

Responsible Business Report 2024-25



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Foreword



Alison Regan

Partner and chair of Responsible Business Committee

Looking back over the course of the last year, I am proud of the progress that has been made in pursuit of our responsible business goals and, in particular, the dedication and passion demonstrated by my colleagues across the firm in support of our people, our communities and our planet.

2024, in particular, has been a year of disruption, change and transition both here in the UK and around the world. Amidst the maelstrom, it is all too easy to lose sight of the incremental positive effect of individual efforts – the personal and the professional – small acts of kindness, and a commitment to staying the course on the journey.

We have made progress this year. And, in some cases, progress means better understanding where the opportunities are to do more and do better.

Our environmental impact is one such example. In our Responsible Business Report for 2023 we laid out our commitment to join the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi), which we have now done and correspondingly committed to reducing our carbon emissions by 50% by 2030. This is an important step. While we have been proud to be carbon neutral for many years, and one of the first UK firms to be so, we know that we must make adjustments to those things that are within our control to minimise our direct impact on the environment.

Key to this is our sustainable procurement policy – the implementation of which was, again, one of our core commitments for 2024 – and which ensures that we are using our buying power as a law firm to support likeminded sustainable and ethical enterprises.

A standout success in recent years and an area that I have been particularly pleased to see the dial shift on is the gender make up of our firm. I am proud that we are leading the way, particularly among London firms, for women in senior positions, and are now very close to achieving parity in the number of male and female partners in the firm. This should be celebrated, even as we acknowledge that we must continue to explore ways to improve access to the profession, and progression within it, among other underrepresented groups.

More widely I have been so inspired to see the energy and effort of our teams right across the firm to deliver on our responsible business commitments, ranging from the roll out of our volunteering programme firmwide to successfully securing a new legal aid contract until June 2026 – helping to ensure that those most in need can access the very best advice as they seek to secure justice. That we are one of the very few top 100 firms doing legal aid work at scale and with respect to some of the most challenging cases remains a real source of pride for me.

Our three-year firm strategy made climate change, and responsible business more generally, core to our business – informing and instigating the decisions we take. As we approach the beginning of a new strategic cycle in 2025-26 those decisions will continue to drive us forward, with the progress made in recent years a platform for long term responsible and resilient business – not least with our 2030 climate target in place.

I would like to thank all of my colleagues who lead, contribute to and support the many initiatives that collectively comprise our Responsible Business Strategy and which, together with our fundamental culture and belief in ‘doing the right thing’, make Russell-Cooke the very special firm that it is.



Our environment

In focus

Our responsible procurement policy

In September 2024 the firm introduced a responsible procurement policy. Director of Finance Samuel Allen and legal director and Head of Environment Alix Rejman discuss why we have introduced the policy, how it will evolve and how it fits within the wider picture of our environmental commitments.

What is it?

We have a long-held commitment to responsible procurement, which has always included striving to make ethical buying decisions. In some cases we have been ahead of the curve, such as in our early adoption of the London living wage.

We define responsible procurement as having three main components: social value, environmental sustainability and ethical sourcing.

Why do we need it?

The motivation for creating a procurement policy was to further formalise our approach, and to ensure greater transparency and accountability in our supply chain, and move away from individual judgement.

As a responsible business we have a duty to use our spending power to the benefit of our community and the environment. We don't just expect this

of ourselves – our stakeholders expect it of us too. We know, and are encouraged to see, that responsible sourcing is a growing trend, with clients looking beyond cost to decide who they work with, with ESG credentials a key factor.

Our three-year strategic plan commits our firm (and in particular its leadership) to ensuring that climate change is a central factor in all decision making affecting our business. Operating sustainably is rooted in our own values and we now have a policy that sets the same expectations for our external suppliers.

How does our responsible procurement policy fit into our wider environmental activities?

Our responsible procurement policy is informed by the wider commitments we have made in relation to environmental sustainability.

We are working to achieve greater alignment between these initiatives

and our policy. For example, last year we joined the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi), which commits us to decreasing our Scope 1 emissions by 50% by 2030 and to report on progress annually. Similarly, we have an ongoing commitment to reducing waste through re-use, recycling and donations, and have a project team in place to actively explore ways to eliminate it entirely. In line with this, we have signed up to the Greener Litigation Pledge to minimise the environmental impact of our dispute resolution practice including by using electronic rather than paper communication, and documents where possible and avoiding unnecessary travel.

We want to see this translate directly into our procurement policy in the form of an explicit commitment to working with carbon neutral providers and those who are working to reduce waste.

There are many complexities to cut through. For example, what might appear as a zero-carbon energy scheme could be contributing to nuclear waste. In that scenario, we would look to source our energy from a perhaps more expensive supplier that utilised non-nuclear renewables. It is important that we are continuously working towards honouring all of our environmental commitments when making procurement decisions, however challenging that can sometimes be.

What do we consider when choosing a supplier?

The question to ask at the outset is, who are we considering working with and paying money to, and do they reflect our values?

When drawing up our supplier checklist, we believed it was important to put ourselves in our clients' shoes and ask, "if they were applying our responsible procurement criteria would they choose Russell-Cooke?" That helped bring into focus what our core considerations are.

As a living wage employer, we strongly prefer suppliers that are accredited living wage employers. So, in the event that two suppliers met the other requirements on our supplier checklist equally, this would take priority. We also actively seek out the opportunity to procure from local suppliers and

those with a clear commitment to environmental sustainability.

Naturally, there is flexibility within the policy to recognise nuance and ensure that when we are making these decisions, we are always considering client needs.

What is the scope of the policy?

As a firm we rely on multiple services and goods provided by external suppliers – from the barristers we instruct on client matters, through to the technology solutions we buy and use, to the tea and coffee we serve in our meeting rooms.

Accordingly, our responsible procurement policy is comprehensive, encompassing everything the firm procures. It therefore calls for the understanding and support of every legal team and business services function in the firm.

What stage of implementation is the policy at?

Under the guidance of our Environmental Group and pursuant to a commitment made in the firm's previous Responsible Business Reports, the policy was rolled out across the firm in September 2024.

We know that our people already instinctively check suppliers for their adherence to sustainability and to responsible business principles, but our next challenge is to ensure the policy is fully socialised and embedded in our practices. To this end, we are planning an internal communications campaign to raise further awareness of the policy's existence and its requirements of our people, which will include asking them to report back on what they already do and may do differently in future.

We recognise the importance of the policy translating into action, and will be gathering feedback from the members of staff who make procurement decisions to understand whether they have faced any challenges when using the supplier checklist.

The decision-making process is often not simple – one supplier might have an environmentally friendly delivery route,

and another a clear commitment to training and awareness raising around modern slavery. Although the policy provides much-needed structure and rigour, there are unavoidably grey areas. Individual judgement will remain key, so it is critical that we give our people the information and tools to feel confident when making those judgements.

How do we see the policy evolving in the coming months and years?

Currently, the focus of the policy is on the firm's procurement decisions. In the future, we will look to expand it to better support our clients to procure responsibly.

This is a significant project, but one that is essential. If we believe that, in our position as a law firm, we have a responsibility in this area, it is correct and inevitable that setting the same standards for our clients should be the future direction.

How will we ensure the policy remains a strategic focus?

Our Responsible Business Committee, which was formed in 2022 to oversee and co-ordinate the firm's responsible business activities, developed and will monitor the success of the responsible procurement policy on an ongoing basis. The introduction of the policy was included as a commitment in our 2023 Responsible Business report, and we will continue to set and report on objectives that we can measure progress against.

Our internal Environmental Group, which feeds into the Responsible Business Committee, acts as a working group and a forum for ideas and initiatives to support the policy and the firm's wider commitments in the area of sustainability. Importantly, the group includes representation from across the firm, ensuring a diversity of ideas and opinions are considered.



Case study 1: our carbon footprint

We have partnered with Carbon Footprint Ltd to offset more than our entire carbon usage, on that basis at least achieving more than carbon neutrality. To date we have offset in the region of 4,000 tonnes of CO₂ through supporting projects certified as reducing future atmospheric carbon.

We know that offsetting is just one facet of the solution, which is why, as a member of the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), we have made the commitment to decrease our scope 1 emissions by 50% by the year 2030.

Accurately measuring our baseline carbon emissions is key to setting meaningful targets for reduction. We rely on two methodologies to do this; the first is the UK's Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting regulations, and the second is the Foundation myclimate calculation (the latter taking into account embedded carbon in purchased materials and CO₂ attributable to business flights and waste disposal.) The myclimate figure equates to 8.1 tonnes of carbon for each £1,000,000 of revenue and 1.1 tonnes per person working in the firm.

Last year staff selected projects focussed on renewable energy sources. This year we have selected a combination of projects that are either Verra VCS or Gold Standard Climate Security & Sustainable Development rated – enabling us to contribute to as broad a range of Sustainable Development Goals as possible with both social and environmental co-benefits.

The carbon offsetting projects we have supported Offsetting of our CO₂e has been split across the following accredited projects:

- Uganda Borehole Project clean drinking water (40%)
- Improved Cookstove Distribution In Kayonza, Bugesera And Nyamasheke Districts Of Rwanda 40%
- Reforestation Of Degraded Forest Reserve Areas In Ghana, West Africa (20%)

In addition, staff voted strongly to support UK-based, local tree planting. We have therefore elected to investigate opportunities for this as an additional action over and above our official offsetting.



Case study 2: solar energy

We have generated our own solar energy on site since 2013. Our solar panels currently generate an impressive 26,000k of electricity per annum which is pushed into the National Grid. Over their minimum 20-year lifespan, these panels are anticipated to yield savings exceeding 388 tonnes of CO₂.

All electricity across our offices is supplied on renewable or carbon neutral tariffs, while we deploy smart technology to proactively monitor and reduce electricity use.

What supporting our environment means to me

“

I believe that business cannot ignore the impact on people and that means taking into account the effect doing business has on the environment and those carrying out the businesses services.”

Sam Morris, associate

“

Sustainable and responsible business is the only real way to make an impact on climate change. Starting from the ground up encourages systematic change and tangible progress helps make the world a less cynical place.”

Ben Randall, office services coordinator



Access to justice

In focus

Reconfirming our commitment to Legal Aid

This year, Russell-Cooke successfully obtained a new legal aid contract. Children Law and Diversity and Inclusion Lead Sarah Richardson reflects on our commitment to legal aid, how the provision of legal aid supports those most in need to access justice, and why she is proud of the work we do.

What does it mean to have reconfirmed our commitment to legal aid?

Every firm that wishes to provide legal aid services has to bid for a contract from the Legal Aid Agency to obtain verification to continue to offer these services. In order to bid, there is a rigorous set of criteria we must satisfy first. This includes everything from the number of lawyers we have and their level of experience, to a lack of formal complaints and proof of indemnity insurance. We must show we continue to be Lexcel-accredited, belong to a certain number of industry bodies such as Resolution, and generally be able to demonstrate we have the skills to do the work and enough lawyers experienced enough to supervise. On top of that, every individual partner must agree to the application, not just those practising in legal aid areas.

Why have we decided to do this?

Russell-Cooke is recognised for its thoughtful approach to law from the very beginning. A lot has changed since the firm was founded in 1880, but our commitment to serving our communities is a long-held principle.

Our 2023-2024 Responsible Business Report confirms that approximately 13,000 hours of legal aid work was provided to clients in that financial year. Those at the firm who handle this work do so because they wholeheartedly believe in the right of everyone to have access to justice. It is one thing to say that we do the right thing, and another to actually do it – and one way of taking real action is to provide legal aid.

This year, you were recognised as a Chambers DEI Champion for the first time, which recognises lawyers who provide advice with an altruistic element to it. You are described as “representing people who wouldn’t



ordinarily have a voice.” What kind of legal aid work do we undertake, and who for?

We provide legal aid work in areas of law where we view access to justice to be vital to those seeking it, and where fewer and fewer firms are able to afford to provide legal aid advice.

In my team, we carry out public law work on behalf of children and their families, which can range from domestic disputes through to child abductions and the state removing children. The government recognises that if the state is going to intervene in family life in a way that is disruptive to children, they need proper legal representation.

We are also highly active in housing legal aid, supporting individuals with homelessness appeals and the fallout of the Grenfell Tower disaster, and can represent individuals looking to bring clinical negligence claims.

What makes our lawyers well-placed to provide legal aid?

Most in the children team here at Russell-Cooke have additional qualifications in children law. We train our lawyers to be able to undertake advocacy themselves, enabling them to do court hearings without the need for counsel. They are experts in the truest sense of the word; they don't just have the technical knowledge and the accreditations to evidence that, they have the experience to support clients in the way they need to be supported.

This experience tells us that our clients often need to see us in their homes and at weekends, and that to know a family's crisis you really have to get to know the family in that crisis. It is as much this as our legal expertise that qualifies us to do such important work.

Are there specific skills needed to do this kind of work?

To represent individuals in these legal aid cases is to represent people in crisis. Whether it is your home or your family that you face losing, it is deeply and urgently personal – and doesn't get any worse.

To represent individuals in these legal aid cases is to represent people in crisis. Whether it is your home or your family that you face losing, it is deeply and urgently personal – and doesn't get any worse.”

A large part of my job involves making sure that my team is coping with what is essentially constant crisis management. To handle this work, you need a certain level of emotional resilience. You are not only exposed to other peoples' harrowing circumstances; you are often their only hope at a time they feel hopeless, which is no small amount of pressure.

In order to navigate this, we work adaptively, ensuring we talk to each other and share the load where we can.

We are one of a small number of top 100 law firms to provide publicly funded legal services. Why is this something to be proud of?

Our commitment to access to justice is in our DNA. Undertaking legal aid work enables us to pave the way for those in our communities who have not been dealt the best cards in life.

As former Senior Partner and Chair John Gould said in an interview in The Times this year, there is a danger of being too culturally focused on money to properly commit to legal aid. Russell-Cooke currently ensures 5% of its revenue is derived from legal aid work, which he describes as a good thing to do that strengthens the values of the firm.

We are proud that this is an identifying – and differentiating – characteristic of Russell-Cooke. It is a privileged position to be able to change lives, so it is important that we strive to.

Legal services are more costly than ever and legal aid funding is diminishing all the time. Why is it important we continue to provide it?

My daily experience in the family courts is that legal aid and access to justice is in crisis in England and Wales. Those in our communities who are often the most vulnerable are left on their own trying to navigate a system which is under pressure.

Earlier this year, we published an article that explored the impact of the Government's management of spending on legal aid, which has fallen significantly in the last decade, with there having been no increase in fees for 27 years. More and more people are unable to provide legal aid as to do so isn't sustainable. In turn, the huge reduction in the number of lawyers taking on legal aid cases has meant greater pressure on the courts, judges and the public sector. By squeezing legal aid, the public sector is placed under additional pressure and inequalities grow ever wider.

Those in desperate circumstances deserve to be seen, heard and given expert legal representation. It is a huge positive and badge of honour that the firm remains supportive of our commitment to legal aid despite the growing financial challenges to providing it.



Case study 1: social housing

In 2023 we were instructed by a young pregnant woman with an 8-year-old daughter who had recently been abandoned by her partner. Our client was living in a property that was damp and cold, and had been deemed a serious hazard by Environmental Health.

Our client's landlord had sought to illegally evict her from the property when she was giving birth in Hospital. Our client later gained access to the property, but her landlord thereafter issued possession proceedings at Court, to evict her from the property due to rent arrears, as our client could not afford to pay the rent after being abandoned by her partner. Our client made a homelessness application to the Local Authority, but the Local Authority refused to provide her with suitable emergency accommodation, so she was stuck in the property and was the victim of ongoing harassment by her landlord.

We assisted our client to successfully defend the possession proceedings and cancel the rent arrears, and also challenged the Local Authority's decision not to provide the family with suitable alternative accommodation. Our client's case continues, but she is now housed by the Local Authority in much better accommodation with her daughters, and we are fighting to hopefully obtain suitable permanent accommodation for the family soon.



Case study 2: clinical negligence

We act for several babies who have suffered serious brain injuries during the course of their birth which have lifelong effects. This is currently the only medical negligence work which qualifies for legal aid.

Legal aid enables us to fund crucial expert evidence in the fields of midwifery, obstetrics, neonatology, paediatric neurology and neuroradiology. Investigations are thorough and comprehensive with the most difficult aspects being showing with the benefit of the expert evidence that the injury was caused by failures of care and that the injury could have been avoided. One such case we have (B) involves a baby who is now a teenager. During the course of his mother's labour the maternity team failed to take early action when it became evident that he was in difficulty and an emergency caesarean section was needed. By the time the decision was made, his head had become impacted and needed to be released before he could be delivered. An incorrect technique was used and therefore during the course of attempting to release his head, his skull was fractured causing haemorrhage and subsequent brain injury.

As a consequence, B suffered a significant brain injury. Initially, he showed no signs of this until he was about 7 years old when he developed seizures. The seizures have increased and cannot be controlled by medication. In addition, as he has grown older other brain injury symptoms have become more apparent. The seizures are increasing and the only potential way to treat them is by surgery to his brain. There is no guarantee that this would be successful and there is a very high risk that the surgery itself could cause additional brain injury. With the benefit of funding from legal aid we have been able to obtain supportive expert evidence and the defendant NHS Trust has admitted full liability. We therefore have court judgment and whilst we investigate the full cost of B's lifetime care, therapies, equipment and other financial losses we have been able to obtain substantial payments on account of the full damages which enable his family to purchase what he currently needs in order to help him to maintain as normal a life as possible. B, who has a normal life expectancy, will need support for life.

What supporting access to justice means to me



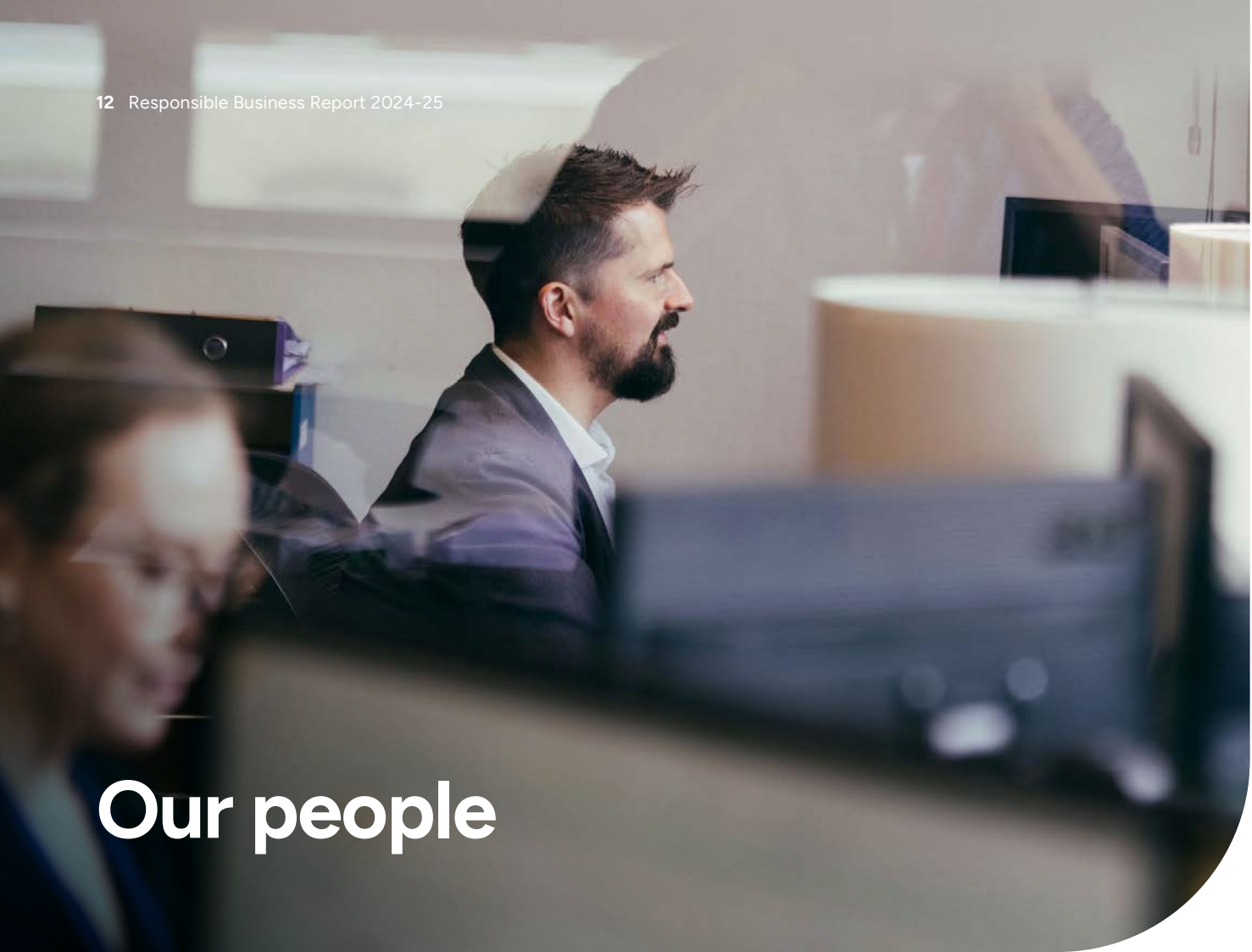
As a company who has a large influence on our society in the fact of being a law firm, I think it is very important to respect the world that we can make change within."

Sophie Zonfrillo, learning and development assistant



I feel proud that I am working for a business which is striving to make meaningful positive change through its work."

Tom Cunild, trainee



Our people

In focus

Gender diversity

During the past year, the number of partners who are women has risen from 43% to 46%. Director of People, Risk and Compliance, Anu Kapila discusses what makes Russell-Cooke such a positive environment for women, what we are doing to maintain a positive gender balance, and where we need to focus going forward.

What are our current figures? How have they changed positively?

According to data from the Law Society, since 1990 women have represented over 60% of new entrants into the profession, and there are now more women than men practising as solicitors. Data from the SRA however shows that while the proportion of women in law firms has risen from 48% in 2015 to 53% in 2023, the seniority gap for women remains.

Although we haven't yet closed this gap at partner level, we are proud to be able to report that women currently comprise 46% of the partnership and 64% of all partners and staff. The percentage of female partners increased in the reporting period from 43% at end June 2023, to 46% at end June 2024.

As such, we exceed the SRA London-wide average for law firms of female staff compared to men, and at every level of seniority for lawyers below partner level there are more women than men. In addition to this, we exceed the London average at partner and at board level.

Since 2014, the firm has grown in size substantially and the amount of fee earners who are women has risen from 50 (71% of fee earners in 2014) to 119 (72% of fee earners in 2024). What is more impressive is that the number of partners who are women has risen from 16 (35% of partners in 2014) to 27 (44% of partners in 2024).

This change over time signifies a shift in the firm's culture and in society at large: women are more likely to be supported to take on leadership roles than they were even as short a time as ten years ago, and we are extremely proud to be able to say we are one of the firms leading the way.

What kind of environment have we cultivated at Russell-Cooke to enable women to thrive?

Russell-Cooke has always been an environment where women are supported to progress. I believe our positive gender balance is an expression of our supportive and collaborative culture. We're committed to fostering a workplace where every individual is valued for who they are. The firm wants to see women succeed, and takes steps to break down any barriers – real or perceived – to their progression.

Our Women's Networking Group, for example, aims to inspire and uplift women across the firm by creating opportunities to network, debate, and develop relationships with others internally and externally. The group holds regular coffee mornings and internal events, as well as external networking events to support women to grow their professional networks. It is crucial that we ensure there are spaces for women to share experiences, ideas and advice, and that participation in such groups continues to be welcomed and encouraged.

Why is it important to us to have good gender representation (throughout the firm)?

It is the partnership of women at different levels in the firm that gives younger women the confidence to aspire to more senior positions throughout their careers at Russell-Cooke.

Women in the earlier stages of their careers can see the solidarity between senior women (and men) at the firm, and in that way, gender equality becomes self-fulfilling. We have an 'open-door' policy here at Russell-Cooke; junior lawyers know that they can speak to and seek the support of those in leadership roles without feeling intimidated by their seniority.

How do we plan to build on this?

The firm has taken decisive steps forward in recent years. In 2023 we reduced the required eligibility period for maternity and paternity pay across

the firm to support more people at the firm regardless of their length of service. In 2022, the firm introduced its first menopause policy, which together with providing clear definitions of the various stages of menopause and details of their associated symptoms, placed a clear emphasis on the expectation everybody in the firm will support their colleagues who are going through the menopause.

69% of our workforce is female, with over a quarter in their 40s and 50s. We want to ensure this significant group is not in any way disadvantaged. It is vital for line managers to have an understanding of what it means for women in their team who are going through the menopause in order that they can give them the right support, which means educating men as well as women. It's important that women do not suffer in silence as they did in the past.

Where are our areas of focus going forward?

Championing equality, diversity and inclusion is a principle that sits at the core of our identity. It is important that Russell-Cooke reflects the community it represents, and we know that we still have a way to go in ensuring that it does. In 2023 we ran a detailed data gathering exercise and compared our ED&I characteristics and performance to other London firms. We are currently analysing what we have learnt from this exercise with a view to exploring specific initiatives relating to our key focus on social mobility.

With regard to the socio-economic background of our lawyers, it is now three years since we introduced Rare Recruitment's Contextual Recruitment System which provides further assistance and context in terms of assessing applications and improving the social mobility profile of our graduate recruits.

We continue to see an increase year on year of undergraduates applying from UK state schools together with an increase in applications from those who will be the first generation in their families to attend university. Consequently, the number of offers and acceptances within this demographic significantly increased year on year: 82%

our 2025 trainee cohort will be from UK state schools up from 56% in the 2024 cohort.

It is clear there is much need for improvement. The SRA data shows that we have fewer solicitors and partners from professional backgrounds compared to both all firms and 50+ partner firms, and we have more partners from a lower socio-economic background. However, we have fewer solicitors from a lower socio-economic background, which suggests that our solicitors who are younger are coming from wealthier backgrounds. We also know that we have fewer Black and Asian solicitors and partners compared to both all firms and 50+ partner firms.

What are we doing to meet these objectives?

In recent years we have seen encouraging progress in social mobility with a growing proportion of state-educated graduates choosing to start their legal careers with us.

We have introduced or built upon a range of initiatives in the past year in support of these goals. We now ask candidates interviewing for a legal position a standardised set of questions to ensure that every individual, regardless of their background or identity, is given the same opportunity at the outset of the recruitment process.

For the past three years we have taken part in the 10,000 Black Interns programme, as part of which we hosted two interns each year for a six-week programme with both interns rotating around three legal teams. The feedback received from the interns and the host departments has been extremely positive, and as a result, we are committed to supporting the 10,000 Able Interns scheme to facilitate disabled candidates' access to law.

We continue to be Stonewall Diversity Champions. We aim through this partnership to ensure that all LGBTQ+ partners and staff feel comfortable and can thrive in the workplace, which we achieve by not only ensuring policies and processes are inclusive of LGBTQ+ people, but committing to actively celebrating our LGBTQ+ colleagues, such as during Pride Month.



Case study 1: Employee Assistance Programme

We are committed to ensuring our colleagues have access to the mental health resources they need to feel secure and able to succeed at work and run a number of initiatives across the firm to support and promote positive wellbeing. The firm has an employee assistance programme through CiC in place, which offers 24-hour call service, up to 6 free counselling sessions and access to webinars on wellbeing topics.

As part of this we also have a digital platform, Ele, launched this year. Ele is a new one-stop shop for elevating health and wellbeing and with thousands of videos and resources, provides easily accessible personalised support 24/7.

We also have eight trained mental health first-aiders at the firm who have undergone specialised training to provide essential support and understanding to their colleagues.



Case study 2: Clubs and Networks

There are a number of clubs across the firm open to all to join and get involved including running, cycling and football through to book, film and board game clubs.

Our Working Parent Group meets regularly and is an opportunity for employees to share experiences and offer support in a safe environment. The group has proved an invaluable space for parents to discuss the challenges of juggling work and family life.

To support good mental health, the running club organised a Mental Health Week Fun 5K for the third year in a row. Two groups of runners and walkers headed out for a 5K route around Putney before returning to the office for pizza and drinks. Organised and run by partner Shabnam Ali-Khan, the firm regularly offers yoga classes encouraging movement with the breath and mindfulness, free of charge and open to all, as well as desk-yoga delivered online.

Our book club also meets once every two months to discuss a wide range of books with the aim of exploring different genres and creating a space for reading enthusiasts to have conversations about literature and build relationships.

What supporting access to justice means to me

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As a junior lawyer, it is encouraging to see senior open colleagues and mentors.”

Brooke Clark, associate

“

Responsible business practices are essential for all modern law firms. I believe they are key to maintaining employee wellbeing and their commitment to the firm.”

Imogen Nolan, senior associate



Our communities

In focus

Our firm-wide volunteering scheme

Following a successful pilot, we have expanded our volunteering scheme to everybody in the firm. Charity partner and Head of Community Chris Rowse explains how it works, why we have introduced it, and what we hope it will achieve.

What is the scheme?

At its heart, it is an opportunity for our people to give something back to their communities and the causes they care about by taking a paid volunteering day each year in addition to their annual leave. The scheme is open to everybody in the firm, and will enable them to volunteer their time and skills in a way that also helps develop their skills and experience.

How does it work?

We have deliberately kept the scheme simple to encourage participation. While we have identified a number of specific volunteering opportunities in line with our values, we also recognise that many of our people have causes they are passionate about, and want to support them with those activities as well.

While participating in the scheme is optional, we want to impress upon our teams that taking part is looked upon favourably in the context of their

own development. Giving back is a responsibility we take seriously, so we want our people to take it seriously too.

What is the plan for its implementation?

The scheme is in its early stages, but we have already begun to build a database of opportunities to inspire potential volunteers and ensure that the activities we are undertaking are aligned with our values. It is important that we are supporting communities local to the firm's London and Surrey offices, and that activities are in the areas of access to justice, social mobility, the environment or equality and diversity, and are of meaningful benefit to the recipient.

We also want to encourage people to participate in groups where possible as there is a clear team-building benefit to this. This sort of work is possible when we partner with organisations like local foodbank the Kingston Foodbank, who are included in our database, and ask for

sorting and packing volunteers as part of a team-building activity day.

In time, we expect our database to grow, and to develop a way of collating feedback from those who participate to ensure the scheme is a success.

What specific opportunities are available within the scheme?

The database of opportunities is not intended to be static, and will grow over time. Currently, initiatives we are encouraging people to participate in include supporting Wimbledon and Putney Commons with scrub clearance and litter picking, Friends of Richmond Park with conservation activities, the Whitechapel Mission with their breakfast and clothing challenges, and Wormwood Scrubs Pony Centre with providing riding lessons to children with learning difficulties and physical disabilities.

What activities has the firm undertaken so far?

In the past year, teams of Russell-Cooke staff volunteered with the charity team's client UK for UNHCR, in support of its collaboration with British artist Es Devlin: CONGREGATION, held at Somerset House and sponsored by Kings College London. This was a collective portrait piece, featuring 50 portraits of Londoners who have experienced forced displacement.

Another volunteering day was used to run a singing workshop in Europe's largest women's prison HMP Bronzefield, with the stated aim of breaking down social barriers, fostering human connection and increase confidence. In the words of the volunteer, for these women, the opportunity to engage in a creative and uplifting activity offered a temporary escape from the bleak monotony of life behind bars.

Why have we created this scheme in particular?

As a leading law firm, we recognise there are particular skills we can offer, and particular synergies between our activities and those of the organisations we support. Giving back to our communities is one of our core values,

but beyond that, we hope the scheme will enable us to build meaningful relationships with the organisations and communities we support over time.

There is a view that corporate volunteering can be tokenistic. We are committed to ensuring that the activities carried out as part of the scheme are done so in the context of a wider relationship and make a genuine positive and lasting impact. To that end, we want to make a distinction between undertaking ad hoc voluntary activities, and cultivating robust and reciprocal relationships with the organisations we support. As the scheme evolves, we want to be able to identify charities that do fantastic work in line with our values, and commit to volunteering with them regularly to sustain that longer-term relationship.

What do we hope the scheme will achieve?

Our people already have a very strong track record of getting involved in their communities, whether in their personal lives or through the firm. We support a number of local and national charities through sponsorships and staff fundraising events, from the London Legal Walk and Kingston Half Marathon through to local sports clubs and arts organisations. Many of our people volunteer as charity trustees – including most members of our charity team.

The introduction of the volunteering scheme is an opportunity to formalise this, and to send a clear message that community work is supported and enabled by the firm. It further embeds our dedication to this work into our responsible business and overall firm strategies, and will allow us to effectively measure and set objectives around our volunteering activities.

As a firm, we appreciate we are privileged to be in a position to undertake this work, and have a responsibility to give back. We are also acutely aware that others – whether that is clients, peers or potential recruits – rightly expect us to take social responsibility seriously, and it is our duty to meet that expectation.

Where do you feel the firm can make the most impact with the scheme?

It is an implied condition of the scheme that any activity undertaken must be genuinely beneficial to the recipient, but there are certain areas where the positive impact we can make as lawyers is particularly pronounced. An example of this is our work with local law centres, where we volunteer to provide free legal advice to those who can otherwise not afford it, typically on social welfare issues. Expanding access to justice is at the heart of our mission at Russell-Cooke; volunteering with a law centre is a fantastic way for our people to support us in this mission, at the same time as putting their legal knowledge and skills into practice.

What does community involvement mean to Russell-Cooke?

Beyond supporting our communities being a key tenet of our ethos, we have one of the leading charity teams in the country. This gives us a particular understanding of and insight into charities and their needs, and the ways a business like ours can provide voluntary support that is actually useful.

Doing the right thing informs how we operate as a firm. It is hugely important that we support our communities in whatever way we can.



Case study 1: The Arts

We are heavily involved in local arts, and have strong relationships with theatres in Kingston and Putney. We have been sponsoring The Rose Theatre since its foundation and construction almost 20 years ago. In addition to its artistic productions, the Rose undertakes a high-quality learning and participation programme, educating people of all ages and backgrounds in various aspects of dramatic art, nurturing emerging talent, and serving as a cultural hub for communities in Kingston and beyond.

We also support the Temple Music Foundation, a registered charity founded in 2002 to raise the funds required for the realisation of Sir John Tavener's *The Veil of the Temple*. The Foundation runs a season of concerts that have grown steadily over the years.



Case study 2: Sports

Russell-Cooke provides support and legal advice to a number of local sports organisations. We are proud principal sponsors of Cobham Rugby Football Club, Barnes RFC Minis Club, and the Roehampton Gold Cup which is a pro-am tournament for female golfers that has been held at the Roehampton Club for over 75 years.

We also provide sponsorship and legal support to Surbiton Hockey Club, the largest hockey club in the UK with over 1,500 members. The junior teams are national champions in nearly all age groups. Both their ladies and men teams current winners of the domestic league titles with the ladies winning for a record 4th consecutive year. Three of the Surbiton ladies are current Olympic champions having won a historic gold medal at Rio 2016. They also support the local community and are a club for all.

What supporting access to justice means to me



Neither individuals nor businesses exist in a vacuum, and it's perfectly possible to use our professional endeavours both to generate profit and make the world a better place."

James Underwood, trainee



I'm excited to give back to the community in any way I can."

Alison Cross, senior associate

Our 2024 commitments – how did we do?

Our environment: we have

- remained carbon neutral
- measured and reduced our carbon emissions in alignment with the Paris Agreement, including Scope 1
- maintained carbon neutral or renewable tariffs for electricity
- implemented and rolled out a responsible procurement policy
- maintained active hives of Buckfast bees and a garden of pollinator-friendly plants at our Putney offices
- received Green Web Foundation verification as a green hosting provider, meaning our website is hosted by data centres using clean, green electricity.

Access to justice: we have

- maintained our commitment to legally aided work equating to 5% of our client work revenue
- successfully obtained a new legal aid contract to allow the firm to continue providing legal aid services until at least June 2026.

Our people: we have

- further increased the proportion of female partners from 43% at end June 2023, to 46% at end June 2024
- encouraged improved data capture to assess social mobility performance and explore further measures to improve social mobility within the firm
- implemented the use of standardised structured interview questions and begun to roll these out across the firm to remove unconscious bias as far as possible
- continued to promote positive wellbeing amongst our staff through ongoing initiatives, projects and support services.

Our communities: we have

- extended our volunteering scheme firm-wide following a successful pilot.

Our 2025 commitments

Our environment: we have

- remained carbon neutral
- replaced gas boilers by 2030
- maintained carbon neutral or renewable tariffs for electricity
- ensured compliance with our responsible procurement policy
- continued working to eliminate single use plastic and to work towards achieving zero plastic waste through various initiatives.

Access to justice: we have

- maintained our commitment to legally aided work equating to 5% of our client work revenue in 2024.

Our people: we have

- explored ways to provide work experience opportunities to those who may have mental health or learning difficulties
- committed to supporting the 10,000 Able Interns programme
- continued to promote positive wellbeing amongst our staff through ongoing initiatives, projects and support services.

Our communities: we have

- continued to develop our firm-wide volunteering scheme and the opportunities available within it.



A more thoughtful approach to law

russell-cooke.co.uk



Best Lawyers Award 2025
Wealth for Good Award 2024
STEP Philanthropy Team of the Year 2023