

# HERBERT SMITH FREEHILLS AND AUTISM FORWARD EXPLORE ROUTE TO EMPLOYMENT FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE

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Firm news

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Herbert Smith Freehills, senior executives, employers, and representatives from the autistic community have gathered today to discuss how organisations can improve recruitment processes and workplace adjustments to make paid employment more accessible for autistic people.

According to The National Autistic Society, only 16% of autistic adults are in full-time employment - a figure unchanged for ten years. Autistic graduates are also twice as likely to be unemployed as non-autistic graduates.\* With 60% of employers worried they may not be able to provide appropriate support, the firm, together with Autism Forward, aims to continue building a supportive and inclusive working environment for autistic employees, removing barriers and inspiring change.

At a roundtable hosted by Herbert Smith Freehills and attended by professional law firms, banks, investment banks, insurers and other public and private sector employers, the group explored how employers should seek to improve their recruitment processes to benefit autistic candidates. They also learnt about initiatives other employers are implementing to improve opportunities and inclusion. The roundtable discussion was led by David Perkins, director of AS Mentoring - Autism Forward's mentor partner in London.

The attendees included Luke Poulton, an AV Technician from the Royal Bank of Scotland, who is passionate about raising awareness of autism to help people better understand the condition, Stuart Boyd and Helen Needham from Capco, who launched the Capco employee Neurodiversity Network in 2018, and Aisling Gallagher who was elected as a Labour councillor in Lewisham in May 2018 and, at 26, is the youngest councillor in the borough.

**Herbert Smith Freehills Chief Human Resources Officer, Helen Anthony, said:** "To support neurodiversity in the workplace, employers and HR professionals must commit to altering their recruitment processes to attract and retain talent from a range of individuals, including having conversations about accessibility and acceptance. The role of HR teams in organisations is to promote equality and support people's abilities and talents. At Herbert Smith Freehills, we welcome all of the differences that make our employees exceptional and are proud to support the work of Autism Forward."

**Co-founder and Trustee of Autism Forward, Jane Pierce, said:** "Employers are increasingly recognising the strengths autistic people bring to the workplace and the value of having a more diverse workforce. However, autistic job seekers face barriers to employment due to the attitudes of employers, the lack of effective adjustments to recruitment processes, inherent social and communication differences and the lack of specialist support to find suitable employment."

"Events like today's roundtable play an essential role in improving employment opportunities and inclusion for autistic people by bringing together autistic employees, employers and professionals to learn from one another and implement the changes needed to ensure autistic people can thrive in the workplace and beyond."

Herbert Smith Freehills is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive culture. The firm's Ability Network was established to support individuals and managers in developing a culture of disability confidence throughout the organisation. It organises events, awareness campaigns and initiatives throughout the year, providing a network for individuals and our clients to meet, discuss and share their experiences.