

## **From paralegal to partnership?: Alternative career routes in the legal profession**

Law firms today face different career challenges from those decades ago. While traditionally, partnership was seen as the pinnacle of career success, today younger generations attribute different meanings to their career or if partnership is their aspiration, they often stand little prospect of success as positions are limited. In addition, there is now a large group of paralegals who strive for legal qualification but face fierce competition for training contracts. While there have been initiatives to promote alternative career routes, these are still lacking in legitimacy. Yet, research indicates that offering meaningful and sustainable career paths is important for the development of legal talent and therefore the success of law firms. The aim of this research is hence to investigate how legal professionals such as lawyers, paralegals and apprentices today experience their careers and interpret the career choices available to them while suggesting pathways to the future for careers in law.

### **Who is the researcher?**

The study is conducted by Dr Stefanie Gustafsson, Lecturer at the School of Management, University of Bath. Stefanie is a trained organisational researcher who has expertise in researching careers and PSFs. She is also an Honorary Visiting Fellow at Cass Business School and a member of the Centre for Professional Service Firms, led by Prof Laura Empson. To conduct this research Stefanie has been awarded the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Future Research Leaders scheme.

<http://www.bath.ac.uk/management/faculty/stefanie-gustafsson.html>

### **How would the research be conducted?**

The research involves a comparative study of law firms. In each firm about 20 interviews with lawyers, management professionals and paralegals will be conducted, each lasting around 1 hour. Key areas of inquiry will include your career aspirations, particularly how these are formed, your perceptions on alternative career routes and how you interpret career opportunities in other areas such as business management and IT. In addition this research makes use of innovative research methods such as participant drawings which have been used increasingly in leadership studies and leadership development.

### **What is in it for you?**

First of all, from experience, participants find having a conversation with experienced researchers personally meaningful. You will also receive a summary of the findings and gain important insights into your career needs. There will be no financial costs involved.

### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

The research has been set up in accordance with the University of Bath General Data Protection Guidelines. The identity of firms and interviewees will remain anonymous. The research findings are intended for presentation at academic conferences and publication in peer-reviewed academic journals, practical dissemination such as practitioner publications and a summative research report.