

# SUSE

# Annual Conference 2023

The Inclusive Employer

16<sup>th</sup> May 2023

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# Conference Overview

We were delighted to welcome so many delegates to the SUSE Annual Conference 2023, in partnership with Apt PSP, to Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh.

It has been a significant year for our sector with the publication of the Scottish Government's Supported Employment Review, the launch of the Shared Prosperity Fund, the continued roll out of No One Left Behind – and of course, a very challenging economy and turbulent political environment.

The agenda was designed to be informative, challenging and fun.

Our panel discussion focused on Economic Inactivity - the record number of working age people who are not in employment in the UK. We asked - is it time for a new New Deal?

We recognised the organisations and individuals who have contributed to making disability inclusive workplaces, during the inaugural Apt Awards presentation.

# Sponsors and 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, along with our other supporters, 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.

**Headline Sponsor** - [Diversity Scotland](#)

**Workshop Sponsors** - [Fedcap Scotland](#) and [Enable Works](#)

## **Exhibitors...**

[British Association for Supported Employment](#) (BASE)

[DFN Project SEARCH](#)

[Values Into Action Scotland](#) [Cole AD](#)

[Lugo IT](#)

[Fife Council](#)

## **And our other supporters...**

LAMH

Brett Nicholls Associates

The Alliance Scotland

Unite the Union Glasgow Not-for-profit branch

The James T Howat Charitable Trust

# 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...

## Put Disability on the DEI Agenda

We need to bring disability into the core of conversation on diversity and inclusion and make it part of what employers are working towards otherwise disabled people are overlooked when it comes to policy, practice, education, opportunity and also around disabled employees as to the help available as well.

## Data is Key

Both employers and employees need to understand the value in collecting data. Employees need to feel included and valued to be encouraged to share their information. There needs to be a match between policy and processes and organisational culture.

## We Need a New New Deal

However it needs to be an evolved New Deal - repackaged and reflective of our time. There needs to be better integration and joined-up services to allow a national programme to be successfully delivered at a local level, especially rural areas. The Supported Employment model works for disabled people but there needs to be a decluttering of the employability landscape to make it easier for people to access the services they need.

# Breakout Sessions

There were 9 breakout sessions throughout the Conference and delegates were invited to register for 3 each. Topics ranged from the challenges and opportunities in the Scottish Economy, to data collection to elevate your business. This section provides you with an overview of each of the sessions, along with the key discussion and learning points and delegate input.

1. Scottish Economy
2. Engaging Employers
3. Trailblazing Employers
4. The 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution
5. SUSE and BASE – our development partnership
6. Making Digital Recruitment Fair
7. The UK Employability Landscape and Scotland
8. Diversity Data Collection to Elevate your Business
9. Digital Tools for Supported Employment

# Scottish Economy Challenges and Opportunities - Now and in the Future

Adam McGeoch, Economist Fellow at the University of Strathclyde's Fraser of Allander Institute, delivered a workshop on the current state of the Scottish economy and the challenges and opportunities that lie further afield.

## Where are we now?

Recent indicators suggest that the UK economy is showing signs of improvement, aligning with key forecasters' beliefs that the country is likely to avoid a technical recession in 2023. The first estimate of economic growth in the first quarter of 2023, released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), revealed a modest 0.1% growth during that period. Notably, the public sector had a negative impact on growth, with contractions observed in public administration, health, and education due to strikes in certain regions of the UK. Despite weak growth, the overall trend indicates some positive developments in both the UK and Scottish economies.

The tight labour market in the UK is putting upwards pressure on wages. This imbalance, with too few people available for too many jobs, gives employees a stronger bargaining position and contributes to significant wage growth. So, while a good deal of the stubbornly high inflation is driven by food and energy prices, there are also sources of domestically generated inflation as the price of labour gets more expensive.

To combat this persistent inflation, the Bank of England has raised interest rates for the 12th consecutive time, bringing the rate to 4.5%. The Bank's economic outlook for the UK has significantly improved compared to their previous forecasts in February.

They anticipate a flat first half of 2023, followed by growth in the second half, with projected growth rates of 0.7% in 2023 and 0.8% in 2024. However, the 2024 growth figure is notably below the current forecast from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), indicating a relatively weak outlook.

The Bank's expectations were for inflation to decline sharply from April, partially due to high price levels from the previous year serving as a comparison. The latest inflation data for April 2023, published on the 24th of May, shows an inflation rate of 8.7%, down from 10.1% in March – slightly higher than what the Bank had forecast earlier this month. The Bank forecasts inflation to come down to around 5% by the end of this year. It is important to note that core inflation (inflation excluding food and fuels), often considered as domestically driven demand, rose in April to 6.8% (a 31-year high) from 6.2% in March therefore, we will be watching closely as the Bank's Monetary Policy Committee decides on whether to raise the rates again next month on June 22nd.

## **Challenges (and opportunities) in the future**

The past few years have presented the economy with unprecedented challenges, but we cannot lose sight of the longer-term issues in our economy that are not going away, and, if anything, have been exacerbated by current conditions. These 'Grand Challenges' are not limited to but include climate change, automation, productivity, demographic change, and poverty.

We regularly publish analysis that looks at these short and longer-term challenges facing the Scottish, UK, and Global economies. If you would like to read more about our research on these issues, then please visit [fraserofallander.org](https://fraserofallander.org), or get in touch with us!

Adam McGeoch, Economist Fellow, Fraser of Allander Institute  
24/05/2023

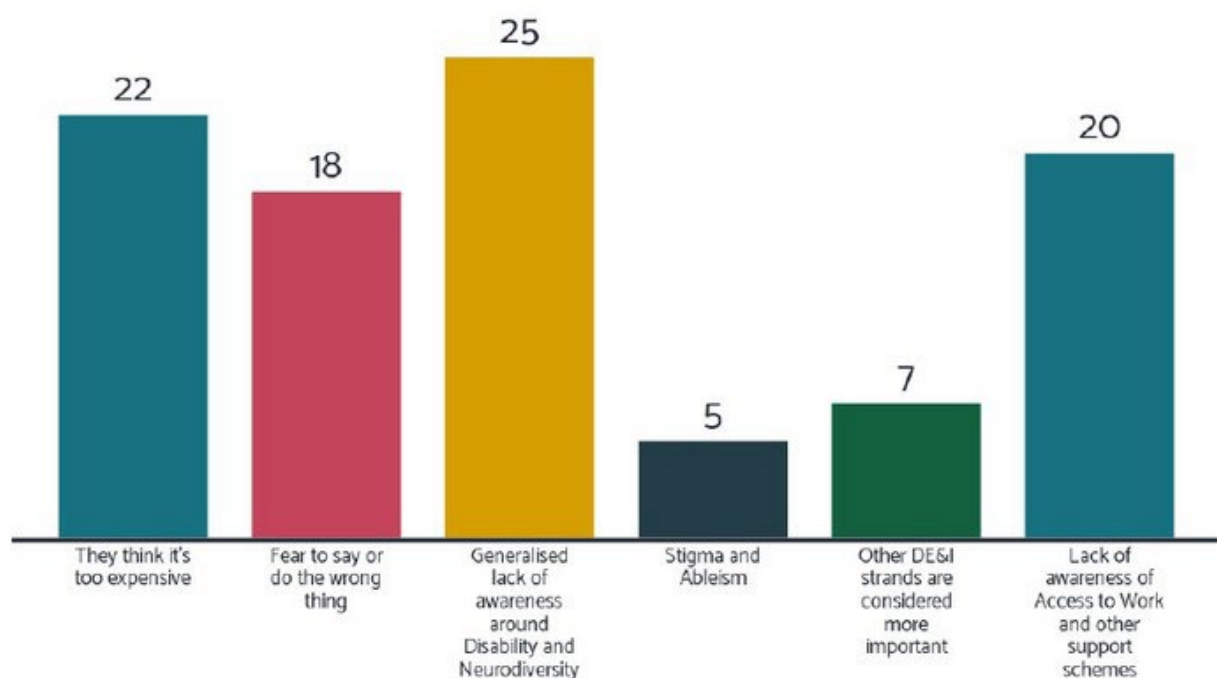


# Engaging Employers

Federico Marchioli, Senior Consultant with The Clear Company, led a workshop on how to engage employers to support more inclusive and accessible workplaces.

The workshop aimed to start a conversation around how we can engage employers with our agenda, supporting more inclusive and accessible workplaces. There was a discussion about the main challenges to employer engagement and how to overcome them – driving the conversation around recruitment as an opportunity, disability inclusion, reasonable adjustments, and the importance of building flexible work environments benefitting all employees.

Delegates were asked why they think only 4% of employers consider disability in their DEI initiatives:



The majority felt there was a general lack of awareness around disability and neurodiversity, closely followed by the feeling that it was too expensive.

Interestingly they also acknowledge that employers have a lack of awareness of the support that is available to them.

Delegates were also asked to prepare a Wellbeing Passport and to think about what questions they could ask to make employees feel supported at work.

A Wellbeing Passport is a designed to support discussions around identifying and removing barriers to enable the potential of everyone to be fully realised in the workplace.

1. Would you benefit from a buddy or support outwith your team manager?
2. Are there any tools you have used in a previous workplace that you would like us to implement?
3. What are your preferred communication methods?
4. What do you need to make your workspace comfortable?
5. What are your current coping strategies and what support would you require for overwhelming circumstances?

Delegates also highlighted that it may be good to discuss Wellbeing Passports at interview stage, as well as asking the employee who they are happy for the information to be shared with. It was also discussed that Wellbeing Passports could be offered to all employees to help avoid any potential stigma.

# Trailblazing PSP Employers

Ryan King, from Fedcap Scotland, led a panel of Trailblazing Public Social Partnership (PSP) employers in Scotland who are actively working towards reducing the Disability Employment Gap.

The workshop highlighted the innovative strategies and practices employed by these employers to create diverse and disability-inclusive workplaces. We explored the insights shared by a panel of prominent PSP employers, including: Michael Cusack from ACS Clothing, Victoria Erasmus from Glen Mhor Hotel and Uilebheist Brewery, Kat Moir from Ambassador Theatre Group, and Debbie Kerr from Borders College.

The discussion primarily focuses on three key areas: rethinking recruitment,

- job carving, and
- fostering an inclusive workplace culture.

## **Rethinking Recruitment: Opening Doors to New Horizons**

The concept of rethinking recruitment emerged as a powerful catalyst for change. We were inspired by the examples of employers embracing Disability Confident hiring, ensuring equal opportunities for all applicants. This invaluable insight illuminated the path to inclusive growth and challenged our own perceptions of how recruitment can be transformed to welcome a diverse range of candidates.

Actively promoting participation in the Disability Confident scheme and communicating openness to provide reasonable adjustments throughout the recruitment process.

Collaborating with supported employment providers, disability organisations and support networks to tap into a wider talent pool. This collaboration helps in identifying suitable candidates, providing necessary support, and building effective partnerships.

## **Job Carving: Unleashing the Potential Within**

We explored the impact job carving has on unleashing the potential within all employees. Through individualised job design, these employers skillfully reshaped roles to align with the unique strengths and abilities of their disabled workforce.

Job carving involves restructuring existing roles to match the skills and abilities of individuals with disabilities, creating opportunities that suit their unique strengths:

**Individualised Job Design:** Employers recognise that disabled employees possess diverse talents and abilities. By customising job roles and tasks, employers optimise the skills of disabled employees, ensuring they contribute effectively to the organisation's success.

**Collaborative Approach:** Employers involve disabled employees in the job carving process, allowing them to identify areas where their skills can be utilised effectively. This inclusive approach enhances job satisfaction, productivity, and fosters a sense of belonging among employees.

### **Workplace Culture: A Beacon of Empowerment**

The workshop brought to light the profound significance of fostering an inclusive workplace culture. The panel shared stories of how these actions propelled their organisations forward, cultivating an environment where every individual felt valued and empowered.

Creating an inclusive workplace culture is crucial for reducing the Disability Employment Gap and promoting diversity:

**Sensitisation and Training:** Trailblazing PSP employers prioritise disability awareness training for all employees, promoting empathy, understanding, and effective communication. Such initiatives help build a culture of respect and support within the organisation.

**Reasonable Accommodations:** Employers ensure that reasonable accommodations are provided to disabled employees to facilitate their work and maximise their potential. This may include physical modifications, assistive technologies, flexible work arrangements, or accessible communication tools.

The vision of a truly inclusive workforce can be realised, creating a society where every individual has equal opportunities for employment and success. For more information on how you can become a trailblazing employer contact [amrit@susescotland.scot](mailto:amrit@susescotland.scot)

# The 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution

Jennifer Remnant, from the University of Strathclyde, led a workshop on the priorities of disabled people in relation to the changes in technology contemporary workplaces.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution, 4IR, or Industry 4.0, is the idea that rapid changes to technology, industry, societal patterns and processes in the 21st century resulting from interconnectivity and smart automation will, over time, irreversibly alter the workplace.

Disabled people represent an important, but underrepresented stakeholder within these changes. The digitisation of communication and interpersonal interactions, improvements in technology and, more recently, the increase in remote and hybrid working has changed the employment landscape for disabled people, including disabled scientists/robotics experts.

Further changes and innovations have the potential to trigger a substantial reduction in the under and unemployment of disabled people, which is an important aim of the Scottish Government's Fair Work agenda.

Through a combination of short presentations and facilitated discussions, we addressed the challenges and opportunities resulting from IR4.0 and explored ideas for the future.

Delegates highlighted the use of tools to make writing more accessible, such as Chat GPT and SIRI, and the use of AI in making workplaces more accessible but also the need for regulation. Discussion was given to the thought that large organisations will have an advantage over smaller organisations.

# SUSE and BASE - Our Training and Development Partnership

This workshop, delivered by Nerise Oldfield-Thompson from BASE, was the opportunity to explore how British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) and Scottish Union for Supported Employment (SUSE) could work more collaboratively and to find out the attendee's views on how the partnership could look and also ideas for what could be done together to move forward.

Alistair Kerr, BASE Scotland rep gave an update on the work BASE is doing in Scotland and how the wider work within the UK links with priorities in Scotland, which included how Sustainable Procurement Duty's and Supporting dedicated Frameworks can develop Sustainable Employment opportunities for disabled people in our local communities.

Delegates represented a range of organisations including supported employment services, employers, commissioners, further education providers, supported employment participants.

It was a great opportunity to be interactive and gain people's views on what the attendees want to see from the partnership and how these can be implemented. There was a lot of feedback and suggestions from the group and below are some of the highlights:

- We need the two voices, i.e. the two different organisations but also need the organisations to work collaboratively across a range of themes Dedicated resources to drive the strategic ambitions forward.
- Collective representation and lobbying at government level.
- Sharing regular information and knowledge from both organisations to ensure members are kept up-to-date.

- Ensuring employers are welcome as members to both organisations. Ensuring that quality framework for supported employment is the same across organisations, it does not need to be different. Drive quality together. One Single Point of Contact across the organisations.
- Bring together communities of practice.

### **Next Steps**

BASE and SUSE will review all the feedback and look at how we can implement the suggestions into the partnership work going forward to support our aims and missions of both organisations.

# Making Digital Recruitment Fair

This workshop, delivered by Fiona Walker from SUSE, Emma McLatchie from Cole AD and Neil Skene from Apt's Experience Network, highlighted the process of reviewing online recruitment and the common barriers found. It focused on the top tips to combat these barriers and improve the accessibility of the online recruitment process.

## What do we mean by accessibility?

Online accessibility is ensuring that your website and its content can be accessed by as many people as possible including disabled and non-disabled users. The aim of online accessibility is to remove barriers that might prevent a user from fully interacting with your website, regardless of their ability or circumstances.

## Why is this important?

Almost all recruitment is done online and many employers only accept online applications. During our recent Digital Recruitment Reviews we've found that almost all testers require support to submit an application. In fact, an average of 18% of testers were unable to complete all the tasks required to submit an application for each vacancy. For each vacancy reviewed, on average 56% of testers stated they would not apply for a job again with that employer.

We have found there are commonly recurring barriers, regardless of website, sector, vacancy type, or technical knowledge or skills of the applicant. These were discussed in details with delegates and are highlighted here.

## Online Accessibility is Everyone's Responsibility!

It's a common assumption that the accessibility of your website is the responsibility of the web team or the web developer who built the site or that it is expensive or difficult to achieve. That isn't necessarily true.

- Does your HR team write job descriptions and job specifications which are used online?
- Does your marketing team upload images and write articles for your website and social media?
- Does your admin team create Word or PDF documents which are used online?



Everyone who contributes to the online recruitment process needs to consider online accessibility. There are some elements of accessibility that you will need the help of a web developer to implement, but there are improvements you can make right now, with just a little bit of knowledge and technical know-how:

1. Use clear and simple language - avoid abbreviations and jargon
2. Provide clear instructions
3. Be open to people applying in different formats
4. Use appropriate headings and sub-headings - be consistent with styling
5. Add alt-text to images
6. Ensure online forms are accessible
7. Ensure error messages are helpful
8. Consider colour contrast between font colour and background colour.
9. Provide information for disabled applicants
10. Can you navigate your website using your keyboard?

### **It's good to Review!**

When did you last review your organisation's online recruitment process?

If you would like to discuss a Digital Recruitment Review please contact Fiona Walker, Digital Communications Officer at [fiona@susescotland.scot](mailto:fiona@susescotland.scot)

# The UK Employability Landscape: What it means for Scotland

This workshop was presented by David MacDougall and Will Freer from 50 Degrees.

The workshop aimed to provide an overview of national employability programmes managed and delivered through the UK government in Westminster. It began by first explaining some context on the economically inactive cohort in Scotland and how it has changed in recent years, what the makeup of the cohort looks like, and how this compares with the rest of the UK. We explored how Westminster has reacted to the increase in economic inactivity and how their response, in terms of strategy and funding, will generate new risks and opportunities in Scotland.

We explored what benefits data can tell us about inactivity. This centred around the large-scale increase in the last few years of the UC 'No work requirements' claimant group, in particular how people have been moved from ESA onto this new benefit and what these changes mean for both claimants and the Scottish government.

We posed a series of questions which focused on how future employability programmes could be better integrated and designed, and what we could learn from previous programmes. The key takeaways from this group discussion is that any future welfare to work programmes should:

- Be delivered primarily via local organisations that hold the knowledge base, trust, and have the passion that will enable them to work successfully with service users.
- Support needs to be targeted and individualised, rather than focusing on large-scale volumes and 'box-ticking' outcomes.

- Be accessible and engaging to enable those who would benefit most from those services to get to use them.
- Be able to find the right balance between supporting those back into work who have left the labour market and supporting those to stay in work who might otherwise slip out of the labour market with no intervention.
- Funding will be key, budgets are tight and previously used sources of funding are evolving, but without the right level of resource behind these programmes, there is only so much that they can do.

# Diversity Data Collection to Elevate your Business

This workshop, delivered by Norma Curran and Julie Sart from Values Into Action Scotland, and Tony McCaffery from Diversity Scotland, covered the following:

- What data do we currently collect?
- Why could more detailed data collection be required?
- What are the range of disabilities and how might we group them for data collection purposes?
- Data that should be collected.
- The importance of leadership; building trust with existing disabled employees and using data gathered to attract new disabled applicants.

Delegates participated well in the workshop and we gathered some of the responses that people gave.

## Why Collect Data?

- Staff surveys (covering protected characteristics) Disability monitoring
- Health questionnaires
- Well-being data (then offering well-being passports) Skills survey
- Satisfaction data Postcode
- You can't make improvements if you don't know your starting point Impact measurement
- To identify gaps- what is missing?
- It is a persuasive way to encourage others

## Why could more detailed data collection be required?

- There is not enough data collected through initial questionnaires  
People might not feel confident about disclosing data up front in a new company
- A better understanding of the nature of disability perhaps using the census categories
- Intersectional analysis from data? Not everyone fits comfortably into boxes

We also demonstrated the significantly low numbers of people from under-represented groups in employment including people with significant hearing loss; sight loss; autism and learning disabilities.

## What are the range of disabilities and how might we group them for data collection purposes?

People listed a wide range of disabilities including those relating to hearing loss, sight loss, autism and physical disabilities. Facial disfigurement was also mentioned as a characteristic protected under the Equality Act which not everyone is aware of. No-one mentioned learning disabilities, and this was surprising as they had been mentioned in the previous slide of the presentation. When this was pointed out to delegates, they were quite shocked that no-one had mentioned them particularly because of all under-represented groups they are the lowest at only 7% in paid work.

We rounded up by listing the groupings used within the Census.

## Data that Should be Collected

- Where applicants came from
- Candidate source
- How their disability or health condition affects them and how they manage it
- Access to internal promotions
- Review the number and range of opportunities to share their data
- Salary data
- Exit data
- Turnover monitoring
- Sickness rates
- Return to work interviews conducted
- Types of roles that people have

## **The Importance of Leadership: Building trust with existing disabled employees and using data gathered to attract new disabled applicants**

We concluded by talking about the role of leadership in change management requiring companies to help people buy into their vision for the organisation.

We gave examples of good leadership:

- McDonalds general induction and recruitment policies under Paul Preston
- Channel 4 – Tell Us Campaign

A full workshop in Disability Diversity Data Collection has been developed for SUSE and Apt and will be launching soon. If you would like to register your interest for this workshop please email [info@susescotland.scot](mailto:info@susescotland.scot).

# Digital Tools for Supported Employment

This session, presented by Dave Gardener from Enable Works, introduced delegates to the Erasmus+ programme funded Belvedere project.

The objective of the Belvedere Project is to equip professionals who support disadvantaged young people and adults in the employability sector with the digital skills needed both to increase the quality of their work, and to help to empower those they are working with. Working as one of seven partners across Austria, Germany, Scotland, and Spain, Enable Works has been involved with the project since its inception in 2021.

The session introduced the project, and the partners. Delegates were then invited to discuss in groups what digital literacy means to them, and what it means in relation to the employability sector. Following the discussions and feedback, delegates were introduced to the four outputs of the Belvedere project:

- **Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)** – the MOOC is designed to be an access point to the learning opportunities of the Belvedere Project, introducing digital approaches across the employability journey, from first contact and entry, to aftercare once a client is in employment, in a compact self-learning format. The modules on the MOOC can be studied in any order, either individual modules or the entire programme.
- **Online Course** – the online course is delivered through a blended learning approach, combining online face-to-face sessions with independent learning to further explore the use of digital approaches across the employability journey. Building on the content of the MOOC, each module of the online course will take 4-hours to complete, with each including a quiz and/or exercise to complete to show the learning gained.

- **Toolbox** – the toolbox provides a range of digital tools that can be used by professionals in the employability sector to both support and share information with their clients. Each of the tools included in the toolbox have been tried and tested by the Belvedere Project Team.
- **Tools for management** – the final output of the Belvedere project are tools specifically designed to be used by managers and leaders in organisations to better understand the use and incorporation of digital tools into their organisation, and how they can support their team through this process.

Included in these tools are an online course, a digital readiness tool, and recommendations based on the outcomes of the digital readiness tool.

Whilst explaining the outputs of the Belvedere Project, delegates were given the opportunity to be some of the first to use and explore two of the outputs – the Toolbox, and the Digital Readiness Tool. Feedback was sought from the delegates on their experiences using the two tools, with this feedback being shared with the project team.

The session ended with a brief overview of the timeline for the remainder of the Belvedere Project, with final testing of the different outputs currently underway, and all learning tools being available in August 2023. Delegates were provided the opportunity to register for updates and information on the Belvedere Project through a sign-up sheet.

## Explore the Toolbox

<https://belvedere-project.eu/toolbox/>





# Apt Awards

The Apt Awards recognise organisations and individuals who have contributed towards creating inclusive workplaces and reducing the Disability Employment Gap.

Congratulations to the following organisations and individuals who are champions of diversity in Scotland's workplaces!

## **Apt Employer of the Year**

Into Work

## **Employer Champions**

Historic Environment Scotland

Ambassador Theatre Group

## **Diversity Champions**

Michael Cusack, ACS Clothing Ltd

Amy Brydon, Borders College

## **Provider of the Year**

Values Into Action Scotland (VIAS)

## **Outstanding Contribution to Apt**

Dr Danielle Farrel

# Delegate Feedback

“Felt inclusive and welcoming”

“Well programmed and excellent conference”

“Excellent day with lots to think about”

“Fantastic event!”

Thank you for joining us at the SUSE Annual Conference 2023

## Contact Us

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