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# Toolkit for Male Champions Roundtables

## Introduction

We have all suffered from unhelpful and limited pigeonholing that has been dominant in our profession for so many years and, in some real senses, progress to overcome this has been glacial.

Indeed, gender balance has become more of a generational issue as younger men cry out to be able to spend more time with their children without that being a career limiting move and young women are fed up with unhelpful assumptions and bias. The challenge of intersectionality in the workplace also adds to the barriers faced by Black and Minority Ethnic, LGBTQI+ and disabled individuals.

We want to bring about true equality of opportunity for all within our profession, to understand the barriers and create real possibilities to address them in an action-orientated and collaborative way. This will take involvement and commitment from all of us.

We believe that there is a compelling moral case and a business imperative for gender balance. Business leaders are critical to achieving lasting performance improvement; as with any priority, leadership is required to deliver lasting and meaningful change.

Engagement and support from men is critical to achieving true diversity and inclusion in the profession. Proactive participation, promotion of gender balance and efforts to understand how gender inequality limits the ability of individuals and businesses to reach their full potential are key. As champions of change, men can work towards the positive transformation of social norms and can take action to hold other men accountable and encourage them to join in.

Greater diversity of perspective can often lead to improved decision-making and outcomes.

The obstacles and barriers faced by women are not always apparent, and consequently gender diversity measures can be seen as unfair. Men who build awareness of these issues can, for example, ensure that women can be more systematically and actively included in succession plans.

The advocacy of men in gender diversity can help to build the conviction that what is good for women will be equally beneficial to men as it will result in more inclusive, healthy and supportive workplaces. This will ultimately result in the evolution of businesses, corporate cultures and performance models that are more efficient, sustainable and in line with the expectations of today's society (and clients).

Recognising that most leaders in the legal profession currently are, and have historically been, men, we also believe that male business leaders have a significant role to play in achieving gender balance.

We hope that this toolkit will offer insight and guidance on what individuals can do to accelerate the rate of progress.

The IBA acknowledges the work of the Law Society of England and Wales, upon which this toolkit is based.

## Emerging themes

**Ambition:** Despite their drive and ambition, many women reported that presumptions made about them on account of being women have damaged their careers – this was particularly perceived by women with disabilities.

**Attributes:** What is considered acceptable behaviour can vary depending on whether it is demonstrated by a man or woman; comments such as ‘aggressive’ or ‘pushy’ can be gender specific and have negative effects.

**Balancing act:** Juggling work and caring responsibilities for young and elderly relations falls predominantly, and often entirely, to women while they juggle demanding careers. They are frequently required to do ‘two jobs’ without recognition and without overlap.

**Credit:** When taking on heavy lifting or work that is seen as undesirable, appreciation or acknowledgment can be overlooked.

**Ethnicity:** Examples of the worst barriers and obstacles faced were received from members of the Black and Minority Ethnic community, who face multiple challenges related to intersectionality.

**Flexibility:** Everyone has personal matters to attend to, and these should not be overlooked, or individuals made to feel awkward for not being in the office; greater flexibility and understanding from business leaders can prevent presenteeism, engender loyalty and contribute to wellbeing. This can often be a gender issue.

**‘Masculine’ leadership:** Senior women reported that they felt required to adopt stereotypically male characteristics to progress their careers, but this is alienating to women who aspire to leadership without having to compromise their authenticity.

**Networking:** Gender-neutral and inclusive activities for networking are preferred and particular activities, such as rugby, football and golf, were perceived as alienating.

**Presumption:** Perceptions that, on the basis of gender, individuals have less motivation for adopting flexible/agile working, returning from parental leave, can be devastating to careers and especially career progression.

**Proof:** Individuals with protected characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexuality or age, face a double burden to prove themselves compared to their peers because of the stereotypes that they face.

**Role models:** There is a strong desire to see women ‘like me’ in senior leadership, women who can be related to and who are transparent about whether it is possible to reach senior leadership roles and have fulfilling personal lives.

**Solitude:** Women who have made it to the top reference their sole voice as women in the top echelons of senior leadership, and the consequent struggle to be heard or understood because of it.

**Support:** Commitment from senior leadership is required to ensure that gender diversity and inclusion is a business priority.

# Research questions for discussion

Have you faced challenges in any of the following areas, and if so, what solutions have you identified or used to address them?

## 1. **Bias (conscious and unconscious)**

Has your organisation implemented any specific action to tackle bias?

Are you seeing any visible result?

## 2. **Gender pay gap**

Has your organisation identified any tangible solutions?

## 3. **Flexible working**

A flexible working culture is critical to improving diversity in the legal profession.

Do you agree?

Has your organisation implemented flexible working?

If so, are you facing any challenges?

## 4. **Best practice**

Finally, examples of best practice include mentoring (including reverse mentoring), sponsorship, role modelling and involving more men in the equality debate.

Does this resonate with you?

Are any best practices being implemented in your organisation?

How have you measured success in each area?

# Men's roundtable agenda

## Purpose:

- Discuss the factors identified as barriers to gender balance in leadership
- Identify key actions for implementation to accelerate gender balance

## Process:

1. Welcome and introduction – ten minutes.

Facilitator introduction:

- role of facilitator and notetaker;
- background of the project and purpose of the roundtables; and
- ground rules and expectations of the meeting and attendees.

2. Participants introductions – five minutes.

Each person states their name and role.

3. Group discussion on the research questions – 30 minutes.

Have you faced challenges and identified solutions in the following areas:

- bias;
- gender pay gap;
- flexible working; and/or
- best practice.

How have you measured success in each area?

4. Group discussion on the business case for gender balance – 30 minutes.

Why is there gender imbalance?

Who is accountable for setting balance?

How can change be accelerated?

5. Calls to action: action plan for law firm leadership – 45 minutes.

- Bias.
- Gender pay gap.
- Flexible working.
- Best practice.

## **Expectations:**

- Honest dialogue.
- Adopting a practical approach to problem analysis.

## **Basic ground rules**

We recommend discussing these ground rules at the beginning of the session:

- No mobile phones.
- Open, frank and fruitful discussions in a polite manner.
- Listen to others, no interruption of speeches.
- No one-to-one conversations: it is a group discussion.
- Respect the agreed time schedule and allow time for others to speak.
- Consensus-orientated meeting (no domination).
- Active participation of everyone.
- Differences in opinions will not be taken personally.
- Voluntary participation.
- Separate the people from the ideas when reacting to discussion items.

## **Calls to action**

### **Bias**

1. Commit to asking your leadership team what steps can be taken to introduce conscious/unconscious bias prevention actions in your organisation. For example:
  - Implement appropriate training for everybody within the organisation, starting with managers.
  - Appoint champions to proactively raise awareness, talk about the impact of bias and encourage everyone to attend training.
  - Use contextual recruitment measures for all internal and external vacancies.
  - Introduce work allocation policies for all staff to eliminate bias.
2. Commit to starting a conversation with your leadership team on the impact that bias can have on appraisal/performance reviews and when opportunities or promotions are being addressed within the organisation.
3. Commit to ensuring that male and female candidates are considered for every high-level opportunity.

4. Commit to installing mixed boards and panels throughout your organisation when making decisions relating to recruitment, assessment, shortlists and promotions to take into account gender, race, age, background, ability and ethnicity.

### **Gender pay gap**

Commit to addressing the gender pay gap as a priority area in your organisation.

This should include the following:

- Develop a gender pay gap action plan for your organisation, setting out how pay gaps are being and will be addressed.
- Include partner pay alongside employee pay data in gender pay gap reporting to develop a useful benchmark.
- If your organisation does not have a gender pay gap action plan because it is not mandatory to report, offer to follow up with relevant areas of the business to ensure that tackling the gender pay gap is a priority and to support implementation.

Priorities may include the following:

- Implement flexible and agile working, and include staff input on what would work for them.
- Review policies on shared parental leave, maternity leave, paternity leave and supporting working carers.
- Introduce initiatives focused on women returning to work.
- Review policies and procedures for recruitment shortlists and interview panels.
- Review pay and reward structures, with a particular focus on performance-related bonuses, to ensure transparency and compliance with equal pay legislation.

### **Flexible working**

1. Commit to not making assumptions about what mothers, fathers or others with caring responsibilities want or are able to do, and ask your senior leadership team to identify the flexible working solutions that would be useful to the teams and individuals in your organisation; you could do this by carrying out a survey.
2. Commit to the technical solutions that would help to keep teams working flexibly.
3. Commit to asking your leadership team to assess what factors are crucial to roles to determine whether they can be done from alternate locations or outside the usual timeframe; you could implement pilot trials, and when recruiting, advertise that all flexible ways of working from all applicants will be considered.
4. Make flexible working available to everyone by focusing on contributions rather than time spent in the office, and have role models in senior positions consistently work in a flexible way to publicly lead by example and make sure that it becomes culturally acceptable without the risk of stigma.

5. Commit to asking your leadership team to create objective performance measures so that flexible workers are not judged more/less favourably than their peers. Use metrics to monitor everyone's performance.
6. Commit to asking your senior leadership team to ensure that work is evenly distributed so that everyone gets a chance to do the exciting/skill developing/high-profile/glamorous work irrespective of their working arrangements; and hold managers accountable if they delegate work unfairly.
7. Commit to taking shared parental or carer leave if you are entitled to it and share your experiences externally with others. Inform your human resources (HR) representatives about what worked well or could have been helpful.

### **Best practice**

1. Commit to countering unfair negative presumptions and low expectations that are expressed or inferred about colleagues on account of their gender or other immutable characteristic.
2. Commit to not taking part in all-male panels and offer to source a suitable female candidate to speak in your place.
3. Commit to getting involved in your internal mentorship initiative and start a conversation with your leadership team about sponsorship to actively support more junior staff to progress their career. For example, assess whether both male and female candidates are considered for every opportunity, and source other candidates if not.
4. Commit to establishing a working group to ensure accountability with the business that reports progress to the board or partnership on a regular basis.
5. Commit to asking your leadership team to make an explicit commitment to gender balance in governance charters to improve workplace culture and business performance, and to ensure that there is accountability in reaching those targets.





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