

Browne Jacobson launches its 2025 REACH mentoring programme to support aspiring Black lawyers

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Thirteen aspiring Black lawyers have been offered the opportunity to kickstart their careers in the legal profession after signing up to a pioneering mentoring programme run by Browne Jacobson.

Last week, the UK and Ireland law firm launched the 2025 cohort of its award-winning REACH (Race, Equality and Cultural Heritage) mentoring programme. Since being piloted in 2022, the scheme has supported 44 individuals, with 14 of those going on to secure employment within the business.

REACH aims to address the disproportionate under-representation of Black lawyers working in UK law firms, which stands at just 3%, by growing, nurturing and creating a sustainable pipeline of future Black talent.

Each of this year's 13 students, aged 16 and over, will enrol on a six-month programme in which they are paired with a mentor from Browne Jacobson or Bupa, one of its partners.

Mentors will share their skills, knowledge and insights to help them gain an understanding of what it is like to work in the legal profession. The programme also includes a week's work experience placement in one of Browne Jacobson's offices.

To mark the 2025 REACH launch, Browne Jacobson held an event for the new students at its Birmingham office on Thursday 3 April. It included talks from prominent barristers Dr Sally Penni MBE and Shaun Wallace, as well as the Birmingham Black Lawyers CIC.

Bridget Tatham, Partner at Browne Jacobson and REACH programme sponsor, said:

"Black people are still disproportionately under-represented in the legal profession, particularly in senior roles. We are committed to changing this landscape and making the legal profession accessible to everyone, regardless of their race, gender, or background."

"The REACH mentoring programme is co-created with our REACH community to increase the representation of Black talent at all levels across our firm."

"This programme is not just about kickstarting careers, it's about ensuring Black lawyers thrive at all levels of our firm and beyond".

Collaborating with universities and The Tyro Lawyer mentoring programme has allowed Browne Jacobson to identify under-represented students and offer programme places to those who are most in need of the opportunity.

Since REACH was first piloted in March 2022, the proportion of Black trainees at Browne Jacobson has increased from none in 2016 to 35% in 2023, 35% in 2024 and 45% in 2025.

The firm has also audited recruitment processes to understand where applicants from Black backgrounds have been adversely impacted and implemented initiatives which create a fairer playing field for all.

These include the anonymisation of training contract and apprenticeship applications, removal of minimum academic grade requirements simply to make an application, and use of a contextualised recruitment system (CRS) to gain a deeper appreciation of candidates' backgrounds and potential disadvantages.

The introduction of a 'second look' policy also means that candidates initially set to be marked as unsuccessful are reconsidered through the lens the contextual data gained from the CRS.

Oliver Holmes, Head of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Browne Jacobson, added:

"We value having a workforce that reflects the clients we serve and communities in which we operate. We aim to be the most inclusive and diverse law firm in the UK and Ireland, striving to build a culture in which everyone feels they belong and where they can thrive, fully appreciated and valued for their strengths and differences.

"When we launched our diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) strategy in 2021, we wanted to translate Browne Jacobson's values into tangible impacts and expand our remit as a law firm at the forefront of society's biggest issues. Our REACH programme is only one of the initiatives we have in place as part of our commitment to increase diversity at the firm."

REACH has won numerous awards, including Best Initiative to Attract and Retain Talent at the Legal500 ESG Awards, and Innovative Approach to DEI at enei's Inclusivity Excellence Awards.

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