

SUSE/Apt PSP Conference

Delivering a Centre of Excellence for Scotland's Employers

The session included an overview of the 'journey so far', covering what a PSP is and how Apt has functioned up to this point. Participants were then introduced to the long-term objective of creating a Centre of Excellence; a one-stop resource hub for employers who seek to diversify their workforce and take a positive and pro-active approach to recruiting and retaining more disabled people in their organisations.

Whilst there are many aspects of this development that require further consideration, the session focused on three key areas in order to make best use of time:

1. Lived Experience – how do we ensure that disabled people are at the heart of the Centre of Excellence, informing and influencing its work and driving continuous improvement?
2. Location – is a Centre of Excellence a physical place? Is it virtual? How do we serve the whole of Scotland?
3. Products/Services – what should a Centre of Excellence actually deliver? Is it face to face or virtual (or both)?

Importantly, the session was introduced as the first of many ongoing opportunities for consultation. With this in mind, we would suggest that a further consultation exercise is undertaken in a few months' time. This should take a few different forms – surveys, group consultations, 1:1 meetings and audio/video feedback. This seems to sit well with the ongoing work of the Apt Sustainability Group.

There was also an overarching principle that the Centre of Excellence should be underpinned by the social model of disability. Further, that this should be evident in all related information and a session available on this for those who are not familiar with the language.

Feedback from the participants on each of the key areas was as follows:

Lived Experience

- People with lived experience should be employed within the Centre of Excellence
- The majority of people delivering training and providing consultancy should be disabled people.
- The majority of people in decision making roles within the Centre of Excellence should be disabled people
- There should be a phone-based service for disabled people to access information from the CofE

- More face-to-face opportunities – this may be more valuable to some disabled people. May also allow for more robust data about what we are delivering and its impact.
- Increase number of disabled people on the Steering Group
- Offer more training and support to disabled people to increase the number of people who can play an active meaningful role in the CofE.
- A key part of the offer to employers is that input will be delivered by people with lived experience, tools and supports are tested by and endorsed by disabled people
- More training for all stakeholders to better understand the particular needs of under-represented groups for whom the disability employment gap is far greater
- Opportunities for disabled people to share experiences and information (face to face and virtual)

Location

There was a mix of thoughts on this subject, with the merits of both a physical and virtual base being considered. However, there was some discussion after capturing individual thoughts, and there was a consensus that a positive scenario – in order to be able to serve the whole country - was to have a small central base, and then have ways to work both virtually and locally. In an ideal world, all 32 local authorities would each commit to providing some space for a defined amount of time each month, providing a local 'hot desk' network that covers all of Scotland. This would reflect a commitment from all LAs to reducing the Disability Employment Gap.

Aside from this discussion, the individual point raised at the session were:

- Mostly an online resource but a floating monthly meeting at different locations
- SUSE to act as a 'triage' service for PSP partners
- Locations across the country by using a 'partners' model where delivery partners offer space to each other
- Using local/community spaces, but otherwise online
- Physical space – maybe in each council area. Mix of 1:1, group and online meetings
- Better use of forums and webinars
- Peripatetic meetings with communities and businesses
- Online chat function
- Virtual presence but contacts in each LA with options to meet and physically visit employers
- Local spaces being offered free of charge, but costs applied when booking for training etc.
- Virtual but meeting physically on an 'as and when required' basis
- Core staff base but using premises of partners across the country
- 'Satellite' bases to be able to offer face to face sessions as needed
- E-learning and Zoom/Teams based support also available

Products and Services

- HR Support for employers to develop processes around accessibility and inclusive practices
- Training – online and in person
- Advice – maybe a helpline?
- Employment information that is always current and up to date
- Mentoring – someone embedded within an organisation for a period to support change
- Signposting & Networking
- Evaluation & action planning for/with employers
- Financial advice for employers
- Career advice for employees
- Inclusive induction programmes and employee support plans which employers can use/develop/tweak
- Inclusive adverts, application forms, interview guides
- Regular case studies/good news stories
- Updates on local/regional/national guidance
- E-learning modules
- Locally based trainers/advisors with different specialisms
- Accreditation (Does this matter? Might it be a way in for employers? Is there something better than Disability Confident?)
- Forums that link employers & employability services – maybe with different themes
- 1hr online intro to inclusive employment – a taster that could lead to employers buying other products/services
- Other services delivered on a consultancy basis, with a standard cost
- Revising the role of ‘job coaches’ and providing this input if needed
- A mixture of good online tools tested by employers and endorsed by disabled people
- A mixture of online and in-person options (this was reflected a number of times)
- A basic package offer which is free, then bespoke offers that incur a cost for employers (this should include an initial evaluation and Action Plan; the agreed package is for delivery of that Action Plan.)
- A Train the Trainer approach – organisations can have a role in training others

There are some obvious themes and priorities arising even from this early feedback. It's important that this initial consultation is followed up and widened to include as many people as possible. This is partly to help inform the business case for supporting a Centre of Excellence going forward, but also to ensure that it is designed in a way that directly responds to the needs of those who will benefit most from its work.

Emma Soanes (Unity)
David Stewart (Fedcap Scotland)
May 2022