



Inclusive Employment in Oxfordshire

What is working and what needs strengthening?

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Funding details: United Kingdom Research and Innovation Creating Opportunities, Improving Outcomes Fund (Grant reference: ES/X004198/1). This grant funded the Creating Opportunities through Local Innovation Fellowships. The following universities partnered with Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership on one of these fellowships and supported the research that is presented in this report: Cardiff University, University of Bath, University of Bristol, University of Exeter, University of Oxford, University of Southampton and Swansea University.

Suggested citation: Esmene, S., Chaidali, P., and Varoutsas, E. (2025). *Inclusive Employment in Oxfordshire. What works and what needs strengthening?* Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines an in-depth case study (qualitative) into inclusive employment in Oxfordshire. Researchers from Cardiff University and University of Exeter worked with Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) to understand how cross-sector (public, private and voluntary sector) conversations and collaborations can strengthen pathways to fair work. The research that was conducted was part of a wider collaboration involving five other universities (University of Bath, University of Bristol, University of Oxford, University of Southampton and Swansea University). Further details about the collaboration and the funding it received from United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) can be found in the full report's introductory section.

As a starting point, a meaningful definition for inclusion is provided. The definition was established through collaboratively reviewing existing academic and community-based research on inclusive employment. Six principles emerged and they are as follows.

1. Person-centred, place-based adaptation of policies.
2. Invested commitment from all stakeholders.
3. Lived experience leadership, which is used to review and adapt action.
4. Stability for spaces and organisations that are lived experience led.
5. Acknowledgement of diversity within diversity.
6. Awareness around trauma.

The principles were used to explore what cross-sector actions around inclusive employment were working well and what needed to be strengthened. OIEP provided a unique opportunity to undertake in-depth research into understanding Oxfordshire's context, as the partnership consists of cross-sector partners across the county.

METHODS

A rich understanding of inclusive employment in Oxfordshire was developed through the following qualitative research methods.

- Researcher participation and engagement (ethnography) in seventeen events and meetings that were run by OIEP or where OIEP were an invited stakeholder to steer work around inclusive employment.
- Semi-structured interviews with thirteen cross-sector stakeholders (see Table 1 in the full report for details).
- Cross-sector reflections and conversations to refine findings and ensure they reflected stakeholder perspectives.

The findings are structured by considering the following aspects of cross-sector partnerships: timing, focus and scope, scale, equity, coordination and funding. These aspects were used to organise our learning because they are identified as being central to cross-sector work by existing research (Liu et al., 2021).

FINDINGS

Timing: inclusion needs to be embedded into organisations and collaborations at their start.

Employers (and other organisations) that have strong leadership around inclusion ensure actions are meaningful. Essentially, employees are given space and time to shape the structure of their work and workplace environment. Where this type of leadership is absent, collaborations with other stakeholders (e.g., with voluntary sector partners) shape actions around inclusion positively. Collaborations that are inclusive to community-level voices help to co-design processes that are sensitive to lived experiences of barriers to work. Such barriers can be deeply engrained into communities due to past prejudices and longstanding social inequalities. Inclusion becomes a key part of an economic landscape when sensitivity to experiences of barriers is present across day-to-day-life (in communities), all levels of education, recruitment processes and requirements, and in workplaces.

Focus and scope: cross-sector partnerships, like OIEP, can act as a central point of information and dialogue. Sustained engagement in such partnerships ensure cross-sector stakeholders have access to and can understand *top-level* considerations for inclusion. Here, *top-level* refers to set actions that can be adopted, such as providing a locally relevant living wage. However, these actions are not enough to address inclusion meaningfully. Partnerships gain strength when they share and learn from case studies around person-centred adaptations of *top-level* actions and innovate approaches that ensure diverse experiences contribute to co-designing pathways to fair work.

Scale: meaningful inclusion emerges from engaging with small-scale activities. This involves being present in communities to understand how individuals experience social inequalities and barriers to work. Community-level relationships that centre on care and trust ensure diverse voices can contribute to shaping policies and pathways to work. Such relationships take time to develop. Yet, their establishment and continuation are key for inclusion. Collaborations with organisations and groups that have existing strong relationships within communities add strength to inclusion. Organisations and groups that are lived experience led deliver particularly high-quality and locally relevant work in this area.

Equity: considerations around equity relate closely to engaging with lived experience and lived experience led organisations. Partnerships between stakeholders with resources and smaller organisations can help to sustain small-scale, high-quality work around inclusion in communities. Relevant case studies involve Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs) and small businesses that work with specific communities and/or social groups teaming up with larger businesses. Two aspects of equity can be considered within such collaborations: i) sharing resources – including funding – to sustain strong relationships that centre on care and trust in communities and ii) embedding processes to include diverse voices in decision-making around *what works* for inclusion. Participatory methods and organisations with expertise and capacity to co-design and deliver such methods are an important part of equitable collaborations. Additionally, relationships that are established through business sector networks and supply chains require attention in terms of establishing equity between large businesses and smaller ones. For example, smaller businesses can be supported with inclusion through the sharing of Human Resources processes and resources, and training opportunities (for small business owners and employees).

Coordination: the effective coordination of cross-sector partnerships centres on openness around capacities and what is feasible. Specifically, it is unreasonable to expect OIEP to implement *what works* for inclusion across all sectors and local communities within Oxfordshire. Therefore, the partnership's role is most effective when it brings together key actions that can be considered by all stakeholders (such as those in OIEP's charter: <https://www.oiep.org.uk/get-involved>). These actions are then used to encourage stakeholders to work together on what needs to be adapted and approached from a lived experience perspective for their meaningful implementation. Another strength of bringing stakeholders together in this way is that innovations can develop between organisations and groups who do not have other opportunities to exchange ideas. Additionally, key considerations - particularly those that relate to community-level barriers to work - can be shared through all stakeholders. This type of collective communication reduces the burden on lived experience led groups and people with experiences of barriers to voice such considerations (repeatedly).

Funding: limits to public funds in terms of the amount that is available and its stringent requirements are well-documented. Novel approaches to funding (e.g., those that emerge from collaborations between cross-sector partners) can create flexible opportunities. Flexibility in this sense relates to the expectations around what the funding that is provided should achieve. While accountability and transparency are important, the understanding of complex barriers to employment requires sustained relationships. This is the case when barriers are highly individualised and/or are associated with systemic exclusion based on certain experiences and characteristics (e.g., racial, political, cultural and social prejudices and poor access to health and social care). Funding expectations can speak to

such issues if they are co-designed. However, co-design with groups and individuals with direct experiences around social barriers to work takes time. Often, the only positive outcome that can be evidenced is sustained involvement and engagement. Cross-sector discussions around sharing wealth equitably (e.g., through flexible funding) can ensure key community-level relationships are sustained, given time for reflection and, going forward, add strength to inclusion.

The findings above are linked to the six principles of inclusion via a series of summary diagrams in the full report (Pages 15, 20, 23, 26, 29 and 32).

CONCLUSIONS

The main outcome of the research presented in this report was to demonstrate that inclusion is an ongoing process and the collective responsibility of all stakeholders within a local economy. Strong relationships and continued conversations between communities and cross-sector stakeholders help to develop a place-based understanding of *what works* for inclusion. Cross-sector conversations around the six principles for inclusion that are highlighted in this report ensure diverse voices can drive meaningful decisions and actions. The outcomes of such conversations are maximised when they centre on care, trust and sustained relationships with and within communities. Importantly, care, trust and sustained relationships allow stakeholders to maintain positive changes that speak to barriers around fair work and how they are experienced by individuals.

Overall, the role of cross-sector partnerships, like OIEP, centres on gathering and sharing key considerations for all stakeholders, and encouraging equitable collaborations to ensure these considerations are addressed through diverse perspectives. In essence, the partnership acts as a network that establishes regular conversations across all partners. Equity is provided through open conversations around how resources (and wealth) can be shared to shape and strengthen local strategies and programmes by engaging with *real-life* experiences of barriers to work. Consequently, cross-sector partnerships can focus on being a central point for positive case studies to be shared and pressing issues that are identified through diverse voices to be discussed (and acted upon). Organisations and/or groups with expertise and capacities around participatory methods can contribute to collaborations around inclusive employment by co-designing locally relevant methods and engaging wide-ranging stakeholder networks with diverse local voices. Figure 8 (Page 34) in the full report highlights how multiple local and business sector-specific networks can be linked to a central network (e.g., OIEP) to work on inclusion as an ongoing collaborative aspect of the local economy.

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines how cross-sector (private, public and voluntary sectors) stakeholders work together in Oxfordshire to create and strengthen inclusive employment opportunities. Primarily, we focus on what is working and what needs strengthening. The research that informed our findings was funded by United Kingdom Research and Innovation's (UKRI's) Creating Opportunities, Improving Outcomes Fund. This funding provided resource for a programme called Creating Opportunities through Local Innovation Fellowships (COLIF). COLIF involved a series of regional pilot projects, where research priorities were identified by local civic organisations.

Oxfordshire's pilot project was initiated by Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) and a team spanning seven universities¹ was assembled to work on OIEP's priorities. Practical responsibilities, such as designing, managing and reporting, were managed by researchers and professional services staff from Cardiff University, University of Bristol, University of Exeter and University of Oxford. Team members from the other three universities contributed to reflecting on key findings and how similar, community-led research work can be facilitated in the future.

OIEP highlighted growing social inequalities in Oxfordshire as a pressing priority that required collaborative action. The urgency of this issue is reaffirmed by recent public health data, which revealed a 13-year difference in life expectancy for men and 9-year difference for women living in different postcodes in Oxford (Oxford City Council, 2024). Current UK-based research on social inequalities has acted as a further reminder of the associations between access to fair work and positive health outcomes, and how inclusive economies strengthen such outcomes through income security (Currie et al., 2022; Höhn et al., 2024). Therefore, the partnership's focus on inclusive employment acts as an important stepping stone towards a fairer society, where inequalities are addressed by challenging persistent barriers to employment and distributing wealth equitably.

In the following sections, we cover key considerations around inclusion and its relation to employment.

What is inclusion?

Broadly, inclusion refers to acknowledging and valuing diversity in society. This value is expressed by ensuring individuals are free from prejudices and barriers in daily life, irrespective of their social, cultural and political values, and identity. Complexities around inclusion arise as some values and preferences may be damaging and/or discriminatory to others. The mediation of these complexities relies on openness, ongoing dialogue and building relationships through an ethic of care (Wood et al., 2015). An ethic of care involves valuing each

¹ Cardiff University, Swansea University, University of Bath, University of Bristol, University of Exeter, University of Oxford and University of Southampton.

individual in a community and recognising that life's challenges, whether they are personal, social or existential (such as climate change), cannot be navigated alone (de Bruin, 2023). Specifically, certain issues can benefit from engaging with previously overlooked and/or marginalised perspectives. In this sense, inclusion goes beyond widening participation by increasing the presence of previously marginalised groups and individuals in certain spaces and activities (Esmene et al., 2024). Engagement with how social norms can be restructured by alternative (overlooked) perspectives to bring about positive social change adds meaning to inclusion (Thomas et al., 2021). Therefore, meaningful inclusion is a continuous process that ensures diverse voices contribute to defining society's values and how daily life is performed in communities. Here, equity becomes an important consideration. Voices that have been marginalised in the past require added time, space and resources to reflect on past experiences and how norms can be restructured so they are no longer disadvantaged by the *status quo* (Esmene et al., 2024). In terms of inclusive employment, these ideas translate into giving people time and space to shape pathways to work (i.e., education and training), recruitment processes, how working tasks and days are structured and what meaningful fair work entails (Inge et al., 2006; Christianson-Barker et al., 2025).

How does inclusion relate to employment?

Recent research into inclusive employment has explored how meaningful inclusion (as explained above) can be established in processes that support employment. For example, Hughes et al. (2021) highlight the importance being person-centred and considering place-based factors when co-designing activities that promote inclusion. This means understanding how the barriers experienced by someone can be unique to them and driven by inequalities on the ground, such as poor access to healthcare and being subjected to prejudices by a community's dominant groups and their norms (Hughes et al., 2021; Gottardello et al., 2025). Inclusive employment is reliant on valuing diversity and ensuring diverse voices shape the practices and aims of inclusion across all levels of society. Ferdman's (2014) framework on inclusion defines these levels as follows: individual level; interpersonal level; group level; leadership level; organisational level and societal level. Individuals feel part of and valued (through a sense of belonging) within their communities when holistic action is taken across all six levels.

Essentially, employment is inclusive when it contributes to a person's sense of belonging and value. These individualised outcomes, i.e., a strengthened sense of belonging and self-value, are often overlooked when processes and policies take standardised steps to build pathways to work for previously marginalised groups (Fletcher et al., 2013; Hughes et al., 2021). The reason for this is that the characteristics of those who belong to certain groups are homogenised and similar results are expected when set steps are taken (Rodgers et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2021). Research on one of the best known national inclusive employment initiatives, "Disability Confident", has shown that its guidance leads to little difference on workplace experiences if the recommendations are applied prescriptively (Hoque et al., 2024). Individuals need to be involved in defining how their work can be more inclusive and conversations around what can be done need to be ongoing, as

barriers to work and someone's experience of them can change over time (Gottardello and Steffan, 2024). These ongoing conversations are sustained in workplaces with strong leadership around inclusion, where employees are encouraged to shape their working environments and tasks (Bennett, 2011). Management styles that are built on trust and openness, and create time for employees to build social bonds help engrain inclusion as a working culture (Bennett, 2011; BITC, 2017). In summary, everybody plays a role in and is invested in inclusion.

Investment in inclusion also involves channelling funds to address social barriers to work, which are closely related to social inequalities (Bridgeman and Loosemore, 2023), and engaging with what diversity actually means. Belluigi et al. (2024) demonstrate how underrepresented groups in certain sectors are the same groups that have encountered racialised, gendered and geopolitical (cultural) inequalities throughout history. In essence, diversity acknowledges that not all individuals make sense of the world in the same way. Consequently, dominant norms around how society should function can be exclusionary to alternative ideas and experiences of the world (Esmene et al., 2024). Inequalities grow when this exclusion translates into prejudice and certain individuals and groups do not feel comfort and peace in their communities and during their daily routines (Belluigi et al., 2024). Over time, these inequalities can become contained in particular locations (Hubbard, 2008), as individuals stay in their immediate surroundings and confidence is lost in relation to exploring opportunities beyond their neighbourhoods. This point is demonstrated by Pratas et al. (2024), who highlight how poor access to education grows the inequalities in a place and people have a narrower range of opportunities available to them. Opportunities are limited in terms of where they are and in their variety. These complex barriers require time to understand and address. This is where the voices of those who have experienced such barriers are key. Some inequalities have been festering for decades and require space and time for reflection, where people can come together to build trustworthy relationships and feel welcome in spaces, e.g., workplaces, of negative past experiences (Olsen, 2018; Belluigi et al., 2014).

Encouragingly, leadership that draws from direct experiences of barriers to work influences inclusion positively (Reynders et al., 2024). This positive influence is created by ensuring social barriers are given attention around decision-making tables (Hoque et al., 2024). Additionally, new recruitment processes and spaces of work that centre on care and trust can be co-designed through real-life experiences and inspire other workplaces to ensure their processes and spaces are open to diversity (Reynders et al., 2024). Such processes and spaces are particularly important where negative experiences have led to trauma. The impacts of trauma can vary greatly from person-to-person. Flexibility is required when expectations around work are set and career pathways are planned (Branicki et al., 2024). Essentially, there is no set way of managing trauma. Discussions around employment aspirations and how they relate to personal daily challenges require continuity, as these challenges and a person's response to them can differ over time (Nafari and Ruebottom, 2025).

The ideas presented in this section can be summarised by six principles. They are listed below.

1. Person-centred, place-based adaptation of policies.
2. Invested commitment from all stakeholders.
3. Lived experience leadership, which is used to review and adapt action.
4. Stability for spaces and organisations that are lived experience led.
5. Acknowledgement of diversity within diversity.
6. Awareness around trauma.

In COLIF, we explored how the six principles above are supported by OIEP's cross-sectoral work and what can be strengthened to engrain them into Oxfordshire's inclusive employment landscape. The methods section outlines the approach that was taken.

METHODS

COLIF took a two-layer approach to understand the inclusive employment landscape in Oxfordshire, OIEP's role within it and how current actions can be strengthened through cross-sector collaboration. The two layers consisted of ethnographic work with OIEP and semi-structured stakeholder interviews.

Ethnographic work with OIEP

Ethnographic research involves becoming part of a context to understand key relationships and the social dynamics within a community by taking part in that community's activities and dialogues (Hammersley, 2017). In this case, the partnership that was assembled by OIEP was treated as a community. A researcher from the COLIF team was embedded in OIEP's activities for four months (April to July 2025). The researcher participated in activities and discussions at seventeen events. The events were a mix of OIEP-run meetings and stakeholder engagement activities, and meetings in which OIEP acted as a stakeholder in steering work around inclusive employment. Meetings that involved OIEP as a stakeholder consisted of local authority-run programmes around employment, housing and refugee services, and mixed-stakeholder² collaborations around public health.

A field diary was kept of the activities and discussions that took place. The field diary also included reflections on how the activities and discussions related to meaningful inclusion. These reflections were shared with the COLIF team in project meetings and with OIEP's stakeholders to sense-check the ideas and to achieve consensus around the reflections that were made. This is referred to as a critical friend approach and ensures that ethnographic findings are established collaboratively (Kim et al., 2024).

² Local authorities, Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs), public health and healthcare professionals, and Higher Education Institutions (research).

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to generate a deeper understanding of specific stakeholder experiences around inclusive employment and OIEP's role within Oxfordshire. Interview questions were designed to elicit discussions about how cross-sector stakeholders contributed to Oxfordshire's inclusive employment landscape and how their activities were influenced by OIEP. Interviewees were invited to openly discuss their experiences and focus on what they felt was important for creating inclusive employment pathways.

Thirteen interviewees participated and they spanned local authority (county, city and district councils) staff, Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs), businesses (employers) and education providers, which included organisations and institutions that are active in delivering research. Participant affiliations are summarised in the following table.

Stakeholder Group	Number of participants
Local ³ business	3
Nationwide business	1
Small-scale local authority (city or district council)	3
Large-scale local authority	1
VCSE	2
Education provider	2
Education provider and VCSE (dual affiliation)	1

Table 1. Participant affiliations.

The methods used gained ethical approval from Cardiff University's College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science (ethics application number: 2790).

Analysis

A framework, Liu et al. (2021), for cross-sector partnerships was used to reflect on the data that were generated by COLIF's ethnographic work and semi-structured interviews. The framework outlines six areas

³ The differentiation between local and nationwide businesses were made based on whether a business had a physical site outside of Oxfordshire.

that inform the effectiveness of cross-sector partnerships. These areas are used to organise actions that aim to support cross-sector collaboration and are listed below.

1. Timing.
2. Focus and scope.
3. Scale.
4. Equity.
5. Coordination
6. Funding.

Liu et al. (2021)'s framework was chosen to guide the analysis due to OIEP's cross-sector structure and approach to strengthening inclusion. Additionally, current research into inclusive employment tends to focus on the actions of particular stakeholders or groups. OIEP's working context provided a unique opportunity to understand how inclusive employment can be supported through cross-sector collaboration.

The findings section is structured based on the cross-sector collaboration framework that is outlined above and discusses what supports inclusive employment. Predominantly, we concentrate on a meaningful definition of inclusion as summarised by the six principles that are listed in the section titled "How does inclusion relate to employment?".

In summary, the qualitative data that were generated through our methods are used to assess how inclusion can be strengthened by focusing on inclusion's six principles and how efforts to apply the principles can be organised across cross-sector partners. For clarity, relevant practical steps are summarised at the end of each findings section via a diagram.

FINDINGS

Before engaging with COLIF's findings, OIEP's context must be acknowledged. COLIF's ethnographic work revealed how the partnership is mainly coordinated by a single manager. The Partnership Manager is OIEP's sole full-time salaried member of staff. Added capacity is provided through part-time (predominantly one day-per-week or less) support on managing communications (website content and email circulars) and the administration associated with partnership meetings. Other time contributions to the partnership are voluntary. Voluntary roles comprise chairing and/or participating in planning meetings. The partnership has two co-chairs and additional independent chairs for its four working teams that focus on inclusive employment, social value and procurement, place making and educational attainment. The Educational Attainment Working Group is in the process of splitting into two groups: Early Years Working Group (focussing on preschool and primary education) and Youth Futures Working Group (focussing on secondary, further, higher education and career pathways for young people).

The findings presented in the next six sections focus on OIEP's Inclusive Employment Working Group, which served as the focal point of this research project. Links to the other working groups are drawn where relevant, as some stakeholders are active across more than one group.

1. Timing

In terms of cross-sector partnerships, timing entails when key stakeholders come together to work on an issue and when action is taken within specific organisations to address pressing social issues (Liu et al., 2021). Barriers to work can certainly be regarded as a pressing social issue and meaningful inclusive considerations are a way of navigating such barriers (Hoque et al., 2024). Our findings show that positive results around inclusion are achieved when it is given priority right from the beginning, i.e., during a business's establishment. Inclusive practices become further engrained into a workplace's day-to-day activities and services when inclusion is given value by an employer's leadership team. These insights are demonstrated by the following quote.

“[The CEO] really feels passionate about being one of the decision-makers, or being able to advise or help those decisions to be made, and social value. She [CEO] advised the Cabinet Office on social value, etcetera. So, as I said, it's a real groundwork passion [for her]. And she's brought the company along. Without her interest, would the company initially have got involved? [with OIEP's Inclusive Employment Working Group] Probably not at this stage.”

Local business participant.

Businesses that demonstrate positive outcomes around inclusion can expand their effective practices across a sector and/or geographic area when their leadership teams share what has worked with other employers (Bapuji and Higgins, 2022). At this point, the importance of defining positive outcomes with people who have and are experiencing barriers to work should be acknowledged. This consideration is covered in more detail in the fourth findings section, titled “Equity”. Nonetheless, the communication of why other employers should follow suit in terms of building an inclusive workplace requires delivering messages with passion and highlighting how inclusion is an act of care, relationship-building and ensuring equity in communities (Fletcher et al., 2013). Equity is particularly important for individuals and groups who have experienced barriers to work through their life and are in areas that have a history of social inequality. These points were raised at a Human Resources (HR) networking event, which brought together public, private and voluntary sector partners to discuss employment pathways for care leavers⁴. At the event, the *big* difference that small considerations make were outlined by businesses, local authority social services teams and VCSEs that worked with care leavers. Examples included ensuring that individuals have a safe and comfortable living environment (as

⁴ In the UK, care leavers are individuals who were in the care of a Local Authority's social services for 13 weeks or more before their 16th birthday (Care Leavers Association, 2024).

defined by them) before they embark on work and they have access to trusted relationships. Trusted relationships included social services staff who individuals had a positive relationship with and peer mentors from VCSEs who acted as a point of care (and guidance). In addition, community champions who bridge the gap between communities and statutory services relating to employment bring added capacity to building relationship and ensure diverse voices are heard. Much like peer mentors, these champions are part of the community and share lived experiences with individuals who are experiencing barriers to work. They can become a source of trust from the outset if they are involved in programme planning phases and activities that co-define the aims of a programme. People in peer mentor and/or community championing roles were also key in confidence-building, for example, around writing cover letters and/or curriculum vitae (CVs), and administrative tasks that are associated with daily life (e.g., processing tax and/or bill payments). A relevant case is outlined by the quote below. Specifically, community champions who were embedded at the planning phase of a programme were shown to be important for understanding how employment pathways (and training) could be co-designed with people seeking sanctuary. When resourced well, these types of activities can have wider (national) impact.

“She [a community champion] involved all other agencies as well in sort of producing the co-production tools, and they’ve actually produced two films now, one of which has won a national award, totally produced by the champions. They spoke at the conferences and on the boards. They’ve given their recommendations. So it’s worked well, but it did need a coordinator, and it needed that resource for funding the co-production”

Local authority participant⁵.

Further, case studies and examples of positive outcomes being shared at the inception of new employment opportunities and/or pathways (including education, training and apprenticeship programmes) make a difference. COLIF’s ethnographic work revealed how collaborations that embed inclusion into projects can develop when key stakeholders are brought together at their start. This point is particularly relevant to projects that have the potential to create new jobs. During an OIEP-run HR networking event, a local VCSE linked up with a construction company that were starting a new local development. Conversations revolved around how training could be co-designed with the local VCSE and individuals experiencing barriers to work. This outcome demonstrates the benefits of cross-sector partnerships in ensuring inclusion is treated as a priority during the design (planning) of local pathways to work.

The following diagram shows how the findings in this section relate to the six principles of inclusive employment.

⁵ No differentiation between small-scale and large-scale authorities are made when including quotes for anonymity purposes.



Figure 1. Timing within cross-sector partnerships and COLIF's six principles for inclusion.

To summarise, the collation of positive case studies and influencing new opportunities for employment are outlined as priorities for cross-sector partnerships. In this sense, OIEP has acted as a body that brings together key stakeholders at key moments. However, complexities around how social barriers impact individuals provide a significant challenge for the partnership. It is extremely difficult to conclusively collate what works when the actions that inspire positive outcomes around inclusion are so varied from group-to-group, amongst individuals in those groups and place-to-place (Olsen, 2018). This challenge takes an even daunting shape when OIEP's limited capacity and reliance on voluntary time is taken into account. In such circumstances,

attention around a partnership’s focus and scope, and how capacities can be maximised through collaboration is required (Liu et al., 2021). Focus and scope is discussed in the next section.

2. Focus and scope

OIEP’s focus around inclusive employment is led by its charter, which reached 100 signees in Spring 2025. The charter’s recommended pledges can be seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2. OIEP’s Inclusive Employment Charter (OIEP, 2024).

While OIEP’s recommendations raise awareness around actions that employers should adopt, the ways in which they are implemented require contextual attention. Here, we mean being sensitive to how actions need to be adapted to suit an employer’s workplace and the individuals who might be disadvantaged by the working environment’s characteristics. The following quote brings clarity to this point.

“So, it might be that we, you know, look to offer [someone] sort of work that is sort of afternoons only. Or it could be that they’re not able to sort of work on site every day, but the line manager might be able to... make an adjustment so that they could, you know, work from home some of the time.”

Education provider participant (talking from the perspective of being an employer).

The quote demonstrates how adaptations need to consider social perspectives as well as the physical nature of the work involved. Employers can reflect on their relationships with local communities and how they can

become a space and/or organisation that is not exclusionary to groups and individuals who have endured and continue to endure exclusion (see quote below).

“It’s local people that we’re looking for. And, you know, the premises that we work out of are shopfront premises [visible to the community]... So people can drop in... you know, you can clearly see in, which I think is really important... you can clearly see when you look in that, you know, we’ve got a varied team here, we’ve got people different ages, we’ve got people of different genders... we’ve got people, you know... of different nationalities. And I think that sends out quite an important message.”

Education provider participant.

The quote above demonstrates the value of being visible and welcoming. The interviewee highlights that they are actively working to engage locals from diverse backgrounds and seeing people who various individuals can relate to makes a difference. Additionally, relationships and trust can begin to develop and/or mend when positive connections are established in the spaces of an employer and when employers are active in a community. The positive influence of being active in the community is enhanced when discussions with communities are used to co-design collaborative activities. Consequently, co-design becomes an important mechanism for building trust amongst groups whose worldviews and experiences have been overlooked in defining how day-to-day life - including employment - works in their communities (Esmene et al., 2024). The following quote demonstrates how co-design inspires inclusion.

“I think it can be good to co-deliver it [community programmes] with existing community researchers [and people in specific communities]. So, I’ve done this before for [name of organisation redacted for anonymity], training students alongside community researchers on how to do community-based research [into inclusion], I think [there] is something about that. People are coming into it from very different backgrounds.”

Education provider and VCSE (dual affiliation) participant.

Additionally, OIEP’s involvement in delivering the Councils of Sanctuary’s⁶ local programme of activities showed the value of using co-design to inspire inclusion. Here, the aims of training programmes that act as a pathway to employment are co-designed with people who have direct lived experiences around barriers to work. For Councils of Sanctuary, this meant ensuring individuals felt comfortable in their communities - including in relation to their living circumstances - and could build confidence through valued social relationships before employment even became a consideration. Direct conversations with people who have

⁶ Councils of Sanctuary is a national programme that provides tools and guidance on how to ensure a local authority’s influence on an area considers and is welcoming to people seeking sanctuary (CoS, 2025).

experienced barriers to work also highlight systemic issues, which need to be addressed at a regional and national level. An example of such a case is presented via the following quote.

“If you've got a job, as I understand, then DWP [Department for Work and Pensions] don't support you to improve your employment situation. So for example, we have a number of doctors or dentists who come from, say, Ukraine, but they are unable to practice because they have to start again [a qualification conversion process or additional quote].”

Local authority participant.

For clarity, the quote above shows how someone can lose support if they enter any sort of employment. This loss acts as a barrier for people in terms of maximising their potential and, in turn, helping to address key skills gaps. Previous research has shown that people with lived experiences of barriers to work gain confidence when their potential is made the focus of a programme and this confidence translates into their active participation (leadership) in strengthening inclusion for others in the future (Reynders et al., 2024).

So far, the views and cases that have been covered in this section demonstrate the sensitivities that require acknowledgement when adapting recommendations, like OIEP's charter. Crucially, these sensitivities are highly variable. Therefore, they are best addressed when adaptations are established by stakeholders involved in specific sectors and/or local areas, and receive equitable input from people who have experienced barriers in those sectors and local areas. The scope of OIEP's role here revolves around sharing key recommendations and requirements, and assembling stakeholders to share positive outcomes. However, these positive outcomes are best acted upon when they are shared within networks that recognise and respond to challenges collectively in particular local areas and amongst certain groups (see quote below).

“We do have very recent examples of people that started volunteering and then have... so, partly through a partnership with [name of organisation redacted for anonymity]... I think they have gone on to employment. And then we've got another example where we've been able to help them find [work]... you know, with applications, and then they have gone on to volunteer [elsewhere], and then get a job somewhere else as well.”

VCSE participant.

OIEP's focus and scope in providing awareness around inclusion is extremely important. Yet, meaningful action happens when key recommendations are focused on within particular sectors and localities. It is difficult for OIEP to coordinate such recommendations in all localities and sectors. Therefore, the partnership's work around bringing cross-sector partners together to share and reflect on positive outcomes and what can be improved through collaboration is its main strength (and a more realistic role to focus on).

Importantly, local, sector-specific and community-specific knowledge helps to translate recommendations into meaningful action. An example here is OIEP's success around establishing employment-related activities for refugees. The Partnership Manager's past connections and previous experiences in this area acted as a strength. Their existing relationships with organisations that worked on employment pathways for refugees meant that services (e.g., information about UK's tax system and support with job applications) could be assembled quickly. This observation shows the importance of existing knowledges when defining a cross-sector partnership's focus and scope (and what is feasible). Transparency and openness about the capacities that are available to manage such a partnership also helps. Relevant areas of capacity to consider are time, resources (including funding) and knowledge.

During OIEP-run meetings, individuals with expertise that filled a knowledge gap within OIEP - including around lived experiences - were engaged to share key considerations and actions with other partners. Examples include: i) working with care leaver peer mentors to demonstrate how inclusive work needs to centre on care, trust and building confidence for young people to fulfil their potential; ii) engaging social value and procurement leaders to work alongside local businesses in creating a framework that focuses on social outcomes and sharing wealth and iii) engaging with VCSEs who understand the inequalities that are being experienced by households (holistically) in certain areas of Oxfordshire. These examples show the benefits of being transparent and open about capacities (time, resourced and knowledge), and seeking collaborators to address any gaps.

Links between focus and scope and inclusive employment's six principles are summarised in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Focus and scope of cross-sector partnerships and COLIF's six principles for inclusion.

Based on current capacities, it would be unreasonable to expect OIEP to coordinate the necessary co-design work in every context. Yet, tools and approaches that facilitate small-scale, but high-quality, change can be shared. The importance of scale is covered next.

3. Scale

When related to inclusion, considerations around scale require a shift around how we think about the connections between different scales of place. Traditionally, larger places are seen as a container for smaller places (LaFleur, 2020). This viewpoint influences how local governance is coordinated in the UK, where smaller authorities sit within larger councils. During discussions at OIEP meetings, we witnessed how confusion and disengagement can arise when a larger authority replicates services without understanding or acknowledging the activities that exist in smaller scales of place (e.g., within a district). Smaller local authorities (and other stakeholders) who have established community-level collaborations can feel alienated when their work is replaced or replicated by partnerships between larger authorities and organisations. An example of services becoming disjointed in this way is shown below. The quote below relates to local people, including a smaller-scale local authority's staff, not being involved in wider (geographically) planning around inclusive workplace activities.

“I’m trying to think if there’s been anything at all where people [here] have engaged with anything, and I honestly can’t.”

Local authority participant.

The role of scale in inclusion becomes more positive when larger areas are seen to be *made up* of smaller places and the communities within them (Trudeau, 2006), as opposed to containing them. This positivity is influenced by building an inclusive landscape through strong community-level relationships and sharing the processes that helped to co-design and co-define what works (HAIRE, 2023). Essentially, *bottom-up* approaches add meaning and value to inclusion.

Relevant work in Oxfordshire has led to individuals feeling valued in their communities and finding spaces they can make meaningful social bonds. A report on local community wealth showcases a suite of case studies that highlight how particular local spaces have become a positive site for people experiencing social inequalities (Davy and Lohr, 2025). The establishment of such spaces and relationships builds confidence and provides a venue for diverse voices to share their experiences and, through dialogue, shape processes that create an inclusive economic landscape. Significantly, positive outcomes are directly related to the unique relationships that are established within specific communities.

An Oxfordshire-wide programme that was discussed at an OIEP meeting provides another relevant example around small-scale, high-quality inclusion. The programme was developed by a local VCSE and links young people with influential large businesses. A significant outcome was how apprenticeships and/or training pathways were being restructured by listening to young people experiencing social inequalities, their feelings about those experiences and how their progress could be shaped (and defined) on their terms. This small-scale, high-quality attention shifted narratives around inclusion altogether. Opportunities for work were no

longer seen as being *offered*, like a charitable act, but as experiences that are built together to maximise an individual's potential. These types of inclusive activities also lead to innovations around new opportunities that are shaped by the experiences of marginalised individuals and groups. The quote below explains how a group of young researchers were employed by a business to inform how the business's apprenticeships and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies could be improved. Additionally, the example shows how cross-sector dialogues and partnerships are important for inspiring innovative actions that strengthen inclusion.

“I believe one of the senior managers there [a local VCSE] approached [our director] about this research to look at diversifying apprenticeships and looking at how the makeup [inequalities] of Oxford affects people's ability to get into work, and what are the barriers and things like that. So, they are... we're nearly finished, actually... So, they started off by doing some interviews with our apprentices, and some of our apprentice managers. They've also collected a lot of data through us about... like the profiles of our apprentices, and how our scheme runs generally, with the aim of them providing us with some feedback as to what things we potentially could do better to diversify our apprenticeship scheme.”

Local business participant.

Overall, inclusive employment pathways and innovations that stimulate the co-design of new roles centre around bottom-up approaches and giving time and value to particular communities. The way these bottom-up approaches help to realise inclusive employment's six principles can be seen below.



Figure 4. Scales of cross-sector partnership work and COLIF's six principles for inclusion.

OIEP's efforts around promoting equity's role in inclusive employment is fundamental to establishing local collaborations between stakeholders with resource and those who have limited resources to sustain their effective (small-scale, high-quality) work. At present, OIEP's main influence in this area is bringing together stakeholders across a diverse range of communities and organisations regularly. Relationships and collaborations develop as a result of such meetings (as highlighted in the previous section). In the next section, we focus on equity within and for cross-sector collaborations.

4. Equity

Primarily, equity relates to sharing resources to balance social inequalities and includes reflecting on who defines society's norms to engage previously overlooked voices (Walker and Martinez-Vargas, 2020). Dialogues around this matter in the public, private and voluntary sectors tend to focus on funding (Leyshon et al., 2024). We outline funding-related insights in the final section of our findings. In this section, other aspects of equity are given consideration. In terms of inclusion, equity can relate to valuing approaches and voices that have been marginalised by society's dominant norms (Olsen, 2018; Hughes et al., 2021). Specifically, stories and qualitative data on experiences and feelings can be overlooked in decision-making circles (Grypdonck, 2006). This is particularly the case when governance is taken into account, as local authorities favour evidence that demonstrates positive changes across large populations (Kneale et al., 2019). Yet, this favouritism is in disparity when inclusion's highly individualised and contextual dynamics are considered. Consequently, it is very difficult to pinpoint set actions that lead to success for everyone. This is the case even if the same communities and people who identify as being in the same demographic groups are involved. Here, diversity within diversity and intersectionality⁷ requires attention. The quote below shows how being sensitive to intersectionality and listening to individuals advances understandings around inclusion.

“I would interview everyone and have an action plan for each of them as to both upskill and get in touch with employers, ideally employers with a training programme who are happy to accept migrants often with limited English... but...if you go to an English lesson... you can talk about the weather and days of the week and the rest of it, but if you're a nurse, then specific things such as medicines and injections and whatever else [need consideration], so [it is about] specifics.... So the best thing that happened [can happen] would be for people to be employed and experience English, and be on a training programme for that job.”

Local authority participant.

⁷ Intersectionality is where different identities, social inequalities and past experiences combine to create a complex web of influences on how someone experiences life and society.

When attention is given to people's experiences and circumstances, equity is brought to the voices of people who have experienced social inequalities and barriers to work. As shown by the following quote, these voices can begin to shape processes and pathways to work when they are valued.

“We got a pool of 20 lone [single] parents from [place name redacted for anonymity] and trained them all to be document controllers. But the bit we also then did is, they did it as a job share. So, they then were able to both, you know, manage their care responsibilities and learn to be document controllers. And the companies loved them, because they were all really like up for it and really good, and they shared the workload between them, which also then worked better for both the companies and the individuals.”

Nationwide business participant.

Approaches that prioritise the lived experiences of individuals who have come up against social inequalities add meaning to inclusive actions that are co-designed. Participatory methods are a way of eliciting this type of information and understanding (SIG, 2025) and were discussed as being effective in a meeting around research into social inequalities. As such, equity can be established if access to such methods is facilitated through equitable resourcing and the information they generate is given value in decision-making circles.

Once more, community wealth can be used as a mechanism to help relevant insights to gain value. As covered in the previous section, community wealth is a way of distributing resources based on small-scale, high-quality positive change. This point is also relevant to employers who have limited capacity to deliver actions around inclusive employment. During an OIEP meeting on social value and procurement, the requirement to link smaller businesses and VCSEs with organisations that have more resources and capacities was raised. The main benefit of doing so related to improving access for smaller businesses and VCSEs to resources that support their recruitment processes. Examples included training on how to best collect and manage employee data, and accessing HR resources that are housed by larger businesses. It was stated that many smaller businesses do not have the capacity to assemble an HR team. Therefore, aid from HR teams with capacity could lighten administrative workloads. Lightened administrative workloads would also mean that businesses that deliver small-scale, high-quality outcomes around inclusion can prioritise strengthening their community-level work. Such work includes businesses, often Community Interest Companies, that provide employment pathways for specific groups and in specific local areas. These employment pathways are key in instilling confidence and breaking down barriers around trust for people who have had negative experiences with employment (and other formal services) (Bridgeman and Loosemore, 2023).

To summarise, equity around inclusive employment must begin to even-out the disparities between the value given to marginalised voices and approaches that foster their elicitation and sharing. The six principles of inclusion and how equity can be thought of to deliver them is shown below.



Figure 5. Equity within cross-sector partnerships and COLIF's six principles for inclusion.

Coordination is an important consideration for cross-sector partnerships when promoting equity and approaches like participatory methods, which help to establish equity. Coordination is drawn on next.

5. Coordination

Based on the previous section, the main aim for cross-sector partnership coordination can be regarded as being the facilitation of conversations across all stakeholders. These conversations need to involve and consider the voices of individuals and groups who have experienced social barriers and been absent from decision-making processes (Walker and Martinez-Vargas, 2020). As discussed in the section titled “Focus and Scope”, meetings and regular contact between diverse stakeholders can spark collaborations between organisations delivering small-scale, high-quality work. However, the establishment of engagement from stakeholders with resource, e.g., corporate businesses, can be difficult. This issue is demonstrated by the quote below.

“You can go to [a big corporate], who are involved... and say, you know, ‘we know you should be doing this’... but you’ve got to sort of demonstrate that there are real world benefits for them. And I think, you know, that exists, but... it’s quite an effort in itself to generate enough case studies [for the benefits] to be plausible.”

Local authority participant.

The quote above also suggests that this engagement issue can be overcome if larger businesses are shown that the benefits of engaging with small-scale contexts and particular communities are mutual. This mutual benefit centres on trust and sustaining relationships with communities to build confidence in each other, as shown by the following quote.

And so, it’s building that confidence, and people [and organisations] get confidence from each other. And I think where there is huge potential are things like procurement, and a lot of work is going on in procurement. But I think that the way in which people procure their goods and services can make a profound effect... have a profound impact on the local community.

Education provider participant.

This quote alludes to how large businesses can become part of a *healthier* community by being sensitive to social outcomes in their procurement (and employee recruitment) processes. Healthier communities mean healthier employees and service users (clients) (RWJF, 2016). These types of community-focused social outcomes have been shown to create innovative services and products that can help businesses develop economically and socially (McCausland, 2021). Leadership within employers and across local landscapes, for example, amongst VCSEs, helps to raise awareness around such mutual benefits. The VCSE-led programme that links up young people and businesses (as discussed in Section 3: “Scale”) also demonstrates the value of this raised awareness.

Additionally, coordination needs to consider sharing the outcomes of meaningful work on inclusion. The previous section discussed how meaningfulness can be understood through participatory methods. Organisations, such as Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), with capacity and expertise to deliver these approaches can support processes that raise awareness around the mutual benefits of inclusion and equity in decision-making. This point is clarified by the quote below.

“[There are] lessons from it [listening to and acting with diverse perspectives] which is like participatory action research, which is when the action and the results are kind of baked into the research and learning process. So you get actions, you make changes as [discuss] problems or the things you’re trying to address, and then that way, people involved see that they have power. Rather than a kind of, let’s gather... and... then a smaller group of us go away and do something, and then we report back, and you don’t really have any control over that, and it’s quite distant, it’s a distant memory that you did that learning. It’s difficult to do well... but it’s a benefit and a challenge.”

Education provider and VCSE (dual affiliation) participant.

Added capacity around participatory methods also lightens the burden on people with lived experiences and individuals in lived experience leadership roles around sharing diverse perspectives. At an OIEP meeting that engaged VCSEs, this point was discussed and highlighted as a negative influence on the wellbeing and workloads of lived experience leaders.

Currently, OIEP’s relationships with organisations that have research capacity (e.g., HEIs) are short-term and arise on an ad hoc basis. Predominantly, research links are made when the need arises and resources are available to commission the research that is deemed necessary. COLIF itself evidences this point. A way of increasing research capacity is to begin valuing research that is conducted within and by communities. All research on local contexts should be given equal value, as long as key research principles, like transparency (Golafshani, 2003), are followed and people are involved in the research ethically (Bussu et al., 2020).

Essentially, research that sustains conversations across stakeholders and brings attention to the perspectives of previously marginalised voices helps to create inclusive local landscapes. The diagram below clarifies this point through inclusive employment’s six principles.



Figure 6. Coordination of cross-sector partnerships and COLIF's six principles for inclusion.

Priorities around funding to sustain cross-sector partnership coordination and continuous collaboration around inclusion are outlined in the next section.

6. Funding

Economic landscapes that foster and strengthen inclusion require funding allocation that values social outcomes, like building relationships and co-designing spaces and processes with communities experiencing social inequalities (Dacombe, 2011; Leyshon et al., 2024). Like any public matter, investment in these types of outcomes gain value when they are deemed as being important by the public and organisations with public influence and resource (Mason and Brown, 2011). The participation of organisations with public influence (e.g., large businesses and anchor organisations⁸) in cross-sector dialogues and in community spaces is fundamental for increasing the funds that are available to advance inclusion. The quote below highlights the importance of increasing funding in this way.

“And I think that many projects, many charities, they could do so much more with a bit of stability in their funding. I think stability of funding is critical, but God knows how that will come about. But... it’s kind of the sharing of the wealth, in a way. Sharing of the wealth in a more equitable way, and that would make a real difference.”

Education provider participant.

Critically, at present, involvement from such organisations is driven by personal motivations of people with influence within those organisations. This point relates to the strong impact of employers who prioritise inclusion as part of their business’s day-to-day operations and culture (see Section 1: “Timing”). However, in anchor organisations, this key influence can struggle to translate into action across the entire organisation if the person with motivations can only shape things within a particular department. This dynamic came to the fore during an OIEP meeting on social value and procurement. An anchor organisation’s endeavours to create a framework on procurement that valued social outcomes related to a specific department and because someone in that department was motivated (due to their past experiences) to be involved in such work. This issue can be navigated by creating relevant social and value procurement frameworks and promoting their adoption holistically. Encouragingly, positive developments in this area are in progress, such as the UK Government’s new procurement requirements for local authorities that will come into effect in Autumn 2025 (UK Government, 2025).

Another aspect of funding that requires rethinking is what is expected from allocated funds. This point is pertinent to experiences that relate to trauma. Before employment and the pathways to it can even be broached, individuals with difficult (complex) experiences require time to build and/or rebuild trusted social bonds and establish comfort and confidence with their daily routines (Sippel et al., 2015). During an OIEP meeting around education and training pathways for young people, it was raised how sustained participation is

⁸ Anchor organisations are large organisations (usually non-profit, public sector) in a local area. Local National Health Service Trusts are an example.

undervalued and funding streams that prioritise the maintenance of trusted relationships need establishment. The following quote demonstrates how the work of local organisations in this area is overlooked and often goes unsupported.

“...just going back to funding and things like that, is that when you're sort of looking at commissioning or more local authority funding, the larger charities are the ones that automatically get considered. But it is a challenge when it is your very local neighbourhood organisations that are the most trusted, the funding is not always reaching there.”

VCSE participant.

OIEP's role around this issue can focus on raising awareness around the importance of flexible funding. This flexibility must relate to timeframes as well. There is no prescriptive measure for how long it takes an individual to build or rebuild confidence (Focht-New et al., 2008). Therefore, organisations who sustain relationships with such individuals and co-design comfortable (caring) spaces with them need acknowledgement with regards to their work's positive influences on inclusion.

Funding-related insights are aligned with inclusive employment's six principles in the following diagram.



Figure 7. Funding cross-sector partnerships and COLIF's six principles for inclusion.

In this report's final section, we present an overall set of conclusions about OIEP's role in sustaining positive outcomes around inclusive employment and what needs to be strengthened.

CONCLUSIONS

Mainly, this report aims to be a stepping stone towards rethinking inclusive employment. Our findings highlight how resources and policies around inclusion raise awareness around key considerations, such as access to a fair wage and co-designing recruitment processes with diverse groups. Significantly, inclusion gains value and meaning across an economic landscape when all stakeholders collaborate and treat inclusion as an ongoing process. This ongoing process must be open to diverse voices and experiences, where these voices and experiences feed directly into decision-making and assessing how inclusion can be strengthened.

Through our findings, we revealed three areas of decision-making that are pertinent to inclusive employment: i) how pathways to employment ensure strong relationships develop between key stakeholders and communities; ii) how recruitment processes can be made more accessible and flexible, and instil confidence in individuals and iii) how diverse voices can be involved in co-defining the aims of programmes and activities that aim to inspire access to fair work. Consequently, collaborations that share resources (and wealth) equitably so that diverse voices are heard in decision-making circles are fundamental to inclusion.

The perspectives of individuals who experience barriers to work due to social and place-based inequalities are a priority for strategies and partnerships that aim to work on inclusive employment. We have shown how OIEP's work on bringing together cross-sector stakeholders has had positive results in this area. Yet, the coordination of such collaborations across all areas and in relation to specific communities is difficult for OIEP, given its current capacities. A way to manage this challenge would be to consider a multi-network model. These models have been suggested as a way of building relationships (between stakeholders and within communities) based on a community's and/or sector's context and communicating the learning within smaller local and/or sector-based networks to a larger one (Avelino et al., 2024; Perennial, 2025). In this case, the larger, central, network role would be assumed by OIEP. Consequently, OIEP would be able to collate key case studies and become aware of pressing challenges without assembling specific meetings to do so. Relevant learning would be provided directly by the smaller networks, as long as the processes of sharing this learning are co-designed and agreed upon. The diagram below (adapted from Perennial, 2025) demonstrates how such an approach can be operationalised.

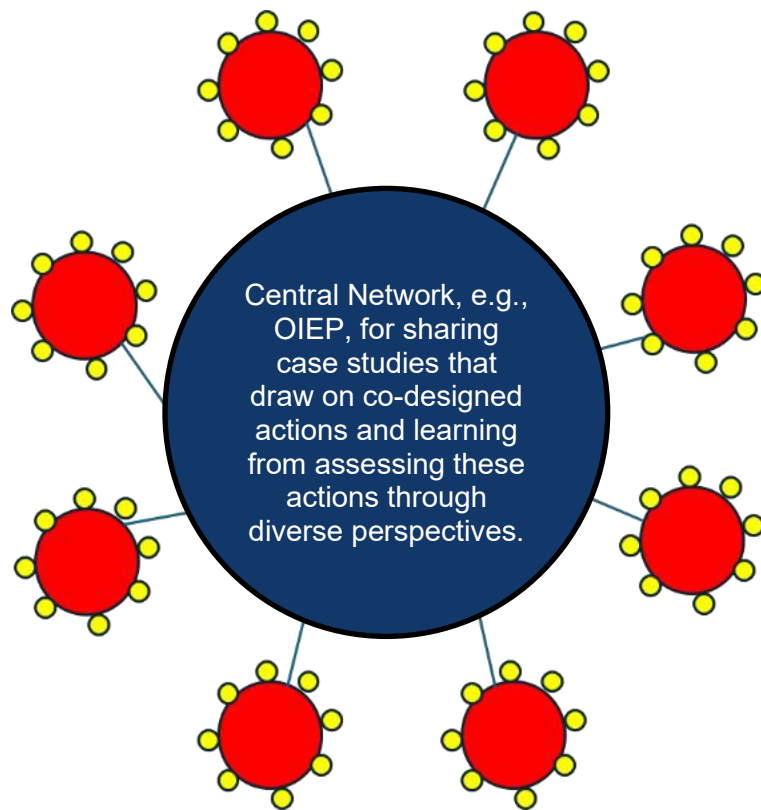


Figure 8. A multiple network approach for bringing cross-sector partners together to collaborate around inclusion.

In Figure 8, the red circles represent cross-sector collaborations that develop around a specific sector and/or social group. These collaborations are then joined to local areas and communities that come together to co-design actions that are relevant to the particular communities (represented by the smaller yellow circles).

Overall, the figure above demonstrates how inclusion's key considerations can be adapted into meaningful action through community-level voices. Additionally, the six principles for inclusion that are highlighted in this report can become a guide for cross-sector collaborations, irrespective of their size and location. Collaborators can reflect on their work by turning the principles into questions (as shown below) and assess their actions against them.

1. Are our policies and/or actions open to being adapted to suit individualised experiences (person-centred) and the local context (place-based)?
2. Are we all invested in shaping our actions through diverse voices as much as we can be?
3. Are there leadership roles that are adequately resourced for people with lived experiences of barriers to work?
4. Are we aware of and in dialogue with spaces and organisations that are valued by diverse groups in the community? (If they do not seem to exist, how can we co-create them?)
5. Are we sensitive to diversity within diversity?
6. Are we flexible enough to provide space, listen to and work with individuals with complex experiences (trauma) to build mutual care and trust?

Significantly, no single stakeholder (cross-sector partner) will be able to address the questions above on their own. Reflections on the questions should aim to highlight areas of improvement and draw on the strengths of all cross-sector partners to deliver inclusion's six principles (as defined by this report). Cross-sector conversations that are guided by the six principles can also be a way of distributing resources equitably. Here, partners that demonstrate strengths in building caring and trustworthy relationships can be valued and sustaining their work becomes a priority.

Once more, caring and trustworthy relationships are best understood through a community's diverse voices and participatory methods can facilitate sharing such insights (Lucero et al., 2020). Therefore, a key final recommendation is for cross-sector partners with expertise in participatory methods to work with (and in) communities and ensure their diverse voices are heard by local cross-sector partnerships. This learning can then feed into the larger central network, e.g., OIEP, and be shared with the numerous other small-scale networks (as demonstrated in Figure 8). This approach allows for Ferdman's (2014) framework for inclusion to be enacted, i.e., where inclusion is considered at the individual level; interpersonal level; group level; leadership level; organisational level and societal level.

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