**MEDIA RELEASE FROM THE CSJ DISABILITY COMMISSION (30/03/21)**

**50 BUSINESS LEADERS SIGN OPEN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER AS CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED TO CLOSE DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT GAP.**

More leading business CEOs, including Dame Emma Walmsley of GSK, Dame Carolyn McCall of ITV and Amanda Blanc of Aviva, have signed an open letter to the Prime Minister urging him to deliver on his promise of a truly transformative National Strategy for Disabled People.

The letter – published in The Times today – coincides with the launch of a campaign to halve the disability employment gap following the publication of “Now Is The Time”, a new report by the CSJ Disability Commission, which includes five key recommendations aimed at improving the employment prospects of disabled people across the UK.

One of the Disability Commission’s key recommendations is the introduction of mandatory workforce reporting as a vital first step in bringing greater transparency and a level playing field for measuring progress.

Lord Shinkwin, Commission Chair, says, **“We are delighted that so many high-profile business leaders have signed the open letter to the Prime Minister. Their support signals a clear appetite for change, so today we are launching a campaign to halve the disability employment gap. It is crucial that the PM now delivers on his promise to produce the most ambitious and transformative disability plan in a generation. The CSJ Disability Commission’s submission to his National Strategy for Disabled People is designed to help him do just that. I hope he takes our recommendations on board.”**

Business CEOs, including Dame Emma Walmsley of GSK, Dame Carolyn McCall of ITV and Amanda Blanc of Aviva, have signed an open letter to the Prime Minister urging him to deliver on his promise of a truly transformative National Strategy for Disabled People. The letter coincides with the launch of a campaign to halve the disability employment gap.

The letter – organised by the Disability Commission – has been sent to Downing Street and is published today in The Times newspaper. In the letter, the signatories say, **“disabled people have waited long enough; now is the time for action”**. They urge the PM to consider the Disability Commission’s proposals and say, **“we stand ready to play our part”.**

The CSJ Disability Commission is chaired by disabled Conservative member of the House of Lords, Kevin Shinkwin, and comprises both disabled and non-disabled members from the business, academic, disability and parliamentary worlds.

Lord Shinkwin says,**“The mounting pressure from business on the PM reflects the growing need to seize the once in a generation opportunity presented by his National Strategy for Disabled People. They know we’ve only got one shot at this. We’ve been so impressed by the clear appetite for change that we’ve decided now is the time to launch a campaign to halve the disability employment gap. It’s crucial we harness this exciting momentum.”**

According to the ONS, disabled people across the UK have been hit particularly hard by Coronavirus, including seeing a widening of the disability employment gap, and that is why concerted action by Government and business is crucial. Currently, just 52 per cent of disabled people are in employment compared with 81 per cent of non-disabled people.

Alongside the letter, a ground-breaking new report called “Now Is The Time” has been published by the CSJ Disability Commission making five key recommendations to vastly improve the employment prospects of disabled people throughout the UK.

The recommendations include:

- Increasing supported routes into employment

- Introducing mandatory workforce reporting

- Leveraging Government procurement

- Reforming the Government’s Disability Confident scheme

- Reforming the Government’s Access to Work scheme

The Commission’s report argues that a central feature of the Prime Minister’s National Strategy for Disabled People must be the inclusion of robust measures focused on improving disabled people’s employment prospects. It says that until employment disadvantage is addressed, disabled people will continue to face social exclusion, financial hardship, and reduced well-being.

The Commission was set up with the backing of the DFN Foundation to feed into the Prime Minister’s National Strategy for Disabled People. The DFN Foundation, founded by David Forbes-Nixon, is committed to developing a new enabling vision that will seize the disability employment agenda and drive tangible and sustainable change.

David Forbes-Nixon, Commission Deputy Chair, says, **“Having a disabled son has opened up my eyes to the inequalities in education, employment and life chances for disabled people in the UK. I hope the Commission’s recommendations, particularly in employment, will be embraced by the Prime Minister in his National Strategy for Disabled People so we can draw on this extraordinary and untapped talent pool.”**

Importantly, the report extends beyond employment to cover four other areas of life for disabled people: transport, education, housing, and access to goods & services. It makes extensive policy recommendations which, if enacted, would enable disabled people to participate more fully in society and realise their potential.

Tanni, Baroness Grey-Thompson DBE, gold medal-winning former Paralympian and a Commissioner, says, **“Despite the very welcome improvements in legislation since the Disability Discrimination Act, the experience of the last 25 years shows that laws on their own aren’t enough. The political will to enforce them is crucial. Right now, disabled people feel that we’re going backwards. That’s why we really need the PM to keep his promise of a transformative strategy and drive change from the front.”**

**ENDS**

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**EDITOR’S NOTES:**

**BUSINESS LEADERS’ LETTER**

The business leaders’ letter to the Prime Minister is attached separately.

**NEW CAMPAIGN TO CLOSE THE DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT GAP**

Lord Shinkwin will be announcing further details of the campaign at the beginning of the new parliamentary session after the State Opening on 11th May. He will be introducing a Private Member’s Bill to extend mandatory employment and pay gap reporting early in the new session as a key element of the campaign.

**THE CSJ DISABILITY COMMISSION**

**The Disability Commission is an independent body backed by the Centre For Social Justice. It’s report, “Now Is The Time”, makes five key recommendations to reduce the disability employment gap:**

1. **Increasing supported routes into employment –** high quality supported internships that involve job coaches and learning support have been proven to be highly effective in supporting individuals with the lowest employment rates into work. The Commission makes a series of recommendations focused on increasing the quality, supply, and awareness of supported internships.
2. **Introducing mandatory workforce reporting –** the Government acknowledges the benefits of transparent reporting, stating in the introduction to the framework for *Voluntary reporting on disability, mental health and wellbeing*, which it introduced in November 2018 to encourage employers to report the prevalence of disabled people in their workforce, that ‘transparency is a vital first step towards harnessing the power of a diverse workforce’. The Commission calls on the Government to realise the full benefits of workplace reporting by requiring all employers with 250+ employees to report the proportion of their workforce that is disabled**.** It also calls on the Government to extend gender pay gap reporting to disability, which will enable firms to monitor whether disabled people are being given equal access to better paying, more senior roles.
3. **Leveraging Government procurement** **–** the Government spends £292 billion per year buying goods and services from external suppliers. The Commission recommends recent reforms to the Public Sector (Social Value) Act are extended to require all large public sector contract award decisions to take tendering organisations’ disability employment records into account, and to require organisations with public contracts to work towards increasing the proportion of disabled people within their workforce.
4. **Reforming the Government’s Disability Confident scheme –** to ensure all employers at the scheme’s higher levels (level 2 ‘employers’, and level 3 ‘committed’) have above a minimum percentage threshold of disabled people within their workforce.
5. **Reforming the Government’s Access to Work scheme** **–** introduced in 1994, this provides funding for the adjustments disabled people need to perform their role, and to enable them to get to and from work. This has transformed many disabled people’s employment opportunities, but problems with the scheme remain, not least that too few employers and disabled people are aware of it. As such, the Commission recommends an extensive awareness raising campaign; reducing administrative burdens and delays within the application process; the passporting of adaptations between organisations; and, importantly removing the annual funding cap.

**THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (CSJ)**

The CSJ is proud to have supported the commission with secretariat and analysis. The recommendations in this report are the independent views of the commissioners and should not be attributed to other businesses, organisations or bodies with whom they are associated.

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain’s social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ’s vision is to give people in the UK who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

The majority of the CSJ’s work is organised around five ‘pathways to poverty’, first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report Breakthrough Britain. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of the UK’s political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in government thinking and policy. For instance, the CSJ report It Happens Here shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the Government passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Its research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners and policymakers. It also draws upon its CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises and other grass-roots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK.

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2021 and beyond, the CSJ will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.