

Mentoring Programme and Careers Forum

Eversheds was seeing slow growth in the number of women in the partnership. As a result, we sought to develop a deep understanding of the barriers, and in 2011 commissioned pioneering research to identify the specific bars to female promotion to partnership. The results of the research led us to introduce a number of new initiatives including a mentoring programme and careers forum, that we believe, in time, will help to boost the number of females entering the partnership.

Issue to be resolved

Currently women represent 22% of the Eversheds partnership and 30% of Board members. The firm has set a target of moving from 21% (2011) female partners to 25% by 2016. In order to identify how we can improve these figures the commissioned research reviewed current policies and practices and the impact and effect of these on the experiences, attitudes and beliefs of our women with regards to their ability to progress. The results of the study uncovered valuable insights and provided us with clear target areas that should improve the gender balance, in brief outlined below:

- 1) Publicising role models that inspire more junior women;
- 2) Creating a mentoring programme for women, primarily to provide cross-practice group networking and sponsorship opportunities;
- 3) Developing a career forum that significantly increases transparency around promotions;

Maternity policy enhancements aimed at increasing maternity return rates and improving the transition back into the workplace.

Action taken

The firm subsequently established a focused working group, comprised of both recently promoted and senior female partners as well as associates, to drive implementation of the recommendations. The Gender Working Party (GWP) is led by Litigation and Dispute Management Practice Group Head, Ian Gray and is accountable to the firm's Diversity Board, chaired by Eversheds' chairman, John Heaps.

Substantive initiatives

Role models: The GWP has developed an ongoing internal communications plan to ensure that successful and inspirational women at Eversheds would become familiar to all members of the firm, and that it would be evident to all internally that Eversheds supports and encourages women at all stages in their career. For example, on International Women's Day, 8th March 2012, an article was published on the firm's intranet, attaching an [e-magazine](#) containing interviews with inspirational women at Eversheds.

Mentoring programme: In June the firm launched a pilot mentoring scheme in two offices. This targets female associates, pairing each with a senior partner for regular one-to-one sessions in which they take time out to talk through issues relating to their career.

Careers forum: In June a pilot careers forum was launched, providing key career progression information, time to personally reflect, and importantly personal career stories from partners.

Enhanced maternity package: A package of maternity enhancements is currently being finalised including greater support for returners – e.g. introducing a transition period of return, with short hours, reduced days etc; mentoring and unconscious bias training across the firm to support managers and team as they support maternity returners.

Result

The specific initiatives introduced as a result of the research are still at an early stage. However, at the time the 25% target was set, the partnership stood at just under 21% female. A percentage point increase has already been achieved in less than a year and women represent 41% of most recent new promotions to partnership. If this increase is achieved annually, the firm will be successful in achieving its target by 2016.

Next Steps

Eversheds will continue with the initiatives that have been introduced as a result of the research and review progress periodically to ensure that goals are subsequently achieved.

Contact

Claudia Clark, Head of Diversity
0845 497 4760
claudiack@eversheds.com