

## LEADING UK EMPLOYERS STEP UP TO SUPPORT WORKERS WHO STAMMER

**As we celebrate International Stammering Awareness Day, businesses across the UK have joined together to stamp out stigma against the 300,000<sup>1</sup> people who stammer in the workplace.**

Leading businesses EY (formerly Ernst & Young), Accenture and DHL, are urging others in the UK to support employees who stammer by joining the first ever *Employers Stammering Network (ESN)*, led by the British Stammering Association (BSA).



Launched as part of the BSA's involvement in International Stammering Awareness Day (22<sup>nd</sup> October), the ESN will provide support and advice for HR departments and managers on how to recruit and support people with a stammer. The Network will also address the many concerns of those at work who often struggle to communicate or who will go out of their way to try and hide their problem.

A 2013 British Stammering Association survey<sup>2</sup> amongst individuals who stammered revealed that almost half had not put themselves forward for promotion because they stammered, while two out of three said they were likely to hold back good ideas at work because they felt that speaking up was a problem. The survey also revealed that more than 83 per cent of those who stammer said it would help if their managers and colleagues understood more about the condition.

With around one per cent of the adult population having a stammer - equating to almost 300,000 of the UK's workforce - the consequences of not providing adequate support in the workplace can be significant.

Iain Wilkie, a Senior Partner at EY, who himself stammers, struggled to achieve in the business environment before a senior partner told him that what he said mattered far more than how he said it.

Speaking about his commitment to ESN, Iain says: "Stammering still holds such a stigma and many of those who struggle to communicate will do their best to hide their problem at work. We are sending a signal to stammering employees that it's ok to ask for support and acknowledge it's an issue in certain situations, without fear that there may be repercussions for their career.

"Being a member of the Employers Stammering Network benefits both us as an employer and our employees. Individuals will learn techniques through mentoring, reaching out to others, or therapy that will enable them to contribute fully to their employer's success with their skills and talents. Employers such as EY, Accenture and DHL are gaining from creating a supportive environment where employees who stammer feel comfortable coming forward to discuss their stammer and the impact it may be having on their performance and development. There are simple solutions available - but only if we talk about stammering."

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<sup>1</sup> Figure based on 1% of the total 2013 workforce <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/june-2013/sty-uk-employment.html>

<sup>2</sup> Survey undertaken by the British Stammering Association in February 2013 of over 200 adults who stammer

Norbert Lieckfeldt, CEO of the British Stammering Association, said: “Getting it right for colleagues who stammer isn’t difficult. However because of the stigma attached to stammering due to the many misconceptions around it, those who stammer are still too often shying away from asking for the support they deserve. With over 20 years in the speech and language community, I have yet to see an initiative that has the potential to make a tangible difference like the ESN.

“The *Employers Stammering Network* will enable employers to support their staff better, foster greater loyalty and draw on the undoubted talents and skills of people who stammer who, otherwise, might decide to work for the competition. Ultimately this work will open the door to a wider appreciation in UK businesses about what makes for good communication in the workplace”

The British Stammering Association, EY, Accenture and DHL are calling on other businesses to join the ESN network. More information can be found at <http://www.stammering.org/esn>

## Ends

### For further information

For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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### Notes to editors

About the British Stammering Association:

- The British Stammering Association is the UK’s national charity on all aspects of stammering.
- The BSA provides an extensive information and support service through a helpline, a number of websites ([www.stammering.org](http://www.stammering.org), [www.stammeringineducation.net](http://www.stammeringineducation.net)), and run projects and campaigns.
- Iain Wilkie is a member of EY’s leadership team for the UK & Ireland. He is a senior audit partner working with fast growing multinational and domestic clients. He has been a partner for 17 years. EY is a global leader in assurance, tax, transaction and advisory services.