



Final report 2023

“Really deepening my understanding of the connections we need to make for change.”

Network member

Executive summary

Over two years the Additional Support Needs (ASN) Learning Network identified the specific barriers that exist in the South of Scotland to individuals with additional support needs finding and maintaining employment.

It has outlined the barriers for organisations supporting people and it has shared what does exist to make joining up services and resources easier. It has analysed and summarised the problem and proposed solutions.

South of Scotland Enterprise funding enabled to the network to operate based on their knowledge of the economic landscape and the area's inclusive economic priorities. The network provided the permission and a platform to think differently about how to solve the problem of too many people with additional support needs not being able to access employment across the region. By amplifying the experience and voice of individuals members and partners were drawn to the urgency of the problem and the local assets that could address it.

In considering what has been learned the next recommended steps are to take forward member led evidence of what is needed – for individuals, for organisations supporting them and for potential employers.

“We should not hide from the fact that that is what is happening those with additional support needs are being let down and denying them the opportunity to get on in life. In short all policy decision makers and politicians must own up to the fact we are failing people.”

Oliver Mundell MSP Dumfriesshire, network conference September 2023

Recommendation

On completion of this two year project the ask of the partners who make up the [Regional Economic Partnership](#) based on member and partner input is summarised against the following three themes with an overarching ask to make sure there are appropriate opportunities for all.

Collaboration and partnership	Funding and support	Employers
<p>Work collaboratively to understand and support individual ambitions to work flexibly, fairly and sustainably locally.</p> <p>Involve more people with lived experience involved in making decisions.</p> <p>A clearer understanding of the value of a person-centred approach to closing the employability gap.</p> <p>Consolidate all of the providers/agencies/funding agencies into one single access point to clarify to everyone what is available.</p>	<p>Fund local projects that meet that need and ensure young people do achieve employment.</p> <p>New thinking needed about multi-year funding and partnership vehicles with equity for big and small organisations.</p> <p>Get away from the cost divided by the number of people and focus more on the holistic benefit to society.</p> <p>Embed equity into every aspect of economic strategy, not just specific ASN policies.</p>	<p>Work with local employers to offer genuine opportunities with support.</p> <p>Work with employers to improve their knowledge, illustrate the benefits and develop their practice of employing people with additional support needs.</p>

These asks align closely with priority areas in the Regional Economic Strategy (2021-2031).

The support offered to employers needs to be much more explicit and easy to access - the change needed will not happen if assumptions are made about employers proactively seeking support; business is already a challenging environment to be in and the support offer needs to reflect this.

Next phase

The recommendation is that the next phase of the network would build on these three areas **collaboration and partnership; funding and support; and employers** by:



1

Supporting an employer group with key partners to develop employment **OPPORTUNITIES** for people with additional support needs.



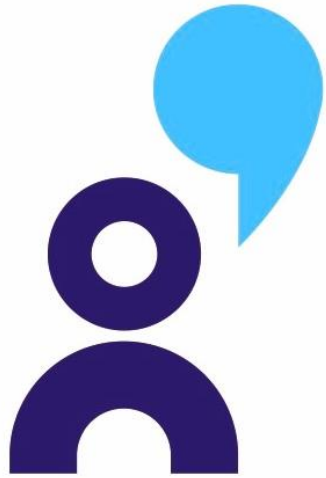
2

Share the **VALUE** of people working with voices and data demonstrating what economic inclusion looks like



3

Working collaboratively to influence change in all **FUNDING** streams across the region to support individuals into work.



Introduction

The ASN Learning Network grew from conversations between the Inspired Enterprise Community Trust (ICET) of Dumfries, Borders Additional Needs Group (BANG) in the Scottish Borders and the South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE).

The network was established as a two-year project in the South of Scotland and was co-ordinated by Inspiring Scotland.

The aim was to:

- Share best practice and innovation in the region in transition and employability policy or young people and adults with additional support needs.
- Enable local organisations to meet and learn through peer-to-peer organisation support.
- Identify gaps in service provision.
- Provide insight from individuals in accessing employment, and work to influence the redesign of employment support.
- Act as a credible reference group for statutory sector partners.
- Help to inform the regional economic strategy and therefore maximise economic investment into South of Scotland.

Inspiring Scotland ran two monthly membership sessions, consulted with people with additional support needs, analysed evidence from members and made recommendations about change needed.



People

In terms of the number of economically active people with additional support needs the Disability Employment Gap generally and for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in the region is significant.



Scottish Learning Disabilities Observatory analysis of the Scotland's 2011 census data found that, of a combined population between the two local authorities of **265,194** there were **2,169** people between 16-64 years old who reported or were reported as having a learning disability or autism. **Only 268 were in paid employment.**

The percentage of known people with learning disabilities and autistic people with paid employment varied between **3-11.3%** compared to between **55.9- 58.2%** of all adults.

The analysis of the 2022 census will be useful to see if there is any change.

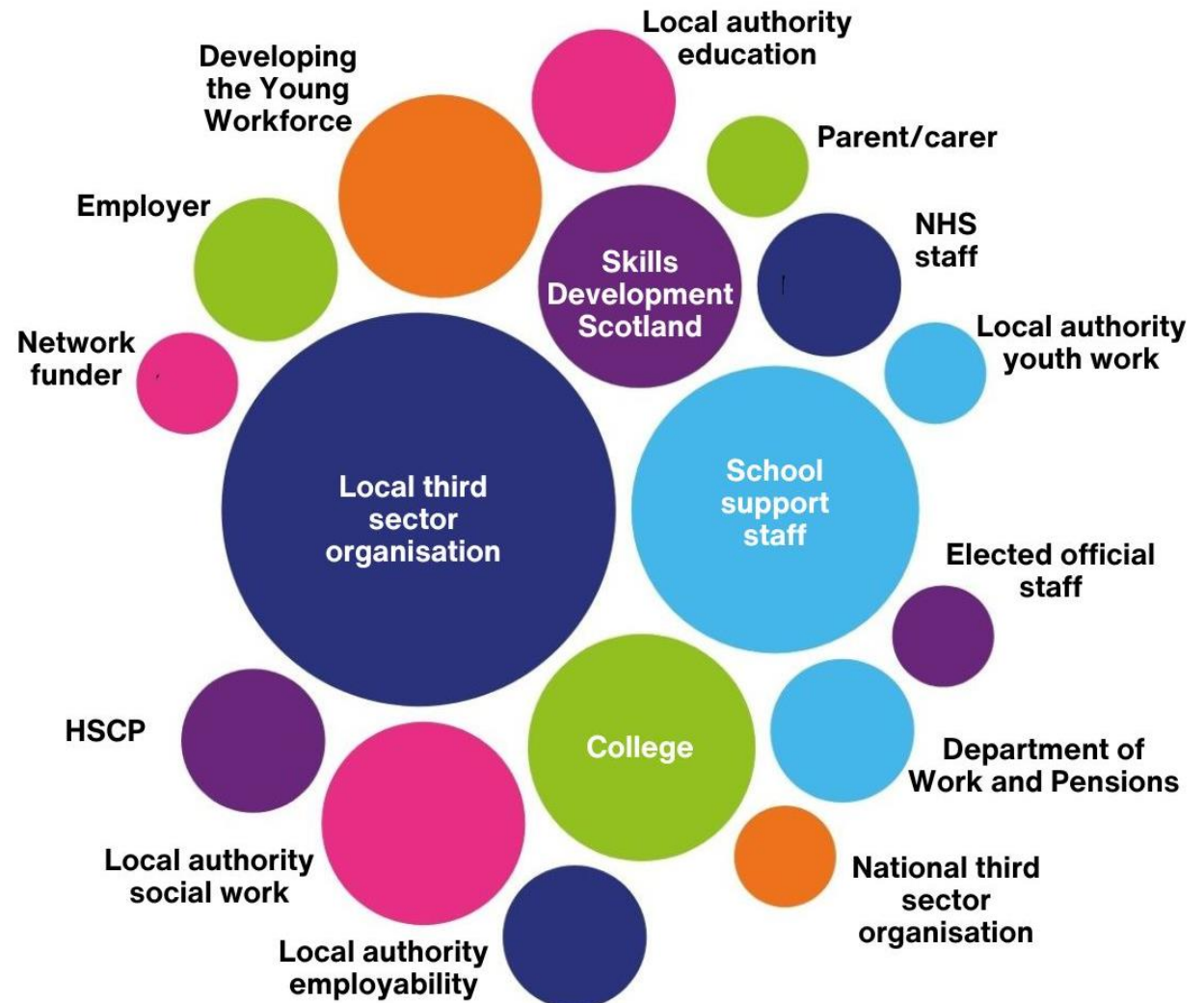
Network membership

56 individuals initially signed up the network from a range of organisations across the region. Where known or applicable there were 28 representatives from The Scottish Borders and 20 from Dumfries and Galloway.

Over the two years there were 11 online sessions of the network plus a bespoke session with [Tree of Knowledge](#) on four pillars of mindset, change, positivity and purpose. Sessions combined spotlights on member organisations, sharing what they do and encouraging referrals or engagement. Some sessions included external participants who shared expertise around setting up and operating social enterprises and developing alternative income streams.

The average attendance at a two monthly session averaged 13 which given the completing priorities members were dealing with demonstrates the perceived value of the network. 76 people attended at least one session of the network with 24 at the first session and the smallest group of attendees at 8.

The most common type of organisational representative attending was from a local third sector organisation with Skills Development Scotland and local authority employability representatives also with high attendance.



People's priorities

A network aim was to make sure it used the views and experiences from individuals to provide insight and to shape the redesign of employment support.

Engagement sessions were held with member organisations with questions about the type of jobs they would like to do and what was or is stopping people from being able to do achieve them. This question is in line with the statement in the Regional Economic Strategy that:

“Everyone should have a job that makes them happy and treats them fairly.”

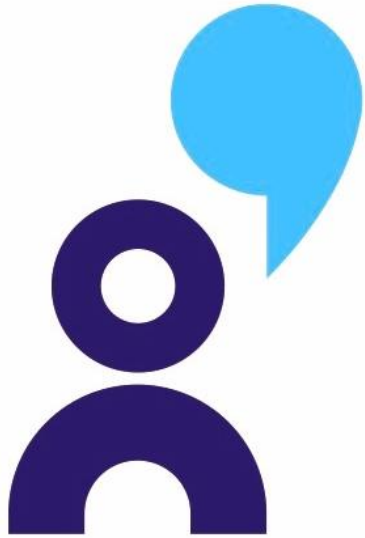
The network heard from:

- 12 young people attending a session of the Borders Additional Needs Group at Borders College in Galashiels
- 22 people attending a session with Wigtownshire Stuff at Stranraer College
- 18 people attending the Youth Matters Conference in Dumfries

12 young people commented on the design and content of an information resource.

Members of the Youth Matters Conference Steering Group attended a network session to share their recommendations following the conference in November 2022.

Surveys were also issued to parents and carers.



The responses to these engagement sessions were collated and overall the key messages are:

Young people with ASN in the South of Scotland

- Want more local opportunities that align with their interests and personal qualities.
- Key blockers to this are anxiety, transport, and required skills and experience.
- What would help most is in work support during training / induction and reasonable adjustments, disability awareness training and transport support.

Parents and carers of those with ASN in the South of Scotland

- Want meaningful employment that meets aspirations and ambitions, in a sector of interest, with accessible training and modern apprenticeships.
- Key blockers to this are lack of social care staff, discrimination and lack of understanding.
- What would help most is support to find work, reasonable adjustments, buddies and disability awareness training.

Learning

This two year pilot project highlighted the range of community assets across the region that have been supporting transformation in the area. The things that stand in the way of change are barriers that collectively could be dismantled.

The key learning forming the basis of recommendations for the next phase are:

- Contributors have cited low energy – the aftermath of the pandemic, the cost of living impact and general economic downturn result in an environment where innovation can be difficult. Although these are very sizeable issues to tackle the focus on making connections, sharing what is available and accessible and providing bespoke development activities will help to counteract some of this.
- The most frequent contributors to network sessions and workstreams were professionals in local third sector organisations who have often have more flexibility around their time than other members in service delivery roles. The core membership interaction was two monthly online sessions but more diversity in opportunities to contribute including a shared online space would be developed.
- Effective support to get people into training and employment often has a short-term investment attached. At the centre of the need for change is to pivot the thinking and approach to secure lifelong opportunities and enrich lives.
- A negative judgement about practice was sometimes expressed – especially across the third and statutory sector members. Ongoing collaboration and relationship building will ultimately contribute to improved awareness of the practice standards that result in changed outcomes for people with additional support needs.
- There is a competition created by funding streams where there is limited money and more providers than funds available. This can make partnership and honesty between members difficult but airing these issues helps to look at where projects and services can complement one another rather than be perceived as competitors.
- Employer response to a survey and request to participate in the network sessions was low. In a next phase the offer of support to employers needs to be more explicit so that employers are aware of this support and quickly see and experience how it makes a difference to them.

Next steps

As stated earlier, on completion of this two year project the ask of the partners who make up the Regional Economic Partnership is summarised against the following three themes with an overarching ask to make sure there are appropriate opportunities for all.

Over the next phase of a network over two years the key building blocks and their proposed owner would be:

ACTION	ACTIVITY	OWNER
Supporting an employer group with key partners to develop employment OPPORTUNITIES for people with additional support needs.	Agree employer priority areas with members; locations and industries	Network facilitator
	Establish employer group with key contacts, agreeing terms of reference	Business lead
	Explore how to expand opportunities provided by employers including support and funding to enable this to develop	Business lead
	Agree targets and measures of success in short and medium term	Network facilitator
Share the VALUE of people working with voices and data demonstrating what economic inclusion looks like	Compile local case studies identifying what made employment accessible and sustainable	Network facilitator
	Compile local data of numbers of people with additional support needs in employment through surveys or agreed means	Third sector lead
	Work with economists to illustrate the impact of economic inclusion	Network facilitator
Working collaboratively to influence change in all FUNDING streams across the region to support individuals into work.	Compile list of potential funding to support employers	Business lead
	Share with members list of funding available to individuals	Third sector lead
	Agree opportunities for redirecting local government, business and education funding to better meet the needs of this group	Network facilitator

Next steps – continued

A formal connection with relevant local planning groups to support these actions would be needed including the Local Employability and Skills Partnerships. Network members cited 12 different planning groups they contribute to which are connected to employment and support for people locally with additional support needs.

Aligning these to three priorities in the [Regional Economic Strategy Delivery Plan](#) covering the years 2022-2025, the ASN Learning Network proposed future actions align most closely with these three priorities:



Theme	Priority	Actions
Skilled and ambitious	Enabling access to skills, training & employment	Remove barriers to make it easier for priority groups to access work and training
Skilled and ambitious	Building Lifelong Learning & Opportunity	Undertake a comprehensive 'mapping and gapping' exercise of the lifelong learning opportunities throughout the South of Scotland
Thriving & Distinct Communities	Activating & Empowering Communities, the Third Sector and Social Enterprise	Develop a renewed and up to date approach to community capacity and capability building for community groups and organisations – enabling change to be driven more locally and from the bottom up

Future funding and governance

To co-ordinate a network the following observations and recommendations are made:

1. A national organisation with specific resource to co-ordinate this type of work enables connections and solutions to develop. A network of organisations and people requires time to organise and this is the reason why it doesn't tend to happen organically in an area as most people do not have the capacity to support this type of work and funding is stretched.
2. A local anchor organisation as a partner in the co-ordination would provide the local knowledge, insight and hold key relationships. This could be a Third Sector Interface, Business Gateway or Chamber of Commerce etc.
3. To ensure effective governance a steering group with clear decision making structure would make for timeous decision making and clarity about how decisions are made.

To fund the network beyond 2023 the following options are suggested:

- Local government employability funding stream
- Scottish Government through a Third Sector Interface
- Business Gateway
- Trusts and foundations



Thanks

This network was made possible by funding from the South of Scotland Enterprise and the commitment of the Communities Specialist to champion the need and shape the scope the network.

The activity was possible through the determination of organisations supporting individuals across the region to be part of change and to be part of achieving different outcomes in employment for people with additional support needs.

The network's core was driven by people who contributed to engagement sessions and who shaped all of the recommendations being made.

Thank you to everyone who has given their time, energy and passion.



INSPIRING SCOTLAND

“Thank you so very much for everything you have done to promote the Learning Network. I know it has not been easy and probably like herding cats a lot of the time too because the very people who most benefit are those who struggle for time too.” Network member