

Employers and recruitment profession pledge to help over 1 million disabled people into work

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Recruiters and employers must work in synergy to increase the inclusion of disabled talent. That was the conclusion of a debate hosted at the House of Commons which was attended by senior figures from the staffing sector and UK businesses.

According to official figures, there is currently a 30 per cent employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people. Attendees discussed the motion that if we are to halve the disability employment gap – by assisting 1.2 million more disabled people into work - the recruitment industry needs to drive radical change from within.

The event, which was sponsored by Eversheds and hosted by the Recruitment Industry Disability Initiative (RIDl) (<http://www.ridiawards.com/>), with the support of Carolyn Harris, MP for Swansea East, closed with 75 per cent of attendees pledging to hire at least one disabled candidate in the next 12 months – positioning them as ‘One in a Million’.

Guest speakers on the day included Inga Beale, CEO of Lloyd's and Naeema Choudry, Partner at Eversheds, who proposed the motion. Tom Hadley, Director of Policy at the Recruitment & Employment Confederation and Melanie Forbes, CEO of Guidant Group, opposed it – stating that lasting change would only be possible through collaboration. Representatives from organisations including the Co-op Group, Novartis, Fujitsu, EON and the Government Department for Work and Pensions were in attendance as well as delegates from recruitment firms.

Speaking of the event's outcome, Kate Headley, Director of Consulting at the Clear Company and debate moderator, commented:

“While it may seem like a daunting task to help over a million disabled people into work – it is achievable if we work together.”

“What became crystal clear during this debate is that getting more disabled people into work is most definitely a shared responsibility. Employers must share their knowledge and resources to build confidence and ensure it is at the forefront of their procurement and education process with talent providers. Equally, it's a cop-out for recruiters to claim ‘employers make the hiring decision’. Good recruiters are persuasive – they can push good candidates and if they are confident on disability this will impact the chances for disabled job seekers. What is very clear from the audience responses around the numbers of disabled people applying to them - just 19% said they regularly receive applications from disabled people - is that there is trust to be built and skills developed to encourage disabled job seekers to disclose their status so that the right adjustments can be made to support them.”

“According to the House of Commons Library, there are around 5.4 million private sector businesses in the UK - not to mention the numerous public sector organisations which account for almost 20 per cent of the entire workforce. If just a quarter of these employers committed to hiring at least one disabled

candidate, we'd smash our target of halving the disability employment gap."

"Organisations that are already engaging with disabled talent are reaping the benefits and I am delighted that a majority of attendees on the day pledged to hire 'one in a million'. This marks another step towards achieving the goal which RIDI shares with UK Government – getting 1.2 million disabled people into work."

Inga Beale, CEO of Lloyd's, Commented:

"We cannot afford to ignore the untapped potential talent that exists within the disabled community – and we need help from the recruitment industry to do it. We will know we have achieved our objectives when recruiters come to us to demand that we do better when it comes to recruiting people with disabilities. Until that time, I issue a challenge to recruiters: Come and work with us and, together in partnership, let us sort out disability confidence once and for all."

Melanie Forbes, CEO of Guidant, Commented:

"Having been in the recruitment industry for over 25 years and outsourcing for the past 15 years, I have become familiar with clients telling me that supply partners do not put forward disabled talent. When I speak to our supply partners they tell me that even if they did, our clients would not hire them. Somewhere in the middle of this I believe lies the truth."

"We cannot create a chain of change alone. This is about collaboration, confidence and commitment. This is not solely the recruitment industry's problem to fix. It is every employer, across every sector, across the country's challenge to overcome. Disabled talent is a highly skilled under-represented talent pool. We can do this but it has to be together. We can change peoples' lives."

Tom Hadley, Director of Policy at the REC commented:

"Lasting, genuine and fundamental change will only come if we achieve a genuine step-change in the way employers – our clients – approach the hiring of people with disabilities. Recruitment that is fully inclusive, fully objective and provides opportunities for all is just good recruitment."

"Let's march under that banner, let's get employers of all sizes and across all sectors to think about how they currently hire and about how they might do things differently. Let's also use this to think about what kind of employer we want to be."

"Radical change cannot come only from within. We need to reach out to the wider business community and to society as a whole to create this brave new world where the focus is on people's abilities not disabilities."

- Ends

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