



CLASS OF 2022

Promoting women in STEM

**What does it mean for
women to be at the heart of
our business? Janine
Swarbrick and Sofie
McPherson of HGF
examine the gender
balance in IP and what is
being done to improve it.**

industry look in 2022? Are women really at the heart of it? Why should they be there? And what more could be done to support women in their careers in this field?

For women to be at the heart of our business, it is critical they are engaged with the running and direction of the business and can participate fully. This matters at all seniority levels: for junior staff, a lack of inclusion and positive senior role models can make it seem that a place at the top is not available to them.

If women feel that they are fighting against the tide, lack a sense of belonging, or that they are not acknowledged fully in moving the business forwards, retention of female staff can be an issue and talented women can be lost.

This loss leads to the lack of female representation at senior levels, which is so crucial to having diverse decision-makers in the business. These factors apply not only to fee earners, but many support staff are female and are absolutely integral to business success. Their voices also should be heard in order for those women to be at the heart of our business.

Where are we now?

A data-packed [article](#) published by the Intellectual Property Owners Association earlier this year focused on "Diversity in the European Innovation Industry and IP Profession". And there were a few encouraging points amid disheartening facts.

The European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) is [succeeding](#) in addressing gender imbalance in senior positions, increasing the proportion of women in managerial roles from 20% in 2003 to 47.4% in 2021. The UK Intellectual Property Office (UKIPO) reports increased success for female job candidates. An increase in female inventorship can be seen in many European countries.

However, there remains a much higher proportion of male patent attorneys, at least in the UK (the Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys reports that the patenting sector comprises 72% males.)

[Female inventorship in Europe](#) in 2019 stands at around 30% in Eastern Europe, with lower figures in France (16%), the UK (11%) and Germany (6%). At the UKIPO, [21% of patent examiners](#) are female, while women comprise a third of examiners at the European Patent Office (EPO) of which [22% have managerial roles](#). Clearly, headway is being made to improve inclusion for women in the IP industry but a lot of work remains.

So what makes women succeed at the heart of our business, and how can the figures be improved?

"Women in IP is a community acting to provide support and networking for all members, including encouraging the next generation of women leaders to progress at work."



**Janine
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Diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives are moving up the list of priorities for IP businesses, and rightly so. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it makes business sense. Clients, business partners and society expect D&I to be at the forefront of business decisions. So what initiatives are there in IP and science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) to support women in achieving their potential?

Company-level D&I groups are being established to advise senior management and kick-start initiatives to support women and other groups.

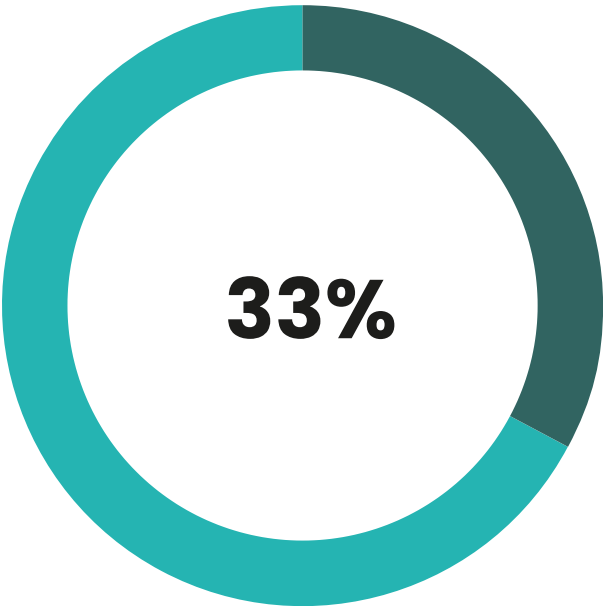
These D&I groups succeed where there is buy-in from elsewhere in the business. Without resources from marketing and business development, great ideas may never be heard. And without permission from line managers and group heads, junior staff may not feel they have permission to be part of initiatives to promote women.

Most importantly, without visible and sincere support from the most senior leaders (especially men), there is no trickle-down of leadership permitting the rest of the workforce to take positive action and improve the workplace for women.

There are also many industry-wide initiatives that promote D&I. For example, the work of [IP Inclusive](#) has been shaping how many company-level D&I groups are supported and heard.

[Women in IP](#) is a community acting to provide support and networking for all members, including encouraging the next generation of women leaders to progress at work, by sharing ideas, recipes for success, contacts and information. As with all IP Inclusive communities, allies are welcome. In relation to supporting women, having male allies is valuable to garner support and raise awareness of issues which may not be widely appreciated.

Female examiners at the European Patent Office
(of which 22% have managerial roles)



Source: The European Patent Office

The IP industry is not the only heavily male dominated industry. The financial industry has been notorious for a culture lacking support for women.

However, that is changing, as reflected by the 400-ish firms that have signed up to the [Women in Finance Charter](#). This is a pledge for gender balance across financial services and a commitment by HM Treasury and signatory firms to work together to build a more balanced and fair industry.

From the list of signatories, it is clear that the gender balance in the financial industry is a serious issue that they are actively trying to address.

Many financial services firms show their commitment to the Women in Finance Charter by setting out internal targets relating not only to hiring but also promoting and retaining women, and by developing tools and programmes to achieve these goals.

One interesting programme run by many top banks such as Citi is the [Return to Work Programme](#). It is designed for women who have had a career break to get into a career within financial services regardless of previous industry experience. The programme aims to acquire and retain talent that otherwise would be lost, and Citi emphasises the importance of flexible working arrangements, which is particularly appealing to women who have had to leave their previous role due to childcare challenges.

A similar culture change is seen in the accountancy sector with The Times listing four leading accountancy firms in its ["Top 50 Employers for Women"](#). One common theme between the firms is that they offer a flexible working culture. They have also developed various programmes to support inclusion, including programmes for allyship.

The legal industry does not appear to be lagging too far behind, as The Times also mentions several law firms making headway in supporting women, and there are many IP industry networks and communities supporting the progress of women in IP law firms. However, to accelerate a faster culture change across the whole IP industry, perhaps a government supported initiative similar to the Women in Finance Charter may be necessary.

"Surely, it is foolish to restrict female talent and ideas from flourishing in the workplace for the sake of historic business practices."

Diversity at work has been shown to [foster creativity and innovation](#), improve financial performance, and increase employee retention and engagement. There are increasing numbers of female CEOs in major firms (though there remain [fewer than 10% female CEOs in Fortune 500 companies](#)). Bringing people of different backgrounds together in leadership allows for a far richer melting pot of ideas to simmer than if everyone in the boardroom shares the same life experiences.

In IP, issues which disproportionately affect women need to be tackled, so it makes sense for women leaders to be present and heard at all levels, otherwise those issues will be unheard or poorly handled.

Technology in female-led areas is accelerating at a rapid rate and so-called 'fem-tech' innovation is becoming an established field of innovation. Products and software to address women's health issues are the focus of an increasing number of businesses and start-ups, including wearables to track pregnancy and fertility. Software for tracking menopause symptoms and providing treatment suggestions, smartphone controllable breast pumps, and mobile breast cancer screening are other examples. These businesses in new technology areas are run predominantly by women, for women—and are a prime example of women being at the heart of STEM innovation businesses.

Hearing the experiences of women in relation to female-focused issues—for example, maternity, childbirth, the menopause, and caring responsibilities—and providing workplaces to accommodate those women, is crucial for the workplace to work for everyone.

For working women, the ability to work from home and work flexibly can allow them to both bring more of themselves to work and manage their home responsibilities more effectively. Improving ways of working for women means those changes are available to all, allowing everyone to thrive. Surely, it is foolish to restrict female talent and ideas from flourishing in the workplace for the sake of historic business practices.

Perhaps the question here should be: Why wouldn't you want the best talent, regardless of gender, to be at the heart of our business? Of course you would.

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