

PIONEERING EMPLOYMENT DIVERSITY

Unlocking the UK's hidden potential

Approximately 800,000 or 6% of young people in the United Kingdom are born disabled or acquire impairment during childhood¹. Although young disabled people have similar aspirations to their non-disabled peers, they often face significant disadvantage in the education system and labour market. The employment rate for young disabled people is 19% lower than their non-disabled peers.

This was the context for Pioneering Employment Diversity, an event hosted by Leonard Cheshire Disability in partnership with law firm Blaser Mills LLP and Capita Talent Consulting.

Held as part of National Inclusion Week 2016, the event, held in London, aimed to raise awareness of the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled young people, and to highlight the programmes and interventions available to organisations in order to broaden employment for people with a disability.

A line-up of inspirational speakers and panellists created a fascinating dialogue spanning challenge, opportunity, and practical action to really make a difference in the workplace. If there's one thing to take away from the event, or from this report, it's the power we all have to make a difference as individuals, as managers, as organisations.

A time of opportunity

Opening the evening at Holborn Bars, was Neil Heslop OBE, CEO of Leonard Cheshire Disability. Blind since his 20th birthday, and going on to forge a successful private sector career (including time as Head of strategy and general manager of retail operations at O2), Neil's personal experience held many parallels with the focus of our evening.

Boldly, Neil told us "there has never been a time that is more full of opportunity for people who have a disability". We live in a time of extraordinary change, and in a time where businesses are waking up to the commercial value of a diverse workforce. The spending value of the disabled population is estimated to be £212 billion and, as we will see later, companies that reflect their target audience through their employee profile have a competitive advantage through their innovation and creativity.

However, despite the pace of change it's also a time of challenge, only 46% of disabled people are currently in employment, compared to around 80% of the general population². Faced with this statistic, Neil urged the audience to approach recruitment decisions "in terms of risk and reward like other business decisions." Indeed, how can we apply this thinking in our hiring processes and decisions? The risks are not as great as people perceive and the rewards are greater than they expect, so do not miss out on a wealth of untapped potential.

¹Transitions into Employment for disabled young people research, Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion (2016)

²ONS Dataset: Labour market status of disabled people: A08, 18 May 2016

Case study: London 2012

The hugely successful London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic games were the first games to be fully inclusive in every aspect of their operations.

Lord Chris Holmes, instrumental in the bid process and planning of the games, was determined to build an Olympic workforce that would truly represent 21st century diverse Britain. How did the London bid team do it?

- Inclusion was at the heart of the bid process and planning of the games from the outset. The London bid team included a diverse committee with young people from London boroughs that would host games representing the Olympic committee.
- Made it a practical reality. When contracting fleet cars for the games they didn't just ask for the vehicles to be accessible for disabled passengers, they also asked for them to be accessible for disabled drivers. Small but significant details helped to make it real.
- Created a flat structure where everyone had a voice - older, younger, disabled, non-disabled, un-employed, ex-offenders, people from all walks of life – with no silos.
- Gave visibility to the Paralympic games in a way that had never been done before. Made the games affordable, accessible and highly visible, further reinforcing the message of inclusivity and resulting in sell-out events.

Making it happen

Following a thought provoking opening by Neil Heslop, OBE, Lord Chris Holmes - Parliamentarian and gold medallist Paralympian swimmer - took the stage. Chris's personal story illustrated the importance of nurturing the aspirations of young people with a disability.

As a teenager, full of hopes and dreams Chris lost his sight suddenly. Despite enormous barriers, Chris successfully pursued his goals: to go to university, to be a lawyer and to represent Great Britain at sport. He gained a degree from King's College, Cambridge, worked for a law firm in London, and most famously, won a total of nine gold, five silver, and one bronze Paralympic medals for swimming.

What kept him on that path? His hopes, aspirations and ambitions always remained the same despite losing his sight. We as individuals and as organisations can make a real difference if we can provide opportunity and a level playing field for young people with a disability.

Our Diversity & Inclusion expert view

Our lively panel session, chaired by Morgan Lobb, CEO of DiversityJobs.co.uk, drew on the expertise of our diverse panel. Here, we share key viewpoints from our panel that can help you or your organisation take steps towards unlocking the UK's hidden potential.

Be curious

Fiona Morden, representing Capita, believes curiosity is an underrated leadership skill. An interesting perspective and not a leadership skill you find in the average model. Curiosity, she believes, opens up the possibility to start to ask questions and to move from 'why' should we do this, to 'how' can we do this? Also on our panel, Paulette Cohen explained that at Barclays' appetite for talking more openly about mental health has helped to reduce the stigma attached to mental wellbeing in the City. Driven by an initial nine people telling their story, they have since been joined by 149 more.

Overcome fear

Jonathan Lilley of Blaser Mills LLP spoke about the fear regulation can create, meaning that business leaders view diversity and inclusion as a 'box-ticking' exercise rather than a commercial decision. The key is to overcome fear of talking about it, and to embrace Diversity & Inclusion with a positive mindset, rather than the fear of falling short of regulation. Fiona Morden also believes that a sense of fear of starting dialogue, and a lack of knowledge about where to begin, can constrain organisations that want to move forward with a disability agenda.

Innovate

Paulette Cohen demonstrated how a full understanding of your customer base pays dividends. Barclays launched a mobile banking service which was made accessible for all customers. I think we'd all agree that we wouldn't be without it - customers with a disability and non-disabled customers. Barclays was also the first bank to launch talking ATMs to improve accessibility for customers with a disability, for example those with visual impairments or with dyslexia. Likewise, Fiona Morden cited online customer 'chat' facilities as an innovation that is, for deaf customers, is a vital alternative to telephone based services but one that a much broader audience also now values. In summary, we can view accessibility as a commercial opportunity and we can build this into our Diversity & Inclusion strategies.

Create a level playing field

When he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, Alastair Hignell's biggest fear was that of being treated and judged differently. He believes it's important for employers to provide a level playing field, but that they need to make sure they allow disabled people to get on with the job.

Also on our panel, Rachel Bashabe, an alumna of Leonard Cheshire's Change100 programme, talked about how flexible employers can help to create that level playing field. Rachel said that she initially didn't want to be classed as disabled because as a young undergraduate she was concerned she might be given a role 'out of pity'. Change100 brings together top students and progressive employers and through this programme for talented disabled people, she found a role where she has flourished, grown in confidence, and gained new skills and experience.

At Barclays, Paulette Cohen told us that they are trying to create a more level playing field through their apprenticeship scheme. Entry criteria including age, qualifications and experience have been reviewed to open the programme up to a wider audience.

Ask questions

Alastair Hignell talked about the mutual learning that took place between him and his employer, the BBC, in order to make it possible for him to do his job that requires travel and attendance at crowded sports venues. Another of our panellists, Fiona Morden talked about using questions as an opportunity to promote more diverse talent: "if asked, 'who would you recommend for my new project?' do you respond with names of those who match the usual organisational profile or suggest and advocate someone different?"

Use your voice

'How can we start the process?' Asked our panel Chair, Morgan Lobb. Fiona Morden, representing Capita, believes we all need to use our voices, whether that be asking questions at work or taking the opportunity next time you are talking to an influencer: "We prime people by how we talk about others and hence we need to story-tell in a positive way about the great ability of people who happen to have a disability." Every conversation has the potential to make a difference and as Fiona said "If enough people are curious about why things are as they are, and challenge the status quo in a constructive way, it creates energy and noise to create change."

Alastair Hignell highlighted the importance of using your voice to influence in the workplace. Those at the highest level of the organisation may understand the argument for a diverse workforce. At the lower level people will also want to help. But, somewhere between the two is often where things become unstuck. We need more people to use their voice to navigate through the 'we haven't done this before' and 'we'd have to change established working practices' type arguments.

Collaborate

Paulette Cohen of Barclays said she'd like to see much more collaboration between organisations. All the panel members agreed that the sentiment of 'let's work together' is what we should be aiming for, to share best practice and scale up the impact of diversity and inclusion. Paulette also talked about collaboration within the business. Barclays' focus on five key Diversity & Inclusion agendas (multicultural, gender, disability, LGBT, multi-generational) relies on collaboration across teams within the business and with the employee networks to champion the agendas.

Change for the better

"Inclusion is the mother and father of innovation" said Lord Holmes in his closing remarks. Via our speakers and panellists we certainly saw this in action.

Inclusion is about making sure people feel valued, respected and listened to; it is about recognising and valuing the differences we each bring to the workplace and creating an environment where everyone has equal access to opportunities and resources, and is able to contribute to an organisation's success.

At an organisational level there is much that can be done in terms of attraction and retention to cultivate and nurture a truly diverse workforce and inclusive workplace culture. The points raised during our panel discussion provide some insight into how to take the first steps, and beyond that there is something we can all do.

We can commit to change things for the better, to use our voice and to make a difference. At the moment, disabled people are far less likely to be employed than non-disabled people.

As a final thought, "talent is everywhere, opportunity isn't" is how Lord Holmes brought the evening to a close.

The Panel



Alastair Hignell, CBE

Trustee of Leonard Cheshire Disability and ex-England rugby player



Fiona Morden

Strategic partner for Capita and Director of Morden Solutions



Jonathan Lilley

Managing Partner at Blaser Mills LLP



Paulette Cohen

Director for Diversity & Inclusion, Barclays



Rachel Bashabe

Change100 Alumna

About Us



Blaser Mills LLP

Blaser Mills is a leading law firm based in the South East with 18 partners and over 65 lawyers. We are a full-service firm, offering a comprehensive range of legal services to businesses and private individuals. The success of our business and the high-quality service we provide for our clients, comes from nurturing the skills, and promoting the talent and diversity, of our staff. We are proud of the diversity of our teams of lawyers, in terms of experience, background and approach.

Blaser Mills' dynamic Employment team consists of specialist lawyers from an array of backgrounds and the team has extensive experience supporting both in-house counsel and HR departments in large organisations. The team works to build lasting relationships with HR professionals, providing them with the on-demand support that thriving a business requires.

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Capita Talent Consulting

Capita Talent Consulting provides a full range of services and resources to help clients achieve faster, measurable and sustainable progress towards their Diversity & Inclusion objectives. The execution of the Diversity & Inclusion strategy requires deep insight and expertise, which we offer through bespoke tools and highly expert consultancy based on years of global practice.

Our industry renowned consultants work with you, using their decades of expertise and our bespoke tools to determine the key elements and decisions required to design and implement an effective and cohesive Diversity & Inclusion strategy.

We know how to avoid the classic pitfalls and help you avoid costly mistakes which often occur when time, effort and budgets are focused on Diversity & Inclusion-related activities which only address symptoms rather than achieving the fundamental change required.

If you would like to find out more, please contact:

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Leonard Cheshire Disability

Leonard Cheshire Disability is a charity supporting disabled people in the UK and around the world to fulfil their potential and live the lives they choose. Our Change100 programme matches the best diverse talent with progressive employers. Change100 aims to unlock the untapped potential of disabled students and recent graduates to give organisations access to a talent pool bursting with ability, creativity and insight.

- Become a Corporate Ambassador and raise awareness of Leonard Cheshire Disability within your company.
- Adopt Leonard Cheshire Disability as your preferred charity partner.
- Agree to take a Change100 intern in 2017.
- Agree to mentor a Change100 student in 2017.
- Fund the bursary Change100 scheme.
- Fund the Change100 light scheme.

If you would like to find out more, please contact:

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Following a successful event Capita and Blaser Mills made a donation to Leonard Cheshire Disability.

Stay in touch to find out more about the outcomes of this event and to hear about next year's Pioneering Employment Diversity forum. Follow Capita [@CapitaHRS](https://twitter.com/CapitaHRS) for Diversity & Inclusion and HR news.