

Background

Many thanks to all those who were able to attend our roundtable on the 24 February and contributed so enthusiastically to the discussion. We know that those of you who could not join us will also be keen to hear the main takeaways.

The roundtable was an important step in bringing together senior representatives from the in-house and law firm community to discuss new ways of working together. We have deliberately chosen to adopt a collaborative mode for this initiative as it is only by working in partnership across the profession that it will be possible to achieve substantive change.

We saw the event as an opportunity to have an open and frank exchange of views, with a view to identifying practical steps that we can take together to move the dial on Diversity & Inclusion to deliver real and sustainable change in our industry.

We have identified some key themes which resonated strongly across the panel and workshop discussions (see below) along with some examples of best practice (which we can all keep front of mind to drive future actions and indeed help address our unconscious behaviours and biases).

We also tabled our draft Framework materials– an initial selection of papers which the Steering Committee General Counsel sponsored with the intent of offering guidance and support to deliver real and sustainable change across our profession. We have taken on board the feedback and have passed all feedback to the teams responsible for drafting the initial materials. Revised versions now available.

Finally, we would like to take the opportunity to express our thanks to Norman Broadbent for hosting this roundtable.

GCD&I Steering Group

Key Takeaways from the Roundtable Discussion

- The importance of **Collaboration** across the profession.
- The aim should be to move **beyond Gender**: while it provides good platform to begin the D&I discussion, there is strong support to extend the scope of the initiative even if other aspects of diversity are more difficult to measure and address.
- The need for **Transparency**: the importance of encouraging an open and honest dialogue between client and law firm and **Empowering** law firms to have open conversation with clients about what might not be working in terms of how they are currently instructed.
- D&I is about **Business Sustainability**: securing the best talent and for those people to thrive and perform at their best.
- **Authentic and Visible leadership** is critical.
- A big focus on the **Importance of Data**: both to measure D&I performance internally and against others.
- Strong support for **Uniformity of D&I data requests and Standardised Templates** but there is a need for clarity of the purpose of the data and how it will be used.
- It is important to be clear how the **data will be used and interpreted**. Notable change from a low starting point can be more telling than a “good” but static gender balance figure.
- Important to be aware that it is not just about Data but fundamentally about **Cultural Change**
- **Inclusion** is vitally important, but the key challenge is **how you measure** it.

Examples of D&I in practice

Our panel and discussion groups shared examples of some initiatives that are underway/points to watch for:

- Make the effort to **pay attention** to those less close to you and be mindful who is missing from your existing teams or connections.
- **Reverse mentoring** can be both educational and provide valuable access to sponsorship.
- **Diverse sponsorship** can also be valuable - find someone in the organization who is very different from you and make sure that is the person you invest in; you can learn a lot from this.
- Law firms might consider **blind assignment and allocation of work**, but to be successful, clients need to be supportive and be conscious of the need not to demand the same faces.
- Discuss the **make-up** of teams and look at **all levels and parts of the organisation**: D&I is not solely for a certain category of employees or team whether in-house or in law firms.
- Be open in deciding what behaviours to reward. Yes, **billable hours are important, but there are many other contributions to business value**, for example attending pitches, internal development, and of course supporting D&I initiatives.
- Be ready to **share your own story** to break down perceptions and create an environment where others feel comfortable to do the same.
- **Don't judge a book by its cover**: don't assume from appearance that everyone is the same.
- Be **mindful about engagement and instructing** work. Consider what is really needed and sustainable to provide; be explicit about what is urgent and ensure instructions are clear.
- **Look back, together**: how did the team (client and firm together) work and what are the learnings from that experience?
- Be ready for **open, sometimes uncomfortable conversations**, to get to the bottom of the cultural barriers that are restricting progress.
- **Promotions in law firms** could be part of a wider conversation with clients.
- **Relationships are about teams**, not just individuals. It is better to have two people from the law firm rather than just the lead partner to build some resilience and important for the client to meet the broader team.
- Consider **Unconscious bias training**: possibly jointly between law firms and in-house teams
- Where **AI is used as a screening stage** it is important to be mindful that there can be a built-in prejudice.
- Achieving a **level playing field** is important: for example, equal parental leave.