

EIP

Careers in Ideas week 2020: Wednesday

To support CIPA's Careers in Ideas week initiative we are interviewing people at EIP about how they found a career in intellectual property. Today we asked Gemma Wooden and Doris Akufo-Addo to share their stories.

Gemma Wooden, Partner & Patent Attorney

1) How did you become a patent attorney?

Prior to becoming a patent attorney, I worked as a particle physics researcher at CERN (the European Organization for Nuclear Research). I enjoyed the science but found the politics of working in a large collaboration frustrating, and I wanted to move away from coding (which was a major part of my job in research). I started looking at alternatives that would still allow me to use my science background, but that would give me more personal satisfaction. I have always enjoyed learning about new things and constructing arguments, so IP seemed like a good fit.

2) What do you see as barriers to more diversity within IP?

One of the issues is a relative lack of diversity among science graduates (as a scientific background is needed to become a patent attorney). For example, there are still far fewer female graduates in physics, engineering and computer science than male. This has a knock-on effect on the diversity of the initial pool of candidates for trainee patent attorney positions, and has historically led to a relative lack of diversity in senior roles in the profession. The stereotype of a scientist as being a white man can lead to some people feeling that science is not "for them" at a very young age, meaning that they opt out before truly exploring whether it might be something they enjoy.

1) How did you get into trademarks?

I fell into IP purely by error. My original love was fashion and I actually went to the London College of Fashion to pursue my dreams. After graduating I did a stint of working part-time in a trademark firm and loved it, and have never looked back since! Although I did work in fashion for some time and worked for the likes of Michiko Koshino at her design office based in Hammersmith, London, and David Fielden design office based in Battersea, London, and attended many fashion shows prepping the models with their clothes before they hit the catwalk it was very difficult to break out on your own with your own brand so I went back to my second love which is trademarks.

2) Do you feel that the IP profession represents diversity?

I belong to CITMA and have found they are taking steps to address this issue and I have been involved with discussions myself with CITMA on ways forward. I can see that they are genuinely making strides to improve matters and hope to see more BAME in the industry.