This blueprint distils the main recommendations of the Law Society’s Women in Leadership in Law project, collated from almost 250 roundtables in 20 jurisdictions, conducted nationally and internationally with women and men working in the legal profession.

It sets out the practical steps to develop your strategy for gender balance in your organisation and should be read in conjunction with the Women in Law Pledge. The blueprint includes particular actions for private practice and in-house practitioners, and for organisations of different sizes.

I want to thank you for your ongoing support for this project. I very much hope you will continue being a leader, advocate and, most importantly, a campaigner working together with us to help us achieve equal representation of women in senior positions in the legal services sector.

Christina Blacklaws
President

A BLUEPRINT FOR GENDER BALANCE:

1. An overarching guide

Sign up to the Women in Law Pledge and implement it:

1. Form a team by selecting champions from different levels in the organisation including a member of the senior leadership – they will be accountable for gender equality

2. Gender equality targets to be set by senior management and progress to be reported – targets should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based)

3. Create action plans to demonstrate how you will achieve your objectives

2. Steps to tackle bias

Deliver unconscious bias training to all within the organisation

- Training should be compulsory, ongoing and include senior leadership

Review and amend recruitment processes to remove unconscious bias

- Ensure that all those involved in recruiting have recently completed or revisited unconscious bias training
- This includes work allocation, programmes of sponsorship, mentoring and reverse mentoring, and internal and external networking
- Regularly analyse these policies to identify whether any particular groups of staff are adversely impacted

Support women in the workplace by ensuring policies are in place to prevent bias

- Include and enable men to champion gender equality

Create an open and supportive environment

- Form networks or groups that encourage collaboration
- Include and enable men to champion gender equality within the workplace by ensuring they play an active role in these processes

Support women in the workplace by ensuring policies are in place to prevent bias

- Include and enable men to champion gender equality

3. Steps to promote fair remuneration, equal pay and closing the gender pay gap

1. Review remuneration policies

- Ensure that the different contributions women make are financially recognised and rewarded, and that they count towards promotions
- Ensure employees are paid equally for equal work

2. Measure the ethnicity, disability, sexual-orientation and socio-economic pay gaps within the organisation

- This will create a clearer picture of the overall diversity and inclusion within the organisation and will help to measure the progress that is made

3. Use technical and digital solutions for work allocation and involve more women in work allocation decisions

- Ensure that the different contributions made by staff members’ circumstances when allocating work
- Ensure work is distributed evenly so that all staff are given access to high profile work, irrespective of who they are or how they work

4. Steps to make flexible working mainstream

1. Make flexible working available to everyone by having a clear policy for the whole organisation that is communicated to all staff

- Ensure that senior leaders within the business use flexible working to demonstrate that it can work for colleagues at all levels
- Implement objective performance measures so that flexible workers’ performance is not judged more or less favourably than their peers
- Ensure that IT equipment and support is available to enable staff to work effectively

2. Identify how working practices and the culture of the organisation may impact those with caring responsibilities, part-time employees and people with disabilities

- Consider how the timings of meetings or social gatherings may impact different groups of staff
- Identify work that could be completed from alternative locations or outside the usual office hours to enable staff to work flexibly

3. Consider how flexible working can be used by those with caring responsibilities

- Ensure that assumptions are not made about what those with caring responsibilities want or are able to do
- Ensure that existing maternity/paternity, adoption and shared parental leave policies do not adversely impact any specific group of staff
- Regularly monitor parental leave policies and the support given to returning staff to ensure that provisions are being used and fit for purpose

4. Consider introducing or enhancing alternative sourcing offerings for clients to enable lawyers with the right skills and experience to return to the workforce

- Enabling experienced lawyers to work for fixed periods or on a contract basis would allow those wishing to manage their working time to transition back to full-time work
SECTORAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. In-house

Identify measures designed to improve gender diversity across the organisation
- Set up an internal group, made up of staff at all levels, to share experiences and ways to deal with day-to-day issues, support each other and increase diversity within the organisation.

2. Smaller firms

Team up with other firms to improve gender balance
- Share practical insights and best practice between firms to develop ideas and use each other’s day-to-day experiences.

Celebrate what senior men are doing on diversity and mentoring
- Use men as champions of change to normalise and encourage the uptake of policies like flexible working by everyone within the firm.

Join local law society initiatives
- Use the experiences of others and understand how different practices and initiatives could work within your own firm.

3. Larger firms

Develop ‘Returner Programmes’ for all staff
- Target both male and female staff who have been out of the profession for three years or more to increase the willingness of women to return to frontline work after career breaks.

Ensure work allocation is fair and non-billable work is financially recognised and rewarded
- Ensure women and men are consistently given the opportunity to secure high impact assignments over a long period of time, irrespective of their working pattern.

Ensure all work is taken into account when considering promotions and rewards
- Conduct appropriate and well-rounded assessments encompassing all the contributions made towards the business. This includes non-chargeable but important work, client and practice development, corporate and social responsibility and knowledge management.

Encourage staff at all levels to use policies aimed at helping to achieve gender equality
- Encourage men to use parental leave
- Encourage all staff to work flexibly and adapt the working culture to ensure those who do work flexibly are included and supported.

We hope this blueprint gives you insights, ideas and practical steps to start taking action for gender equality today!

As we have seen throughout the Women in Leadership in Law project, change often starts with a conversation. So please do talk to your senior leaders, managers and colleagues about this and discuss what actions you can implement together.

The Law Society remains committed to carry on with this important work, so keep in touch and let us know about your progress: www.lawsociety.org.uk/get-in-touch

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