MACFARLANES

Macfarlanes Insider Issue four - July 2021

Welcome to the fourth issue of Macfarlanes Insider.

In this issue we announce our new head of ESG, share information about the firm's recently launched *Conversations about race* programme, detail the support the firm is offering to employees looking to qualify via the Solicitors Qualifying Examination, and share the initial results from the firm's staff survey. We also feature two Q&As with the firm's HR business partner for business services and secretaries, and our recently promoted senior group executive assistant.

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Macfarlanes Insider

Environmental, social and governance (ESG)

In May, private client partner Isobel Morton started a new role as head of ESG, which she will undertake alongside her existing role. Isobel is passionate about environmental issues and her new position will see her advise clients, and the firm, on ESG matters which are of increasing importance to organisations.

Isobel has formed a steering committee made up of partners in key ESG practice areas, business services directors and other relevant heads to help determine how the firm should be approaching this fast-changing area, both internally and in terms of client facing activities.

Here Isobel shares why she decided to take on this new role.

"I have loved being a private client lawyer for the last 13 years, especially my last three years as a partner building closer relationships with clients. However, on a personal level I have been increasingly concerned about environmental issues over the last few years and was feeling frustrated that I didn't have the bandwidth to consider how I could have a more positive impact through my work. This challenge must not be left to a community of environmentalists, but can and must be met by every organisation and individual."

Isobel is working closely with Rachel Richardson (who, as head of banking and finance policy, has been engaging with clients for some time on the implications of ESG for finance) and head of corporate advisory, Shailen Patel. The group is engaging directly with each practice area and business services team on ESG issues over the coming months, and we look forward to sharing updates with you in future issues.



Conversations about race programme

In June the firm launched a new *Conversations about race* programme. The programme, which is mandatory, is an important part of our progress in relation to building a more representative partnership.

The first part of the programme comprises five short videos featuring perspectives from a collection of senior partners and external consultants, Howlett Brown.

The videos focus on discussions about the minority experience, what holds us back, what moves us forward, and collective and individual action.

The second part of the programme will involve a series of facilitated discussions in the autumn.

In addition, the firm has provided staff with a language guide to accompany this programme.

Staff survey

Earlier this year the firm conducted an engagement survey where staff were asked to provide feedback on their careers and various areas of the firm.

The survey received an 80% completion rate and over 90% of respondents said they would recommend Macfarlanes as a great place to work. The firm performed well in questions on culture and direction, career development, diversity and inclusion and recognition, and over 94% of employees said they were satisfied with the firm's communication over the Covid-19 pandemic.

Findings of the survey are being communicated to staff and their feedback will be used to shape the direction of the firm over the next two years.

Covid vaccine donations

The firm has made a donation to Vaccinaid, the campaign to vaccinate health workers and high risk and vulnerable people in low and middle income countries.

The firm has given the equivalent of two vaccination doses per staff member to the campaign (a full vaccination per person), which has been launched by UNICEF in collaboration with the global COVAX alliance. Vaccinaid aims to provide two billion Covid-19 vaccines, as well as millions of treatments, around the world this year.

Supporting employees with the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE)

From September 2021, the SQE will be phased in to become the new centralised way to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales.

The firm recognises that some employees may prefer not to take the Training Programme route for a variety of reasons and will support those who wish to qualify independently by:

- providing up to seven days of exam leave;
- providing for such study leave to be allowed on a paid basis; and
- signing off all applicable QWE and paying for practising certificates upon qualification.

For further details please contact a member of the recruitment team.

Award wins

Last month the HR team attended a virtual awards ceremony run by People in Law, an HR network that recognises people's achievements across the legal industry. The team were thrilled to win two awards, *Best CSR initiative* and *Best HR innovation through technology*.



Best CSR initiative

This award recognised the firm's focus on pro bono advice for asylum seekers bringing fresh claims for asylum. The judges were particularly impressed by the dedication of the firm and its volunteer lawyers to the project, and the clear alignment with the firm's strategic focus on increasing access to justice.



Best HR innovation through technology

Our graduate recruitment and trainee development team were recognised for going out of their way to develop their own vacation scheme platform, providing a highly personalised experience with a feel for the culture of the firm, and with measurable results in terms of a significantly high proportion of subsequent trainee place acceptance and truly outstanding feedback from the platform users.

Senior inclusion and CSR executive Farzana Begum was shortlisted for the *Rising Star* award and we were also shortlist for *HR team of the year*.

Macfarlanes guardians

In 2019 the firm launched a guardian programme. A guardian is a trained member of staff who acts as a confidential support for colleagues who have something they might want to discuss or share but are unsure about the best way of doing so. The guardians are an informal point of contact for anyone who has concerns around workplace behaviour, health/wellbeing or stresses and worries at home. Their role is neutral, confidential and they are there to listen to staff. Anyone at the firm can volunteer to be a guardian, and all volunteers are provided with training and ongoing support.

This year to widen the pool of guardians, we invited staff and partners to volunteer and were delighted with the response; we have doubled the number of guardians across the firm and all new volunteers have completed their training.

Existing guardians have described the role as immensely rewarding to be able to advise and offer support to colleagues across the firm.



Recent events

Dr Jane Goodall

A world renowned ethologist and environmentalist, founder of the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI) and a United Nations Messenger of Peace, Dr Jane Goodall shared her experience of her time in Tanzania where she ventured into the little-known world of the wild chimpanzees living in Gombe, and talked to us about conservation and the importance of managing and mitigating risks to biodiversity.

Photo © Stuart Clarke

Former professional footballer Clarke Carlisle, and his wife Carrie

As part of Mental Health Awareness Week, they gave their dual insight into coping with mental ill health in a relationship. The talk included a focus on how to support the supporters of those suffering with mental ill health.

Separately we also hosted a 15 minute Mindfulness in the Workplace session every day. The sessions allowed staff to develop their mindfulness practice or for those new to practising mindfulness, an opportunity to experience it for the first time.

Jill Nalder

An HIV/AIDS activist and the inspiration behind the character Jill Baxter and the actor who portrays Christine Baxter in It's a Sin.



Hashi Mohamed

Barrister, broadcaster and author of *People Like Us: what it takes to make it in modern Britain*, to mark World Refugee Day. Hashi was born in Kenya and lived in Nairobi with his family until his father tragically died in 1993. Then nine years old, he arrived in the UK with his siblings as a child refugee.

Q&A with Laura Childs

HR business partner for business services and secretaries Start date: November 2002

Tell us about your career journey since joining Macfarlanes.

I initially joined the firm as a full-time HR Secretary in 2002. I've had several promotions over the years which have led me to my current role. After I had my son in 2011 I moved to a flexible working pattern (four days per week with one of those days from home) – it was at this point that my career really accelerated.

What do you attribute to your success?

I didn't do particularly well at school and I didn't go to university, but my hard work, determination and commitment have been recognised by the firm and has led to opportunities for me to progress.

When I moved to a flexible working pattern, I quickly realised that I needed to manage my work and diary well to meet deadlines. Being organised allowed me to better plan my week and avoid me having to change my working pattern. I ensured I built a strong rapport with colleagues based on trust and honesty, and would manage their expectations by setting clear timelines. This meant that they had confidence in me completing the work by the agreed deadline rather than them focussing on which days I was in and out of the office.

• What are the most enjoyable aspects of your job?

My role allows me to create opportunities for others where the business supports it. I led on an employability programme with two charities, St Mungo's and New Horizons, offering a work placement to one to two people every six months. I support them on their journey at the firm, ensure they have exposure to key people and receive all the training they need to help them succeed. I'm pleased to say that we have retained the majority of these candidates and some have since progressed into other teams and roles from where they started.

We also run an internal programme, Business Services Academy (as detailed in issue two), which offers high performing employees exposure to another area of the business. The firm wants to give its staff opportunities that they might not get elsewhere, irrespective of their academics. Some who have chosen the academy route have secured roles in other teams or have gone back to their position with a greater understanding that can assist them in the future.

What would you say to somebody who is considering applying for a position at Macfarlanes?

If you work hard, the opportunities are there for the taking. The firm genuinely values its staff and recognises their contribution. Working at Macfarlanes isn't just your "next job", it's likely to be the best career move you'll ever make.

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Q&A with Claire Phillips

Senior group executive assistant Start date: April 2018

Tell us about your career journey since joining the firm.

I joined Macfarlanes in April 2018 as the private client group executive assistant (EA). At the time the private client group had just gone through a complete secretarial restructure and it was my role to ensure that the transition was as smooth as possible. After approximately 12 months, I moved to the management team for six months - this was incredibly insightful and helped me gain a greater understanding of the firm and its core values. I returned to the private client group following this and have recently been promoted to senior group executive assistant.

> You have recently taken on the newly created role of senior group executive assistant. Can you tell us how the position will differ from your previous role?

In this new role I am responsible for the development of the firm's PA staff and for improving efficiencies across all practice areas. I work closely with the EAs to improve cross-departmental working relationships and build on the team PA skillset to ensure we provide the highest level of support to all staff. I perform this role alongside my existing position as the private client group EA.

• What is the career path of a PA at the firm?

Macfarlanes has a clear structure for its PA staff: the entry level role is an admin assistant, progressing to junior team PA, team PA, senior team PA and group EA. The structure allows staff to understand the career development opportunities open to them and to recognise the skills and experience required at each level. Our PA staff develop within a supportive environment, learning from their peers and progressing over time.

 How do you see the PA function evolving as a result of the pandemic?

The PA function has evolved considerably over the years and the pandemic has certainly had a big impact on that. Prior to Covid most of our PA staff were office based. As we look to return to the office over the coming months, we will ensure that the firm's PA staff continue to support their stakeholders whilst benefitting from the firm's recently revised agile working policy. In order for agile working to be a success for PA staff, they must work as a team, even more so than ever. PAs need to support all members of their team, not just within their practice group but across the wider firm. In terms of the day-to-day work, the traditional skills like typing transcriptions, proof reading, redacting etc. have been replaced with business skills such as supporting business development managers and fee earners to build and maintain client relationships, supporting partners and fee earners with the billing process, managing diaries and inboxes, acting as the gatekeeper for fee earners and ensuring associates are able to gain access to partners, to name a few.

• What important skills do the PAs of the future need?

Proactiveness has always been a key skill for PAs. Individuals must look one step ahead at all times to pre-empt the needs of their team and respond to them. Flexibility and adaptability are even more essential than before, as are self-motivation and trustworthiness. PAs need to understand how their teams work and the overall scope of the business; only by understanding and supporting their team with this will they really add value.

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