



# Annual Report 2024 – 2025

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Charity Commission for NI No NIC103821 and  
Company Limited by Guarantee No NIO58440

# Annual Report

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# Norman Sterritt NIUSE Chairperson Report



The past year has been challenging for both our members and NIUSE. Members have experienced funding uncertainty with the UKSPF ending in March 2025, all of which have had a direct impact on service users. NIUSE worked in partnership with NICVA and CO3 and UKSPF projects to secure a transition year to March 2026. This year will provide time to co-design a new programme addressing economic inactivity. Despite these pressures, our members have risen to the challenges, working collaboratively with partners and allies. Together, they successfully delivered the new UKSPF programme and met their targets in supporting people into employment.

Looking ahead, it is essential that we ensure NIUSE members are not placed in this position again. There is a clear need for strong strategic direction, and we hope that the forthcoming Disability and Work Strategy will focus on those furthest from the labour market and contribute to reducing the employment gap for disabled people.

Supported Employment is a proven solution and must be recognised in the same way it is in other countries. With the development of the Supported Employment Quality Framework in England and Wales, the timing is right to strengthen and embed this approach.

During this year NIUSE commenced new projects *Mind the Gap* (Shared Island Civic Society Fund) and *Employer Engagement – Empower* (Halifax Foundation) and we are looking forward to continuing this work collaboratively with our members and partners in the South of Ireland.

Norman thanked NIUSE members, Board members, and staff for their dedication and hard work over the past year and looks forward with optimism to the year ahead.

# Information and Advice

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NIUSE provided weekly updates to members on policy developments, job fairs, training opportunities, and employment vacancies through the *Current Vacancies and Events* mailshot, issued every Monday. Members were also invited to attend a range of information sessions, including briefings on the Go Succeed Programme (Self-Employment), Social Value Clauses, and updates on employment programmes.



# Training and Staff Development

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NIUSE collaborated with a range of specialist trainers to deliver professional development opportunities for members and stakeholders. Training covered key areas of employer engagement, including sessions such as “*5 Strategies to Getting Results*” and “*Boosting Employer Engagement Performance by Phone*”, both delivered by Aubrey Bodman (Outshine).

NIUSE continued its partnership with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland through the *Making it Work* campaign, building on the success of the previous year. A series of webinars was delivered focusing on Positive Action Measures, including Pre-Employment Training, Work Trials, Guaranteed Interviews, and Ring-Fenced Posts. These sessions were co-delivered with member organisations and featured lived experiences from disabled people alongside employer perspectives.

# *“Working Together to Reduce the Disability Employment Gap”*



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In partnership with Derry City and Strabane District Council LMP and the Equality Commission for NI, NIUSE hosted the conference *“Working Together to Reduce the Disability Employment Gap”* on 20/03/2025. The event attracted over 90 delegates—primarily employers—who heard examples of effective practice in employing people with disabilities and learned about the support available from the disability sector and the Department for Communities

In total, more than 250 delegates attended NIUSE-organised training sessions and events during the year





# Policy and Influencing

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The year once again began with funding as a key priority for NIUSE and its members, particularly in relation to the ending of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) in March 2024 and uncertainty around its replacement. NIUSE joined the Economic Inactivity Coalition, led and supported by NICVA, to strengthen collective advocacy on these issues.

The group focused on the future of employability programmes following the end of the UKSPF, recognising the value of presenting a unified voice on behalf of projects supporting disabled people, young people not in education, employment or training, women, ex-offenders, and long-term unemployed people.



# Policy and Influencing

The Economic Inactivity Group met regularly, engaged in sustained lobbying of MLAs, MPs, Ministers and senior government officials, and hosted a conference in June 2024 to highlight project outcomes and the potential impact on individuals furthest from the labour market and on the wider local economy.

NIUSE also contributed to a range of wider policy initiatives, including input into the Disability and Work Strategy, participation in the NICS Disability Working Group and the Regional Autism Forum, responses to public consultations, and contributions to disability employment research. This included engagement with the Equality Commission for NI on their research project *“Funding for Equality Groups in NI – The Impact of the Transition from EU Funding to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund,”* due for publication in June 2025.





# Employer Engagement

NIUSE continued to work closely with employers to promote employment opportunities for disabled people and to support inclusive recruitment and selection processes.

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This included advertising vacancies through the weekly *Current Vacancies and Events* bulletin and working collaboratively with the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) to deliver outreach information sessions promoting accessible employment opportunities.

NIUSE also coordinated recruitment for several employer-led work experience programmes, including:

- **Queen's University Belfast Individual Placement Scheme** – 14 placements
- **Translink Disability Work Experience Programme** – 3 placements (with 3 participants progressing into employment)
- **NI Assembly Work Experience Scheme** – 1 placement



# NIUSE Projects

## Mind the Gap Project (May 2024 – June 2025)

The *Mind the Gap* project is a cross-border partnership between NIUSE and KARE (Ireland), funded by the Shared Island Civic Society Fund and administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The aim of the project is to explore the reasons behind the low employment rate of people with disabilities across the island of Ireland—among the lowest in the UK and Europe—and to identify opportunities for improvement.

The project seeks to establish a foundation for strengthened cross-border collaboration and shared learning. It is guided by a cross-border steering committee made up of representatives from 12 disability employment support organisations across the island. During the reporting period, the steering committee was established and two study visits were delivered: one in Belfast (January 2025) and one in Dublin (February 2025). The project will continue into the next year and will conduct research, collect data and producing a report to be presented at a summit in June 2025.



# NIUSE Projects

## **Employer Engagement Project (July 2024 – July 2026)**

Funded by the Halifax Empower Project, this initiative focuses on working with employer representative bodies to promote good practice in employing disabled people, in partnership with NIUSE members. During the year, NIUSE delivered two engagement events with sector organisations and held discussions with additional employer representative groups to further expand this work.



## **BEO Project – Business Engagement Odyssey (Nov 2023 – Oct 2025)**

NIUSE represents the Association of Supported Employment on the BEO Project, funded under the Erasmus+ Programme. During this period, NIUSE contributed to a comprehensive training needs analysis for practitioners and employers, exploring the key skills and competencies required for effective employer engagement and identifying what employers expect from Supported Employment practitioners.

The findings informed the development of an Employer Engagement Training Manual. NIUSE pilot tested the training with local Supported Employment practitioners and provided feedback to refine and enhance the content. The next stage of the project includes hosting a World Café Event in Lisbon and producing a Good Practice Guide.



# Partnerships

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NIUSE works with a range of stakeholder and partnerships working collaboratively to share best practice and campaign and lobby such as:-

- Economic Inactivity Coalition
- Disability Employment Network (DEN)
- Equality Commission NI



# Membership



# Association of Supported Employment Europe

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A highlight of the year was NIUSE's participation in the **15th European Union of Supported Employment Conference** in Spain, which brought together more than 600 delegates from across Europe and beyond. Delegates heard from high-profile keynote speakers and took part in a wide range of workshops. NIUSE, in partnership with NI Screen, delivered a workshop titled *"Lights, Camera and Positive Action."*







# **Financial Report**

**NIUSE Accounts 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025**

- **Kieran Molloy, Treasurer**
- **McGroarty McCaffery & Company Ltd, Accountants and Tax Consultants**

# Financial Report 2024/2025

	Unrestricted	Restricted	Total funds 2025	Total funds 2024
<b>Total Incoming Resources</b>	£39,545	£42,564	£82,109	£51,065
<b>Total Resources Expended</b>	£32,015	£41,695	£73,710	£64,165
<b>Total Funds carried forward</b>	£26,695	£3,598	£30,293	£21,894

# Financial Report 2024/2025

## NIUSE Balance Sheet 31 March 2025

	2025	2024
<b>Net Assets</b>	£28,321	£19,574
<b>Funds</b>		
<b>Restricted Income Funds</b>	£3,598	£2,7299
<b>Unrestricted Income Funds</b>	£26,695	£19,165
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>£30,293</b>	<b>£21,894</b>

# Re-appointment of Accountants

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McGroarty McCaffery & Company Ltd Accountants and Tax Consultants – were re-appointed as NIUSE Accountants

NIUSE Accounts are available by contacting [info@niuse.org.uk](mailto:info@niuse.org.uk)





# NIUSE Board Members – 2024/2025

- Norman Sterritt - Triangle Housing Association
- Kieran Molloy - Cedar Foundation (Treasurer)
- Karen Smith - Disability Action
- Lydia Lynas - Orchardville
- Liam Burns - Mencap
- Tony O'Reilly - NWF of Disabled People

# For further information on and to contact NIUSE:

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## Staff Team

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