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# Eversheds LLP

## Promoting Gender Diversity, Inside and Out

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Eversheds is one of the largest full service law firms in the world employing over 4,000 people, including more than 500 partners and almost 2,000 legal advisers. We have 52 offices across 30 countries within major cities in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Our head quarters are in London.

### Overview

As a firm we recognise the value that balance brings to our business, and the importance of diversity at every level. We take a proactive approach to inclusion and gender diversity, working hard to promote gender equality internally and within the profession.

Through the involvement of senior management figures in all diversity initiatives and engagement of staff at every level, we have fostered an inclusive culture where women know that their progress matters and is part of a larger picture to which they contribute.

Our commitment to inclusion, particularly focused on gender, is written into the firm's strategy making it a core objective for our Board, Executive and Senior Management Team.

In 2011 the firm undertook ground-breaking research to identify reasons for a decline in female partner representation (20.4% as at Sept 2011), and to identify innovative solutions to redress this "leaking pipeline" across the firm within five years (target 25% by 2016). To deliver these objectives, we created a Gender Working Party (GWP) to progress action plans to address challenges identified by this research. The group is divided into four sub-group "Working Parties", each of which address a different area of our diversity strategy.

Two years on, we have:

- established a national client speaker programme, at which senior female role models from client businesses provide inspirational presentations to our members of staff;
- established a mentoring programme for 42 female Principal Associates across the firm, who are supported onto the partnership track by the Senior Management Team
- established a career forum attended by over 200 Associates/Senior Associates;
- made significant enhancements to our maternity policy including revised financial targets for women managing the challenges experienced by females upon return to work.

Progress is communicated internally through a quarterly intranet article which provides and update on the gender diversity programme. Female award winners are regularly profiled to provide visible examples of success.

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## Business Case

The firm's enduring commitment to gender is delivering results. We consistently recruit over 50% females as trainees and have achieved parity or more in every level below partner. Formal flexible working was established in 2009 (24% of our female lawyers work part time) and in 2011 we launched 'FlexAble', our informal flexible working scheme. We have reported gender diversity statistics externally since 2010 and were the first law firm to sign up to the GEO Voluntary Gender Equality Reporting initiative.

We recognised that we had lost ground on the gender mix of the partnership as we had grown internationally and this did not accurately reflect the talent pipeline within the firm or its commitment to equal opportunity. Our female partner numbers dropped from 23.0% in June 2009 to 20.7% in June 2011. This was a situation that we could not allow to continue, and we presented our Diversity Scorecard to the Board and agreed targets for the first time. In October 2011, we commissioned an Ashridge Business School MBA student to undertake a piece of objective research. She conducted over 100 interviews with women at different levels across the firm and 20 interviews with male and female partners. The results demonstrated a clear case for change.

The GWP was created, made up of male and female lawyers from across the business, and a male member of the SMT was appointed as Executive sponsor for gender diversity and asked to lead the group.

## Innovation

We have focused on highlighting the link between gender diversity and business success and making successful senior females visible within the business through our female client speaker series as well as International Women's Day events across our offices in March 2014.

We have engaged specifically with our female partner group to understand their thoughts. They have encouraged us to do more work to understand the barriers to female progression at the firm. They have committed to work together to change the mindset of male colleagues.

Formal career planning workshops have been established for male and female Associates and Senior Associates, providing an open forum for discussion, and access to the skills and tools needed to enable medium to longer term career planning.

We have taken a close look at the pipeline for promotion to partner to identify and plug the "leak". We have developed a pilot programme to help senior women and their supervisors to anticipate the issues that have a different impact on career progress for women. We have also introduced a specific coaching programme for a select group of high potential female Principal Associates to assist them to take charge of their career progression.

All partners have attended maternity roadshows, aimed at taking the mystery out of managing employees' return from maternity leave. The course focuses on encouraging partners to have honest and constructive discussions when managing a return to work, so that each party can approach this process in a business focused and mutually respectful way.

In 2013 we published our second Board Report. This followed on from our 2011 in-depth research survey of the boards of top companies and financial institutions. The report highlighted the fact that better-performing companies tend to have a higher percentage of female board members. We have used findings from both reports as a driver for a series of external events highlighting the issue. These events have helped to deliver a strong message to the business community about the performance benefit of gender diversity.

Putting diversity at the heart of our business gives it organisational credibility: it enables open conversations; the identification and dismantling of barriers; credibility with clients (which is an invaluable commercial asset); and people support something which "makes business sense". Speaking to a business case with a bottom line impact influences senior leaders - it is essential to talk their language not 'diversity speak'. Having a target is important, because what gets measured gets managed. But it is important to recognise that change takes time. Persistence and flexibility is important and building momentum and understanding at all levels is critical to success.



## Outputs

- Diversity and gender objectives are built into 2012-2015 strategy
- Eversheds has 30% female board membership
- Annual female partnership promotions increased to 40% in 2012 and 60% in 2013
- Increase in female partners to 24% as at December 2013
- Employee opinion survey results show high engagement levels across both genders
  - 92% agree that Eversheds actively supports diversity in the workplace
  - 92% feel that Eversheds is an inclusive environment regardless of background, age, race or gender
  - 85% of the firm have been able to work flexibly
  - 84% agree we are an employer of choice for women in the legal sector

A comment from a female Principal Associate demonstrates our success: "My experience of Eversheds' diversity programme is that it supports women in the firm in any way that they want to take their careers – whether it be promotion, working part time, or working flexibly. It is part of the Eversheds' dynamic culture; there is no 'one size fits all'."

Our unique and business focussed approach to gender diversity has been recognised within the wider business community with the following awards:

- *The Times* Top 50 Employers for Women 2012, 2013 and 2014
- *Opportunity Now* Excellence in Practice Awards 2014 – Winner of the 'Inclusive Culture' category