



# ridi

Recruitment Industry  
Disability Initiative

## Parliamentary Reception with Minister for Disabled People, Sarah Newton MP

According to official figures, there were an estimated 3.7 million disabled people in employment during the first quarter of 2018. However, while the fact that the percentage of people with a disability who are in work has now reached the momentous stage of just breaking the 50% barrier, disabled individuals still remain hugely under-represented in the workplace: the employment rate for people without disabilities is 81.1%.

The Recruitment Industry Disability Initiative (RIDI) has one purpose, which is reflected in everything we do: break down the barriers facing disabled people in the recruitment industry.

RIDI hosted a reception at the House of Commons in November 2018 where Minister for Disabled People, **Sarah Newton MP**, outlined how recruitment plays a critical role in helping the government to achieve its target of getting one million more disabled people in to work.

The oversubscribed event was kindly sponsored by Vercida, Vercida Consulting, Eversheds Sutherland and Lloyd's and included keynote presentations from influential stakeholders such as: Sir Philip Rutnam, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office; Morgan Lobb, CEO of Vercida; Karen Wilson, CEO, Hoggett Bowers and Kate Headley, Chair of RIDI and subject matter expert. In attendance on the day were key HR decision makers from organisations including Manpower, Sainsburys, KPMG, Zoopla, ITN and American Express.

The discussion and key recommendations are summarised on the following pages.

CREATING DISABILITY CONFIDENT RECRUITERS

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## SMASHING MYTHS

All speakers on the day challenged certain myths which continue to surround disability in the workplace. As **Karen Wilson, CEO of Hoggett Bowers** succinctly summarised, **“Disability is in a box which is too easy to be labelled ‘too difficult’ - but it’s not”**.

While some people may still assume that disabled people represent a very small - or even insignificant - percentage of the overall workforce, **Sir Philip Rutnam, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office**, outlined how this is clearly not the case, **“The Civil Service employs 400,000 people across the UK, and we need to be smart about identifying and developing talent,”** he explained, **“Ten per cent of our employees identify as disabled - and that’s those who have disclosed their disability.”** As this highlights, the Civil Service alone has at least 40,000 disabled employees countrywide and, with official figures showing that there are 11 million disabled people in the UK - representing 16% of the working age population - disabled individuals represent a significant portion of the entire workforce.

Continuing on the theme of misconceptions around disability, **Karen Wilson, CEO of Hoggett Bowers** shared her personal experience of managing one disabled staff member. She relayed how, 15 years ago, she recruited an individual into the firm’s admin team who had a sunny disposition and was rarely sick - it was only later that she found that, contrary to popular belief, low levels of absenteeism are common among disabled workers. After realising something was going on, she asked

carefully and found that this employee had a form of diabetes which meant that she would lose her sight by the age of 40. Karen asked how the business could help, to which the employee replied, **“Treat me as you would normally, and I’ll come to you if I need anything”**. The perception that businesses need to be experts in disability to provide the support that individuals need is misplaced: no one has all the answers, but by asking the right questions companies can provide the adjustments that their employees need. In this particular case, one of the most useful reasonable adjustments was to stop others from leaving their bags on the floor as they were a trip hazard - which is arguably good health and safety practice generally.

Karen Wilson also stressed how business leaders shouldn’t assume a low sickness record means that everything is OK, outlining how another employee with a mental health condition once confided that, when he was feeling low, the last place he wanted to be was at home, highlighting how, **“this long recognised metric has now had its validity questioned”**.

In his presentation, **Morgan Lobb, CEO of Vercida**, shared a shocking statistic that he had recently stumbled across: 50% of disabled people do not feel connected to society. He subsequently declared, **“That’s not a society that I want to be part of”**. He outlined that research from the Clear Company shows that 74% of disabled people will not disclose their disability due to fear of being discriminated against - and in order to shift the tide, we must challenge long-held misconceptions.

### Karen Wilson

CEO of  
Hoggett Bowers

### Sir Philip Rutnam

Permanent Secretary  
at the Home Office

### Morgan Lobb

CEO,  
VERCIDA

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## THE BUSINESS CASE

On the day, **Sir Philip Rutnam** stressed how engaging disabled talent was not only the **“right thing to do”** but also the **“right business thing to do”**.

**Morgan Lobb** echoed this sentiment, highlighting how companies recognise the competitive advantages of disabled talent. However, he outlined how unconscious bias may be a hurdle to unlocking the benefits of engaging with disabled talent. Previous research from Vercida found that,

when 2,000 hiring managers were assessed to identify unconscious bias, 49% of individuals in the talent sector, 39% in law and academia and 38% in financial services and consultancy held bias against disability.

He went on to say that, when you look at wages vs. inflation, businesses are asking, **“How can we be inclusive to become more attractive employers?”** He also highlighted how it can be a ‘minefield’ to find these inclusive employers.

## COLLABORATION AND LEARNING FROM OTHERS

There was a firm consensus on the day that, in order to become more inclusive to disabled talent - and to effectively promote this inclusivity - businesses must collaborate and learn from the success of others.

**Sir Philip Rutnam** thanked RIDI for being **“a platform for collaboration”** and outlined how emerging trends in the nature of the workforce - such as an ageing population and shifting employee expectations - means that organisations need to, **“Get the basics right and have the ambition and aspiration to change both the ‘mechanical things’ and the way people see disability”**.

He outlined how the Civil Service is building an attraction strategy which is friendly and accessible - and working in conjunction

with other groups to make this possible. For example, the organisation is working with Ambitious About Autism to offer autistic adults practical work experience so that disabled people can get used to work environments. However, he admitted that, despite innovative programmes such as this, **“there’s still a huge amount to learn from other leaders in disability inclusion”**.

**Morgan Lobb**, meanwhile, advised that employers and recruitment consultancies should work together to create consistency in the methods of engaging with disabled people. He pointed out that there are 5,000 job boards and 35,000 recruitment companies in the UK - and for those facing unconscious bias, there needs to be a ‘guiding light’.

## CREATING DISABILITY CONFIDENT RECRUITERS



## DISABILITY CONFIDENT



**disability  
confident**

On the day, **Sarah Newton MP** and other speakers highlighted the benefits of the government's Disability Confident scheme - which has collaboration at its very heart.

Disability Confident supports employers to make the most

of the talents disabled people can bring to workplaces. Through the programme, thousands of employers are: challenging attitudes towards disability; increasing understanding of disability; removing barriers to disabled individuals and those with long-term health conditions; and ensuring that disabled people have the opportunities to fulfil their potential and realise their aspirations.

**“If you’re yet to start your journey, this is a service developed by disabled people, with businesses” Sarah Newton MP** explained. She outlined how it’s a free service which improves confidence to recruit through providing peer-to-peer support which enables companies to learn from the **“best available organisations”**.

**Sir Philip Rutnam** echoed this sentiment, outlining how, **“Disability Confident is a great scheme, with a great entry level”**.

**Kate Headley, Chair of RIDI**, pointed out that many employers ask where they can find Disability Confident recruiters, and advised RIDI 100 is a searchable list of recruitment service providers who have demonstrated their commitment to disability inclusion.

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## FINAL THOUGHTS

Since its inception, RIDI has touched the life of 500,000 individuals through direct hiring and the recruitment industry, yet, as **Sarah Newton MP** highlighted on the day, the under-representation of disabled people in the workforce continues to be the **“biggest, most persistent employment gap”**.

She then went on to highlight how the recruitment sector has a, **“critical role in helping the government to achieve its target of getting one million more disabled people in work as soon as possible - but by 2027 at the very latest.”**

**Sir Philip Rutnam** thanked RIDI for spreading its important message and, **“making an impact right across the economy and recruitment industry,”** before stressing that disabled people are a vital part of workforce - and in order to realise the potential of this country we need to do everything to raise our game in terms of disability inclusion.

The fact remains that only half of disabled people who want to work are in employment - and in order to make a change, it is crucial that businesses work together, share best practice and forget long-held misconceptions around disability if they are to capitalise on what **Karen Wilson** calls the **‘disability opportunity’**.

Visit our website to find how you can get involved: [www.ridi.org.uk](http://www.ridi.org.uk)



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