

EIP

International Women's Day 2020: Paula Flutter

With the theme of International Women's Day 2020 being #EachforEqual, partner [Paula Flutter](#) provides her perspective on equality in the workplace and how to encourage more women into IP law.

Describe your role at EIP

I am a patent and trademark Attorney at EIP which involves helping clients navigate the world of Intellectual Property, be that obtaining their own protection or working around rights that third parties have, for both inventions and brands.

Through my work, I have a lot of client contact with various types of people within a wide variety of organisations. I could be dealing with the CEO, research and development teams, in-house Intellectual Property experts or people on the commercial/marketing side of a business. At EIP, I work as part of a multidisciplinary team because the work we do inevitably crosses many technology and business areas and requires different skills, so we have a range of diverse expertise to support our clients.

What has been your career path?

I first got into Intellectual Property from an engineering background. I did an engineering degree first but having then completed a Master's degree in the same field, I decided that I would like to look beyond engineering. I wanted something that would enable me to use not just technical knowledge, but other competences and I had always been interested in law. I looked into my options and the patent attorney career jumped out. I found a trainee position at one of the largest specialist patent firms in the UK, where I went on to complete my training.

Following my first position, I spent a couple of years working in the Intellectual Property

department of a general law firm. My motivation in making that move was to get a different perspective on IP, specifically from the litigation side. Often clients will enforce their rights or be on the other side of someone enforcing their rights - this aspect of Intellectual Property work was something I felt was a gap in my experience at that point. Although I thoroughly enjoyed those years, I ultimately decided that I preferred being in a specialist patent firm. What attracted me to EIP then was the people and it's what I still love about it; it's a place where I feel at home and that hasn't changed in 14 years.

Why did you decide to qualify as both a Patent and Trademark Attorney?

It is quite unusual to do this these days. My first boss was dual-qualified so from Day One I was trained to do both patent and trademark work. I obtained my patent qualification first but when I completed that I realised that I'd already practised for a number of years in trademarks too and that it would be a waste not to also seek a trademark qualification. It worked well in my early days at EIP because at that point there was no trademark specialist within the firm so it meant I was able to provide these services to existing patent clients.

What are your main challenges?

One of the best things about this job is the variety it brings. Every day you're dealing with different technology and business areas, different tasks, different clients and different personalities. But that presents challenges too because you have little control over what work is done each day; you are driven to react almost exclusively to your clients' needs. Putting clients first means you're not able to dictate the pattern of a particular day or week and that can lead to a lot of pressure at times.

International Women's Day is about celebrating social, economic and political achievements of women. Which personal achievement are you most proud of?

From a professional perspective, it would be achieving client recognition. A really big focus for me in my work is making clients happy and that drives everything I do. When clients are asked anonymously how they view your performance, it is incredibly rewarding to hear favourable feedback.

The common perception of the legal industry is that it's male-dominated. What has been your experience in the firms you have worked?

It is male-dominated, particularly in the Intellectual Property sector but that's not surprising because you need an initial technical qualification to work in this field and the kind of technical backgrounds people have tend to be (broadly) engineering, software and science, which are still very much male-dominated sectors. Although this is improving, I

think it will take a very long time for things to balance out, mainly because there needs to be a lot more done in schools and universities to encourage young women to study the relevant subjects. However, I do think there have been a lot of positive changes.

I am in a male-dominated industry and in a male-dominated team but I do not feel at all disadvantaged by that. I think people are a lot more enlightened these days and I truly feel that I'm treated as an equal with my male counterparts.

Can you describe any initiatives you have seen or been involved in which promote a working culture of equality, diversity and inclusivity?

The body that governs patent attorneys, the Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys, has an initiative called IP Inclusive which supports a wide range of minority groups. They are doing a lot of really good work to raise the profile of minority groups, to encourage them to have a voice and help them to feel recognised as equals within the profession. There has been a lot of support for the initiative not just from people in the relevant minority groups but also from the profession as a whole.

Are there any simple things everyone can do to help create a gender equal workplace?

Everyone needs to treat their colleagues in the way in which they would like to be treated themselves. Treating everyone as an equal is key, as well as trying to understand and respect other people's perspectives. If you learn to do that, there should be no issue in relation to interacting with people on an equal level.

The 2020 International Women's Day campaign theme is #EachforEqual. What is your interpretation of that?

Each for equal applies across the board. Everyone should be treating people as equals and striving to be more empathetic. It's a great initiative that should go beyond just the focus on women.