

# Looking beneath the surface

**T**hat law firm leadership is defined by homogeneity is an undeniable and unwelcome truth. Attune to this, many in the industry have made a push to ensure 'diversity and inclusiveness' is more than just a mantra, and that the best talent is hired and promoted irrespective

of their demographics. This latest best practice series installment explains what some of the Wibl group's sponsors and members are doing to create a culture in which difference is truly valued.

## Arthur Cox

By head of HR **Ruth D'Alton**

**A**s a firm we are committed to creating and developing an inclusive and diverse workplace where individuals are valued and supported. Last year, the managing partner appointed two diversity partners to head up this initiative. Since then, we have championed a wide range of programmes to promote gender, LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender], ability and health diversity.

These have included the first Irish rollout of fully paid shared parenting leave, the introduction of a Helping Parents Booklet, two parenting courses, membership of GLEN [gay and lesbian equality network], and a series of talks on LGBT matters which have included some high profile figures. We also signed the Diversity Charter Ireland and have participated in a European-wide study on gender diversity at work. The launch of our Employee Assistance Programme, which has been very well received, featured another high profile speaker on this topic. Going forward, our immediate plans include holding focus groups with members of staff to



Ruth D'Alton

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get feedback on how we can improve our diversity initiatives further. Initial feedback has been

that this programme is actively changing the culture of the firm in a very positive way.

## DLA Piper

By diversity & inclusion manager **Mitra Janes**

**W**hen we talk about diversity, we're referring to all the ways in which we are different – not just the differences we can see, such as gender or race. Actually, people who look very different often behave in similar ways, either because they have been hired because they 'fit' into a particular firm, or because they have assimilated into a firm's culture. We need to focus on all aspects of diversity including working style, personality, talents, life experiences and background. It is through nurturing and leveraging these differences that we translate diversity into better business outcomes; for us that means providing a broader and better range of solutions for our clients.

All too often, organisations will focus on diversity without considering inclusion. Failing to create a culture where difference is genuinely valued, where everyone is given an opportunity to contribute and have their voice heard can feel not just unwelcoming, but in some cases hostile.



Mitra Janes

As human beings, we have a natural preference for similarity and we resist change. We all need

to challenge ourselves in this regard, by increasing our personal awareness and moving out of our comfort zone.

At DLA Piper we know that unconscious bias can impact all our decision-making processes, from who we hire, to who gets promoted and who gets the opportunity to pitch. We are therefore focussing on unconscious bias training, providing workshops for all partners, e-learning for everyone in the firm and incorporating unconscious bias training into our Career Academy programme for lawyers and business support staff.

We recognise that we have to be prepared to make real structural changes rather than introducing a series of initiatives. For us at DLA Piper, this has meant developing and implementing comprehensive diversity and inclusion action plans in every region, and focussing on agile working practices, work allocation and recruitment processes.

# NautaDutilh

By HR manager **Esther Ledermann** and HR officer **Coralie Gablin**

In Luxembourg, 60 % of our workforce hails from overseas. It's part of the country's DNA to work in a multicultural team. Our team is truly diverse, and we are convinced that diversity leads to better results. We are proud that the first female lawyer in The Netherlands, Adolphine Kok, worked at NautaDutilh. 'Viewing matters from an unexpected perspective' has been the firm's vision since 1724. At Nautadutilh, we do not assess individuals based on their ethnicity, gender or national identity. Instead, our recruitment department focusses on both technical and soft skills; to be at the top, we think and look further. We have a personal approach, provide individual coaching, and view each candidate or employee as a valued and unique individual. We respect all opinions and strive to identify strengths, while leaving enough room for each person to evolve both personally and professionally within our organisation. In our opinion, if you allow your employees to develop their strengths, they will feel more secure and achieve their full potential.

We are all different and can learn from each



Esther Ledermann



Coralie Gablin

other. At the end of the day, we work and communicate better, and can achieve the best re-

sults for our clients, as a team. Diversity and inclusion are the keys to a win-win situation.

# Shearman & Sterling

By partner **Lisa Brill**

**S**hearman & Sterling values and promotes a diverse and inclusive workplace – it is part of the fabric of our identity as a global firm. In 1992 we established a diversity and inclusion committee to raise awareness and advance the benefits of a work environment with varied perspectives and backgrounds – both to our clients and to our lawyers and also to our staff around the world. Shearman & Sterling was among the first BigLaw firms to take this step.

In 2000, the committee created a dedicated diversity team led by a full-time global diversity director. The firm, committee and diversity team have worked tirelessly to promote diversity and inclusion within the firm and the greater legal community, making our programme the consistently award-winning initiative it is today.

Today, Shearman & Sterling is home to numerous inclusion networks as part of our comprehensive diversity and inclusion efforts. The groups are associate-led and are open to all who would like to participate. Our newest initiative is Sterling Pride Ally, which was started by Sterling Pride, our LGBT inclusion network. Launched with Straight for Equality in the Workplace 101, the first of a two-part programme presented by PFLAG [parents, families and friends of lesbians and gays] in October 2014, Sterling Pride Ally advances the discussion on how to be an effective



Lisa Brill

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ally and the positive impact these efforts have on the workplace and beyond. The value of our inclusion networks cannot be overstated. We know that when people feel accepted and valued as individuals, they are empowered to do their best work.

Our pioneering recognition of the need for a diverse set of perspectives, one that is truly reflective of the business world at large, has put us ahead of the curve in our ability to align with the priorities of our clients. Our recent recognition by Bank of America's legal department with its 2015 Diversity and Inclusion Business Council Award proves that outstanding legal work goes hand in hand with an inclusive workplace.

# Sidley Austin

By partner **Steven Pitt**

**S**idley Austin is in the business of selling knowledge and advice to a sophisticated client base. As such, it makes clear commercial sense to ensure we have access to the most talented individuals, and to break down barriers to their recruitment and retention. Clients are also increasingly demanding (often as part of their panel recruitment processes or on pitches for new business) that firms they engage provide tangible proof of the effectiveness of their policies to promote diversity. Apart from the obvious commercial benefits, opening up the profession to the best talent regardless of background or other characteristics and, once recruited, ensuring that the working environment enables them to flourish, is simply the right thing to do.

Sidley's diversity steering group is made up of people from all areas of our firm; from support staff to partners – anyone who has a genuine interest in the promotion of diversity and inclusion. Through this group, the firm's London office is now in its second year of partnering with the BLD Foundation in its First Head Start and Legal Launch Pad programmes. The BLD Foundation works with black, minority ethnic and socio-economically disadvantaged young

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Steven Pitt

people; groups which have traditionally been significantly underrepresented in the legal profession.

Our collaboration is already bearing fruit, with two new trainees due to start with us

shortly. While they secured their training contracts on merit alone, had we not been part of these initiatives, we may never have had the chance to offer these talented individuals the opportunity to become part of Sidley.

# White & Case

By counsel **Tallat Hussain**

**O**ur gender balance objectives are included in our firmwide business plan, and integrated into our firm processes and policies. We have found that this approach to align our focus has enabled us to better engage with our partners, associates, line managers and business services employees, and to drive progress towards reaching our goals.

In developing and implementing the diversity initiative at White & Case, we believe that leading the way means looking outside the firm and into the communities in which we function. Our pro bono practice is an excellent example of how our day-to-day operations as a law firm and our core legal activities come together and reflect our commitment to programmes such as our diversity initiative. As the chair of LINK (the black, minority and ethnic affinity group at White & Case in London), I have been lucky enough to work on diverse pro bono projects. The pro bono practice reflects the diversity of our staff as well as the numerous countries in which we have clients and offices, and of course, issues that impact women, children and other vulnerable or persecuted groups. The practice focusses on access to jus-



Tallat Hussain

tice, the rule of law and social and environmental issues.

Going from strength to strength, White & Case has now started to enhance the outreach of the human trafficking database development work we have been committed to over the past few years. The firm's anti-human trafficking initiative includes more than 200 lawyers glob-

**White & Case links diversity in the firm to diversity outside the firm**

ally. They are working on matters including a comprehensive, worldwide online database of human trafficking court cases for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the creation of a global trafficking victims' assistance hotline for Polaris Project, and surveying domestic worker rights in seven countries.

White & Case's diversity also feeds the appetite of its staff to bring diverse issues to the fore and assist in the protection of our communities. In this way White & Case links diversity in the firm to diversity outside the firm.

# Lloyds Banking Group

By global trade lawyer Evelien Visser

There are two obvious elements to diversity and inclusion (D&I). Diversity essentially encompasses all the ways in which we differ. This includes both visible differences (such as gender) and invisible differences (such as thinking styles, life experience and nationality). Inclusion revolves around valuing and respecting these differences, and the purpose of bringing these two together is to create a productive and well represented working environment.

It is this richness of colleagues' ideas, backgrounds and perspectives that makes our working environment more attractive, and in turn creates value which enables the business we support to innovate and anticipate the needs of the

## It is great to be part of an organisation that provides an inclusive and inspirational workplace

diverse customers and communities that we serve. One of our key D&I initiatives is our women's network, Breakthrough. This is hugely active across all areas of our organisation, and arranges nationwide events such as Footprints in the Snow which enable attendees to share experiences and take inspiration from each other. It is really great to be part of an organisation that provides an inclusive and inspirational workplace where colleagues can be themselves and succeed on merit flowing from a unique and personal skillset.

With thanks to IFLR's Women in Business Law Group's gold sponsors

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