had any influence over the digital recruitment platforms that were used, input on their design or further development.

6. A significant amount of time is required to support clients to make online applications. The initial stages such as setting up passwords and remembering email addresses were time consuming even before getting into the main body of the application.
7. Many online processes 'time out' and do not allow the jobseeker to complete the application. This is stressful and frustrating.
8. The process of sifting applications and progressing only those which meet specific requirements (or match an algorithm such as key words) is cost effective for employers. However, this does not take into account the impact on the applicant. Many of the people receiving support lack confidence, have experienced multiple rejections, or have had episodes of mental ill health. In many cases the jobseeker does not receive any notification when their application has been unsuccessful or an explanation why. The online application process may be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of jobseekers and actually push people back instead of moving them forward.
9. Jobs advertised online can often be out of date and may have closed or no further applications are being accepted. Jobseekers can spend time applying for a job they have no chance of getting.
10. Employers can be persuaded in some cases to make adjustments to the recruitment process. However, this required individual negotiations in each case. There were few examples of ongoing arrangements that benefit people with disabilities.
11. Public sector recruitment was seen as particularly challenging - including major employers such as local authorities and the NHS.
12. Practitioners have not been trained to carry out this support – they learn as they go along and support each other within their teams.

13. There is little sharing of intelligence on specific large scale employers - for example, how to tackle the recruitment process for high street retailers. This happens on some occasions within teams but generally each employment workers learns about each employer for them self.
14. Practitioners were not aware of any employers who had carried out user testing of their platforms or who had asked for feedback on their clients' experience of the recruitment process.
15. Some employers do not allow jobseekers to apply again until a specific timescale has elapsed e.g. 6 or 12 months. This was seen as an unnecessary prohibition.
16. Digital recruitment can present ethical difficulties, particularly when completing online tests. Practitioners felt it was important to allow people to make their own decisions and respond to questions as they saw fit. This means they may not intervene when their clients were giving responses that they knew to be wrong.
17. There is some training available for practitioners on the use of assistive technology and equipment, but this can be patchy and it is difficult to stay up to date with new developments.
18. Practitioners were not aware of any recruiting managers they worked with who had knowledge of their business' CSR policies, the targets or ambitions laid out within or their personal contribution to achieving this. This suggests that these policies are not percolating throughout these businesses to the front line.

## 5.5 Potential Developments and Improvements

A key general message of the workshops is the need to raise awareness on these issues and their potential implications – employers are often unaware and, in many cases, would be happy to work with SUSE members if this can help them to get it right.

As previously noted, many of these issues are not exclusive to people with disabilities – they relate to the wider incidence of digital exclusion. In this context, capacity building support is important – ENABLE Scotland's 'One Digital' project was cited as a good example currently providing this. It is a 6 week certificated programme which has supported 100+ participants across 22 sites. Sessions include: IT confidence; social media; CV preparation; on line banking and and on line safety. It mainly supports existing ENABLE Scotland clients, but approaches like this have scope to widen access.

It may be of value to consider producing a generic 'how to' guide in terms of designing a digital recruitment process that assists people with disabilities. This could build on some key learning from Fair Chance and use identified good practice exemplars. Specific work with one or more third party sites on the design and practical application of this guide should also be considered. The guide could articulate links to the requirements of the Equality Act and detail tips, guidance on 'how to', and showcase best practice.

Although it was recognised that the Fair Chance project was focused on private sector employers, most of the findings also apply to the public and voluntary sectors. Future action is required to address challenges in all employment sectors.

# SECTION 6

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Conclusions

**discrimination** **actions not words**  
**improve data gathering**  
**employer commitment** **positive opportunities**  
**simple fixes** **user testing** **better feedback**  
**support and guidance**  
**employer training** **practitioner training**

The Fair Chance project has provided a useful opportunity to test the issues that SUSE members have raised. A number of headline messages are apparent:

- Digital recruitment is now the overwhelming employer recruitment preference and this is only likely to increase further.
- Many digital recruitment processes can disadvantage people with disabilities (and are in practice discriminatory).
- Employers' commitments to CSR are not always percolating throughout organisations as they expect or hope – while recruiting managers are aware of the policies, they do not always have a clear idea of how their actions are contributing to the ambitions laid out.

- Managers often do not have up to date data on the makeup of their organisation, specifically the proportion of their staff who have a disability of long term health condition.
- Employers want to have processes that are fair and want to do the right thing – we are not assuming that they are deliberately acting in ways that are preventing people with disabilities from gaining employment - it is likely that this is an oversight. Put simply, they have just not considered the impact on some jobseekers of their decision to move to a digital recruitment system.
- Some aspects of digital recruitment have the potential to be a positive development for people with disabilities (e.g. Skype interviews), particularly if there is appropriate support throughout the process.
- There are a range of simple and easy fixes to make digital recruitment processes fairer and some good and positive examples to share and build upon.

## 6.2 Recommendations

1. The websites testing process highlighted that none of the testers was able to complete the application process. Employers should be commissioning independent testing of their recruitment platforms. These tests should be carried out by people who have a diverse range of disabilities and health conditions. Providers (including SUSE members) should promote this practice and if necessary campaign for it.
2. Employers should be routinely asking for feedback from job applicants on the recruitment process, particularly their experiences of digital recruitment platforms.
3. Employers' recruitment platforms should always offer support and additional guidance for people who may find them inaccessible.
4. Practitioners (including SUSE members) should encourage HR staff and recruiting managers to understand and engage with the detail of digital recruitment practices in their own organisations and promote improvements.
5. As traditional recruitment mechanisms further reduce, employability providers, funders and commissioners should forward plan for this. In particular, it cannot be assumed that jobseekers have access to IT equipment or locations where they can apply for jobs. A plan is needed to ensure that people are not being denied equal access to vacancies because of these structural barriers.
6. Employers should ensure that accurate data is available throughout their organisation on the number of people with disabilities or health conditions currently in their workforce. Providers (including SUSE members) should highlight this knowledge gap and show how it may be preventing positive developments.
7. Providers, employers, commissioners and funders should recognise the potential opportunities that digital recruitment has for people with disabilities and other



jobseekers (e.g. people in rural communities) and respond appropriately.

8. Providers should not assume that their staff have the skills or experience to support jobseekers with digital recruitment and improvements should be made to staff training if necessary.
9. Providers (including SUSE members) should review their vocational profiling processes to ensure that clients' digital skills are fully assessed and that the extent to which they may need support with online recruitment is recorded and subsequently acted upon.

## 6.3 Next steps

The final aspect of the Fair Chance project is now to share and communicate the learning from this pilot. This should include:

- SUSE members.
- Ongoing work with the Employer Group recruited for the pilot to review the completion of action plans.
- The relevant staff within other employers who are responsible for digital recruitment – including public sector employers.
- Key third sector sites increasingly important via employer outsourcing.
- Employers' bodies.
- Policy makers – specifically the Scottish Government. In April 2019 the *Scottish Government Response to the Consultation on Increasing the Employment of Disabled People in the Public Sector* was published. This is an opportune moment to share the learning from this project in light of the actions Scottish Government intend to take to increase the diversity of public sector workforce. In addition the government are currently creating a Public Social Partnership to work with employers to close the disability employment gap.

# Appendix 1

A series of written documents recording project progress have been produced and informed this report. Many of these contain significant details and have not been presented fully. Nevertheless, SUSE retains these records which will inform future work with the participating employer groups and beyond.

These records are:

- 6 tester reports prepared by Cole AD containing details of the actual experience of people with disabilities seeking to access jobs directly through employer sites, and any other recruitment websites used. These include specific technical recommendations by site on potential improvements;
- 5 employer disability reviews – with the findings summarised in appendix 2;
- 5 employer action plans (considered in section 4).
- Records of practitioner consultations.
- Jobseeker/employee case studies.



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