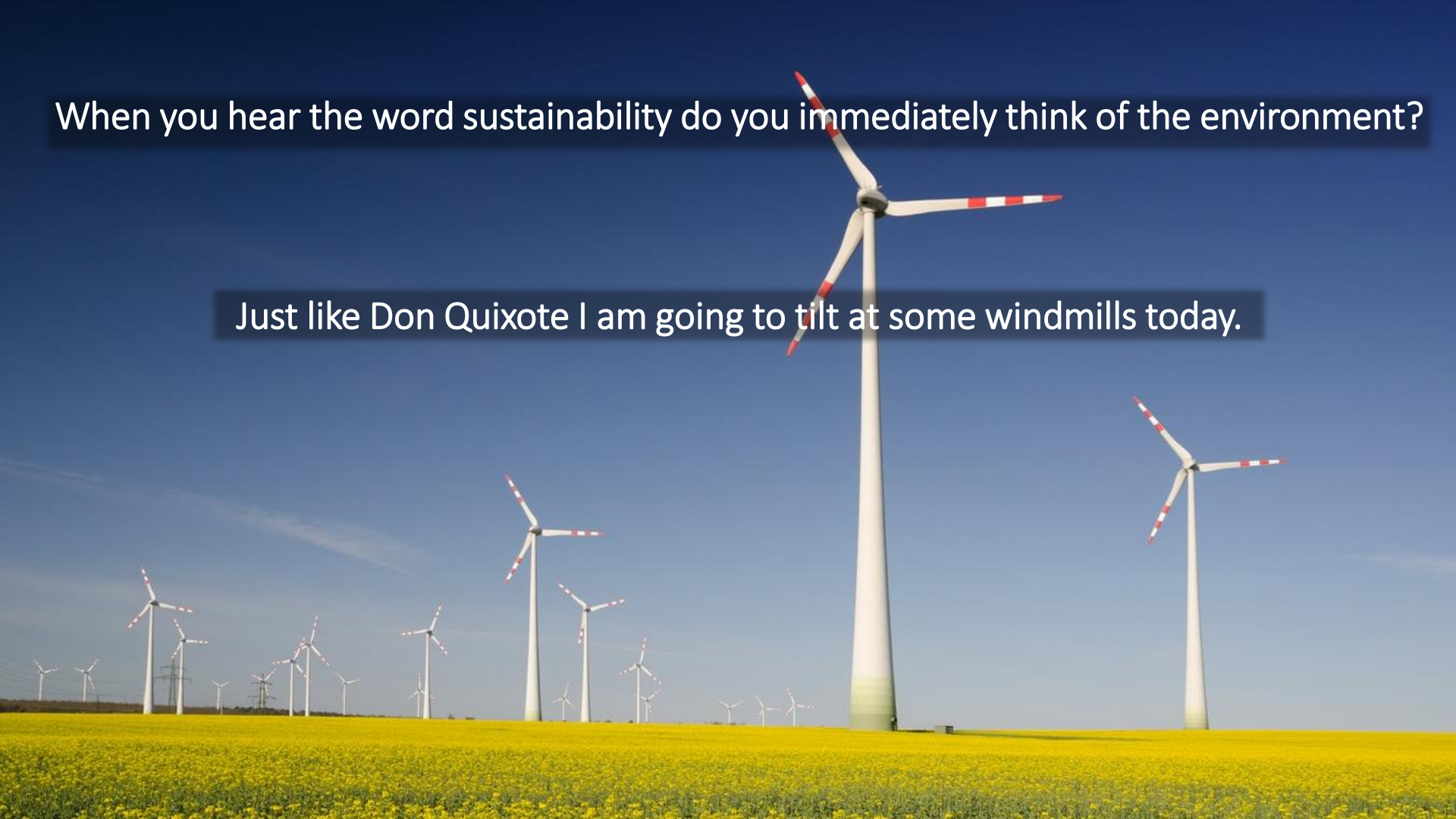
Neil Milliken

A sustainable approach to accessibility and inclusion.


When you hear the word sustainability do you immediately think of the environment?
Just like Don Quixote I am going to tilt at some windmills today.

We have a skills shortage in accessibility.

There are simply not enough people to do the work we already have.

And most people come to accessibility as a second career.

How do we grow the next generation of accessibility professionals?

IAAP is one part of the equation but in the UK we have another opportunity – Apprenticeships.

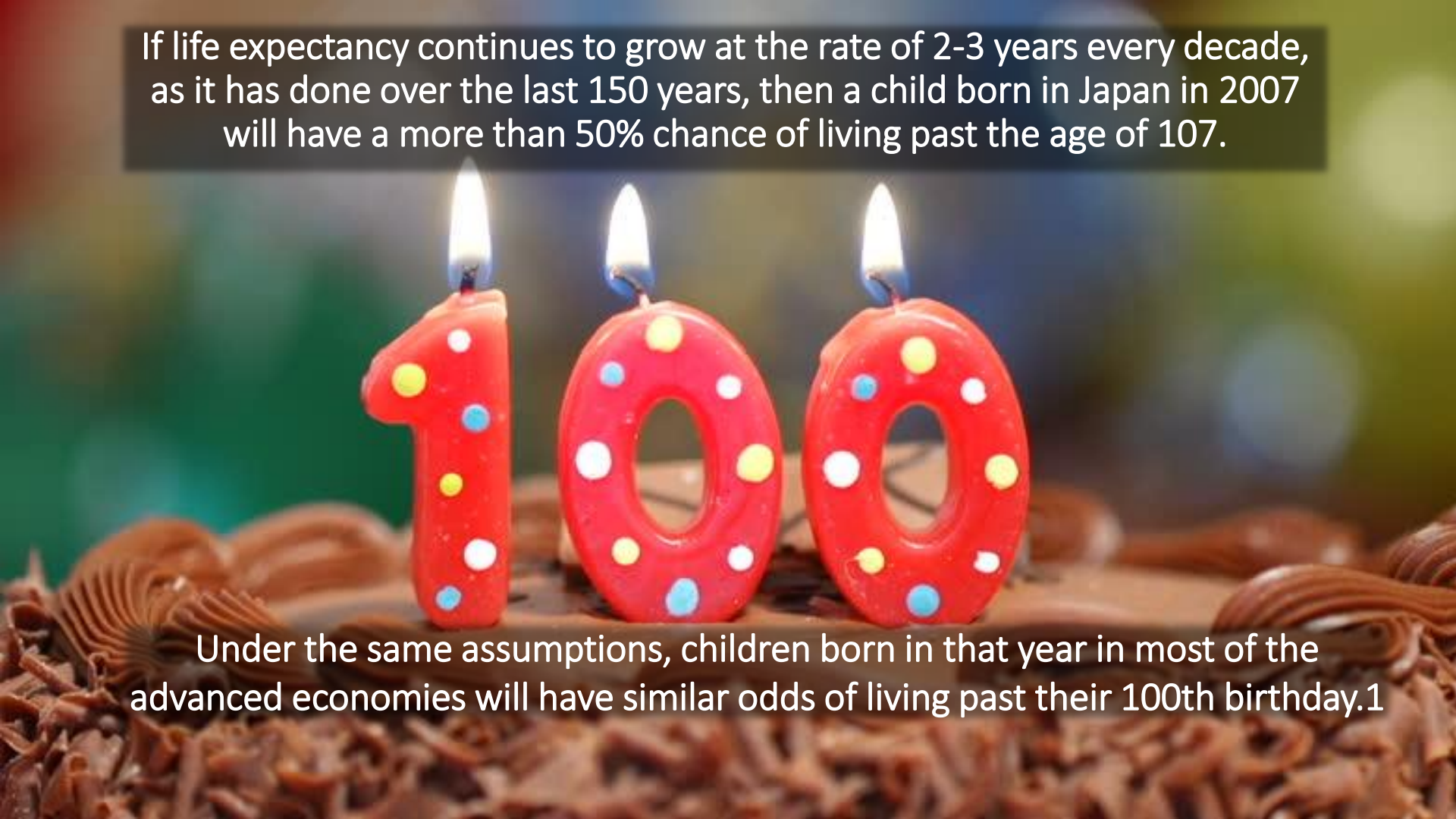
We are working with the Institute for Apprenticeships to develop a national apprenticeship standard for accessibility.

This means that it will be a recognised occupation and that we can support people to acquire transferable skills in accessibility to an agreed standard.

We have formed a “Trail – Blazer” Group and the intent is to agree a standard for a first intake late in 2019.

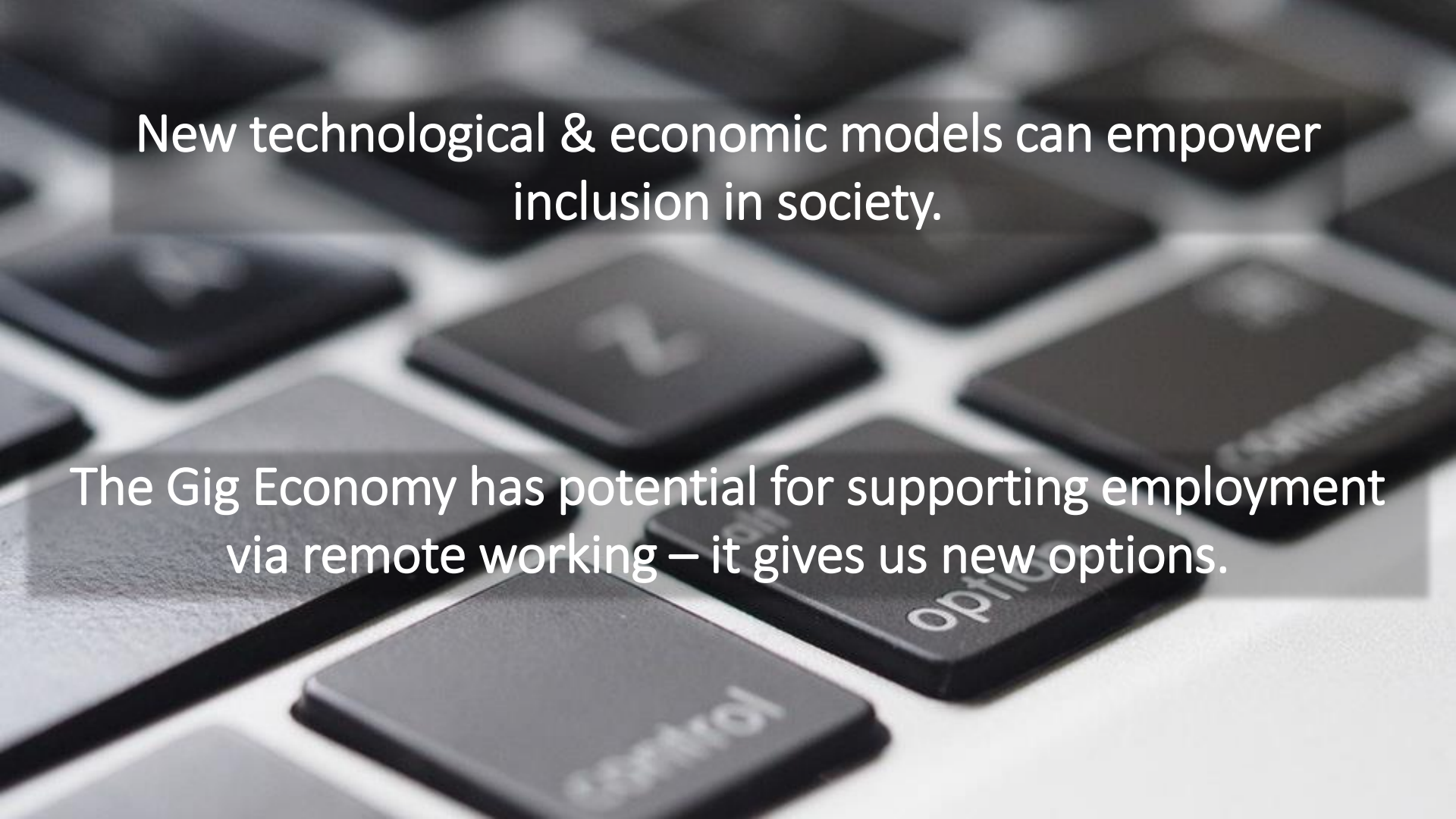
Why link accessibility & sustainability?

If life expectancy continues to grow at the rate of 2-3 years every decade, as it has done over the last 150 years, then a child born in Japan in 2007 will have a more than 50% chance of living past the age of 107.



Under the same assumptions, children born in that year in most of the advanced economies will have similar odds of living past their 100th birthday.1


Most Disabilities Are Acquired As People Age
The Numbers Are Huge & Will Continue To Grow
It’s imperative that we enable people to remain independent & economically active for as long as possible.



New technological & economic models can empower inclusion in society.

The Gig Economy has potential for supporting employment via remote working – it gives us new options.

Additive manufacturing is delivering the prospect of personalised and localised accessibility solutions for people with disabilities & long term conditions such as 3d printed prosthetics & even replacement organs.

Smart devices may unlock the potential to make our homes & cities much more inclusive.

Augmented Reality coupled with ubiquitous computing give us opportunities to support people with cognitive disabilities.

Accessibility puts customers, employees, you & me in control.

Sometimes for the 1st time ever.


But so much new technology isn’t accessible.
IAAF
CERTIFIED PRODUCT
We make hurdles for people to jump over before they can realise the potential of the technology & their own potential as individuals.

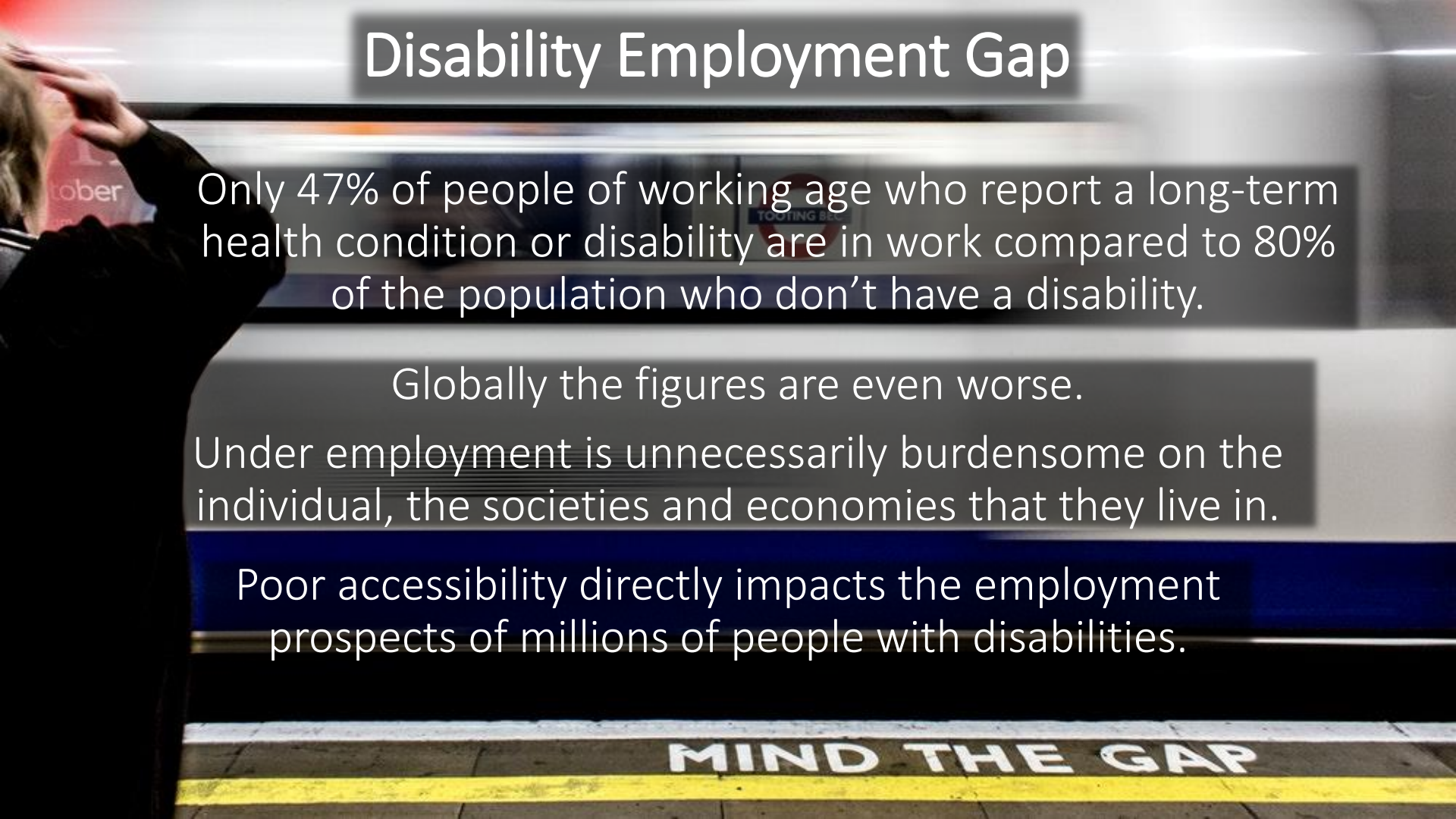
Disability Employment Gap

Only 47% of people of working age who report a long-term health condition or disability are in work compared to 80% of the population who don't have a disability.

Globally the figures are even worse.

Under employment is unnecessarily burdensome on the individual, the societies and economies that they live in.

Poor accessibility directly impacts the employment prospects of millions of people with disabilities.




How is this stuff that benefits individuals linked to sustainability?
Do I sense a little scepticism?
Let me make the connection.

Businesses already report on sustainability and the reporting metrics are starting to include social factors such as disability.

Disability inclusion is embedded in the following UN Sustainable Development Goals:

Goal 4 Equal & Inclusive Education – building inclusive learning environments and providing support where needed

Goal 17 Underlining the importance of data collection and monitoring of the SDGs with an emphasis on disability disaggregated data.

Goal 8 Promoting inclusive economic growth – Allowing persons with disabilities to access the job market

Goal 10 Emphasising the social & economic political inclusion of persons with disabilities

Goal 11 Creating accessible cities, providing universal access to safe, inclusive accessible & green public spaces.

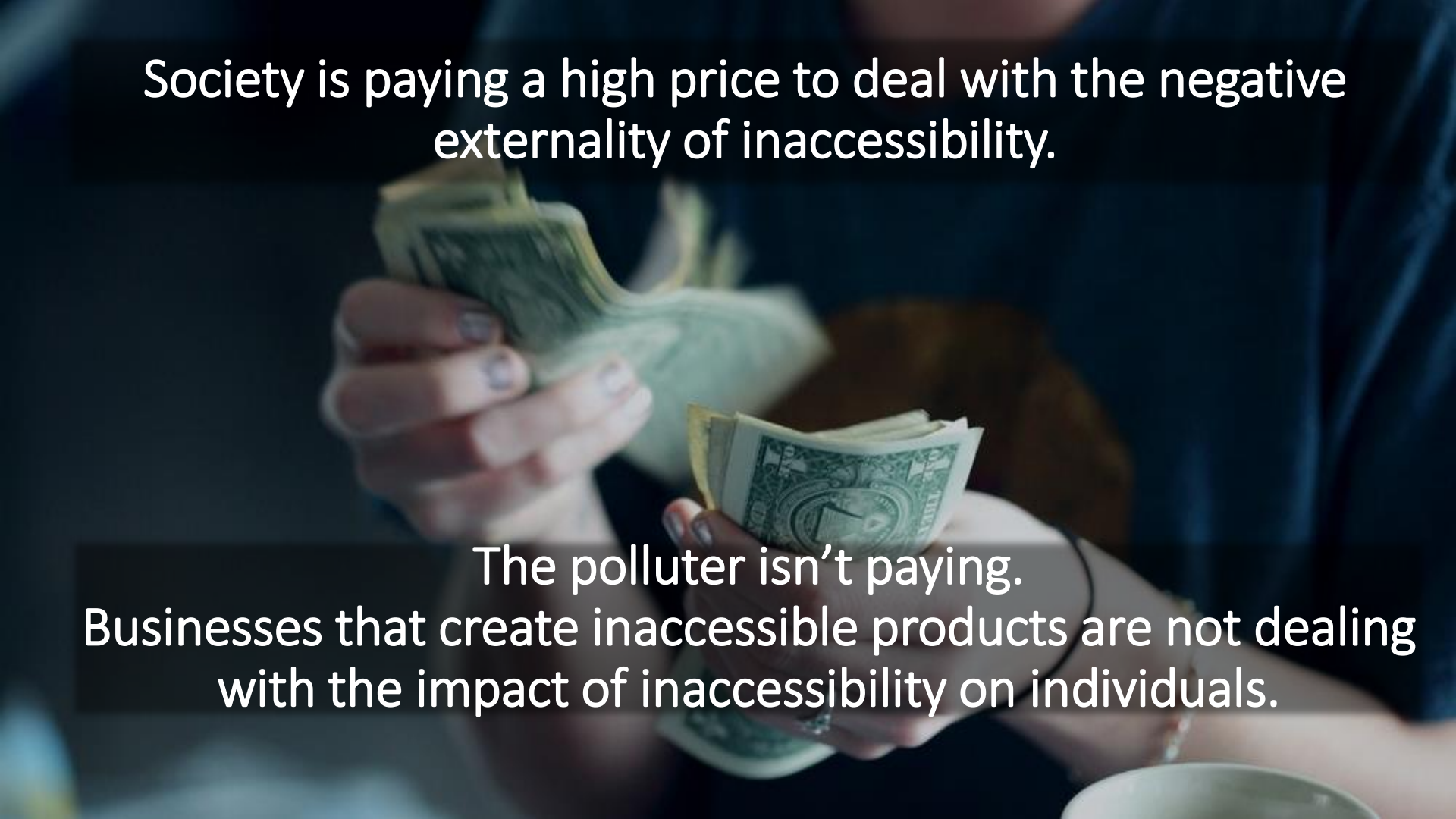
The Concept of Externalities

We frequently did not include the environmental costs people paid for goods when they were sold & manufactured.

This meant society met the additional costs of pollution & emissions.

Jim Tobias observed that “Inaccessibility is kinda like pollution.”

The logical extension of this idea is to take frameworks designed to address pollution & apply them to accessibility.



Society is paying a high price to deal with the negative externality of inaccessibility.

The polluter isn’t paying.
Businesses that create inaccessible products are not dealing with the impact of inaccessibility on individuals.


A lightbulb moment.
Legislation alone isn’t enough.

Incandescent bulbs were cheap to buy.

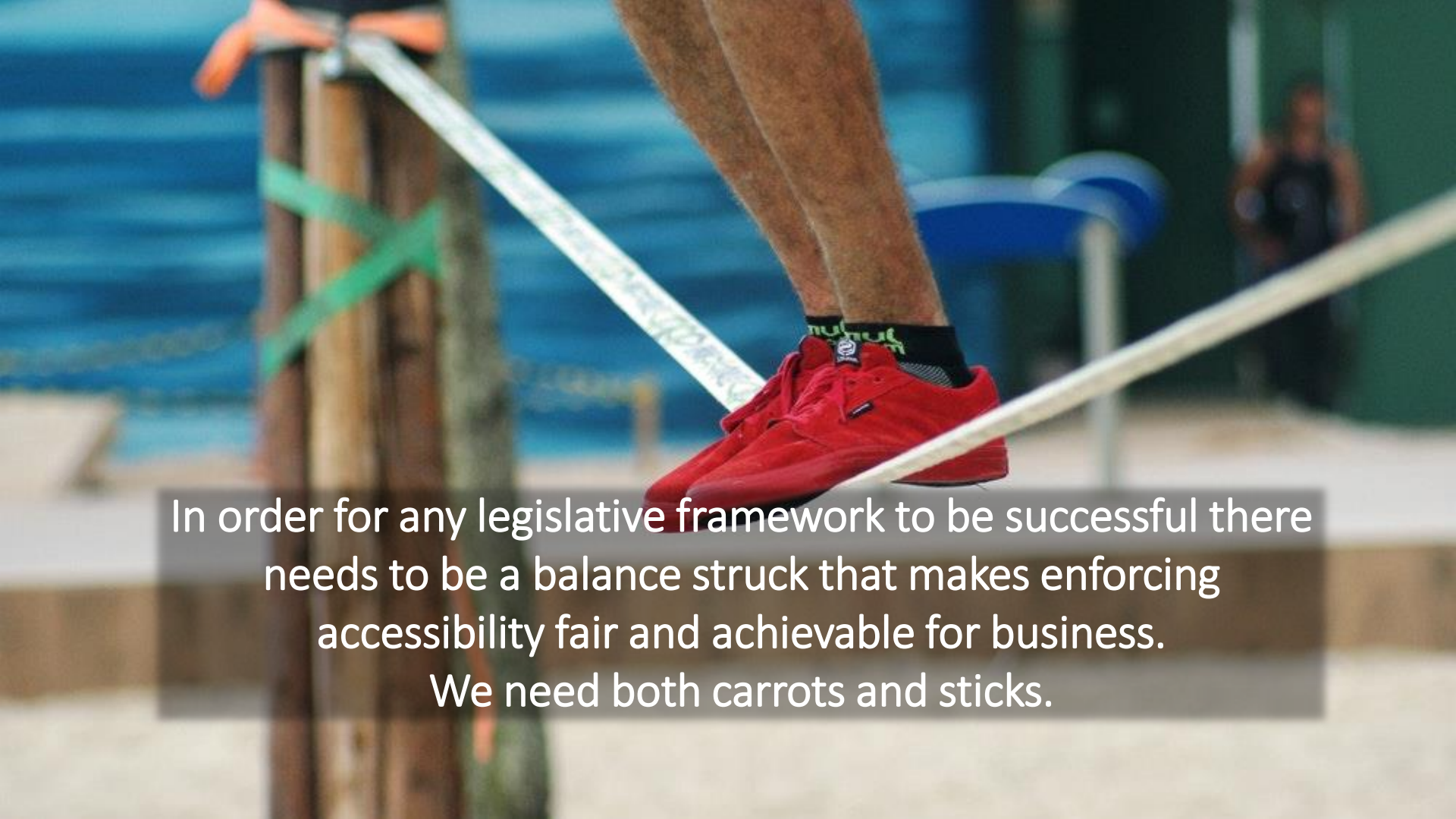
But their inefficiency created a negative externality of pollution…

Efficient LED lights used to be very expensive.

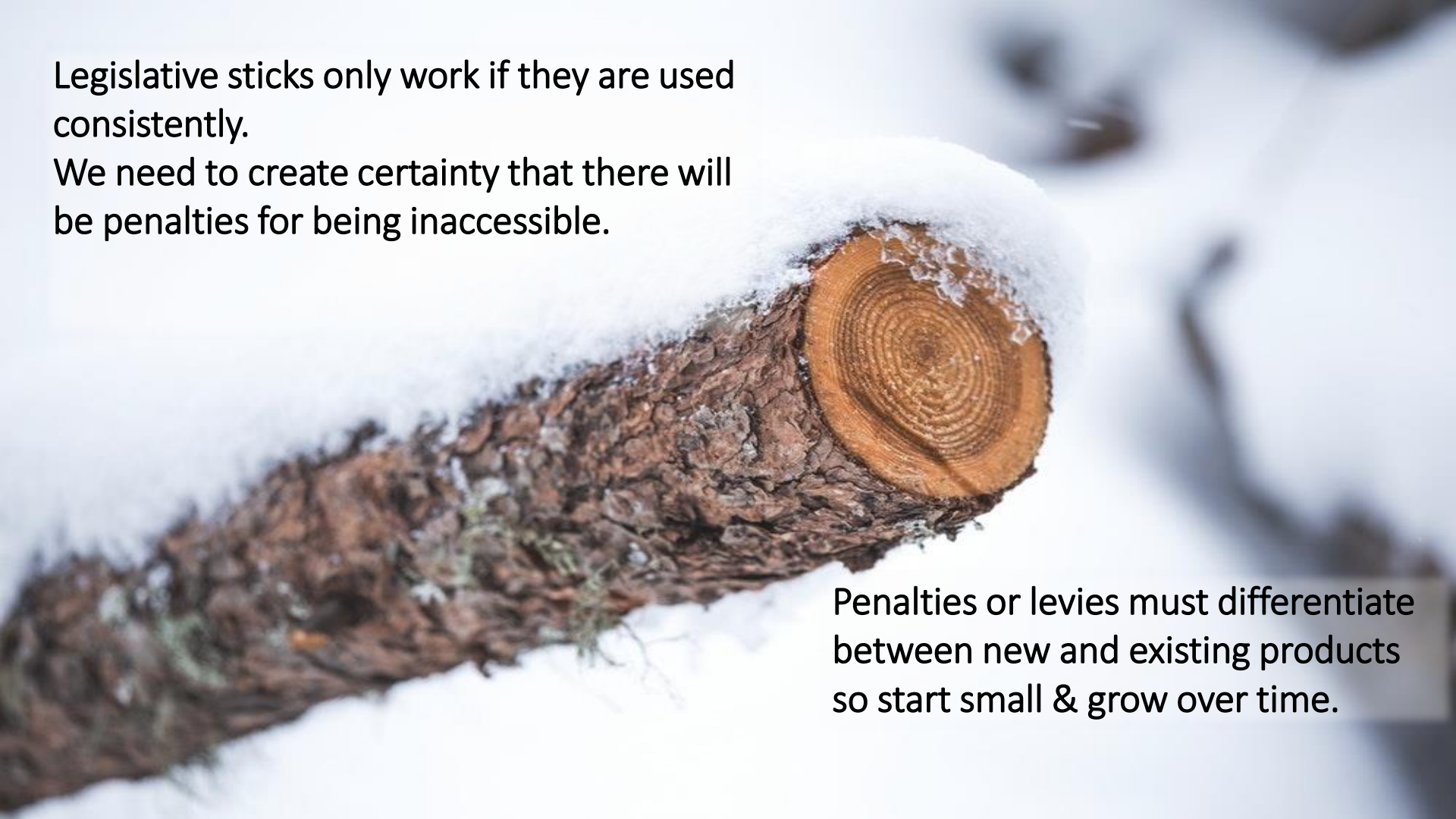
A combination of legislation, regulation and a timeline for implementation has allowed industry to adjust.

Now LEDs are cheap to buy and run.

When legislation is not enforced businesses are often willing to gamble, taking a calculated risk that they will not incur penalties when they don’t implement accessibility.



In order for any legislative framework to be successful there needs to be a balance struck that makes enforcing accessibility fair and achievable for business.
We need both carrots and sticks.



Legislative sticks only work if they are used consistently.
We need to create certainty that there will be penalties for being inaccessible.

Penalties or levies must differentiate between new and existing products so start small & grow over time.

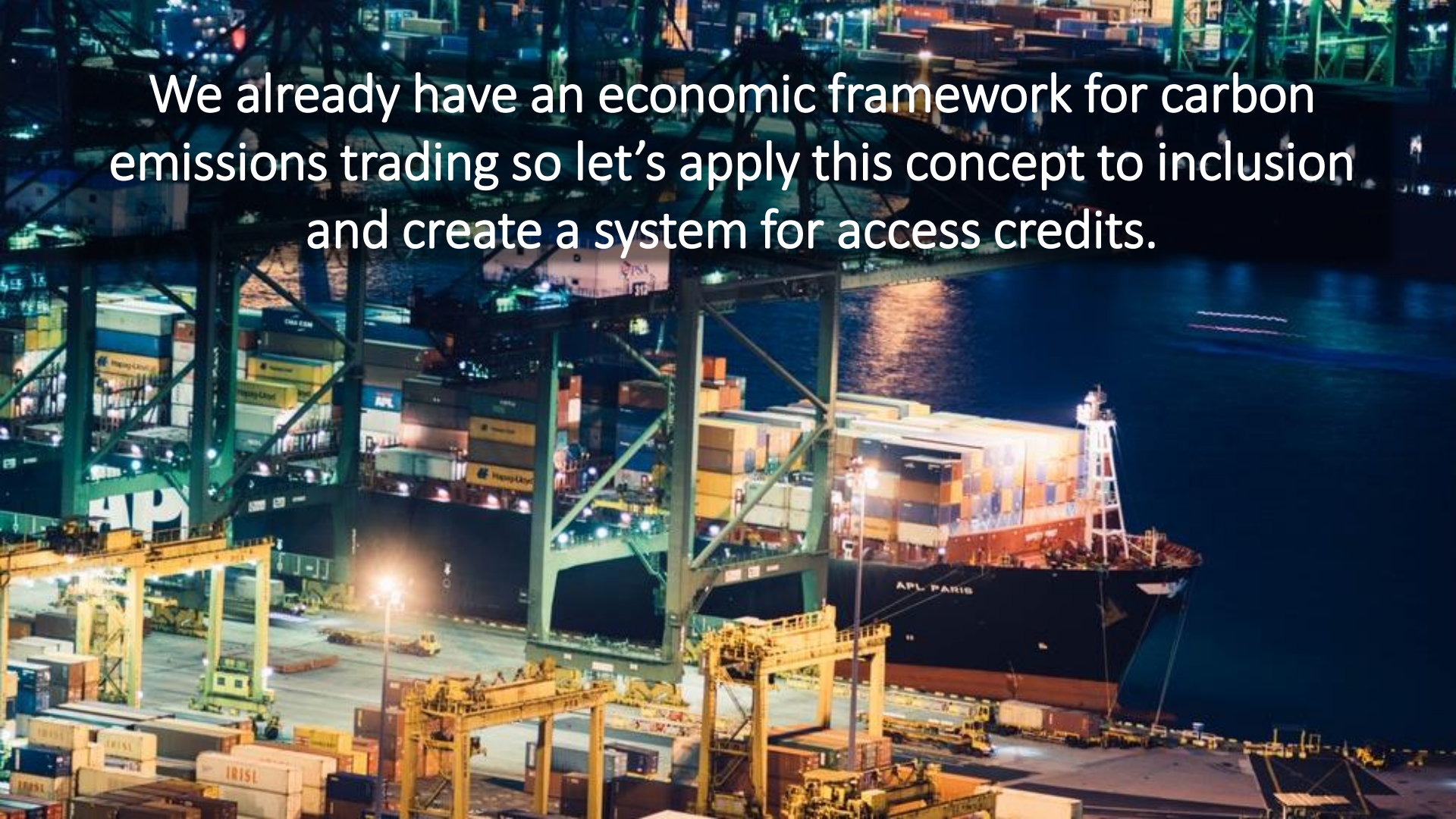
We need to offer business incentives to be accessible.

The Carrots - Money that we collect in fines should be used to reward businesses that are delivering inclusive accessible products and services.

And

Subsidise investments in accessibility.

We already have an economic framework for carbon emissions trading so let’s apply this concept to inclusion and create a system for access credits.



When we enable people to participate through accessible technology we are enabling them economically.

Enabling the economic participation of 20% of the world's population is a key sustainability topic.


Swap the word accessible with awesome.
Who doesn’t want to be part of something awesome?

Thanks

For more information please contact:

Neil.Milliken@atos.net

All images used with permission.