



Championing the talent and  
potential of women in law

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# WOMEN WHO WILL

Obelisk

NEXT  
HUNDRED  
YEARS

100

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## METHODOLOGY

In compiling this report, the teams at Obelisk Support and Next 100 Years invited nominations from senior General Counsel and other senior leaders in law, as well as including women recognised by the judges of the First 100 Years / Next 100 Years Inspirational Women in Law Awards and doing our own research across published and social media. Space only permits us to shout out 30 brilliant women in this report. We know there are many, many more *Women Who Will* out there, and we hope this prompts greater recognition of all the talented women across the legal industry.

# INTRODUCTION

## A letter from Dana Denis-Smith, our CEO

Back in 2019, as we celebrated 100 years of women being able to practise law in England & Wales, my team and I had the idea of inviting legal leaders in the FTSE 100 to champion some of the talented women they work with. As well as shining a light on talented individuals, we also wanted to reflect on the gender diversity of leadership in law and why it matters. As founder supporters of the First 100 Years Project, now the Next 100 Years Project, we at Obelisk have always been vocal supporters of diversity in the profession.

When we started this project, the new coronavirus and covid-19 were unknown. Since then, we have been through a period of change not many of us could have imagined: the bulk of legal work has been carried out from home, institutions such as schools and universities closed their doors for almost six months in the UK and support for those caring for elderly or SEND relatives has been drastically reduced. Now, as economies around the world watch and wait to see how recovery will take shape, and we assess the impact of the crisis on professional careers and institutions, strong and diverse leadership will become more important than ever.

It has been widely reported that the recent lockdowns across much of the world will have a disproportionate impact on women. They are more likely than men to pick up the additional work within the home associated with educating and caring for their children, even when both parents are at home and work full time. They are more likely to work in positions that have been furloughed or made redundant. In the UK, women-led businesses are also less likely to have been able to access government funding. Against this backdrop, we feel it is more important than ever to



shine a light on the huge potential and achievements of women in law, so we have joined forces with the Next 100 Years project and *The Inspirational Women in Law Awards*, now in their fifth year, to compile this report. We thank those leaders in the FTSE 100 who have joined us in contributing their personal "Women who will" to our 2020 list and all those who have helped judge the Awards over the years.

Despite being able to practise law for just over 100 years in the UK, making up 60% of new entrants to the profession, women are still under-represented at the highest levels of leadership in the industry. Over these past months of disruption, I have been struck by how fast the legal industry has been able to adapt to remote-working. It shows that many of the barriers put up in the past to such change were mindset, not reality. I hope our industry will find a fresh impetus to discard other equally outmoded biases and structural inequalities and embrace the potential of women at all stages of their careers and from all backgrounds. Encouraged by the recent election of Georgia Dawson as the inaugural female senior partner at Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, I truly believe we have come too far to go backwards now.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dana Denis-Smith".

**Dana Denis-Smith**  
CEO  
**Obelisk Support**



## FOREWORD

Women make up half the world's population, and it is undisputed that no country, community, or economy can achieve its potential until girls and women have the same rights, opportunities, and voice as boys and men. We must keep it vividly in our mind that everyone has something to bring to the table, and when empowered to believe in our aspirations, each one of us contributes in our unique way.

When I was eight years old, my schoolteacher went around the classroom asking pupils "*what would you like to be when you grow up?*". Between children dreaming of becoming princesses and footballers, I was more mature in my answer: "*I want to be a judge*".

We women — and women of colour in particular — must remain resilient in everything we do. We must believe in our authentic self as we define our goals and surround ourselves with those who help us move up in the pursuit of our aspirations. Take a minute and think of who inspires you in life, who is there to mentor you through thick and thin, and reflect on what your support system ought to look like to achieve your definition of success.

Women's journey to the top is not an easy one, but it is certainly not impossible. Ceilings are meant to be broken, and we must hold a mirror up to society as we navigate the complexities of gender-based discriminations. This starts in the home and continues in schools, universities, in our relationships, and at the workplace.

Investing in people is critical to how successful a company, a law firm, or a home can be. Quite literally, companies in the top-quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams are 21% more likely to have above-average profitability, and those with the most ethnically and culturally diverse boards are 43% more likely to experience higher profits.

## **Sandie Okoro**

*Senior Vice President and General Counsel  
World Bank Group*

We must remember to celebrate our diversity, intellectual wealth, and what makes us unique. To never give up on our authentic self because of social constructs or norms that challenge our differences, and as importantly, to pass it forward to the next generation. A better future for girls and women starts now.

“My parents always told me that the only limits on my potential are the limits I set for myself.”



# Diversity statistics for *women* and *Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic* people in different areas of the *UK legal profession*

\* Data collected from the Ministry of Justice Report: Diversity of the judiciary: Legal professions, new appointments and current post-holders published September 2020

## Courts

### Supreme Court:

2

/ 12 Justices  
are women \*

0% are  
**BAME\***



### Court of Appeal & High Court:

25

%  
**Women\***

3.5

%  
**BAME\***

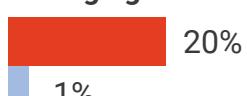
## Law Firms

# of Top 100 UK firms where the most senior leadership position are:

% Women

% BAME

Managing Partner



Women

19

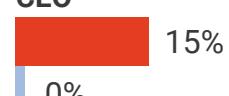
BAME



Senior Partner



CEO



## In House

% of General Counsel at FTSE 100 Companies are:

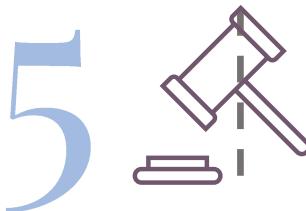
35

%

Women

5

%  
**BAME**



## Bar

% of Queen's Counsel are\*:

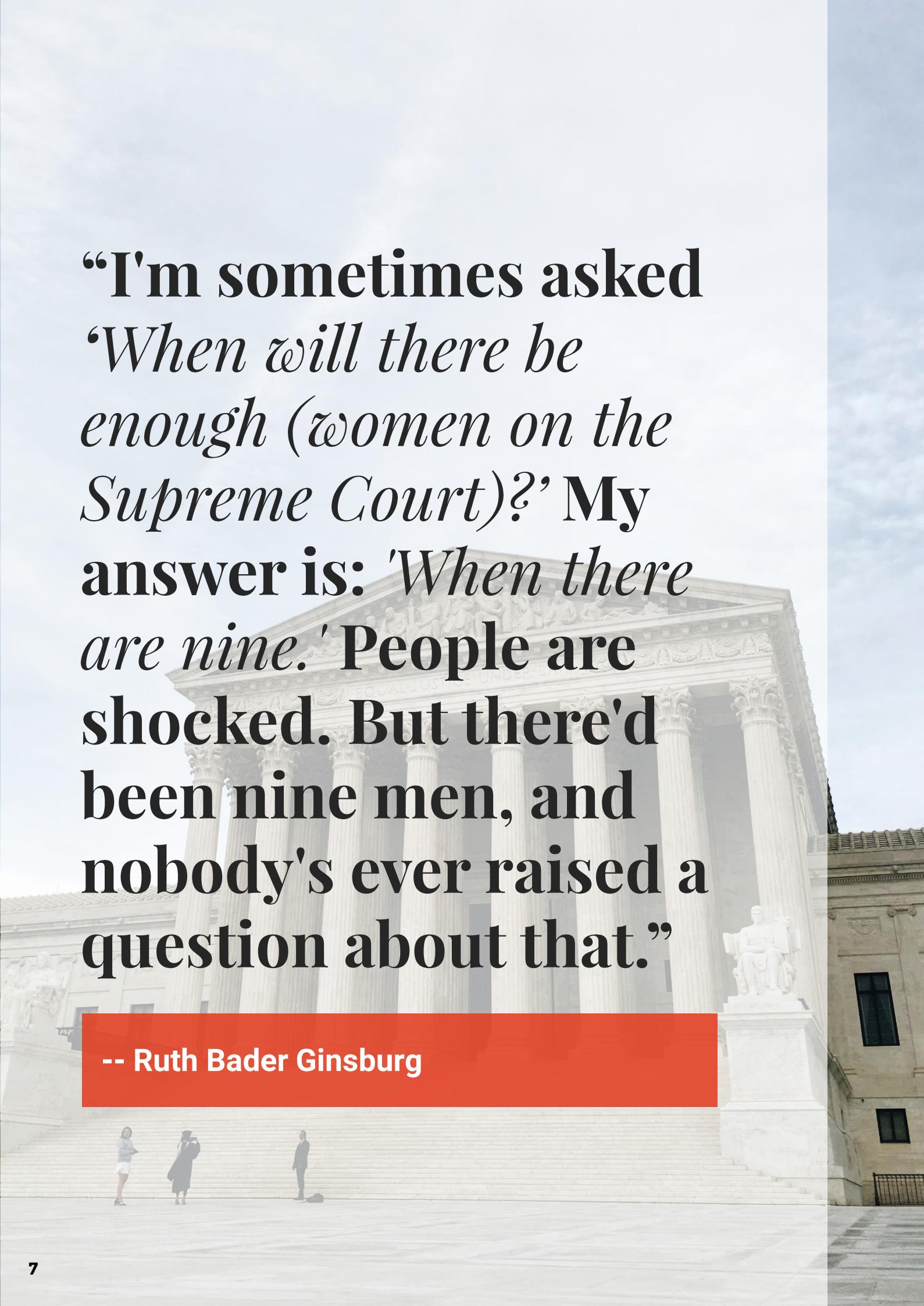
17

%

Women

9

%  
**BAME**



**“I'm sometimes asked ‘When will there be enough (women on the Supreme Court)?’ My answer is: ‘When there are nine.’ People are shocked. But there'd been nine men, and nobody's ever raised a question about that.”**

-- Ruth Bader Ginsburg



# WOMEN WHO WILL

From the in-house community

## Nilema Bhakta-Jones

Farillio

*Chief Operating Officer*

**Winner of the 'Champion of the Year Award' at the  
Inspirational Women in Law Awards 2018.**

Nilema is the Chief Operating Officer of the legal tech start-up Farillio. She is a champion for diversity and has been a committed mentor throughout her career. Nilema is also the former General Counsel of Ascential and began her career as a barrister.

## Caroline Brown

Aviva

*Head of Legal Operations*

**Put forward by Kirsty Cooper, Group General Counsel and Company Secretary, Aviva.**

"Caroline leads from the front but is not afraid to dive into the detail of issues. She and her team typically deal with the tough issues which the function faces, such as improving the function's management of data, risk and controls, finances and IT. In this way, Legal Operations has an

outside impact on the function as a whole. Caroline manages these challenges with a smooth unflappable style, and is an effective diplomat and champion between the function and other parts of the Company. She does not rest there though, and gets involved in lots of other areas, such as supporting our People Leaders Forum and Annual Legal Conference, in order to add value."

Caroline Brown has been Aviva's Head of Legal Operations since June 2018. She studied Law at Nottingham Trent University where she was awarded the Vice Chancellor's Award, then her LPC with Nottingham Law School at Kaplan, before training with Eversheds in the UK. After a number of years in private practice, Caroline began consulting with a number of blue-chip companies including Legal & General and Barclaycard and then moved in house permanently, first to Bupa and then Chubb Insurance.

## Caroline Halliday

Schroders PLC  
Legal Counsel

**Put forward by Howard Trust, General Counsel,  
Schroders plc.**

Caroline has been with Schroders since June 2012. She grew up in the North West, before reading Classics at New College, Oxford and starting her career with Hogan Lovells in 2004. Caroline is responsible for managing contentious issues globally, including contentious regulatory issues. She is a key point of contact for the Risk team for management of issues and events, and is involved in a number of initiatives across the global business to enhance client outcomes and reduce risk.

"The City has always accepted that diversification is key to reducing risk in the investment space. So why should we think any differently when it comes to choosing our leaders? I believe that organisations like Schroders, which prides itself on its commitment to diversity, are best placed to think innovatively in a rapidly evolving market and anticipate the challenges ahead. We need leaders who can, collectively, see the full picture. If we all approach an issue from the same perspective, we are not going to spot a curveball – let alone hit it!"

## Dr. Laura Janes

The Howard League  
Legal Director

**Winner of the 'Inspirational Women in Law Awards, Solicitor of the Year 2019'.**

Laura is Legal Director of the Howard League for Penal Reform. With a doctorate in youth justice, she has expertise in representing children and young people in penal detention. She was also the driving force behind 'Equal to Everything', the illustrated children's book about Lady Hale, which is now an Amazon bestseller for children's books.

## Danette Joslyn-Gaul

Pearson  
Legal Director

**Put forward by Bjarne Tellmann, formerly General Counsel, Pearson, now SVP and General Counsel, GSK Consumer Healthcare.**

"Danette has received a fair amount of recognition recently for her work with us, both internally and externally. She has, for instance, been shortlisted for the Women in Compliance Awards Chief Compliance Officer, Large Company for two years in a row. Most recently, she was awarded a First Chair Award for Top Compliance Counsel and was awarded "Business Partner of the Year" for Pearson Canada. She has also been chosen for many top talent initiatives at Pearson, including attending a mini-MBA at Oxford and various other leadership initiatives. Danette is resilient, hard-working, and curious about everything, which I love."

Danette has spent over two decades as a lawyer solving problems and achieving results in a variety of settings by honing skills in policy development, legislative work, litigating complex matters, transactional work, negotiations, corporate crisis management and most recently as the head of a FTSE 100 global corporate compliance department. In that role, she reports compliance matters to the Audit Committee of our Board and has an impressive track record of achievements in this space.

## Rebekah Martin

AstraZeneca

*Senior Vice President Reward and Inclusion*

**Put forward by Jeffrey Pott, General Counsel, AstraZeneca.**

Rebekah Martin has been AstraZeneca's Senior Vice President for Reward & Inclusion since April 2018.

She studied Molecular and Cellular Biochemistry at the University of Oxford in the UK, before qualifying as a specialist employment lawyer in

London. After a number of years in private practice, Rebekah joined AstraZeneca in 2011. Since then she has held progressively senior roles in legal, with responsibility for IP litigation, employment law and handling the full spectrum of commercial legal matters as Asia Area Legal Director, based in Singapore, and then as Deputy General Counsel for Europe Commercial and Global Employment, based in the UK.

In her current role, Rebekah leads the team responsible for Reward strategy, design and governance at AstraZeneca, and leads on the design and implementation of AstraZeneca's global inclusion and diversity strategy. Rebekah is passionate about the strong connection between diversity of thought, innovation and performance.

"Inclusion and diversity in leadership are fundamental to successful organisations, because innovation requires breakthrough ideas that only come from a diverse workforce empowered to challenge conventional thinking. Shared creativity unlocks challenges and brings new solutions. It fosters continuous innovation, constant learning and propels our growth – for individuals in the team as well as for our company as a whole."

## Ruth Murphy

BT

*Legal Director, In-Life and Product, BT*

**Put forward by Sabine Chalmers, Group General Counsel, BT Group PLC.**

Ruth has been BT's Legal Director, In-Life and Product since October 2018. She graduated in Law from Trinity College Dublin, and started her career with Eversheds. She is admitted as a solicitor in both Ireland and England & Wales. After a number of years in private practice, Ruth joined BT in 2004.

As well as being BT's Partner Champion for Lean In Circles, she is focused on STEM for the next generation and is Chairperson of the Judges for the BT Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition and is a director on the board of the Young Scientist and Technology Exhibition.

"In my experience companies can create **diverse** teams and leaders but that in itself doesn't guarantee high performance. **Inclusive leadership** is essential – leadership that ensures that all team members feel they are treated respectfully and fairly, are valued and sense that they belong.

Every day I have to challenge myself and my leadership ... have I made diversity and inclusion a personal priority, have I said that out loud to others, have I challenged the status quo, checked my blind spots ... and have I held others accountable to this? Have I shown vulnerability, admitted mistakes, asked for help! Have I listened, am I curious and open, or too focused on delivering my pre-set goals? Have I created a safe place where people can challenge, make mistakes, trust each other and thrive?"

## Carol Paton

Royal Bank of Scotland

*Head of Litigation and Investigations*

**Put forward by Michael Shaw, Group General Counsel, Royal Bank of Scotland.**

"Carol is a senior and vastly experienced member of the RBS Litigation & Investigations team, the largest single area of our function. A Scottish-qualified lawyer, since joining the bank from private practice she has managed a wide range of court actions, regulatory investigations and other contentious matters in jurisdictions across Europe, Asia and the USA.

Throughout, she has demonstrated all of the desirable qualities of a senior figure, marrying her great legal skills with also being a role model to her more junior colleagues."

Carol has been with the Royal Bank of Scotland since 1993. She graduated in Law from University of Glasgow and started her career with Brodies LLP. Carol is an active mentor of younger women and junior lawyers at RBS and a proactive champion of flexible working in her teams.

## Deborah Stevens

Persimmons Homes

*Company Solicitor*

**Put forward by Adrian Hicks, Group Solicitor, Persimmon plc.**

Deborah Stevens has been Company Solicitor at Persimmon since April 2016. She graduated in Law from University of Newcastle and started her career with Beaumont Legal.

## Sarah Thomas

Sage Group

*EVP Deputy General Counsel*

**Put forward by Vicki Bradin, General Counsel & Company Secretary, Sage Group.**

Sarah has been with the Sage Group since February 2018, when she joined them via secondment. She graduated in History from the University of Bristol and started her career with A&O.



*“I've always been really focused on my career, doing what I can and allowing other people's sexism, racism and prejudice to be their problem and not mine.”*

-- Baroness Scotland QC



# WOMEN WHO WILL

## From private practice and the Bar

### Oxana Balayan

Hogan Lovells

*Partner, Global M&A Leadership Team, Head of Corporate Russia & CIS*

"Innovative Individual" in 2016 and is renowned for her creativity, expert knowledge and problem-solving ability.

### Keily Blair

Orrick

*Partner*

***Put forward by Igor Kapshuk, Chief Legal Officer, Polymetal.***

Oxana has been with Hogan Lovells since 2002, when she joined as Head of the Russian M&A practice. She studied Law at Lomonosov Moscow State University and has also studied at Harvard Business School. She is dual-qualified in Russia and England & Wales. Oxana was awarded the inaugural Hogan Lovells' Innovation Award

***Winner of the Inspirational Women in Law Award 2016.***

Keily is head of the Cyber & Data Privacy Enforcement & Litigation Practice at Orrick. Keily is also the Founder and Chair of FV, a not-for-profit space for young women to network, to grow and to learn to lead.

## Kirsty Brimelow

QC

Doughty Street Chambers  
Barrister

**Winner of the 'Inspirational Women in Law Awards, Barrister of the Year 2019'.**

Kirsty is an expert practitioner in criminal law, public law and international human rights law. She was the first woman elected to Chair the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales (BHRC), has provided expert legal advice to a range of international organisations, including UNICEF and Amnesty International, and devotes a considerable amount of her time to pro bono work.

## Alison Eddy

Irwin Mitchell

Managing Partner, London

**Winner of the 'Champion of the Year Award' at the Inspirational Women in Law Awards 2019.**

Alison Eddy is Managing Partner for the London office of Irwin Mitchell. She is a leading advocate of promoting a healthy work-life balance and flexible working and her nominator described the female friendly environment Alison has helped to create at Irwin Mitchell.



## Anita Jewit

Irwin Mitchell  
Partner

**Winner of the *Inspirational Women in Law Award 2017*.**

Anita is a Partner at Irwin Mitchell and specialises in clinical negligence. She was promoted to partner just seven years after qualifying as a solicitor and while on maternity leave with her first child.

## Hilary Meredith

Hilary Meredith Solicitors  
Chairman and Founder

**Winner of the 'Inspirational Women in Law Awards, Solicitor of the Year 2018'.**

Hilary is the founder, partner, chair and owner of Hilary Meredith Solicitors. Over the last 30 years, Hilary has established herself as a hugely positive role model for women in law, playing an active role in achieving equality through a range of initiatives at her own firm and in the wider profession. She started her legal career in 1982, rising to become the youngest ever managing partner of 300-strong Manchester city centre law firm, Donns Solicitors, at the age of 29.



## Priscilla Osoba

Burges Salmon  
Solicitor

**Winner of the 'Inspirational Women in Law Awards,  
Under-35 Lawyer of the Year 2019'.**

Priscilla is a solicitor at Burges Salmon and is on the management committee of Burges Salmon's BAME network BCultured. Her work leading the network's initiatives, such as the launch of the South West Black Professionals Network, helped her to win her well-deserved award last year.

## Rehana Popal

33 Bedford Row  
Barrister

**Winner of the 'Inspirational Women in Law Awards,  
Barrister of the Year 2019'.**

Rehana is a barrister at 10KBW Chambers and runs a Public and Civil practice. She won her award for consistently advocating for equal and fair treatment of disenfranchised groups. This has included setting up an NGO during her GDL to bring awareness to the challenges facing displaced people and working as an analyst on the UN Drone Inquiry.

## Rachel Welch-Philips

Bird & Bird  
Associate

**Winner of the 'Inspirational Women in Law Awards,  
Under-35 Lawyer of the Year 2018'.**

Rachel is an associate at Bird & Bird and the founder of the firm's first ethnic minority network, Embrace, which she now chairs. She is also mentor to a female law student through the firm's Bursary Scheme, a member of Lawyers in Schools, a programme that sees lawyers conduct workshops on what the law is at local schools, and a Professional Ambassador in the Aspiring Solicitors programme.

## Claire Wills

Freshfields  
Partner, Corporate & M&A and  
Managing Partner, London

**Put forward by Philip Richards, Group General  
Counsel, Rio Tinto plc.**

Claire Wills has been Managing Partner, London at Freshfields since February 2019, having first become a partner in 2001. She graduated in Law from University of Liverpool and started her career with Freshfields. Claire works mainly with financial institutions such as insurance companies, banks, asset managers as well as clients in the retail and consumer sector. Her expertise covers mergers and acquisitions, complex restructurings, joint ventures and governance projects.





**“As a profession, we simply cannot afford to waste a single dedicated and talented person, *let alone an entire gender!*”**

-- Cherie Blair, CBE QC



# WOMEN WHO WILL

## The legal change-makers

**Malvika  
Jaganmohan**  
St Ives Chambers  
*Barrister*

Malvika is a family law barrister at St Ives Chambers in Birmingham and a panel member of Advocate, with a firm commitment to pro-bono work. Outside of her busy practice, Malvika is passionate about mental health and wellbeing in the legal profession and runs Stiff Upper Lip, a blog that tackles the stigma around openly discussing these issues. She regularly attends events and writes pieces on the importance of wellbeing for lawyers. Malvika is also a founding member of Women in Family Law and a member of the Core Group for The Transparency Project,

which aims to help people to better understand family law and family courts in England & Wales.

**Tessa Khan**  
Climate Litigation Network  
*Co-director*

Tessa is an international human rights lawyer who co-founded the Climate Litigation Network, which helps to organise efforts to use the law as a tool to hold governments accountable for their climate change responsibilities. Tessa's application of international human rights to issues of climate change contributes to a new and compelling approach to climate litigation. She also persuasively makes the case for how such litigation fits into a wider movement, tapping into growing global concern.

## Karlia Lykourgou

Doughty Street Chambers  
*Barrister*



Karlia is a defence barrister at Doughty Street chambers, specialising in crime, extradition and public law. She is also the founder of Ivy & Normanton, the first legal outfitter dedicated to court wear for women. Named after the first women to be called to the Bar of England & Wales, Ivy Williams and Helena Normanton, the first-of-its-kind shop sells clothes created with 'the day-to-day experience of female advocates, clerks and judges in mind'.

## Sabrina Mahtani

The Elders Foundation  
*Senior Policy Advisor*

Sabrina leads The Elders Foundation's access to justice programme, focusing particularly on combatting violence against women and closing the global justice gap for members of minority groups and those living in poverty. She is also the co-founder of the award-winning NGO, AdvocAid, which is the only holistic organisation in West Africa providing access to justice, education and empowerment for women in the criminal justice system in Sierra Leone.



## Shanika Amarasekara MBE

British Business Bank  
*General Counsel and Company Secretary*

Shanika is General Counsel of the British Business Bank, a government-owned development bank dedicated to making finance markets work better for smaller businesses. Shanika led the Bank's efforts during the Covid-19 pandemic to support innovative UK companies with the launch of its Future Fund scheme. The Future Fund is designed to help companies with strong potential through the current economic disruption, enabling them to continue to grow and eventually reach their full potential. Shanika has also consistently worked hard to break down barriers at work for women and ethnic minorities.

## Rebecca Perlman

Herbert Smith Freehills  
*Senior Associate, Co-Chair of Impact Investment*

Rebecca leads HSF Impact, her firm's social finance and sustainable investment practice, designed to help entrepreneurs to grow businesses that produce positive impacts on society and the environment. Rebecca also oversees Herbert Smith Freehill's Pro Bono practice across 12 countries. She is also the director of the African Commercial Law Foundation, a trustee of the Prisoners' Advice

Service, a member of Oxfam's Lawyers Against Poverty Steering Committee, co-founder of the UK Sierra Leone Pro Bono Network, and a member of the European Banks Alliance Against Human Trafficking Expert Working Group.

## Natasha Rattu

Karma Nirvana  
*Executive Director*

Natasha is a barrister and the Executive Director of Karma Nirvana, a Leeds-based charity that supports victims of honour-based abuse and forced marriage. Natasha has recently worked with MP Pauline Latham to introduce a bill to criminalise child marriage under the age of 18. During the ongoing pandemic, Karma Nirvana's helpline for victims of honour based abuse has seen an increase in reporting by up to 200% with Natasha calling public attention to the problems posed by lockdown in this regard.

## Jennifer Swallow

LawTechUK  
*Director*

Jennifer is the Director of LawTechUK, a major new government-backed initiative to transform the legal sector through technology. It aims to provide leadership, tools and a targeted work programme to help the legal and tech community generate new solutions that will enhance legal services in the future. With the Lawtech sector contributing £35 billion to the economy each year, LawTechUK may prove influential in magnifying this number further.

## Louise Whitfield

Liberty  
*Head of Legal Casework*

Louise is the Head of Legal Casework at human rights organisation Liberty. She helps to lead their strategic litigation efforts, with the team winning a ground-breaking legal challenge in August 2020 to the use of facial recognition technology by police. It was the world's first legal challenge to police use of facial recognition software. Louise also founded the Deaf and Disabled People's Legal Network and works on a number of human rights issues affecting disabled people.

## Alexandra Wilson

Five St Andrew's Hill  
*Barrister*

Alexandra is a barrister specialising in criminal and family law and an author. Her debut book, *In Black and White*, was published in August 2020 and describes her experience of the justice system, how it treats those that go through it and what it is like starting out in the law as a young mixed-race barrister. Alexandra has used her voice to speak out about racism and sexism in the justice system, prompting much-needed discussion about the prejudices ingrained within it.





# WHY DOES DIVERSITY IN LEADERSHIP MATTER?

Diversity doesn't only matter from a moral standpoint. A large body of recent research worldwide shows that greater diversity encompassing gender and other characteristics in senior management teams leads to better business performance<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, it acts to attract a greater diversity of candidates to join the organisation, with research by PWC<sup>2</sup> finding that 61% of female candidates for a role look at the diversity of an organisation's leadership before deciding to accept a position.

Greater diversity *and* inclusion leads to:

## Greater profitability

Research for the IMF<sup>3</sup> found a positive association between gender diversity in senior teams at companies in Europe and financial performance, particularly in companies in knowledge-intensive sectors. Researchers at Deloitte found that teams which felt they had inclusive leaders were 17% more likely to report high performance and 20% more likely to feel they made high-quality decisions.<sup>4</sup>

In the legal industry, we have already seen clients taking the lead in demanding greater diversity from their supplier firms. For example, in April of this year, British communications company BT<sup>5</sup> announced that the firm with the best D&I

statistics across its partner, associate and trainee workforce would automatically have their place on their panel reconfirmed.

## Superior risk management

Broadening the collective experience and perspective of a team and listening to everyone's input leads to better decision-making and makes it less likely that a team or organisation will overlook potential risks due to "group-think". Researchers have found that greater diversity of age, ethnic background and gender in boards leads to less risky financial decisions and correlates with improved performance.<sup>6</sup>

## Increased innovation

Research by the Boston Consulting Group published in 2018 found that "Companies that reported above-average diversity on their management teams also reported innovation revenue that was 19 percentage points higher than that of companies with below-average leadership diversity—45% of total revenue versus just 26%."<sup>7</sup> In a business environment which was changing rapidly due to economic and technological pressures even before the C-19 pandemic hit, rapid and successful innovation is critical to future organisational success.

# BARRIERS THAT WOMEN FACE

## The motherhood penalty

For women who want to have children and build their career, current structures in the legal profession put them at a disadvantage. The peak years for building skills, expertise and network coincide neatly with the years when women are most likely to have to meet the demands of home-life, yet 60% of women surveyed in 2019 felt that working part-time would impact on their career prospects.<sup>8</sup> For too many women, trying to balance both is exhausting, with the increased demands of the recent lockdown adding to the pressure: "*I am the only female solicitor in a team of five. The other solicitors' partners manage the home-schooling for their children, but I have only been able to manage my workload by working early morning and late evening.*", explained an in-house solicitor who replied to the First 100 Years project's survey in May 2020.<sup>9</sup>

## Bias in the workplace and society

Engrained expectations of women's roles in society mean that the motherhood penalty is often applied even to those women who choose not to have children, as the perceived risk of them doing so is seen as enough to shut them out of opportunities.

Bias also leads to existing leaders recruiting in their own image, and given there are more men than women leaders, this reinforces the imbalance. In their work on the issue, the Law Society of England & Wales found that "perpetuated notions of women's difference to



their male counterparts results in their exclusion at all stages of a single career and ultimately limits advancement to positions of leadership."<sup>10</sup>

Bias is particularly apparent when multiple characteristics intersect, for example being a BAME woman in law is even harder. "*I think as a black woman, I over-compensate. I don't want to be perceived as aggressive or in a certain way...it makes it difficult to be my true authentic self.*", one respondent told the Law Society's roundtable research into the subject.<sup>11</sup>

## Lack of role-models and visibility of women leaders

"You can't be what you can't see" .... Well, you can, and many women do, but it's a lot harder. Google "Picture of legal leader" and you will see more men than women's faces on the image search returned - and very little ethnic diversity. This lack of visibility serves to reconfirm existing biases and exacerbates "imposter syndrome", where a person doubts their accomplishments, despite external evidence, and under-performs or leaves the profession altogether.

# STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

## Managing sponsorship

Organisations tend to be proud of coaching and mentoring schemes aimed at encouraging women to progress. However, research by nonprofit diversity experts Catalyst<sup>12</sup> has found that the most powerful support a potential female leader can receive is sponsorship from above. Most easily thought of as “the person who will put you forward when you are not in the room”, sponsors often bestow their patronage unconsciously. To avoid bias, senior leaders must begin to think consciously about how they are evaluating potential and who they are championing.

## Re-routing career paths

Recent events have seen the myth that work has to happen in an office bust wide open. Now it's time to challenge the convention that a career can only follow one pattern - a linear path from training to leadership that takes place between the ages of 21 and 50. Life expectancy for men and women is increasing; 50% of the children born today in rich countries are likely to reach the age of 100 or more.<sup>13</sup> Why then should we compress our career into the same years that we did when we could expect to live only until 70?

The book *On-ramps and off-ramps* by Sylvia Ann Hewlett described the penalties women face for stepping off the career ladder, and posited solutions back in 2007, yet programmes to bring women back to work after a break are still in their infancy, especially when compared to the prevalence of graduate recruitment schemes.

Too often people with a previous track record of achievement, followed by a career break or time spent in a part-time or more junior position, are viewed as less desirable candidates for senior roles. Priorities may shift as life transitions take place, potential does not. It is time to recognise that the qualities that make an effective leader may in fact be sharpened by time out of the professional workplace. The design of recruiting, retention and training practices that encourage more women, and men, to pursue flexible careers is essential to build greater diversity in leadership in the future.

## Building inclusive work environments

As the coronavirus pandemic has shown that working from remotely isn't a barrier to working effectively, and in fact may even lead to an increase in productivity, there is an opportunity to





rebuild the physical environment in ways that put less emphasis on physical presence in an office. More importantly, legal organisations have an opportunity to reset the culture in their workplaces. Research by Thomson Reuters Acritas found that organisations that take strong action on behaviours that are contrary to their diversity & inclusion policies are more likely to retain and develop female staff.<sup>14</sup>

## Re-imagining leadership

How do we describe a good leader? Traditionally traits such as dedication (as manifested by working long hours), technical expertise, a focus on achievement at all costs, the ability to "win" at negotiations, perceived charisma and confidence, the strength to command and to feel comfortable in the limelight have been celebrated and sought after. They are traits that many societies tend to be more comfortable with when they are manifested by men.

When women show these same qualities, studies have found that they are perceived as either less likeable or less trustworthy.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, researchers such as Daniel Goleman<sup>17</sup> have suggested that the most effective leaders are able to flex their style across a much wider range of styles and behaviours. Now is the time to rethink how the legal industry describes, nurtures and evaluates leaders, whilst consciously tackling deep seated bias.

## Measuring diversity and setting targets

Setting targets based on detailed diversity data can help today's legal leaders drive change for the future. To accelerate diversity across all dimensions in the legal profession, now is the time to be bold and take decisive action across all areas: positions on senior management teams, supplier contracts awarded, public appointments. It is heartening to see both the in-house and private practice communities working together on such initiatives.



## ABOUT THE NEXT 100 YEARS

Founded by Dana Denis-Smith, CEO of Obelisk Support, who conceived the idea for the First 100 Years project back in 2014 when she stumbled upon a photograph from 1982. It showed City law firm, Herbert Smith (now Herbert Smith Freehills) celebrating its centenary. Front and centre of the photo was the firm's first female partner, Dorothy Livingstone.

For Dana it was the start of a five-year journey to chart and celebrate the history of women in the law and to inspire future generations. Activities have included the commissioning of the first artwork for the Supreme Court to focus on

women lawyers, the publication of "First" a book dedicated to the stories of the women legal pioneers and the creation of an archive of films capturing the stories of the first women to occupy different roles across the profession.

The Next 100 Years continues this work whilst looking to the future and how we can create an equal future for women in law. Obelisk Support is proud to be a founding sponsor of the Project and to have helped it grow and succeed over the last six years.

Find out more about the project at [www.next100years.org.uk](http://www.next100years.org.uk)

# INSPIRATIONAL WOMEN IN LAW AWARDS

Five years at a glance

## 2020

### Barrister of the Year

Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC  
Anneli Howard  
**Kama Melly QC - Winner**  
Sheryl Nwosu  
Sarah Pinder

### Solicitor of the Year

Amanda Adeola  
Vanessa Challess  
**Tracey Dovaston - Winner**  
Attia Hussain  
Farzana Naz

### Champion of the Year

Natasha Harrison  
**Samina Iqbal - Winner**  
Sabeena Pirooz  
David Stone  
Suzanne White

### Under-35 Lawyer of the Year

Chloe Birch  
Netanya Clixby  
Anne Collins  
Sangeetha lengar  
**Karlia Lykourgou - Winner**

### In-House Lawyer of the Year

Shanika Amarasekara MBE  
Clare Belcher  
**Anne Bodley, Lex:lead - Winner**  
Amy Marren  
Angharad Price

### Champion of the Year

Dr Kim Barker  
**Alison Eddy - Winner**  
Jemima Lovatt  
Sun-Hee Park  
Rachel Pears  
Eduardo Reyes

### Under-35 Lawyer of the Year

Cynthia Jakes  
Stephanie Kay  
Coralie McKeivor  
Coleen Mensa  
Ingrid Munyanzeza  
**Priscilla Osoba - Winner**

### In-House Lawyer of the Year

Penny Caven  
Elaine Hutton  
**Catherine Palmer - Winner**  
Ruth Pearson  
Prini Pithouse  
Angharad Price

### Lifetime Achievement Award

**Baroness Helena Kennedy QC**

## 2019

### Barrister of the Year

Elaine Banton  
Poonam Bhari  
Kate Brunner QC  
Professor Jo Delahunty QC  
**Rehana Popal - Winner**  
Professor Suzanne Rab

### Solicitor of the Year

Hermione Allen  
Danielle Ayres  
Catherine Hart  
**Dr Laura Janes - Winner**  
Sarah Khan-Bashir MBE  
Kelly Thomson

# INSPIRATIONAL WOMEN IN LAW AWARDS

Five years at a glance

## 2018

### Barrister of the Year

**Kirsty Brimelow QC - Winner**

Martha Cover  
Caoilfhionn Gallagher QC  
Angela Rafferty QC  
Brie Stevens-Hoare QC

### Solicitor of the Year

Katja Butler  
**Hilary Meredith - Winner**

Brandusa Tataru-Marinescu  
Belinda Lester  
Natasha Harrison

### Champion of the Year

Ray Berg  
**Nilema Bhakta-Jones - Winner**  
Dan Fitz  
Charlotte Wannedeya  
Mary-Ann Wright

### Under-35 Lawyer of the Year

Frances Hull  
Zeena Luchowa  
Katherine McAssey  
Annsley Merelle Ward  
**Rachel Welch-Phillips - Winner**

### In-House Lawyer of the Year

Maaike de Bie  
**Ruth Murphy - Winner**  
Jolie Norris  
Anna Suchopar

### Lifetime Achievement Award

Baroness Hale

## 2017

### Anita Jewitt - Winner

Harriet Johnson  
Suzanne Keenan  
Suzanne Szczetnikowicz  
Jenny Wilde

## 2016

### Keily Blair - Winner

Annie Flower  
Gemma Pesce  
Claire Sng  
Georgina Wolfe

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Company number: 07312074

Next 100 Years is a campaign of Spark 21 Registered charity number: 1167825