

AUTISM FORWARD RECRUITMENT ROUNDTABLE

3 July 2019 at Latham & Watkins, London

LATHAM & WATKINS



The Autism Forward logo consists of the words "AUTISM FORWARD" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, positioned to the left of a large, black, right-pointing chevron symbol.

Latham & Watkins hosted Autism Forward's second recruitment roundtable event on 3 July 2019. The event brought together senior executives, HR teams and autistic employees and professionals to discuss how organisations can improve opportunities for autistic people by offering internships and rethinking the way they recruit and assess employees to ensure that they are attracting and retaining the widest pool of talent. In attendance were representatives from law and accountancy firms, banks, investment banks, insurers and other City organisations and corporates.

Jay Sadanandan, Latham & Watkins London Office Managing Partner, introduced the event and said:

"At Latham we are deeply committed to diversity and inclusion at our firm and in the legal profession at large. In order to achieve richer diversity the firm are dedicated towards concrete action items both individually and collectively to promote inclusion. This includes taking steps to embrace, support and maximise the talents of people who think differently. The role of our like minded organisations is to develop our workplaces practices through education, knowledge sharing and partnering with specialists in the field."

Jane Pierce, one of the trustees of Autism Forward, explained that the purpose of Autism Forward is to enable more autistic people to access employment by funding specialist support for individuals to help them prepare for and find work and by encouraging employers to improve opportunities and inclusion for autistic people within their organisations. The purpose of this series of roundtables is to enable HR and D&I teams to learn from other employers and the autistic community what steps they can take to improve diversity and inclusion and share ideas and best practice in this area.

Autism Exchange Programme

Felicity Carter of Ambitious About Autism began the discussion by outlining their Autism Exchange Programme which was initially the idea of their Youth Council and has now been running for 5 years. The Programme paid internship for autistic candidates aged between 16-25 with a range of employers. In the pilot scheme 5 years ago, 3 candidates took part in 2 week placements with the Civil Service, this year 34 young people will be given that opportunity and 3 month placements are available with other employers including SAP and Deutsche Bank.

The main purpose of these placements is to give the young autistic people valuable work experience and some have also been offered permanent placements. Ambitious prepare an individual support plan for the young person and provide training, advice and support to the employer to maximise the benefit to both the employer and the candidate.

The Autism Exchange Programme is an excellent way for young autistic people to gain valuable work experience and skills that will enable them to prepare for employment and determine what type of working environment is suitable for them. It also gives employers the opportunity to improve their understanding of the strengths and needs of autistic employees and to adjust their recruitment and management practices to accommodate autistic people.

Further information can be obtained on their website [here](#), or please contact Felicity Carter at fcarter@ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk.

AS Mentoring/Credit Suisse

David Perkins, Director of AS Mentoring, outlined his experience running the NAS employment programme Prospects (where he worked with many employers, including law firms, accountancy firms, insurers and banks) before setting up AS Mentoring to continue that work. AS Mentoring, Autism Forward's mentor partner in London, Poole, Birmingham and Bristol, now have over 20 mentors supporting around 150 autistic people with pre-employment or workplace support and providing consultancy services to employers.

In addition to placing individuals with a whole range of employers as part of their core service, AS Mentoring work with a number of employers, including Goldman Sachs and Deutsche Bank, to implement internship and other work experience programmes for autistic candidates. Most recently this includes working with Credit Suisse, who a year ago decided they would like to offer a paid 10 week placement in their data science team to an autistic candidate. AS Mentoring provided training to the line managers and team where the candidate would be recruited and were present at the interviews. This training focused on key areas which can present difficulties for autistic employees and strategies and straightforward adjustments minimise such issues. Credit Suisse were so impressed by the candidates that they created two internships and one of the candidates was offered a permanent role within the team at the end of the placement.

Liam Collins-McIntyre, who is the team manager overseeing the placements, explained how beneficial having the interns had been, both from the perspective of the talent that the candidates bring to the team and also the way that he has had to review his own management and communication style to ensure that he got the best from his new team members. He noted how well the team adapted to include the interns and how important it was for the whole team to be involved. In view of the success of the internships, Credit Suisse will be offering internships to autistic candidates in other departments. Liam noted that in addition to the benefits both to the individuals and to him as a manager, there was a genuine business case for hiring autistic candidates with relevant skills and a way of approaching problems and processes differently.

For further information, David Perkins can be contacted at david.perkins@asmentoring.co.uk

Capco

Helen Needham, a management consultant with Capco who is autistic herself and founded the Neurodiversity Network at Capco last year, noted that it was important for the whole organisation to develop a culture of inclusion and find ways of working to develop the strengths of all employees. Helen herself manages a team of 70 people and has a client-facing role, which she is able to do successfully due to the adjustments that she and her team have put in place to address the aspects of the role she finds more difficult and to maximise the use of her talents and skills. Capco recently undertook a survey of all employees and discovered that around 10% of them identify as neurodivergent (autistic, ADHD, dyslexic or dyspraxic) and are now collaborating to review their HR policies and procedures and regularly invite people in to raise awareness of the strengths and benefits of a more diverse and neurodiverse workforce.

The challenge for organisations is to ensure that the impact of initiatives such as placements and internships expand beyond the immediate team and are embraced at all levels of the organisation. There are undoubtedly people at all levels of an organisation who are undiagnosed or who feel unable to disclose a diagnosis, who are not making the progress they could otherwise make if there was a better understanding of how to maximise their strengths and adjust aspects of their role or assessment criteria which pose difficulties for them.

Aspierungen

Nick Heckscher of [Aspierungen](#), an organisation which helps firms recruit and retain autistic talent, described how they have recently worked with Siemens to overhaul the recruitment processes for their apprenticeship scheme to reduce the barriers to entry for autistic candidates. For example, they reviewed the seven "core competencies" and reduced them to four, excluding those which were irrelevant to the roles and which could have inadvertently excluded autistic candidates. They also made changes to the interview procedures and psychometric tests, adjusting the aspects that would have been unsuitable for autistic applicants. The apprenticeships were open to neurotypical as well as autistic candidates and Nick noted that the success of the project was evident when Siemens concluded that only candidate who had the skills for the digital twin apprenticeship position was an autistic candidate, an Autism Forward client mentored by our mentor partner in Hull, Carl Cameron. For further information about Aspierungen, Nick can be contacted at nick@aspierungen.org.

HR Contacts

Rachel Pearson, a senior regional employment consultant with AS Mentoring who has a background in HR and business consultancy, noted that one thing that all employers could do to benefit autistic candidates is to make contact details available for a member of the HR team who can be contacted to circumvent automated systems for applications, as such systems often exclude autistic candidates whose education or employment history does not fit with the usual norms. Rachel noted that they would never put forward candidates for roles unless they felt they were suitable, but candidates often struggled to get interviews despite having the right skills.

We would be grateful if any employers who are willing to make available HR department contact details to Autism Forward mentors could email jane@autismforward.org.uk with the relevant details. We will of course only make such details available to our approved mentor partners for use in situations where they have identified a vacancy at the organisation which they believe would potentially be suitable for one of their clients.

Future Events

In addition to the work Autism Forward does to support individuals into employment, we are keen to continue to hold roundtable events bring together employers, autistic employees and professionals and develop a network of people who want to drive change in this area. Please do get in touch with us if you or any of your colleagues are interested in attending future events or would like to host a similar event with us. We would particularly like to hear from any autistic colleagues who are interested in participating in these discussions.

Our next event will be held on 24 September 2019 at from 12.30-2pm at Credit Suisse's offices at 1 Cabot Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 4QJ which will look at the practical adjustments that were put in place at interview stage and in the workplace from both the perspective of the autistic candidates and their line managers and colleagues and the strengths of their autistic employees.

Contact

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