

Practical first steps to make your firm more inclusive

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We launched an Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) mentoring scheme in July 2020. It offered small and medium sized law firms the opportunity to receive free mentoring to develop their approach to EDI by law firms who are recognised as leaders in the field.

Participating firms gained access to a range of advice, support materials and networking opportunities.

The case studies below provide an overview of some of the mentoring relationships, the ideas that firms are using and the next steps mentee firms subsequently took to drive forward EDI.

Top tips taken from the EDI mentoring scheme

- Carry out staff engagement surveys, focus groups and gather EDI data to help shape your approach to EDI.
- Draft a simple EDI strategy and look for areas of focus that could benefit multiple groups, such as career pathways for under-represented groups and an inclusive culture to encourage retention.
- Set up an EDI committee or working group with different members responsible for different business areas in order to drive the strategy forward.
- Grow your own - consider how you can progress the diverse talent within the firm through personal development plans and mentoring schemes.
- Consider connecting with local schools and universities to provide vacation experience or share insights from your diverse staff to encourage new talent into the legal profession.
- Adapt your recruitment process to attract new and diverse talent - reconsider the qualifications required of candidates and consider removing certain information from candidate profiles to avoid unconscious bias.
- Monitor your progress and take time to pause and reflect on your achievements even those 'small wins'.

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Recruiting for and promoting diversity: Teacher Stern and DWF

Teacher Stern is a commercial law firm based in London which has 29 partners and 43 fee earners.

Teacher Stern was partnered with DWF and found them to be a useful benchmark as EDI is well established at the firm and taken seriously by leadership.

Teacher Stern already had EDI initiatives in place since joining the scheme but saw it as an opportunity to talk with DWF about pre-existing plans.

Their main focus during the scheme was to promote diversity and inclusion internally and improve social mobility through recruitment processes.

What did they do?

- Created a space for diversity and inclusion in the firm's monthly newsletters, increasing awareness, inviting engagement and raising the profile.
- Requested recruitment partners to submit 'blind CVs' – remove identifying factors such as name, race or age so as to mitigate any potential biases.
- Published a new EDI policy that set out the firm's intentions in eliminating discrimination and promoting equality.

Next steps

- Adopt a recruitment portal which removes certain information at different stages of the recruitment process.
- Appoint EDI advocates and champions as part of its EDI committee.
- Connect EDI and corporate social responsibility committees and identify areas for collaboration.

Creating a meaningful strategy: Boyes Turner and Hogan Lovells

Boyes Turner is a medium-size law firm with 28 partners located in the Thames Valley. They work with start-ups, multi-nationals and private individuals across a range of business areas.

The firm is fairly new to EDI but believes that when employees feel included they gain a sense of belonging which strengthens performance and innovation.

For this reason, the goal has been to set up a robust and meaningful EDI strategy to start them on their journey.

To help with this Boyes Turner partnered with Hogan Lovells as part of our scheme. They met regularly with Hogan Lovells who gave both practical ideas and acted as a sounding board for developing an EDI strategy.

What did they do?

- Conducted focus groups and other engagement work with employees to understand diversity gaps at the firm.
- With the findings from the engagement work they set out a clear vision and purpose to the strategy incorporating four strands that included EDI awareness, workforce diversity, workforce inclusion and sustainability and accountability.
- Set up an EDI steering group which is responsible for taking the EDI strategy forward.
- Implemented EDI awareness training for all staff as part of the strategy.
- Decided on what they could realistically achieve and focused on three core areas where there were common issues: social mobility, ethnicity, and gender to develop representation across the firm.

Next steps

- Look at how to drive diversity through changes in the recruitment process such as removing degree results from CVs to improve social mobility.
- Consider how to promote and incentivise employee involvement in employee networks .
- Consider an external EDI consultant to drive the strategy forward.

Learning together: Rayden Solicitors and Hogan Lovells

Rayden Solicitors is a firm of around 60 employees. It is the largest specialist family law firm in Hertfordshire and has offices in other areas of the UK.

Although the team there have taken proactive steps to promote EDI they want to reach a point where the whole firm lives and breathes inclusion.

Rayden was partnered with an EDI specialist at Hogan Lovells. As Rayden Solicitors does not have anyone who specialises in EDI at the firm they found this a valuable resource.

Learning came from both sides of the relationship as they talked through ideas and compared notes where both firms had similar initiatives, particularly those related to wellbeing.

What did they do?

- Put together a new menopause policy - the firms compared their policies to identify areas for improvement.
- Swapped ideas on how to improve wellbeing at both firms with working from home and how to engage effectively with staff online to alleviate

disconnect and loneliness.

- Ran virtual social events for staff such as 'Desert Island Discs' sessions - an idea which was fed back to the Mental Health First Aiders and HR at Hogan Lovells.
- Attended Hogan Lovells' wellbeing sessions including a meditation workshop to gather new ideas for the firm.

Next steps

- Since taking part in the scheme Rayden has run mandatory menopause training for all employees and separate training for managers.
- Set up monthly virtual menopause coffee mornings and a menopause Teams' channel to prompt conversation and exchange information.
- The firm celebrates an annual 'heritage day' - to encourage staff to showcase their cultures with different foods - something they will continue.
- Continuing to acknowledge relevant awareness days and weeks including mental health awareness week and meditation awareness day.
- Use a Teams' wellbeing channel to share resources, advice and provide colleagues with an opportunity to check in with each other.

Growing internal talent: Wright Hassall and Baker McKenzie

Wright Hassall is a firm of 240 lawyers based in Warwickshire. Before joining the mentoring scheme Wright Hassall was already passionate about EDI and 'inclusive' is one of its business values.

The focus during the scheme was to embed this value firmly into their business culture, recognising and growing internal talent to improve retention and progression.

Wright Hassall was partnered with EDI experts from Baker McKenzie. They had sense-checking conversations - particularly about how to structure their EDI committee and weave it into their business narrative and strategy.

What did they do?

- Structured their EDI committee to allow certain members to spearhead specific areas such as facilities, communications, partnerships and events.
- Carried out a culture survey of the firm to gauge how staff felt and to listen to their ideas and provide opportunities for individuals to raise questions directly to senior leadership in person or anonymously.
- Offered internal staff training contracts and will sponsor staff through their qualifying examination.

- Developed career pathways and personal development plans for all roles within the firm including non-legal roles.
- Encouraged peer groups on similar professional levels to share challenges and solutions thereby creating safe spaces for all colleagues.
- Senior leaders shared their experiences and career pathways and demonstrated active learning and understanding, creating a culture of intentional allyship.
- Set up internal apprenticeship opportunities so that staff can move into roles in different business areas.
- Developed a mentoring scheme which allows people working at all levels to take up mentee or mentor roles.

Next steps

- To allow promotions to happen earlier than expected if a vacancy opens up or a new role is created.
- Consider how they can better weave their different EDI initiatives together.
- Ensure they reflect on, take a record of, and celebrate big and small EDI achievements.