International Women's Day 2023 – Spotlight on: Amanda Steadman

Today BDBF Principal Knowledge Lawyer Amanda Steadman, shares with us her thoughts on gender equity.

Tell us about your female role models.

Any woman who manages to keep all the balls that life throws at you in the air is a role model to me!

In your opinion, what more can be done to promote equity in the workplace?

In theory, shared parental leave is a great idea. It puts both parents in more or less the same boat when it comes to the possibility of taking leave during a child's first year. This evening up should mean that women of childbearing age face less prejudice about the prospect that they may become pregnant and take maternity leave – as a father could also take extended leave. It should also encourage fathers to take a more hands on role with childcare after the first year – which should help to avoid the "childcare disparity" that often emerges with the father focusing on his career and the mother having primary responsibility for the children and having to make her career fit around that.

In practice, however, the shared parental leave scheme is

extremely fiddly and probably quite off-putting for a lot of parents. I suspect the fact that shared parental pay is so low also discourages many from even considering it. Simplifying the scheme, uplifting statutory pay to bring it in line with statutory maternity pay would make a big difference to uptake – and I think that would have real power to promote equity over time.

What do you think has been the most positive step forward for gender equity over the last few years?

The fact that so many of us have moved away from full-time office-based work has undone the (incorrect) notion that someone who works flexibly, especially sometimes from home, is somehow less committed to their role or is on the "mummy track". Advances in technology and the normalisation of more flexible ways of working, including part-time working, hybrid working and homeworking have been helpful for women, because men want to work in these ways too.

Finally, tell us about a professional goal or achievement that you are proud of, and what (or who) inspired you to go for it?

I think it is important not to get into too much of a comfort zone in your professional life. Taking yourself out of the comfort zone helps you to develop new skills and, I think, often helps you to produce your best work. I took a bit of a gamble when I moved from working in large, full-service respondent-facing firms into a boutique claimant-facing firm. I wasn't sure whether I'd be able to adjust to working in such a different environment but I decided to do it anyway and I'm very glad I did! It did take me out of my comfort zone but I feel I am developing and learning all the time and have become

a better lawyer for it. It also helps that BDBF is such a great place to work!