

LEGAL PROFESSION URGED TO HOLD UP MIRROR THAT REFLECTS SOCIETY

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Firm news

Addressing an audience of senior lawyers, regulators and in-house counsel, Jemima Coleman, a board member of the Legal Services Board and professional support lawyer at Herbert Smith Freehills, has today called for greater collaboration and more transparent data collection "so that diverse workplaces become the norm, allowing the legal profession to truly mirror society."

Sharing a platform with Dame Laura Cox, the former High Court judge and Christina Blacklaws, president of the Law Society, Coleman urged delegates to recognise that "consumers don't just need or want legal information, they want access to quality advice from a profession that reflects the society it serves."

Coleman's comments were made in a keynote address to the Westminster Legal Policy Forum in London. She spoke in the wake of data published by regulators* exploring ethnicity, disability and gender representation across the legal sector.

Coleman said: "The business case for diversity and inclusion has long been proven, but many organisations are yet to translate their understanding of the competitive advantage it brings, into a fully inclusive workplace. There is evidence to suggest that the solicitors' profession is now attracting high numbers of those who are the first in their family to go to university, but those with disabilities are under-represented; and more needs to be done to encourage retention and progression of underrepresented groups to senior levels."

"Data is key. We won't be able to address concerns if we don't have evidence of where issues lie, but collecting data is not an end in itself. What really matters are the actions taken by firms to tackle unconscious bias, to open the profession to those with an interest and aptitude for the law."

Coleman's comments follow news that Herbert Smith Freehills' has recently teamed up with Autism Forward to explore routes into employment for autistic people, seen two partners named in the inaugural list of senior mental health executives in the UK, and attained the 'Gold Standard' in Hong Kong's LGBT+ Inclusion Index.

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