

# Pathways in law from schools outreach to senior partner: summary of the event

## Contents

<b>I. Stephanie Boyce: opening remarks</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Panel members' key points</b>	<b>3</b>
Dr Louise Ashley	3
Claire Maton	3
Hepzibah Adeosun	4
Oliver Hipperson	4
<b>Q&amp;A</b>	<b>5</b>
Intersectionality and outreach	5
Pandemic and flexible working	6
<b>Discussions in breakout groups</b>	<b>7</b>
Schools/college outreach and admissions to law	7
Graduate attraction and hiring	9
Early career progression	10
Progression to partner	11

# I. Stephanie Boyce: opening remarks

I. Stephanie Boyce is the President of the Law Society.

*“Events like today's, with their focus on practical recommendations and driving change, fill me with confidence that we will tackle the barriers that still exist.”*

- > The legal profession needs to be representative of society, without this it cannot be claimed that the legal system is the best it can be.
- > Many talented people from non-traditional backgrounds are unable to join the legal sector or progress within it.
- > This issue needs to be considered holistically.

*“The entire pathway from education through to the first legal job and onto progress in the sector must all be considered.”*

- > BG research has shown that those from lower socio-economic backgrounds were amongst the slowest to progress.
- > Data from the regulation authority from 2021 shows that 58% of lawyers are from a professional background, compared to 37% national average.

*“We must make sure that every person in our profession can progress, as far as their talent and ambition can take them.”*

- > Many workplaces are playing their part in addressing the gaps, through, for instance: transparent work allocation, mentoring schemes, robust data collection.
- > Law Society runs for example [Diversity Access Scheme](#) and [Social Mobility Ambassadors programme](#) and participates in [#10000BlackInterns initiative](#).

*“Outreach matters, as many young people from less advantaged backgrounds do not know legal professionals.”*

# Panel members' key points

## Dr Louise Ashley

Louise is a senior lecturer in Organisation Studies at Royal Holloway, University of London.

- > The UK is highly unequal, causing those from LSEB to struggle in finding belonging and suffering stigma and shame. These feelings can be amplified by the profession, causing a plethora of issues including mental health problems.

*“Those structures [of inequalities] critically, can exist, even when they're not rational on the basis of economic efficiency or talent, and they often become systematised, but not through any kind of conscious effort.”*

- > We must look to secondary education when improving access to law.
- > Institutionalised inequality – discrimination can be irrational, unintentional and become unconsciously systemic.
- > Within law, firms copy each other, locking in systems of institutional inequality.
- > When improving access, firms often make small, incremental changes within the system, limiting the scope and speed of change.

*“If we do want more significant changes which really open access to diverse talent, we do need to really think hard about our systems and their inadvertent effects.”*

## Claire Maton

Claire is the Head of Employability Programmes at the Sutton Trust.

*“It is a sector that's very good at best practice sharing. It's very good at collaborating, and speaking to one another.”*

- > Law excels at developing best practice and setting standards in outreach, hiring, progression and retention.
- > However, it is crucial that we are honest and transparent about expectations to candidates.

*“I think outreach can play a really important part in giving the students the opportunity to hear about the challenges in that journey. Those might be things around dominant culture. They might be levels of competitiveness. It might be working hours, but not just showing the success stories, but also the challenges that come along and giving students and young people the chance to ask questions.”*

- > Setting expectations benefits firms because it boosts retention and helps attract those who are best suited to the role.

### **Hepzibah Adeosun**

Hepzibah is an Associate at Clifford Chance LLP and a Bridge Group Trustee.

- > Attracting applicants can be improved by increasing pathways into law e.g. eliminating A Level requirements or prior law experience.
- > Virtual internships can democratise opportunities and upskill young people.
- > Removing financial barriers can democratise pathways into law – including driving down costs of SQE, encouraging employers to pay for/sponsor costs and offer grants.

*“We know that getting in is really important, but getting on is also equally as important, and it's important that employees ensure that their employees can thrive equally, no matter their economic background.”*

- > Working-class people leave the profession in higher numbers.
- > This should be addressed by providing one-to-one supervision, pastoral support and recognising intersectionality.

*“Whilst many working-class people may secure admission into elite occupations, they don't necessarily go on to achieve the same levels of success as those from more privileged backgrounds.”*

### **Oliver Hipperson**

Oliver is Partner at Clifford Chance LLP.

*“We need the data and the data needs to tell us a story, and only when we've got the data can we really engage senior management.”*

- > Inequalities in hiring must be understood by all people within a law firm. Currently class is the least talked about issue.
- > It's crucial to lead open discussions and be transparent.
- > We need to amplify credible role models.

*“One of the things we have learned from our inclusion initiatives in the firm is that it's really important to have credible role models, and for those role models to go out there and be prepared to educate.”*

- > We need to raise the understanding that we all benefit and learn from working with people from working class/diverse backgrounds.
- > These efforts need to be relayed in external communications.
- > It is important to collaborate on D&I initiatives.
- > Data collection is crucial for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and reach of D&I efforts.

## Q&A

### Intersectionality and outreach

#### Louise Ashley

*“When we when we talk about intersectionality, we think about how social identity characteristics, such as social background, social class, intersect with other identities, such as sex or gender or ethnicity. (...) on average, those intersections can have a kind of amplification effect.”*

- > The disadvantages faced by those from LSEB is less noticeable in early career stages however, many will stagnate compared to more privileged colleagues.
- > This is in part due to networking and ‘who you know’. Connected individuals can leapfrog talented minorities.

#### Claire Maton

*“Intersections are really important but because of these quite complex patterns around what we call both horizontal and vertical segregation, it's really important to use data to really understand within your own organisation what those patterns look like for different people depending on different intersections, because that enables a much more careful kind of targeting in terms of interventions.”*

- > Must understand the diversity within intakes for outreach activities – women are more motivated and likely to self-select for those programmes.
- > It is useful to highlight and share how you're addressing challenges in hiring and attraction to motivate candidates to apply.
- > Helpful to develop skills in young people around resilience and goal setting.
- > Skills development and support in outreach programmes should start as early as possible and remain consistent.
- > The pandemic has been a barrier to support and it's important to maintain supervisions and adapt to changing working conditions.

## **Pandemic and flexible working**

### **Hepzibah Adeosun**

- > There is friction in hybrid working and flexibility when it comes to maintaining quality supervision. Must make sure that working schedules are aligned to keep supervision sessions in place.
- > Could be beneficial to have two supervisors so there is always support in the office.

### **Oliver Hipperson**

- > Many trainees are reluctant to come back to the office full-time.
- > Pandemic working is what they're used to, with many entering the workplace under these conditions. Therefore, they don't see the advantages of a full office culture / environment.

*“The challenge here is not just getting people back to the office. It's creating an office environment that people want to come back to.”*

# Discussions in breakout groups

## Schools/college outreach and admissions to law

*Two groups discussed this topic and we combine the notes here.*

Participants noted difficulties and unequal access to outreach opportunities, and were in agreement about starting outreach early. A key theme in discussion was how to make outreach more realistic, so it reflects the profession more accurately.

Participants noted the **importance of starting outreach early** (as early as nursery and primary school), **raising aspirations** and instilling awareness of careers in the legal sector. As one of the participants shared from their experience, unless students know someone who has worked in the legal sector, there is no reason why students would know what the work/roles look like.

Another key point brought up by a participant working with schools was **ensuring access to outreach to everyone in schools** (rather than those who are already interested or know about the legal sector). This means working with teachers, parents and people who are key in supporting young people, and making them aware of these opportunities and programmes.

In discussing how to enable outreach to reflect the profession more accurately, participants reported a range of practice and made further suggestions.

One participant's organisation has **been showcasing honest lived experiences in outreach programmes**. This was done using role models: alumni who look like the students and come from similar backgrounds talk to students about their journey to law, challenges, rewards. Getting people to tell their stories is important, because SEB is not always visible.

Participants agreed that it was good practice to **give a balanced view of the profession**, and a number of organisations reported putting emphasis on it in their approach. They said that it is important to be honest about what it's like to work in the legal sector, even if it is hard to show more challenging aspects during work experience such as working late nights or the pressure to deliver. It was also important to tell students about the support available in the profession.

Key elements mentioned were:

- > Talking about both the good and the bad, but also considering how students will be supported
- > Explaining to students the types of support offered and that the firm is invested in their success
- > Making sure that students have support in schools/university, reassuring and reinforcing that support will also be available in their career.

Participants reported examples of what their organisations do to provide a realistic and helpful picture:

- > **Focusing on transferable skills**, which is particularly key for those who study law but do not choose a career path in law. This university's outreach emphasises how a law degree builds political thinking skills and other transferable skills and how it is useful for employability. Additionally, the work experience component seeks explicitly to develop transferable skills and name them as such (as well as provide knowledge content on various areas of law).
- > **Providing opportunities to network and hear from people in the sector.** Specifically, provide contact within outreach with current law students, who are encouraged to talk about their planned next steps after graduation and to be open about the reasons. One large law firm's outreach is consciously very transparent about challenges and provides detailed information about expected working hours etc. Students receive this positively and ask about sources of support, how people cope etc.
- > **Supporting students in deciding about a career in law** by having explicit discussion of career choices & motivations as well as open discussion within outreach of the 'pinch-points' in progressing to a career in the bar and the uncertainty of progression.

One attendee noted that young people generally seem less keen on longer hours and noted - as others did - that there seems to be a shift in attitudes, especially since the pandemic: lawyers want a better work/life balance. One academic - formerly a solicitor - is honest when her students ask why she changed career, but does find it hard, as she doesn't want to put everyone off becoming a lawyer.

There was insufficient time to discuss **admissions to law school**. Some participants are following this up separately; please email [penelope.griffin@the-bridgegroup.co.uk](mailto:penelope.griffin@the-bridgegroup.co.uk) if you would like to join the discussion.



## Graduate attraction and hiring

One of the elements of the hiring process, **assessment centres**, was discussed in detail. These are often core to the recruitment processes and participants thought from their experience that people from privileged backgrounds are more likely to perform well, as they tend to be more confident, have experience and exposure to public speaking training and similar. Raising confidence among LSEB applicants is one aspect of improving their performance and traineeships and internships can help with that. A careers advisor suggested that there is utility in coaching/advice. However, the disparities in confidence, public speaking skills etc. emerge much earlier (at school). Thus, coaching and advice cannot level the playing field entirely. Addressing social and educational disadvantages experienced by LSEB is, arguably, more effective.

Another point raised was the **complexity of hiring processes**. Specifically, someone who is involved in hiring shared that the processes may become very complex and layered, making them difficult to navigate for those applicants without pre-existing networks or with little exposure to the profession.

A participant brought up the importance of **addressing unconscious bias**. Participants said that even if hiring practices are tailored towards increasing diversity and inclusion, the barrier to implementing D&I more broadly are the unconscious biases which are very complex, and these should be addressed as a priority.

Following up on the panel discussion around the challenges of working in the law sector and how applicants and students should be made aware of those, participants highlighted **the role of transparency and the value of networking**. They thought that:

- > Balancing expectations is challenging, as honesty could put people off or may seem overwhelming.
- > Networking with people from similar backgrounds can be reassuring, as it encourages transparent and relatable conversations.
- > Networks and groups within firms can be very helpful for employees in communicating the challenges they face.

Finally, participants thought that **mentoring programmes** can be very helpful for people who are at early stages of their careers, but also further on, to support progression.

## Early career progression

Participants thought that this was an interesting and important space for research. The Bridge Group's findings resonated with their experiences and what they had found as educators and individuals within the sector. There was a general consensus that the sector needs to see the issues identified as a systemic and cultural problem within law firms, rather than something that could be quickly and easily fixed, or as an issue that requires those from LSEB and minority ethnic backgrounds to adjust their behaviour and expectations. There was open discussion about the kinds of systemic responses that people would like to see, as well as recognising that actions should be taken against those who perpetuate an exclusionary culture.

Participants thought that a **more explicit induction is needed**, in particular about the unwritten rules of the profession. It was emphasised that the level of knowledge that people have should not be taken for granted.

Participants highlighted that a **broader change of culture is required instead of the expectation to fit in**. Participants agreed that small gestures / reminders that someone does not share a background can have a cumulative effect and cause staff to leave. We should not place the onus on the individual by asking them to assimilate, but rather change the culture so it accepts real diversity. One participant said they think it is necessary to penalise those that commit microaggressions and "get rid of the dinosaurs". It was also suggested that having a proper system in place (within HR) to provide a safe environment for calling out bad behaviour could help.

Another point was made around the **value of mentoring**. It was considered that line management / coaching / mentoring is important. Participants' experience of good practice suggests that mentoring requires good levels of resource: time, funding, training and recognition.

Finally, a participant who worked at university said that with early progression they noticed **similar trends during the first year at university**. In particular, students from LSEBs had the aim of getting into law school, without necessarily fully understanding what the reality of law school was like, or whether they could feel they belong.

## Progression to partner

Participants recognised that there are disparities in chances and pace of progression. Their organisations have an idea of where their organisations need to be, but the issue is working out how to get there. Everyone in the group was working on the issue of unequal progression in some capacity. There's clear commitment to the issue. The participants thought that working out the barriers and pinch points is crucial but it's not the same for every firm or even in every circumstance, which complicates things.

The challenges in **defining progression** were raised. Participants wondered: *What are the options?* not everyone wants to become a partner, or follow a traditional linear path, and there isn't much discussion around this. Participants mentioned alternative routes such as becoming a chartered legal executive, yet this is often looked down on as a progression route. Participants thought that there's a need for mature conversations about progression - more open and detailed - as well as safe forums.

It was highlighted that **SEB is a topic which not everyone is comfortable to talk about**. Socio-economic background is important in the diversity & inclusion space but it can be a hard thing to discuss and it's still something not everyone is comfortable talking about or has even necessarily processed as part of their identity. One person in the group said they were from a low SEB background, but that while they talk about their other D&I characteristics, SEB isn't something they feel comfortable bringing up in the same way. One participant described a good practice at their organisation - they said that bringing speakers in to talk about SEB/D&I and progression seems to have a good impact on helping get conversations going and bring senior people on board. Participants mentioned other examples of best practice in social mobility networks and mentoring which their firms were implementing. Mentoring in particular was used by more than one firm in the group as a way to support progression and help to keep people on track. For example, Connectr (<https://www.connectr.com/>) is a mentoring platform with a focus on progression.

Some organisations have set/committed to partnership targets (i.e. within the next 5 years the proportion of female partners should be 40%) but are still trying to find ways to achieve those targets.