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Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
The Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
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5th March, 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: National Strategy for Disabled People

We were extremely heartened to hear of your determination for the forthcoming National Strategy for Disabled People to be the most ambitious and transformative endeavour for disabled people in a generation.

We are sure you will agree that in ensuring the strategy is indeed ambitious and transformative, it is essential that it outlines the measures the Government plans to take to reduce the disability employment gap. Currently, just 52 per cent of disabled people are in employment compared with 81 per cent of non-disabled people. While this situation persists, disabled people will continue to face social exclusion, financial hardship, and reduced well-being.

Much of the government's attention on this matter has focused to date on seeking to incentivise disabled people to engage in job search activity. However, we believe that attention also needs to be paid to measures aimed at supporting and encouraging employers to identify and dismantle the barriers disabled people often face in the workplace. Such measures will be essential in ensuring disabled people are able to secure employment, progress within their careers, and maximise their contribution to the British economy, both as employees and as consumers (as you may be aware, the purple pound – the spending power of households with one or more disabled person – is worth more than a quarter of a trillion pounds).

On February 16th, senior officials from the Cabinet Office Disability Unit and the Department of Work and Pensions attended a Disability@Work/ APPG for Disability joint meeting, chaired by Dr Lisa Cameron MP and Lord Shinkwin, at which policy proposals focused on these matters were outlined. These proposals included:

- the introduction of mandatory reporting to require employers to measure and declare the prevalence of disabled people in their workforce (thereby extending the best practice already in place in organisations including Clifford Chance, EY, the NHS, Channel 4, the BBC, Sky, and central government departments, for example).
- strengthening of the government's Disability Confident award, to require organisations at level 2 and 3 to report their workforce disability prevalence and meet a threshold for the proportion of their workforce that is disabled.
- the extension of the recent reforms to public sector procurement to ensure all contract award decisions take tendering firms' disability employment records into account.

- helping trade unions work in partnership with employers to support disabled people by providing statutory rights to time-off for trade union equality representatives and disability champions.
- reforming national-level statistics to take into account increased disability prevalence in estimating the size of the disability employment gap.

We believe these proposals, all of which have received the backing of the APPG for Disability, and details of which have previously been presented to officials, will go a long way in encouraging employers to develop workplace policies that will boost disabled people's employment opportunities. This will significantly increase disabled people's social inclusion and financial independence, which in turn will contribute substantially to your levelling up agenda.

We would also like to express our relief at the assurance given at the meeting on February 16th by Hannah Rignell from the Cabinet Office Disability Unit that, contrary to rumours, detailed employment proposals will be included in the National Strategy for Disabled People, rather than being relegated to a Green Paper. The omission of employment would, we fear, not only undermine the strategy, but also your levelling up agenda.

Given this confirmation that employment will feature in the strategy, we would like to call on you to ensure it includes the widely-supported proposals outlined above.

If you do so, you can count on our support. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Kim Hoque, Warwick Business School and Disability@Work
Diane Lightfoot, CEO, Business Disability Forum; Vice-chair, Disability Charities Consortium
Dimple Agarwal, Deputy CEO Deloitte UK and Managing Partner for People & Purpose (North and South Europe)
Fazilet Hadi, Head of Policy, Disability Rights UK
Liz Sayce OBE, Visiting Senior Fellow, London School of Economics
Professor Melanie Jones, Cardiff Business School and Disability@Work
Professor Nick Bacon, City University, London and Disability@Work
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