

HRDs commit to action around disability in the workplace at cutting-edge conference

Submitted by: BlueSky Public Relations Ltd

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Significant progress is being made around disability inclusion in the workplace, but there is still work to be done. That was the conclusion of the Recruitment Industry Disability Initiative's (RIDI (<https://ridi.org.uk/>)) inaugural annual conference.

The sell-out event, which was kindly hosted by headline RIDI sponsor, Eversheds Sutherland, was opened by Penny Mordaunt MP, Minister of State for Disabled People and included keynote presentations from influential stakeholders including Paralympic gold medallist, Sophie Christiansen CBE and disability champion, Philip Rutman, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office & Civil Service. The conference, Creating Disability Confident Recruiters through Collaboration, was attended by key HR decision makers from organisations including Diageo, John Lewis Partnership and Coca-Cola.

Sophie Christiansen shared the challenges she has faced as a highly skilled disabled person looking for work. Despite obtaining a First Class master's degree in Maths, it took her six months to land her first graduate role. Following an inclusive interview process, which she highlighted was, "more about looking at what role they could place me in – fitting the role around the person rather than fitting the person into the role", she is now an Analyst in the Technology Division at Goldman Sachs. Sophie's inspiring address ended with her noting that, "The Paralympics inspired a nation", and urging attendees to "let your next recruit inspire a company".

However, when the audience was polled on whether Sophie would be likely to get through their own company's existing application processes, a third (33%) thought it was still unlikely. A common theme which ran throughout the conference was the importance of confidence, communication and collaboration. Speakers highlighted how we're judged by the company we keep, and while legislation can go some way in levelling the playing field – it is 'peer pressure' that will have the greatest impact on encouraging others to question current practices and change behaviours. It was advised that both recruiters and employers should not be afraid to ask questions, challenge their supply chains and highlight their own successes. As Pauline Miller, Head of Diversity and Inclusion at Lloyd's pointed out on the day, "We need to talk to our suppliers about disability the same way we talk about gender – and make them accountable".

While two thirds (67%) of attendees are already on a Disability Confident journey, it was found that 79% of recruiters in the room haven't put forward a disabled candidate for an executive level role in the last 12 months, highlighting where more progress needs to be made.

On the day, every one of the attendees committed to taking action around disability inclusion within their own organisation: 8% pledged to sign up to the government's Disability Confident scheme, 24% committed to prioritising Disability Confident organisations in the recruitment supply chain, 17% said they will ensure hiring managers are trained on disability, 13% committed to reviewing application processes, 16% said they will reconsider policy around travel and logistics, 11% indicated they would be open to hosting a round-table for RIDI and 17% said they had plans to enter the RIDI Awards.

Commenting on the survey results, Kate Headley, Chair of RIDI and subject matter expert, said:

“While there is no doubt we still have a long way to travel to achieve true disability inclusion, not least at senior level, bringing influencers together in this way enables us to tackle difficult questions together. I’d like to thank the RIDI Executive Committee and our partners for tirelessly beating the drum for RIDI. Without them, game-changing events such as this would not be possible. The quality of speakers who gave their time to share their experiences was just incredible, and it’s fantastic that attendees left feeling empowered to think and do things differently.”

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