

Race equality in the workplace

Published July 2020

How diverse is the profession?

We want to work with law firms to promote and support race in the workplace. Currently 21% of all lawyers in law firms [\[sra/equality-diversity/key-findings/diverse-legal-profession/\]](#) are from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) background. This compares to a 13% BAME workforce [\[https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/employment/employment/latest#by-ethnicity\]](https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/work-pay-and-benefits/employment/employment/latest#by-ethnicity) across England, Scotland and Wales.

Asian lawyers make up two thirds (15%) of all BAME lawyers and black lawyers form 3%. In comparison, Asian employees make up 7% of the workforce in England, Scotland and Wales and Black employees are 3%.

On the face of it, it appears that the profession is ethnically diverse even at partner level with 22% of BAME partners. However, both black and Asian lawyers are significantly underrepresented in mid to large size firms (those with six or more partners). The largest firms (50 plus partners) have the lowest proportion of BAME partners.

Further information on firm diversity [\[sra/equality-diversity/key-findings/diverse-legal-profession/\]](#)

Improving race equality in your law firm

In our discussions with solicitors some say they feel there is more work that can be done to promote race equality. We have been speaking to law firms about this and recognise there is some good practice that exists. Firms have started to progress the race equality agenda and now more than ever this is a priority.

Read how some firms are supporting and promoting further progress to ensure greater inclusion, diversity and equality for BAME people.

Reflect, develop and progress your firm - race equality, what now?

Open all [#]

Liberty Law Solicitors - Promoting race equality in a small firm

Background

Liberty Law Solicitors are a small independent firm of lawyers based in Luton and Watford. Their ethos involves placing the community first and, as such, are regularly involved in pro-bono work. These include actions against the police and regularly support and promote community projects and charities that promote access to justice and equality, diversity and inclusion. Their location and type of work means that their client base is ethnically diverse, their workforce reflect this diversity and they have made proactive effort to ensure they are able to respond to the cultural nuances their clients bring.

What have they done?

Liberty recognise the challenges that smaller firms face. However, they feel that small steps can be taken to promote an inclusive and anti-racist firm that do not require huge resources. Here are some of these steps:

- **Keeping the conversation going** - Because of the type of work the firm carries out, conversations about justice and equality occur frequently with team members. More recently, in light of a bigger focus on race equality and the Black Lives Matter movement the firm have facilitated specific conversations about racism, what this looks like and how to tackle it. This is maintaining a culture where employees feel safe to share their thoughts and experiences.
- **Speaking to clients** - Liberty's clients are very ethnically diverse and some are vulnerable. They have made proactive efforts to communicate their anti-racism ethos in the work they do. In particular, speaking with clients about recognising and dealing with prejudice, bias and racism. For example, they talk about the difficulties in challenging and evidencing racist behaviour and attitudes and suggest the importance of logging experiences and keeping a record. They advocate the importance of being confident to speaking up to raise awareness and highlight bad practice. It is only when this is highlighted, it can be acted upon.

Top tips for smaller firms wanting to promote race equality

1. **Talk** - It is really important to normalise conversations about race equality. Productive and respectful conversations about what is happening can demonstrate your commitment. You may feel that it isn't relevant to your work and employees however, by starting the conversation you can learn and challenge yourselves and others and provide space for people to share their views. You could watch a video or a film or read a book on the subject and discuss that if you are not sure how to start.
2. **Set your stance** - Racism, in any form, should never be ignored, excused or tolerated, regardless of who seniority and position. Make a commitment about being a zero-tolerance firm with clear information about consequences for staff and clients. Communicate that is everyone's responsibility in the firm. You can bring your commitment to life by having a short clear statement and providing examples of racist behaviours such as micro-aggressions.
3. **Be proactive**
 1. Look at your recruitment practices and data about your firm and the profession at large. What does this mean for your firm and the location you are in - can you do more?
 2. Think about ways you can educate and support. It could be as simple as attending an event or addressing unconscious bias.
 3. Share your wisdom and insight! Think about mentoring others that want to progress in the legal profession.

Baker McKenzie - BAME networks

Background

Having a diverse and inclusive workforce is at the heart of Baker McKenzie's culture. The firm has been recognised for its leadership on race equality and inclusion in the workplace by being included in Business in the Community's [<http://race.bitc.org.uk>] Best Employers for Race listing.

BakerEthnicity

BakerEthnicity, is a global network for Baker Mckenzie's BAME employees established in 2006. This supports the firm in implementing initiatives which go beyond celebratory events and instead take steps to bring about change at a structural level.

Key activities include:

- Launching Colour Brave, a campaign in its London office, which seeks to create an environment where people of all races feel comfortable talking openly about race and ethnicity.
- Establishing Mentoring Circles, an initiative which provides reverse mentoring opportunities for junior BAME talent.
- Sponsoring a virtual Zoom town hall meeting in which Black talent spoke candidly about challenges at work and in British society. This event attracted almost half of the London office with almost 400 attendees joining to listen and contribute.
- Hosting roundtable events to share learnings and discuss the progress that has been made by the respective organisations in this space.
- Following Baker McKenzie becoming one of the first law firms to publish its London ethnicity pay gap, working with the firm to better understand and address the issues which lie behind the figures. For example working with departmental managers to help set aspirational ethnicity targets and establish a culture where individual teams are accountable for ensuring the talent pipeline in their area.

Tips for creating an engaging network

1. **Consider your data** - It is crucial to have access to reliable data as this will show whether and where there is a problem. Encourage all of your talent to declare their ethnicity. Following a targeted email campaign, Baker McKenzie was able to get over 95% of its people to declare their ethnicity.
2. **Cultural events alone are unlikely to change** - While celebrating cultural events is important, real change can only be brought about by taking a close look at your data. You need to identify the causes of any inequality this reveals and developing an action plan to address these.
3. **Senior leader involvement is pivotal** - A BAME network with senior partners involved is a more effective network. This will make it far easier to secure senior buy-in and engagement across the organisation. These individuals do not necessarily need to be BAME themselves, as ally support can be just as effective.

What they said

"Baker Ethnicity performs a vital role in our organisation and brings the voice of ethnic minorities into the heart of our conversations. This means that our leadership - for now, predominantly white - learns and understands what the minority experience feels like for BAME employees of our firm."

Linklaters - BAME networks

Background

Linklaters is a global firm that is committed to reflecting the races, ethnicities, cultures and nationalities that exist in the countries and communities in which they operate. The firm wants to be known as one where everyone feels they belong, and diversity is celebrated.

Their BAME network is the oldest diversity related network and was created in 2012. It has been pivotal in supporting race equality agenda at Linklaters and provides a community for minority ethnic colleagues.

What did they do?

- The network has two senior sponsors that champion and advocate for the network at a senior level. This is also supported by the Senior Partner as Race and Ethnicity champion for the firm.
- The network has consciously steered away from being events driven and focused its efforts on making sure it is aligned to strategic plans of firm to allow for race equality to be mainstreamed into its core aims and activities.
- It has four strategic aims:
 - Making sure the firm is focused on RRPP (Recruitment, Retention, Progression, Pay) for minority ethnic colleagues
 - Raising awareness of racial inequality
 - Creating a community and safe space for minority ethnic colleagues
 - Playing an influential role in the firm and the local community.
- It has supported and driven several initiatives in the firm and local community including:
 - Hosting a firmwide 'Let's talk about race' session with Senior Partner Charlie Jacobs
 - Launching the City Link - an opportunity for BAME networks across the city to come together to collaborate, share ideas and discuss best practice over food and drinks
 - Supporting various not for profit organisations in the local community including Amos Bursary and the Black British City Group.

What's next?

In the wake of George Floyd's tragic murder, the networks priority has been to support the black community and working with the firm to make sure it continues its efforts to create systematic change.

Top tips for a firm wanting to have a successful network

1. Make sure you have senior backing in the form of senior sponsors
2. Establish a steering committee from the outset
3. Engage allies

Eversheds Sutherland - BAME networks

Background

Within Eversheds Sutherland International there are five people networks - Gender, Perspective (LGBT+), Verve (Race and Ethnicity), Ability (Wellbeing, Ability and Carers), and Multi Faith. Eversheds Sutherland encourage allies to get involved in the networks. The Verve (Ethnicity) network, in its current form was established in 2018 and has more than 200 members.

The Verve network has two senior sponsors to demonstrate its commitment and has local representatives from its offices.

What did they do?

The network has set a clear purpose aligned to the firm's strategic objectives, and also provide a focus which allows it to measure and track progress.

The areas of focus are:

- Raising awareness and understanding of race equality and inclusion
- Recruitment and retention
- Supporting talent and career progression
- Engagement with the broader community and the legal profession

The key activities of the network include:

- Establishing quarterly network calls with senior sponsors to provide updates to its members on topics such as the BAME mentoring scheme.
- Circulation of a regular newsletter keeping all staff updated on latest news and topics.
- Discussing and reviewing progress with the firm's Inclusion Council, who meet regularly to discuss furthering change across the business.

Top tips on creating a network

1. Senior management support and engagement, and visible leadership is essential for a successful network to gain recognition across the firm at all levels.
2. Use a range of communication channels such as newsletters, social media and events to make sure the message is widely shared about the importance of race equality.
3. Highlight the benefits of joining a network, for example developing and building skills, expanding your professional network, and gaining project management experience.

What they said

"Diversity and inclusion are a core part of our strategy and how we ensure our purpose and values are brought to life. Building a culture which is inclusive, where everyone can bring their true selves to work and thrive, is crucial. I am committed to ensuring our culture encourages professional growth and values differences. I know we still have a lot of work to do and I am excited by the passion and engagement of our people. Together we can drive positive change across the firm and achieve our diversity and inclusion vision."

Eversheds Sutherland - Normalising conversations about race

Background

Eversheds Sutherland fosters a diverse and inclusive culture that places respect and support for everyone at its core and empowers its people to fulfil their potential.

- The firm signed the Business in the Community Race at Work Charter [<https://www.bitc.org.uk/race/>] in 2018 to demonstrate its commitment to improving race equality in the workplace.
- In 2019, it published UK ethnicity targets with the aim of increasing representation across all levels including within its partnership, and in 2020, it voluntarily published its ethnicity pay data alongside its gender pay gap report for the first time.
- The firm are also participating in the Cross-Organisational BAME Mentoring Scheme that is run by Business in the Community with the aim of further supporting career development and progression for BAME talent.

The firm recognises that there is a sense of nervousness around talking about race and potentially saying the wrong thing. With this in mind the firm has been focussing on supporting

colleagues to have conversations and facilitate the discussions internally, and in particular, has been working with Business in the Community as part of its ongoing race partnership.

What did they do?

- The firm engaged with the Race Equality Toolkit [https://www.bitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Lets-Talk-About-Race_03012018.pdf], a Business in the Community [<https://www.bitc.org.uk/race/>] guide to start the conversation around race.
- In October 2019, coinciding with the firm's wider Black History Month celebrations, the network delivered a national event titled 'Let's Talk about Race' that was open to all colleagues (including allies) to promote race discussions and to raise the profile and build momentum around its network group.
- The event was successful in building engagement, with 180 people joining and direct increase in network membership as a result. It provided a space for employees to explore race and ask questions about language, terminology and what more could be done to build on the good work that Eversheds Sutherland had already been doing. In particular around equipping senior members of staff to lead confidently on race equality.
- In the months following the session, the firm have also partnered with the charity, Show Racism the Red Card, for both fundraising and hosting workshop sessions with the group to further build understanding of racism and how individuals can make a difference. The Cardiff office held an event in February 2020 during which key members of the charity group joined colleagues for a 'lunch and learn' workshop that was well attended and helped to further raise awareness of the importance of these topics.
- The network has hosted a series of calls open to all colleagues, during which individuals have shared personal experiences, ideas and expressions of support.

What's next?

Although off to a good start, the firm knows there is much more work to do to build a truly diverse and inclusive culture and is committed to addressing barriers to progress. In addition to the work it is doing in this area, they are running a number of internal activities, including sharing recommended resources in response to recent external events surrounding the Black Lives Matter protests has seen an increase in engagement levels across the business.

It has also recently signed up to our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion mentoring scheme [[/solicitors/resources/diversity-toolkit/edi-mentoring-scheme/](#)]. In particular, it will mentor another firm on race equality, sharing their learning from the challenges and opportunities that they have experienced.

Top tips on starting a conversation about race

1. Sometimes, it may feel daunting to start the discussion, but just start!
Engage with your people network and talk about your experiences. People always relate to personal stories from any perspective.
2. Use the available resources, these in themselves are great conversation starters.
3. Make sure senior partners and leaders are involved in the discussions, it shows real commitment and sends a message that is okay to talk about race in the workplace.
4. Mistakes are part of being human, but the willingness to learn and adapt is key to moving the conversation along and breaking down barriers.

Read more about Eversheds Sutherland's commitment and approach to diversity and

Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner - Recruitment and early talent

Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner (BCLP) has a deep commitment to inclusion and diversity, supported by well-established goals, programs, campaigns and leadership engagement. They aim to create an environment where all our employees are valued, motivated and able to be themselves, whatever their differences might be.

What did they do?

- BCLP are in their fifth year of 'Race for Change' a tailored African-Caribbean recruitment initiative. The annual London event is aimed at African-Caribbean students interested in a career in law.

The initiative aims to provide an insight into the assessment and evaluation process, and includes three exclusive panel event talks from diverse range of people who have diverse specialisms and varying career paths. The panel ranges from those at the start of their legal careers, those that are mid careers and a senior leadership panel.

- Following the event BCLP have held further follow up events providing more detailed information on the interactive elements of the law firm recruitment process.
- BCLP have created an alumni community for attendees. Those who have joined the alumni community are provided specific resources, further guidance and networking opportunities. In January 2020, the firm ran a confidence and competency event for those wanting to up their skills on networking effectively in person and virtually.

What's next?

- BCLP plan to hold monthly workshops for the alumni community aimed at developing confidence and conversation skills on topics such as current affairs and commercial issues.
- In addition to the focus at entry level to the firm, the firm are part way through a deep dive review of retention and progression. This work will include a qualitative review and include small focus groups of black lawyers and others key colleagues to talk about experiences at BCLP with a view to implementing positive changes.

Top tips for firms waiting to develop initiatives

1. **Be open and honest** - Your people will trust you and engage with your aims and plans if they are genuine and authentic. Keep in touch with your network - EDI initiatives should never be stand alone "one hit wonders", to achieve real change and to make progress, it is important to stay connected.
2. **Collaborate** - This is a shared challenge, work together with other firms and groups to support the profession at large this will help us to achieve the best outcomes for Black people and those in other under-represented groups.

What they said

"Five years ago, I was part of a small group of professionals at then Berwin Leighton Paisner who came together to explore steps we could

take to address the under-representation of black lawyers in the profession. We agreed to hold an event specifically for black aspiring lawyers, providing practical "insider" knowledge and tips on entering and succeeding in the profession as a minority.

"While our aspiration was to increase diversity in private practice as a whole, five years on, Race for Change has made a meaningful impact at BCLP. Race for Change participants accounted for 12.5% of BCLP's 2018/9 Vacation Scheme cohort and 13% of the training contract offers made by BCLP in 2019. I hope to see that trend continue."