

The logo for SUSe, with 'S' in blue, 'U' in teal, 'S' in pink, and 'e' in purple. On the left side of the page, there are four vertical bars in blue, teal, pink, and purple, corresponding to the colors in the logo.

SUSe

2024

Annual Conference

CREATING OUR FUTURE

HOW SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT CAN
DIVERSIFY SCOTLAND'S WORKPLACES

CONFERENCE REPORT 2024



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Conference Overview

We were delighted to welcome so many delegates to the SUSE Annual Conference 2024, which took place at the Golden Jubilee Conference Centre on Tuesday 21st May.

We aimed to give delegates some food for thought: what's the economic and policy outlook for the year ahead as we approach a General Election? Is our sector diverse enough and how can we attract people from all parts of our community? What's happening next with the Supported Employment Review recommendations?

Our conference anticipated a UK General Election, as it happened, this was announced the following day.

The discussion topics were prescient and confirmed our desire to be ready for potential policy changes at UK level and how this will impact the employability sector.

Our panel discussion focused on Where are we now? How is No One Left Behind (NOLB) supporting disabled people to achieve their potential?

The programme was about facing the challenges ahead; about being prepared for a future that is changing.



**Facing the
challenges ahead
and being
prepared for a
future that is
changing.**

Sponsors & Supporters

We would like to thank our sponsors and supporters, who helped to make the day as inclusive, engaging and interactive as possible for all delegates.

Our sponsors not only engaged with delegates on the day, but their participation, allowed us to provide complimentary tickets and travel for our Experience Network and provide all the necessary assistive technology to ensure the day was as accessible as possible.

- Values Into Action Scotland
- DFN Project Search
- The Open University
- SCLD
- Brett Nicholls Associates
- Unite Glasgow Not for Profit Branch SC/164/403
- Cole AD
- 50 Degrees
- Fife Council's Supported Employment Service



Supported Employment Review

We invited the Scottish Government to provide delegates with an update on the next stages of the Supported Employment Review. However, delegates were left with many questions about what happens next.

There is a great deal of enthusiasm for the Review recommendations and frustration at the lack of progress.

On its publication, SUSE and our members were encouraged by the Review and agreed with the recommendations, but even in early 2023, it was felt that further work and commitment was required to ensure the recommendations could be implemented effectively.

At the Economy and Fair Work Parliamentary Committee in May, David, along with Ashley Ryan (Enable Works) and Oxana Macgregor-Gunn (SAMH) urged MSPs to move forward with the implementation of the Review recommendations. You can read our summary and the full report on the SUSE website.

David Cameron intends to meet with Scottish Government civil servants to drive forward the need from the sector and SUSE members to progress with the recommendations from the Supported Employment Review. SUSE's Supported Employment Review Working Group have already been contacted and are meeting to agree the approach and next steps.

SUSE members are welcome to support this meeting.
Please contact info@susescotland.scot to express your interest.



Emerging Themes

We heard from inspiring speakers and candid discussion from our panel of experts. Here are some of the key points from the day...

01. Are employability services reaching the people who need them?

30 Local Authority areas reported they were delivering some form of specialist employability support provision and 86% were focused on disabled people. The challenge is volume, variety and the way it's delivered is very different across the country. We need to make sure we are meeting the needs of disabled people who want to access services locally.

02. No-One Left Behind has to get more strategic in its vision and connect across Government to ensure change can be delivered.

Funding for education, employability and social care is delivered as three different areas but there should be a thread that goes through the three.

03. Multi-year funding is essential to the professionalisation of the sector and achieving a quality standard.

Targeted funding and more sustainable investment is required to achieve results by 2038, not a short-term approach that loses people due to lack of investment.

Breakout Sessions

There were 9 breakout sessions throughout the Conference and delegates were invited to register for 3 each. Topics ranged from the barriers to getting more people with learning disabilities into work, providing accessible products and services, to the challenges and opportunities of tackling the rise in economic inactivity. This section gives you an overview of each of the sessions, along with the key discussion and learning points.



1. Employment Barriers



2. Upskilling for the Future



3. Everybody's Welcome



4. Trailblazing Employers



5. Developing a Digital Work Support Platform



6. Neuro-Inclusive Operating Systems



7. Immersive Unconscious Bias



8. How do we Become More Ethnically Diverse?



9. Tackling the Rise in Economic Inactivity

1. Barriers to Getting More People with Learning Disabilities Into Work

Delivered by Chirsty McFadyen (Associate Economist) and Emma Congreve (Deputy Director) at the Fraser of Allander Institute.

Delegates explored barriers to employment for people with learning disabilities (LD), positive employment examples, and strategies to support their workforce integration.

Some of the points raised are summarised here in this note based on post-it notes collected during the session.

Barriers to Hiring People with Learning Disabilities

Perceptions and Stigma: Negative labels and stigma, lack of confidence with legislation and fear of the unknown all feed into conscious and unconscious bias that may be barriers to recruiting people with learning disabilities.

Cost and Resource Concerns: Employers may worry about the costs of necessary workplace adjustments and the time required to support employees with LD. Small employers may feel they lack the time and resources to support employees with LD adequately.

Systemic and Process Barriers: For example, traditional recruitment processes, especially digital or complex ones, pose significant challenges for people with LD.

Low Expectations: Society's low expectations for people with LD can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy where individuals are not given opportunities to prove their capabilities.

Positive Examples of Employment for People with Learning Disabilities

Benefits to businesses: Participants spoke about how employees with LD often exhibit high loyalty and a strong desire to prove their worth, enhancing workplace morale and productivity. Participants had also seen examples of benefits for the wider workforce morale and workplace culture.

Benefits to Individuals: Participants spoke about how employment provides individuals with LD with a sense of independence, confidence, and community integration. It can also help individuals with LD improve their social standing and integrate better into their communities.

Successful Practices

Partnership Working: Collaboration between services and employers provides effective support for individuals with LD.

Work Trials and Adapted Recruitment: Work trials allow individuals with LD to showcase their strengths.

Disability Awareness Training: Training for employers and staff reduces stigma and improves understanding of LD.

Supported Employment and Mentorship: On-the-job support and mentorship are crucial for sustained employment success.

Early Intervention: Engaging individuals with LD (and their parents) early, during school years, and providing continuous support post-employment helps in long-term success.

Flexibility and Adaptation: Employers willing to adapt recruitment processes and provide necessary adjustments create a more inclusive environment.

**On-the-job support and mentorship
are crucial for
sustained employment success.**

2. Upskilling for the Future

Delivered by David Allen (Senior Partnerships Manager) and Page Munro (Partnerships Manager) at the Open University in Scotland.

This session looked at how the world of work is constantly evolving, and it is more important than ever to ensure we are upskilling ourselves to keep up with the pace of change. David and Page introduced delegates to the different ways that the Open University in Scotland can support them to develop skills and grow in their career.

Benefits to Upskilling

Learning and upskilling can help you to feel more confident in your current role, progress in your career or help others to do so. The delegates discussed the benefits of continuous learning and some of the subject areas that could be of most benefit to them.

Learning Opportunities

From free short courses to Microcredentials to full degree programmes, the Open University have something for everyone, no matter where you are in your career or learning journey.

The aim of the session was for delegates to come away feeling excited about their future learning journey and have some great ideas about how they can upskill for the future.

SUSE Members can access all the latest Open University courses via the Members Dashboard on the SUSE website.

3. Everybody's Welcome

Delivered by Catherine Bowie (Director), CBTS Ltd and trainer for Visit Scotland's Welcome to Excellence programme.

This workshop examined how providing accessible products and services offers new opportunities and can contribute to business growth and an improved quality of service for everyone.

- More than 1 in 5 potential UK consumers have a disability.
- Businesses lose approximately £2 billion a month by ignoring the needs of disabled people.
- 73% – 73% of potential disabled customers experience barriers on more than a quarter of websites they visited.
- 75% – 75% of disabled people and their families have walked away from a UK business because of poor accessibility or customer service.
- The spending power of disabled people and their household continues to increase and is currently (2020) estimated to be worth £274 billion per year to UK business.

(We Are Purple 2023)

Delegates discussed the importance of inclusivity in employment and service and looked at the businesses behind the Purple Pound and how others are encouraged to get involved.

Their importance of engaging with agencies such as Welcome Me, Accessible, Euan's Guide and Purple Tuesday, Tourism for All and various campaigns was discussed. The session highlighted the importance of inclusive language and demonstrated what a warm welcome looks like.

Delegates then looked into practical ways to make their business or service more accessible. They discussed the importance of getting feedback and acting on it, along with how to give constructive feedback to organisations

This practical workshop was shaped by the lived experience in the room and discussed real-life examples of great service or where improvements could have been made.

**Businesses lose approximately £2 billion a month
by ignoring the needs of disabled people.**

4. Trailblazing Employers Panel

A discussion with a panel of employers who are passionate about their vision of creating truly diverse and disability inclusive workplaces.

The panel was hosted by Grant Thoms who was joined by Allan MacKillop (Disability Strategist and former DEI Manager with the BT Group), Gerry McKeown (Development and Enterprise Manager at Camphill Blair Drummond), Steven Coutts (CEO of COPE Ltd) and Lisa Cathro (Owner and Manager of Zest Café).

During this session, the panel discussed:

- **Rethinking Recruitment** (alternative recruitment methods to reach a more diverse pool of candidates),
- **Building a Disability Inclusive Workplace** (the small changes employers can make to foster a more supportive environment for all employees),
- **Successful Job Carving** (providing training to managers and colleagues to ensure initiatives succeed), and
- **Supported Employment in Practice** (employers experience of working with Supported Employment providers and success stories).

The discussions focused on some key themes:

- Depending on the role, consider the need for formal interview questions.
- Consider job carving for all role levels, not just entry level, and create an environment where disabled people can thrive.
- Many organisations will job carve already but may not call it that. It's about being flexible with elements of the job role and shaping it to make the most of the skills of the employee.
- Encourage open conversations between colleagues and managers.
- Create employee networks and ally groups for informal support.
- Join a Disability Quality Network to meet and share learning with other employers.
- Be positive employer role models and speak about the benefits of a diverse workforce.
- Make use of support services and free advice such as Supported Employment.
- Culture change is a long process, especially in large organisations, but it is possible and rewarding.
- Use data to understand what's working and what's not.

5. Developing a Digital Work Support Platform

Delivered by Dr Elaine Wainwright (Impact Coordinator) and Stuart Anderson (Centre Manager), Centre for Musculoskeletal Health and Work (CMHW).

The CMHW is a multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional research collaboration which seeks to identify cost-effective ways to minimise the adverse impacts of musculoskeletal disorders in the workplace.

CMHW held an interactive discussion workshop to discuss the Centre's current plans to bring together seven evidence-based work support interventions into a single online hub for people with musculoskeletal health conditions, to help them remain in work as long as they wish to do so.

After an initial presentation outlining the need for a central, clear, and reliable online repository of work support resources, followed by an overview of each of the planned projects for included in the initial build of such a platform, the presenters opened up a broader discussion to SUSE delegate attendees. Feedback from this lively discussion included:

- Overall impressions - The idea is a timely one; bringing together high-quality information in confusing online environment is much needed.
- Need for continued engagement - Any platform shouldn't just be a 'one way' informational resource – there is a need for continued repeat engagement through provision of genuinely useful tools and resources for the end user.
- Content needs to be high-quality - Initial programmes included at the start of the project are all evidence-informed. However, content gaps and additional needs will emerge as the platform is built and used, so there is a need to ensure that any additional programmes are of a similar high standard in terms of quality of content, and also user-engagement and accessibility.

- Not just for 'patients'! - People who might benefit from the support of a central support platform may not consider themselves 'ill' or 'patients'. This could have a major influence on how the platform is branded, and how marketing initiatives are positioned, and could also have important implications for including future preventative content.
- Resources for employers and third parties – Recognition that work support is a two-way street. Attendees were very keen to see how such a platform might be made available as a resource for employers, line managers and OH departments or providers.
- Importance of public awareness - It is important that people are made aware of the platform; it doesn't matter how effective it may otherwise be. Engagement with interested parties and marketing strategies need to be in place from the start of the project to help ensure its ultimate sustainability.
- Equality, inclusion and diversity - Accessibility of the platform as a whole, as well as each intervention or project within it, was emphasised as key and a minimum (high standard) must be part of any entry criteria for additional intervention projects.

The CMHW team left the event with plenty to consider as they develop their plans – we look forward to hopefully hearing more about this project in the future!

Continued user engagement is key to the development and on-going success of central support platform.

7. Immersive Unconscious Bias

Delivered by Mike Douglas, from Age Scotland.

Delegates had the chance to explore their unconscious bias through this workshop, which was based on one of Age Scotland's 3 hour training options, funded by the Scottish Government.

How can we stop a bias if it is unconscious?

Through a workshop that puts you inside your own biases and exposes you to them. It can be uncomfortable but one of the few ways we can make change.

The session examined how much information a person can process at one time, how this differs from person to person and how people react positively or negatively in an instant based on their biases.

Biases are formed at a young age, often before 6 years old, and we are trying to run inclusive workplaces with adults, when biases are already formed. It takes so many forms, racial, age, gender and disability bias. Even a name, when a person from Brazil with a degree was applying for 200 jobs and didn't get invited to interview, until he changed his name.

Delegates explored examples of age related bias through the use of videos set in the workplace. They saw how the assumptions employees made had an impact on their colleagues, not only personally but also on career progression.

Getting employees more equipped to call out unacceptable behaviour is the only way you will change the culture of your organisation. It is important to recognise when unconscious bias takes over. Remembering that unconscious biases are not just visual, they can come from what people do, how they speak, or what they are interested in.

When busy, this is when unconscious bias takes over and you make irrational decisions. Challenge yourself and be aware of the triggers.

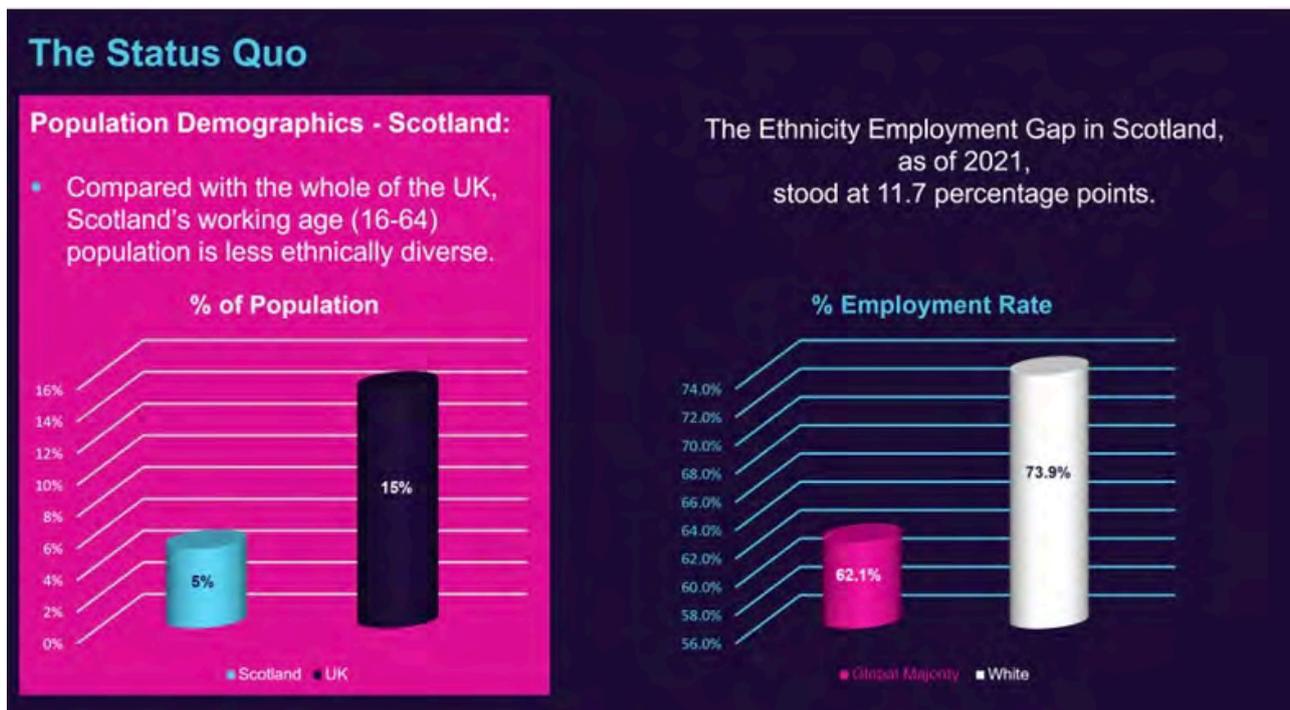
- Be honest when you get something wrong.
- Make sure when running project teams, meetings or events to deliberately break up the 'in' groups.
- Put certain tasks on a rota.
- Learn about different biases and pull out which ones you think affect you.
- Make sure there is diversity on recruitment panels.
- Try to avoid and call out stereotypical views.

8. How Do We Become More Ethnically Diverse?

Delivered by Tony McCaffery (Founder & CEO), Diversity Scotland.

This workshop examined on the current lack of focus in relation to ethnic diversity from the Employability / Supported Employment sectors as well as the wider VSCE sector in Scotland.

The context?



- Many in Scotland do not fully understand racism, often questioning if it's related to prejudice, discrimination, bullying, harassment, protesting, politics, or institutional systems.
- Throughout the session Tony defined concepts such as prejudice, discrimination, power, oppression, and racism, emphasising how it is the oppression (not discrimination) of marginalised racial or ethnic groups that creates the different types of racism present in Scotland today.
- Tony stressed the importance of starting education around racial (in)equity from a primary school age.

The Status Quo:

- Tony and attendees explored the causes of the Ethnicity Employment Gap in Scotland. In particular, highlighting issues like the Ethnicity Pay Gap, disproportionate offering of zero-hour contracts and low-paid employment, lack of role models, and the need for a more mature and dedicated focus on the attraction of racialised job applicants.

Call to Action:

- Session attendees agreed that significantly more work is needed to truly explore what actions are needed to change the status quo, and that further development workshops should be facilitated by Diversity Scotland and SUSE to address this with members and sector stakeholder.

We are holding another opportunity for SUSE members to get together to discuss these issues and identify actions for the sector to address. If you would like to attend please contact info@susescotland.scot.

Tuesday 27th August

2pm - 4.30pm

Online

Important to start education around racial equity at primary school age.

9. Tackling the Rise in Economic Inactivity: Challenges and Opportunities

Delivered by David MacDougall, Managing Consultant at 50 Degrees.

This workshop focused on the impact of economic inactivity and the challenges and opportunities this presents to policy makers. The presentation was very timely as a new Government will be elected on the 4th of July. Economic inactivity and wider welfare reform will be a pressing policy priority.

Our workshop started by presenting DWP data that highlighted the extent of the problem in Scotland. We used the rapid rise in economic inactivity in Glasgow and North Lanarkshire to demonstrate the scale of the problem. This included an overview of the underlying issues that have driven the accelerated rise of economic inactivity since 2019 including changes to the benefit system, a rise in claimants with a health condition (mental health & MSK) and a lack of service integration which made it difficult for claimants to navigate through the benefits system.

The final slides focused on what future policies a Westminster Government would focus on the implications this would have on Scotland. We provided some examples of good practice already taking place within devolved English regions (Greater Manchester and London) and highlighted some previous initiatives that mirrored policy announcements that have already been made (Youth Guarantee, Devolved Employability Programmes, Individual Placement Support).

The key takeaways from this group discussion feedback is that any future welfare to work programmes should be:

1. Opportunity to change the existing landscape after the General Election and harness greater partnership working across the public, voluntary and private sectors.
2. The potential for Westminster and Holyrood Parliaments to work together to address economic inactivity through closer policy collaboration.
3. Learn and share best practice from across the UK through stronger networks.

Delegate Feedback

96% of delegates enjoyed the Conference

96% of delegates stated that they learned something new

89% were happy or very happy with the workshop options

89% found the workshops to be useful or very useful

The workshop on the diversity of the employability sector was highlighted by delegates. We have planned more member discussions on this topic for Tues 27th Aug. Please contact info@susescotland.scot if you would like to attend the online session.

Delegates also emphasised their frustration at the situation the employability sector is currently in. They called on Scottish Government for action to:

- fund Supported Employment services
- invest in Professional Development Awards in the employability sector
- focus more on employers and continue the work of Apt, to dispel myths around employing disabled people and ensure workplaces are set up for all employees to succeed.

Following the Conference, we have re-engaged members of our Supported Employment Review Working Group and are meeting in August. David Cameron intends to meet with Scottish Government to drive forward the need from the sector and SUSE members to progress with the recommendations from the Supported Employment Review. SUSE members are welcome to support this meeting. Please contact info@susescotland.scot to express your interest.

“A worthwhile day and very enjoyable.”

“Good range of speakers and debate and on a really topical subject.”

“Very well organised and varied content.”

“There seemed to be a great buzz at the conference.”

“Overall, a great day, thank you.”

The Conference in Images



Thank you for joining us at the SUSE Annual Conference 2024

Contact

SUSE
1 Neasham Drive
Kirkintilloch
East Dunbartonshire
G66 3FA

www.suse.org.uk
info@susescotland.scot