

MAKING IPS WORK AT SCALE:

A 12 month snapshot
of impact within a
national programme



An introduction from our Executive Director



Access to good work is fundamental to inclusion, quality of life and wellbeing. Too often, people accessing mental health or drug and alcohol services are not given the opportunity to benefit from this. This is not about a lack of aspiration or ability, but about whether the right support is available at the right time.

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is helping to change this. IPS is an evidence-based approach that enables people to find and sustain paid employment, with support integrated into health and care services and tailored to the individual.

IPS has expanded rapidly across England. The number of people accessing support for severe mental illness and drug and alcohol needs has increased by 81% in less than three years. IPS Grow was established by Social Finance to support this scaling, strengthening the foundations for high-quality, consistent delivery.

In 2025-26, over 10,000 people accessing mental health or drug and alcohol services have moved into good work through IPS – jobs that build confidence, independence and opportunity.

This reflects the incredible achievements of the IPS community across England in supporting more people than ever into good jobs. We are proud of the role IPS Grow plays in this, enabling partners to strengthen the IPS workforce, improve the use of data and insight and share learning across the system'

This report shares highlights from 2025-26 and reflects a collective effort across providers, systems and partners. It shows what is possible when IPS is supported to work well at scale - so that more people, in more places, can access high-quality support into employment.

Niall O'Reilly

Executive Director, IPS Grow



WHY IPS GROW EXISTS

IPS Grow was launched by Social Finance in 2019 to expand Individual Placement Support (IPS) services across England, helping thousands of people with health conditions to find and sustain good quality work that they want.

IPS AND EMPLOYMENT: THE CONTEXT

IPS is an evidence-based employment support approach supporting people with severe mental illness, receiving drug or alcohol treatment and other complex health needs. IPS focuses on supporting people to find and sustain paid employment through eight principles:



1. It aims to get people into competitive employment.
Volunteering or sheltered work are not counted as outcomes.



2. It is open to all those who want to work.
With no exclusions based on diagnosis, health condition or benefits status.



3. It tries to find jobs consistent with people's preferences.



4. It works quickly.
Job search starts within four weeks, even if a person has been out of work for years.



5. It brings employment specialists into clinical teams.
So that employment becomes a core part of treatment services.



6. Employment specialists develop relationships with employers based on a person's work preferences.
Not based on who happens to have jobs.



7. It provides ongoing, individualised support for the person and their employer.
Helping people to thrive in their jobs.



8. Guidance and support with benefits is included.
So no one is made worse off by participating.

NATIONAL REACH AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Made up of regional experts across England, IPS Grow is the national infrastructure supporting IPS services to strengthen quality, data and workforce capacity.



TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND DELIVERY

As IPS has expanded, there is a greater risk that the quality of support people receive becomes inconsistent across regions, providers and settings. In response, IPS Grow provides national technical support, working alongside services and systems to deliver IPS in line with the evidence base, strengthen integration and respond early to emerging delivery or performance challenges. This supports growth in access to be planned and managed in a way that protects service quality and delivery confidence, rather than allowing variation or instability to develop unnoticed.

The results 2025-26

+40

Integrated Care Systems (ICS) supported with mobilisation, quality improvement and integration.



60

Fidelity Reviews, 73 Guided Self-Assessments and nearly 1,000 quarterly call check-ins delivered to strengthen quality and performance.

1,586

practitioners and leaders connected through Communities of Practice and the IPS FutureNHS Collaboration workspace.

287

IPS teams supporting people across severe mental illness (SMI) and drug and alcohol (D&A) services nationwide.



By providing consistent national support and oversight, services are able to maintain high-quality IPS delivery as access grows, adapt to local pressures and support more people into good work with consistent, high-quality support.



CASE STUDY

Supporting system-led expansion of IPS across Staffordshire & Stoke 2025

Staffordshire & Stoke delivers Individual Placement and Support (IPS) across dual providers within a complex and evolving system. In recent years, the system set out ambitious plans to expand access to IPS in response to rising demand and national priorities. As with many large scale expansions, there were clear risks that growth in access could outpace workforce capacity, data readiness and governance arrangements, increasing the likelihood of performance instability or future remediation.

IPS Grow worked alongside commissioners, NHS England regional leads, system leaders and providers across Staffordshire & Stoke to support a coordinated, system level approach to expansion. Rather than focusing on individual teams in isolation, the emphasis was on helping the system plan and sequence growth in a way that protected quality and delivery confidence.

This included supporting partners to develop a shared understanding of demand and how many people the system wanted to support through IPS and to model workforce requirements over time. Using the IPS Grow workforce calculator, the commissioner calculated how funding should be applied year on year to ensure adequate staff growth to meet access growth. This work helped the system consider how staffing levels, supervision capacity and skill mix would need to evolve as access increased.

Alongside this, IPS Grow supported the early establishment of consistent data and reporting expectations, enabling clearer oversight of how many people were accessing IPS services, the quality of support and performance.

This approach supported Staffordshire & Stoke to plan IPS expansion in a structured and sustainable way. By strengthening coordination and planning upfront, the system gained greater clarity around how growth could be delivered without compromising workforce stability or service quality. With improved alignment across providers and clearer sight of future workforce needs, the system is better equipped to allocate resources effectively, anticipate risks and maintain oversight as more people access IPS services.



IPS Grow helped us think about expansion as a system challenge, not just a service one, which gave us greater confidence that growth would be sustainable."

Portfolio Manager – Mental Health at Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICB



CASE STUDY

Embedding race equity into IPS delivery: A practical, system wide approach to race equity

Equity is a core component of quality. As more people access IPS services, systems need to understand who is being reached and whether people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds are being supported into work equitably. IPS Grow's Race Equity Action Plan helps services identify and address disparities as part of routine quality improvement.

IPS Grow has embedded a Race Equity Action Plan (REAP) as a core part of its quality and workforce offer, addressing racial inequalities in access to employment support and outcomes for people with severe mental illness. This work aligns with the NHS Patient and Carer Race Equality Framework (PCREF) and reflects the IPS principle of zero exclusion.

The Race Equity Action Plan provides services with a practical, structured framework focused on data, learning, processes and partnerships, supporting teams to move from reflection to action. Embedded within Fidelity Reviews and Communities of Practice, it avoids a tick box approach and supports ongoing improvement. Since launching in February 2024, 111 teams have completed a REAP, with 56 completing a plan in the first year.

Cambridge and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust IPS service used their plan to identify disparities in staff representation, leading to more inclusive recruitment, stronger PCREF partnerships and additional cultural competence training.

Race equity is now one of the most engaged areas of IPS Grow learning, supporting delivery that is effective and equitable.





DATA TOOLS AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Rapid expansion of IPS exposed fragmented and inconsistent approaches to data collection across services and systems. In response, IPS Grow has developed national processes, standards and tools to support consistent IPS data collection and reporting, working alongside services and commissioners to enable consistent reporting and a shared evidence base for oversight and improvement.

By strengthening national data consistency and reporting, services and commissioners can make more informed decisions, identify issues earlier and ensure people receive equitable, high quality IPS support.

The results

287

IPS teams (187 SMI and 100 D&A) using the IPS Grow Reporting Tool across England.



80%

data completeness for IPS-SMI provider submissions to the IPS Grow Reporting Tool (up from 38% since January 2025).



- Consistent data flows into the Mental Health Services Data Set and the IPS Grow Reporting Tool across services.
- National and regional dashboards enabling more informed commissioning and oversight.
- Improved use of data by services to identify trends, areas for improvement and facilitate live reporting.

What's next: Exploring avenues to reduce the administrative burden of data capture and reporting, while strengthening the evidence base needed to demonstrate impact and value for money.



CASE STUDY

Implementing data tools and performance standards at The Life Rooms Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust 2025

The IPS teams at Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust were spending significant time manually extracting IPS-related data from their Electronic Patient Record (EPR) and preparing monthly uploads to the IPS Grow Reporting Tool. This labour-intensive and error-prone process diverted the employment specialist's time away from their core role of supporting people into work.

Working closely with IPS Grow, Mersey Care pitched modifications to their EPR to include IPS-specific data fields to more closely match the IPS Grow Reporting Tool. The modifications were agreed and implemented; we provided regular check-ins and offers of support throughout that process. They can now generate automated data exports and upload information to the IPS Grow Reporting Tool. Additionally, the data now aligns with the national reporting standards set by IPS Grow.

While final testing of the export pipeline is underway, Mersey Care have now laid the technical foundations. This change represents a pivotal shift: IPS data that once required hours of manual manipulation is now being produced in a consistent, reliable format every month. Furthermore, there is increasing evidence that when employment specialists have access to live client information, it strengthens collaboration and decision-making, ultimately improving the support people accessing IPS services receive. The impact isn't just about setting data standards or facilitating analysis at a national scale. It's also about alleviating administrative burden for services and improving the support people receive through IPS.

The necessity to upload data to the Reporting Tool has encouraged the service to think about its data systems and how to optimally capture and flow data. This offers a powerful example of how the IPS Grow Reporting Tool unlocks data that drives better national performance and accountability. Mersey Care provides a replicable model for end-to-end IPS data integration, which reduces burden, improves quality and enables commissioners to access richer national insights.





WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

As IPS has expanded, services have faced growing challenges in recruiting, developing and retaining the high-quality workforce they need. In response, IPS Grow has developed a national workforce programme. Our Workforce Leads provide coordinated recruitment support, structured onboarding and mentoring and learning pathways, including to our Level 3 qualification.



The results

1,270+

IPS staff across Severe Mental Illness services supported through workforce development.

923

learners completed dedicated IPS e-learning in the last year, strengthening consistency of practice at scale.

99%

of Team Leaders and Employment Specialists would recommend IPS Grow's 12-month onboarding programme.

127

learners enrolled in the world-first Level 3 Certificate in IPS in its first year, strengthening career pathways and long-term workforce sustainability.



We've massively benefitted from working with the IPS Grow workforce team, updating recruitment methods to generate lots of new ideas, meet some amazing candidates and successfully appoint talented new staff. It has enabled us to work in innovative ways that increase participation, representation and coproduction".

IPS Service Lead

69%

of hiring managers highlighted the need for structured onboarding support (through the IPS Grow Annual Workforce Survey), informing the development of a national 12-month onboarding programme.

By strengthening recruitment, onboarding and development through a national workforce programme, services are building confident, skilled teams and more people can access consistent, high quality IPS support.



CASE STUDY

Developing the workforce through new recruitment practices at Southampton City Council's Employment Support Team 2025

Southampton City Council's Employment Support Team had a strong desire to strengthen lived-experience involvement in their recruitment processes. However, this could not be facilitated under the local authority's Human Resource (HR) policy. The service felt it was not fully embodying its principles of co-production, nor truly reflecting the voices of people accessing IPS services in their recruitment processes.

That's where IPS Grow came in. We worked with the service's IPS team to influence the local authority's HR policy and advocate for lived-experience inclusion through an evidence-based and structured approach.

We developed a clear and robust business case outlining the benefits of meaningful lived experience involvement in recruitment, including more values based recruitment, a stronger lived-experience voice and an improved candidate experience. We demonstrated how this aligned with organisational values and national IPS principles for co-production.

Working with the IPS service, we carried out an in-depth review of the local authority's recruitment policy, identifying where lived-experience could be appropriately integrated. We provided suggested amendments, templates, confidentiality agreements and guidance, alongside advice on safeguarding and training. This included sharing best practice from other IPS services and voluntary sector partners to support a practical and proportionate approach.

As a result of IPS Grow's proposals, the IPS service was able to include a lived experience representative in their interview panel, better aligning with IPS principles. The local authority's HR team is also considering amending its recruitment policy to include lived experience representatives on their interview panels.

This work demonstrates IPS Grow's role in influencing policy to better align with IPS principles, unlocking more inclusive recruitment practices that can be replicated across other systems.



Without shared national infrastructure, variation increases, workforce instability grows and data becomes less reliable - making it harder for services to consistently support people into good work at scale.

INFLUENCING THE SYSTEM: NATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY



Executive Director of IPS Grow
on a visit to Number 10

Alongside our work supporting IPS services directly, we've worked with national and system leaders to raise the profile of employment as a core health outcome and to strengthen understanding of what high-quality IPS delivery requires as services grow.

Over the last year, this has included engaging MPs, senior healthcare leaders and policymakers through targeted roundtables and national events and bringing together system leaders to share learning on workforce sustainability, data and quality.

The results

150

senior healthcare staff and policy makers attended our inaugural IPS Grow national conference at the British Library.



Mary Docherty



Professor Dame Carol Black

150,000

individuals were reached through national recruitment advertising campaigns and webinars.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR IPS GROW?

IPS Grow will continue to play a central role in supporting more people into paid work that they want through high quality IPS services, across mental health and drug and alcohol treatment settings. As more people access IPS services, the focus shifts to sustaining quality, equity and workforce confidence, supported through funding, evidence, workforce stability and national leadership.

Strengthening the evidence base



By supporting consistent use of national reporting tools and improving the data completeness and quality, IPS Grow enables better benchmarking, sharper performance conversations and deeper insight into what drives positive outcomes. This evidence is critical to demonstrate the value of IPS investment, inform improvement, and support national accountability.

Expanding IPS to support more people into work



We will work with partners to explore how IPS can be extended to reach additional groups facing significant barriers to employment, including prison leavers, people experiencing homelessness and other underserved communities. Any future expansion will be grounded in the established IPS evidence base with a focus on fidelity, workforce capability and the conditions needed to deliver high-quality IPS.

Equitable support and quality at scale



As IPS reaches more people and new settings, maintaining equity and quality is critical. IPS Grow will continue to embed equity into workforce development, quality improvement and system support, ensuring that services are equipped to identify and address disparities in who is accessing IPS services and in the outcomes people achieve as services grow.

National leadership and system stewardship



Employment support is still treated as outside the remit of healthcare instead of a key part of recovery. We will continue to advocate for IPS with key national and local stakeholders, strengthening its position within health, employment and economic agendas.

Thank you to our partners



IPS Grow exists so everyone who wants to work can access consistent, high quality IPS support into good work - wherever they live.

To access support with commissioning of IPS or to learn more about IPS Grow's work, please email [**support@ipsgrow.org.uk**](mailto:support@ipsgrow.org.uk)