

Innovate  
Trust

# The *Insight* Investigators Project

October 2022 to September 2023



# Introducing Insight Investigators

Insight Investigators is an Innovate Trust project funded by the WCVA's Strategic Grant Fund. The project has allowed us to carry out a member-led evaluation of Insight to review how people are engaging with the app and what it means to its users post-lockdown.

It has also given us an invaluable opportunity to pause, reflect and take stock to ensure that the app keeps meeting its users' ever changing needs after an initial fast period of growth.

A key focus of this evaluation work has been to consider the role of volunteering within the app and how this adds to one of Insight's key aims of reducing social isolation and loneliness for its users.

Throughout the project, our main priorities have been:

- To listen to Insight users and trial new events based on their suggestions
- To understand how Insight tackles loneliness and to reflect on how volunteering can protect against loneliness and isolation
- To consider how we can better promote volunteering on Insight
- To support Insight members to review how accessible the app is.

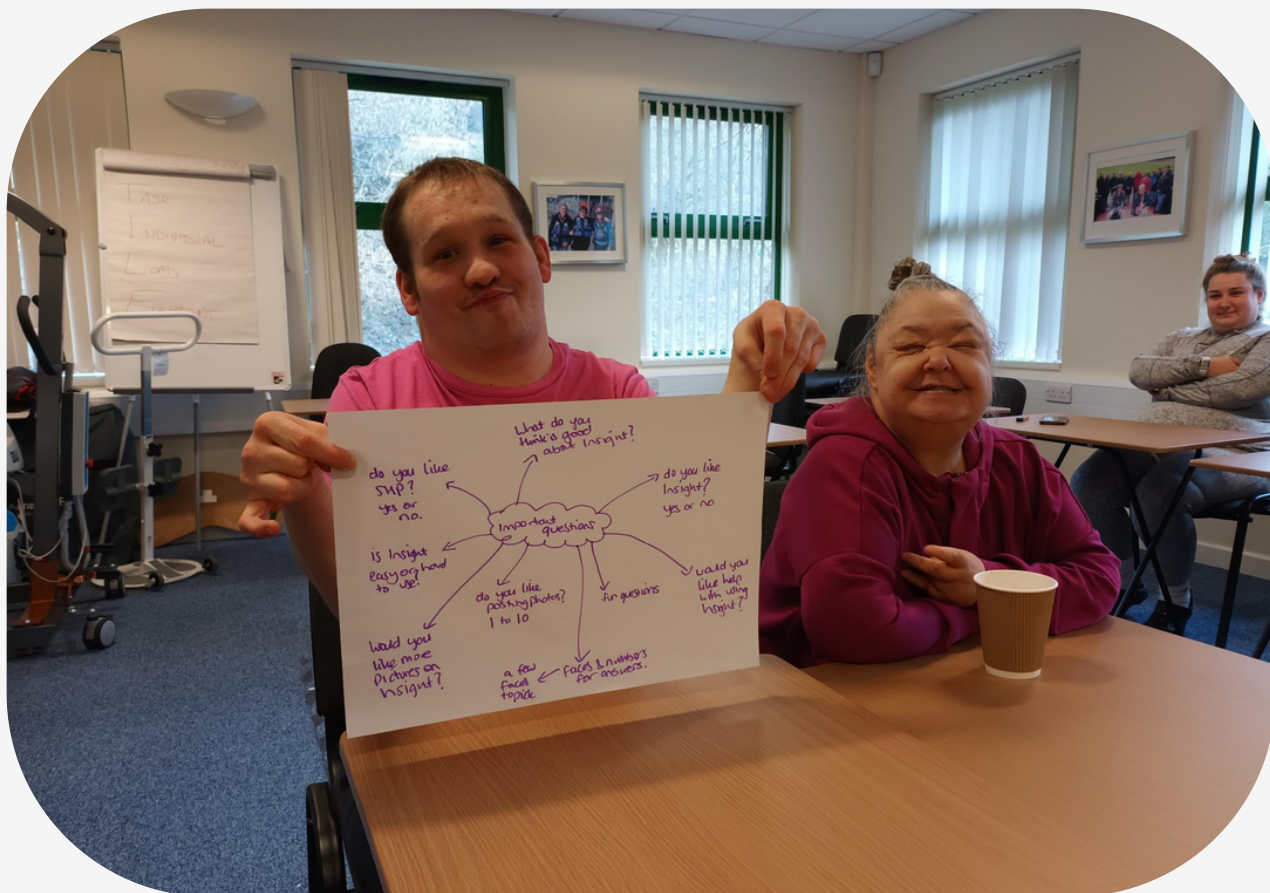


## Let's begin with some key stats



- In September 2023 Insight counted 1809 members and 98 groups - this compares to 1658 members and 93 groups at the start of the project in October 2022.
- Insight delivers an average of 20 online sessions for its members every week.
- Members use Insight for an average of 1 hour and 40 minutes every day.
- Insight currently counts over 100 partners and facilitators who help deliver activities and create content. This number is growing all the time.
- 31 members volunteer to plan and deliver activities as part of the peer-led team.
- Insight's partners and users are primarily based in Wales but there are no geographic limitations to the app with some users accessing from England and Scotland.

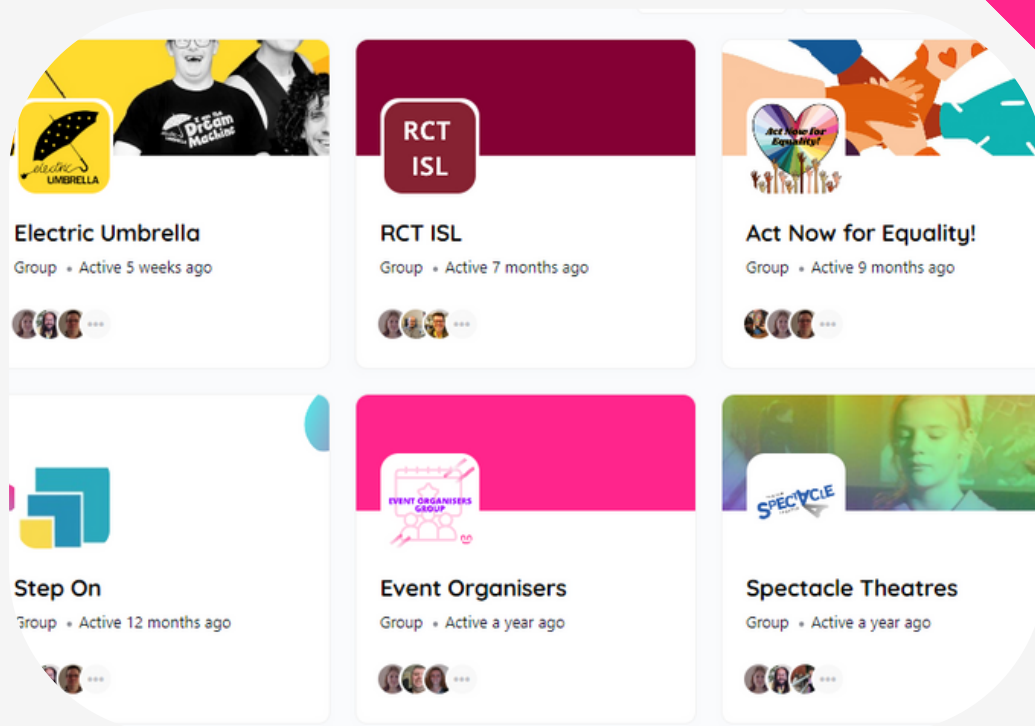
## The consultation process



Staff from Innovate Trust's Skills and Wellbeing department worked alongside the peer-led team to carry out extensive consultation about the app. It was important for us to consult with a wide range of people and not just our regular users so that we could establish a clear picture of what the app is currently delivering but also better understand its future potential.

This involved reaching out to:

- Active Insight members
- People who have signed up to Insight but don't engage with the app
- Individuals who don't yet use the app - potential new members
- Existing partners
- Potential new partner organisations
- Local Special schools
- Nationwide volunteer bureaux



As part of the consultation process, we sent out surveys to all partner organisations who are current members of Insight to ask for their feedback and reflections on the app. Partners were offered a one to one follow up meeting to talk in depth about their survey responses.

It was clear that across the board, partner organisations had found the app extremely useful during the pandemic; Insight was of significant benefit to them and contributed to their ability to continue service provision during this time. Post-pandemic, some organisations remain prolific users of the app, whilst others have moved back to pre-pandemic models of support.

Moving forward, we identified a need to re-fresh relationships with partner organisations on the app and support them to recognise the continued benefits of Insight in a post-pandemic context. There is a real risk that learning and approaches from the pandemic, such as a willingness to be adaptable, try new methods of service delivery and embrace digital technology, could be forgotten. This is a point for the wider third sector to be aware of and address.

## Lessons from the past 3 years

We worked with Innovate Trust's Digital Inclusion team to identify the lessons learnt from a development and delivery perspective over past 3 years. Our conclusions were as follows:

### **Scalability Challenges and Critical Infrastructure Upgrades**

One of the major challenges we faced was the sudden increase in the app's usage. As the number of community members grew rapidly during COVID, our existing infrastructure struggled to handle the load. This necessitated the purchase of additional server space to ensure the app's stability and performance. Investing in scalable infrastructure was crucial to meet the growing demands of our expanding user base.

### **User Acquisition Efforts and Onboarding**

Getting out into the community and signing up new members proved to be an essential aspect of Innovate Trust's work. We realised the importance of actively engaging with potential users, promoting the app's features, and explaining its benefits. However, we also identified that more streamlined onboarding processes were necessary to enhance user adoption and reduce friction during the initial setup.

### **User Feedback and Iterative Improvements**

Throughout the three years, we actively gathered feedback from members, which played a pivotal role in shaping our app's evolution. Users provided valuable insights, identified areas for improvement, and reported issues that we promptly addressed. By maintaining an open feedback loop, we were able to iteratively enhance the app's functionality, user experience, and overall satisfaction. The dedicated ideas section of the app has also played a role in helping us shape our roadmap.

### **Community Moderation and Content Management**

As member numbers grew, managing user-generated content and ensuring appropriate behaviour within the app became increasingly important. We encountered instances where moderation processes needed refinement and additional resources. It was crucial for us to strike a balance between facilitating free expression and maintaining a safe and respectful environment for all members.

### **Accessibility and Inclusive Design**

We learned that prioritising accessibility and inclusive design principles significantly improved the overall user experience. Implementing features such as customisable font sizes, device compatibility, and support for various languages and cultures broadened our app's reach and enhanced its usability for a diverse range of community members.

### **Privacy and Data Security**

We continuously evaluate and update our security measures to protect user information. Strengthening our protocols by implementing secure authentication mechanisms, and regularly auditing our systems were critical steps in maintaining user trust. We also ensure that we have regular audits of our application to ensure we meet security standards.

### **Regular Updates and Bug Fixes**

To address user feedback, introduce new features, and resolve issues, we adopted a disciplined approach to regular software updates and bug fixes. By prioritising and incorporating user-centric improvements, we demonstrated our commitment to continuously refining the app's performance.

Each aspect mentioned above has taught us valuable lessons that have contributed to the overall growth and success of the app.

## Insight - a member-led app

A person-centred approach is at the heart of everything we do at Innovate Trust. Insight Investigators allowed us to consult with Insight members to take on board their suggestions for new online activities, therefore keeping the individuals we support central to the project. This ensures that the app stays fresh and keeps delivering what the membership wants.

Over the course of the project we piloted the following new sessions based entirely on members suggestions:

- Bellydancing (Stephanie Gwane-Hamza)
- Bollywood dancing (Bollywood Vibes and Nisa Aleem)
- Martial Arts (Adaptive Martial Arts)
- Mental Health Awareness training (Black Dog)
- Puppetry (Magic Light Productions)
- Clubbercise (Anna Wilson)
- Face Yoga (Echo Yoga)
- Creative expression and acting (House of Deviant)
- Zoo Science (Welsh Mountain Zoo)
- Zoom skills training (Digital Communities Wales)
- Magic skills (Leigh Milne)
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training (SVC)

**Innovate Trust**

**Try Bellydancing on Insight!**

Led by Stephanie, learn basic moves and dance to traditional Arabic music. Sitting or standing, this is for everyone!

**Monday 3rd July 4-5pm**  
see Live Events on Insight for link

**WcVA C&GC**

The poster features a woman in a gold and white bellydancing outfit against a blue background with colorful geometric shapes.

**Innovate Trust**

**Clubbercise is a brand new online dance activity for Insight!**

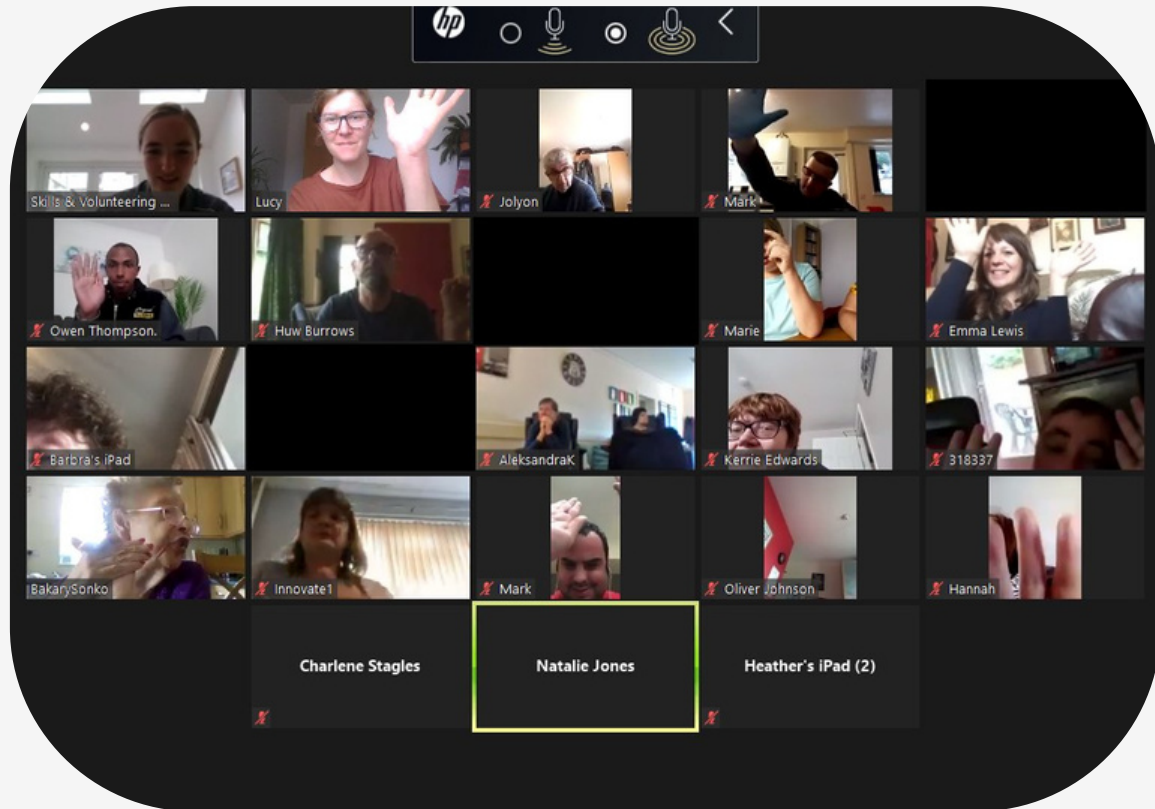
Thursday 22 June  
11.15am-12.00  
Login: 909 171 6445  
Passcode: Innovate1  
or click on the link in Live Events

Clubbercise® is a fun online workout with a BANGING soundtrack of club anthems from 90s classics to the latest hits. The class is held in a darkened room with party lights. Our easy-to-follow routines suit all fitness levels. COME AND JOIN US!  
Turn your room into a club

The poster features a dark background with colorful party lights and silhouettes of people dancing.



# Tackling Loneliness



We know that Insight is an invaluable tool to support people's mental health and wellbeing by providing a safe and secure place for members to connect and take part in new activities. In fact, this is why the app was pushed into such a rapid phase of development during lockdown when social isolation and loneliness were a real concern for all of us.

Insight Investigators more specifically looked at the role of volunteering in reducing social isolation. We explored how Insight promotes volunteering opportunities which create social connections both online and in-person. Insight now counts 31 member volunteers who run online sessions for their peers. There's also a fantastic variety of volunteering opportunities available on the app such as volunteer yoga instructor roles, community garden roles, peer-support roles and many more.

However, the project identified that Insight members were keen to access more volunteering opportunities, and for these to be more readily available and accessible on the app.

# A new vision to make volunteering more inclusive

Through our consultation process, we identified that the people we support struggle to find suitable volunteering opportunities for a number of reasons: they don't know that volunteering is an option for them, they don't know where to look for opportunities or what different opportunities exist, they don't feel confident that they'll be supported by the organisations in question, they don't know how to apply...the barriers are numerous!

We asked what information would make individuals feel more confident about volunteering. They told us that they wanted:

- To be able to research an organisation and know whether it is 'safe', for example whether the organisation has experience supporting people with learning disabilities and whether they will 'understand me'.
- Information on how to behave when volunteering so as to have clear rules to follow.
- Information regarding the accessibility of venues and how to get there; this was a major cause of anxiety for many.
- Accessible information - they wanted to feel confident that information would be given in a format that would be understandable to them.
- To know how many people they would come into contact with when volunteering.
- To know what training would be given and in what format.

In regards to what format information should be delivered in, the following was suggested, reflecting the varied ways in which accessibility needs to be considered:

- Photos
- Short videos
- British Sign Language
- Easy Read
- Audio clips
- Makaton



We learnt through consultation with our partners that there's a desire within organisations who welcome volunteers to make their processes more inclusive and to improve practices when it comes to working with volunteers with additional needs.

For example, Glamorgan Voluntary Services commented that they regularly came across organisations who were nervous and unsure about providing support to people with disabilities and would find it helpful to have somewhere to direct them or something to send them to explain what type of things they could put in place to better their practice.

This has led us to consider the creation of a dedicated space for volunteering on Insight - The Volunteer Hub.

Our aim is for this to become a "go-to" space for Insight members to get accessible information about local volunteering opportunities but also advice and guidance about how to volunteer.

It would also be a useful tool for organisations who want to welcome a more diverse volunteer workforce by providing tools, tips and resources to make the process of volunteering simpler and more accessible.

This is an exciting development for the Insight app which would open up the volunteering landscape by making it more inclusive.

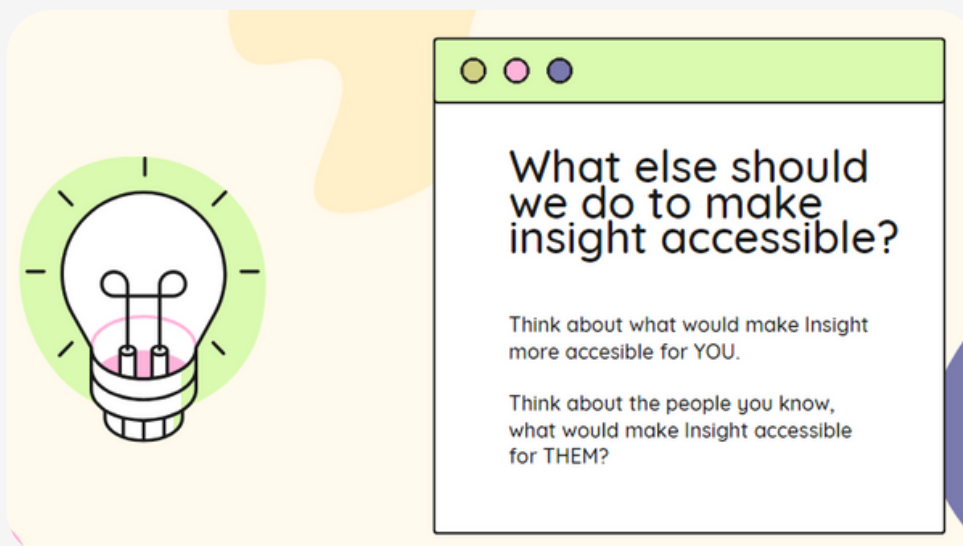


# Reviewing accessibility with Insight's users

It's so important that Insight be as simple and accessible as possible for its users. Although Insight has been created with accessibility at the heart of its design - the Insight Investigators project enabled us to catch up with Insight users to get their thoughts about how accessible the app is as it stands. This piece of work certainly challenged our assumptions of accessibility and revealed the key areas where change is needed. We learnt that:

- Simple icons that are considered universally recognisable are not easily identifiable for everyone.
- More traditional calendar-style layouts are preferred for Insight events.
- People want even more images to complement text where possible.
- There's a demand for more easy-read resources across the app.
- We need to consider how to maintain Insight's vital safety features without impacting accessibility with many users finding the login process challenging.

This consultation process was so revealing and will inform our practice moving forward. We will look to imbed regular accessibility testing and reviews into the future development of the app and volunteer hub.



## Challenges Faced

Whilst overall we feel the project has been successful, it has not been without its challenges. It was important to us that any project consultation was truly reflective of the learning disability community. We wanted to ensure that we engaged with very active Insight users, people who didn't use the app at all and everyone in between.

It has been a difficult process to make sure that the consultation undertaken with people with learning disabilities is truly representative and that the conclusions drawn from it are therefore meaningful. To help us achieve this, we have facilitated online and in-person consultation sessions across various localities, and have attended events led by other providers in order to catch individuals who would otherwise not engage with us under their own initiative. We have also carried out one to one consultations with individuals in their own homes when it has been clear that we will not be able to collect their feedback in any other way. This process has encouraged us to reflect on what constitutes meaningful consultation and will inform our future consultation plans within our department and Innovate Trust.

We have also reflected on the use of a peer group as part of the project. The intention was for this group of individuals to engage with the wider membership and take more of a lead on the consultation. Although this group was hugely helpful when it came to feeding back on the direction of Insight and specific issues explored by the project, it became clear that they found it difficult to put themselves in the shoes of those who had more complex needs than their own. This raises considerations about the extent to which any group of individuals can possibly represent a wider community of people. Clearly groups such as these have their place within research projects and many other settings, but there is a need to be aware of both the pros and cons of exclusively pursuing this approach.

## Celebrating Success!



To mark the end of the Insight Investigators project, we hosted a dissemination event at Insole Court in Cardiff. The theme was 'Insight in Real Life' and the event brought together people with learning disabilities, professionals from Social Services and partner organisations to learn about the key findings of the Insight Investigators project. Various partner organisations had stalls at the event, whilst some of the most popular Insight facilitators ran taster versions of their sessions. We also had an Insight room where individuals could find out more about the app and sign up.

Over 170 individuals attended on the day and it was fantastic to hear so many conversations about the Insight app! The event gave individuals the opportunity to understand more about what Insight has to offer and encouraged partners to consider how Insight can continue to work for them.

## Application of learning

Conclusions from the Insight Investigators project have application to the wider third sector.

- Consultation with project partners identified that organisations were propelled to adapt to digital service delivery in order to stay operational during the pandemic. There is now a clear need to support the sector to continue to recognise the benefits of online and blended delivery and not let lessons learnt from the pandemic slip away.
- Greater investment is needed in community-based technology support. Whilst we have gifted a huge number of smart devices at our own expense in an effort to combat digital poverty, there still needs to be ongoing support which can be provided in the home setting to ensure that those who struggle most to access activities are able to build their digital skills. This issue is wider than the current project and would need sustainable funding and buy-in from other organisations supporting people with learning disabilities. This type of digital outreach support would be the best way to reach individuals who are seldom heard from and are not regular users of the app or indeed other services.
- As a sector we still make assumptions about accessibility, including what accessibility really means and what qualifies as being accessible. It's important that our assumptions are continually challenged and organisations need to be proactive about embedding accessibility testing into practice. This applies to any area of work, including volunteer support.
- People with learning disabilities find volunteering platforms designed for a mainstream audience difficult to navigate, or in some cases they are completely unaware of the mainstream offering. There is a need for a dedicated space for advertising volunteering opportunities in a way that is accessible and tailored to the needs of people with learning disabilities. Whilst there are some easy read resources about volunteering available, this is in no way equivalent to the resources available to someone without a disability. Volunteering provision for people with learning disabilities doesn't have to be in competition with mainstream platforms. Better collaborative working is needed across the sector to provide the best support for volunteers with additional needs.

## What's next?

Although phase 1 of the Insight Investigators project is coming to an end this month, we have been successful in obtaining further funding from the WCVA Strategic Grant programme to fund the launch of the Insight Volunteer Hub. We are continuing to collaborate with key partners such as the WCVA and their Volunteering Wales website, SVC, GVS, C3SC and other local volunteer bureaux who are all keen to open up the volunteering landscape to make it more accessible. We will also be embarking on an exciting piece of work with Learning Disability Wales to explore good practice regarding easy audio and easy video resources for people with learning disabilities.

Insight is driven by its membership - we're passionate about ensuring that the app keeps reflecting and meeting their changing needs. As such we will continue to consult with Insight members to make sure the app delivers what they want. We will also continue to upskill members, to bring new partners on board and to review accessibility requirements to make sure that Insight adapts and grows alongside its users.





## And finally, thank you

Thank you to all our partners and members who continue to make Insight the success that it is today.

Thank you to the Welsh Government and WCVA who funded the Insight Investigators project through their Strategic Grant fund.

