Attract, include and retain:
Key outcomes

Introduction

The following are key points that emerged from an IP Inclusive "virtual round-table" held on 2 June 2020. We hope they will be of value to IP sector employers who are looking to improve the way they attract and retain good staff and get the best out of them.

These notes are also intended to underline the business case for diversity and inclusivity, which appear to be gaining in importance in the context of staff recruitment and retention.

About the 2 June event

The round-table was for professionals involved in recruitment and talent management in IP sector organisations. It was intended as an open discussion about what professionals are looking for when they decide where to work, and the extent to which an employer's diversity and inclusivity credentials influence the decision to join, stay with or leave that employer. These are crucial business questions, because recruiting and retaining good people can be a challenge in a fast-growing sector like ours, and D&I could strongly influence success.

We are grateful to the panellists and delegates for engaging in the discussions both candidly and constructively.

The meeting was chaired by Andrea Brewster OBE, Lead Executive Officer of IP Inclusive. The panellists were Lesley Babb (Head of Pay, Reward and Diversity, UK Intellectual Property Office); Pete Fellows (Managing Director, Fellows and Associates); Catherine French (Director, Sacco Mann); and Stephen Gill (Head of IP Recruitment, Caselton Clark).

Our four themes

The discussions covered four themes:

1. What are candidates looking for in IP sector jobs? What D&I-related criteria affect their choice of employer?

2. How has that been affected by the Covid-19 crisis? How might we expect it to change in the short- to medium-term future?

3. How should the IP professions as a whole, and individual employers within it, respond to the answers to (1) and (2)? How can we make sure we attract, and retain, the best people?

4. What opportunities does all of this present for the IP sector? And how can we make the most of them?

Q1: What are candidates looking for?

- Both anecdote and survey data (see Annex I) suggest that, even before Covid-19, IP professionals were starting to prioritise work-life balance over salary in their career choices.
- Workplace culture is also increasing in importance. This of course is often linked to the likelihood of career progression and financial reward, in particular for those who might historically have expected to encounter discrimination.
- "Work-life balance", as the Covid-19 lockdown has shown, is not always synonymous with working from home. Rather, it is the ability to choose the right balance, for the individual, between office-based and remote working, work time and personal time.
- Type of work, level of responsibility and development prospects are usually important to candidates, but even here, different people will be looking for different things so what matters is an employer's ability to accommodate.
- Not all candidates will ask about a potential employer's D&I credentials, although some will ask about workplace culture and whether they are likely to "fit in". An impression of academic elitism in an organisation, or a large gender imbalance, might for example put candidates off.
- The candidates most likely to ask questions about D&I are those who have had either positive or negative experiences of inclusivity (or lack of it) with previous employers. People in so-called "minority" groups (eg LGBT+, BAME, disabled, women) are more likely to have been affected by such experiences.
- Younger candidates tend to take more of an interest in D&I credentials.
- Country of residence, or of education/training, also sometimes affects candidates' views on the importance of D&I to career choices.
- Candidates do not typically confide to recruitment consultants about negative experiences – such as bullying or discrimination – that have motivated their decision to move jobs. Nevertheless, our panellists believed that such things have almost certainly caused some people to change employers.

Q2: How will that be affected by Covid-19?

- Panellists felt that the emphasis on work-life balance was almost certain to increase as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown. People have experienced a different, more home-centred lifestyle and many are unlikely to want to return to the working and commuting patterns they left behind.

- We can expect a wider range of people to start taking these issues into account when deciding where to work.
- Employers should therefore anticipate more questions, both before and during interview, about flexible working options and the support provided for part-time and remote workers.
- They should also expect more requests for flexible working, particularly from lateral hires. Those who refuse or limit flexibility without good reasons may find themselves correspondingly less popular.
- Panellists had not observed the expected decrease in candidates seeking new jobs. They are already being contacted not just by people who are worried about redundancies post-lockdown, but also by those for whom lockdown has provided an opportunity to reflect on future career choices, including some who may have been unimpressed by their current employer's handling of the situation.
- As a general point, the lockdown has emphasised to both employees and employers that properly-tailored support is vital for a resilient, productive and of course loyal workforce. The presence or absence of this support will have changed some people's career expectations.

Q3: How should we respond?

- *Be prepared to offer more flexible working arrangements*
  - Candidates are more likely to ask for flexibility in the future, and employers who are unwilling to offer it will need good reasons.
  - Before and during interviews, be ready to answer questions about the support (practical, professional and pastoral) you provide for employees working remotely or flexibly, as well as for their colleagues, and the procedures you have in place to ensure business continuity and client care.

- *Commit resources to supporting your workforce*
  - Work-life balance is little help if working hours are difficult or unpleasant.
  - As above, provide practical, professional and pastoral support for remote and flexible workers as well as for their colleagues in the office.
  - Make sure the support can be tailored to accommodate individual employees' needs, rather than a one-size-fits-all policy.
  - Take account of other aspects of your employees' lives where allowances might be needed, and provide extra support during times of change.
  - Wellbeing – both physical and mental – is increasing in importance, and employers can expect to be judged on how well they look after their staff.

- *Take care with your "branding"*

- o Prospective employees will be attracted to organisations that look to have a happier, healthier workplace culture; existing staff will be more likely to stay if they are proud of their organisation.
- o IP is a small sector: reputations spread quickly and can be hard to change, especially in today's hyper-connected world.
- o Make sure your corporate comms (including social media, and in particular your website) project the right image about the type of employer you are or want to be and the type of candidate you'd welcome: don't discourage good candidates and equally, reduce the risk of unsuitable applications.
  - ▪ Highlight the good aspects of your organisation, eg diverse teams; sound policies on diversity, inclusion, workplace behaviour, parental leave, wellbeing and employee support; allegiances to groups such as IP Inclusive and its "communities"[1] or Stonewall; relevant awards; corporate social responsibility work
  - ▪ Use personal stories to illustrate your employees' different backgrounds and why they work for you
  - ▪ Present your messages in a range of ways – eg podcasts and videos as well as text – and a range of forums (blog pages, Twitter, LinkedIn, industry journals, local media) to reach a wider range of people.
- o IP Inclusive is always keen to share examples of good practice, if submitted in the spirit of sharing and sector-wide improvement rather than purely for individual gain.

- *Be prepared to recruit and even onboard remotely*
  - o The profession cannot afford to stop recruiting for too long; remote recruitment is likely to become a necessary part of the employer's armoury.
  - o Some employers have already successfully recruited and "onboarded" new staff during the lockdown; it has proved perfectly possible.
  - o Remote-access selection can open the field to previously excluded or discouraged groups, for example disabled people, parents and other carers, and people living in less accessible parts of the country – thus widening the pool of people from which you can feasibly recruit.
  - o Remote interviews help you to assess a candidate's ability to work and communicate in a virtual space, which is fast becoming a core business skill.
  - o Tips for virtual onboarding of new recruits:
    - ▪ Ensure the practical support (eg IT systems and hardware) is in place; understand and help with constraints around office location and availability, including relevant personal circumstances

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[1] Our networking and support communities currently include IP & ME (for BAME professionals); IP Ability (for disabled people and carers); IP Futures (for early-career IP professionals); IP Out (for LGBT+ professionals); and Women in IP. All are open to allies as well. See https://ipinclusive.org.uk/community/.

- Have a plan for the phased delivery of introductions (at various levels in the organisation), induction and training
- Provide advice and support on remote working, to both the new starter and their manager(s)
- Make sure the new starter is aware of and has access to the support you provide, both professional and pastoral
- Establish regular contact with a range of colleagues (including both managers and peers, and on formal and informal bases) to ensure they feel involved and to check how they're coping

- *Be bold*
  - o Businesses that survived the 2008 downturn did so by continuing to recruit and being ready to exploit opportunities as the economy recovered.
  - o Invest in the longer-term if you can. IP is likely to fare better through the Covid-19 crisis than many sectors.
  - o Think strategically about future staffing and client opportunities. Avoid gaps in eg particular technical areas or seniority levels. Skewed demographics are bad for the IP sector as a whole as well as individual organisations.

- *Be open-minded about where and how you recruit*
  - o Consider who you need to strengthen your team as business practices change – it may be wise to seek people who bring different perspectives.
  - o Corporate clients often look for more diverse teams (eg in pitches): recruit with that in mind and aim to balance your intake.
  - o Widen the forums in which you recruit and the ways in which you assess and select (for instance, with greater use of virtual interactions).
  - o To improve your access to potential recruits, consider recruiting from other countries and alternative educational backgrounds; think laterally about apprenticeships and other less traditional training and qualification paths.

- *Importantly: start now*
  - o Lockdown gave people a chance to reflect and re-prioritise, a taste of a different way of working. They will expect their employers to take account of that.
  - o The way that employees are treated, both during lockdown and on their return, could be vital for securing their loyalty.

- *Work with your recruitment consultants*
  - o Discuss the messages you want them to disseminate about your organisation, and the types of candidate you want them to bring to your door. If you're looking for a more diverse intake, tell them.

      ○ Regularly seek their advice about candidate expectations and competitive benchmarks.

We are lucky in the IP sector. We have specialist recruiters who know our niche field well. They are ideally placed to help employers exploit the opportunities presented by the Covid-19 crisis, and to avoid potential pitfalls as we move to a "new normal". And they will be vital to the push for greater D&I that will help the IP professions to flourish in the future.

Q4: What opportunities does this present?

- The position we find ourselves in as a result of Covid-19 presents tremendous opportunities for employers who are willing to learn from it and adapt.
- The success of the imposed remote working arrangements has shown us new ways to:
    - Improve staff engagement and productivity
    - Provide more inclusive, better-tailored support for individual team members
    - Improve staff wellbeing
    - Carry out, manage and allocate work – thus potentially allowing us to develop new business models
    - Reduce workforce overheads, for instance office and travel costs
    - Lessen our environmental impact
- It has also provided an ideal opportunity to recruit a more diverse intake, which in turn allows us to:
    - Access a wider and deeper talent pool
    - Bring in new perspectives, to make our teams more innovative and effective ("innoversity")
    - Improve our attractiveness to clients and to future recruits
- The IP sector is now well positioned, compared to many recruiters, to attract and retain talented people. We should emphasise this in our messaging.
    - On the whole it has been quick to adapt and to demonstrate that it can function in more flexible ways
    - It is already good at communicating with clients, colleagues and tribunals across the globe, including through virtual channels
    - It is capable of providing an excellent working environment, combining rewarding prospects with a good work-life balance
    - It has proved reasonably resilient to recessions and other crises
- We need to grasp these opportunities now. The employers that fare best will be those prepared to think strategically, creatively and with open minds – about who they recruit, and how, and into what working arrangements.
    - Not only the next generation of workers, but also our existing workforce, will have different priorities and expectations as a result of Covid-19; employers must be aware of those and respond accordingly.

- *Key to attracting and retaining good employees in the future will be:*
  - Communication
    - Consult with staff and take account of their needs and expectations
  - Flexibility
    - Offer less proscriptive, better-tailored opportunities and support
  - Inclusivity
    - Accommodate employees as individuals; respect (and make the most of) their differences
  - Nurture
    - Put employee wellbeing, and appropriate support, at the top of the agenda
  - Trust
    - Where staff have remained loyal and productive through the Covid-19 crisis, there is every reason to trust them to continue if properly supported

- To be successful after Covid-19, we must embrace the changes it has made possible, rather than insisting on returning to how we were before. This is as important in the context of recruitment and retention as in any other aspect of a business.

Annex I
Further reading

General

Please visit the websites of our panellists' organisations and other IP sector recruiters. Many regularly publish news, blogs and survey data, for example:

- https://www.caseltonclark.co.uk/blog/ (including posts about remote working, gender balance, mental wellbeing and employer branding).
- https://fellowsandassociates.com/news (including advice for employers and employees in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis).
- https://www.saccomann.com/posts/ and https://www.saccomann.com/ipconnections (including guidance on remote working and virtual recruitment, and posts about IP Inclusive activities).

Relevant news and comment also appear on the IP Inclusive News and Features page (https://ipinclusive.org.uk/newsandfeatures/).

Also see the IP Inclusive Resources page (https://ipinclusive.org.uk/resources/) for guidance and tools to help employers recruit and manage more inclusively: see in particular our "Recruiting for Social Mobility" guidelines at https://ipinclusive.org.uk/resources/recruiting-for-social-mobility/.

Recruiters' survey data

- Caselton Clark (https://www.caseltonclark.co.uk/): see https://ipinclusive.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Casleton-Clark-IP-Salary-Lifestyle-Survey-2019.pdf for report of 2019 survey results; 2020 results to be published on the website soon
- Fellows and Associates (https://fellowsandassociates.com/): see https://fellowsandassociates.com/site-news/567-previous-salary-survey-results for reports of previous survey results; 2020 survey currently live at https://fellowsandassociates.com/site-news/836-2020-salary-survey
- Sacco Mann (https://www.saccomann.com/): see https://www.saccomann.com/patent-trademark-salary-survey-2020 for report of 2020 survey results