

Aspire in Partnership (AiP)



Newsletter – January 2026



This report provides a quarterly summary of EDI-focussed activity, aimed at supporting employers to diversify their workforces.

Aspire in Partnership (AiP) is a Growth Company (GC) service designed to help businesses attract and retain best-in-class talent from a diverse range of backgrounds – creating a productive workforce and opportunities for all.

Overall Impact

Over the months of October to December 2025, we've proactively supported 22 employers to widen their candidate pools, placing 136 unemployed people into work in the process. All placements are with employers paying at least the Real Living Wage (RLW).

Below is a breakdown of the key D&I metrics:

RLW Job Starts	Male	Female	Non-binary	16-24	25-49	50+
136	42%	58%	0%	13%	67%	20%
Arab	Asian/Asian British	Black	Mixed heritage	White		
2%	19%	29%	7%	43%		

Employer Case Studies

Teleperformance

Employers who take a flexible approach by making reasonable adjustments to working practices and creating supportive environments can access a wealth of hidden talent. For individuals managing health conditions, these measures not only open doors to employment but also enable them to thrive and contribute meaningfully. Teleperformance are one such organisation who understand the power of supportive environments. Here's a recent success story involving one of our employability customers:

RS was referred for support after being out of work for over 10 years following a diagnosis of a degenerative neurological disease affecting his mobility and cognition,



for which he continues to receive regular treatment. Previously an IT account manager, RS hoped for a low-pressure Work From Home (WFH) role but was open to a nearby hybrid option. Initial job searches were unsuccessful; roles he liked declined his applications. Teleperformance held an Open Day with immediate interviews for face-to-face positions. Even though RS preferred a WFH option, he attended to explain his situation. He lacked suitable interview clothing, so *Working Wardrobe* provided a suit and shoes, helping to boost his confidence.

The interview went well, Teleperformance could see a great candidate who could be a valuable addition to the team provided changes to working practices took place. For RS, this meant increasing the Work From Home time and amending the work schedule to include more frequent short breaks. RS started on 21st October and although RS still faces health challenges, returning to work has given him a new lease of life, easing mental health pressures and supporting his overall recovery and providing Teleperformance with a great addition to their workforce.

Metroline

AiP continues to support Metroline to recruit Trainee Bus Drivers from under-represented backgrounds. The first Pre-Employment Academy (SWAP), run in collaboration with the Job Centre Plus, completed in early December with the first cohort of drivers commencing employment at the end of 2025. The next cohort started training on 12th January and there will be a session specifically for females towards the end of March.

It is anticipated that the SWAPs will continue every other month throughout 2026 to support Metroline to meet their Social Value commitments and reflect the communities they serve.

To understand how to adapt your workplace and attract talent like RS or to access SWAPs, contact Adrian Bird (details below).

Understanding Neurodiversity Workshop Delivery

Back in October 2025, the Good Employment Charter launched the [Bee Neuroinclusive Code of Best Practice](#) to support employers to understand how to become more neuroinclusive.

As knowledge on neurodiversity has risen over the last few years, so has demand for diagnoses and workplace adjustments to support those with a neurodivergent condition. Fear of stigma means that many with conditions are reluctant to disclose the information, even to their line manager in some instances. Given that organisations and even individuals may not be aware of their neurotype, best practice would be to adapt environments, policies, systems and processes so that they are neuro-friendly as this will support employees to deliver their best work.

AiP's Understanding Neurodiversity Workshop aligns with the Code of Best Practice. In the last quarter of 2025, AiP delivered the workshop as part of the Good Employment Week schedule, as well as to over 40 senior managers at the NHS Manchester Foundation Trust and to HR and Recruitment personnel at Salford City Council.

To enquire about workshop delivery, contact Adrian Bird (details below).

Colleague Representative Groups Network

On 19th November 2025, the fourth Colleague Representative Groups (CRG) Network event was held, bringing together 60 network co-Chairs from 36 organisations across the public, private, and VCFSE sectors. The event focused on collaboration, best practice sharing, and shaping the future of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB).

The day featured inspiring presentations from network leaders. Adam Lappin showcased United Utilities' Armed Forces Network, highlighting success in attracting military talent through the Armed Forces Covenant. Valentina Othieno, Race Network Lead at Bruntwood SciTech, spoke passionately about how employee networks foster skills and meaningful connections. Mysha Williams, Co-chair of The Growth Company's EmbRace Network, emphasised cross-team collaboration as key to lasting impact. Closing the speaker session, Dr. Christopher Owen, founder of Coliberate, reminded attendees that collective effort drives meaningful change.

A lively panel Q&A explored challenges such as maintaining traction and supporting socially anxious network leads. Practical solutions included adopting co-Chair models to share responsibilities and creating psychologically safe environments. Table discussions celebrated achievements like fundraising for *Not a Phase*, launching hidden disability training, and sponsoring Wigan Pride. Networks also strengthened external partnerships with organisations such as Blackburn 1 Voice and Barclays Bank.

Looking ahead, plans include expanding outreach to schools, monthly faith and race activities, and deeper collaboration across regions. The event closed with optimism and a clear message: Colleague Representative Groups are vital, but success depends on leadership support and alignment with business goals.

The next in-person event will take place on 13th May 2026 at the Alliance Business School, University of Manchester.

For more information or to join the network, contact Adrian Bird (details below).

Ready to Rethink Inclusivity?

Inclusivity is often framed around *Protected Characteristics*—race, gender, sexuality, disability, and more. While this approach is essential for addressing systemic inequalities, some organisations are finding that it can unintentionally create feelings of exclusion among employees who do not identify with these characteristics.

When conversations about diversity and inclusion (D&I) feel like they focus on “others,” these employees may disengage, feeling marginalised or overlooked.

This challenge highlights the importance of understanding overt and covert inclusivity.

- **Overt inclusivity** is visible and explicit. It includes policies, training, and language that directly reference underrepresented groups. These measures are critical for equity, but if not balanced, they can appear exclusive to those outside the focus.
- **Covert inclusivity** is subtle and universal. It embeds fairness, belonging, and wellbeing into everyday practices without singling out specific identities. This approach ensures everyone feels valued, regardless of background.

AiP has begun working with organisations to shift their language and strategy from identity-based frameworks centred on Protected Characteristics, toward concepts like belonging, fairness, progression, and mental wellbeing. These themes resonate broadly, creating space for all employees to see themselves in the conversation while still supporting those who face systemic barriers.

The goal isn’t to dilute D&I efforts, more to make them sustainable and inclusive for everyone. By combining overt actions (such as targeted support for underrepresented groups) with covert strategies (such as promoting psychological safety and equitable progression), organisations can foster a culture where diversity is celebrated and unity is strengthened.

To explore how your organisation can adapt language in an inclusive way, contact Adrian Bird (details below).

Enquiries

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