

THINKING DIFFERENTLY



ALLEN & OVERY

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION 2019



“A lack of diversity stifles innovation and puts a block on creativity. No business that wants to build a sustainable future can afford to constrain itself in that way.”

Wim Dejonghe, Senior Partner

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WHY DO WE NEED MORE ACTION ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE BUSINESS WORLD?

We can't be advanced if we are not diverse



Bringing together people who think differently is the key to creating a resilient, innovative and advanced firm. That means taking a close look at culture.

Diversity is a subject that has been a priority for both Andrew Ballheimer and me since we took over the leadership of A&O in 2016.

For me, you can look at diversity in two ways. You can see it as the right thing to do – a fundamental part of being a progressive, socially responsible business – a view I take.

If that argument doesn't work for you then there are compelling business reasons. In McKinsey's Delivering Through Diversity 2017 report – based on 100 public companies in 12 countries – those in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity were 33% more likely to have above average profitability; for gender diversity it was 21%. More diverse organisations tend to make better-informed decisions, create superior solutions for their customers or clients and attract the best talent.

The legal industry, like the wider professional services sector, has more work to do here.

For about a century, our industry has been dominated by white, heterosexual men, many with wives at home looking after the kids. Working culture has largely developed around the needs of this one group.

Although times have changed, elements of that culture remain engrained, not least because we're all susceptible to

unconscious bias and have a tendency to recruit for 'fit' – hiring people we feel comfortable with because they look like us and come from backgrounds we share.

By doing this we seclude ourselves from a very large pool of talent – people who can bring new and challenging perspectives to the business, both in how we organise ourselves and in how we work with our clients.

A lack of diversity stifles innovation and puts a block on creativity. No business that wants to build a sustainable future can afford to constrain itself in that way.

Indeed I would argue very strongly that we cannot aspire to be a truly advanced law firm unless we continuously challenge ourselves with a different range of perspectives.



**A&O HAS MOVED UP
OVER 100 PLACES IN
STONEWALL'S WORKPLACE
EQUALITY INDEX SINCE
ENTERING TWO YEARS AGO**

BROADER PROGRESS

If this assessment sounds a little bleak, it's really important to be clear about the progress we have made, particularly since making diversity one of our strategic priorities.

Our initial focus was on improving the gender balance at partner level, as well as on race and ethnicity, LGBT+ inclusion and disability – all of which remain a work in progress.

But diversity is broader than that. "Diversity means tapping the talent of people from different social, academic and cultural backgrounds as well."

In the markets where we can, we're now actively recruiting more people with STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) degrees into teams like Litigation, IP and Life Sciences. We're also looking for people with computing skills to help us develop products in our Markets Innovation Group, and people with business experience to join our new A&O Consulting team. This recognises that in the years ahead legal services will be delivered not only by lawyers but by a broader range of people, highly capable in other areas like technology and process management as well as the law.

We are also the first law firm – and one of relatively few businesses – to introduce Situational Judgement Tests to our graduate and wider recruitment programmes. The behavioural tests we used in the past tended to favour students from more privileged backgrounds who'd had the opportunity to build up a rich CV. The new approach uses real work scenarios to test for potential rather than 'fit', allowing people to demonstrate their raw abilities whatever their background.

Equally, we're doing a lot to encourage more flexible and alternative working practices, and working with our partners to include a people and diversity objective as part of their performance goals.

All of this helps us build the culture we want at A&O.

THE CONTINUING CHALLENGE

We should be pleased with the progress we're making, but realistic. We're not yet where we want to be.

Clients are routinely demanding more diverse teams and, as recent [media reports show](#), are now coming together in the U.S. and UK to publicly demand more action from our profession.

We have to make faster progress, but if it were simple we'd have done it by now.

Fundamentally, it comes down to a question of culture. It's about changing attitudes and mindsets, both at the recruitment stage and throughout people's careers, so that we can retain people of diverse backgrounds, and ensure more women come forward as partnership candidates. To do that we need to really understand the extra hurdles people can face and take the right action.

We also need to make sure we have a fully inclusive environment where everybody feels safe and where bad behaviour is called out. We've introduced a global Code of Conduct and an independent, confidential speaking-up service available 24/7 to help achieve that.

We're having the right conversations about all of this across A&O and we need to keep investing in it – each one of us.

We will keep building on what we have achieved because valuing differences is one sure way we will stay ahead – developing stronger client relationships, and attracting and keeping the talented people who will be the lawyers and support professionals of the future.

It will also make A&O a richer and more interesting place to work. That's important to me and to so many others in the firm.

“Valuing differences is one sure way we will stay ahead.”



Wim Dejonghe

Senior Partner – London

Tel +44 20 3088 2270

wim.dejonghe@allenoverly.com

The first step is *understanding* the barriers that exist



Guled Yusuf

Senior Associate – London
Tel +44 20 3088 3502
guled.yusuf@allenoverly.com



Jean Lee

Partner – Washington, D.C.
Tel +1 202 683 3898
jean.lee@allenoverly.com



Hervé Ekué

Managing Partner – Paris
Tel +33 1 40 06 53 59
herve.ekue@allenoverly.com



Lindani Mthembu

Director and Counsel – Johannesburg
Tel +27 10 597 9887
lindani.mthembu@allenoverly.com



Madhu Mirpuri

Marketing and Communications
Manager, Asia Pacific – Hong Kong
Tel +852 2974 7377
madhu.mirpuri@allenoverly.com

At the highest levels of the legal industry, even in the most international firms, people from minority backgrounds are under-represented. Movement on this issue has been slow, but A&O – like many firms – is trying to make faster progress.

Last year, senior associate Guled Yusuf took part in a series of interviews with colleagues from A&O's BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) network in the UK.

The [interviews](#) were the start of more open and candid dialogue about race and ethnicity at A&O, supported by the launch of the BAME network and the start of reporting our ethnicity pay gap in the UK (becoming the first law firm to do so).

In the U.S., the Black and Latinx Affinity Group marked Black History Month and Martin Luther King Jr. Day with events in New York and Washington, D.C., following the success and growth of the Asian Affinity Group. Activity is growing across the Netherlands, South Africa and other offices too.

If understanding the issues and barriers that exist for people within each country is complex, the international picture is even more so. But as a global firm that's what we must try to do. So here, Guled talks to four colleagues from major cities about their personal stories and how we can start to find more answers.

DIFFERENT JOURNEYS

Guled was born in Switzerland to Somali parents. After spending time in the U.S. and Europe, his parents found themselves unable

to return to Somalia because of the increasing violence in the build up to the civil war.

Guled was raised in New York, Vienna, Ottawa and Paris, and believes this upbringing taught him to consider and appreciate different perspectives. "Growing up outside of my own country and culture meant I always had to adapt. That's made it easier to work with a wide mix of colleagues and clients. I hope it's also taught me to be open-minded and receptive to new ideas."

Jean is the daughter of Korean immigrants who came to the U.S. in the 1960s. Her parents met at the University of Illinois, married and settled in the Washington, D.C. area, where she and her brother were born and raised.

"The business of D.C. is politics and law, and that definitely had a lot to do with my decision to go to law school," Jean says. She wanted to do transactional work with an international angle and found her niche in project finance, something she specialises in at A&O today.

Hervé's family is originally from Benin, West Africa. His grandfather secured French citizenship and moved the family to Bordeaux, after which his parents worked as Beninese and French diplomats, as well as for international bodies such as the

Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations. Born in Cameroon, Hervé spent time in France and Benin before moving to Ethiopia and attending an international school in Addis Ababa for ten years, then returning to France.

“I was privileged to see that the world is extremely diverse. That helps you to adapt whenever you go to a new place,” Hervé says, adding that he saw some dramatic events as he grew up.

“In my first six months in Ethiopia, there was a revolution going on. Experiencing that has certainly shaped me – I take things in a relatively cool and calm way.”

Lindani’s story has, not surprisingly, been shaped by South Africa’s history. “As far as diversity here is concerned, it’s a sad story for those who know it,” he says. Despite being part of the majority population, the black community remain very much in the minority in the corporate world, especially at senior levels. At times it has been “quite a lonely environment,” he says.

“We don’t have many people we can identify with in the corporate world – many of my colleagues have come from a different space and went to schools that taught a much broader syllabus. I had a different set of norms.”

Born in the rural Eastern Cape, and growing up in a town that started off as a sugarcane farm, he felt the constraints of the limited school curriculum. He focused on history and geography (only eight subjects were taught), which meant his career options were relatively narrow – the police, nursing or, perhaps, the law.

Madhu felt cultural constraints in a different way. Born into a “very traditional” Hindu family in Hong Kong, her parents struggled with the idea of their fourth and youngest child going to university and into work. “My mum’s attitude was: you need to learn how to be a housewife and daughter-in-law. But that never sat comfortably with me,” she says.

When she did marry, her husband had a different view. Though also Indian by origin, he had been brought up in the UK and told her: “Don’t limit yourself because of society’s expectations.” Her mother-in-law serves as an inspiration – still working in her

late 60s while having played a full role as a mother. “Her story is incredible. She has taken her family to where it is today.”

Madhu began her career in financial PR and worked in Tokyo for two years before returning to Hong Kong. She joined A&O in 2018, attracted by the firm’s approach to diversity and pro bono work.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Jean is clear where she has faced her biggest career and life challenge to date – deciding to move to Seoul to open A&O’s first office in South Korea when her son was just eight months old.

“Pounding the pavements, building the office and the team at the same time as raising a child was very challenging,” she says. Her husband, an engineer, decided to become a stay-at-home dad, a move that helped the family through a testing time but caused some surprise among family and friends.

The most enjoyable part of her five-year assignment was working with a diverse group of people. The office was small so it was essential to call on the support of colleagues from across A&O’s Asia Pacific network. Overcoming challenges is all about perspective, she says. “I tried to look beyond the challenge, focusing on the fun side of things and the progress we made with the new office. It was good to know I wasn’t on my own.”

Was it difficult to work in Seoul as a Korean-American, born and raised in D.C.? “Koreans are culturally very open. If you make an effort, they’re very willing to build a relationship, whether that’s as a friend or client. To be frank, it also helped that I like karaoke!”

Going back to D.C. the contrast was clear – “more people, but I missed the diversity,” she says.

Lindani also sees a contrast in his career experiences, comparing his time working for a U.S. firm in New York and being with A&O, to working at a South African firm. “About four or five years ago, I was working in organisations where it felt certain opportunities were reserved for certain types of people. It helps to be working in a place now where decisions are based on merit and everyone is expected to uphold the firm’s values.”

“In my first six months in Ethiopia, there was a revolution going on. Experiencing that has certainly shaped me – I take things in a relatively cool and calm way.”

Hervé Ekué,
Managing Partner, Paris



He believes his career success is down to an individual drive and the robust stance taken by South Africa to re-balance the past. “However, certain legal requirements and business incentives in South Africa now sometimes lead to black lawyers being hired to bolster numbers. So I take the view that I’m either going to be useful to an organisation or go somewhere else. I don’t just want to sit there and be part of the furniture.”

Hervé’s perspective of his career progression is similar. French firms have traditionally been conservative, he says, with relatively little gender or ethnic diversity (although he does see things improving). He has many highly capable friends who only achieved their potential by working for the more international, outward-looking organisations.

Hervé himself trained with Clifford Chance. “If I had started with a local firm, I would probably not be a partner now.”

His way of overcoming barriers has been to focus on his work.

“Most people don’t see me as black. I could be blue or green. Most just look at me as an expert in my field.

“I’ve never had a problem with identity. My attitude has always been, if you’re not happy with my colour that is your issue.”

In Hong Kong, Madhu sees fewer challenges now. “It’s a very cosmopolitan city,” she says. “Thirty years ago there was significant discrimination and exclusion of Indians, but I’ve never experienced problems or barriers in my career.”

For Madhu, her focus is more on continuing to be successful in work now that she is a mother of two children.

“While my society may give me a hard time for working full-time, I am focused on the long-term value for my children. Ultimately, I want to break the mould and be an inspiration for my children, particularly my daughter.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPONSORSHIP

While personal experiences vary greatly, one trend links all five people. Each had someone who, at a crucial time, supported their progression.

“One of my biggest hopes in setting up the BAME network in the UK,” says Guled, “is that we can offer junior colleagues an opportunity to meet mentors and sponsors.

“It’s not always possible to find people with the same background, so it’s less a case of focusing on a cultural or ethnic identity, and more a case of looking for someone in a role that interests you and who’s willing to share their experiences.”

Jean is also very clear about the importance of sponsorship. “I’ve had multiple mentors and role-models, inside and outside the firm, all of whom have been important.”

“The key to progressing in private practice is to have a strong sponsor – someone who has your back and will speak up for you in the wider partnership.”

Her own sponsor was a “cheerleader”, “a great coach”, and he made sure she got good client exposure. But those relationships are hard to form, she stresses. “You both need to put effort into it. There has to be a good personal fit and a willingness to really engage and invest time. It doesn’t just happen organically.”

Lindani believes he has been lucky in this regard. “Without someone giving you guidance you are likely to end up as a statistic,” he says. Of the black trainees he started with back in 2006, only one is still practising. His own sponsor has supported him at several firms where they have worked together, including now at A&O. “As a black lawyer in South Africa, it’s not always easy to find a sponsor who will take you under their wing. I was one of the exceptions.”

Hervé got backing as a trainee from a senior associate (later a partner), who admired a paper he had published and urged Clifford Chance to hire him. His sponsor also planted the seed that Hervé should aim for partnership. As his career has progressed, he’s also seen the importance of building a strong

“Ultimately, I want to break the mould and be an inspiration for my children, particularly my daughter.”

Madhu Mirpuri, Marketing and Communications Manager, Asia Pacific





**JEAN LEE, PARTNER,
WASHINGTON, D.C.**



**LINDANI MTHEMBU,
DIRECTOR AND COUNSEL,
JOHANNESBURG**

personal network, with a group of people in law, politics and business he can turn to for support and advice.

For Madhu, it was a female boss at her first job who proved crucial to her development – testing ideas with her, including her in key meetings and giving her encouragement. “I was really worried about being left adrift when my boss moved on. But she just told me, ‘you are ready’. I’ve been lucky. I’ve had really inspirational people around me,” she says.

DRIVERS OF CHANGE

So where do the barriers in the legal profession exist? Is it about soft barriers and cultural factors? Is it the lack of role models at the top of the profession or a continuing strand of unconscious bias?

“All of these factors together,” says Jean. “Late recognition of the problem is another issue, so I’m glad we’re talking about this now.”

“Changing behaviour is difficult for anybody. So is recognising unconscious bias – that natural inclination to favour people more like you. But all of these things conspire to create very tangible barriers for people from different backgrounds, making it that much harder to get recognised for your talent,” she says.

Guled agrees. “Doing a good job only gets you so far. If senior colleagues unconsciously perceive a gulf between themselves and a

junior colleague – because they’re a different gender or ethnicity – it can make it harder for the junior person to access the opportunities and sponsorship that are critical to career progression.”

Jean sees growing client pressure on the issue of diversity and inclusion as a positive driver for change. “I welcome that pressure. It’s a very good tool to bring about faster progress.”

Lindani has also seen that client pressure first-hand. Diversity scorecards introduced as part of Black Economic Empowerment legislation are helping to change behaviours, he says. “A company that embraces diversity will not want to do business with one that does not.”

For Hervé, it is crucial that A&O keeps looking at its own performance, not least as black representation in the partnership remains low. “By no means should we give priority to people just because of their race, but there are certainly more things we can do.”

He also stresses the need to promote socio-economic diversity – looking for people from different social and educational backgrounds – as well as focusing on race and gender.

“The first step,” Guled adds, “is understanding the barriers that exist – if they didn’t exist, the picture at the top would be different.”

“We need to put our heads together and find answers. Junior colleagues are excited that we’re starting to do this and they will expect to see real change.”

JUST BE YOURSELF

So what advice is there for young people from minority backgrounds starting their careers today? The answers are very similar.

“Take an interest in different traditions and don’t be afraid to be different,” says Madhu. “Be ambitious and surround yourself with people who inspire you, not pull you down.”

Jean’s advice is to have confidence. “You’ve earned your place and have every right to the opportunities that brings. Recognise those opportunities when they come and create them for yourself when they don’t.

“Don’t shy away from the different voice and perspective you bring. The more perspectives we can throw at a problem, the better and more reasoned the solution will be,” she says.

For Hervé, the key lies in being recognised for your practice. “Focus on your work, but always be yourself and implement your dreams.”

It’s the message he gave to colleagues when elected as managing partner in Paris in 2018.

“I told them, the only way I can make my strategy work is by being myself. If it doesn’t work out you can always choose someone else.”

Lindani agrees:

“At the end of the day, we are who we are. The work we do will guide us and help us to progress. You don’t have to lose your identity to fit in.”



“We need to put our heads together and find answers.”

Guled Yusuf, Senior Associate, London

How does your background influence your thinking?



“Growing up outside of my own country and culture meant I always had to adapt. That’s made it easier to work with a wide mix of colleagues and clients. I hope it’s also taught me to be open-minded and receptive to new ideas.”

Guled Yusuf, Senior Associate, London



“I grew up in an environment with people from different backgrounds, nationalities, religions. My friends are from Mali, Sweden, Ethiopia, France, Spain and more. I genuinely believe that we enrich our work environments and ourselves by having greater diversity.”

Hervé Ekué, Managing Partner, Paris



“My background has shown me that progress can be made within as short a timespan as one generation, so it really is worth fighting for what you believe in.”

Louise Hennessey, Senior Associate, London



“I started work in a professional services firm in 1984. The intake was 50:50. None of the women stayed to be partners, including me. This gives me the passion to change things for women joining now.”

Alison Temperley, author and expert on women’s development programmes



*“My background growing up as a minority in the U.S. has helped me appreciate the value in approaching issues and problems from **a perspective that is not otherwise represented** in the situation or discussion.”*

Jean Lee, Partner, Washington, D.C.



*“Contrasting growing up gay in the ‘80s, in a region of the UK that lacked diversity, with my life now in a multi-cultural, cosmopolitan and (generally) tolerant city like London, gives me an optimistic outlook on how **people’s opinions on all manner of things can change** over time.”*

Jim Ford, Partner, London



*“My background gives me a different way to **see, proceed and make decisions** – especially big decisions in the business.”*

Gyorgy Hiesz, Business Services Officer, Sydney



*“I am from a developing part of the world. Things do not always work in the way they should, or in the way they’re expected to in the developed world. **There is not always a black and white approach to issues** and there is not always a precedent in dealing with matters. I therefore approach things more pragmatically.”*

Lindani Mthembu, Counsel and Director, Johannesburg



*“**‘Things don’t have to be this way’** was something a very wise teacher told me when I said that I didn’t think certain career options were open to me. It’s something I have said to myself ever since, whether thinking about my own career or how I can help others achieve their potential.”*

Jo Dooley, Head of Diversity & Inclusion, London



We won't become complacent

2018 saw A&O ranked as one of the top 13 global employers for LGBT+ inclusion. Progress is being made, but our commitment must continue.

On the ground floor of A&O's London office, a wall roughly 2m x 4m stands by the main welcome desks. On it are nearly 300 signatures underneath the banner: *'I am an ally for my LGBT colleagues'*.

A&O's 'allies wall', as it has become known, went up in June 2016 to mark the relaunch of the firm's international LGBT+ network, A&Out, and the start of its formal allies programme.

"We wanted to make a visible statement to everyone coming into A&O that we are completely supportive of our LGBT+ community," explains Jo Dooley, A&O's Head of Diversity & Inclusion.

"We thought the wall would stay up for a week or so around our A&Out relaunch event, but nearly three years later it's still here. We had such an overwhelmingly positive response from A&O people, clients and others coming into the building that we didn't want to take it down."

In fact on a recent visit, Gareth Thomas – former Welsh Rugby international and the first openly gay rugby player – commented on how welcome the wall made him feel when giving a talk to A&O about inclusion and resilience on World Mental Health Day.

The reaction to the allies wall in London has led to similar walls going up in A&O's New York, Hong Kong, Sydney and Belfast offices – an indication, Jo believes, of how strongly people feel about showing support for LGBT+ colleagues.

A STRATEGIC BUSINESS PRIORITY

The reinvigoration of A&Out in 2016 followed the decision by Wim Dejonghe and Andrew Ballheimer – then newly elected senior and managing partners – to make diversity and inclusion one of their top business priorities, with LGBT+ inclusion a key area of focus globally.

"Promoting LGBT+ diversity brings so many benefits to us as a business," says partner and A&Out's global chair Jim Ford.

"If everyone had the same background and experiences, you'd query whether we're really fostering creativity and building the strongest teams for our clients."

"A&Out had already existed for around a decade," Jim explains, "but we wanted to increase the level and visibility of support, and ensure it was an active network internationally. While progress has been made in many parts of the world, in some countries it's still very hard to be openly out. So it was important to demonstrate that, wherever you are in A&O, you can feel safe and supported in being yourself at work."

THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLIES

A key part of building this inclusive culture has been encouraging people across the firm – whether LGBT+ or not – to openly support LGBT+ colleagues.

"We'd always had support," says Jim, "but the allies programme



Jo Dooley

Head of Diversity & Inclusion – London
Tel +44 20 3088 4392
jo.dooley@allenoverly.com



Jim Ford

Partner and A&Out Global Chair – London
Tel +44 20 3088 4797
jim.ford@allenoverly.com



Elaine Johnston

Partner – New York
Tel +1 212 610 6388
elaine.johnston@allenoverly.com



Gyorgy Hiesz

Business Services Officer and
A&Out Committee Member – Sydney
Tel +612 9373 7626
gyorgy.hiesz@allenoverly.com



recognises how important that support is in creating an open and friendly environment at work, so that people aren't wasting their energy trying to hide who they really are."

This is particularly important in some of the smaller offices where only one or two people identify as LGBT+. "But if we get ten or 15 allies in that office, we then get the traction we need to hold networking and client events at a local level," he says.

Gyorgy Hiesz, a Business Services Officer in Sydney, agrees. "I joined A&Out because, as an LGBT+ employee, I wanted to belong to a firm-wide community and use it to make sure we have good support both within and outside of A&O, especially in countries where we have offices but where the local laws or customs don't support LGBT+ employees.

"I've always been a confident person outside of work," says Gyorgy, "but being part of this network has given me more courage and actually helped me improve my work on many levels. Allies play a greater role than they perhaps realise."

A TOP GLOBAL EMPLOYER

The response to A&O's allies programme has exceeded initial expectations; 160 people signed the allies wall in London within its first week, and A&Out now has 750 formal allies, alongside its 100-plus members around the world.

Progress has been recognised by Stonewall, the leading LGBT+ rights organisation, who judged A&O to be one of only 13 'Top Global Employers' for workplace inclusion in 2018.

And in January this year, A&O was ranked in the top 40 of over 430 companies in Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index – the most comprehensive audit of workplace culture for LGBT+ staff in the UK.

IT'S NOT 'JOB DONE'

But, as New York partner and A&Out member Elaine Johnston acknowledges, it's by no means 'job done' for LGBT+ equality. The latest World Economic Forum figures show gay relationships

are still illegal in 73 countries worldwide, and in eight of them can result in the death penalty.

"Even in countries where they are legal, the LGBT+ community can be denied basic rights and face persecution," Elaine says, "so a growing area of A&O's pro bono work is defending LGBT+ rights around the world, with a number of high profile successes recently." (See [page 15](#)).

THE T IN LGBT+

"There's more we want to do within our own business too," says Elaine. "Take, for example, people who identify as trans. There's less understanding about the trans community so we've worked on that over the past year."

In the U.S., a 'Trans 101' presentation was offered to all staff. "We didn't know how much interest there would be in the event," Elaine says, "but on the day there was standing-room only in our New York office. It was a really interesting and thought-provoking event."

In London, following the success of an A&Out event on trans equality, all staff working in Front of House, hospitality and HR received training on how to support and respect trans individuals. A guide to 'The T in LGBT+' was also published internally to provide advice on how to support colleagues, and a session was held to discuss the issues parents and carers of gender-diverse children can face.

A CLEAR AND EXPLICIT COMMITMENT

Against the backdrop of this progress, Elaine believes we still need to keep in mind that many LGBT+ people experience isolation and exclusion in their lives. "It can still be really hard for people to be open if they're unsure of how their families, friends or colleagues will react. This is why we continue to be clear and explicit about our support of and commitment to our LGBT+ community."

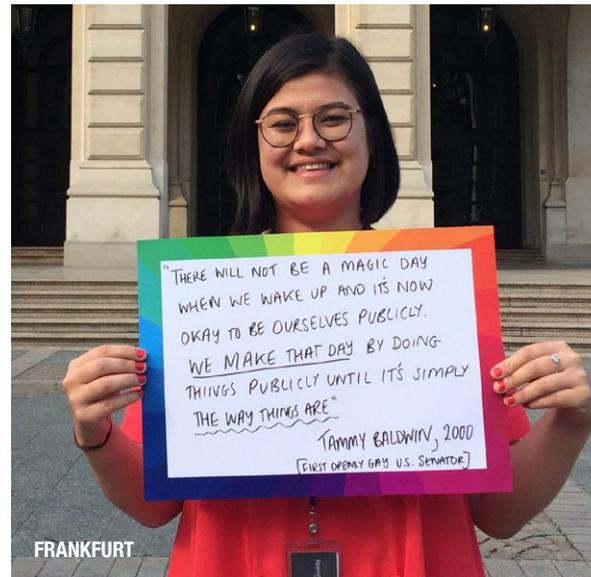
Jo Dooley agrees. "A&O came together for the Pride events in Belfast, Prague, London and New York this year, as well as lots of other festivals and events around the world, like Wear It Purple Day in Australia and Pink Season in Asia, often alongside our clients. The photos and stories we get from across the network are inspiring and help reinforce that we have a truly global network."

A&O has also held LGBT+ networking events with clients in New York and London, and in 2017 became a founding member of LGBT+ LegalNetworkGermany, a group of law firms promoting LGBT+ equality across the sector.

"There's more we want to do," says Jo. "This year, for example, we want to focus on the bisexual community. They can sometimes be overlooked, so it's important they feel confident in being open and understood within our business. We're also addressing the issue of mental health and wellbeing for the LGBT+ community – for example with the talk Gareth Thomas gave and a mental health first aid session in London – as well as having continued LGBT+ representation in our reverse-mentoring programme.

"We've made a lot of progress across our international network over the past couple of years, but we certainly won't become complacent."





Defending LGBT+ rights around the world

A&O has taken on a growing number of pro bono cases on LGBT+ rights, with some important successes in recent years.

In the **UK**, associate Josh Little was awarded a LawWorks Pro Bono Award for his, and the wider A&O team's, work to help campaign for an historic amendment in Parliament to broaden the scope of the disregarding scheme for historical gay sex offences. This granted automatic statutory pardons to thousands of deceased gay and bi men in England and Wales, and extended the disregarding scheme to Northern Ireland for the first time. The scheme became known as 'Turing's Law' after the World War II Enigma code-breaker, Alan Turing, who committed suicide in 1954 following a conviction for gross indecency.

A&O's team, led by partner Andrew Denny, advised Stonewall on how the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 could be extended to clear a wider range of offences not covered by the original scheme and which should never have been criminalised, such as holding hands or kissing in public. This also bolstered moves to introduce a similar scheme in Scotland, which became law in June 2018.

In **Hong Kong**, A&O has worked with a number of law firms and investment banks to successfully support a legal challenge to the immigration rules in Hong Kong relating to dependant visas for same-sex spouses.

The challenge was brought by a woman in a same-sex civil partnership whose spouse was denied a dependant visa on the ground that 'spouse' relates to a marriage between a man and a woman.

The intervention of A&O and a number of other major employers helped to raise the profile of the judicial review proceedings by arguing that such a policy would discourage talented people from living and working in Hong Kong, and therefore impact businesses' ability to create strong and diverse teams.

In July 2018, the Court of Final Appeal made a landmark decision, upholding the right of all people, regardless of sexual orientation, to obtain dependant visas for their spouses to live and work in Hong Kong – a significant result for LGBT+ equality.

Building on this, A&O is now conducting a substantial piece of pro bono research to identify policies and legislation in Hong Kong – such as preferential tax treatment and access to IVF – that favour married couples over same-sex or co-habiting couples. The findings will be significant. Only heterosexual marriage is legally recognised at all levels of Hong Kong law. People in other types of relationships – whether same-sex marriage or civil partnerships and cohabitation, regardless of gender – generally do not have the same rights, benefits or obligations. This research is intended to provide a basis for discussions on the express recognition of these relationships under Hong Kong law.

In the **U.S.**, A&O has taken on many pro bono cases for LGBT+ asylum seekers and is currently working on five cases with Immigration Equality – the largest LGBT+ immigrants' rights organisation in the U.S. – to advance the asylum applications of people fleeing countries hostile towards the LGBT+ community.

These are complex cases that require research into the evolving country conditions to prove they are unsafe for the LGBT+ community, as well as finding witnesses who can attest to clients' persecution. They have been further complicated recently by significant changes in U.S. immigration policy.

In the case of one client – a gay married couple from Latin America, one of whom is HIV-positive – just as our team had submitted all necessary documentation and requested the asylum interview, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service reversed its prioritisation of interviewees from a 'last in, first out' policy, to 'first in, first out'. This has left many asylum seekers, including our clients, facing a delay of months or years. We are working with Immigration Equality to resolve these issues, but without support it is increasingly difficult for vulnerable LGBT+ people to navigate the changing immigration landscape.

In **Belfast**, A&Out members have produced a 'Gay Straight Alliance Toolkit' for local schools, in partnership with three organisations – Cara-Friend, ShoutOut and Hazelwood Integrated College – who provide support for LGBT+ young people in Northern Ireland.

The Toolkit has supported LGBT+ education workshops in schools across Northern Ireland and comes as research by Cara-Friend shows that 68% of LGBT+ students have experienced bullying on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We have also helped fund its LGBTQ+ Inclusive Schools Programme/ShoutOut workshop, which works to stop homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying.



TRANSATLANTIC LEGAL AWARDS 2018

A&O highly commended in the Pro Bono & CSR category for supporting complex asylum applications to the U.S. from LGBT+ and HIV-positive applicants



LAWWORKS JUNIOR DIVISION PRO BONO AWARD 2017

London associate Josh Little recognised for advising Stonewall on 'Turning's Law' in the UK



LEGAL ISLAND AWARDS 2019

Belfast office shortlisted for Best Employer in Equality and Diversity





JIM FORD RECOGNISED IN THE FINANCIAL TIMES' OUTstanding LIST, 2018 AND 2017

This recognises 100 role models in senior positions within global businesses who have been openly out during their careers and served as an inspiration for younger people.



LONDON



NEW YORK



PARIS

The support is there but it doesn't make you feel different

MATT SHORT is an associate in London and para-Alpine skier. He's had both the flexibility to pursue his Paralympic dream alongside his A&O career, and the support to deal with his disability.

It's January 2017. Matt Short has spent most of his day in an Austrian hotel closing a major transaction for one of A&O's international media clients.

Above him, the slalom and downhill courses are waiting.

Balancing a demanding career as a young banking lawyer with trying to qualify for the British Paralympic team for the PyeongChang Paralympics 2018 has, he admits, proved tricky at times.

"There have been times when I've been on the phone to a trainee from a deserted chair-lift in the Alps saying, 'you need to talk to this partner and do x, y and z,'" he recalls. "I tried to keep it infrequent but usually did a few things each day."

Matt's journey into the law and para-Alpine skiing has not been an easy one – but in both cases, disability hasn't held him back.

In 2007 he was 16 and had just finished his GCSEs. A pain in his ankle that summer, initially diagnosed as a stress fracture in his heel bone, quickly left him struggling to walk. By November that year, Matt had been diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer.

Four months of intensive chemotherapy followed. "Everybody tells you chemo is a horrible experience, which it is. But the worst thing is it's really boring!" he says.

It came as a huge shock when his surgeon recommended an amputation to protect against a relapse and also to enable Matt to stay active with the help of a prosthetic leg. "For someone very, very keen on sport, I was determined I wasn't going to lose a limb," he says.

He spent the next eight weeks researching his options, only deciding to proceed with amputation on the day of surgery.

Despite having missed a large part of school, Matt completed his A-Levels and gained a place at Leicester University to read law.

But 2010 brought a new setback as he began his second year. Scans showed there was a small tumour on his lung. The relapse meant further intense chemotherapy, surgery and a longer period of recovery. Even so, he went back to university far earlier than his medical team thought possible.

JUGGLING COMPETING DEMANDS

It was at this point Matt got his first taste of juggling a legal and sporting career. During his second year he applied successfully for a place on A&O's vacation scheme and, through Disability Snowsport UK, got the chance to try ski racing for the first time – his prosthetic leg meaning contact sports were now out of the question.

His speed caught the eye of the British Disabled Ski Team coach, who encouraged him to pursue ski racing.

"This was all in 2012," Matt says. "I absolutely loved it and was totally hooked. When I started the accelerated Legal Practice Course in 2013, I talked to A&O's graduate recruitment partner and the HR team about the possibility of occasionally taking a couple of days off to attend races. They were fantastic."

QUALIFYING FOR PARALYMPICS GB

Matt started as a trainee in 2014, deciding not to do much skiing in that first year. After settling in, he then used his annual holiday allowance to attend races and build his skill and profile in the sport.

"My plan was to spend my post-qualification leave training in the Alps and then taking part in the French and British championships," he says.

In the latter, he came away with silver medals in the Giant Slalom and the Slalom. "I was pretty chuffed with that, especially as I hadn't been able to train much because of trying to balance everything."

On the strength of those achievements, the British team coach took him aside and said: "We can't have you turning up and beating the guys on the formal training programme.

Frankly, it doesn't look very good!"

Matt was asked to join the programme but that meant committing to 60 days a year on the snow – more than double his annual leave entitlement, and at an extremely busy time as a newly qualified lawyer.

He explored options with Banking partner Greg Brown and the HR team and was offered additional discretionary leave for the forthcoming year.

During that time, Matt's performances earned him qualification for the British team at the World Championships in January 2017 – where he finished in the top 25 in Slalom and Giant Slalom – and then a place on the long list for Paralympics GB.

This came, however, with a warning from his coaches: "We don't know how you're managing to balance this with work demands, but you won't make it to PyeongChang if you carry on like this. You'll get run down."

Matt admits it was getting difficult. Often he would leave work at the end of a busy week, jump on a plane, drive for two hours, sleep, and then have one day on the snow before a race the next day.

The message from his coaches was – if you are serious about this you've got to find a way to go full-time.

SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITY

He knew that asking to take a six-month unpaid sabbatical was highly unusual so early in his career, but A&O's response was again, he says, amazing. The partners were all supportive and agreed he should take time out and return after the Paralympics.

"They knew this was a once-in-a-four-year chance and there was no knowing, come the next games, whether I'd be healthy or fit enough to race. The feeling was – you've got to seize this opportunity."

Sadly, 2017 saw exceptionally heavy snow in the Alps – great for holiday skiers, but not for racing.

With too much snow to clear, lots of events were cancelled and valuable qualification opportunities disappeared.

Matt had switched to Downhill and Super-G racing – the higher speeds but wider turns put less painful pressure on his leg, he explains. Everything hung on the World Cup Finals in Canada where he was one of three skiers vying for a place on the British team. But, although his times were improving fastest of the three, he didn't quite make the final cut. Soon after, Matt called Greg to ask if he could come back to work a little earlier than planned. "Six months without pay will do that to you!"

In reality, it felt good to return to A&O, the team, the mental challenges of work and the buzz of being on a transaction.

"It will sound like hyperbole, but it isn't," he says. "I missed it. It's quite an emotional thing to come through an unsuccessful selection process, so to return to a team who were very happy to have me back was really quite comforting."

WHERE NEXT?

Matt has taken a year off skiing to focus on his career and staying well. He is "50/50" about whether to pick it up again but says the next Paralympics could still be a target. "It depends on whether I can find a good way to balance my career and my passion for the sport.

"A&O has gone out of its way to make things possible for me."

It is the same, he says, for how he has been supported with his disability.

"It's important to know that, whatever you're dealing with, you can get support. But it's all to ensure that, once some adjustments are made, you're then treated exactly the same as everyone else."

"I like that approach – you know support is there whenever it's needed, but it doesn't make you feel different in any way.

"I know there's flexibility for people to pursue interests outside of work – the biggest challenge is often having the confidence to ask. You really don't have to be years into your career before you can ask."

In his experience, support will be there. And that commitment to helping people pursue other interests brings long-term benefits.

"If you take that approach as a business, what you get back is so much more."

It takes time, consistency and tenacity

A year on from announcing a more ambitious approach to improving gender balance at partnership level, Denise Gibson, partner, and Alison Temperley, managing partner at ATD partners, share their thoughts on what the picture now is at A&O.

In March 2018, Wim Dejonghe and Andrew Ballheimer launched a new strategy to increase the proportion of women at the top levels of A&O – the result of 18 months of consultation and planning.

With higher targets of 30% partnership candidates, 40% women at all other levels and a commitment to look beyond those targets – plus much closer management of the pipeline of female talent – A&O's renewed gender strategy is bolder and more determined than before.

The need for greater action came from the recognition that, despite women making up 50% of the graduate intake for over a decade, change at the top was not happening fast enough. In 2015, 15% of partners globally were women; by 2018 it was 18%. A real concern was that, without stronger action, the numbers would hover around that level for the foreseeable future.

"For many years the business world believed that time would change the gender balance at the top," says Alison Temperley, author of *Inside Knowledge: How Women Can Thrive in Professional Services Firms*. "Then we thought women behaving like men would make the desired change. I remember firms wanting programmes to 'fix' the women. None of them worked."

DO FIRMS REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HOLDING WOMEN BACK?

Alison, who has designed and delivered women's leadership programmes for many top professional services organisations, believes a large part of the problem is that again and again businesses assume the lack of female leaders is all about motherhood.

"Let's tackle that question, first. We assume that women still take the largest share of childcare responsibilities in their families," says Alison, "but I question the assumption that this is the single issue – and also whether it's an out-dated view. Not all women are or will be mothers. And not all mothers tone down their ambition and want to work differently from their male peers after having children."

Denise Gibson, partner and A&O Board member, agrees. "Motherhood may be a factor, particularly in professional services where career paths have historically been quite linear. This means that the time when people would traditionally push for partnership is the same time many women may be trying to have children."

DENISE GIBSON, PARTNER ►



“One way we’re tackling this is to show there are different paths to partnership – not just the traditional one – and to encourage more flexible working practices,” she says.

But Denise agrees that the gender imbalance at the top of professional services firms is not only about women having children.

“I personally think ‘motherhood’ is used as a convenient explanation for the fact that firms still haven’t redressed the gender imbalance. I’ve seen many talented women step away long before motherhood is a factor – some because they simply don’t see what lies ahead as attractive, others because there’s a lack of self-belief coupled with a lack of sponsorship to empower them to navigate their way to the top.”

From personal experience, Denise knows motherhood and career ambition are not mutually exclusive.

“Does anyone really believe that women at A&O feel less ambitious after having children? My desire to work at the top of my field didn’t just disappear when I had my daughters. In many respects it drives me harder. By the time they enter the workforce, I hope it’s unfathomable to them that gender diversity was even on the agenda, because it will just be normal.”

THE NEED TO LISTEN

As part of the groundwork for the renewed strategy, A&O established a global committee of 21 partners to drive action and progress, and spent 18 months consulting and listening to women at different levels across the business.

“This is a really important point,” says Denise. “We need to listen rather than assume we know what women are experiencing – particularly as the picture is different internationally.”

“Out-dated perceptions about why fewer women make it to partnership are part of the reason progress has been slow for the past 20 years.”

LEADERSHIP, SPONSORSHIP AND BRAVERY

Shifting the gender balance at the top of professional service firms is what Alison describes as a ‘sand-bag issue’, with a number of interlocking factors that need to be addressed, and it will take time, persistence and vision. The approach focuses on three things: leadership, sponsorship and bravery.

“Leaders at all levels need to be clear why change is needed if they want their business to be a true meritocracy.

“Clients and firms want the best lawyers and leaders, and most no longer believe they’re predominately male.”

“Leaders also need to be more aware of what is going on by using (but not being driven by) metrics, as well as what they see culturally within their business.”

This isn’t just an issue when diversity is on the agenda, Alison says. It’s important in a broader sense when work is being allocated and informal discussions are taking place. “Leaders need to watch out for biases and be prepared to challenge them.”

At an individual level, sponsorship is critically important in providing high-performing women with the advice and support they need to thrive, and in ensuring work and client opportunities are allocated in a way that considers development needs, business cases for progression and flexible working arrangements.

“Men and women may need different support throughout their careers, so it’s important sponsors are alive to that,” says Alison. “It’s human nature to support somebody who reminds us of our younger selves, so in a business with over 80% men at the top, that can often result in men receiving more effective sponsorship and informal mentoring.”

This is likely to be a totally unconscious bias for most, Alison points out. But it emphasises the need for good, transparent processes around developing talent. And it’s one of the reasons that Wim and Andrew implemented more rigorous reporting requirements across every office and practice group, as well as greater accountability from all partners.

“This is not about positive discrimination. We’re in a war for talent and we need to keep the best people in our business.”

Denise Gibson, Partner, London

Managing partners now report twice a year on their pipeline of talent, as well as the specific sponsorship and development plans they have in place, and how programmes like unconscious bias training are being implemented.

“Asking for more responsibility and accountability from all partners was one of the biggest shifts in the renewed gender strategy,” says Denise. “Monitoring the talent pipeline from a junior level means we eliminate the chance of getting to the partnership selection process and finding too few of our talented women have remained in the business. Proactive reporting provides a clear picture and means each partner needs to own it.”

TIME FOR BRAVERY

This leads to the bravery point. Leaders have to make decisions others may not be comfortable with, like, for example, setting targets. A&O’s initial target is to see at least 30% women enter the partnership selection process every year. If practice groups are unable to achieve this by 2021, they can expect to lose some of their partner slots.

“I know many people – men and women – question the need for targets,” says Denise. “There’s a concern that women’s achievements will be undermined by a perception that they’ve progressed because of their gender rather than their talent. Or that setting targets means lowering the bar for quality.

“I’ve heard too many times that ‘it’s not fashionable to be a white man in professional services today’. I’m sorry but I don’t buy that.

“This is not about positive discrimination. We’re in a war for talent and we need to keep the best people in our business.”

To retain our best people, Denise believes we all need to be aware that certain barriers can hold people back. “Everyone should expect a level playing field so that we can put more diverse candidates through to our partnership selection process. Once in the process, everyone goes through the same hoops and is assessed on the merits of their personal and business case.”

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Bravery, however, is not just down to business leaders.

“Some women become reluctant to articulate successes and express ambitions long before they start their careers,” Alison explains. “In many societies, women who step forward are judged more harshly and described as ‘pushy’ or ‘bossy’ – language that just isn’t applied to men in the same way.”

This reluctance leads to some women being overlooked in the workplace so it’s important, Denise and Alison agree, for women to be vocal early on about their aspirations and the support they want during their careers.

“I always encourage the women I mentor to try and ‘sit at the table’,” says Denise, “even when this feels a bit uncomfortable. Amy Cuddy’s TED talk, [‘Fake It Till You Make It’](#) really resonated with me. Make sure people know what you are doing and don’t be afraid to celebrate your successes. Do it in a way that you are comfortable with – but do it!”

In addition to stepping forward, Denise says, her plea is for women to stay with the firm and be the leaders of the future.

“Do it your way, challenge the firm, tell us how to make it work for you. I want to see more examples of people who’ve done things differently to the person before them.”

SO IS A&O MAKING PROGRESS?

Alison has been working with A&O for three years now, including running the firm’s Emerging Female Leaders programme around the world, and believes the firm has made substantial progress.

“I see Wim and Andrew actively engaged in getting more women into the partnership selection process,” she says, “not so that they can jump easier hurdles, but so that they’re in the race. This is brave and innovative.”

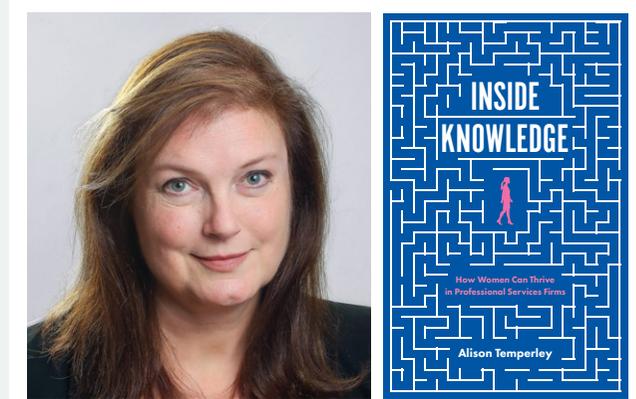
She has also been impressed by A&O’s focus on sponsorship within the broader gender strategy. “It’s addressing the fact that you can’t just ask women to push – you have to ‘pull’ by ensuring high potential women have effective sponsors.”

This is where A&O’s programme, Upping Your Sponsorship Game, has been important in supporting partners to be strong sponsors. “I can really see the difference this is making to women on the Emerging Female Leaders programme,” Alison says.

Also key is targeting women at junior levels through Women Making Their Mark and, new in 2018, the Stepping Forward programme for mid-level associates. These provide structured support and enable women to form networks earlier in their careers, as well as providing the firm with real information on women’s experiences internationally.

For Denise, the most encouraging indication of progress is the change she has witnessed in the attitudes, conversations and levels of engagement across A&O.

“People buy in to the fact that improving gender balance is about doing what is right and fair, and that this really is a business imperative. But I’m not patting us on the back just yet,” she adds.



▲ **ALISON TEMPERLEY IS MANAGING PARTNER AT ATD PARTNERS,** a business specialising in leadership development and executive coaching with extensive experience of working with women in professional service firms globally. Alison is the author of *‘Inside Knowledge – How Women Can Thrive in Professional Service Firms’* and is a chartered accountant, qualifying and working in senior roles for several years at PwC.

“We now have to take the progress we’ve made and the wave of support we have and ensure it actually delivers the results we need.”

“Even then we can’t be complacent – we must keep on evolving our people strategy.”

CHALLENGES STILL REMAIN

A challenge Alison sees is ensuring men don’t feel alienated by the focus on gender balance, or worry that their own chances for progression are diminished.

“Wanting to ensure A&O is a real meritocracy, in which no group has to overcome additional hurdles, is not anti-men,” Alison says. “Creating better gender balance – and more diversity broadly – will ensure success for the entire business.”

“Our clients are demanding this of us,” says Denise, “because they know mixed teams produce better results. If we can’t show improvements in gender balance and diversity overall, it will curb our ability to win work.”

A growing concern is also that sponsorship and mentoring are becoming harder in the #MeToo era, with reports in the media that men are increasingly wary of sponsoring junior women.

“I hope common sense prevails here,” says Alison, “otherwise the business world will start going backwards.

“I’m also worried that gender equality will become ‘old news’ before change and progress is fully embedded within business culture.”

A CULTURE THAT WORKS FOR EVERYONE

That is why culture, in a broad sense, is the other crucial component of A&O’s gender strategy.

“There’s a huge benefit to both men and women – lawyers and support professionals alike – in building a culture where people

can develop their careers in ways that suit their lives,” says Denise.

“Underpinning our gender work is the need to develop a stronger culture of flexible working across the business, for men as much as women. So we want all reasonable requests for alternative working arrangements to be a ‘yes’, unless there are strong business reasons preventing it.”

2018 saw A&O complete the roll-out of iFlex across every office for all lawyers and support professionals working in roles that can be done in an agile way. This allows informal flexible working, both in terms of time and location. The roll-out of a new suite of IT systems will make remote working easier too.

“I work from home one day a week, like a lot of people now,” Denise says. “We need both men and women to take up these opportunities to demonstrate that flexibility doesn’t harm career progression.”

“It might take a little longer, and it might take an alternative path, but you can absolutely still get there.”

SO WILL A&O SUCCEED IN ITS AMBITIONS?

“The energy and focus is there, and the bravery is spreading,” says Alison. “I believe A&O will get there but it will take time, consistency and tenacity.”

Denise believes so too. “We’ve achieved our aim of having at least 30% women in all leadership positions at A&O. I was elected to the Board while on maternity leave, which tells me things are changing.

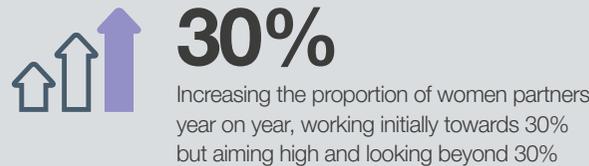
“Forty-three per cent of our senior associates are women, and we have a pretty even gender balance across our senior support professionals. So it’s really about seeing the picture change at partner level now, and making sure that change lasts into the future. I believe it will happen.”

A&O leadership figures and gender strategy targets

A&O has achieved strong representation of women in leadership positions across the business:



A&O’s gender strategy targets:



Denise Gibson
Partner – London
Tel +44 20 3088 4231
denise.gibson@allenoverly.com



- OVER THE PAST YEAR, DENISE GIBSON HAS BEEN:**
- ranked in The Lawyer Hot 100 for 2019
 - awarded Lawyer of the Year at the Legal Business Awards 2018
 - ranked in the top 100 Female Executives in the Financial Times
 - ranked in the ‘HERoes Champions of Women in Business’ list

LOUISE HENNESSEY is a senior associate in the International Capital Markets practice. She spent five years based in Singapore, working across the Asia Pacific region, before returning to London in 2016. Louise was one of the first women to join A&O's Emerging Female Leaders programme.

In 2018 she became the chair of *WiN*, A&O's women's network in London.



The case for *change*

My first experience of the Emerging Female Leaders (EFL) programme back in 2016 wasn't at all what I expected.

I thought it would be focused on women's initiatives and career planning, but actually it was much more about coming together with a group of women at similar stages of their careers, building a strong network, coaching and sharing experiences.

Even though we were from different offices and practice groups, and had taken varied career paths up to that point, there was a sense of some common experiences across our group.

One issue we felt we wanted to engage with the firm on was how to make faster progress towards increasing the number of women in the partnership.

ACCELERATING CHANGE

Along with the second cohort of EFLs, in 2017 we produced a paper that articulated some of the underlying issues we felt needed more consideration. We presented this to senior partners from across the practice groups.

This paper became one of the key drivers in A&O's renewed gender strategy.

We looked at a number of issues like flexible working, supporting parents and work allocation. A&O was addressing many of these already, but we wanted to make our voices and experiences heard to ensure the focus was in the right place.

Many of the EFLs already had children and were very clear they were still ambitious to progress in their careers, so it seemed the real challenge was the final stage of progressing from

successful senior associate/counsel to partnership candidate. We focused a lot on what we saw as a critical factor at that stage: sponsorship.

When the new gender strategy was presented to us at the start of 2018, we were genuinely surprised at how far it went, particularly in setting concrete targets and holding partners accountable.

"It was clear the firm had listened to our real life examples and was taking action."

QUOTAS CHANGE THE WAY DECISIONS ARE MADE

I know quotas are controversial, but they force change. If every practice group has to put forward 30% women for the partnership process, then partners will look more broadly at their teams and consider women who might otherwise have been overlooked, perhaps because they didn't have a sponsor or make their ambitions known as loudly, or because they took time out in their career.

"Women don't want to be promoted because of quotas, but there is an imbalance to redress. It's important to remember that what the firm is doing is simply ensuring more women are considered."

The 30% quota applies to women being put forward for the partnership process, rather than the number of women actually being promoted. With over 40% women in the Emerging Leaders programme, it seemed clear to us that this level should be more closely reflected in partnership candidates.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE SPONSORS

My hope is that the support women now get earlier on at A&O – through the Women Making Their Mark and Stepping Forward programmes, plus women’s networks, reverse mentoring and other initiatives – will encourage women to speak up more about their career ambitions, so that we can find the opportunities to help them achieve those ambitions. That’s when the importance of having a sponsor really kicks in.

I’ve had a lot of support from female partners over the years. This has happened organically and has been so important, but men need to be involved too if things are going to change.

Men can and do sponsor women effectively, but sometimes it has to be more deliberate. It means looking further, beyond the people you might naturally lean towards because they’re similar to you. Targets and quotas make people look that bit harder.

CHANGE IS HAPPENING

We have to be realistic that we’re trying to change the way business and society have operated for centuries, but change is happening. If I see an all-white, male team on a pitch now it massively jumps out at me. When I started out, I wouldn’t have even noticed it. That’s the importance of this work, to make us more aware of where things have been going wrong.

I think the increase in flexible working will also help us retain more women – and men. Informal flexible working – iFlexing – is completely normal now. “So many more people have formalised alternative working arrangements that help them manage their lives better.”

Seeing more women make it to the top is very important for our junior women. It is what will inspire them to stick with their careers in law.

That’s one of the objectives for WiN, our women’s network. We want to share real life examples around the firm, to show people the different ways that others have made it work – not just women

and not just partners – but across different roles and departments.

I also believe it’s really important to have male representatives on our WiN committee (currently we have two associates and a partner), because if men aren’t part of the dialogue then we’ll end up with a pretty weird situation of women sticking with women, and men sticking with men. Our aim is to support women but it’s also to work with men. So many families are sharing responsibilities more evenly now, so careers, work/life balance, childcare – it’s a conversation for everybody.

MY ADVICE FOR WOMEN STARTING THEIR CAREERS NOW

Make sure you enjoy what you do. Avoid just putting your head down at work and instead make sure you’ve got balance in your life, whatever that means to you. But do focus on building your confidence through as much experience as you can get.

“Speak up about what you want and need along the way. You’ll always find people willing to talk to you here.”

I found a mentor through A&O’s Alumni Programme – she was a former A&O partner in Asia and really helped me make some tricky decisions over the years.

HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

My broad hope for society is that opportunities for young people from all social backgrounds increase. I was the first in my family to go to university and I was told ‘people like me’ didn’t go to universities like Oxford, let alone have a legal career in the City. This turned out to be wrong and I want to see young people from diverse backgrounds – social and ethnic – be supported to take advantage of the increasing opportunities opening up through more awareness of how important diversity and inclusion are.

I also hope that we all find greater flexibility in how we work, so that there’s more balance. We all work hard, but for the benefit of everyone I believe having more flexibility in careers and working practices is key to bringing about better gender balance.

“Women don’t want to be promoted because of quotas, but there is an imbalance to redress. It’s important to remember that what the firm is doing is simply ensuring more women are considered.”

Louise Hennessey

Senior Associate – London

Tel +44 20 3088 3485

louise.hennessey@allenoverly.com

Why do we *need more action* on diversity and inclusion in the business world?



*“My wife and I have two daughters – as much as I would dislike people judging them differently because they are women, I also **dislike people judging me or any lawyer from a minority group for being different.** Diversity is a source of innovation and brings around the table new ways of thinking. We will miss opportunities if we are not diverse. The international aspect of A&O and the diversity that brings is key to me.”*

Hervé Ekué, Managing Partner, Paris



*“The business world and the world generally are more complex than they have ever been and **we need diverse thinking to respond to that.** Overlooking talented people because they don’t fit the mould is not the smart (or the right!) thing to do.”*

Jo Dooley, Head of Diversity & Inclusion, London



*“Almost too many reasons to mention! **Better originality of thought,** more innovative and robust solutions for our clients, a happier and more productive workforce, a more vibrant working environment – not to mention that it’s simply the right thing to do.”*

Jim Ford, Partner, London



*“Businesses can only effectively serve society if they actually **reflect the society they are serving.**”*

Louise Hennessey, Senior Associate, London



“Talent is evenly spread across gender, race, sexual orientation and all other groups, and in today's complex businesses we need the most talented leaders. Warren Buffett stated one of the reasons for his great success was that he was only competing with half the population. What more could we do if we harness all the talent?”

Alison Temperley, author and expert on women's development programmes



*“It would not be sustainable for the business/legal world to alienate itself from the wider society in which we all live and to which **we should be contributing our diverse talents.**”*

Jean Lee, Partner, Washington, D.C.



“It is the right thing to do. Business exists in diverse environments, so it is right for business to reflect that diversity and mirror the demographics that surround it.”

Lindani Mthembu, Counsel and Director, Johannesburg



*“Businesses have a lot of power and influence. This brings with it **a strong tool to change perceptions** around diversity.”*

Gyorgy Hiesz, Business Services Officer, Sydney



*“Above all, it's the right thing to do. It is also well established that **diverse companies attract the best talent** by virtue of casting a wider net, enjoy more employee satisfaction and improve decision making and client satisfaction.”*

Guled Yusuf, Senior Associate, London

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Jo Dooley

Head of Diversity & Inclusion – London

Tel +44 20 3088 4392

jo.dooley@allenoverly.com

Alice Lewis

Diversity & Inclusion Manager – London

Tel +20 3088 1904

alice.lewis@allenoverly.com

Sarah Harris

Diversity & Inclusion Manager, Asia Pacific – Sydney

Tel +612 9373 7711

sarah.harris@allenoverly.com

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