

IP Futures launch event 12.9.19

Key discussion & action points



IP INCLUSIVE

Working for diversity and inclusion in IP

Following the launch of the IP Futures survey in June 2019, 160 responses were received. We were keen to get a good overview of opinions around access to the profession and the perceived impact of economic and social background on accessibility, as well as views on diversity and inclusivity in the workplace.

Some interesting statistics that framed the discussion points for the launch event in September 2019 include:

- 40% of respondents stating that the highest educational level that parents or guardians had reached by the time the respondent was 18 was GCSE or A-level;
- 7% of respondents having a parent or guardian working in the legal sector;
- 42% of respondents being the first members of their family to attend university;
- 58% of respondents first finding out about the IP profession at university, and 35% after graduation;
- 18% having felt discriminated against in a recruitment process in the IP profession;
- 18% feeling that their background has held them back in the profession; and
- 63% agreeing or strongly agreeing that their workplace could do more to improve inclusivity and diversity.

While it seems in some ways that the IP professions encourage social mobility there were clear indications from the survey results that more work can be done.

Discussion point 1 - Finding out about the profession

A large percentage of respondents did not find out about the IP profession until at university or after graduation. How can the profile of the IP profession as a career pathway be raised?

- Outreach at schools, for example talking to pupils doing A-levels (or earlier, so that STEM subjects may be chosen) and educating careers counsellors on the profession as an option.

- School competitions around trade marks could bring IP into the education system at an early stage in a fun and accessible way.

- Open days at firms for A-level students would allow them to get a taster of the profession at a key decision stage before they proceed to university.

- Liaise with UCAS to include careers in IP, for example in their “What can you do with this degree” sections, and within their pre-AS degree questionnaire.
- Educate careers services at universities so that they can suggest the profession to students nearing graduation. In particular, linking up with careers services other than those in Oxbridge would hopefully encourage individuals from a wide range of backgrounds to consider IP as a career, feeding in to the diversity of the profession.
- Provide lectures to undergraduates following STEM degrees for patents (and potentially law degrees for trade marks), and liaising with law departments to encourage them to offer cross-over courses in IP for STEM students.
- Firms could offer more placements, whether these are work experience placements for school pupils, internships, or tech transfer style placements for researchers.
- Additional marketing and advertising of Careers in Ideas in careers emails and on job websites such as Target Jobs/Indeed/The Student Room etc.
- Utilising blogs and social media.
- Open days at firms for university students, again to offer a taster of the profession when they are considering what to do after graduation.
- Having more active recruitment drives by firms directed towards final-year students and more of a presence at careers fairs.
- Potentially starting an apprenticeship scheme within the profession - hiring individuals without a degree background.

Discussion point 2 - Discrimination during recruitment

18% of survey respondents felt that they had been discriminated against during a recruitment process in the IP profession. The goal of IP Futures is to reduce this to zero. How can the profession improve?

- Anonymise applications or CVs that are received.
- Include unconscious bias in the training of staff involved in recruitment.
- Review the diversity of recruitment panels; involve younger staff, not just partners.
- External moderation of the interview/recruitment process.
- CIPA could perhaps be more active/inclusive – for example, centralised recruitment training rather than within firms.

- Since there is currently no onus on certain firms to improve their inclusivity or take on more social responsibility, perhaps add restrictions on who can sign the IP Inclusive charter. Create a business case that actively working on D&I and outreach helps recruitment, helps public speaking, CPD/communication skills.
- Raise awareness within the profession of the problem of discrimination during recruitment (both in-house and in private practice), however unintentional. Encourage recruitment from wider backgrounds.
- Consider whether the profession itself creates an impression of exclusivity; for example, barriers to entering CIPA, difficult of obtaining work experience or training to enter the profession in the first place; if somebody is keen to enter the profession but is rejected, there are very few options for gaining experience and proving their competence.

Discussion point 3 - Supporting early-career professionals in the workplace

Regardless of background, beginning a career in IP involves a huge amount of adjustment, steep learning curves, and pressure. How can the profession best support those at an early stage in their career (ECP)?

- Offer buddy and/or mentorship schemes, for example inter-firm or out of the ECP's immediate group/management/office, or an IP Inclusive buddy scheme.
- Have staff that are assigned to the ECP for pastoral support, for example to support through exams and through qualification and the changes that brings in the role and responsibility.
- Offer financial support for examinations – such as time off for studying, preparation materials.
- For smaller firms external support may be needed from CIPA/CITMA, e.g. a helpline or inter-firm support scheme, exam mentorship.
- Trainee exchange programs may offer broader training. Create a business case for promoting secondments/exchanges; in-house could get experience in private practice and vice versa.
- Financial support for trainee meetups e.g. CIPA informals, or within the firm.
- Discourage/try to move away from a keep quiet, head down mentality.