



WATSON ESAM Solicitors

**PRESS
RELEASE**

A FAIRER SHARE FOR LEGAL EAGLES.

It is said that law remains a frustrating profession for women, with more female solicitors leaving it than men because of the inequality in progression to partner level. Of the top 20 city law firms in the country, only 18% of the partners are women. What then is happening at Sheffield solicitors Watson Esam?

Based in the legal beauty spot of Paradise Square, Watson Esam has been dealing with the legal enquiries of Sheffields for more than 150 years. Much has changed in those years, as the firm has grown from what has always been a good solid general practice, to a vibrant and forward thinking, young partnership, responsible for driving this business forward. So is that partnership 18% female? Absolutely not.



Led by Senior Partner Jay Bhayani, 3 of the firm's 4 partners are female – 75%. Jay is a leading employment lawyer in Sheffield and heads the firm's commercial and employment departments. She became a partner 11 years ago when she was the first Asian partner in a law firm in the region at the age of 29, and remains one of very few female senior partners. She is credited with directing much of the enormous change in the firm. Married with 2 young children, Jay juggles her family life with directing the business, gaining numerous awards along the way. She won the Yorkshire Lawyer Award – Employment Lawyer of the year 2005, and was instrumental in the firm winning Law Society's Race Equality Award in 2005, in the category of Best Employer (25 partners or fewer). She has now been short listed for one of The Yorkshire & Humberside Institute of Directors Awards

Kate Fitzpatrick is the firm's Managing Partner, and has been a partner for 10 years. She specialises in children law with a particular interest in public law children work including High Court and child abductions. She is one of the city's leading lawyers in this field. Her specialism in this field is recognised as a member of the Law Society Children's panel. Kate is also a Solicitor-Advocate having been granted Rights of Audience in the Higher Courts (Civil Proceedings). This means that she has the right to present cases as an Advocate in the Higher Courts in all civil proceedings - including family - a right traditionally available to barristers only.





Michelle Cooper is head of the firm's family department and has been a partner for 4 years. Michelle specialises in high value divorce and ancillary relief cases. A high profile leader of one of the city's larger family departments, Michelle is an accredited specialist panel member in advanced financial provision and domestic abuse with Resolution (formerly the Solicitors Family Law Association). Sitting on local Resolution committee and National Resolution sub-committees, she is able to use her influence to help steer family law for the benefit of the public. Michelle is delighted that her department has been short listed to receive the Private Client Award at the Yorkshire Lawyers Awards in 2007

What's more, 50% of other Solicitors at Watson Esam are female. So, maybe Watson Esam is exceptional in its female dominance, but as the Law Society is now suggesting that the number of women entering the legal profession is overtaking men, maybe it can be held up as a shining example for women in the legal profession.

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