



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2023

**How do we
#EmbraceEquity?**

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How do we Embrace Equity?

“Why educate your daughters? In the end they will only be wives and mothers.”

A phrase I often heard my parents being told. These views are not reserved to my family alone. Nor to my culture. Yet education has been the key to where I am today, just as my parent’s wished it to be.

With this year’s theme; #EmbraceEquity, in mind I’ve taken on both the risk and reward in writing down my inner most thoughts of what this phrase means to me in the context of the Scottish legal profession.

In this book you'll find those thoughts, along with advice, and the comments of women and men across the legal profession in Scotland.

I hope it helps you to move forward with your own version of embracing equity, and we can use this International Women's Day to start making changes that really matter.

Naeema Sajid , Founder, Diversity+

....Naeema Sajid continued...

Having been in the legal profession for over 20 years, 'served' in both the public and private sector, carried out both civil and criminal work, kept myself abreast of the many changes that have taken place during that time and indeed the many changes since I retired in 2019, I think I've earned the privilege to say a few words.

I say 'earned' because rightly, against all the odds, that is what I, and many women of my background have done. We've earned it. And that is the starting point of embracing equity: **making good the disadvantages that don't make us equal to begin with.**

"To #EmbraceEquity it's important to recognise where we have privilege and support others to shine. I have the good fortune to be supported by many incredible women and will try my best to pay forward their kindness."



Seonaid Stevenson-McCabe LLB (Hons) LLM DipLP,
Solicitor (Scotland)
Lecturer in Law | Glasgow School for Business and Society

....Naeema Sajid continued...

The power of privilege is such that it ought not to belong to one, or indeed a few.

In my relentless pursuit to make the smallest of change, turn the mind of the most antiquated decision maker and build the tiniest of bridges to replace the most translucent of barriers, I've come to realise just how unjustly powerful the structures that prevent equality truly are.

Is this why in 2023 we are seeking equity as opposed to equality? The UN year on year assesses the rate of **progress towards full gender equality**. It's current prediction is that **it will take 300 years**. I recall it being 99 in 2020. **We are going backwards.**

In my mind, the rationale is quite simple. Just as we can't have genuine diversity without first having inclusion. **We can't have equality without first having equity.** We have inequity in our homes, in our education system, in our health service, in the distribution of wealth, to name but a few. Inevitably these all lead to unfairness and unjust outcomes in our professional lives: the legal profession for all its rigour to uphold justice and fairness, is not immune.

"I want us all to #EmbraceEquity so that we leave the legal profession in a better and more diverse state than we found it in."



Dr Jonny Hardman, Senior Lecturer, Edinburgh Law School.

....Naeema Sajid continued...

Ask any women in the profession what the barriers are to her progressing her career and you'll get several answers:

Overwhelming, the lack of family friendly policies; lack of opportunities; lack of support; lack of relatable models, all of these and more. But seldom do we look behind why 'there is a lack of?'

In the era of organisations embracing change, why is there a lack of? With more women than men entering the profession for at least the last 20 years it's certainly not a lack of us.

We're lawyers. We know logic, right?

Wrong.

We thought offering flexible working would help retain and progress female talent.

Wrong, again.

We thought dangling the carrot of a better work/life balance would open the doors for more women to want to take decision making roles.

Wrong, yet again.

The legal sector should reflect the society it is supposed to represent. The only way to achieve this is to create the space for all to succeed across the profession. #EmbraceEquity

Marie-Claire Boyle. *Women in Law* Project Knowledge Exchange Officer



....Naeema Sajid continued...

The problem, for which I don't have all the solutions (although I'm working towards them), is that above, beyond and around all of this we still have cultures and structures that were designed by men for men. Cultures and structures that we have tried to tinker with to allow flexibility. But there has never been full scale reform to bring these structures down and start again with men and women as equals.

What are these cultures and structures? These are **the outdated ideas upon which we measure merit and success**. Who's billing the most chargeable hours, who's bringing in the high value clients, who's best at battering their opponent in court, who exudes confidence and demands promotion.

For my part #EmbracingEquity means doing my part to help you rethink your cultures and structures for a more equitable profession.

International Women's Day is an opportunity for people around the world to come together and celebrate the achievements of women, while also recognising the challenges and barriers that they face. **One of the most important challenges that women face is the lack of equity**, which can manifest itself in many different ways. From unequal pay to limited access to education and healthcare, women continue to be marginalised in many parts of the world.

"To be successful as a woman, you have to break through the glass ceiling, but you also have to address the sticky floor".

*In my experience the sticky floor is **underrepresentation** which fosters imposter syndrome, self-doubt and undervaluing myself as a result of my intersectionality. I choose to **#EmbraceEquity** by using my voice to advocate for an inclusive and equitable profession and to address the barriers of access and progress of ethnic minority women within the profession.*

Brianella Scott. Assistant Solicitor to the Sheku Bayoh Public Inquiry



....Naeema Sajid continued...

In order to address these issues, it is important for everyone to embrace equity and work towards creating a more just and equal world. This means **acknowledging the ways in which women have been excluded and marginalised, and actively working to address these issues**. It means promoting policies that ensure equal pay and equal opportunities for women, regardless of their background or identity. It means challenging harmful stereotypes and biases that contribute to the marginalisation of women, and creating spaces where women can thrive and succeed.

Embracing equity is not just the right thing to do; it is also good for society as a whole.

When women are able to participate fully in all aspects of society, they bring a unique perspective and set of skills that can help to solve some of the most pressing challenges that we face. Women have played a key role in driving progress in areas such as healthcare, education, and social justice, and their contributions are essential to building a better world.

"As a socially mobile, first generation lawyer and working mum, I will #EmbraceEquity by choosing to challenge inequality as I encounter it and by using my voice and recognising the privilege of my education to try to support and raise others up."



Caroline Colliston, Executive Partner for Scotland, DWF

...Naeema Sajid continued...

Finally, embracing equity is not just the responsibility of women; it is **the responsibility of all of us**. Men and women must work together to create a more just and equal world, and this means supporting and advocating for policies and practices that promote equity. It means **recognising the ways in which we may have contributed to the marginalisation of women**, and committing to doing better in the future.

In conclusion, International Women's Day is an opportunity for all of us to come together and celebrate the achievements of women, while also acknowledging the challenges that they continue to face. By embracing equity and working towards creating a more just and equal world, we can ensure that women are able to participate fully in all aspects of society, and that their contributions are valued and recognised. **Let us all commit to doing our part to create a more equitable and just world, not just on International Women's Day, but every day.**

Naeema Yaqoob Sajid
Founder, Director. Diversity+



@naeemaysajid



#embraceequity by making sure that not only is everyone represented when I look round the table, but also that their voices are heard and have equal weighting.

Aaliya Seyal, Chief Executive Officer, Legal Services Agency



"I stand on the sacrifices of a million women before me thinking 'what can I do to make this mountain taller so the women after me can see farther'

(legacy – Rupi Kaur, The Sun and Her Flowers book)

In this short poem, Rupi Kaur acknowledges the sacrifices that other women have made which have contributed to her success, as well as wanting to use her position to benefit women too. For me, this is a good reminder of how we can all work collectively to impact positive change. Together, we must #EmbraceEquity - only then, can we move forward and help forge equality."

Rupa Mooker. Director of People & Development. MacRoberts LLP

"We #EmbraceEquity when we have a profession reflective of the people we represent with Lawyers who feel able to openly be their authentic selves."

Kay Foulkes, 2nd Year Trainee Solicitor, Legal Services Agency



"I recognise the importance and need for equality, but 'treating everyone the same' is not always equitable. We don't all begin at the same starting point. I greatly appreciate #IWD2023 for reminding us of this. There are inequities in life and in order that we may make appropriate adjustments and resolve these, we need to have regard to everyone's specific circumstances, in order to be fair to them. #EmbraceEquity"

Angela Grahame KC, FCI Arb



"Equality is a crucial aspect of promoting gender justice and creating a more just and equitable world for all people. International Women's Day encourages us all to work towards a future where women are truly equal and free to live their lives to the fullest.

On this International Women's Day, let us celebrate the power of women's voices and the strength of our collective actions. Together we are unstoppable."

Nadia Cook. Founder of The Scottish Lawyer.

"#EmbraceEquity means ensuring that woman are properly and positively represented around the key decision-making table of the organisation they belong to, and where the issues that impact them and their lives are determined. Too many legal organisations have structures where woman are not represented proportionately at the top table and this only serves to exacerbate existing inequity. Ensuring that woman are positively represented at the top is win-win-win for an organisation's culture, it's bottom-line and for retaining female talent whose contribution will soar where their values and needs are met."

Anon

"The theme of IWD this year is Embrace Equity. Why should we? We've just got our heads round equality, diversity and inclusion. Why another word to bamboozle us?"

Because equality is not enough.

A legal profession is part of the society and culture it serves. Therefore, if societies and cultures put up barriers to women advancing then it is obvious that the same will happen in the professions. It is why women are consistently on the wrong side of a pay gap, take longer to be promoted, and are more likely to be bullied or harassed. It is why, despite, so much effort progress is slow. Cultural, systemic change takes time and needs all of us – regardless of background – to put our shoulder to the wheel.

To acknowledge the issues that women face is to implicitly acknowledge that the support we give to women in the profession, and elsewhere, needs to be different to the support we give to others. Structural issues can only be overcome with a system-wide response. More than this we know women of colour, disabled women, LGBTQ+ women may require different support too. It means deep down looking at the needs of every individual and seeing how they can shine.

Rather than focusing on equality which usually means giving everyone an equal share; equity makes us consider those systemic and structural barriers, how they impact people, and how we can dismantle them. More people taking the time to #EmbraceEquity will see us taking down those barriers brick by brick and, in turn, building a society where all can thrive."

Rob Marrs. Head of Education. The Law Society of Scotland



"In my role I pledge to #EmbraceEquity by ensuring I help lift and amplify marginalised voices in every room I am in. I will listen, and I will advocate."

Lindsay Jack. Director of Student Experience. Edinburgh Law School



"If an able woman isn't appointed to a role because of a personal characteristic or a caring responsibility, that isn't her problem, it's OUR problem"

Laura Dunlop KC

"100 years on from the admission to Membership of the first female Advocate – Dame Margaret Kidd – the Faculty of Advocates is delighted to support International Women's Day. Much remains to be done to achieve gender parity in the legal profession, but we can celebrate the achievements of Dame Margaret, and of all the female lawyers who have followed in her footsteps, in advancing the interests of the profession and the administration of justice as a whole".

Roddy Dunlop KC Dean of Faculty of Advocates



"Perhaps it's the pedantic lawyer in me, but I immediately thought 'what does equity mean?' How does omitting those two letters - 'al' - change the meaning?"



Equity, the dictionary tells me, has two main meanings. The first is about fairness and justice. It's about recognising that in order to achieve equality, it may be fair and just to adapt the way we do things. In a world designed by men for men, it's no surprise that systems and procedures largely favour men.

Equity recognises the need to change those systems and procedures in order to achieve equality.

And the other meaning of equity? It's what's left when liabilities are deducted from assets. This International Women's Day, let's try and see women, indeed everyone, as assets to be embraced and cherished, not liabilities to be tolerated. #EmbraceEquity "

Kay Springham KC. King's Counsel at Compass Chambers, Faculty of Advocates



This is what to implement now, to #EmbraceEquity in your workplace

- 1. Eliminate the Gender Pay Gap:** Ensure that everyone, regardless of gender, is paid equally for their work. Conduct regular pay audits to identify and rectify any pay disparities.
- 2. Diverse Hiring:** Create a diverse and inclusive hiring process from beginning to end, that does not discriminate based on gender or any other identity. This can be achieved by reviewing job descriptions, sourcing candidates from diverse backgrounds, working with third parties who share the same vision as you, and providing training on implicit bias for those involved in the hiring process.
- 3. Flexible Work Arrangements:** Offer flexible work arrangements such as part-time, job-sharing, or remote work to accommodate the needs of employees with caregiving responsibilities, the majority of whom are women; and review your structures to ensure these arrangements do not contribute to bias and slower career progression.
- 4. Career Development:** Provide equal opportunities for career advancement and professional development for all employees, regardless of gender. Offer mentorship and sponsorship programs to support the growth of underrepresented groups.
- 5. Family Leave Policies:** Offer equal and remunerated family leave to all employees, regardless of gender, to support better balance of work and family responsibilities.

- 6. Inclusive Culture:** Create an inclusive workplace culture by celebrating diversity, promoting allyship, and addressing micro aggressions or other forms of discriminatory behaviour.
- 7. Gender-Neutral Language:** Use gender-neutral language in all communications, including job descriptions, employee handbooks, and company-wide communications such as private spaces for breastfeeding and pregnancy-related medical appointments.
- 8. Leadership Training:** Provide leadership training that promotes equity and inclusion and helps managers recognise and address any biases or discrimination in the workplace.
- 9. Employee Resource Groups:** Create fully resourced and supported employee groups that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, and allow employees to connect and support one another. These groups can be based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or any other identity.
- 10. Relatable Role Models.** Find them, value them and use their skills to better plan for the future. If you don't have relatable talent within - look externally.
- 11. Power and Privilege.** Measure your power and privilege and use it to create cultures and structures that support equitable solutions.



"Let us all commit to doing our part to create a more equitable and just world, not just on International Women's Day, but every day."

Naeema Sajid, Diversity+

That is our aim - to make lasting change. Equality remains our goal. Equity will help us get there. We hope this book supports you in your aim to understand what embracing equity is about, helps you to feel inspired and included by the thoughts and hopes of the sector, and gets you ready to make things happen.

We are a leading Diversity and Inclusion Consultancy, and our business and legal sector experience is backed by lived experience of bias and discrimination in the workplace. Our aim is to support the sector to reflect the society it serves.

If you like this guide, keep in touch on our social channels, and through our newsletters.



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