



May 8, 2019

Businesses urged to take action over disability employment crisis

- Disabled people remain overlooked by employers
- Outdated attitudes and failure to discuss disability at board meetings put the UK in the midst of a disability employment crisis
- Virgin Media and Scope urge UK companies to sign ground-breaking #WorkWithMe pledge and come together to accelerate social change for disabled people
- Pledge backed by global businesses such as Philips and JCB

Virgin Media and the disability equality charity, Scope, are calling on businesses to take urgent action and pledge to tackle the UK's disability employment crisis.

There are one million disabled people in the UK who want to work but are not being given the opportunity [1]. New YouGov research focused on HR decision makers reveals that businesses are creating a disability employment crisis because of outdated attitudes and a failure to engage with the issue [2]:

- Half of businesses surveyed say it's easier to recruit a non-disabled person over a disabled person
- Four in ten HR decision-makers (41%) say their company's board of directors never or rarely discuss disability
- More than half (56%) believe – wrongly according to Scope – the main reason disabled people don't get jobs is because they lack the right skills or qualifications
- More than one in 10 (11%) questioned think disabled people should accept lower paid positions, and more than two in 10 (23%) think disabled people need to adapt better to a business' culture
- A quarter (26%) of businesses questioned claim that they have never had a disabled candidate for a job interview, despite there being 7.6 million disabled people of working age in the UK (That's one in five working adults in the UK) [3]

It's therefore unsurprising that the UK's disability employment gap – the rate at which disabled people are employed compared to non-disabled people – hasn't changed for more than a decade, with disabled people's employment still stuck about thirty percentage points behind.

To tackle these entrenched, structural issues, Virgin Media and Scope are launching the **#WorkWithMe pledge**. It is a free ground-breaking initiative to bring businesses – large and small - together to help improve workplace practices, and to support a million disabled people to gain the skills and confidence to get and stay in work.

Despite a raft of attempts to address this issue, disabled people remain shut out of the workplace.

Virgin Media and Scope are now calling time on disability discrimination and see business as a way to accelerate social change.

Businesses urged to join the #WorkWithMe pledge

To date, **19 companies** from a wide range of sectors have signed the pledge to support disabled people and will share their experiences and best practice with other businesses. This includes leading electronics firm **Philips** and global construction equipment company, **JCB**.

The pledge is a free, five-step plan for businesses to take accountability and receive practical advice on how to improve workplace policies, practices and culture for disabled people.

The key elements of the pledge include:

- a senior leader taking accountability for disability inclusion
- a complete review of how a company supports disabled people – from recruitment to the policies in place to provide support in the workplace, and implementing a disability action plan
- helping line managers become confident about how to support disabled people, such as how to implement reasonable adjustments
- begin your journey to record progress on disability inclusion, such as measuring the number of disabled people employed and tracking disabled employees' views on how well the company is doing at creating inclusive workplaces
- Sharing best practice and learnings, and co-creating with other businesses

Companies that sign the #WorkWithMe pledge will have access to a suite of free resources created by their peers based on first-hand experience of employing disabled people, information that a third of businesses are calling for. This includes guides for managers on how to talk confidently about disability and hold accessible meetings, along with the opportunity to connect with other companies which have signed the pledge to discuss best practice and to share resources.

Jeff Dodds, Managing Director at Virgin Media, said:

“It feels like time has stood still for disabled people in the UK. It’s as difficult for them to find employment today as it was a decade ago, with businesses continuing to struggle with knowing how to support them.

“But, enough is enough. Companies big and small now need to come together to help put an end to this disability employment crisis.

“I’ve seen first-hand the benefits of working with disabled people and I want other businesses to see them too. So my ask is for companies now to come together and sign the #WorkWithMe pledge and commit to transforming how they recruit disabled people.”

Mark Hodgkinson, Chief Executive at disability equality charity Scope, said:

“Disabled people often get a rough deal getting into and staying in work.

“Far too many struggle to get into work, and too many fall out because they don’t get the support they need to thrive.

“There are pockets of good practice in large, medium and small companies all over this country, that we need to champion. But too many fall short.

“There is a huge amount of disabled talent and potential waiting for companies to tap into. It’s absolutely scandalous that a quarter of HR decision-makers claim that they have never had a disabled candidate for a job interview, and leadership boards often don’t even discuss disability.

“Both government and businesses have an urgent need to address the disability employment crisis.

“The pledge gives companies the tools they need to start making everyday equality in the workplace a reality for disabled people.”

Long-ignored issued

Many businesses are not currently set up to take action and become better employers of disabled people. This is despite the fact that nearly half of businesses surveyed (46%) admitted that employers’ lack of skills or resources are the main reason why there are more than a million disabled people out of work. Half of businesses (47%) say that creating an inclusive workplace for disabled people isn’t a priority, meaning they are missing out on a huge opportunity to tap into new talent and reflect the communities they serve.

Jonathan Coles, Head of HR, Philips UKI, said:

“We strongly believe in building inclusive and richly diverse teams that attract the UK’s most sought after talent.

“This includes encouraging applications from communities that for various reasons might often feel overlooked or sadly, uninvited. This is still too often the case for some in the disabled community. Over the years we have heard many reasons disabled candidates don’t apply for jobs. They may not believe employers value their skills or are set up to accommodate physical conditions.

“This definitely isn’t the case at Philips and it is the reason we have signed up for the #WorkWithMe pledge. We believe organisations can and should do more to share best practices about how to integrate talent regardless of physical, mental or learning abilities. We want to be a part of and to also inspire new and more inclusive ways of working. Although we are constantly looking for ways to improve our own programmes, we also hope that some of what we have already implemented can help set an example for others.”

Virgin Media’s progress

Virgin Media is focused on becoming a leading voice on disability employment as a result of teaming up with Scope and The Valuable 500 to unlock the business, social, and economic value of disabled people in the UK.

Since 2017, Virgin Media has been transforming every part of its business; such as having Board-level accountability for disability, updated HR policies, providing new training for managers, and streamlining workplace adjustments – in order to become more inclusive for disabled candidates, employees and its customers.

As a result of this extensive work, Virgin Media has made positive progress on how it supports disabled employees and customers while recognising there is further work to do to improve its workplaces, products and services.

Sign up to the pledge at www.workwithme.support.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

Storyteller: Charles Bloch – available for interview:

Since birth, Charles' eyesight has been slowly deteriorating as a result of four different hereditary conditions. Despite being initially refused the opportunity to learn to read and write, Charles has worked tirelessly to achieve a first-class education and find employment.

Having faced significant discrimination along the way, Charles has shown incredible resilience and perseverance on his journey to finding a job, educating on disability awareness along the way. **One thousand applications and fifteen interviews later**, with the help of Scope's Support to Work team (funded by Virgin Media), Charles is excelling as a Digital Marketing and Campaign Executive, paving the way for a much more inclusive workplace.

Charles used Support to Work to help him improve his interview skills and application writing. He has a really positive experience of employment with an employer who has given him the reasonable adjustments he needs to thrive in the workplace.

For interview requests and information contact:

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[1] Office of National Statistics, Quarterly Labour Force Survey, October - December, 2018

[2] All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 515 HR senior decision makers. Fieldwork was undertaken between 11th - 22nd April 2019. The survey was carried out online.

[3] UK figures taken from the Labour Force Survey as at October to December 2018 In: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Supporting-disabled-people-to-work.pdf>

[4] Scope analysis of Office of National Statistics, UK Labour Market statistics <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/labourmarketstatusofdisabledpeoplea08>

About Scope

Scope is a charity that exists to make this country a place where disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else. For more information go to www.scope.org.uk

About Virgin Media

Virgin Media offers four multi award-winning services across the UK and Ireland: broadband, TV, mobile phone and landline.

Our dedicated, ultrafast network delivers the fastest widely-available broadband speeds to homes and businesses and we're expanding this through our Project Lightning programme, which could extend our network to up to 17 million premises.

Our interactive Virgin TV service brings live TV, thousands of hours of on-demand programming and the best apps and games to customers through a set-top box, as well as on-the-go through tablets and smartphones.

Virgin Mobile launched the world's first virtual mobile network and offers fantastic value and innovative services with 4G connectivity. We are also one of the largest fixed-line home phone providers in the UK and Ireland.

Through Virgin Media Business we support entrepreneurs, businesses and the public sector, delivering the fastest widely available broadband speeds and tailor-made services.

Virgin Media is part of Liberty Global, the world's largest international TV and broadband company. Liberty Global connects 21 million customers through operations in 10 countries across Europe subscribing to 45 million TV, broadband internet and telephony services. It also serves 6 million mobile subscribers and offers WiFi service through 12 million access points across its footprint.