

HERBERT SMITH FREEHILLS HELPS BUILD DISABILITY CONFIDENCE

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Firm news

Business leaders and employees with a range of disabilities have gathered to discuss how organisations can create a culture of inclusion and deliver better experiences for their clients and colleagues.

According to official figures, more than 3.7 million people with disabilities are in work across the UK*. Yet, despite a significant proportion of the workforce living with a disability, 60 percent are uncomfortable sharing information about their disability at work, fearing how others may react**. Wider research suggests these fears may not be unfounded as around one-third (32 percent) also admit they think people with disabilities are not as productive as non-disabled people***.

Against this backdrop Herbert Smith Freehills has teamed up with PurpleSpace - the UK's only networking and professional development hub supporting disability employee networks. The combined aim is to help organisations understand the impact of learning from the experience of disabled employees when removing barriers and building the right environment for people of all abilities to work in. Through a workshop, individuals learned how to take a systematic approach to creating mini eco-systems that enhance cultural understanding and improve business performance.

"Prejudices and misconceptions need to be challenged at an individual, organisational and societal level. It is clear that harnessing the skills, ideas and talent of a diverse range of people requires fresh conversations about ability in the workplace. Employers need to take positive steps to promote greater inclusion and reinforce a supportive workforce. Unless concerted efforts are made to challenge the status quo, UK organisations risk missing out on the creativity and productivity that is driven by a diverse workforce," says Alison Matthews, a consultant in Herbert Smith Freehills' corporate practice and co-chair of the firm's Ability Network.

In the workshop, which was attended by a range of network leaders and employees from a range of sectors and industries, the topics covered included:

- how to develop initiatives to support those with disabilities in the workplace
- guidance on establishing ability networks with C-suite support, and
- how to measure success over time.

Kate Nash OBE, CEO of PurpleSpace, said: "It is fitting that three years after Herbert Smith Freehills launched PurpleSpace to the world with our first event, that they are now hosting our first 'Networkology Park One - Foundation Workshop' - part of the core academy of learning in building high-performing networks. All the evidence suggests that organisations want to build disability confidence from the inside out - this means investing in and nurturing the change agents that work 'on the side of their desk' to support an organisation's diversity and inclusion strategy. Herbert Smith Freehills are to be commended for being at the cutting edge, yet again and we are proud to work with them."

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

As part of its ongoing commitment to inclusivity and diversity, the firm will be hosting a 'Recruitment Roundtable' in May led by Autism Forward, a registered charity with the aim of helping autistic people find paid or voluntary employment and reach their full potential in life.

** Office for National Statistics [Labour Force Survey](#) (Jan-March 2018)

*** [Scope](#) (2018) and [Office for Disability Issues](#) (DWP), Jan 2014

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