



Aspire in Partnership (AiP)

Newsletter – October 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 July to September 2026, we’ve proactively supported 23 employers to widen their candidate pools, placing 195 unemployed people into work in the process. All placements are with employers paying at least the Real Living Wage (RLW).

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

RLW Job Starts	Male	Female	Non-binary	16-24	25-49	50+
195	40%	58%	2%	27%	55%	18%
Arab	Asian/ Asian British	Black	Mixed heritage	White		
1%	8%	50%	4%	37%		

Employer Case Study

Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM)

In August, we began working with **TfGM** to support them to regularly attract and hire people from a range of under-represented backgrounds to help them reflect the Greater Manchester communities they serve. Activity has centred on three public-facing roles: **Customer Service**, **Site Co-Ordinator** and **Utility Officers** who will primarily work in **Bus Stations** and **Public Transport Interchanges** in Greater Manchester.

The candidates were drawn from a range of partners including, local Job Centres, community organisations and Housing Associations to undertake a two-week pre-



employment course, which covers the fundamentals of Customer Service, leading to the **Customer Service Level 1** and the **Wellbeing at Work Awards**.

Each participant is guaranteed an interview with TfGM at the end of the process. This aligns with the approach taken by bus companies in GM, which means there is a strong consistency of approach across the sector, ensuring that public-facing organisations reflect the communities they serve.

To date, there have been three courses, with a total of **43 candidates** completing the course and moving forward to interview. Following this success, regular monthly academies are planned going forward to support TfGM's recruitment needs. Job interviews are currently in process, we'll update on outcomes in the next edition.

To explore whether this approach could be beneficial for your organisation, contact Adrian Bird (details at the end of the newsletter).

Jobs Guarantee Pilot Scheme

In the previous edition, we covered the launch of the **Jobs Guarantee Pilot Scheme**, helping young people access meaningful work placements, while supporting employers to develop future talent. The programme offers **fully funded, six-month work placements** for eligible **young people aged 18 to 24** who have been receiving Universal Credit and looking for work for over 18 months. Participants work for **25 hours per week**, with wage costs, at the appropriate National Minimum Wage, funded through the programme. Employers also receive **dedicated support with recruitment, onboarding and advice** throughout the placement.

The focus is on creating placements, which offer meaningful experience, skills and development allowing young people to move into longer-term employment.

The programme went live in late-May. Early engagement has generated strong interest from employers across a wide range of sectors, including **health, voluntary and community, professional services, construction, hospitality, digital and technology**. On September 30th, there were **249 participants** on programme with **100 of those having started work placements already**.

Phase Two of the programme is due to begin in late November, where activity will be broadened to cover all of the UK. The Scheme is one part of wider Government support to tackle the youth unemployment crisis.

For further information and to apply, please visit [Jobs Guarantee | Greater Manchester | The Growth Company](#)



Universal Design: An approach that works for everyone

For many employers, **disability inclusion still revolves around the concept of reasonable adjustments**. An employee faces a barrier, identifies a need, and a specific accommodation is put in place. While this approach remains important, it is **often reactive, resource-intensive, and dependent on individuals disclosing** their needs. Universal Design offers a different perspective.

Universal Design is the principle of **flexibility by design not by exception** - creating environments, systems, and experiences that can be accessed and used by as many people as possible, **without the need for constant adaptation or specialist intervention**. The concept recognises that human beings are naturally diverse, and that designing for this diversity from the outset creates better outcomes for everyone.

Most people **encounter Universal Design every day** without realising it. **Dropped kerbs** were introduced to support wheelchair users, yet they also benefit parents with pushchairs, delivery drivers, cyclists, and travellers with luggage. **Automatic doors, subtitles on videos, voice recognition technology, and adjustable workstations** all follow the same principle. Features initially developed to remove barriers for disabled people often prove beneficial to a much wider audience.

The workplace is no different.

Traditionally, organisations have designed jobs, processes, technology, and workplaces around a narrow idea of what a “typical” employee looks like. When someone falls outside that model, adjustments are then added. Universal Design turns this process on its head by asking a simple question:

How can we design work so the greatest number of people can participate successfully from day one?

This shift has significant implications for recruitment and employment.

A recruitment process built on Universal Design might offer job adverts in accessible formats, provide multiple ways to apply, use skills-based assessments rather than relying solely on interviews, and ensure digital systems are compatible with assistive technologies. These changes help disabled candidates, but they also benefit neurodivergent applicants, people with limited digital confidence, individuals with caring responsibilities, and those whose strengths may not be best demonstrated through traditional recruitment methods.

As part of its Disability Confident service, Aspire in Partnership can help you understand how to adopt Universal Design principles. Contact Adrian Bird for more information (details below).



Colleague Representative Groups Network

The next in-person event of the Colleague Representative Groups Network will be at 10am, 26th November at the Postgraduate Building, Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9WL. The focus will be on the forthcoming relaunch of **Disability Confident** and the role staff networks can play towards an organisation becoming more disability confident. During the session we shall hear from **ABL Health**, **Bolton Council**, **The Growth Company** and **Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust**. Each will share how their Employee Resource Groups have contributed towards their Disability Confident status before a panel discussion where attention will turn towards the relaunch of the scheme and how adopting **Universal Design** methodology will lead to a greater number of disabled people in the workplace.

For more information on the CRG Network and to book your place at the event, contact Adrian.bird@gcemployment.uk.



Enquiries

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