

VOICES AT WORK REPORT

MAY 2026



**Glasgow
Futures**
Helping you shape your future.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba



Project delivery staff

Project Manager and Report author: Stacey Highfield

Project Support Team: Jenny Marshall, Head of Operations

Project funding

Glasgow Futures which is funded by Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Methodology	7
Steering Group	9
Workshops	12
Outreach	13
Interviews	14
Interview Results	16
Findings	18
Creating Solutions	31
Learning and Reflections	44
Final Recommendations	46
Acknowledgments	49
Appendix	51

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Voices at Work is a co-produced research project led by GCIL (Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living), funded by Glasgow Futures and delivered between October 2025 and May 2026. The project explored the experiences of disabled people in the workplace, with a focus on understanding what supports or undermines sustainable employment.

The project engaged 47 participants through workshops, interviews and wider engagement activity, with lived experience shaping both the process and outcomes.

Findings demonstrate that barriers to sustaining employment are rarely driven by disability itself. Instead, they are shaped by workplace culture, inconsistent support and limited understanding of disability. Survey findings showed that 68%* of participants identified workplace culture as a barrier to sustaining employment, 51% identified in-work support, and 43% identified a lack of reasonable adjustments. Participants consistently highlighted that day-to-day attitudes, communication and relationships had a greater impact on their ability to remain in work than formal policies or procedures.

Support was often dependent on individual managers rather than embedded organisational practice, resulting in inconsistent experiences. Only 47% of participants felt their line manager understood disability or health conditions, while 35% said only somewhat and 18% said no. Participants also described challenges around disclosure, gaps and delays in reasonable adjustments, and a lack of ongoing, proactive support. 40% identified feeling a lack of peer support as a barrier to sustaining employment, contributing to isolation and placing responsibility on individuals to navigate barriers themselves. While disability training and policies were often in place, participants highlighted that these did not always translate into meaningful understanding of how workplace culture, management practices, communication and adjustments affect someone's ability to stay in work.

In response, Voices at Work developed a set of co-produced recommendations for a toolkit of practical solutions. These include recommendations for an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training module to improve understanding and communication, and for a peer-led support

- Statistics have been rounded. For precise data please refer to the appendix.

service offering ongoing advice, advocacy and shared learning. Together, these recommendations set out how more consistent and sustainable systems of support could be created. The report concludes that improving access to employment alone is not sufficient. Sustainable employment requires proactive, inclusive and flexible workplace practices, embedded across organisations and shaped by lived experience.

INTRODUCTION

GCIL (Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living) is a disabled people's organisation committed to the principles of inclusive living and the social model of disability. We recognise that people are disabled not by their impairments, but by barriers created by society.

For many disabled people, securing employment is only the first step. Sustaining work and building a meaningful career often presents a greater challenge. Evidence from Scotland's No One Left Behind employability programme shows that disabled participants take significantly longer to enter employment and are less likely to remain in work one year later than non-disabled participants (Scottish Government, No One Left Behind Statistical Summary May 2026). Too often, the issue is not access to work but remaining in work in a way that is sustainable. This concern was also reflected in Voices at Work survey findings, where only 18% of participants said they felt extremely confident they could sustain their current job, while a third had already left employment due to disability related barriers.

This reinforces the need to focus not only on getting disabled people into work, but on the support, culture and conditions needed to help people stay in work over time.

To address this gap in understanding what experiences cause these stark statistics, Glasgow Futures awarded GCIL £52,010.13 in July 2025 to engage with disabled people with lived experience of employment.



Selina & Jennifer at a workshop

The funding supported a co-produced, lived experience approach, enabling a project manager to work with both people already supported by employment services and those who had not previously engaged with services before.

Voices at Work ran over seven months and explored disabled people's experiences in the workplace, focusing on the barriers and challenges that affect sustainable employment. Rather than treating gaining employment as the sole marker of success, the project sought to understand what helps people stay in work, what contributes to people leaving jobs, and what needs to change to support long-term, meaningful employment.

Participants brought a wide range of experiences across disabilities, health conditions, employment journeys and professional backgrounds. Through workshops, interviews and wider engagement activities, they shared both positive and challenging workplace experiences, highlighting factors that support or undermine sustainability at work.

Co-production was central to the project, recognising disabled people as experts in their own lives. Participants helped shape the project's focus, priorities and the development of recommendations for practical solutions.

This report brings together insights from 47 participants and presents key findings and themes, including workplace culture, disclosure, support and reasonable adjustments. It highlights barriers that affect disabled people's working lives and sets out co-produced recommendations for practical solutions for disabled people, employers and service providers.

The recommendations represent a shift away from expecting disabled people to adapt to workplaces not designed with them in mind, towards environments shaped by lived experience, co-production and inclusive practice.

Voices at Work took place between October 2025 and May 2026, with the report completed in May 2026.

Voices at Work adopted a co-produced research approach to better understand the experiences of disabled people within the workplace, identify barriers and challenges, and explore what supports sustained employment. The project aimed to be accessible, flexible and responsive to participants' needs, whilst ensuring that lived and living experience remained central throughout the design, delivery, data collection and analysis of the project.

Co-production

Co-production was fundamental to Voices at Work and shaped every stage of the project. Rather than involving disabled people as participants alone, individuals with lived experience played an active role in influencing the direction of the project, identifying priorities, interpreting findings and shaping recommendations for practical solutions.

Embedding co-production within projects is important because it moves beyond assumptions about what people need and instead ensures that recommendations are informed directly by those with experience of the issues being explored. Traditional approaches can unintentionally create solutions for people rather than with them, resulting in recommendations that do not fully reflect real experiences, barriers or changing needs.

Within Voices at Work, co-production brought authenticity, insight and accountability to the project. It created space for experiences that may otherwise have been overlooked and ensured that findings reflected the complexity and realities of sustaining employment as a disabled person. Participants consistently reported feeling valued, listened to and included within the process, creating a strong sense of ownership and belonging.



Steering group working on the road-map

Importantly, co-production did not simply strengthen participation; it strengthened outcomes. By embedding lived experience throughout, the project moved beyond identifying problems and supported the development of practical, realistic and meaningful recommendations that could inform more sustainable and lasting change.

Method

To gather experiences and perspectives, Voices at Work adopted a range of methods throughout the project. These included:

- Co-produced steering group workshops
- In-depth semi-structured lived experience interviews
- Wider engagement through events and consultations

The project involved 47 participants with a broad range of lived and living experiences across disabilities, impairments and long-term health conditions, alongside varied employment experiences. Participants represented a range of workplace settings, skills, employment types and career stages, allowing the project to capture both positive and challenging experiences and build a detailed understanding of barriers affecting sustainable employment. Further details of the participant's work history can be found in the data appendix.

Participant Focus and Recruitment

Voices at Work aimed to ensure that groups often underrepresented within research and service delivery were represented from the outset. Initially, the project focused on engaging individuals with sensory impairments, Multiple Sclerosis (MS), and epilepsy. These groups were identified because they can experience significant barriers within employment and support systems, whilst often being underrepresented within wider research.^{1. & 2.} Conditions such as MS and epilepsy can involve fluctuating symptoms and invisible impacts, while sensory impairments can create distinct challenges relating to accessibility, communication and workplace environments.

As the project developed, participation in interviews expanded to include individuals with a broader range of disabilities, impairments and long-term health conditions. This strengthened the project by bringing together a wider range of experiences and allowing both shared and condition-specific themes to emerge.

1. Findlay, Patricia and McQuarrie, Johanna and Congreve, Emma (2022) Epilepsy and Employment : a Scoping Exercise for Epilepsy Scotland. University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.

2. Wicks, Charlotte Rose (2020) Working together: understanding job retention in Multiple Sclerosis. PhD thesis, University of Leeds.

During the initial recruitment phase, over 400 emails were shared across GCIL networks, organisations, community spaces and businesses with the aim of recruiting members for the steering group.

Partnerships were developed with specialist organisations including the MS Society Scotland, Visibility Scotland and Epilepsy Connections, who supported project promotion through newsletters, social media and wider communication channels.

Recruitment was also supported through outreach activities and engagement events, including community open days and disability-focused events, allowing the project to engage directly with individuals and raise awareness of the project aims.

STEERING GROUP

In line with the co-produced approach, a steering group was established to support the direction and development of the project. Steering group members actively shaped workshop content and priorities throughout the project, with each workshop informing the development of subsequent sessions.

Workshops acted as collaborative spaces where participants could openly discuss experiences, identify priorities and explore emerging themes. Activities included reflective exercises, group discussions and collaborative design work that enabled participants to move beyond identifying barriers and contribute directly to the development of recommendations for practical solutions and possible toolkit elements.

Accessibility was considered from the outset. One-to-one introductory meetings were held with all steering group members to discuss project expectations, understand individual requirements and identify support needs. This ensured that participants had access to adjustments where required, including:

- Large print materials
- Transport arrangements
- Different methods of providing feedback
- Access to wellbeing spaces
- Flexible approaches to participation

“ When your opinion does get listened to it does make you feel valued.

Further adjustments were made, particularly with IT once the workshops were underway. Workshops were delivered using a hybrid format to support participation around work and personal commitments and maximise accessibility.

“ Stacey thinks about everyone’s needs and adapts accordingly.

To recognise the time, expertise and contributions of Steering Group participants, compensation of £15 per hour was provided through One4All vouchers. This applied to workshop participation and additional activities completed outside of sessions.

STEERING GROUP



Joan



Derek



Michelle



Jeff



Jennifer



Selina



Stephen



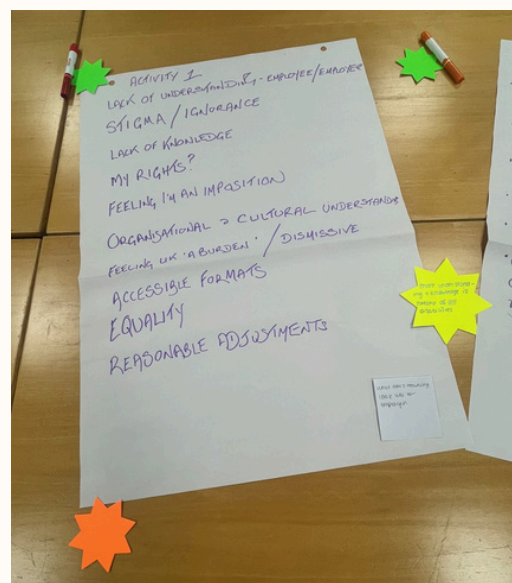
Lucinda

WORKSHOPS



The eight steering group workshops were central to Voices at Work's co-produced approach, creating regular opportunities for participants to share lived experiences, identify key barriers and shape the development of recommendations for a solutions-based toolkit. Through group agreements and trauma-informed practice, workshops created a safe, inclusive and confidential environment where participants felt comfortable contributing openly and honestly.

Participants played a direct role in shaping the content and direction of the workshops, with each session informing the development of the next. Early workshops focused on identifying the key barriers disabled people face within employment, with discussions consistently highlighting issues around workplace culture, disclosure, communication, inconsistent support and reasonable adjustments.



As workshops progressed, participants explored what sustainable employment looked like in practice, emphasising the importance of ongoing support, consistent treatment, flexibility and proactive communication.

Discussions also focused on management practices, Human Resources processes and workplace systems, with participants identifying a need for greater disability awareness, stronger understanding of the social model of disability, and more consistent and accountable approaches to support. These discussions directly informed the development of recommendations for a solutions-based toolkit. Through interactive activities, participants created an 'employment roadmap' exploring where barriers emerged throughout employment journeys and identifying points where earlier intervention and support could improve sustainability.

This informed recommendations around induction, reasonable adjustments, peer support and ongoing review processes, reinforcing that sustainable employment is an ongoing and evolving process rather than a one-off outcome.

Final workshops focused on refining the toolkit recommendations and shaping the end-of-project event. This co-produced approach ensured that the outputs of Voices at Work were not simply informed by lived experience, but actively shaped and led by disabled people throughout every stage of the project.

OUTREACH

Alongside workshops and interviews, Voices at Work engaged in a range of outreach and engagement activities to raise awareness of the project, support recruitment and connect with key stakeholders. This included attending events delivered by fellow Disabled People's Organisations, key partners, Health and Social Care Partnerships and employability-focused organisations. These activities helped ensure that the project was informed not only by direct lived experience, but also by wider perspectives, practices and ongoing discussions across the disability, employability and health sectors. Outreach also supported the development of relationships with employers, service providers and policymakers, helping to strengthen awareness, collaboration and support for the project and its aims.



**GDA Conference & AGM
Feb '26**



**Alliance AGM & annual
conference Mar '26**



INTERVIEWS



To further develop and strengthen findings emerging from the steering group, the project initially planned a wider consultation phase involving a series of one-off workshops. However, uptake remained lower than anticipated, with feedback highlighting barriers including work commitments, personal responsibilities and discomfort around discussing potentially difficult experiences within a group setting.

In response, the project adapted its approach and moved towards one-to-one semi-structured interviews delivered at times, dates and locations chosen by participants. This flexible approach ensured individuals could participate in ways that felt comfortable, accessible and appropriate to their circumstances.

Following this change, uptake increased significantly despite minimal additional promotion. Many participants had initially become aware of the project through social media posts, organisational networks or information shared through partner organisations. Whilst a £30 voucher was offered as recognition for participation, findings suggest that the primary motivation extended beyond financial incentive.

Many participants expressed the value of having a safe, neutral and confidential environment to discuss experiences that they had previously not felt able to share. Several described the experience of sharing their story as “a weight off my shoulders”, while others reflected that it was the first time they had spoken openly about their experiences.

To ensure alignment with project aims, steering group members worked collaboratively with the project manager to develop interview topics and questions. Drawing on themes emerging through workshops, interviews explored workplace experiences, barriers to sustainable employment, support systems, disclosure, legal rights, reasonable adjustments and potential solutions.

This process ensured that interviews not only explored individual experiences but also strengthened and validated findings emerging throughout the wider project.

Interview Question Themes



General Questions

How well supported do you feel in the workplace?



Barriers to Employment

What are the main barriers to you sustaining employment?



Leaving Employment

Have you ever left employment due to your disability or long-term health condition?



Legal Rights

Do you understand what legal rights you have in the workplace?

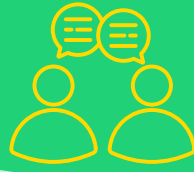


Advice & Ideas

What advice would you give to any employer looking to support disabled staff?

- 5 weeks to complete 37 interviews.
- Interviews took, on average, 2 hours to complete.
- Participants received £30 for taking part.

SUMMARY INTERVIEW RESULTS



THE CHALLENGE



60%

felt their disability
had affected career
progression

65.7%

are comfortable
being open about
their disability at
work

46.9%

worry that disclosing
a disability might
affect interview
success

91%

disclosed their
disability to their
employer



80%

**had a negative
experience at work**

related to their disability or long
term health condition

62%

**Left a job due to a
disability or related
barrier**

52%

**Did not have
reasonable
adjustments discussed
at all or only briefly.**

21%

**Are still waiting for
reasonable
adjustments to be put
in place or have been
waiting for more than 6
months**



WHAT WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE



What do you feel
are the main
barriers to
sustaining
employment?

68.6%

WORKPLACE
CULTURE

54.4%

IN-WORK
SUPPORT

42.9%

LACK OF
REASONABLE
ADJUSTMENTS

40%

LACK OF
DISABILITY-
SPECIFIC INFO

40%

LACK OF PEER
SUPPORT



What type of
support would help
you stay in work?

91.4%

FLEXIBLE
WORKING
HOURS

85.7%

BETTER
UNDERSTANDING
OF DISABILITY BY
MANAGER

82.9%

ADJUSTMENTS
REVIEWED
REGULARLY

80%

REGULAR 1:1
MEETINGS



What type of
support would you
want from an
independent
advisor?

85.7%

ADVICE ON
WORKPLACE
RIGHTS

82.9%

ACCESS-TO-
WORK SUPPORT

82.9%

ADJUSTMENT
TROUBLE-
SHOOTING

74.3%

MEDIATION WITH
EMPLOYER

FINDINGS



Workplace Culture

Workplace culture emerged as one of the strongest and most consistent findings across interviews, workshops and wider project engagement. Survey findings reinforced this clearly, with 69% of participants identifying workplace culture as a barrier to sustaining employment. Participants repeatedly identified culture as a key factor influencing not only their experiences of work, but their ability to remain in employment over time.

Participants described experiencing assumptions and perceptions about disability that shaped how they felt within the workplace. This was reflected in the survey data, where 79% reported fear of discrimination or stigma, 74% reported assumptions about ability, and 65% said they had been overlooked for opportunities.

For some, this included hearing comments such as “you don’t look disabled”, witnessing negative discussions about colleagues, or feeling that their abilities and contributions were questioned. These experiences often created fear around disclosure, concerns about being judged, and reluctance to ask for support.



“Did you enjoy your wee holiday?” [in reference to sick leave]

Participants also described more direct experiences of exclusion and bullying. Overall, 80% of participants said they had experienced a negative workplace experience they felt was directly related to disability or a long-term health condition, 56% reported microaggressions, and 32% reported bullying.

Others reflected on the cumulative effect of seemingly small interactions and everyday experiences which over time contributed to feeling isolated, undervalued and disconnected from their workplace.

The impact extended beyond workplace experiences alone. Participants described reduced confidence, loss of belonging, emotional exhaustion and increased stress, with some reporting that negative workplace environments worsened symptoms relating to fluctuating conditions such as Functional Neurological Disorder, Multiple Sclerosis and Fibromyalgia. For many, these experiences affected not only wellbeing but also their confidence in their ability to continue working.

“ They didn’t invite me to the Christmas party because they were worried I’d have a seizure ... Everybody else went, but not me.

However, participants also shared examples of positive workplace cultures. Where managers demonstrated understanding, built strong relationships and showed a willingness to adapt support as needs changed, participants consistently reported feeling valued and included. These experiences were often described as making it possible to stay in their job.

Overall, findings demonstrate that workplace culture is not simply a background factor but a critical determinant of sustainable employment. Inclusive environments built on trust, understanding, flexibility and proactive support reduced stress, strengthened wellbeing and created conditions where disabled people felt able not only to remain in work, but to thrive.

Disclosure of disability or long-term health condition

Across Voices at Work, disclosure emerged as one of the most emotionally complex aspects of workplace experience. While 91% of participants said they had disclosed their disability to an employer, this did not mean disclosure felt straightforward or safe. Participants rarely described disclosure as a straightforward conversation or a one-off event. Instead, it was experienced as an ongoing process of negotiation, where individuals continually weighed the need for support against concerns about judgement, stigma and the potential impact on their future within the workplace.

“ You think, if I say too much, I’ll be next. [when discussing watching fellow employees being forced to leave due to disability and lack of support]

For many participants, disclosure was not simply about sharing information; it involved deciding whether it felt safe to do so. Although 61% of those who disclosed did so at application stage, 47% worried that disclosure might affect their chances of success at interview and a further 34% said it might somewhat affect them. This suggests that more than four in five participants had at least some concern about the impact of disclosure during recruitment.

Decisions around disclosure were often shaped by workplace culture, previous experiences, relationships with managers and colleagues, and wider concerns about how disability was perceived.

Participants described carefully considering who to tell, when to tell them, and how much information to share. Rather than disclosing openly, many described taking a selective and strategic approach, often limiting disclosure to individuals they trusted.

Participants frequently described concerns that disclosure could alter how they were viewed within the workplace. There was a fear that once a disability or health condition became known, assumptions would be made about capability, reliability, productivity or future progression opportunities.

For others, disclosure was closely connected to identity and concerns around becoming defined by a condition rather than recognised for skills and contribution.

“ You’d expect healthcare professionals [colleagues] to be more understanding, but sometimes it’s worse. That ignorance was absolutely unbelievable when I look back at it now.

Participants with invisible or fluctuating conditions described additional complexity. Whilst 66% said they felt comfortable being open about their disability in the workplace, 23% said this was only sometimes the case, suggesting that openness was often conditional rather than secure.

Many felt caught between concealing their condition and deciding when disclosure became unavoidable. Hearing colleagues make negative comments about others or witnessing poor responses to disability within the workplace often reinforced fears and reduced confidence in being open.

For some participants, disclosure was not experienced as a choice at all. Changes in health, safety concerns or increasing support needs meant disclosure became necessary.

Importantly, the impact of disclosure extended beyond whether support was accessed. Participants described withholding information, delaying requests for support, masking symptoms and attempting to manage difficulties independently because of concerns around how disclosure might affect workplace relationships or future opportunities. Over time, this often-increased stress, emotional exhaustion and feelings of isolation, creating additional barriers to sustaining employment.

“ They said [if they knew before I started] they wouldn’t employ me because they didn’t understand the condition. Even though I had the skill set, because I’ve got a degree as well.

Career progression

Career progression emerged as a significant concern for many participants and was closely linked to fears around disclosure, stigma and workplace culture. 60% of participants said their disability had affected their opportunities for career progression, with a further 20% saying it had somewhat affected them. This means four in five participants saw at least some impact on progression.

For many, disclosure created uncertainty around promotion, training and professional development.

“ Even in a disability organisation, you can see that once people disclose, they don’t seem to progress the way you’d expect them to.

Some participants reported feeling overlooked for opportunities or excluded from progression pathways despite repeatedly expressing interest and requesting support. This reflects the wider pattern in the survey data, where 65% said they had been overlooked for opportunities.

These experiences reinforced wider concerns that once a disability became known, assumptions could be made about capability, reliability or long-term potential. Findings suggest that disclosure not only affected access to support, but also shaped participants’ confidence in their ability to build and sustain meaningful long-term careers.

Line Management

Throughout the interviews, participants consistently described significant disparities in experiences of management and employer support. Survey findings reflected this inconsistency. Less than half, 48%, felt their line manager understood disability or health conditions, while 35% said only somewhat and 18% said no. Just over half, 54%, felt their employer showed openness and willingness to support disabled staff, while 29% said only somewhat and 17% said no.

While some participants experienced understanding, flexibility and meaningful support, others reported dismissive responses, poor communication and a lack of understanding around disability. Findings suggest that support was frequently dependent on individual managers rather than embedded within organisational systems or workplace culture.

Participants often reflected positively on managers who took time to understand their experiences, adapted support to changing needs and demonstrated a willingness to listen. These relationships were frequently described as being central to participants feeling supported, valued and able to remain in work.

However, positive experiences were often accompanied by uncertainty around whether this support would continue over time or exist elsewhere within the organisation. Participants highlighted concerns that support could quickly change following restructuring, staff turnover or changes in management.

When asked out of ten, how well supported do you feel in the workplace, one participant reflected:

“ I would say nine... but that changed with management. The previous one was not very supportive, but the new one was.

This highlights an important finding: support was often experienced as inconsistent and dependent on individual personalities and approaches rather than reliable organisational practice. That inconsistency was also reflected in participants' own ratings of workplace support, which varied widely rather than showing a clear pattern of confidence.

Mini case study:

Sarah* described how support at work depended almost entirely on which supervisor was on shift. One supervisor recognised when she needed to sit down and adjusted tasks accordingly, while others made her feel like an inconvenience for asking for the same support. She said the real issue was not her condition itself, but the lack of clear, consistent communication and the expectation that she should keep managing until she reached breaking point. This reflected a wider theme across the project, where support often relied on individual managers rather than being embedded across the workplace.

* All case study names have been changed to protect participant anonymity.

In contrast, many participants described experiences where a lack of knowledge and understanding created barriers to receiving meaningful support. Participants reported situations where managers lacked confidence discussing disability or demonstrated limited understanding of specific conditions.

One participant described being asked:

“ What is MS anyway?

For some, these experiences reduced confidence in seeking support and reinforced concerns around disclosure. Rather than trusting that concerns would be understood or acted upon, participants described becoming selective about who they approached.

As one participant explained:

“If it had been my longer-standing manager, I would have definitely had that open conversation”

Participants also described feeling responsible for identifying solutions themselves and managing workplace barriers independently. In situations where support was not proactively offered, individuals often felt they had to continually advocate for their own needs.

“They kind of left it to me, which was kind of a wee bit difficult ... I didn’t know what I needed”.

These experiences suggest that responsibility for removing barriers was frequently shifted onto disabled employees themselves rather than being recognised as an organisational responsibility.

Importantly, participants described positive and negative experiences existing simultaneously within the same employment journey. Individuals could have highly supportive managers while continuing to navigate wider systems that felt slow, inconsistent or difficult to access. This created uncertainty and reinforced perceptions that support was based on individual circumstances rather than consistent organisational practice.

Overall, findings demonstrate that disparities in management and employer treatment can have a significant impact on sustainable employment. Where support relied heavily on individual managers, participants experienced uncertainty and inconsistency. In contrast, workplaces where understanding and support were embedded across culture, systems and practice created stronger feelings of trust, stability and long-term sustainability.

Reasonable adjustments

Participants consistently highlighted a significant disparity between reasonable adjustments being available in theory and what happened in practice. Only 41% of participants said reasonable adjustments were discussed clearly before or when they started the job. Nearly a third, 29%, said they were not discussed at all, and 24% said they were discussed only briefly.

“ I can’t quite get my head around why it wasn’t progressed. It would have cost my employer £27 as their contribution, and it didn’t happen.

Adjustments were often described as delayed, inconsistent or absent altogether, with experiences heavily influenced by management relationships, workplace culture and levels of disability understanding.

Many participants felt that reasonable adjustments were treated as “goodwill gestures” rather than essential and embedded workplace practices. Among those who required adjustments, only 55% said they received the support they needed, while 14% received only partial support, 14% received no support, and 10% were still waiting.

As a result, support was often reactive rather than proactive, with individuals only receiving help once difficulties had escalated.

“ They knew I was blind, but nothing was set up when I started ... I’ve been there for years and I’ve never been properly trained.

Adjustments were often described as delayed, inconsistent or absent altogether, with experiences heavily influenced by management relationships, workplace culture and levels of disability understanding.

Many participants felt that reasonable adjustments were treated as “goodwill gestures” rather than essential and embedded workplace practices. Among those who required adjustments, only 55% said they received the support they needed, while 14% received only partial support, 14% received no support, and 10% were still waiting.

As a result, support was often reactive rather than proactive, with individuals only receiving help once difficulties had escalated.

The impact of inconsistent support was significant. Among participants who experienced delays in adjustments, 67% reported increased stress, 67% reduced productivity, 61% a decline in health, and 50% conflict with their manager. Most starkly, 44% said they left employment as a result.

Participants also described the emotional labour involved in accessing support, often feeling responsible not only for identifying their own needs, but for educating managers and employers about reasonable adjustments themselves. This was particularly difficult during periods of worsening symptoms or fluctuating health, as many participants described the pull of health versus fear of consequences.

“ They refused a sit-stand desk because they ‘couldn’t see how it would help me’ ... In the end I just went out and bought it myself [for less than £100], but not everybody can do that.

Participants consistently stated that reasonable adjustments should not be treated as a one-off or “box-ticking” exercise. This was reinforced by the fact that only 44 % of those who received adjustments said support continued on a regular ongoing basis, while others described only occasional support or support stopping altogether.

Mini case study:

Lauren was recruited into a call centre role after openly disclosing that she was blind. 5 years later, she described being left without the accessible systems, assistive technology or training needed to fully do her job. Instead of being asked what support would help, assumptions were repeatedly made on her behalf. As a result, Lauren often relied on colleagues to complete basic tasks and described feeling excluded from meaningful work and progression within her own role. “I’ve done nothing in these 5 years. I mean, nothing.”

They emphasised the need for adjustments to be flexible, regularly reviewed and responsive to changing circumstances. Findings showed that where adjustments were proactive, fluid and supported through good communication, participants felt more valued, supported and able to remain in employment. In contrast, a lack of flexibility and ongoing review often resulted in workplaces becoming unsustainable over time.

Workplace barriers

Participants consistently highlighted that barriers to sustaining employment were rarely driven solely by their disability, impairment or long-term health condition itself. Instead, findings throughout Voices at Work showed that challenges were often shaped by wider workplace systems and practices, where inconsistent support, poor communication and a lack of flexibility created barriers to remaining in employment.

This was particularly evident for participants working in specialised, skilled or physically demanding roles, where changing health needs often exposed a lack of flexibility, limited alternative pathways and inconsistent approaches to support. Participants described situations where reasonable adjustments were unavailable, delayed or insufficient, resulting in individuals feeling that remaining in employment was becoming increasingly difficult.

“ I can’t even clock in or out myself – I need someone else do it. There’s no independence in that. You shouldn’t need someone else for basic things.

For some, developing a disability, impairment or long-term health condition later in life had a significant impact on their employment journey. Participants described the challenge of navigating changes in identity, adapting to new circumstances and attempting to remain within careers they had often spent many years building. Rather than workplaces adapting alongside these changing needs, participants frequently described feeling responsible not only for adapting to systems and environments that lacked flexibility, but also for identifying and developing solutions themselves.

Mini case study:

After spending more than 30 years in a highly specialised profession, Tommy’s career ended, not because he could no longer contribute, but because his workplace would not adapt when his needs changed. Support was initially strong following his accident, but this reduced once it became clear his condition was long term. Despite offering to take alternative or more junior roles, Tommy was ultimately forced out of the workplace he had dedicated decades of his life to.

These findings reinforce a key message throughout Voices at Work: disabled people were often not leaving employment because of disability itself, but because systems, environments and workplace practices were unable to adapt to changing needs. Across the survey, 63% of participants said they had left a job due to disability-related barriers, when combining those who had left once and those who had left multiple times. Of those who left, 73% felt that support at the right stage would have changed the outcome.

Among those whose situations escalated, 87% said they left before the issue was resolved.

Lack of peer support

A lack of peer support was highlighted across Voices at Work as a contributing factor to feelings of social isolation, exclusion and reduced confidence within both workplaces and across people's wider employment journeys. Survey findings showed that 40% of participants identified feeling they did not have peer support as a barrier to sustaining employment.

There was a significant value placed upon connecting with those with lived and living experience, something that was easily accessible outside of the workplace but not always within it. For those who had peer support through Staff Forums etc, it provided an important source of value. Albeit, informally, they were able to get practical advice, solutions to problems as well as understanding, reassurance and social connection. For those who did not have this opportunity, particularly when workplaces did not have Disability Staff Forums, they felt a huge sense of 'othering'.

Participants reported they often faced challenges without access to shared knowledge or support networks. In some cases, this meant relying on external groups rather than workplace-based support structures. While some participants reported having "plenty of peer support" through community networks, this was not consistently reflected within organisational settings.



I don't have any strong relationships with people in my workplace .. they just don't know how to communicate with me as a disabled person

This lack of peer and independent support also affected access to information. For example, 32% of participants said they were not aware of Access to Work, and many described uncertainty about employment rights, reasonable adjustments and where to turn for advice.

Despite peer support being incredibly valuable, particularly for those facing additional barriers within employment, it is not consistently built onto workplace structures. Facing challenges or struggles alone can be highly isolating and places additional pressure on individuals.

Strengthening peer support, both formal and informal, was identified by participants as important not only for improving workplace experiences but also for improving long-term sustainability in work. This is reflected in the fact that 71% said a peer support network would have helped them stay in work.



Stacey and Joan at a workshop

Throughout Voices at Work, participants consistently highlighted that sustainable employment requires more than workplace policies, individual adjustments or one-off interventions. Findings demonstrated that many of the barriers experienced by disabled people were often linked to gaps in communication, inconsistent support, limited understanding of disability, and workplace cultures that relied heavily on individual managers rather than embedded systems and practice.

A clear need for improved training and ongoing support emerged throughout the project. Almost all participants felt employers would benefit from additional disability-related training, with only 6% saying additional training would not make a difference. Participants also emphasised that any training should go beyond compliance and be grounded in lived experience, practical application and the realities of sustaining employment.

However, one finding stood out consistently across interviews, workshops and wider engagement:

100% of our participants highlighted the importance of better communication.

Participants repeatedly described wanting workplaces where they felt listened to, involved in decisions that affected them, and able to discuss changing needs without fear of judgement or negative consequences. Findings showed that support often depended on individual goodwill rather than consistent systems, leaving many participants feeling uncertain about whether support would continue or remain available over time.

Voices at Work has therefore created a co-produced set of recommendations for what a future toolkit should include, grounded directly in the experiences, priorities and expertise of disabled people. Rather than proposing isolated interventions, these recommendations set out practical and sustainable approaches that could support both disabled people and employers in building workplaces where support is proactive, accessible and consistent.

The recommended toolkit elements focus on key barriers identified throughout the project and are intended to:

- Improve communication and understanding
- Strengthen workplace culture and inclusivity
- Increase confidence and knowledge around disability
- Improve consistency in support and reasonable adjustments
- Provide practical tools and resources for both employees and employers
- Create ongoing systems of support across all stages of employment

The following sections outline the core elements recommended for a future Voices at Work Solutions Toolkit and how each responds directly to the experiences and barriers identified throughout this project:

1. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Training Module

2. Disability Peer-Led Support Service

Together, these recommendations represent a shift away from expecting disabled people to navigate barriers independently and towards workplaces that are informed by lived experience, shared responsibility and sustainable support systems.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Training

Participants recommended that any future EDI training module should be grounded in a person-centred approach, ensuring that training reflects the realities, needs and experiences of disabled people. Participants also highlighted the need for that training to be practical rather than abstract.

This recommendation is strongly supported by the survey findings. 86% of participants said better manager understanding of disability would have helped them stay in work, and 69% identified workplace culture as a barrier to sustaining employment.

Participants recommended that any future training should be built around the social model of disability, recognising that people are disabled by barriers within society, such as workplace environments, systems and attitudes, rather than by their condition or impairment itself. They also emphasised that training should avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and instead reflect a range of disabilities, impairments and long-term health conditions, alongside their different impacts and support needs. Embedding lived experience within the training was seen as essential to challenging assumptions, addressing barriers and supporting meaningful and sustainable change within workplaces.





Suggested Delivery Format



Participants recommended that the training should be flexible, engaging and accessible, so that it could be embedded within existing organisational systems. It could:

- Include fun and interactive elements
- Be immersive in its approach
- Use short, person-led training videos
- Provide space to learn, revisit content, and reflect over time
- Be available in multiple formats, including fully printable versions
- Be designed so that all content can be embedded within existing company training module systems



Lived experience at the forefront

Participants recommended that lived experience should sit at the centre of the training, with content built around real-life stories and insights. This could include:

- “What I wish I knew” reflections
- “How I can do things differently”
- Real-life stories and real people
- Examples of good practice

This would ensure that the training is grounded in reality and directly reflects the experiences highlighted throughout the Voices at Work project.



Understanding impact: ripple effect content

Participants suggested that the training could include ripple effect videos and case studies demonstrating the consequences of not providing reasonable adjustments. This could include:

- A video showing a one-to-one conversation between an employer and employee discussing pathways to reasonable adjustments
- Content designed to highlight impact and allow viewers to see beyond a single decision

The aim would be to make visible the wider and longer-term effects of workplace decisions on individuals and organisations.



Disability myth-busting

To support ongoing learning and culture change, participants recommended including disability myth-busting content, which could be shared across organisations in a variety of ways:

- Regularly shared with all staff
- Available on internal training platforms
- Shared through a team email account, including anonymous contributions
- Included at the bottom of email signatures for those who choose to take part



Resources and support

The module could provide clear and practical resources to support both employees and employers. This could include:

- Information on who to contact in different situations
- Signposting to external organisations, support services, and peer groups
- Guidance on accessing training and support for assistive technology



Practical tools for employers

Participants recommended that the training should include practical, co-produced tools to help employers better understand and support staff. These proposed tools are informed by disabled people's experiences and are intended to provide clearer guidance to improve retention and workplace experiences.



Workshops and team-based learning

Participants suggested that a future training module could include workshop-based learning to help teams take that learning further. This could include:

- Supporting teams to develop their own team agreement
- “Unlimited budget utopia” exercises, encouraging participants to explore:
 - What they would need to feel well supported
 - What meaningful support looks like in practice

These exercises would be intended to demonstrate that many reasonable adjustments are practical, low-cost and achievable.



Reflection tools

Participants recommended that the training should include reflection tools for both employers and employees, supporting ongoing communication and understanding. These could include:

- Templates for identifying pathways and next steps
- Conversation prompts
- Guidance on how to identify needs and support
- Practical ways of asking supportive questions, such as:
 - “How can I best support you?” instead of “What is wrong with you?”
- “Plan B” guidance, outlining:
 - What happens when support stops working
 - How adjustments can change over time



Reasonable adjustment tracking and accountability

To address inconsistencies in support, participants suggested that the module could include real-time reasonable adjustment trackers that are accessible to both employers and employees. These could:

- Increase accountability
- Move support away from “goodwill gestures” towards consistent, shared practice
- Improve communication, responding directly to findings that employees want to be kept informed and involved

The proposed EDI Training Module directly responds to the lack of consistent, clear and proactive support identified throughout the project. If developed, a module of this kind could help organisations create environments where disabled people are better supported to remain in and thrive within employment.

Disability Peer-Led Support Service

Our research has shown that structured support systems can be key not only to entering work, but to staying and thriving in employment. Survey findings showed that 71% of participants believed structured support such as regular check-ins would have made a difference, and 83% said an independent disabled-led adviser checking in during the first months of employment and onwards would have helped.



Steering group members at a workshop

Whilst traditional employability services often focus on placements or pre-employment support, participants identified a need for a peer-led service that could offer support throughout a person's employment journey.

They felt that this kind of approach could reduce stress, support earlier intervention and help prevent avoidable resignations or exits from work. This is consistent with the finding that 73% of participants who had left work due to disability-related barriers felt that support at the right point would have changed the outcome.

71% of participants supported a joint approach involving both the employer and an independent disabled-led support service.

Participants suggested that a joint approach involving employers and disabled staff could help bridge this gap, offering an additional source of support, advocacy or mediation where needed.



Peer-led support

Participants often reported feeling isolated in the workplace and described a lack of peer support or representation. In response, many identified the need for a neutral, independent peer support system. Voices at Work highlighted the value of lived experience in shaping meaningful and practical responses to sustainable employment. A peer-led approach could create space for disabled people to share knowledge, develop strategies together and offer support grounded in real-life challenges and successes. Participants felt that this kind of safe space could help people feel understood, build confidence and strengthen support networks. A peer support model rooted in lived experience could also challenge traditional power dynamics by recognising collective expertise, trust and realism.

Participants consistently reported that peer support is important in reducing isolation within the workplace. Whilst some workplaces had staff networks or disability forums, several participants expressed concern that information shared there might not remain confidential, particularly where line managers were involved. The lower uptake of wider consultation workshops also suggested that participants valued safe spaces where confidentiality and anonymity were clear. Findings from the workshops and interviews therefore suggest that external sessions, held away from the workplace in community or third sector settings, may feel safer and more accessible for some people.

Participants suggested that this could take the form of a regular monthly drop-in, offered at different times and on different days to maximise flexibility and attendance. Sessions could include guest inputs on topics such as Access to Work, use of the Equality Act 2010 and reasonable adjustments, alongside informal space for discussion and peer connection.



Advocacy & consultancy support

Participants often felt that employers, line managers and Human Resources primarily operated in the interests of the organisation, rather than in the interests of disabled staff. Interviews showed that whilst many disabled people were aware of protections under the Equality Act 2010, there was often a lack of confidence in how to use those rights in practice.

Participants often stated that, when they did not know how to use this legislation, an independent disabled-led service could have made a significant difference to their experience. They felt that access to individual or collective advocacy could help build their confidence, knowledge and skills in navigating workplace issues and asserting their rights.

As well as providing support to disabled staff, participants suggested that such a service could also offer guidance to employers. This might include support on inclusive practice, workplace barriers, reasonable adjustments and more constructive ways of responding to disability-related issues.

- Identifying necessary adjustments
- Supporting employees to self-advocate
- Celebrating and sharing examples of good practice
- Mediation between employee and employer
- Challenging poor practice if required



Independent advisor

Findings suggest that access to an independent disabled peer-led adviser could reduce stress and help disabled staff feel better supported.

Participants also highlighted a clear demand for specific types of support, including workplace rights, 86%, Access to Work support, 83%, adjustment troubleshooting, 83%, mediation with employers, 74%, and career planning, 63%.

“ I really like the idea of a joint approach – the employee, the manager, and an independent adviser. ... It allows people a neutral space to learn and feel better supported.

Participants suggested that an advisor role could include the following:

- Support and advocacy
 - Help with identifying and troubleshooting reasonable adjustments
- Employer navigation
 - Act as a bridge between employee and employer
 - Help resolve issues early
 - Provide both staff and employer guidance
- Emotional and confidence support
 - Confidence building
 - Identity and disclosure support
 - Coping with stigma, discrimination or negative experiences



Access to Work (ATW) support

Access to Work was repeatedly identified by participants as a potentially valuable source of support for sustainable employment, yet awareness and confidence were inconsistent. Survey findings showed that 32% of participants had never heard of Access to Work, and a further 9% said they had needed it but had not used it.

Where participants had used Access to Work, experiences were mixed. Some described the process as smooth, but others described delays, complexity and ongoing difficulties. For participants who had already applied to Access to Work, 70% felt that support from an independent adviser

would have improved the process. Among those who had not applied, responses also suggested that additional support could have helped them to do so.

In response to this, participants recommended clear and accessible guidance on Access to Work for both employers and employees, with the aim of:

- The responsibilities of both employers and employees
- What the scheme can be used for
- Clear expectations around processes and timeframes
- Promote strategies on how to use the scheme



Drop-in sessions

Participants highlighted the importance of ongoing communication, peer connection and collaborative problem-solving. They suggested that a future service could include regular drop-in sessions providing safe and supportive spaces for lived experience sharing, alongside opportunities for constructive conversations between staff and employers where appropriate.

- Drop-in sessions for just lived experience
- Structured sessions that allow staff and management to come together – separate to the lived experience sessions

SOLUTIONS TOOLKIT

DISABLED PEOPLE

PEER-LED SUPPORT SERVICE

Confidential spaces to share experiences and build support

INDEPENDENT ADVICE

Neutral support on workplace issues and rights

ONGOING SUPPORT

Ongoing help throughout employment

ACCESS TO WORK GUIDANCE

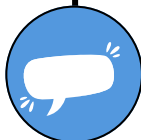
Clear support to understand and use the scheme

CONFIDENCE TO SPEAK UP

Support to navigate disclosure and conversations

PRACTICAL TOOLS

Tools to express what you need



EMPLOYERS, SERVICE PROVIDERS AND ORGANISATIONS

LEARNING TOGETHER

Team workshops to apply learning and embed practice

TRAINING MODULES

Co-produced training based on lived experience

TRACKING SUPPORT PROPERLY

Tools to manage and review adjustments

GUIDANCE ON ACCESS TO WORK

Straightforward information on roles and processes

BETTER CONVERSATIONS

Guides to support open, ongoing communication

FLEXIBLE TRAINING

Accessible training that fits into existing systems

LEARNING AND REFLECTIONS

Throughout Voices at Work, a number of important lessons emerged regarding engagement, co-production and delivering lived experience-led work. These reflections have highlighted key considerations for future projects aiming to ensure meaningful participation and create sustainable outcomes.

The Importance of Co-production

The use of a co-production approach throughout Voices at Work was hugely beneficial and strengthened both the process and outcomes of the project. Participants actively shaped discussions, identified priorities and contributed directly to findings and recommendations for practical solutions.

The relationship between participants and the project manager also played an important role. Shared lived experience of disability, employment and experiences of accessing employability support created a stronger sense of understanding and trust. Participants often felt comfortable discussing experiences because there was an understanding of the realities and barriers being described.

This highlighted that lived experience within project delivery can be extremely important, not only in developing trust and relationships but also in creating an environment where participants feel understood and comfortable sharing experiences.

Building Relationships and Connection

Creating opportunities for informal communication and relationship building proved extremely important throughout the project. The use of a WhatsApp group for steering group members helped develop positive relationships between participants and supported ongoing discussion outside of workshops. It created a more informal and accessible space where members could ask questions, share experiences and stay connected.

This highlighted that meaningful engagement often extends beyond formal meetings and workshops. Creating opportunities for connection can support trust, strengthen participation and create a stronger sense of belonging.

Time and Project Planning

While co-production strengthened the quality of the project, it also highlighted the importance of building additional time into project delivery. Meaningful co-production requires flexibility and responsiveness, allowing space for discussion, reflection, relationship building and adapting approaches based on participant feedback.

Future projects should ensure that additional time is built into project timelines to accommodate:

- Co-production and collaborative decision-making
- Relationship and trust building
- Accessibility requirements and adjustments
- Participant feedback and ongoing adaptation
- Flexible approaches to participation

Although this can extend project delivery timescales, Voices at Work demonstrated that allowing sufficient time for co-production significantly strengthens findings and outcomes.

Accessible Participation and Verification

In order to reduce barriers to participation, we allowed people to take part without asking for proof of identity, contact details and disability. Whilst this approach was successful for the majority of participants, a small number of individuals provided inaccurate or false information in an attempt to access the £30 participation voucher. (Any fictitious contributions are not represented in our findings or data.)

Whilst this represented only a small proportion of responses, it highlighted the importance of balancing accessible participation processes with appropriate verification measures. Future projects should consider proportionate approaches that protect the integrity of the project while ensuring that genuine participants are not faced with unnecessary barriers to engagement.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from Voices at Work demonstrate that barriers to sustainable employment for disabled people are not simply individual challenges. Across the survey, 69% of participants identified workplace culture as a barrier to sustaining employment, 51% identified in-work support, 43% identified a lack of reasonable adjustments, and 40% identified a lack of peer support. These findings reinforce that sustainable employment is shaped by systems, relationships and workplace practice rather than by disability alone.

Instead, experiences throughout the project highlighted the impact of wider systemic, structural and cultural barriers, including inconsistent workplace support, gaps in understanding, fear around disclosure, limited ongoing support and workplace cultures that often relied on individual goodwill rather than embedded practice.

The findings highlight a clear need for approaches that move beyond supporting disabled people into employment alone and instead focus on supporting people to remain, progress and thrive throughout their careers. Sustainable employment requires long-term, proactive support that recognises that needs, circumstances and workplace experiences can change over time.

As a result of these findings, Voices at Work recommends the following actions:

Pilot and Evaluate Solutions Toolkit

Voices at Work recommends a 'Test of Change' approach to pilot and evaluate the co-produced recommendations developed throughout the project.

This would:

- Create toolkit resources
- Test the practical implementation of the recommended toolkit elements
- Explore impact on retention, workplace experiences and wellbeing
- Identify strengths, gaps and areas for improvement
- Build evidence around sustainable, scalable approaches
- Ensure any future solutions continue to be shaped by lived experience and ongoing feedback

A Test of Change would allow these recommendations to move beyond concept and into practical application, creating opportunities to assess whether they lead to meaningful and measurable improvements for disabled people and employers.

Develop and Deliver a Disabled-Led Employability Service

Throughout Voices at Work, individuals consistently approached the project seeking support across a wide range of areas including:

- General employment advice
- Workplace rights and the Equality Act
- Reasonable adjustments
- Access to Work
- Placements and training opportunities
- Support to sustain employment

This demonstrates a clear gap in existing provision and highlights the need for a dedicated disabled-led employability service that would extend beyond entry into work and support individuals throughout their employment journey, past the usual 12 month cut-off.

The service should:

- Be delivered by staff with lived experience and understanding of disability and workplace barriers
- Provide tailored support across all stages of employment
- Establish peer-led support and advocacy pathways
- Support individuals to identify and navigate workplace barriers
- Act as a bridge between employees and employers

Support early intervention and reduce preventable exits from employment

Investment in Capacity and Resources Within GCIL

Demand for general employment advice and support through Voices at Work increased significantly throughout the project and extended beyond current capacity. Interest in both participation and ongoing support highlighted a need. Additional resource and infrastructure within GCIL would sustain and develop this work further.

Voices at Work therefore recommends:

1. Investment in infrastructure and resources to support the development of a Disabled People led employment support service
2. Resourcing staffing capacity to support delivery
3. Capacity to move beyond a pilot phase and support long-term implementation
4. Continued investment in lived experience-led and co-produced approaches

Increasing capacity would help ensure that future support is sustainable and would allow the project to move from identifying barriers to developing and testing long-term, practical solutions.

Ultimately, Voices at Work demonstrates that creating sustainable employment requires a shift away from expecting disabled people to continually adapt to systems that do not meet their needs. Instead, long-term change requires consistent support, lived experience leadership and workplaces that are designed not only for disabled people, but with disabled people.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Voices at Work and Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living (GCIL) would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this project.

This project, report and the recommendations presented within it would not have been possible without the time, expertise and openness of those who shared their lived and living experiences. We are especially grateful to the 47 participants who took part in workshops, interviews and wider engagement activities, sharing personal experiences, reflections and insights with honesty and trust.

We would like to give particular thanks to our Steering Group members, whose ongoing involvement, commitment and lived experience helped guide the project and ensured that disabled voices remained at the centre of every stage of the work. Through co-production, members played a vital role not only in shaping the project itself, but also in influencing discussions, identifying priorities and contributing to recommendations for practical solutions aimed at supporting disabled people to access meaningful, long-lasting and sustainable careers.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all interview participants who shared their experiences with honesty, openness and trust. Many individuals spoke about deeply personal and often difficult experiences, and their willingness to do so provided invaluable insight into the realities of sustaining employment as a disabled person. Their contributions not only strengthened this research but helped ensure that the voices, experiences and true needs of disabled people remained central throughout the project.



Our thanks also go to the organisations, partners, community spaces, Disabled People's Organisations and wider networks who supported the promotion and engagement of Voices at Work from the very beginning. We are grateful to third sector organisations such as MS Society Scotland, Visibility Scotland, GCVS and others, public sectors such as Greater Glasgow & Clyde NHS and Health and Social Care services, whose support helped strengthen participation and broaden the reach of the project.



We would also like to recognise the contribution of all those who supported Voices at Work throughout its development and delivery, including GCIL staff who provided practical support, guidance and encouragement, alongside those who offered valuable feedback, insight and expertise throughout the project.

Finally, we extend our sincere thanks to Glasgow Futures for funding and supporting this work, and for recognising the importance of lived experience and co-production in understanding and improving sustainable employment outcomes for disabled people.

Voices at Work has been built on the principle that disabled people are experts in their own lives. This report reflects their voices, experiences and recommendations. It is through their contributions that this work seeks to create meaningful, practical and sustainable change.

“ Nothing about us, without us.

Data from 1:1 interviews

Q1: Have you ever taken part in an employability programme?			
Responses (n): 7			
Answer option	n	%	
No	6	85.7%	
Yes	1	14.3%	
Q2: What is your current employment status?			
Responses (n): 34			
Answer option	n	%	
Paid employment	23	67.6%	
Looking for work	4	11.8%	
Unpaid employment	3	8.8%	
Prefer not to say	2	5.9%	
Unemployed	2	5.9%	
Q3: Have you disclosed your disability to your employer?			
Responses (n): 34			
Answer option	n	%	
Yes	31	91.2%	
No	3	8.8%	
Q4: If you have disclosed, at what stage did you disclose your disability?			
Responses (n): 33			
Answer option	n	%	
Application stage	20	60.6%	
Interview stage	4	12.1%	
After starting the job	3	9.1%	
I have not/did not disclose	3	9.1%	
Diagnosis occurred after I started employment	3	9.1%	
Q5: Did or do you worry that disclosing your disability might affect your chances of being successful at interview stage?			
Responses (n): 32			
Answer option	n	%	
Yes	15	46.9%	
Somewhat	11	34.4%	
No	6	18.8%	
Q6: Do you feel comfortable being open about your disability in the workplace?			
Responses (n): 35			
Answer option	n	%	
Yes	23	65.7%	
Sometimes	8	22.9%	
No	2	5.7%	
I chose not to disclose	2	5.7%	
Q7: On a scale of 1 to 10, how comfortable do you feel discussing your disability with your employer?			
Responses (n): 35			
Answer option	n	%	
	1	1	2.9%
	2	1	2.9%
	3	1	2.9%
	5	2	5.7%
	6	4	11.4%
	7	7	20.0%

	8	9	25.7%
	9	3	8.6%
	10	7	20.0%
Q8: On a scale of 1 to 10, how well supported do you feel in the workplace?			
Responses (n): 35			
Answer option	n		%
	1	1	2.9%
	2	3	8.6%
	3	3	8.6%
	4	4	11.4%
	5	2	5.7%
	6	4	11.4%
	7	2	5.7%
	8	7	20.0%
	9	4	11.4%
	10	5	14.3%
Q9: Do you feel your line manager understands disability or health conditions?			
Responses (n): 34			
Answer option	n		%
Yes	16		47.1%
Somewhat	12		35.3%
No	6		17.6%
Q10: Do you feel your employer shows openness and willingness to support disabled staff?			
Responses (n): 35			
Answer option	n		%
Yes	19		54.3%
Somewhat	10		28.6%
No	6		17.1%
Q11: As a disabled person, how confident do you feel that you can sustain your current job?			
Responses (n): 33			
Answer option	n		%
I have already left employment due to disability related	11		33.3%
Somewhat confident	10		30.3%
Extremely confident	6		18.2%
Somewhat not confident	4		12.1%
Unsure of how I feel	1		3.0%
Extremely unconfident	1		3.0%
Q12: Do you feel your disability has affected your opportunities for career progression or will in future?			
Responses (n): 35			
Answer option	n		%
Yes	21		60.0%
Somewhat	7		20.0%
No	6		17.1%
Not sure	1		2.9%

Q13: Have you ever had a negative experience within your workplace that you felt was a direct result of your disability or long-term health condition?		
Responses (n): 35		
Answer option	n	%
Yes	28	80.0%
No	5	14.3%
Unsure	2	5.7%
Q14: Have you ever left a job due to your disability/long term health condition or disability-related barriers?		
Responses (n): 35		
Answer option	n	%
Yes	13	37.1%
No	13	37.1%
Yes - multiple times	9	25.7%
Q15: Did you feel able to raise concerns at that point?		
Responses (n): 22		
Answer option	n	%
No	10	45.5%
Yes - but it was difficult	9	40.9%
Yes - easily	3	13.6%
Q16: At what stage do you think the situation could have been prevented from?		
Responses (n): 21		
Answer option	n	%
After new diagnosis or worsening condition	12	57.1%
Before starting the job	4	19.0%
Around 6 months	3	14.3%
First 3 months	1	4.8%
Not sure	1	4.8%
Q17: If support had been provided at that point, would it have changed the outcome?		
Responses (n): 22		
Answer option	n	%
Yes	16	72.7%
No	3	13.6%
Maybe	2	9.1%
Not sure	1	4.5%
Q18: Was the situation eventually resolved?		
Responses (n): 23		
Answer option	n	%
I left before the issue could be resolved	20	87.0%
I refused to take the job offered, I didnt want to take the	1	4.3%
Some adjustments made but not enough to improve	1	4.3%
Yes	1	4.3%

Q19: Do you understand what rights you have in the workplace as a disabled person?		
Responses (n): 35		
Answer option	n	%
Yes	17	48.6%
Somewhat	13	37.1%
Unsure	3	8.6%
No	2	5.7%
Q20: Do you understand what reasonable adjustments is?		
Responses (n): 35		
Answer option	n	%
Yes	29	82.9%
Somewhat	4	11.4%
No	1	2.9%
Unsure	1	2.9%
Q21: Do you understand what reasonable adjustments are available or that you require?		
Responses (n): 35		
Answer option	n	%
Yes – I researched them myself	11	31.4%
Third party explained them to me	11	31.4%
No – as I am unsure what adjustments would help	5	14.3%
Yes – my employer explained them	5	14.3%
No – my employer did not explain them	3	8.6%
Q22: Thinking about your current or most recent job: Were reasonable adjustments discussed before or when you started the job? If you have a new diagnosis or		
Responses (n): 34		
Answer option	n	%
Yes, clearly	14	41.2%
Not at all	10	29.4%
Briefly	8	23.5%
Unsure	1	2.9%
I did not disclose	1	2.9%
Q23: If you required adjustments, did you/have you received the adjustments you needed?		
Responses (n): 29		
Answer option	n	%
Yes	16	55.2%
Partially	4	13.8%
No	4	13.8%
I am still waiting	3	10.3%
I did not disclose	2	6.9%
Q24: How long did it take for any employer adjustments to be put into place?		
Responses (n): 24		
Answer option	n	%
Within the first week starting	7	29.2%
It took up to 6 months	7	29.2%
I have been in employment for at least 6 months and am	5	20.8%
Within the first month starting	5	20.8%

Q25: If you received adjustments when you first started your job or when you had a new diagnosis, did this continue after this point?

Responses (n): 25

Answer option	n	%
Yes – regular ongoing support	11	44.0%
Yes - occasional support	8	32.0%
I did not receive support	4	16.0%
Not applicable	1	4.0%
No support stopped after recruitment or new diagnosis or	1	4.0%

Q26: Have you ever used Access to Work?

Responses (n): 34

Answer option	n	%
Yes	15	44.1%
Not aware of it	11	32.4%
No - I did not need it	5	14.7%
No - but I needed it	3	8.8%

Q27: If you had received support to apply to Access to Work, would you have done it/ would it have improved your experience?

Responses (n): 23

Answer option	n	%
Yes	16	69.6%
Maybe	4	17.4%
No	2	8.7%
Don't know	1	4.3%

Q28: If you had received support to apply to Access to Work, would you have done

Responses (n): 21

Answer option	n	%
Yes	17	81.0%
Maybe	3	14.3%
No	1	4.8%

Q29: Do you think structured support such as regular check-ins would have made a difference?

Responses (n): 35

Answer option	n	%
Yes	25	71.4%
Possibly	9	25.7%
No	1	2.9%

Q30: If check-ins took place at months 1, 3 and 6, 9, 12 months and then yearly, would this have?		
Responses (n): 34		
Answer option	n	%
Prevented issues;Reduced stress	17	50.0%
Possibly helped	8	23.5%
Prevented issues	2	5.9%
Made no difference	1	2.9%
Made no difference;Possibly helped	1	2.9%
Possibly helped;Made no difference	1	2.9%
Reduced stress;Prevented issues;Possibly helped	1	2.9%
Not sure	1	2.9%
Prevented issues;Reduced stress;Possibly helped	1	2.9%
Reduced stress;Prevented issues	1	2.9%
Q31: If an independent disabled-led advisor checked in during the first months of employment, would that have helped?		
Responses (n): 35		
Answer option	n	%
Yes	29	82.9%
Possibly	3	8.6%
Not sure	2	5.7%
No	1	2.9%

Appendix summary of open and multiple-answer responses

Barriers to sustaining employment

Respondents most frequently identified workplace culture as a barrier to sustaining employment. Other commonly selected barriers were insufficient in-work support, lack of reasonable adjustments, lack of disability-specific information, and lack of peer support.

Support that would help people stay in work

The most commonly selected forms of support were flexible working hours, better manager understanding of disability, regular reviews of adjustments, regular one-to-one meetings, and working from home options. Respondents also identified peer support networks, support with workload, and faster implementation of adjustments as helpful.

Ongoing support and check-ins

Most respondents said structured check-ins would have made a difference. There was a clear preference for check-ins to involve both the employer and an independent disabled-led support service, rather than being led only by a line manager or employer.

Support from an independent adviser

Respondents most often selected advice on workplace rights, Access to Work support, adjustment troubleshooting, mediation with employers, career planning, and emotional support as the types of help they would want from an independent adviser.

Delays in adjustments and support

Where adjustments were delayed, respondents most often reported increased stress, reduced productivity, declining health, conflict with managers, and in some cases leaving employment. Some also said they had considered leaving employment.

Raising concerns in the workplace

Among those who had raised concerns, common responses included being told to “manage”, experiencing tension, and feeling that they were not taken seriously. Some respondents reported delayed adjustments, while a smaller number said adjustments were made quickly.

Access to Work

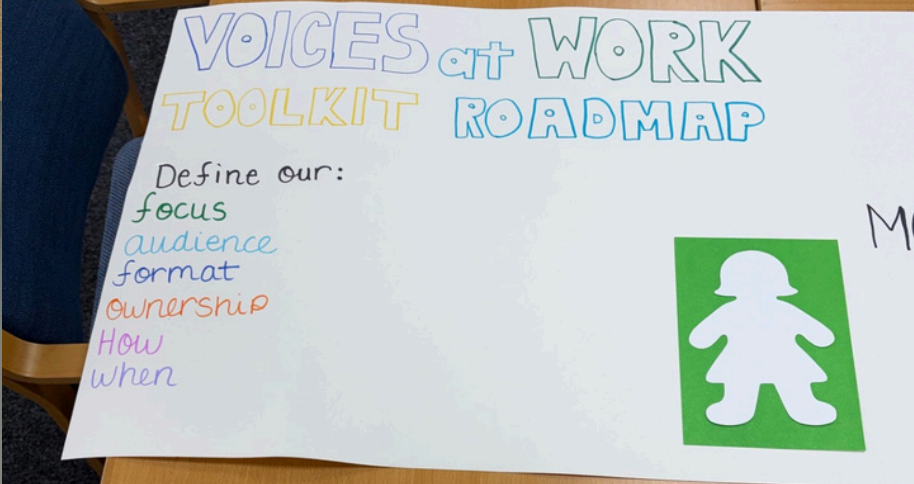
Responses on Access to Work were mixed. Some respondents described the process as smooth, while others described it as difficult or slow. Among those who had not applied, several said they were unsure what support was available, did not know enough about the scheme, or were unsure how to apply.

Wider open comments

Across the more open responses, several recurring issues appeared. These included better understanding of disability, more flexible working arrangements, clearer communication, timely support, access to appropriate adjustments or equipment, and workplace approaches that avoid assumptions about capability. Respondents also referred to the importance of trust, fairness, and feeling listened to in the workplace.

Participant work backgrounds

Survey respondents represented a mix of sectors, job roles and employment situations. The largest single group worked in the third sector. Public service roles were also represented, including the NHS and other public bodies. Other respondents described backgrounds in call centre work, retail, housing, education, skilled trades and finance. The survey also included people who were retired, studying, unemployed, or unemployed on medical grounds.





Contact Information

GLASGOW

 0141 550 4455

 GCIL@gcil.org.uk

EAST DUNBARTONSHIRE

 0141 776 2219

 GCILEastDunbartonshire@gcil.org.uk

NORTH LANARKSHIRE

 01698 537 472

 GCILNorthLanarkshire@gcil.org.uk

SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

 01698 892 372

 GCILSouthLanarkshire@gcil.org.uk



www.gcil.org.uk



Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living



#GCIL_DPO



gcil_dpo



@gcil

We are a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee, set up in 1995.

Charity number: SC024299 Company number: 161693