

An underwater photograph showing a person's arms and hands reaching out towards the camera. The water is a vibrant, clear blue, and sunlight filters through from above, creating shimmering, wavy patterns on the person's skin. The hands are positioned in the center-right of the frame, with fingers slightly spread. The overall mood is serene and immersive.

TAKING THE PLUNGE



Marsons Solicitors swims against the flow

Based in Kent, Marsons has been providing legal services since 1986. The firm has four female Partners and is made up of five specialist departments: social housing, commercial property and conveyancing, personal injury, and commercial litigation and employment. Its policy and practice are to promote equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion. Its philosophy is to deliver quality, client-focused services by understanding its clients' needs, employing qualified specialist staff, communicating effectively, being approachable and available, and seeking practical solutions.

'We are slightly unusual in that our average age is younger than in most law firms and the majority of our employees are female,' says Jennifer White, the firm's Managing Partner. 'Our most important area of work is social housing where our dedicated team deals with housing management litigation and advice, and our commercial property department handles sales, acquisitions and developments.'

The social housing team's members provide advice and litigation services in respect of all types of tenancy management, and also assist with leasehold management issues. Marsons is recognised in both the Legal 500 and Chambers independent guides to the profession.

Mary Martil, Partner and Head of Social Housing, joined the firm in 2003 and is ranked as a leader in the social housing field by the Chambers guide, where she is described as 'outstanding, can-do and commercial.' 'It's nice to work in a law firm that isn't in the traditional mould,' she says. 'We have quite a high proportion of women here and people from various ethnic backgrounds, which can only be a positive thing. It is important to reflect the diversity of real life from the sectors in which we operate.'

Martil and her team in social housing work are at what she describes as the 'sharp end' of diverse Britain, in the sense that building sustainable communities, in which people from different cultures and from different social backgrounds live together and exercise tolerance, is not easy and presents an ongoing challenge. 'Social housing providers are under a lot of pressure to deliver and our role is to help them achieve their aims. One recurring issue is anti-social behaviour,' she asserts. 'We find a lot of anti-social behaviour has to do with mental health. If you're dealing with vulnerable people, you have to bear in mind the danger of disability discrimination, as people with mental health problems may well be disabled.'

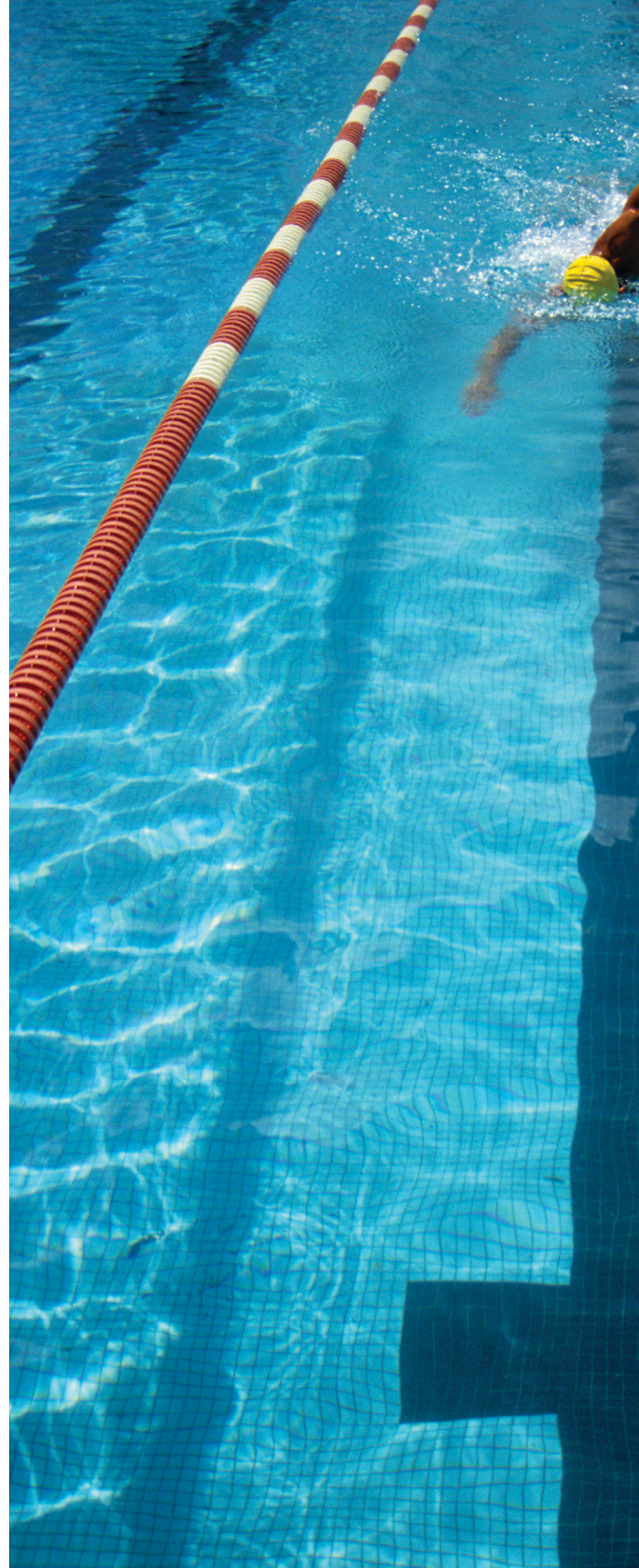
Recruiting the best

Speaking on recruitment, White notes: 'When you look at who's coming through our doors, there are a lot more women, and there is much more ethnic diversity than there used to be, and we welcome that. We have tried to encourage more men to come forward, but it's just turned out that the women have often been better candidates for a particular position. It's all about the person's skills and what they can bring to the table.'

White adds: 'The typical impression of lawyers is middle-aged men in suits, especially the owners and partners, which is not necessarily the best way or the future. As a firm, we are very supportive of different types of working, whether that is part time or flexible, and are committed to investing in our staff. I believe that if you support and put your trust in staff, then it will be paid back. In the end, it is about people - the firm is nothing without them. Nowadays, staff retention is an issue, so we will always look to recruit the best and hang on to them. It is simple things that work, like being flexible, offering training, support and letting employees grow. Ultimately, it makes good business sense because it's good for the firm and its culture and for all those who work within it.'

Putting policy into practice

Marsons has achieved diversity through putting equal opportunities into practice. By always seeking to recruit the best person for the job, regardless of gender, race or other irrelevant factors, it has built a firm in which women and ethnic minorities feature strongly as partners and solicitors.





Its social housing team and its clients benefit from that diversity. The diverse make-up of the team reflects the diversity that exists within the social housing organisations it acts for and the communities they serve. Having team members who have come from a housing management background, and who have been employed as lawyers within Registered Social Landlords and local authorities, gives the firm an understanding of the structures within which housing professionals work, and of the pressures and demands that affect them.

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As ‘Investors in People’, Marsons provides its diverse staff with the training opportunities and support they need to fulfil their aspirations. It provides financial support and flexibility to enable employees who have joined the firm as support staff to qualify as lawyers. Marsons believes that having a wide variety of life experience within the firm helps its members understand and empathise with clients, their needs and the needs of the wider community. As White acknowledges: ‘Diversity has increased our awareness of community-related issues and has provided us with opportunities to contribute, not just to the local community, but to communities elsewhere. For example, last year we provided clothing and equipment to a supported housing unit in southeast London and donated the firm’s used computers to an educational project in Ghana.’

White concludes: ‘As a firm, we intend to grow organically and want our staff to grow with us. We see there is always an opportunity for good lawyers providing a good service and bringing about practical solutions for clients. What’s good about being a relatively small, young firm is that we can adapt very quickly. Our future is bright and we will continue to reflect our workforce and the markets we work in.’