

Business 7

Breaking the ceiling

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FACTFILE

Clare Murray

- Educated at Queen Mary, University of London, where she earned a law degree
- She studied for solicitor exams at Guildford College of Law.
- Clare did a two year training contract at Jaques & Lewis, now Eversheds.
- She then went to Fox Williams for six years before leaving in 2005.
- She had a year off before deciding, with former colleagues, to start her own business.

Employment lawyer Clare Murray believes positive discrimination is a bad way to deal with gender inequality

Equality: Wharfer says gender gap is still there despite strides forward

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ANYONE needing a reminder of the ongoing disparity between men and women in business has only to take a glance at last year's Equality of Human Rights Commission survey into gender pay.

The report, commissioned by the Government, found women in the city earned five times less in bonuses than men. It seemed there was a still long way to go before gender equality would be reached.

But Clare Murray, founder and managing partner of One Canada Square-based law firm CM Murray, has a much more optimistic view.

Her firm deals in employment and partnership law, regularly representing workers who feel they have been hard done by and firms which are defending themselves against sex discrimination claims.

She said: "It's very positive that the generation in their 20s, 30s and even 40s have such a different outlook to that of the past.

"We've come a huge distance since the '60s. In another two generations we won't even be having this discussion.

"Two generations ago, would I have had my own law firm? Would I even be a lawyer? I doubt it, but I do and I am and that's an incredible sea change."

As for the current pay gap, Clare urged that this be tackled through enforced openness for firms on salaries.

She said: "It's the responsibility of

employers to have programmes, training and monitoring to make sure the sexes are treated equally.

"Then there's supporting that with a push from the Government to have transparency in pay and audits for employers. They should be forced to be transparent so that men and women are paid equally."

Living with her husband Clayton, Clare - who is eight months' pregnant - is soon to take three months off when she has her first baby. Clayton, who has recently returned to studies, then takes over for three months during the summer break.

As a businesswoman and a manager

of staff, the family issue is an important one for Clare. She said staff having children should not be seen as a hindrance to business in the long-term.

She said: "Some employers recognise they could have one or more members of staff away for up to a year but that's a short-term view.

"Out of 12 members of staff we have six who work flexible part-time hours for a variety of reasons but they are incredibly committed. If you take a short-term view of staff they may take a short-term view of you.

"In my experience those working part-time hours are incredibly hard working."

Clare said that while there was clearly still a gender gap in terms of pay and attitudes in some businesses, positive discrimination is not the correct tool to use in tackling it.

She said equality of opportunity is the best way to create a fair work environment.

She said: "I'm a supporter of merit-based discrimination. It can cause resentment if you're seen to take proactive steps to help one group. If you provide everyone with the same opportunities, it is the most talented people, whatever their gender, that deserve the opportunities."

Female accountants earn 60 per cent less

A RECENTLY released study by recruitment firm Robert Half has found the pay gap between men and women is narrowing for accountants under 30.

But it also revealed inequality was increasing for those over 45.

According to the survey, the average basic salary for a male chartered accountant over 45 is £98,400 - over 60 per cent more

than their female colleagues' average of £60,500. But in the case of those under 30, females currently receive an average wage of £47,300 while the average male salary is only four per cent higher at £49,300.

Phil Sheridan, managing director Robert Half UK, said: "Historically, some of the difference in salaries between the genders has been

attributable to the fact the average male accountant tends to be older and longer qualified than their female counterparts."

Women over 45 reported an average 10 per cent drop from last year's figures, compared with just a one per cent drop for males, in the wake of the recession. Sixty per cent of respondents said it had a negative effect on their basic pay.