

Good lawyers are ten a penny

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If all you want from your lawyer is technical excellence then you are spoilt for choice. However, clients want and expect more than that. Today, a 'good' lawyer is defined by their broader business knowledge and empathy for their client, resulting in pragmatic advice and counsel grounded in commercial reality. And more. As the growing movement around the O shaped lawyer testifies, businesses want an attitudinal shift in how we as advisers approach our relationships. As the programme says it is the person they want to see first and the lawyer second.

That is why in Browne Jacobson one of the leading pillars of our new National Powerhouse strategy is to demonstrate our personality to the world and to build into all that we do our espoused values of inclusion, ambition, collaboration, pragmatism, fairness and a down to earth approach to all our relationships.

But nice words alone won't cut it and will sound increasingly hollow if we don't back it up with unambiguous commitments, so that others can measure the depth of our ambition and resolve.

So the values we are known for, and now articulated in our strategy, are beginning to find their traction in our diversity and inclusion programmes, our environmental agenda, our community action initiatives, the build of a stronger employee wellbeing and engagement proposition and the development of an ethical decision making framework that will guide us all in Browne Jacobson in how we go about our work.

Of equal importance, how we meet our values is increasingly embedded in our performance strategy. We now measure partner and senior leader performance, in part, based on how well they have demonstrated our values in their own actions and words, with all promotion and reward decisions subject to close scrutiny ensuring balance and fairness across all our communities. In addition, a new onboarding process will provide a deeper dive into the culture of our business, accelerating new joiners' successful orientation into the firm.

The values agenda is immense, multifaceted and intrinsically intertwined and the more we do, the more we realise how much there is still to do. That said we can look back on a number of achievements with pride: The achievement of 5th place in the Social Mobility Foundation Index in 2020, a jump of 77 places from our first submission the previous year; achieving net carbon neutrality across the firm at the end of 2020; through the adoption of anonymised applications and rejection of academic qualifications as a basis of selection in 2018, a significant change in the diversity of our trainee intake, with persons of colour making up 44% of our 2021 intake (up from 5% in 2018) and with greater representation of trainees from socially disadvantaged backgrounds; our partnership with the University of Nottingham socio-linguistics team on testing our recruitment collateral for non-inclusive language and expression (and in time to be extended to all our people policies) and, most recently, the use of contextualised recruitment methods to appreciate fully the whole applicant.

And beyond the stats there are the individual stories that bring our values to life and take the agenda from intellectual appreciation to emotional engagement; from head to heart. To illustrate, we have publicly supported one of our associate lawyers, a successful gamer, who has created an online movement to achieve greater opportunity for women in the industry and greater gender representation in the games themselves. This has attracted both national and international media attention and from Ubisoft, one of the largest gaming companies in the world.

Our progress spurs us on and the next 12 months will see a major new awareness raising programme around conscious inclusion and anti-racism, going beyond training and building a safe-space dialogue for us to explore how our backgrounds and life experiences influence our attitude to others. In addition, we will be launching a new national work experience programme focused on students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds as well as extending our national partnership with the National Literacy Trust on key programmes for young readers and the 16-18 group.

This is our story so far and, although we can look back positively on our achievements, we must not get ahead of ourselves. There remain fundamental issues for us yet to tackle and allowing any sense of organisational complacency to creep in would be letting down our people, clients and communities. So, our journey continues...

[Declan Vaughan](#), People Director, Browne Jacobson LLP.

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Contact



Henrietta Scott

Head of Marketing

PRTeam@brownejacobson.com

+44 (0)330 045 2299

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