



# The Power of Diversity

## Debate Synopsis

Portcullis House, Houses of Parliament, London  
14 June 2022

shaw  
trust

40  
YEARS

DPC  
Disability  
Policy  
Centre

  
appg

The  
shaw trust

Disability Power 100

2022

# Welcome

For seven years Shaw Trust has produced the Disability Power 100. The annual list of the most influential disabled people and disability led organisations in Britain, as nominated by the general public and judged by an independent panel of disabled leaders and allies. This year we are taking the campaign further, to not only highlight the role models, advocates, campaigners and change makers across the UK celebrated annually, but to advocate for the Power of Diversity.

This paper is a synopsis of our parliamentary roundtable event, hosted jointly with the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Disability and the Disability Policy Centre where we call for greater representation for disabled influencers and for acknowledgement for their contributions both locally and in the wider national debate about representation. It is only by demanding recognition for the huge contribution made by the more than one billion disabled people globally will we achieve equality and inclusion.

The Power of Diversity welcomed panellists Sophie Morgan, Kush Kanodia, John Horan, Shani Dhanda, Andrew Miller and Marsha de Cordova MP. Each shared their experience of disability across their sectors, and the event was attended by current Disability Power 100, alumni and invited guests.

**Thank you to our hosts the APPG for Disability and Disability Rights UK.**

## Our Panel



**Marsha de Cordova MP**



**Shani Dhanda**



**John Horan**



**Kush Kanodia**



**Andrew Miller**



**Sophie Morgan**



## The Event

On Tuesday 14 June 2022, The Disability Policy Centre, Shaw Trust and the APPG for Disability joined together in Parliament to discuss 'The Power of Diversity' in celebration of the Shaw Trust Disability Power 100. Dr Lisa Cameron MP, APPG chair opened proceedings identifying current governmental and legislative developments for accessibility progression. Lisa stressed the need to utilise the abilities of disabled people and people with long term health conditions across various industries. Lisa highlighted the importance of improved representation, spotlighting disability champions and breaking down accessibility barriers to ensure that as a society we are harnessing the potential of disabled people across the United Kingdom.

## The Panel

One by one the speakers Marsha de Cordova MP, Sophie Morgan, Kush Kanodia, John Horan, Shani Dhanda and Andrew Miller provided their insight into the debate.

Andrew Miller spoke descriptively about the importance of disabled representation in our media, culture and entertainment. Andrew highlighted the importance of active promotion of disabled talent across the media and entertainment industries, the importance of visible role models along with the necessity to provide disabled people with a platform in mainstream culture. Andrew also stated that despite recent progress, the entertainment industry still has a long way to go to ensure better representation of disabled people in the spotlight as well as in behind-the-scenes roles.

John Horan spoke in detail about the importance of ensuring that disabled people and people with long term health conditions are aware of their lawful rights and protections, citing the preservation and advancement of legislative safeguarding. John described how the lack of disabled representation in the legal sector and public service sector is impacting on protections for disabled people, citing the importance of having disabled people at the heart of policy formation. John noted that although we have come a far distance in the disability rights movement, we still have a way to go to ensure better protections against discrimination and the provision of equal opportunity.



**Dr Lisa Cameron MP**

Marsha de Cordova MP drew on her own experiences and identity as a disabled women in politics, identifying the importance of having disabled people at the heart of legislation. Marsha described how the needs of disabled people must be incorporated in legislation from the point of formation, ensuring that as a society we are not isolating the 20% of the population who is disabled or has a long-term health condition.

Sophie Morgan spoke powerfully about her own experiences in the media as a disabled woman, and the challenges, discrimination, and stereotyping that she has faced from within herself and externally. Sophie championed the need for the better representation of disabled people in mainstream media, moving away from tokenism and highlighting the talents and potential of disabled people. Sophie explained how the media portrayal of disabled people has progressed and is moving away from stereotyping and categorisation, but this movement must be completed at greater pace.

Shani Dhanda spoke emotively about her experiences as a disabled woman throughout her career, and the barriers she has faced. Shani cited the need to ensure that accessibility barriers are broken down by not only the work of the disability activist community but also the need for allyship with non-disabled people, collaboratively working together to break down intrinsic conscious and unconscious biases. Shani also stressed the importance of intersectionality recognition and personal identity, being proud of one's identity and working to break down the archaic stereotypes faced by disabled people.

Kush Kanodia spoke in depth about his past campaigning experiences for the improvement in the accessibility of travel across the United Kingdom, providing a descriptive insight into the importance of accessibility in relation to the equality of opportunity, access to services and community inclusion. Kush highlighted the importance of collaboration for the advancement of accessibility provisions with the disabled community consulting closely with industry leaders to implement a real and tangible change.



**Shani Dhanda**

# The Power of Diversity

## Key Themes

Exploring representation, community and allyship, breaking down barriers, power and ability, stereotypes and identity

**Representation:** Sophie Morgan “I turned on the TV one day and saw Channel Four’s Paralympics campaign for the 2012 Paralympics. It was bold, it was energetic and everyone in that advert was proud to be disabled. I had never seen disabled people represented in that way. And it literally took my breath away. I watched the trailer over and over and over again. It lit a fire underneath me. I wanted to be superhuman too – I didn’t want to be a Paralympian - but I wanted to be a superhuman in my own way. And then my environment became unrecognisable. Kids smiled at me everywhere I went instead of staring. People engaged with me. Admittedly they mistook me for a Paralympian, but I let it go! It was a whole new world and it was like stepping out of the shadows and into the sun. In that moment, it forced me to examine and address the ableism that still existed in me and in the world around me.”

**Community and Allyship:** Shani Dhanda “What does it actually mean to be diverse and inclusive, especially when these terms are used interchangeably? I want to share with you today that diversity is a fact, it’s a measurement. Equity requires an acknowledgment that everyone has different needs and therefore we have to act accordingly to meet those different needs. Inclusion is choice. It’s the act of creating a culture where diversity is respected, accepting people for who they are with what makes them who they are. We’ve all got to do that work and that includes us disabled people too. I know it can sometimes feel uncomfortable but so is being oppressed in life. I personally think if inclusion doesn’t feel uncomfortable, you’re probably not doing it right. My question to everyone today is actually, what action are you going to take?”

**Breaking Down Barriers:** Andrew Miller “We must establish a wider understanding of ableism. It needs to be understood in the same context as racism and other discriminatory behaviours. Developing the network of disabled people in positions of power and responsibility, creating new disability specific roles as the BFI have just done, is also vital to ensure the next generation of disabled talent don’t keep experiencing the same barriers.”

**Power and Ability:** Marsha de Cordova MP “We’re talking about power here. I always reference the quote by the abolitionist Frederick Douglass who says, ‘power concedes nothing without a demand.’ It never has done, and it never will do. That is something we – as a disabled community and also our allies – should always be very, very mindful of. Every right, every accomplishment, every victory that has been achieved by our community has been because we demanded it.”





Breaking Down Stereotypes: Kush Kanodia “Organisations and systems still value academic experience and work experience, but not lived experience. I find that it’s the lived experience that ends up being the most valuable missing element. The power of diversity and disability ends up being a free insurance policy for every one of us because we will all experience disability in some shape of form in the future. This is because 80% of disabilities are acquired. Universal design principles are from the cradle to the grave. Helping the mother and father whose child is in a pushchair to the old age pensioners. When we design for disability, we are designing for all.”

Identity: John Horan “One triumph of being disabled was to get the Article 13 of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities rules amended on 6 April last year. For the first time since the rules have existed, they recognised the rights of a disabled person and why that made a certain part of the litigation process more difficult for them and suggested reasonable adjustments. The reason I’m so proud is that I pride myself – as well as being a barrister – of being a fire starter!



**Kush Kanodia**



**Sophie Morgan**



**John Horan**

# Questions and answers

Following from the speaker introductions, co-chairs of the event Celia Hensman, from The Disability Policy Centre, and Clare Gray, from Shaw Trust, posed questions to the panellists.

## **How can we foster diversity to generate innovation, entrepreneurialism and problem-solving by looking at things from different perspectives? Is there a role for Allyship?**

The panellists spoke about the importance of the removal of conscious and unconscious biases and accessibility barriers to ensure that disabled people can contribute to discussions. Each of the panellists agreed that allyship plays a large part in ensuring the progression of the disability agenda, with the importance of consultation, collaboration and joint community working across intersectionalities.

## **Disabled people are becoming increasingly more aware and prouder of their identity which is crucial to personal and community growth. What needs to collaboratively change to ensure that differences become seen as strengths?**

The panellists spoke in depth about the importance and need for representation of disabled people, and demonstration of the diversity of disabilities and health conditions. The panellists cited the role of the Shaw Trust Disability Power 100 list in championing the talents and capabilities of disabled people across industry sectors. From this question the key extrapolated theme was the need for increased conversation around disability and accessibility inclusion, removing stigmas, archaic stereotypes and intrinsic biases.

## **Vocabulary and language used about disability is an incredibly powerful tool. The definition of disability has historically been contentious and varies. What can people do to keep pace with the many social, economic, and technical shifts of inclusive language?**

The panellists spoke about the importance of the use of language in reference to intersectionality, accessibility and disability, noting the diversity of disability itself and the importance of increasing conversations around the wants and needs of disabled people. The panellists referenced 'cancel-culture' stressing the importance of correcting and educating when individuals who are not aware of the correct language progressions make mistakes. The panellists stressed the importance of communication, speaking freely and educating others, with a burden of responsibility both on disabled people and non-disabled people, a collaborative effort to ensure the removal of discriminatory or offensive language.

## **In what way can people challenge themselves to cross-examine their conscious and unconscious biases in order to learn from different voices?**

The question posed to the panellists tied the conversation back into the statements that had been made in relation to the previous question, with similar themes and topics provoking debate amongst the speakers. The panellists highlighted the important role of media and voices of influence, with the power that they yield to educate others. All the panellists once again highlighted the importance of self-education and the promotion of conversation.

Clare and Celia opened up to questions from the floor for the remainder of the discussion, allowing attendees to share what they had drawn from the discussion. Comments from the floor echoed the sentiments of the panel, the importance of representation, championing disabled people from across industries, ensuring the voice of disabled people was heard equally and that the talents and abilities of disabled people were given the recognition that they deserved. Contributions from the audience noted the disabled community must advocate beyond the accessibility arena and break through to policy and industry leaders to ensure tangible success.

To finalise each of the panellists and chairs summarised their thoughts on The Power of Diversity. Key themes dominated the discussion; the importance of representation, community, allyship and the power and capabilities of disabled people. Each speaker reinforced the potential, ability and talent of disabled people, noting that as a society we must do better to break down accessibility barriers to ensure disabled people are able to contribute to their full potential of diversity, strength and capability.



**Andrew Miller**



**Marsha de Cordova MP**



# The views of our Roundtable chairs

Dr Lisa Cameron MP: “The data indicates that whilst we may be making some progress slowly legislatively, we still have such a long way to go to shift attitudes as a whole. One way to kick start the shift is to ensure that people are visible and represented in both public and private sectors and also in parliament.”

Clare Gray: “The power of diversity should not be underestimated. For too long disability has been in the shadow of the progress made by other minority groups. Disabled people navigate an inaccessible world every day and the talents and skills acquired to ‘fit in’ are too often overlooked. True diversity recognises difference and includes everyone. When everyone is included, progress is achieved, and the power of diversity is realised.”

Celia Hensman: “Representation Shapes Perception. Those who represent us as leaders and governors have the power to both consciously and unconsciously shape public opinion and lay down societal standards. Disabled people, despite being the largest minority group in the UK are often overlooked, and negatively stereotyped by society. We must start to acknowledge the value, talents and skills of disabled people, valuing us as part of society. Representation matters because people and the right to accessibility matters. We must ensure the removal of barriers faced by disabled people and people with long term health conditions, by increasing representation of disabled people and people with lived experiences across all sectors.”



# Our Panellists



## **Marsha de Cordova MP**

Since 2017, Marsha de Cordova has been the Labour member of parliament for Battersea. Marsha previously served as the Shadow Minister for Disabled People and Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities. As an MP, she has been involved in campaigning to make parliament more accessible for disabled people.



## **Shani Dhanda**

Shani Dhanda is an award-winning disability specialist. As a keynote speaker and practitioner for inclusion across business, government, non-profit and wider society, Shani helps organisations break barriers and integrate inclusion into their business frameworks. Shani's style and approach are described as 'a winning combination of authenticity and passion, helping to remove the awkwardness and fear of having confident conversations about disability within business and society.'



## **John Horan**

John Horan is a barrister specialising in all kinds of anti-discrimination work and employment law. On the day before the millennium John Horan had a stroke - it changed his life and made him a passionate discrimination lawyer. His extensive experience in battling for the rights of disabled people has led to expertise in employment, goods and services, education and public authorities.



## **Kush Kanodia**

Kush is a disability rights and race equality champion, a multi-award winning social entrepreneur and a systems leader. Kush creates systemic change for the inclusion of disabled people, focusing on the intersection of disability with his portfolio. His portfolio includes health and wellbeing, technology and accessibility, sports and inclusion, and employment and entrepreneurship.



## **Andrew Miller**

Andrew is a national council member of Arts Council England, a governor of the Royal Shakespeare Company and a trustee of BAFTA. Throughout his 30-year career, Andrew's mission has been to democratise our creative industries by championing inclusion. He is recognised as one of the most influential disability advocates in the UK with extensive experience of the arts, film and broadcast sectors.



## **Sophie Morgan**

Sophie Morgan is an award-winning disability advocate and one of the first physically disabled television presenters in the UK. In addition to fronting the 2016 and 2022 Paralympic Games live on Channel 4, she presents her own travel series, various consumer and current affairs documentaries including Dispatches, and is a regular panellist on Loose Women, ITV.

# Our Chairs



## **Dr Lisa Cameron MP**

Dr Lisa Cameron is the Scottish National Party MP for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow, and has been an MP since 7 May 2015. She currently undertakes the role of Shadow SNP Spokesperson (Mental Health) and chair of the APPG for Disability.



## **Clare Gray**

Clare is the Head of Disability Advocacy at Shaw Trust. A Disability Specialist, formally recognised on the Global Diversity List by the Economist, Clare has over 30 years' experience working in the specialist field of disability, equality and inclusion with first-hand experience of societal barriers as a disabled person.



## **Celia Hensman**

Celia Hensman is the Co-Founder and Director of The Disability Policy Centre, the first think tank in the UK dedicated to the development and advancement of policy, ensuring that accessibility and disability is at the heart of legislation.



# For more information visit:

<https://disabilitypower100.com/>

<https://thedisabilitypolicycentre.org/>

## All-Party Parliamentary Group for Disability | Disability Rights UK:

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/policy-campaigns/all-party-parliamentary-disability-group-appdg>

**Twitter:**

<https://twitter.com/shawtrust?lang=en-gb>

**LinkedIn:**

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/shaw-trust>

**Facebook:**

<https://www.facebook.com/shawtrust/>

[www.shawtrust.org.uk](http://www.shawtrust.org.uk)

**shaw  
trust**

40  
YEARS



The

**shaw trust**

**Disability Power 100**

**2022**