



Scottish Union of Supported Employment

# ANNUAL CONFERENCE REPORT 2026



Making It Work:  
Excellence in Supported  
Employment Practice



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# Introduction

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**Thank you to all delegates who attended the SUSE Annual Conference 2026. It was a pleasure to welcome colleagues, partners and stakeholders from across Scotland and beyond to come together under this year's theme, Making It Work: Excellence in Supported Employment Practice.**

The conference continues to be a key moment in the year for sharing learning, strengthening connections and celebrating the impact of Supported Employment in creating inclusive workplaces and life-changing opportunities.

Inspired by our combined commitment to driving quality and innovation in practice, the day provided a valuable space to reflect on what works, what needs to improve, and how we collectively move forward.

The programme brought together a rich mix of perspectives, combining research insights, policy developments, employer engagement and frontline practice.

Our panel discussion looked ahead to the future of the labour market, including the impact of AI and changing workforce dynamics.

There is real momentum, but also a clear recognition that we still have work to do - together.



**The difference  
between a  
placement and  
a life-changing  
outcome is  
simply this:  
quality.**

# 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.

- Next Generation Training
- Growth Solutions Scotland
- Two Business Finance
- Outshine Telephone Training and Resources Ltd
- DFN Project SEARCH
- Fair Work Convention
- Values Into Action Scotland
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## Workshop Sponsors



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# Conference Overview

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The conference programme brought together a diverse range of speakers to explore the challenges and opportunities shaping Supported Employment today. Through a series of keynote inputs and discussions, delegates were invited to reflect on the evidence, lived experience and practical action needed to deliver more inclusive and effective employment outcomes.

We heard evidence from Chirsty McFadyen (Fraser of Allander Institute) on the persistent gap between aspiration and reality - with the vast majority of people with learning disabilities wanting to work, yet far too few in employment. The message was clear: we need better data, stronger employer engagement and more joined-up systems.

Anna Ritchie Allan (Close the Gap) reminded us that inequality is not experienced evenly. Their work on disabled women's employment experiences highlighted deep structural barriers, from recruitment through to progression, and reinforced the importance of intersectional approaches to policy and practice.

We explored the importance of fairness in the workplace with Dr Joanna Butler and Kathryn Andrew (University of Strathclyde), who challenged us to think beyond policy towards how fairness is actually experienced by employees, a theme that resonated throughout the day.

From a UK policy perspective, David Long (DWP) provided an overview of the Keep Britain Working initiative which aims to create a cultural shift to ensure employers engage earlier and more effectively.

Kelly Forrest (VIAS) provided a real world example of how quality has been established in a new Supported Employment service.



Our panel discussion on the future labour market brought into sharp focus the impact of AI, demographic change and skills shortages. Expert input came from Derek McCamley (Scottish Enterprise), Ian Duff (Bank of England) and Brian O'Reilly (EGG Lighting), who agreed that while there are risks, there was also a strong sense that - if used well - these changes could allow for more personalised, inclusive approaches to work. We summarise the panel discussion later in the report.

Delegates took part in interactive workshops covering a range of topics. We heard from large private sector employers Balfour Beatty and Springfield Group and expert consultancy from Growth and Performance Solutions discussing the sector-specific opportunities for careers in construction.

Other workshops explored practical approaches in recruitment, employer engagement, communication and digital accessibility. We explore each of the workshops in the Breakout Sessions section of this report.

The conference closed with opportunities for networking, reflection and shared learning, ensuring delegates left with new ideas, connections and renewed commitment to advancing Supported Employment.

### **Useful Links:**

- **[Keep Britain Working review – March 2026 update - GOV.UK](#)**
- **[Kbw.vanguards@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:Kbw.vanguards@dwp.gov.uk)**
- **[The Excluded by Design full report, summary report and Easy Read report on the Close the Gap website.](#)**



# Panel Discussion

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This panel discussion explored how the labour market may change by 2030, with a strong focus on AI, automation, demographic change, and sustainability. Across the panel, there was clear agreement that AI is inevitable and will become part of most jobs, changing tasks rather than simply removing roles.

Here we provide a reflection of the panel discussion where we have taken a broad, complex discussion and offered some clear, practical insights.

## Key Points from the Panel

- AI will reshape jobs, reducing routine tasks and increasing the need for human skills like communication, trust, and judgement.
- There are early signs of reduced entry-level roles, particularly in professional services, raising concerns about future talent pipelines.
- Growth in human-centric sectors: care, construction, and relationship-based roles remain less automatable.
- Organisations are adopting AI at different speeds, creating a two-tier workforce between those who can use it effectively and those who cannot.
- Successful use of AI depends heavily on leadership, transparency, and workforce engagement, not just technology.
- Environmental constraints: AI is acknowledged as energy-intensive and potentially harmful without regulation - highlighting a tension between economic growth and sustainability.
- There are also ethical concerns, particularly around bias.

The panel agree that widespread AI integration is expected: By 2030, most roles will involve AI in some capacity.



## Implications for Disabled People

The panel highlighted both opportunities and risks:

### Opportunities:

- AI can improve accessibility, helping with applications, communication, and interview preparation.
- It allows for personalised workplace adjustments, tailored to individual needs.
- It can build confidence and support re-entry into work.

### Risks:

- AI-driven recruitment processes (e.g. screening, chatbots) may create new barriers or reinforce bias.
- Digital exclusion may widen gaps if people lack access or skills.
- Fewer entry-level roles could disproportionately affect those already facing barriers.

A key takeaway from the discussion is that AI itself is not the issue - how it is designed and used is what matters. **Employers need to:**

- Use accessible and inclusive systems.
- Ask the right questions about bias and fairness.
- Keep human oversight in decision-making.
- Provide training and support for staff.

## What This Means for Job Coaches

Although not a direct focus of the panel, the discussion clearly implies an important role for Job Coaches. As recruitment becomes more AI-driven, Job Coaches will need to develop their own AI skills so they can:

- Help clients use AI to prepare CVs, applications and interviews.
- Support clients to practice and build confidence using AI tools.
- Explain how AI is used in recruitment and how to navigate it effectively.
- Recognise when systems may be creating barriers and help clients find alternatives.

The panel made clear that AI will shape the future of work, bringing both opportunities for inclusion and risks of greater inequality. The outcome will depend on leadership understanding, workforce skills, and inclusive design choices.

In this context, Job Coaches who build confidence in using AI will be better equipped to support their clients, helping ensure disabled people can access and succeed in an increasingly AI-driven labour market.

# Emerging Themes

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The conference centred on driving quality in Supported Employment, with a strong emphasis on inclusive practice, employer engagement and system-level change to improve outcomes for disabled people and those facing labour market barriers.

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

## **01. AI and Digital Transformation in Employment Support**

Artificial intelligence and digital tools are rapidly reshaping both the labour market and how Supported Employment services operate. Conference discussion highlighted AI affecting recruitment, job design, skills needs, and productivity, while also creating both risks (e.g. entry-level job displacement, bias) and opportunities (e.g. personalised support, improved accessibility).

- AI expected to influence “most roles” and is already impacting recruitment and job design.
- Opportunity to enhance personalised support and reduce admin, freeing staff for human-focused work.
- Growing need for AI literacy and digital skills across practitioners and jobseekers.

## **02. Shift Toward Employer-Focused and Inclusive Workforce Practices**

There is a strong move away from purely client-focused interventions toward working directly with employers to build inclusive workplaces, co-design roles, and address systemic barriers. Workshops emphasised understanding employer needs, recruitment processes, and workplace cultures to improve outcomes.

- Research highlighted higher employment outcomes where employer involvement is strong.
- Programmes focusing on building employer capacity and addressing barriers are growing.
- Initiatives like Keep Britain Working stress a cultural shift in workplaces and clearer standards of good practice.

### 03. Quality, Personalisation and Long-Term Outcomes in Supported Employment

A major talking point was the shift from short-term job outcomes to high-quality, personalised and sustained employment, with continuous support and measurable impact.

- Emphasis on “quality over placement” - jobs that are sustained and meaningful.
- Best practice includes individualised job matching, ongoing in-work support, and employer partnerships.
- Increased focus on data, evaluation, and evidence-based improvement.

### Summary

Across the conference, the direction of travel is clear:

- Technology (especially AI) is reshaping the system
- Employers are central partners, not just end-users
- Quality, personalised and sustained outcomes are the benchmark.



# Breakout Sessions

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There were 9 breakout sessions throughout the Conference and delegates were invited to register for 3 each. Topics ranged from practical skills to engage employers, real world tools and techniques, and thought-provoking discussions about navigating careers in construction, to examining how to use data effectively to support disabled jobseekers. This section gives you an overview of each of the sessions, along with the key discussion and learning.



**1. Navigating Careers in Construction: Panel**



**2. Employment Rights Act Update**



**3. Integrating Free ATech into Supported Employment**



**4. Creating Opportunities by Phone**



**5. Using Data to Strengthen Adviser Practice**



**6. Vocational Profiling in Action**



**7. Apt: Successful Approaches to Workplace Inclusion**



**8. Digital Accessibility: What good looks like**



**9. Meeting People Where They Are - Tailoring Support**

# 1. Navigating Careers in Construction - A Panel Conversation

## **Panel Host:**

**Emma Soanes (SUSE Trustee and CEO of Downs Syndrome Scotland)**

## **Panellists:**

**Heather Henderson (Group HR Director, Springfield Group)**

**Naila Wood (Head of Social Impact, Balfour Beatty),**

**Pamela Cunningham (Consultant, Growth and Performance Solutions)**

This panel discussion explored careers in the construction industry, recruitment pathways, inclusion practices, and future workforce challenges. It aimed to challenge misconceptions and highlight the sector's wide range of opportunities.

## **1. Industry Overview & Opportunities**

- Construction is a large, diverse sector with roles far beyond on-site trades, including HR, marketing, legal, communications, and administration.
- Projects are delivered through multi-layered supply chains (Tier 1 contractors to smaller subcontractors), creating varied entry points.
- The industry offers long-term career progression, not just jobs, with opportunities to move across roles and organisations.

## **2. Recruitment & Entry Pathways**

- Recruitment is typically flexible and informal, involving:
  - Online applications and interviews
  - Partnerships with colleges, schools, and training programmes
  - Work placements, apprenticeships, and agency roles
- Entry-level roles prioritise soft skills over qualifications:
  - Reliability, timekeeping, willingness to learn, teamwork
- Awareness of alternative entry routes (e.g. placements, supply chain roles) is essential for candidates.

## **3. Barriers & Misconceptions**

Key misconceptions about construction include:

- It is only manual, male-dominated, or low-paid work
- It is unsafe or unsuitable for diverse groups
- It lacks career progression or flexibility.

Challenges identified:

- Limited awareness of the range of roles available
- Lack of early exposure and work experience opportunities
- Supply chain businesses often lack knowledge of inclusion support
- Difficulty engaging young people due to competing interests and perceptions

#### **4. Inclusion & Social Impact**

- Inclusion is increasingly a business priority, not just a compliance exercise.
- Employers are adopting:
  - Inclusive HR practices and unconscious bias training
  - Partnerships with charities, schools, and training organisations
- Programmes like placements, Project Search, and apprenticeship pathways help underrepresented groups access careers.
- Communication is critical - many opportunities exist but are not well promoted or understood.

#### **5. Skills Shortages & Future Demand**

- The sector faces a significant labour shortage, with ~20% of workers expected to retire within 5–10 years.
- High-demand roles include planners, quantity surveyors, civil engineers and estimators.
- Major infrastructure and housing projects mean strong long-term demand (10–15+ years).
- Shortages are compounded by:
  - Insufficient apprenticeship funding
  - Geographic workforce gaps
  - Limited future workforce planning

#### **6. Engagement & Early Talent**

- Early engagement (primary and secondary school level) is critical:
  - Showcasing creative and practical aspects of construction
  - Providing meaningful work experience (not token placements)
- Parents, teachers, and career advisers often lack awareness, influencing career choices.

#### **7. Key Takeaways**

- Construction offers a “spider web” of career paths, suitable for diverse skills and backgrounds.
- The sector is growing, future-proof, and evolving, with increasing emphasis on inclusion.
- There is significant untapped potential, particularly among disabled people and underrepresented groups.
- Stronger collaboration between employers, educators, and support organisations is essential to unlock workforce potential.

## 2. Employment Rights Act Update

**Delivered by: Fiona Davies (People and Safety Services Manager, GCVS)**

This session looked at the Employment Rights Act 2025 and how organisations can prepare for the implementation.

The Employment Rights Bill was passed into law in December 2025. There are 28 employment law reforms which are being implemented in a staged approach of April 2026, October 2026 and 2027.

Changes that were implemented in April 2026 include:

- The removal of the waiting days and lower earnings limit for Statutory Sick pay
- Paternity and Parental Leave becoming a day 1 right
- Sexual Harassment included under Whistleblowing protection
- Annual leave records to be kept for a period of 6 years
- The introduction of the Fair Work Agency

January 2027 will see a significant change to unfair dismissal where the current 2 year service requirement will be reduced to 6 months. This is being applied retrospectively therefore will impact any new staff appointed from July onwards. This will increase risks to organisations and there are some focus areas that should be considered now to help manage this risk:

- Recruitment – it is important to get the right person for the role using fair and effective selection processes
- Onboarding – your induction process can help new employees to feel connected to the organisation and their colleagues. A good induction plan will create the psychological contract that leads to a positive working relationship
- Probation – those with 6 month probation periods will need to consider how they will manage dismissals at the end of the probation as the employee will be able to raise a claim for unfair dismissal. Organisations should consider a shorter probation period such as 3 months with space to extend if needed.
- Staff handbook and policies – clear policies and procedures are the underpinning of being a good employer. It is important that employees can access these, have been trained on relevant policies and have signed to confirm they have read them.

Situations where you are considering dismissal need to be carefully thought out. A fair dismissal process needs to be followed. This includes giving the right to be accompanied, taking formal minutes, issuing a written reason for dismissal and giving the right to appeal.

Employees on fixed term contract for more than 6 months will also be able to claim unfair dismissal. It is important a fair reason for dismissal is established and a fair process is followed when ending fixed term contracts.

If you are a voluntary sector organisation seeking further support and guidance around HR matters, GCVS has a HR and Health and Safety Advise Service. We are a registered charity and provide full professional support at cost effective rates to meet the needs of the voluntary sector.

More information is available on the GCVS website:  
[HR and Health & Safety - GCVS](#)

“A good induction plan will create the psychological contract that leads to a positive working relationship.”

# 3. Integrating Free ATech into Supported Employment

**Delivered by: Gurur Deniz Uyanik, Senior Researcher at Policy Connect.**

The session explored how cost-free assistive and accessible technology (ATech) could support transitions into employment. Delegates were introduced to key types of free ATech, including speech-to-text, text-to-speech, screen magnification, and live captions, as well as built-in tools available across iOS, Android, and Windows devices. Additional apps providing visual support and transcription were also highlighted. Participants learned about practical resources such as AbilityNet and CALL Scotland, and reflected on the advantages of cost-free ATech - such as accessibility, portability, and confidence-building - alongside limitations, notably that it cannot replace more comprehensive support.

Findings from the ATech Policy Lab showed that ATech support often falls between services, with job seekers unable to access it early enough. Delegates examined how misconceptions about cost and timing prevent integration into employment support, despite free tools already being widely available. The Midlands pilot initiative was discussed, which emphasised embedding ATech from early stages of support and strengthening resource sharing and practitioner networks. Learn more about the [ATech Policy Lab](#)

In group discussions, attendees shared useful tools (e.g. Dragon, Copilot, Goblin Tools) and agreed that best practice involves tailoring support to individual needs and ensuring continuity of access. They also identified gaps in staff training, particularly around disability awareness and practical ATech use, and highlighted the need for policy changes to embed ATech more consistently within Supported Employment services.

Helpful resources:

- [ATech Guide \(Millennium Community Solutions\)](#).
- [CALL Scotland](#)
- [AbilityNet My Computer My Way](#).

**Free ATech should be standard in early-stage support:  
introduced at vocational profiling, not after job offer.**

# 4. Creating Opportunities by Phone - 5 ways to get better results

**Delivered by Audrey Bodman (Trainer and Coach, Outshine)**

With over 30 years of experience delivering employer engagement skills training, Audrey Bodman has consistently observed the same avoidable mistakes holding people back. This workshop distils that experience into 5 practical ways to accelerate your results: challenging common mindsets, reducing call reluctance, and giving attendees a clear framework for approaching phone-based outreach with confidence, purpose, and a relationship-first mindset.

## **The 5 Key Ways**

### **1. Mindset & Confidence Before You Dial**

Call reluctance is normal, but it can be broken by starting small and building a routine. The critical shift is to stop thinking of your call as asking for a favour and start seeing it as offering a solution. Employers are not doing you a favour: you are bringing them talent and social value they have not yet found. Prepare your voice and mindset before you connect, not after.

### **2. Getting Through to the Right Person**

Research the right contact name before you pick up the phone. Asking for someone by name gets far further than a generic question about 'who handles recruitment'. Voicemail is an opportunity: leave a short message with a clear benefit that motivates a callback. Treat gatekeepers as allies, and lead with opportunity: 'I'm calling about potential job opportunities' rather than 'I'm calling about recruitment'.

### **3. Opening the Call Effectively**

The first 15 seconds determine whether the employer stays on the call. Keep your opener simple: your name, your organisation, and one sentence of value. Make it about their world, not yours. Sound purposeful, not apologetic. If it is not a good time, always ask 'when would be better?' A small piece of researched insight shared in your opening can immediately demonstrate that you have done your homework.

#### **4. Building a Relationship, Not a Transaction**

Go into every call wanting to learn, not just to get. Curiosity opens doors. One vacancy today is nothing; a trusted contact gives you opportunities for years. Ask questions, as employers who feel heard are far more likely to engage. Think in terms of the trust equation: credibility, reliability and intimacy, with a low focus on self-interest. Every call plants a seed, so water it with follow-up, not pressure.

#### **5. Handling Objections & Keeping the Door Open**

'We're not hiring' means 'not right now', so ask when they are likely to review this. 'Send me an email' can be a brush-off; respond by asking what would be most useful to include. Never end a call without a next step: a name, a date, or permission to call back. Every 'no' is really 'not yet'. Log every conversation, diary every callback, and stay in the conversation.

#### **Key Takeaway**

The most powerful shift delegates were asked to make: stop asking 'What can I get from this call?' and start asking 'What can I find out?' Curiosity builds connection, connection builds trust, and trust creates lasting opportunity.

#### **Further FREE Resources**

- [Free fortnightly Monday Top Tip newsletter](#)
- [Regular free bitesize webinars](#)
- [Connect with Audrey on LinkedIn](#)
- Book: The Call That Changed Everything. Creating Opportunities Through Reverse Marketing By Phone (available on Amazon and [outshinegroup.co.uk](http://outshinegroup.co.uk))

**Stop asking 'What can I get from this call?' and  
start asking 'What can I find out?'**

# 5. Using Data to Strengthen Adviser Practice and Support Disabled Jobseekers

**Delivered by Dr Joanna Butler, MyEmploy and University of Strathclyde**

This workshop explored how data can be used to better understand employability needs, support adviser practice and improve service effectiveness. The workshop began by examining the concept of employability, recognising that within Supported Employment services it is often more complex and multifaceted than in other settings.

Employment outcomes are shaped by a combination of individual, social, economic and environmental factors, including health, skills, confidence, personal circumstances, social support, labour market conditions and access to services.

Discussion highlighted the tension between frontline practice and performance measurement. Employability support often involves complex individuals, gradual progress and professional judgement, while reporting systems frequently focus on standardised categories and binary outcomes. A key challenge identified was not whether this work is taking place, but how organisations can evidence it. Factors such as confidence, wellbeing, perceived employability, progression, distance travelled and adviser impact are often recognised as important indicators of progress, yet they can be difficult to quantify and report consistently to commissioners, funders and other stakeholders.

Several challenges facing the sector were identified, including a lack of standardised assessment, difficulty evidencing impact, inconsistent approaches across services and limited research on adviser contribution. There was recognition that many organisations assess service quality through observations, case reviews and professional judgement, but that much of the value created through employability support remains difficult to capture and communicate through existing reporting systems.

The workshop introduced research conducted by Dr Joanna Butler at the University of Strathclyde, which was among the first to examine the jobseeker-adviser relationship as a factor influencing employability and employment outcomes. Findings demonstrated that employment outcomes are influenced not only by employability factors but also by the quality of the relationship between jobseeker and adviser, suggesting that adviser practice plays an important role in shaping outcomes.

A key theme was that data should strengthen practice rather than replace professional judgement. Better alignment between what organisations measure and the factors that drive successful outcomes could support more effective services, stronger evidence of impact and improved outcomes for jobseekers.

The workshop also introduced MyEmploy, a University of Strathclyde spin-out company developed to address these challenges. The platform uses evidence-based assessment and real-time data to measure employability factors, track progress and provide insights into both jobseeker needs and adviser contribution. MyEmploy is currently in the pilot phase, working with employability providers to test and refine the platform.

Organisations interested in participating in future pilots, research collaborations or discussions around data-driven approaches to employability support are encouraged to contact Dr Joanna Butler ([joanna.butler@strath.ac.uk](mailto:joanna.butler@strath.ac.uk) or [joanna@myemploy.co.uk](mailto:joanna@myemploy.co.uk)).

**Publication:**

Butler, J. (2025). [MyEmploy: Transforming employability services through occupational psychology and AI innovation](#). EWOP in Practice, 19(1), 44–60.

Open-access version available via [Strathprints](#)

**“Data should strengthen practice, not  
replace professional judgement”**

# 6. Vocational Profiling in Action: Tools, Techniques and Real World Practice

**Delivered by Kelly Forrest, Values Into Action Scotland, Ross Maclean and Kirsten Souter, Into Work.**

This session focused on rethinking vocational profiling as a dynamic, person-centred process rather than a static form, with the aim of achieving excellence in practice.

## **Core Principles of Excellence:**

- Active listening and probing questions are essential to move beyond surface level answers, uncovering clients' true motivations, barriers, and strengths.
- Reflecting and repeating information builds trust and shows genuine understanding, especially important for clients with low confidence or negative past experiences.
- Capturing clients' words authentically ensures the profile reflects their reality, not the adviser's interpretation. This makes it more meaningful and accessible.
- Vocational Profiles are living documents that evolve as trust develops, new experiences emerge, and client confidence grows.

## **What Excellence Looks Like in Practice:**

- A person-centred, collaborative approach.
- Clear communication about the purpose of the Vocational Profile, reducing pressure and encouraging authenticity.
- Building trust before challenging or probing deeply.
- Using the Vocational Profile to explore patterns across a client's life, not just job history
- Being flexible, curious, and persistent.

## **Key Learning from the Case Study:**

- Progress often comes from asking "one more question" and noticing inconsistencies.
- Strong rapport allows for honest conversations about barriers.
- Clients gain self-awareness over time, which should be reflected in ongoing updates to the Vocational Profile.

**Overall Message: Excellence in Vocational Profiling comes from depth, not speed. It involves:**

- Listening deeply.
- Building trust and safety.
- Asking meaningful questions.
- Co-producing the profile with the client.
- Capturing the whole person (strengths, values, needs, patterns).
- Keeping the process flexible and evolving.

Ultimately, Vocational Profiling should be a collaborative journey that supports insight, confidence, and sustainable employment outcomes.

We would encourage everyone to **stay curious**.



# 7. Apt: Successful Approaches to Workplace Inclusion

**Delivered by Lorna Prince, Changing the Chemistry and Jonathan Aitken, SUSE.**

This session explored two of the programmes delivered as part of the recent Apt Making It Work Project:

1. Positive Workplace Conversations
2. Digital Access Reviews

## **Positive Workplace Conversations**

Delegates first learned about The Positive Workplace Conversations element of the project which was delivered by Changing the Chemistry. This focused on supporting more inclusive workplace conversations around disability and long-term health through practical reflection, a structured approach to conversations, and real workplace application.

### **The Challenge:**

The session started with a core question: If we know inclusive workplace conversations matter, why don't they always happen? Discussion highlighted that this is often not simply an awareness issue. People may feel uncertain about what to say, worry about causing offence, or lack confidence in how to approach conversations in practice. Previous experiences as well as workplace culture, trust and psychological safety also influence whether conversations happen or are avoided.

### **Key Learning:**

- Confidence builds with repeated opportunities to practise and reflect on conversations in real workplace situations.
- Adopting a mindset of curiosity and learning before conversations begin will help shape the unfolding of conversations and workplace relationships.
- Don't focus on moving quickly to solutions – asking open questions with neutral observations will help to stay engaged in conversation.
- Ensuring small repeated behavioural shifts through everyday interactions will help to support more open conversations, trust and psychological safety over time.

## Digital Inclusion

Another element of the Making It Work project focused on exploring common digital barriers, the in-work experience of disabled employees and why it's important to ensure everyone has the same access to information, learning and development opportunities.

Delegates heard about the **Digital Access Reviews** - A comprehensive assessment of employers' eLearning resources and information systems, which was carried out by the SUSE Experience Network with support from IT experts.

During the project SUSE examined the challenges experienced by staff and effective ways to support them. Delegates learned about the common barriers faced by disabled employees and were provided with examples of how to make small changes that would have a hugely positive impact for all employees.

### Useful Links:

To discover top tips on digital accessibility, such as making digital recruitment fair and how to create accessible documents and online events, visit [\*\*Apt's Employer Resources\*\*](#).

## Summary

The session concluded by reflecting on the importance of curiosity, reflection and continued dialogue in workplace inclusion. Rather than focusing on having a 'perfect' response or solution, delegates were encouraged to approach conversations with curiosity rather than certainty, recognising that not always having the answer is part of inclusive practice.

# 8. Digital Accessibility in the Workplace: What good looks like

Delivered by Stephen Cole, Cole AD

This workshop explained what digital accessibility is, why it matters, and how it benefits everyone at work. It highlighted common barriers and practical ways to make everyday tools (emails, documents, meetings, systems) accessible. It also emphasised that accessibility should be built in proactively, with clear employer responsibility and simple habits to create inclusive workplaces.

## What is digital accessibility?

Designing digital tools, content, and systems so everyone can use them easily and independently - including disabled people and those using assistive technology.

## Why it matters

- Improves productivity and efficiency
- Supports inclusion and staff wellbeing
- Helps with recruitment and retention
- Reduces risk and meets legal responsibilities

## Who benefits?

Accessibility supports:

- Disabled and neurodivergent staff
- People with temporary conditions
- Remote/hybrid workers
- Everyone (clearer, simpler systems)

## Simple accessibility principles

**Perceivable** – Can users see/hear it?

**Operable** – Can they navigate/use it?

**Understandable** – Is it clear and consistent?

**Robust** – Does it work with assistive tech?



## Employer responsibilities

- Set clear accessibility standards
- Train staff creating content
- Check accessibility when buying systems
- Test with users and improve continuously

## Key message

### **Accessibility isn't an add-on - it's a quality standard.**

Small changes make a big difference to inclusion, efficiency and workplace culture.



**“Accessibility isn't an add on - it's a  
quality standard”**

# 9. Meeting People Where They Are - Tailoring Support for Sustainable Employment

**Delivered by Gail McKee and Scott Robertson, North Lanarkshire Council Supported Employment Enterprise, and Mel Bridgwood, Public Health Scotland.**

This practical workshop provided delegates with the opportunity to explore how to truly “meet people where they are” by understanding individual motivations, barriers and strengths.

Using real-world scenarios, reflective activities and evidence-informed techniques, they explored how to personalise support that helps people take confident steps toward paid employment – and stay there.

Representatives from Public Health Scotland and One Parent Families Scotland delivered a joint presentation on the design and delivery of a parental employability pathway for lone parents, with a particular focus on how services can effectively “meet people where they are”.

The session explored how the pathway was co-designed with parents and informed by the expertise of employability practitioners who understand the specific barriers faced by lone parents in accessing and sustaining employment. Presenters shared practical examples of how traditional recruitment processes were adapted, including changes to interview approaches, pre-interview engagement opportunities and the delivery of a tailored Training Academy to build confidence, skills and readiness for work.

The importance of flexibility was highlighted throughout, both in role design and working arrangements, alongside the value of adopting a solution-focused mindset that seeks to remove barriers rather than reinforce them. The presentation emphasised that high-quality employability provision is achieved through strong partnerships, person-centred support and a willingness to adapt systems and processes to better meet the needs of parents entering the workforce.

The second part of the workshop provided the opportunity to bring North Lanarkshire Council's (NLC's) No Limits Programme to life and look in more detail at the critical successful factors that led to the high percentage of young people sustaining employment.

No Limits is a 9 month, paid work placement and training programme for young people with additional support needs leaving school or college. It is designed by NLC's Supported Enterprise Service along with input from the trainees and is funded by No One Left Behind.

They shared photos and stories of what the trainees participate in and discussed why they believe it has been successful, including:

- Co-designed nature of the programme (to include the trainees).
- Vocational Profiling whilst the young people are still at school.
- Partnership working and network of support within NLC and outwith.
- Alternative methods of learning.
- Being adaptable/flexible and providing ongoing support after the 9 months.
- Consistent employer engagement.
- Regular monitoring and reviews.
- Keeping the young people at the front and centre.
- Placement matches and preparation.

For further information on the No Limits programme please contact Gail McKee, Supported Employment Co-ordinator, [mckeeg@northlan.gov.uk](mailto:mckeeg@northlan.gov.uk)

# Delegate Feedback

**100%**

of delegates said they...

- enjoyed the Conference
- learned something new
- were happy/very happy with the choice of workshops
- found the workshops to be useful or very useful

**“It was a great event. I got a lot out of it and made some good contacts.”**

**“What an excellent event. It was great to see so many varied organisations represented”**

**“Well done the team at SUSE for hosting an amazing event. Great work.”**

**“It exceeded my expectations.”**

**“Absolutely nailed it. Incredible panel and really thought-provoking workshops.”**

**“The conference at Stirling was the best yet! Great speakers and really informative workshops.”**

# The Conference in Images



Thank you for joining us at the SUSE Annual Conference 2026

## Contact

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