

# **AUTISM IN THE WORKPLACE: HERBERT SMITH FREEHILLS UNVEILS NEW PROGRAMME TO WIDEN THE SEARCH FOR TALENT**

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Herbert Smith Freehills has partnered with Autism Forward to launch a programme to recruit autistic individuals and provide ongoing support, enabling them to reach their full potential in their working lives. As a result of the programme, two autistic jobseekers have already been placed in teams within the firm's London office.

Figures from the National Autistic Society\* show that only 16% of autistic adults are in full-time employment, despite 79% of people with autism wanting to work. Against this backdrop Herbert Smith Freehills is also working with AS Mentoring, an organisation providing specialist coaching and mentoring support, to identify and support autistic candidates who have the skills appropriate to the available roles within the firm.

Roles filled to date include a data analyst position in the firm's Legal Operations team and a support role in the Corporate practice. The two successful candidates begin work at Herbert Smith Freehills' this month. This also follows the appointment of two autistic individuals in the firm's Belfast office.

"Fostering a culture of opportunity and inclusivity is core to the way we work and I am delighted that this programme has delivered its first successes. Every business wants to ensure it recruits and retains the best talent for each role and this means having the right support processes in place at every stage of the candidate and employee journey," says Alison Brown, partner and chair of Herbert Smith Freehills' global diversity and inclusion group.

A key part of the new programme will involve working with the teams to which autistic individuals are recruited. Training will be provided to enhance awareness about a broad range of working practices and communication styles, including but not limited to those identifying as being on the autism spectrum. The programme will also continue its work to build and support a neuro-diverse workforce across the firm.

Co-founder and trustee of Autism Forward, Jane Pierce, added: "Autistic people have a whole range of strengths and skills but face barriers to employment due to misconception and lack of understanding. So many businesses focus on the search for talent but miss out on swathes of individuals with so much to offer. We are delighted to support Herbert Smith Freehills whose commitment to building, developing and maintaining a diverse workforce and culture is clear to see."

Earlier this year, Herbert Smith Freehills hosted the first in a series of roundtables being run by Autism Forward for executives across industry sectors to discuss how organisations can improve recruitment processes and workplace adjustments to make paid employment more accessible for autistic people.

\* *The Autism Employment Gap, published by the National Autistic Society, August 2016*

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