

Disability Confident Reform

Delivery Plan

December 2025 – December 2026

Contents

Executive summary	1
The policy proposal	1
Key objectives	1
Intended outcomes	2
What success looks like	3
Strategic context	4
Problem statement	4
Evidence base	4
Government alignment	5
Objectives and Success Measures	6
Objectives	6
Success metrics	7
Delivery approach	9
Phases and Milestones	9
Dependencies	11
Stakeholder Engagement	12
Who we will work with	12
Purpose of engagement	12
Approach	13
Expected Outcome	13
Risks and Mitigations	14

Communication Strategy	15
Purpose	15
Objectives	15
Key Audiences	15
Channels	16
Timing	16

Executive summary

The policy proposal

This delivery plan sets out the next phase of reform for the Disability Confident scheme. Our ambition is to establish a nationally recognised, inclusive, and accountable framework that enables employers to confidently recruit, retain, and support disabled people and those with long-term health conditions.

The renewed scheme will introduce clear standards, greater transparency, and expectations for continuous improvement, ensuring that each level of membership reflects meaningful action rather than compliance alone. By embedding collaboration, accountability, and lived experience at the heart of delivery, the scheme will drive cultural change, reduce barriers, and champion equity across workplaces.

Through these reforms, Disability Confident will move beyond awareness-raising to become a practical, measurable, and trusted marker for inclusive employment, supporting employers to make lasting change and improving outcomes for disabled people.

Key objectives

Overall objectives for a reformed Disability Confident scheme include:

- **Establish clear, progressive standards for each level of the scheme**, ensuring transparency, consistency, and practical processes that deliver positive outcomes for disabled employees.
- **Embed accountability** by incorporating employee voice and lived experience into design and assessment.
- **Enhance transparency and impact measurement** through robust data collection, national alignment, and accessible reporting.
- **Promote an inclusive culture and continuous improvement** by adopting the Social Model of Disability, providing resources for managers, and driving cultural change through leadership and peer networks.
- **Empower SMEs and local employers** with tailored support, toolkits, mentoring, and regional engagement strategies.
- **Introduce verification mechanisms** to ensure credibility and consistent feedback across Disability Confident organisations.

Intended outcomes

- A clear, progressive framework with practical standards and streamlined processes, evidenced by 100% of participating employers meeting minimum standards.

- Greater accountability and transparency with the Readiness Tool capturing lived experience, data, and verification to drive measurable impact.
- A culture of inclusion and continuous improvement supported by tailored resources and readiness assessments that help employers, including SMEs, reduce barriers and champion equity in the workplace.

What success looks like

- A trusted and credible scheme with clear, progressive standards and a proportionate verification process that employers and disabled employees recognise as fair, scalable, and impactful.
- Inclusive participation across all employer sizes, with a dedicated SME pathway providing tailored support, simplified evidence requirements, and strong regional engagement.
- Improved real-world outcomes for disabled employees, driven by embedded lived experience, accessible training for managers, and measurable improvements in recruitment, retention, and progression.
- Greater visibility and engagement nationwide, through practical guidance aligned with wider government frameworks and a UK-wide network that amplifies inclusive employers and shares best practice.

Strategic context

Problem statement

The Disability Confident scheme, while well-established, lacks the clarity, consistency, and accountability needed to drive meaningful change in disability employment. Stakeholder feedback reveals that employers, particularly SMEs, find it difficult to navigate the scheme's expectations, and many people report limited evidence of real-world impact.

External verification processes are perceived as inconsistent and overly reliant on self-assessment, and reporting mechanisms fail to capture outcomes that matter to disabled employees. Without reform, the scheme risks becoming a symbolic gesture at best, rather than a credible driver of inclusion.

Evidence base

Drawing on extensive stakeholder engagement, including employers, disabled people, and sector experts, we have identified four strategic priorities to strengthen the Disability Confident scheme. These priorities reflect the need for robust non-legislative standards, tailored support for diverse employer needs, and greater visibility to drive engagement and impact:

- **Robust Standards and Independent Verification**
 - Introduce more stringent time-bound membership and progressive minimum standards, supported by

employee feedback mechanisms. Empower strategic stakeholders to co-design a transparent verification process, particularly for higher scheme levels.

- **Inclusive SME Pathway and Tailored Support** – Develop and test a dedicated SME track that maintains consistent standards with proportionate evidence requirements. Provide bespoke advice, regional engagement, and simplified processes to address unique challenges faced by small businesses.
- **Employee-Centred Impact and Real-World Outcomes** – Embed employee voice and lived experience throughout the scheme. Explore accessible training for line managers to strengthen inclusive practices and improve retention.
- **Strategic Engagement and Visibility** – Co-develop practical guidance with employers and align with wider Government frameworks, including the Jobs and Careers Service (JCS). Establish a visible UK-wide network with national and regional representation to amplify inclusive employers and strengthen credibility.

Government alignment

Stakeholder feedback highlighted the importance of stronger integration between the Disability Confident scheme and wider government initiatives to ensure coherence, reduce duplication, and maximise impact.

Objectives and Success Measures

Objectives

Across the four strategic priorities identified we have the following objectives:

- **Robust Standards and Independent Verification**
- Relaunch and pilot enhanced standards across the three levels of the scheme alongside a transparent and credible verification process that drives continuous improvement and supports progressive employer practices.
- **Inclusive SME pathway and tailored support** – Co-design and test a simplified, proportionate pathway for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to confidently engage with the renewed Disability Confident scheme and embed inclusive employment practices.
- **Employee Centred Impact and Real-World Outcomes** – Amplify the voice of disabled employees and pilot practical interventions that strengthen retention and foster genuine workplace inclusion.
- **Strategic Engagement and Visibility** - Build a strong, collaborative employer network that champions inclusive practices and connects businesses within clear pathways to support and resources, aligned with wider government initiatives.

Success metrics

As we introduce reforms to the Disability Confident Scheme, it's important to understand whether they are making a real difference for employers and disabled people. We plan to implement a proportionate evaluation approach that reflects available resources and provides meaningful insights.

Our evaluation will aim to answer key questions about the impact of reforms using a mix of research methods, that could include (pending Ministerial sign off):

- **Theory of change** – We could map out how the reforms are expected to work, from the inputs we provide, to the short-term changes for employers, and ultimately longer-term benefits for disabled people. This helps us test assumptions and understand what drives positive outcomes.
- **Pilot and Comparison Group** – We could also run a pilot with a group of employers and compare their experiences to a 'business as usual' group. This would help us see whether changes are due to the reforms rather than wider trends. Both groups would need to be large enough for meaningful analysis.
- **Comparing Different Employer Groups** - For new Disability Confident members, we could look to collect baseline and follow-up data. We may also compare existing members, new members and non-members to identify any differences that may be attributed to the reform.

- **Employer Surveys** - Surveys at the start and end of the pilot would capture changes in attitudes and practices. Where possible, we could use questions from previous Disability Confident surveys to track progress over time (for example, asking employers if they believe joining the Disability Confident scheme has had a positive impact on their organisation).
- **Qualitative interviews**, with employers and employees would provide rich insights into how organisations support disabled employees and those managing a long-term health condition. For example, we could examine in depth attitudes and perceptions of the new verification process.
- **Management information (MI) data** – We could also use ‘real time’ data where available to monitor trends and outcomes. For example, we could check the average completion time when employers complete Disability Confident membership forms, to gauge administrative burden.

Delivery approach

Phases and Milestones

Phase	Key Activities	Milestone Date
Phase 1: Set up and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finalising pilot design – Standards, Innovation Zones, Testing Groups including regional/sectoral mix.• Begin stakeholder re-engagement	By January 2026
Phase 2: Piloting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confirm renewed standards, tools, and resources prior to launch of Pilot• Launch Pilot Activity across testing groups• Determine the training offer / need for line managers• Define processes and mechanisms for baseline data and feedback• Establish support networks	By June 2026
Phase 3: Evaluation and Refinement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysis of pilot outcomes and stakeholder feedback• Refine scheme elements based on pilot and feedback• Ensure alignment with broader Government offer for coherence.	By October 2026

Phase	Key Activities	Milestone Date
Phase 4: Relaunch preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for 10-year anniversary relaunch of the scheme • Develop refreshed branding • Prep for launch of renewed guidance, tools, resources (alternative formats/ languages) • Finalise scheme structure and standards including supporting processes 	By November 2026
Phase 5: Full Rollout and Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of reformed scheme UK wide • Embed on-going feedback loops, support networks, stakeholder engagement, and media handling. 	From December 2026

To support employers in meeting the new Disability Confident standards, we are exploring the introduction of a Readiness Tool. This practical resource will help organisations:

- Assess their current capability
- Identify gaps in policy, process, and culture
- Prioritise improvements effectively

The tool will provide tailored guidance to make implementation simpler and faster. By combining clear compliance steps with usability insights, it will help employers deliver meaningful changes that improve outcomes for disabled people.

Dependencies

Implementing the Disability Confident reforms will require investment in digital capability, employer support, and cross-government coordination to ensure consistency and accessibility across the UK. While the scheme remains voluntary, future legislative changes may influence employer expectations. Our aim is to build the right infrastructure and tools so employers can adopt any new standards smoothly and deliver meaningful improvements for disabled people.

Stakeholder Engagement

Who we will work with

- **Current Scheme Members** – sharing their experience to shape and test the new standards.
- **Regional Authorities and Devolved Governments** – ensuring reform reflects local priorities and provide consistent support across the UK.
- **Large Employers and Influential Bodies** – offering insight from major organisations to strengthen the schemes impact.
- **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)** – understanding unique challenges and opportunities in smaller organisations to make sure the scheme works for a range of business sizes.
- **Vanguard Employers** – Piloting innovative approaches and determining best practice.
- **Business Leaders Group and Professional Advisors Group** – providing strategic advice, sector expertise and practical support.

Purpose of engagement

Stakeholders will play a critical role in:

- Co-designing and testing approaches to ensure they are practical, scalable, and trusted.

- Providing feedback and evidence on what works for different employer sizes and sectors.
- Supporting peer learning and visibility to drive wider engagement and uptake.

Approach

Engagement will be collaborative, transparent, and iterative. We will use:

- Regular touchpoints and feedback loops to share progress and gather insights.
- Regional engagement to reflect local labour market needs.
- Peer learning networks to amplify best practice and encourage employer confidence.

Expected Outcome

This approach will ensure that test-and-learn activity is informed by real-world experience, builds trust among employers, and generates evidence that is representative and scalable across sectors and regions.

Risks and Mitigations

We recognise that reform brings challenges. Our approach is to identify risks early, manage them transparently, and apply proportionate mitigation strategies to protect reform objectives and maintain stakeholder confidence.

At this stage, the main areas we are monitoring include:

- Political and Policy Risks – ensuring reforms remain aligned with wider priorities and supported by robust evidence.
- Operational Risks – addressing resource and technology challenges through clear governance, prioritisation, and strong engagement.
- Reputational Risks – maintaining trust through inclusive design, transparent communication, and robust data to demonstrate impact.

By planning and working collaboratively, we aim to deliver reforms that make a real difference for disabled people and employers.

Communication Strategy

Purpose

To ensure clear, consistent, timely communication that builds trust, drives engagement, and supports successful testing of Disability Confident reforms.

Objectives

- Raise awareness of the purpose of test activity within the target groups.
- Provide transparent updates on milestones, testing progress and evaluation findings.
- Encourage participation in test activity and promote peer learning through employer networks.
- Manage expectations and mitigate reputational risk through proactive messaging.

Key Audiences

- Employers (members and non-members, varying sizes and sectors).
- Disabled employees and representative groups.
- Internal stakeholders.
- External stakeholders.

Channels

- Guidance pages and tools.
- Targeted emails, newsletters, stakeholder briefings.
- Engagement events.
- Case studies highlighting inclusive practice and innovation.

Timing

- Phase 1 – Communicate reform objectives and pilot opportunities.
- Phase 2 – Share progress updates and success stories.
- Phase 3 – Communicate findings and refinements.
- Phase 4-5 – Campaign material for rollout and ongoing engagement.