

# Alumni Yearbook

2023

A responsible business



ALLEN & OVERY

# Welcome to your 2023 Alumni Yearbook

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Change is becoming one of the few certainties at Allen & Overy as it adapts to the ever-developing consequences of globalism, technology and human resources. As a responsible business at the forefront of innovation, we have much to celebrate.

It may just be my advancing years, but at this year's Global Alumni Reunion in London, I was struck by the noticeable shift in the makeup of attendees. The gathering was visibly more diverse than in years gone by – a positive illustration that efforts to change A&O's makeup are bearing fruit.

It's obvious, when you look at the history of A&O and the legal profession, that there's been a demographic sea change. Those of us with long memories will recall how groundbreaking it was in 1985 when Clare Maurice was made the first woman partner. Today, A&O is making steady progress towards our goal of parity between men and women in the partnership globally.

Having a wealth of diversity, in all its forms, and different ways of thinking bring huge business benefits and make A&O a more dynamic place to work. It's absolutely right for A&O to reflect society, and we've made huge strides, albeit with work still to be done.

At the core is the need to have a robust business. To achieve that, the partnership and its leaders have taken stronger action. With women in law, for example, although for many years women have made up more than 50% of trainees, for reasons that we understand much better now, too many were leaving at the mid- and senior-associate stage. I'm pleased to see that changing, for other under-represented groups as well.

Understanding the issues we need to address, particularly at a local level, is helping us take the right actions and achieve progress. As Stephanie Camilleri describes in her interview on pages 16-19, by understanding the barriers and challenges a particular demographic may face, steps can be put in place to enable those within it to achieve their full potential.

That's part of being a responsible business, which is the theme of this year's yearbook. Guided by our key

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Guided by our key values – diversity, equity and inclusion, environment/sustainability, wellbeing and social impact – we explore what responsibility means.”

values – diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I), environment/sustainability, wellbeing and social impact we explore what responsibility means.

It's good to see steps in the right direction to cutting A&O's carbon footprint. Moving to new offices at 2 Broadgate in 2026-27 will undoubtedly have a huge impact. The new building will mean a step-change in energy performance and wellbeing provisions for everyone. The way it's being built and operated will support local businesses and help preserve biodiversity in the area while reducing the London office carbon emissions by an estimated 80%.

Firm-wide initiatives are featured in our article on pages 20-25, as well as individual actions which, together, can make a difference.

Being responsible extends to how we manage advances in technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI) tools like Harvey, and automated documents. As our article on pages 30-35 notes, it's a question of navigating the risks and embracing the possibilities.

A&O's new global charity partner is Women for Women International, whose focus is on helping women survivors of war and conflict. We meet them on pages 44-49, where we also reflect on the impact of our work for our previous partner, Street Child, and learn why it was time to rename our Pro Bono and Community Investment (PBCI) team as the Social Impact Group (SIG).

In addition to these advances by A&O, the latest news is the outcome of the partner vote in support of merging to create A&O Shearman, working towards a final close date of the transaction in or before May 2024. Amid the excitement,

there's a lot to think about during the integration planning period for clients, colleagues and alumni of both firms. Shearman & Sterling does have its own alumni network, albeit newer and smaller than ours. We expect the two to fully integrate, giving members access to an even larger, even more diverse professional community. Stay tuned!

Member benefits, notably our mentoring programme and advisory service, are important parts of our network activities. The mentoring programme is a particular success. Numbers fluctuate, but we currently have more than 70 active pairings worldwide. So highly regarded is our programme that we're approached regularly to share best practice internally, as well as with peers. This is mainly thanks to the sterling efforts of Stella Ekkeshis and Jenny Enever, our Global Alumni Managers, who have led the charge on it from the beginning in 2014. They really are the engine driving your network, ably assisted by Cara McKinstry.

This year, your yearbook is going 'greener': for the first time we're using recycled paper and packaging; previously it was printed on paper from certified sustainable forests. As this is the only piece of alumni

communications that is still printed – 44% of respondents to our survey prefer a hard copy – we're committed to making it as sustainable as possible.

Thanks to everyone who completed the 2023 survey. We're listening and, where it's possible, taking action. You asked for more local events, for example, and mentioned Asia Pacific and New Zealand. We're delighted that our Global Alumni Reunion took place in ten locations this year: Amsterdam, Auckland, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Jakarta, London, Paris, Singapore, Tokyo and Zurich.

The survey showed that engagement with the A&O Alumni Network is high and positive, with events, newsletters and the Alumni Yearbook in particular all helping to achieve this. Again, I would like to thank Jenny, Stella and Cara for all their hard work in continuing to make the Alumni Network the success it is.

Finally, I hope you enjoy this year's edition of our yearbook as I extend greetings from the whole team with the hope that 2024 will bring peace and health to us all.

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**Boyan Wells**

Chair, Alumni Network



(L-R) Jenny Enever, Cara McKinstry and Stella Ekkeshis





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In memoriam

# An extraordinary and transformative year

Senior partner Wim Dejonghe reflects on a game-changing year for A&O, culminating in the transformative merger with Shearman & Sterling, record full-year revenues and progress across many other strategic areas.

## **Let's start with the big news – the merger with Shearman & Sterling. Why is this such an incredible opportunity for A&O?**

It starts with our strategy. We want to be the world's first fully integrated global elite law firm, serving the most sophisticated clients in their most sophisticated work.

To do that, we have to have the best people and excellent capabilities in key practice areas, which for us links to our strategic priorities: technology transformation, private capital and energy transition.

But doing business globally has become increasingly complex. Regulation is getting more complicated, the world is much more fragmented and the uncertain geopolitical environment has a direct impact on the law.

These days clients increasingly look to partner with a legal adviser that can handle all their cross-border matters across multiple markets, rather than work with many different firms in different jurisdictions.

To be a truly global firm, we also need to be equally fluent in English law – highly relevant in a lot of cross-border finance and M&A work and in arbitration – U.S. law, the only other exportable legal system, and the laws of the world's most dynamic markets.

While we've been growing our presence in the U.S. since the 1980s and have built a top quality practice across six offices, A&O lacked bench strength and brand recognition. The merger with Shearman & Sterling delivers that.

A&O Shearman will have recognition in U.S. boardrooms and access to a first-class corporate client base in the world's largest legal market. In a highly

litigious commercial environment, our litigation practice will be right up there with the best.

And with nearly 4,000 lawyers across 48 offices, A&O Shearman will have unparalleled global reach and local depth that clients increasingly demand.

## **Is this a trend others will follow?**

We expect to see greater consolidation in the industry and we know others want to build a great transatlantic law firm. But it's not easy to pull off. You need cultural fit, client fit and a brand that is equally strong in both firms. There aren't many that meet those requirements.

## **A&O reported strong revenue growth at the full year point, although profits were flat. What do you attribute that to?**

Our revenues climbed 7% to GBP2.1 billion – breaking the GBP2bn barrier for the first time. We're a secondary industry.





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...we're growing faster than our competitors because we've read the market correctly and picked the right strategic priorities.”

We follow the market. These numbers show we're growing faster than our competitors because we've read the market correctly and picked the right strategic priorities.

Profits remained level at GBP892 million, partly reflecting the impact of high inflation and interest rates at a time of great economic uncertainty.

But mostly it's down to salaries. There's an intense war for talent in our industry and we need to pay at the top of the market to attract the best. That's had the biggest impact on profitability, but it's a trend we see right across the legal sector.

**As A&O announced the results, we learned that managing partner Gareth Price was leaving.**

Yes, sadly, Gareth decided to retire from A&O for personal reasons, after 30 years.

I'd like to express our gratitude for Gareth's loyal and stellar contribution to the firm – starting out as a trainee,

becoming one of our youngest partners in 2003 and being elected managing partner in 2020.

He led our market-leading energy and infrastructure practice for many years and, as managing partner, steered us through the pandemic and played a pivotal role in the negotiations with Shearman & Sterling that have set us up for success in the future.

Following Gareth's departure, I'm delighted the Board unanimously voted to appoint Khalid Garousha as interim global managing partner until the end of April 2024.

**The energy transition is one of the greatest challenges of our times. What are the opportunities for clients?**

Our activity has grown exponentially in this area and it's really exciting. We now have more than 250 energy transition specialists who have advised on over 200 projects in 45 jurisdictions, across new energy transition technologies.

The size and scale of this challenge – and thus, the opportunity – can be hard to comprehend. Our recent study in partnership with Climate Policy Initiative helped us visualise just how big the net zero financing gap is: tracked climate finance passed USD1 trillion for the first time in 2022 and yet an estimated USD6-7tn of climate finance is required annually to deliver net zero by 2050.

We're working across the full breadth of transition technologies that will help accelerate net zero, including hydrogen, carbon capture, batteries and green manufacturing. Many of these projects are truly groundbreaking, and these technologies are advancing – quickly. For instance, we're currently advising the sponsor in relation to the development and financing of the GBP20bn Xlinks Morocco–UK power interconnector project as well as the U.S. Department of Energy on the USD11bn BlueOval battery projects in the U.S.

### **Has A&O been performing as strongly where technology and private capital are concerned?**

Yes, very much.

We've advised on some standout tech deals, including OpenText's USD6bn acquisition of MicroFocus and many digital infrastructure deals. And we're right at the forefront of emerging technologies such as AI, quantum computing and blockchain. We were the first firm to test and integrate Harvey, a GPT-4-based generative AI tool that's fine-tuned for lawyers, into our practice, and that means we're best-placed to advise clients on using AI across their businesses. Our Markets Innovation Group (MIG) also develops tech-based solutions for clients, which means that

we understand the intricacies of this technology better than most.

Our Silicon Valley office, now in its second year, advises not only tech companies, but companies across sectors on how to capitalise on technology transformation. And we continue to build our capabilities with important hires, not least around privacy, data and cybersecurity.

Revenue from clients in the private capital space has grown by a fantastic 60% in the past two years, with our infrastructure and private credit teams particularly active. Notable matters include EQT Infrastructure's EUR3.4bn stake in Wind Tre's mobile and fixed network and Macquarie Capital's acquisition of a majority stake in CloudExtel.

U.S. money dominates this sector, so this is another area where the merger boosts our capabilities. Outside the U.S. law firms, we're leading the market. With the merger we can grow that position much further.

### **It's been a strong year too for Advanced Delivery & Solutions, hasn't it?**

Absolutely, and we're proud of what we've achieved in the last ten years with the creation of businesses such as aosphere, Peerpoint, Fuse, MIG, A&O Consulting and Advanced Delivery legal.

All these businesses are flourishing, but we know some could grow faster with a change of approach. As we continue to invest, we've been considering how to boost their performance further. For example, we recently announced that A&O has forged a strategic partnership with Inflexion Private Equity to drive the continued growth of aosphere.

### **Being a responsible business is a core part of A&O's strategy. How is this embedded into the wider firm?**

It's crucial for every business to have a genuine sense of responsibility and purpose.

For me, the starting point is simple. As lawyers, many of us are privileged and we have a responsibility, beyond making money, to give back to our people, our clients, and wider society.

Of course, that's about looking at environmental sustainability, and we set our own science-based targets and work with clients that share our goals, another area where progress has been strong. We're on track to reduce our absolute global carbon emissions by 50% by 2030, and this year we began reporting our global emissions through the Carbon Disclosure Project, along with some 18,700 other companies, many of them our clients.

But equally important is our social impact work, creating a culture that prioritises wellbeing, and working hard to improve diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) – particularly retaining diverse talent by creating a truly inclusive workplace.

Culturally, going back to the merger, I'm glad to say there's complete alignment on this between our two firms. Our values fit well together and were at the centre of the very first conversations we had.

There's a perception that the big U.S. law firms are all "eat what you kill" but that's not true. Shearman & Sterling is 150 years old and its roots are in lockstep. Cohesion and providing quality client service within a collegiate workplace lie at the heart of its culture, like ours.



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### **What progress is A&O making on DE&I?**

This is fundamental for us and, these days, there's no conversation about talent in A&O that doesn't cover the diversity challenge. But it does take time. You've got to keep drawing attention to the issue, put stretching targets in place and then stretch them again when they are met, as we did last year.

We're now making progress, particularly on women's representation in the partnership. This year, 42% of partner promotions were women, bringing representation to 25% globally compared with 18% in 2019. There's still much further to go to make sure we retain our diverse talent, which is why inclusion is key. The focus is retention rather than recruitment.

Much of the progress is down to targeted action at a local level and it's great that we now have diversity champions right across our network, helping us decide what needs to be done, office by office.

For example, this year we've run allyship training in Belgium, promoted the role of male allies in the Middle East in creating an inclusive workplace, introduced reverse mentoring in South Africa, expanded our award-winning Asian Affinity Network in the U.S. and piloted a passport scheme in the UK to help disabled colleagues get the support they need more easily.

Feedback from colleagues on DE&I issues remains very positive, but we must never let our efforts slip.

### **Tell us about the work on wellbeing to support A&O's people.**

We engage in inspiring and challenging work, knowing clients and colleagues expect our best. Wellbeing is essential to this – to do our best we need to be at our best – and we're making good progress. We're implementing wellbeing plans in every office, making office heads accountable for delivery, and we've set a firm-wide goal to provide a workplace that promotes positive mental wellbeing, measured through our internal survey.

Hybrid working, which we've adopted across our global network, is an important part of this. But from a wellbeing perspective, when you're part of a team, meeting in person brings a sense of purpose and integration. Being in the office is also vital where training junior colleagues is concerned. So, while I'm not suggesting we should be in every day, we need to keep sight of the collective benefits of coming in for the majority of our working time.

We want our people to be able to speak openly about their wellbeing and seek help with confidence. We have a growing community of 200 mental health allies and, to mark World Mental Health Day, we highlighted the power of storytelling with 20 colleagues from across our global network sharing their stories to inspire others.

Finally, we've set up a Wellbeing Advisory Board – a group of partners from across our network who will shape our wellbeing policies in the future, act as internal and external advocates for our approach, and report directly to our Board, holding us to account.

### **People are making an ever-bigger contribution to social impact work. Why is that so important?**

Hours dedicated to this work have increased by a fantastic 56% over the last two years, in large part due to our programmes of work to support displaced people, for example Afghan and Ukrainian asylum seekers and refugees stranded on Greek islands. Last year, our lawyers volunteered 78,000 hours in support of access to justice, social finance, education, and employment around the world. In addition, partners contributed GBP3.9m to charitable funds, including GBP2.4m via the A&O Foundation.

Our global charity partnership with Street Child was a huge success and we've now chosen Women for Women International as our new global charity partner. This great organisation invests where inequality is greatest by helping women who are forgotten – the women survivors of war and conflict. I know we can make a huge difference to their work, not just with funding but through practical support and advice.

It's important to remember bringing our skills to bear in this way links very closely with client work. In fact, we've

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**We're implementing wellbeing plans in every office, making office heads accountable for delivery...”**

renamed our Pro Bono and Community Investment team as the Social Impact Group, reflecting our clients' growing focus on sustainability, which has seen social impact legal work increase sharply.

**The Alumni Network goes from strength to strength. How do you regard the network?**

I care about it very much. I look at other successful networks such as McKinsey's and Arthur Andersen's (which continues to grow even though the firm went bust years ago) and what strikes me about our programme and those other successful ones is that the members of the network are like a huge family. For A&O it means helping each other while at A&O and after leaving it.

That's what we've created and like any family it's important to keep investing in it to keep this great community of ours together. Given the number of people who are members of our network and attend alumni events across the world, I think it's a shared ambition, which I'm so pleased to see.

**In September you were honoured with a lifetime achievement award for innovative leadership by the FT and again at The British Legal Awards. What fantastic accolades!**

It was very humbling to receive these awards, but, actually, I was in two minds about accepting them because innovation is never about one person, certainly not at A&O.

So, I accepted them on behalf of the whole firm. I saw them as a way of thanking all the people, hundreds of them, who are committed to making A&O a success by putting innovation at the heart of how we operate. Innovation should be a constant focus for any successful law firm in a rapidly changing world. It certainly is for us.

## Looking ahead...

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**You're coming to the end of your term as senior partner. What do you cherish most about your time at A&O?**

The thing I cherish and am most proud of is our culture – the desire to help each other and the care people show for colleagues, which is so much a part of who we are as a firm. In a very competitive and sometimes aggressive environment, that's something that's easy to lose, but we still have it. I hope it will always be there.

**And what does the future hold for you personally?**

I'm not going to spend my life on a golf course – I'd be bored within a day!

I've never taken a sabbatical, so I may take six months off to review my options. I've also decided not to have any conversations about what I might do before January 2024.

I enjoy working and have lots of energy, with five, seven, maybe ten years of working life left in me, health permitting. I believe one of the secrets of staying young is remaining physically and mentally active, both professionally and socially.

Although I'm keen to keep working, it won't be as a lawyer, and I don't think I can work for another law firm. My loyalty to A&O and the joy I've had being part of this great firm wouldn't allow it.

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**Wim Dejonghe**

Senior Partner  
A&O: 2001-present



# The world needs different

Becoming a truly diverse and inclusive organisation remains a top priority, as A&O adds disability and social mobility to its focus.

Insightful ideas and creative solutions come from diverse perspectives and varied lived experiences, which is why diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) remains one of A&O's strategic priorities.

A&O has made strong progress across a multitude of areas, enabling people to thrive in an inclusive culture. Recently, the business has increased its focus on disability and social mobility.

## 6%

**of our partners and employees in the UK identify as having a disability.**

Having a disability, whether it's physical, neuro or any other kind of difference, shouldn't be a barrier to anyone starting a career or achieving their potential.

A&O understands that the levels of support and types of adjustments required vary for each person, so A&O works closely with colleagues to understand their individual needs.

### **AccessAbility Network**

A&O's global disability network, AccessAbility, was formed to support colleagues, end stigma, and embrace the talents of every individual.

Ghazi AbuYounis co-chairs AccessAbility with London workplace manager Phil Whaite. Ghazi, a senior associate based in Dubai who has a visual impairment, comments: "I've learned that disabilities don't have to hold you back. At A&O anything is possible because the support is there. We're building a truly inclusive culture by smashing through barriers."

Phil adds: "We want colleagues to feel able to talk about how disability might affect them in the workplace. Sharing our stories is important, and AccessAbility is a safe space that encourages open discussions to take place."

One way A&O is improving accessibility is through its introduction of a workplace adjustment passport – a digital record that holds all information in one place to identify the support and changes colleagues may need in a workplace.

So if, for example, you're moving to a new team, attending client meetings or training, there's no need to re-explain any adjustments you need to perform your role, and you can be sure you'll get the support you need.

## “

**I've learned that disabilities don't have to hold you back. At A&O anything is possible because the support is there. We're building a truly inclusive culture by smashing through barriers.”**

Ghazi AbuYounis



AccessAbility has also launched the firm's first Neurodiversity Peer Support Group in London, specifically for colleagues who have neurodivergent conditions, or care about someone who does.

Neurodivergent conditions include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, autism and Tourette's, as well as chronic mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia.

"At its heart, neurodiversity is challenging the assumption that great minds think alike", says Lisa Nguyen, regional DE&I partner for the Americas. "Many of us excel because of the way we see or do things differently, not despite it. It's important to recognise that neurodivergent colleagues can often have unique strengths, perspectives and abilities that positively contribute to the workplace."

### **Légal à Egal – internship programme for law students with disabilities**

A&O launched an internship programme in Paris for talented law students with disabilities and, after a successful three years, it has launched in Luxembourg too. The Légal à Egal programme aims to remove the obstacles students with disabilities often face when trying to enter the legal profession.

The programme includes two internships – one in a law firm, and one in a company legal department – and, with just one application process, students avoid repetitive explanations about their disability and the workplace adjustments they may require.

Légal à Egal has been extended to include students from universities in Luxembourg, France, Belgium and Germany. Clients involved include Chanel, Total, BNP Paribas and Bank of America.

Jean-Baptiste Lebelle, head of HR in Paris, commented: "The programme has been very well received in the local legal market and by our clients, and has opened up conversations about disability. It's helping to break down barriers in the industry and change perceptions, so that with the right support and adjustments the students have the opportunity to thrive in their legal careers."

## Boosting social mobility

A&O strives to be open, accessible and inclusive and believes that nobody's background should determine their future. Working with the Social Mobility Working Group, A&O's Social Mobility Network aims to influence and shape policy on social mobility issues within A&O, in the legal industry more broadly, and in relation to recruitment and retention of talent.

Often role models and representation make the biggest difference to people believing they belong and can excel in an organisation. A&O's social mobility mentoring scheme for colleagues from lower socio-economic backgrounds offers mentees the opportunity to learn from more senior mentors from similar backgrounds. Through the scheme, introduced by the Social Mobility Network, colleagues can find support as well as gain career insight and advice from someone who understands their experiences.

A&O knows that young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds still find the legal profession, in particular, harder to access in many countries. And if they do join the profession, there may be additional challenges. That was one of the reasons why A&O enthusiastically introduced solicitor apprenticeships in September 2022, which represents an important step in broadening access to A&O and the legal profession more widely.

The first six apprentices started at A&O in September 2022 as part of their six-year programme to qualify as solicitors in England and Wales. A&O was one of the first leading law firms to introduce such a scheme.

The initiative provides an alternative route into law direct from school, giving young people who haven't attended university the opportunity to earn a salary while gaining academic qualifications and becoming a lawyer.

"University isn't for everyone for a host of reasons, including financial," says James Partridge, early careers recruitment partner, and chair of A&O's Social Mobility Working Group. "Having an alternative route like this helps to bring the legal profession in reach of a wider range of talented young people."

A&O apprentices spend time in the legal practice groups, and have the opportunity to work in Fuse, A&O's tech innovation hub, as well as the Markets Innovation Group, Legal Tech, eDiscovery and Project Management teams. Apprentices spend four days a week working in the business, with one day allocated to study.

"Regardless of their background, we want A&O to be the destination for the best people," James adds. "Our backgrounds should never limit our opportunities."

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James Partridge





Josh Wilkins and  
Arina Stelmokaite

Arina Stelmokaite and Josh Wilkins are two of A&O's pioneering apprentices. What are their impressions one year in?

Arina said: "Initially I was surprised how friendly A&O is. When people first told me about the approachable and welcoming culture at A&O, I didn't believe them. A&O definitely defeats the stereotypes of a typical commercial law firm."

Josh added: "I've been taken aback by the quality of work I've been immersed in since starting at A&O. At first I was surprised by how much exposure I've gained with clients and transactions, and the extent to which colleagues were willing to place their trust in me."

### Collaboration across the legal sector

In the broader legal sector, A&O is also one of the founding firms of City Century, which has seen more than 50 City law firms commit to increasing the number of solicitor apprentices in the City of London.

James says: "We're one of the six firms spearheading City Century together with the City of London Law Society. Everyone involved is dedicated to identifying and recruiting apprentices, as well as raising awareness of the importance of the initiative in the legal industry."

"As part of City Century, we'll mentor and share best practice with firms which are yet to set up a programme, helping to embed many more successful solicitor apprenticeships throughout the City."

A&O has also launched a new global virtual work experience programme to enable a wider variety of people to gain insight into life in the legal industry.

Two free, virtual legal work experience programmes covering employment law and M&A and technology law are on offer. Designed by A&O lawyers, both programmes are self-paced and can be accessed from anywhere in the world, providing participants with a variety of real life tasks to help them understand the day-to-day work of a commercial lawyer, the skills needed and most importantly the opportunity to practise them.

### Top 10 UK employer for social mobility

A&O has been ranked 7th in the Social Mobility Foundation Employer Index 2023 out of a total of 75 companies. This is the fifth consecutive year that the firm has improved its ranking and our highest placement to date.

The index – considered the leading authority on employer-led social mobility – is an annual benchmarking tool for organisations looking to understand how they are performing on social mobility and to identify areas for improvement.

As A&O concentrates on improving social mobility and accessibility for people with disabilities, it's not letting up on pursuing a more equitable approach across gender, LGBTQ+ and race and ethnicity matters.

## Striving for a better gender balance

Jo Dooley, head of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, said: "Having achieved most of the gender targets set in 2018, A&O undertook a review of progress and set more ambitious targets in 2022 to ensure the firm continues to stretch itself. We're seeing meaningful change."

### Targets and progress



#### 50% women at every level

- Associate population has remained constant at around 50%
- Senior associate population has grown from 35% to 48% in the last five years
- Counsel population has grown from 30% to 40% in the last five years



#### 50% women partners

- Currently at 25% globally, up from 18% in 2018



#### 40% partner promotion candidates every year

- **2023:** 42%; **2022:** 36%; **2021:** 33% and **2020:** 45%



#### 30% of women in elected leadership positions

- 38% of the executive committee are women

## LGBTQ+ visibility, representation and inclusion

# 6%

of our partners and employees in the UK identify as LGBTQ+

A&O continues its commitment to ensuring that lesbian, gay, bi, trans and queer (LGBTQ+) colleagues know A&O is safe ground, wherever they are in the world. However people identify, whatever their difference, it's A&O's goal that they should feel completely able to bring their authentic selves to work.

Ways in which A&O is achieving this include:

- Focusing on allyship by inviting to A&O LGBTQ+ changemakers who are experts in sharing stories to educate and ignite change, and also widely sharing global allies guidance
- Launching a global LGBTQ+ mentoring programme, linked to the A&Out network
- Adding gender confirmation care to the firm's private medical cover in the UK
- Growing our network with our A&Out global women's group having virtual and, where possible, in-person meet-ups

**A&O's global network for its LGBTQ+ community has over 150 members and 750 allies across the world.**

Stonewall – the world's second-largest LGBTQ+ charity – has recognised A&O for its commitment to advancing inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in the workplace.

## Race and ethnicity – enabling diverse people to thrive

A&O continues to focus on attraction, retention and progression of talent from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds and on ensuring an inclusive culture across A&O.

In 2020 A&O announced new targets for the London office aimed at achieving greater racial and ethnic diversity at every level of the firm.

The global picture when it comes to race varies greatly from region to region, and so requires tailored local action.

Under local data privacy obligations, it's not always permitted to gather the data required to put targets in place across A&O's network. But A&O is determined to make a start, and hopes to use its London approach as a demonstration of how committing to targets can lead to positive change.



15%

ethnic minority partners by 2025 – now 15% (including our first three Black partners promoted in the last two years)



25%

ethnic minority lawyers and support staff by 2025 – now 26%



35%

ethnic minority trainees, including 10% Black trainees, each year – now 51%, of which 5% are Black



50/50

Equalised retention rates for trainees and lawyers, in particular retaining more Black associates

### Ghazi AbuYounis

Senior Associate  
A&O: 2015-present



### Jo Dooley

Head of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion  
A&O: 2015-present



### Jean-Baptiste Lebel

Head of Human Resources, Paris  
A&O: 2015-present



### Lisa Nguyen

Partner  
A&O: 2022-present



### James Partridge

Early Careers  
Recruitment Partner  
A&O: 1994-present



### Arina Stelmokaite

Solicitor Apprentice  
A&O: 2022-present



### Phil Whaite

Workplace Manager  
A&O: 2006-present



### Josh Wilkins

Solicitor Apprentice  
A&O: 2022-present



Read more about A&O's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion at [allenoverly.com/en-gb/global/about\\_us/all\\_in](https://allenoverly.com/en-gb/global/about_us/all_in)



# The power of ADHD and how to harness it

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A&O alumna Stephanie Camilleri discovered she had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) after her daughter was diagnosed with the same condition. Drawing on her experience as a lawyer and a parent, Stephanie created her coaching and advocacy business, The ADHD Advocate.

Stephanie Camilleri always had a passion to help people and to understand how the brain works. Growing up in Australia, she wanted to be a psychiatrist, but just missed out on the grades she needed so, encouraged by her parents, she decided to study law.

As a law student, Stephanie faced challenges keeping on top of all the studying, not knowing her undiagnosed neurological condition was the reason why her brain seemed to work differently from those of her fellow students. It forced her to develop her own strategies to succeed. “One of the many characteristics of ADHD is having a weak working memory, which meant a lot of last-minute cramming for me before exams,” she says.

Not for the first or last time, she found herself working harder and longer than her neurotypical colleagues. Stephanie learned speed-reading to compensate for her difficulty in digesting information. She also avoided participating in class. “Thinking I might not be able to recall the correct information made me

anxious so I wouldn’t speak up. I realise now that meant I missed out on taking part in interesting discussions.”

Following her studies, Stephanie trained and qualified at Coudert Brothers in Sydney. A stint in the firm’s New York office opened her eyes to the opportunities to travel that a career in law could offer.

After a spell in property finance with Blake Dawson Waldron, in 2006 Stephanie joined A&O in London for a job in real estate finance.

“I loved working with such accomplished and interesting people at A&O,” she says. “It was all so exciting and varied. I got to travel to Norway for a celebration dinner after a deal closed. I felt really valued and my work felt important.”

## **The struggle for balance and boundaries**

Stephanie found stimulation in the high profile deals, removing the danger of becoming bored. “Boredom to people with ADHD is like kryptonite to Superman. I needed the challenges

to make me perform and keep me motivated. Work deadlines kept my ADHD brain focused and client demands removed distractions.”

For Stephanie, having ADHD meant she was hyper-focused on her work and she struggled to set boundaries for herself. “For someone with ADHD, finding balance is the holy grail,” she says.

Australia eventually beckoned when Stephanie wanted to raise her children with her wider family nearby. She joined the Project Finance team at the Australian bank Westpac, where she enjoyed working with a variety of different industries.

A move back to the UK – this time with three children – followed and Stephanie began working at Westpac’s London office in the

Global Derivatives Reform team where she was responsible for implementing financial regulations. Though it was “a high pressure environment and a stressful job,” her ADHD meant she was “motivated and stimulated by the urgency of the trading environment.”

### **The importance of a diagnosis**

Stresses were developing at home too when the behaviour of Stephanie’s eldest daughter became concerning. “She was inattentive, impulsive, and

hyperactive, but she was misdiagnosed with sensory processing disorder so we weren’t getting the help we needed.”

It took two years for Stephanie’s daughter to be correctly diagnosed. Stephanie was reluctant at first to give her ADHD medication, but when she did, she saw an instant change.

“I had my first real conversation with my daughter the day she started taking the medication. It was like she was present for the first time in her life.”

Stephanie began noticing traits in her own behaviour that made her start to analyse herself. She saw a psychiatrist who eventually diagnosed her with ADHD.

Stephanie started medication like her daughter.

“It was like the world stood still,” she says. “For the first time I was able to stop working on autopilot. I wasn’t just reacting to work demands anymore, and I found I could reflect on what I really wanted to do with my life.”



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I had my first real conversation with my daughter the day she started taking the medication. It was like she was present for the first time in her life.”



With her daughter now thriving at school, and after benefitting from ADHD coaching herself, Stephanie wanted to help others understand ADHD and avoid the struggles she and her family had experienced. She trained with the ADHD coaching academy, studied legal support frameworks for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), and set up The ADHD Advocate.

Stephanie credits her time at A&O for helping her do it. “The firm’s high-quality training, standards of excellence and commitment to client satisfaction set the foundation for my professional growth and gave me the confidence to start The ADHD Advocate on my own.

“For four years it was just me. Now we’re a team of 14, having grown from advocating for young people and parents within education to also offering coaching and training in workplaces.”

Now, whenever her business and family responsibilities allow, she enjoys escaping for a walk in the woods and indulging her love of travel and food. Last year A&O invited Stephanie to deliver ADHD awareness training at an event hosted by A&O’s disability network, AccessAbility, which supports colleagues who have a disability, those who have caring responsibilities

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At The ADHD Advocate, we help people look through the ADHD lens, to ensure employees have the right tools to work with their ADHD, and equally to empower organisations to create safe and supportive environments where neurodiverse people can thrive.”



for people with disabilities, and those who are allies. Stephanie's business is poised to expand. "We have ambitious plans for the next year, including launching in the U.S. and introducing our new Higher Education Success Programme."

She also has a book coming out – the first of the 'Tell A New Story with ADHD' series, called *Look through the ADHD Lens*.

### **Beating the stigma with practical support**

When Stephanie was diagnosed with ADHD, she already had a successful career. "That shielded me from the prejudice that I could have faced as a junior lawyer," she says. In fact, the first thing the psychiatrist said to Stephanie was: "How can you have ADHD when you're a lawyer?"

Like other demanding professions, law actually attracts many people with ADHD who can operate at a high level, but are at risk of burnout from overcompensating, for fear of discrimination. That is where training and coaching come in.

"At The ADHD Advocate, we help people look through the ADHD lens, to ensure employees have the right tools to work with their ADHD, and equally to empower organisations to create safe and supportive environments where neurodiverse people can thrive."

The benefits for businesses are clear as they retain talented employees with a lot to offer their organisations. "People with ADHD have powerful brains. They bring creativity, vision and perseverance. Who wouldn't want them as part of their talent pool?"

Stephanie references psychiatrist and ADHD specialist Dr Edward Hallowell who describes ADHD brains as being like Ferraris, but with the brakes of a bicycle. "They are powerful, but burn fuel very quickly without the right brakes. With the correct support, we can harness and protect that power."

## Get curious

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### **What can we do to help colleagues and friends with the condition?**

"Get curious," Stephanie says.

"Make time to go to the awareness training, and check in with colleagues with ADHD. Be willing to listen, and ask them what adjustments they need so they feel enabled to work more effectively."

Stephanie says 98% of people with ADHD suffer from rejection sensitive dysphoria, which means they are hyper-sensitive to criticism and perceived criticism. Adapting constructive feedback can be powerful, she says. "Begin and finish in gratitude so someone with ADHD feels safe."

Creating this kind of supportive environment will encourage more people with ADHD to get diagnosed, Stephanie believes. "Through diagnosis and coaching they can develop strategies to work with and not against their ADHD, feeling comfortable to discuss the adjustments they need to thrive at work."

In practical terms, administrative tasks can often cause issues for people with ADHD. "In my experience, what is in sight is in mind – like responding to urgent client requests. Unfortunately, submitting a timesheet or updating a spreadsheet can easily become out of sight. That puts pressure on relationships but can be easily worked around."

A quick chat instead of a written progress report, for example, is much more effective. Stephanie calls it verbally processing a task. Employees and managers are encouraged to identify and agree these kinds of strategies together in co-coaching sessions run by The ADHD Advocate.

"ADHD is a hidden disability," said Stephanie. "Let's increase awareness and support to break down the stigma and protect employees from anxiety and burnout."

### **Stephanie Camilleri**

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Director at The ADHD Advocate  
A&O: 2006-2007

Reconnect with Stephanie Camilleri at  
[allenover.com/alumni](http://allenover.com/alumni)

# Environmental sustainability is everyone's business

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A&O's head of Environmental Sustainability, Jakub Bartnicki, explains why publishing our carbon emissions data as part of a worldwide disclosure project will make a big difference to the firm, our clients and the planet, and that we all have a part to play in the effort to combat global warming.

A&O reached a watershed moment in 2023 when the firm published its carbon emissions data as part of the worldwide Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP).

Only by operating in a sustainable way can we reduce our impact, play our part in the global decarbonisation effort and contribute to our clients' environmental goals and obligations. Signing up to the CDP is a clear sign that we take our environmental responsibilities seriously and are committed to making progress.

That progress includes reaching our own science-based target of halving our carbon emissions by 2030 and in so doing, as part of our clients' supply chains, helping them decarbonise in line with the Paris Agreement framework to limit global warming.

It also shows we're listening to our clients, says Jakub. "Joining the CDP is something our clients have asked us to do. Our targets have been official and in the public domain since 2021. Now we have reinforced this message."

The CDP runs the global environmental disclosure system. It's a portal where thousands of companies, cities, states and regions input their carbon emissions data to help them measure and manage their risks and opportunities on climate change, water security and deforestation. Since 2010, when the project started, more than 18,700 companies have reported on it, including more than 60% of our clients by revenue.

"From the data we publish on the CDP, our clients can see how much of their carbon footprint we're responsible for. This insight is invaluable on their journey to achieving net zero," says Jakub.

### **Measurement is key**

The Paris Agreement, which sets out a global framework to limit global warming in this century to below 2°C, placed obligations on businesses to decarbonise their supply chains. That includes us as a supplier of legal services. For our part, we've committed

to halving our carbon emissions by 2030, from a 2019 baseline. Six working groups, answerable to A&O's executive committee, have been set up to ensure we stay on track.

Jakub, who is leading the charge on behalf of the firm, says the key to reaching this science-based target is measurement, and that's why being part of initiatives such as the CDP is vital.

"We can't improve what we can't measure," says Jakub. "Our role in the Environmental Sustainability team is to measure and mitigate the firm's impact on the environment.

"We're currently collecting carbon emissions data from offices across our global network to identify which of our activities are contributing the most to our environmental impact. We can then drive action to reduce them."





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From the data we publish on the CDP, our clients can see how much of their carbon footprint we're responsible for. This insight is invaluable on their journey to achieving net zero.”

### Turning data into action

Our environmental data shows the most significant part of our carbon footprint – 87% of it – is in our own supply chains: in the goods, services and products we purchase. Our Procurement team is currently working to identify our most material suppliers and engage with them to improve their performance.

Another objective is to procure all our electricity from renewable sources by

April 2024. Currently, about 80% of our global electricity consumption is supplied from renewable sources, so we're making good progress.

The other area of focus for Jakub's team is controlling our own emissions – those that stem from our buildings, our equipment, the waste we produce and our business travel.



In London, we're moving into a new office during the winter of 2026-27, which is being built with sustainability at its heart. This will also significantly reduce emissions.

There are many more ways we can reduce these types of emissions. A good example is the work the IT team is doing to move our IT systems to the cloud. This not only helps us work more efficiently, it also uses less energy. By grouping together the IT activities of many organisations, fewer individual data centres are required, along with the electricity, materials and labour they consume. A&O becomes a small part of a bigger, more efficient and modern system run by Microsoft.

### Small changes make a big difference

"Reducing our emissions by half isn't something Business Services can do on its own," says Jakub. "It will take a firm-wide effort. Don't lose sight of the fact that any small changes you can make will add up across a global network the size of ours."

Some individual actions suggested by Jakub to reduce an organisation's carbon emissions include:

- Travelling by train instead of flying
- Using a bike or public transport to get to work
- Turning off lights when you leave the room
- Using refillable water bottles rather than plastic ones for your events
- Printing less
- Opting for vegan or vegetarian meals more often

#### Jakub Bartnicki

Head of Environmental Sustainability  
A&O: 2022-present







# Market insights: A&O's sustainability campaign

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A&O has launched a multichannel campaign exploring the net zero transition from a variety of angles. Here are some of the highlights:

**Financing the gap** explores the dynamics shaping global energy markets and the challenges of transitioning to a low-carbon economy. Featuring the thoughts of partners across A&O, the project identifies a number of ways to accelerate decarbonisation.

**Decarbonisation disputes** takes a deep-dive into how net zero will drive future litigation. Through a series of Q&As, our partners explore the risks and how to mitigate them.

Better climate finance data enables investors and policymakers to make better decisions. In partnership with the Climate Policy Initiative, we have conducted a landmark study to assess the scale of the financing needed to achieve the energy transition across a range of technologies. You can see the results in our **Net Zero Financing Tracker**.

We have hosted a number of high-profile events in Europe and the U.S. over the year. In March we welcomed Patricia Espinosa, former executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, to our London office, and in September we were joined by Avinash Persaud, architect of the Bridgetown Initiative, in New York.

Finally, during the COP28 conference in Dubai between 30 November and 12 December, we took an emerging markets perspective on net zero to reflect the conference's agenda.



## Supporting clients: case studies

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A&O's involvement across the spectrum of energy transition industries has increased exponentially. The team of more than 250 energy transition specialists has advised on projects in over 35 jurisdictions, involving clients from diverse sectors such as power, shipping, aviation, automotive and manufacturing.

### **The Equator Principles Association**

The financial industry uses a benchmark called the Equator Principles (EP) to determine, assess and manage environmental and social risk in project finance and related transactions. The EP Association (EPA), representing EP Financial Institutions (EPFIs), was set

up in 2010 to manage, administer and develop the EP.

A multi-jurisdictional team of A&O lawyers, led from London, has worked closely with the EPA Steering Committee and Secretariat to prepare the official loan documentation guidance for the fourth edition of the EP.

A&O has also been assisting the EPA with updating its Governance Rules to ensure they are fit for purpose and can support the development and promotion of the EP. This involves a wholesale restructure of the EPA itself and its rules to prepare the organisation for the next two decades. This will be a critical

part of the EPA's ability to respond to regulatory and market changes as sustainability and the adoption of environmental standards to lending activities becomes more mainstream.

### **Lead partners**

Stephen Mathews, partner, London  
Matthew Townsend, partner, London

### **Summit Carbon Solutions**

A&O is advising Summit Carbon Solutions, a vertically integrated carbon capture company, in connection with the structuring and financing of a USD5.3 billion operation, the biggest to date in the world.



The project will consist of carbon capture technology, midstream carbon pipelines and sequestration facilities, and vertically integrating the full carbon capture, usage and storage (CCUS) value chain.

Major incentives driving the deal structure include U.S. federal tax credits for carbon sequestration and clean fuels, California Low Carbon Fuel Standard credits, and voluntary carbon offsets, which combined generate billions of dollars for the project.

A&O is advising on the fund structure, debt and equity raise, project documents, financing documents, overall structure,

and accessing a series of federal and state incentives specific to CCUS.

**Lead partner**

Kent Rowey, partner, Los Angeles

**FREYR battery gigafactory**

A&O is advising the lenders on the development and financing for the FREYR battery gigafactory project in Norway on the full range of project documents (construction/ project development, revenue, feedstock, process licensing, equity) and finance documents.

The project is being constructed under a multi-contracting construction model;

A&O has been advising across all construction, equipment supply and process licensing arrangements and approaches to mitigating interface risks arising under this model compared to a turnkey solution.

A&O has also advised on the multi-feedstock/raw material arrangements and the committed offtake arrangements, including inputting on the offtake strategy for short-term offtake commitments. A&O has also continued to advise on the financing and equity arrangements.

**Lead partner**

Lorraine Bayliss, partner, London



# On the road to a sustainable society

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A&O alumna Valérie Brisac has always looked for roles where she could make a difference – worthwhile jobs that benefitted society. Fortuitously for her, and society, she has a knack for finding them.

Valérie Brisac was never going to use skills honed at the ESSEC Business School to market consumer goods – that was old hat, and didn’t answer the needling question in her young mind: what could she contribute to the world? She needed a role with “superior value”, as she puts it.

If that young Valérie could see herself now, she would be extremely happy. Not only is she contributing, she’s taking a lead in the movement to create an equitable, resilient and sustainable society.

Since 2019, her focus has been business transformation toward sustainability in her native France, first with an organisation that helps start-ups develop breakthrough technology to use against greenhouse gases, then running an ambitious project to define 100 measures to accelerate the transformation of the economy, and now heading a new association of mission-driven companies seeking to transform themselves and, through that effort, the economy.

It’s her dream job, she says, one that wasn’t even on the horizon when she was starting out.

At the end of her studies at ESSEC, she couldn’t picture herself in any of the jobs on offer at graduate recruitment days. What did interest her was urban planning, an area where she saw opportunities to solve problems.

## **A new direction**

She first joined the SCET Group and then the Paris consultancy Bossard in its public sector division. She switched to marketing after a change in ownership and internal reorganisation left her thinking, if she couldn’t “fulfil something deep, at least I could have fun”.

Her chance to “invent something that hadn’t been done before” arose at Nexity, a progressive real estate company. Nexity had acquired a business that managed large residential buildings and put Valérie in a new role of marketing director to develop innovative ways of selling its services.

“I liked the connection with my previous urban planning life. When you manage buildings where a lot of people live, and do it well, you create value for them. It’s like building a city and giving it a kind of soul.”

Valérie and her husband wanted their growing family of boys to experience life outside France, so they moved to Belgium in 2010. They loved it – and for Valérie, joining A&O in Brussels as head of Marketing, Communication and Business Development was the icing on the cake.

She’d found it hard without speaking Flemish to get a job and, although she’d decided not to take another role in marketing, she changed her mind after an interview with then-managing partner Dirk Meeus, now co-head of A&O’s Global Corporate practice.

“Life totally changed,” she said. It was more than the firm’s international environment, the many nationalities or the high level of the work. There was an attractive richness in A&O’s Belgium





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When you manage buildings where a lot of people live, and do it well, you create value for them. It's like building a city and giving it a kind of soul.”

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I liked to open the newspapers at the business pages where I could see everything we were doing... It made me proud to think that we were making business history.”

office. “People were mostly trilingual, culturally agile, extremely respectful – the mix of ambition, excellence and a human dimension were powerful.

“I liked to open the newspapers at the business pages where I could see everything we were doing – all the M&A, the complex discussions at European level: we were working on all of that. It made me proud to think that we were making business history.”

In her marketing role, she enjoyed the freedom to be creative. On one memorable occasion, an alumni reception around the theme of connecting people, she and her team recreated the onboard environment of an aircraft complete with hostesses dressed as cabin crew and city trips as prizes for attendees.

In 2017, the family returned to Paris, her eldest son for education, her husband to develop his business in their home city, and Valérie to take up an opportunity to move to A&O’s Paris office as director of Marketing, BD and Communication. Her move coincided with the appointment of Hervé Ekué as managing partner, taking over from Jean-Claude Rivalland. She worked closely with Hervé during “a very interesting” time.

### Wake-up call

The introduction in 2019 of France’s so-called Pacte law – *Plan d’action pour la croissance et la transformation des entreprises* (‘An action plan for business growth and transformation’) – was “a wake-up call for me”. She recognised a ‘superior value’ in the Pacte law, which requires French companies to consider social and environmental issues in their business and encourages them to incorporate social and environmental objectives into their corporate purpose.

“A lot of things changed,” said Valérie. “Companies reflected for the first time on their purpose.” It was “very exciting” to help companies articulate their *raison d’être*, to go into their history and corporate DNA and change their governance.

She saw it as a historic cycle, and wanted to be part of it but realised she couldn’t at A&O. “Pro bono involvement is peripheral: I wanted to be at the centre.

“I loved the people at A&O but it was time to go back to my goal of working for the common good.”

Then Covid-19 hit.

About that time she met Team for the Planet (TFTP), a group that raises money to fund start-ups whose technology, if replicated in open source, could have a massive impact; for example developing air-conditioning that doesn’t use harmful hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).

While volunteering for TFTP, she took on what she describes as the “toughest thing I’ve ever done” and in 2021 became executive director of Le Grand Défi. It was, as its name says, ‘The Great Challenge’: a corporate-funded charity, its ambition was to mobilise businesses to define 100 proposals for accelerating the ecological transition of the economy, and then follow

through on their dissemination and implementation with decision-makers.

It was a brand-new project, with no team or budget. “My aim was always to have an impact,” said Valérie, “so I jumped in.”

Valérie knew they needed expert legal advice and turned to A&O for help. That led to the pro bono involvement of “a wonderful lawyer” from the Paris office, Arthur Sauzay – now partner but counsel at the time – who stepped in with the blessing of both Romaric Lazerges, partner and head of the Public Sector team, and Hervé Ekué.

“Arthur helped us tremendously,” she said. A specialist in environment and public law, he provided invaluable context, perspective and background to ideas arising from the brainstorming – even the correct legal vocabulary to use. “What a gift to have this excellence at our service.”

Through Valérie’s hands-on effort – the work took her to top-level meetings with officials of the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry – and the co-founders’ extensive network, Le Grand Défi succeeded in stimulating interest across a broad cross-section of business and government.

A key measure for Le Grand Défi was a national strategy for biodiversity. In July 2023, the government introduced a new national biodiversity strategy (SNB3) and appointed a secretary of state for biodiversity. Said Valérie: “We can never say this happened because of us, but we contributed to making it happen.”

### On a mission

Valérie left the project in July 2023 for a new job as chief executive of Communauté des Entreprises à Mission (CEM), which she started in September. CEM is the reference association in France on the question of the ‘company



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Pro bono involvement is peripheral: I wanted to be at the centre.”

with a mission’. The term refers to how an economic entity defines its activities toward the common good, or ‘society with a mission’, a concept that gained legal status with the Pacte law of 2019.

“We’re basically an interface between government and business,” said Valérie, “set up to help mission-driven companies transform themselves.”

What’s interesting, she said, is that similar initiatives are happening across Europe on a country level. The hope is that policy-makers will come up with a new Europe-wide status for companies with a mission – something to which her role will contribute.

### **Change the economy**

The big challenge now, and one which she approaches with obvious relish, is to grow the 1,000-strong CEM membership of mission-driven companies “many times over”, and while she’s at it, change the economy.

How does she feel about that? “It’s a combination of everything I’ve learned as a consultant, marketing director and so on,” she says. “The role corresponds with what I want to do and what I know.

“It also has the political and societal dimensions that I like – it’s great!”

Music and sport help Valérie unwind. She discovered Zumba a few years ago – “a good way to combine cardio exercise with a lot of fun in a non-competitive atmosphere” – and added it to her fitness and swimming routine.

But her first love is singing. She has been on the concert stage as a member of choirs performing mainly classical music, and now takes singing lessons “to progress and sing different things” – art imitating life in every sense.

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### **Valérie Brisac**

Chief Executive of Communauté des Entreprises à Mission  
A&O: 2014-2019

Reconnect with Valérie Brisac at [allenovery.com/alumni](https://allenovery.com/alumni)



# Responsible AI: navigating the risks and embracing the possibilities

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The launch of GPT-4 has led to the widespread use of generative artificial intelligence (AI). As the first law firm – and one of the few firms of any sort – with experience in deploying GPT-4 across our business, we’re helping clients embed and use AI responsibly. We speak to some members of A&O’s AI working group.





The terms 'AI ethics', 'trustworthy AI' and 'responsible AI' are often used interchangeably, but there's a technical distinction between the three despite the overlaps, as A&O counsel Karishma Brahmhatt explains.

"AI ethics," she says, "is defined as the study and evaluation of moral problems relating to data, algorithms and corresponding practices to formulate and support morally good solutions. In practice, it embodies the difference between what you can do and what you should do with AI and the output it creates.

"In the corporate context, this discourse has been subsumed into the broader notion of 'responsible AI', which asks who is answerable for the ethical and acceptable uses or outcomes of AI systems. There's an inherent accountability element to it."

Responsible AI also goes further: it's also about future-proofing.

"Part of responsible AI is making sure that your system remains fit for purpose, and that the purpose you're using it for remains acceptable in the context of the social, economic and cultural environment in which it's used," Karishma adds.

But as the concepts of 'ethical' and 'acceptable' change, so responsible AI means keeping your finger on the pulse of societal and cultural expectations, what 'good' or 'right' mean at a particular moment, and adjusting your commercial strategy accordingly.

Responsible AI is values-driven, embodying oft-cited principles such as fairness, lawfulness, ethics, safety and security, and it matters because these issues are uppermost in consumers'

minds and – as the slew of white papers, guidance, commentary and draft legislation indicates – those of policy-makers.

### **Why should businesses care?**

There are many reasons why businesses should care about responsible AI. For Daren Orzechowski, partner and global co-head of Technology, it comes down to practicalities. "Your people are using it, no matter what they say, so you need to get ahead of it to drive safe use and safe conduct. Embrace the efficiencies and the possibilities of the technology; it's happening, so you need to figure it out."



“

Embrace the efficiencies and the possibilities of the technology; it's happening, so you need to figure it out.”

Daren Orzechowski

And while the technological singularity (the point at which AI surpasses human intelligence and machines can learn and innovate on their own) might not currently be keeping you up at night, the fact that AI is a hot topic for regulators should be. Says Karishma: “We’ve already seen data protection regulators at the forefront of enforcement actions concerning AI systems. To avoid fines or regulatory sanctions, organisations need to keep on top of compliance.”

There’s also the reputational risk – and potential gains. AI, if used irresponsibly, could have far-reaching, detrimental impacts and undermine progress in environmental, social and governance (ESG), and diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I).

“AI is a technology of the future, but it consumes data, and most data is a reflection of our past,” says Karishma. “We need to be careful how we’re using data to train the AI systems that could shape our future.

“Inaccurate, incomplete and inappropriate datasets can result in the use of AI systems, and their outputs, being unfair, discriminatory and exclusionary in harmful ways, and therefore problematic for creating a smarter, more inclusive, more sustainable society.

“Social consciousness is creeping up the corporate agenda. Responsible AI practices can help companies protect rights and freedoms of individuals, while also enabling innovation and creativity and giving companies a commercial edge.”

### **The risks of AI**

Daren explains that IP and data privacy risks also apply to its use and output. “When you’re dealing with AI, it’s almost like a child: it’s hungry for data and it wants to learn, so you have to feed it in order to train it.



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Karishma Brahmabhatt





“The initial question is, if you use third-party data or images to train the AI, is that an IP infringement? A second question is whether there’s an infringement at the point of use, when we rely on the AI and the things it was trained on, to produce a result.”

There’s also the risk of ‘hallucinations’: wrong answers that look like right ones. Francesca Bennetts, ICM partner and a member of our Markets Innovation Group (MIG), says: “We liken it to an articulate, knowledgeable 13 year old who is capable of giving a convincing and well-constructed answer, but they don’t know what they don’t know.”

“That’s probably the biggest risk from a legal perspective, because if people rely on the outputs of these systems without rigorous checking, they could give materially incorrect answers to clients, with potentially serious repercussions.”

A bigger question is who is responsible if something goes wrong. Karishma says AI liability may not be top of the legislative agenda right now, but soon will be. “We’re already looking at the question of who should be liable for the output created by the AI system – is it the person who created it, the person who procured it or the person who used it? Where does (and should) the buck stop?”

### **How to manage those risks**

Before you can begin to build a responsible AI framework, you need to define your use case. This enables you to take a by-design approach. Daren explains: “It starts with understanding your organisation – its needs and its goals – and then understanding the various use cases that would make work easier or more enjoyable. Technology should be used to create efficiency.”

Knowledge of the technical architecture is critical too.

“Before you let your people use the technology, you need to know where the data they input into a tool is going and who’s seeing the input and the output,” he adds. This will determine whether you design or license AI systems – and whether you limit access.

You need to establish the principles that will govern your use of AI and tailor them to the organisation’s culture. Develop a risk management framework, but make sure your policies are practical and realistic. This means engaging with employees early so they understand the strategy, the risks, and the rules of use.

Buy-in from senior management and other relevant stakeholders is also essential if your AI governance measures are to have teeth, as is representation.

“We’re a diverse bunch of people,” says Karishma, “which means AI, and AI governance frameworks, should be created with that diversity in mind. Making sure that the right people are involved and understand their responsibilities will help make your adoption of AI a responsible one.”

### **Deploying Harvey: how we did it and what we learned**

Our MIG team was responsible for rolling out Harvey, a generative AI system based on OpenAI’s large language model. Today, more than 3,500 employees across 43 jurisdictions have access to it from their desktops, with around 800 people using it daily. IP partner Peter Van Dyck says there are myriad examples of how Harvey has already changed the way he and others in the team now work.

“For example,” says Peter, “I used it to research international case law as part of patent litigation work. Harvey came up with several relevant and promising cases, which I was then able to send to our colleagues in the relevant jurisdictions for further analysis.”

Referring to deployment, Francesca adds: “The biggest hurdle was making sure we understood the key legal and regulatory risks. We actively managed those before we rolled it out.”

We also set up layers of governance, including an AI steering group to set the strategy, and a group for early adopters.

“This AI Brains Trust are not just champions,” says Francesca. “They identify use cases for their practice group, best practices and what doesn’t work well. We share those learnings with the wider firm so that everyone has the benefit of up-to-date thinking.”

The rules of use are also updated regularly to reflect any changes to regulations or our internal position on risk, but there’s one rule that remains constant.

“You have to validate the output,” says Francesca. “The outputs are meant to be used as inspiration, not verbatim, and we’ve made that crystal clear. It’s your responsibility to make sure that what you’re producing for your clients is accurate and fit for purpose.”

### **Impact on junior lawyers**

Francesca is also focused on how AI impacts our people and making sure that the technology doesn’t disrupt their career plans and lives. She has been working with HR and training teams to understand how AI will affect our junior lawyers.

“There’s no doubt that AI makes some of the processes that our juniors do more efficient. We have to identify the skills we want people to learn, and if we think they are not going to get that experience organically, then we have to proactively teach them.”

In this respect, AI is allowing us to become more purposeful about our training for junior lawyers.

“I actually think that’s a good thing for our lawyers because it’s more systematic,” she adds. “It will mean we have that certainty that we’re teaching our people what they need to be an effective lawyer.”





“

The increasing use of AI is challenging the concept of what it means to be human and whether a technology can be afforded ‘rights’ in the same way as a person can.”

Karishma Brahmhatt

**Building solutions and sharing our experience**

The MIG team has used our AI experience to develop our own proprietary tool, ContractMatrix.

“ContractMatrix leverages generative AI to speed up contract drafting and review. It allows you to compare a clause that has been amended or suggested by generative AI to a selection of your golden-source precedents and data,” says Francesca. “It aids efficiency because, rather than having to trawl through subfolders to find previous documents, it’s all in a single place.

“The system is surfacing up the best precedent every time, which means our lawyers have access to much better knowhow, much quicker.”

Additional functionality is regularly added in response to internal A&O user feedback, for example the ability to find an example clause or the most similar entire document in the bench.

ContractMatrix has the potential to help others too. We’re developing a client-facing version of the platform that uses their own data, which we’ll provide on a software-as-a-service (SaaS) basis.

We’re also building out our advisory practice, helping clients to manage risk across the full lifecycle of an AI system. Says Daren: “A lot of clients are looking to build or license in technology and that’s also leading to transactional work to acquire those technologies. This type of work has been a core part of our technology transactions practice for years.”

Daren, Francesca, Peter and Karishma are part of our AI working group, which is sharing our learnings from deploying AI systems with our clients on a syndicated basis.

“The AI working group was born out of the processes we’ve had to go through,” says Francesca. “We realised these were the same issues our clients were grappling with too.”

**Looking ahead**

As for the future, it’s a ‘known unknown’, says Daren. “We don’t know how all this is going to play out, so we need to make sure we’re using AI responsibly. It’s a balancing act, but it will sort itself out: the markets will have to adapt to it, as they did with online books and music streaming.”

Karishma says, once the rules have been established and the scramble to implement compliance frameworks is over, “we’ll find ourselves dealing with the really meaty, knotty, interesting questions.

“The increasing use of AI is challenging the concept of what it means to be human and whether a technology can be afforded ‘rights’ in the same way as a person can.

“The pace of development is so fast that I think those types of questions will become more relevant. In ten years, we’re not going to be scratching our heads over today’s AI issues in the same way we are now.”

**Francesca Bennetts**

Partner  
A&O: 2006-present



**Karishma Brahmhatt**

Counsel  
A&O: 2009-present



**Daren Orzechowski**

Partner, Global Co-head of Technology  
A&O: 2021-present



**Peter Van Dyck**

Partner  
A&O: 2003-present



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# Building inclusive digital societies

Alumnus Jeremy Ng always wanted an impactful career where he could improve people's lives. Now he's in a position to do so at the World Bank.

Jeremy Ng says he went into law for the most mundane of reasons: it was what his elder brother had chosen. "We were both good in humanities – my favourite subject growing up was English literature," he says.

In another life, he might have been an English professor looking at societal change through the writing of others. Instead, he finds himself working toward that change as a consultant to the World Bank's Legal Vice Presidency, specialising in technology and innovation.

Law, he said, is a "pretty common pathway" for someone analytically minded who wants to work with language. In his second year at the University of Cambridge, he discovered a passion for international law: his undergraduate dissertation was on the interaction between investment law and human rights. According to Jeremy, an early interest in human rights stemmed from the fact that "a lot of my generation are really attuned to the social implications of what we do and want to build careers around creating meaningful change."

Unclear on how he would achieve that goal, he applied to A&O, partly due to the firm's reputation for innovation. He was among the August 2019 cohort, qualified into the Derivatives and Structured

Finance (DSF) group in 2021, and remained with the firm as an associate until July 2022. Throughout this period, he remained involved in human rights through pro bono work across women's rights, indigenous rights, and environmental protection.

Covid-19 didn't interrupt his progression as much as offer him new opportunities. Pandemic restrictions meant limited opportunities for an international posting, so he was seconded to Fuse, the firm's technology innovation hub in London, and became its first trainee: "It completely changed my career."

## **An amazing mentor**

Jeremy pays fulsome credit to Shruti Ajitsaria, partner and head of Fuse, who was "an amazing mentor", giving him a lot of responsibility for a trainee at that level. "She really showed me what was possible for innovative lawyers who are willing to think differently." While working on cutting edge LegalTech mandates, Jeremy was exposed to a style of work different to the traditional transactional lawyer's role: "I thought 'I could make a career of this'."

Although leaving A&O was difficult, pursuing an LLM at New York University (NYU) School of Law afforded Jeremy the opportunity to combine his new

found interest in technology with a lifelong affinity for the public good, taking courses such as the Digital Governance and Human Rights seminar convened by former UN special rapporteur Philip Alston.

He packed a lot into his time at NYU. "It's not uncommon to see people juggling multiple commitments," he says, "given that everyone wants to make the most out of the year-long master's programme." While at NYU, he was a Human Rights Scholar at the Centre for Global Justice & Human Rights, a Research Assistant at Guarini Global Law & Technology, and a Salzburg Cutler Fellow.

Following his graduation from the LLM programme, he joined the World Bank as an International Finance and Development Fellow, a position funded by NYU. This led in August 2023 to his current role as a consultant in the World Bank's Legal Vice Presidency.

Jeremy describes his current role as "very specialised". The World Bank has two goals: ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity in a sustainable way. Much of its work is in digital development, where the Bank funds projects that create digital inclusion and support responsible digital transformation. Areas of focus include



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A lot of my generation are really attuned to the social implications of what we do and want to build careers around that.”





internet connectivity, data infrastructures, and digital identity.

In his new position in the Legal Vice Presidency, Jeremy supports this work through the provision of advice on legal frameworks related to ongoing digital development projects (ranging from data protection to cybersecurity), and analytical work involving legal and policy research on digital economy issues such as AI regulation, content moderation, and data governance.

Increasingly, the human rights impacts of these digital projects underpins much of Jeremy's work in this area, whether it's looking into accountability

frameworks for harmful content hosted on online platforms, issues of fairness and algorithmic bias, or changes to basic privacy settings that big tech firms are trying to push through across the world.

#### **Human rights principles**

Funding for such work comes from mechanisms such as the Bank's Human Rights, Inclusion and Empowerment Trust Fund, which seeks to strengthen knowledge and application of human rights principles in World Bank operations around the world.

Although the Bank is not a human rights organisation per se, Jeremy says

“there's an increasing recognition within the Bank that citizens will only participate in an inclusive digital society that respects fundamental rights.”

Jeremy has come into the World Bank as a new president, Ajay Banga, begins his five-year term with a strong focus on the climate crisis. Says Jeremy: “His priority is mobilising the resources to support sustainable energy. There's still a large funding gap that needs to be bridged to meet the Paris targets.”

For Jeremy, however, it's the AI “revolution” that holds his attention. “Increasingly we see governments deploying AI in the public sector for

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There's an increasing recognition within the Bank that citizens will only participate in an inclusive digital society that respects fundamental rights.”

various reasons such as streamlining operations and reducing costs, but for all the benefits of this transformational technology, there are very real risks.”

These can include human rights violations through reinforcing discrimination, undermining privacy, and violating basic principles regarding transparency, accountability and due process. As a result, “the World Bank is working hard to ensure such risks are accounted for.”

### Real strength from differences

Throughout history, technological progress has created inequality and power asymmetries. An area of concern for Jeremy is how to distribute the gains from today’s “insane level” of technological advancement.

In one key area, the World Bank walks the talk, as Jeremy sees it. He says: “Diversity is inbuilt as the Bank draws staff from around the world and brings them to D.C. The differences in outlook, culture, language and experience is a real strength. It makes working here such a pleasure.”

If Jeremy were to move back into the private sector, it would likely be into a legal or policy role in the tech industry. He says: “The people who really shape the human rights outcomes of new technologies such as AI are the software engineers and product managers who build and design them. I’m interested in seeing what it’s like on the inside, where these decisions are made.

“People my age want to make an impact. Sometimes this means making multiple jumps to get where we want to be in our careers.

“Although I’m happy with how my post-A&O career has panned out, I was sad to leave the firm. I enjoyed working in DSF; they are some of my closest friends anywhere. Coming back to visit the London office, bumping into people – it’s wonderful and I’m so grateful to A&O for giving that to me. I have fond memories of my time there.”

## Migration, music and a second family

Family is important to Jeremy. He was born in Hong Kong to Malaysian Chinese parents who had themselves moved around Southeast Asia. He left Hong Kong at 18 for Cambridge, where he experienced a “huge culture shock,” which he says “is one of the reasons I was so active in DE&I during my time at A&O.”

He appreciated how global the firm was, and how cosmopolitan his colleagues were as a result. “Many of my teammates in DSF had spent time in Hong Kong on secondment and so we had common ground to connect over.”

Thanks to his musical father, Jeremy and his brother learned piano from an early age, and as teenagers they picked up bass guitar and drums respectively. In his high school years, Jeremy played bass guitar in a band, confessing: “We only really had two songs in our repertoire: ‘Sweet Child O’ Mine’ and the Metallica instrumental ‘Orion’.”

At A&O he found a new family among the team at DSF, notably partner Guy Antrobus, counsel Tess Khoo, senior associates Ben Berry, Vicky White and Sam Clitheroe, and associate Abbie True. They remain very close – “lifelong friends.”

“We see each other as often as possible,” he says. The wedding of Ben, his former trainer, in September 2023 drew many of the group to the West Country, reuniting with alumni from the team stretching over the past decade. “Really good fun,” says Jeremy.

He recently reconnected with fellow alumnus Suril Patel, now VP of Partnerships at legal AI startup Harvey, to discuss developments in generative AI for legal services. Coincidentally, because of Covid-19, Suril had been one of the first partners Jeremy spoke to in person in DSF: reconnecting with him was a full-circle moment that “really shows the power of the A&O Alumni Network.”

### Jeremy Ng

Legal Consultant, Technology & Innovation  
at the World Bank  
A&O: 2019-2022

Reconnect with Jeremy Ng at  
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# Being a successful lawyer in an AI organisation

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Ed Hirst's happiness comes from interacting with people with different perspectives, making his impact on the world and having the opportunity to learn about truly ground-breaking innovations. His role at the AI business Google DeepMind ticks all the boxes.

After studying philosophy, politics and economics at Durham University and international law and politics at SciencesPo in Paris, Ed Hirst didn't initially have a particularly clear career path and considered politics. On campus at Durham, he attended events that A&O was running but decided to keep his options open and took the next step to study for his law conversion exams while working for an MP.

"What initially appealed to me about a career in law was that it seemed very much about people and cultivating relationships," he said. "I learned that 'A&O-style' law was about being close to big things and exciting developments and being a part of projects that have a bigger impact than what's on our doorstep. The exciting, influential decision-making definitely attracted me."

A&O's global reach and reputation for top-performing lawyers working at the cutting edge of many industries led him to apply for the firm's Summer Vacation Scheme.

"As soon as I met with my fellow vac schemers and those at A&O who were facilitating the scheme, I knew they were the kind of people I'd like to have as colleagues. It sounded like great work; the team was super-approachable and extremely flexible when I broached the subject of a year abroad following my studies.

"Alex Shandro was my training supervisor during the summer of 2015, and he was most certainly the person who helped me decide to join A&O on a training contract."

## The 'people' element

After joining A&O as a trainee in 2019, Ed's first seat was in the Commercial, Data and IP practice. He "greatly enjoyed" the experience, particularly the 'people' element of the role and working with both Alex and the wider team. The role was full of variety, including deal-making and finding diplomatic solutions to commercial negotiations.

For his final seat, Ed took up a secondment at Google DeepMind, a business that researches and builds safe artificial intelligence (AI) systems. "Working in-house for the first time felt like a big change," he said. "I found myself in a small legal team where I was expected to find solutions rather than just put forward potential options. I was closer to the decision-making and enjoyed the buzz of working with the research teams."

## Energy and enthusiasm

Ed found advising AI and robotics research teams, a diverse international group, "incredibly interesting – you couldn't help but feel the energy and enthusiasm."

"For the first time I was liaising directly with clients, who often hadn't dealt with lawyers before, rather than with opposing legal teams. I was interfacing with heads of research, the security team, the exec committee – all with their own ideas of their optimal outcomes and excited about the work they were doing.





“

As soon as I met with my fellow vac schemers and those at A&O who were facilitating the scheme, I knew they were the kind of people I'd like to have as colleagues.”

“

But it's not 'just science'. AI is being employed to improve lives and power systems with never-before-seen capabilities.”

“I enjoyed the internal negotiation aspect of the role; finding solutions that work for all stakeholders, identifying the common threads and identifying efficient ways to tie them together. That's a big part of the role for an in-house lawyer.”

His time at Google DeepMind gave Ed a taste for working in-house and a desire to pursue opportunities later in his career. Meanwhile, when he qualified in 2021, he returned to the Commercial team and work that interested him.

Less than two years later, Ed learned of a role at Google DeepMind and he felt he should apply for it.

“The opportunity to return to such a fast-paced and interesting business appealed, though the reality of leaving A&O came about a little earlier than I'd anticipated,” he said.

Ed's current role is to support the research business and product efforts across the entire team at Google DeepMind, acting in an advisory role as well as supporting commercial transactions.

“Google DeepMind to me is about advancing the state of science and using that to benefit the world,” he said. “It's at the pinnacle of science, using research to develop AI and then using AI to develop the research.

“But it's not 'just science'. AI is being employed to improve lives and power systems with never-before-seen capabilities.”

Generative AI is already having an impact on the legal profession, being used to speed up more of the 'mundane' work that lawyers are faced with. Ed believes it's also set to change the tech industry itself. For example, Google DeepMind has developed fundamental research into algorithmic efficiency, using AI to improve algorithms and to efficiently define processing within the computing hardware that we use every day, such as mobile phones and laptops.

The greatest challenge for Ed is getting to grips with the science behind AI: “A good lawyer has to understand the subject matter upon which they are advising and what matters to those receiving the advice. The science is part of what makes my job so interesting. I've learned so much – from particle physics to neuroscience – from incredibly knowledgeable colleagues.”

Diversity at Google DeepMind has two important goals: the aim of inclusivity but also to encourage breadth of thinking. Its scholarship programme is part of a concerted effort to inspire diverse groups of people to pursue a career in AI research.

### Benefits of diversity

Meanwhile, Ed and his colleagues in Google DeepMind's legal team work with Aspiring Solicitors and Flex Legal to help people from underrepresented groups access the legal world. “There's a genuine understanding that we benefit from having diverse people around the table, as different perspectives working together on the research, as well as the legal advice, will help create AI and solutions that we can all benefit from.”

He also volunteers as a mentor for Spear Islington, helping people aged 16-24 who face barriers to accessing work to believe in themselves and their value in society. As part of the six-week programmes, organised sessions provide mentors who run mock interviews and CV-writing clinics.

Ed is a believer in the power of mentors and considers himself lucky to have benefitted from many through his professional life. “I've had hugely supportive managers who have my best interests at heart and have helped me unlock my potential,” he said. “I feel I've been raised by a village of mentors – many at A&O – rather than one in particular, and their different personalities and viewpoints have shaped who I am today.”

### A fine balance

Ed has an interesting view on what to look for when appointing advisers, having experience of working both in-house and within private practice. He said: “Risk for us is anything that may block research and the mission, so sometimes it might be a fine balance between accepting slightly less favourable terms in an agreement and, for instance, missing out on the chance to work with an external partner who could add great benefit to our research...”

“As a junior lawyer, I would always aim my advice to cover every eventuality. Yet, now I'm working in-house and seek external advice, I want an adviser who understands what actually matters to us and has the confidence to leave aside the remote or irrelevant.”

For Ed, being a good lawyer is about reading the room, being empathic to the reasons behind your stakeholders' views, while still standing behind your beliefs on what the probable or optimal outcome will or should be.



## Research boosts trust and safety technology

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For the past ten years, Google DeepMind has focused mainly on research, and those years of research have given birth to a suite of scientific advancements, as well as trust and safety technologies.

One of its groundbreaking products is SynthID, which takes a promising step towards answering the questions around how we trust what we see online. “AI-powered image generation is improving every day, which is exciting, but it brings with it a real risk of people being misled,” said Ed. “SynthID can embed an imperceptible digital watermark into images generated by an AI model and later identify whether that model generated a given image.

“It’s important that solutions like these are developed to help people know what to trust. Over time, the technology will have to extend

to other modalities, such as audio and video.”

Google DeepMind also undertakes research with a strong environmental focus. Optimising the efficiency of national energy grids was the focus of early research. The business has also carried out research on finding ways to distribute power efficiently to data centres, climate forecast mapping and weather forecasting. There’s also a considerable nuclear fusion research effort. This research could add to the body of knowledge that ultimately may bring about the clean energy we all hope for.

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### Ed Hirst

Associate Commercial Counsel at Google DeepMind  
A&O: 2019-2022

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# Making a **positive** social **impact**

Around the world, in many different settings, A&O is drawing on all its resources – from financial to skills, time and expertise – to make a real difference in the lives of people.

**A&O's new global charity partner, Women for Women International (WfWI), is making a difference to marginalised communities all over the world.**

A&O started a new global charity partnership with WfWI in September 2023, with a focus on helping displaced people. The charity is dedicated to supporting women survivors of war.

Sara Bowcutt, managing director of WfWI – UK, welcomed the news: “Thank you A&O for believing in the power of women, and committing to

make the world more equal, peaceful and prosperous. Together, we will create positive change for women – as well as their families and communities – for generations to come.”

Hilde van der Baan, Amsterdam partner and co-lead partner of A&O's Social Impact Group (SIG – see page 46), added: “People being displaced by conflict is a growing issue in the world today so it's a privilege to be able to boost WfWI's work supporting women survivors of war. Drawing on all our resources as a global organisation – not just financial, but also our skills,

time and expertise – we hope to make a real difference over our two-year partnership.”

WfWI invests where inequality is greatest by supporting those who are often forgotten: women survivors of war. In conflict-affected countries, including Iraq where part of our funding will be directed, we'll support WfWI's holistic work equipping women with knowledge, skills and resources to overcome trauma, rebuild their lives and regain hope.

WfWI's training programmes produce quantifiable results. Graduates generate earnings and join savings groups, on average increasing household income by 199%; they defend their rights, with a 425% increase in women speaking out publicly against gender-based violence; and they strengthen their communities, with a 200% increase in women taking up local leadership positions.



For our previous global charity partner, Street Child, A&O contributed GBP1.5 million and provided GBP1.12m in legal and non-legal pro bono support.

Our funding supported Street Child's work to keep children in school in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone, where economic barriers lead to poor education outcomes, especially for girls.

Elsewhere, A&O lawyers supported the South Asian Assessment Alliance's work to improve educational outcomes for the most marginalised children across Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal, while the A&O Muslim Network helped raise GBP100,000 for Street Child with its first Iftar dinner, part of its new Ramadan campaign in 2022, repeated in 2023.

"This partnership has provided so much more than just funding," says Tom Dannatt, chief executive and founder of Street Child. "Thanks to A&O's pro bono support we can be an even more effective and efficient organisation for years to come."

## Key achievements in Sierra Leone

 **1,000**  
education support packages

 **244**  
teenage mother support packages

 **828**  
psychosocial counselling and family mediation sessions for girls

 **17**  
schools renovated

 **23**  
schools reconstructed

## Standout fundraising efforts

 **GBP703,000**

A record GBP703,000 donated in 2023's 'First Hour, First Day' campaign, where colleagues could donate the first hour or first day of their January pay.

 **GBP44,000**

More than 175 people from 29 A&O offices took on personal challenges – from cycling, running and climbing to learning a new piece of music – as part of the Around the World Challenge, raising nearly GBP44,000.

 **GBP44,000**

12 colleagues travelled to Makeni for our global charity partner's flagship fundraising event, the Sierra Leone Marathon, taking part in a 10k, half or full marathon, and raising more than GBP44,000 for the charity.

# Focus on outcomes

The newly named Social Impact Group (SIG) has been busy making an impact. Formerly known as the Pro Bono and Community Investment team, the group changed its name to reflect our increasing commitment to, and expertise in, corporate and social responsibility.

The move is also in line with our clients' heightened awareness of global sustainability challenges, such as climate change, social inequality and corporate governance issues, which has led to an increase in social impact legal work and a blurring of the lines between pro bono and fee-paying matters.

As Franz Ranero, co-lead partner of SIG, explains: "This is a shift in the way we define what we contribute to, and how we interact with the rest of the firm. The term pro bono and community investment reflects some, but not all, of the inputs that go into what we do. Essentially, it describes the fee arrangement. We want instead to focus on outcomes – the positive impact we have on the communities we touch."

'Impact' has also gone mainstream, says Hilde van der Baan: "Gone are the days when social finance and investing in social causes were considered solely the realm of pro bono work. With our clients placing more emphasis on non-financial factors and integrating Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) measures into their risk management frameworks, the relationship between pro bono and fee-paying work is more nuanced. With some clients now, we take a blended approach.

"Our team's role in this broad ecosystem is to provide the social impact lens, working with our ESG and asset management experts. We're here to facilitate and empower our clients, our people and the firm to maximise positive social impact."



## Belfast apprentices

Outside of legal roles, our Belfast apprenticeship programme has grown to 34 apprentices, working in IT, Finance, HR, Marketing, Legal Tech and Business Projects. Now in its tenth year, our award-winning scheme offers an alternative route to employment and education.

We work closely with local education providers to design bespoke training, enabling our apprentices to gain qualifications and skills, and earn while they learn. Around 80% of apprentices stay with A&O after finishing their two-year course, choosing to progress to a higher-level apprenticeship, or taking up a permanent role within the firm.



## Education schemes go from strength to strength

A key theme of our social impact work for many years has been improving access to education for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. A number of schemes we run across our network are going from strength to strength.

The A&O bursary programme is making an impact for young people, with nine bursary recipients going on to work with A&O from the 30 students who have taken part since the programme started in 2010 in London.

The programme offers support to high-potential students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who are about to embark on their university studies and have a particular interest in a career in law. It's a three-year programme of financial and non-financial support for students who have participated in either of A&O's social mobility programmes, A&O Accelerate or Smart Start.

A&O increased the number of bursaries from two to six in 2021, and the amount awarded to each student increased to GBP15,000, a total GBP270,000 investment over three years. The students also benefit from a dedicated A&O mentor for the duration of their studies.

## Access for all

In Asia Pacific, we support students from ethnic minority backgrounds. In Hong Kong, alongside the Zubin Foundation, we offer scholarships and mentoring to three college students who are currently studying accounting and finance, engineering and law. Another scholarship is also coming soon.

Catherine Husted is head of Social Impact in Hong Kong, chairs the Scholarship Committee for The Zubin Foundation and is also vice-chair of the Foundation's Board of Directors. "We want to provide more young people with opportunities to pursue higher education," she explains.

"Many ethnic minority students stop further education after high school, while some even drop out during high school due to financial barriers. Many want to get into the job market as soon as possible to lift the financial burdens off of their families and therefore sacrifice their education dreams and future aspirations."

In Australia, A&O has been supporting the educational objectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals through its partnership with Career Trackers in which A&O provides internships to high-achieving first nations students on a biannual basis.

In addition, A&O Australia provides funding to the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre, supporting its aim to increase the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in higher education. Financial support also goes to the Karrkad Kanjdji Trust, which provides bi-cultural education to children in West Arnhem land.

Lachlan Shelley, a senior associate in Sydney, commented: "These initiatives are aligned with A&O Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan to address systemic issues affecting first nation Australians, and to work towards creating a more equal society in the country."





### Support for displaced people nearly triples

Our support for displaced people continues in our legal pro bono work. Projects in this area have nearly tripled since 2020; in 2023, we've continued to support Ukrainian, Afghan and other refugees.

After the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, our Warsaw office worked alongside the Polish Bar Association, NGOs and other law firms to assist refugees. Nearly 1,500 lawyers volunteered in Poland, providing information on issues including work permits and accommodation.

In Slovakia, our Bratislava office contributed specialist asylum law expertise via the Human Rights League's information line; others volunteered at the border in UNHCR and UNICEF protection and support hubs. We also mobilised a wider international team of 170 lawyers to help refugees wanting to resettle outside Poland.

In the months that followed the invasion, alongside other law firms, we deployed lawyers on two-week secondments to our existing NGO partners, European Lawyers in Lesvos (ELIL) and Safe Passage International (read more about alumna Evangeline Atkinson's work at Safe Passage on pages 50-53), to provide legal advice to refugees in Polish-based shelters and support centres.

In Australia, we continue to work with the Refugee Advice and Casework service to support visa applicants to prepare for their interviews, which involves work similar to our longstanding collaborative pro bono project in Greece with ELIL.

We're also continuing to assist Afghan refugees. In the U.S., more than 100 international lawyers have helped hundreds of individuals and their families, advising on many aspects of their U.S. immigration pathways, often in collaboration with our other offices.

We're helping Afghans reunite with their families in Europe too, joining forces with other law firms and collaborating with charities in France, Germany, Spain and the UK.

“

Our support for displaced people continues in our legal pro bono work.”

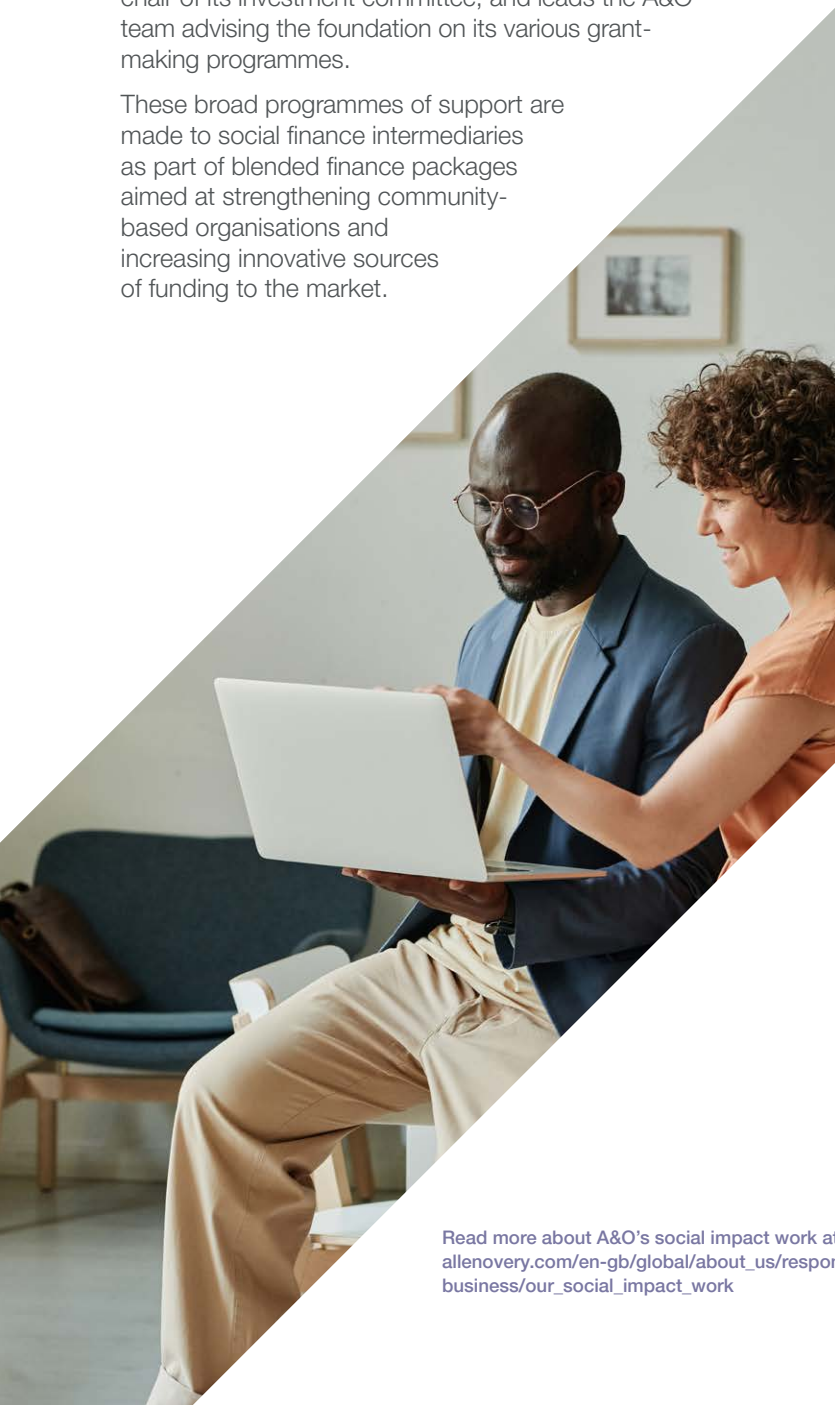
## Social finance and impact investing

We have been busy leveraging our Finance, ESG and Asset Management practices to advise on impact-driven transactions.

One of our clients is Five Lamps, a UK-based charity and responsible lender offering affordable loans to socially and financially excluded individuals: an alternative solution to high-cost credit.

Another client is Access – The Foundation for Social Investment. Franz is also a member of the Access board, chair of its investment committee, and leads the A&O team advising the foundation on its various grant-making programmes.

These broad programmes of support are made to social finance intermediaries as part of blended finance packages aimed at strengthening community-based organisations and increasing innovative sources of funding to the market.



Read more about A&O's social impact work at [allenoverly.com/en-gb/global/about\\_us/responsible\\_business/our\\_social\\_impact\\_work](https://allenoverly.com/en-gb/global/about_us/responsible_business/our_social_impact_work)

## Big Issue magazine charity merger

Most recently we advised the Big Issue Group on the charity merger of the Big Issue Foundation and its frontline sales operation into a new community interest company (CIC), called the Big Issue Changing Lives Community Interest Company. Corporate partner Lisa Goransson led the transaction team in London and has since been appointed as a trustee of the Big Issue Invest Trust.

*Big Issue* magazine street vendors, who are often homeless, earn an income through selling the *Big Issue* magazine. The merger marks the next stage of the group's journey, creating a more optimal platform for both fundraising and support for vendors.

Kate Cavelle, A&O's global head of Social Impact, is proud of the diverse ways A&O is supporting positive change: "From legal advice, to championing charities, to fundraising, our aim is to create varied opportunities for involvement. It's really special that anyone in any team can contribute to social impact work. Together we're making a real impact."

“

It's really special that anyone in any team can contribute to social impact work.”

Kate Cavelle



# Making a difference: routes to safety

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A&O provided Evangeline Atkinson with the skills and confidence to support causes that matter to her. She now uses the law to champion the rights of refugees and displaced people.

Working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic gave Evangeline Atkinson the time to reflect on what was important to her. Although she thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of her work at A&O, she describes an 'itch' that led her to relocate to Greece, where she hoped to make a difference.

Her self-belief and principled, diligent approach propelled her into a completely new work environment providing asylum support to displaced people, who receive no state legal aid before their first interview.

Evangeline knew, when she graduated from Oxford in 2016 with a law degree, that she wanted to work alongside talented and ambitious people, benefit from high-quality training and have the opportunity to work overseas in a firm with a global outlook and reach. A&O ticked all the boxes.

Before joining, she volunteered for several months with the independent non-governmental organisation (NGO) PRAKSIS at the Eleonas refugee camp in Athens, helping to teach English and run activities for children.

"My work with PRAKSIS sparked my interest and concern around displacement and how we welcome people who have had to leave their homes behind, and flee to safety," she says. "I knew when I was there that I wanted to do more to support people in these environments."

The two years before qualifying provided a solid grounding for Evangeline, and after a six-month secondment to the Hong Kong office, she was delighted to settle into a role within the Derivatives and Structured Finance (DSF) team in London. It was a busy time as the department supported banks undertaking large-scale repapering of their derivatives contracts.

## **Supported and challenged**

"Every day was different," she says. "There was a welcoming and purposeful feeling in the team where I felt both supported and challenged. I felt at ease to be my true self."

"While I was at A&O, I learned the fundamentals of being a good lawyer. I developed a keen eye for detail, an ability to break down complex

matters and to think critically but pragmatically. I was taught to read carefully, listen carefully and to be unafraid to ask questions if I still didn't understand something. These skills I developed in the early days of A&O have stayed with me ever since."

During her four years at the firm, Evangeline worked on a number of pro bono projects. One was the Z2K appeal, a partnership with the specialist welfare benefit NGO that supports people at risk of losing their benefits, helping them through their tribunal process and prioritising cases that are complex and carry a serious risk of homelessness.

Another was the ELIL Collaborative which supports people caught up in the European refugee crisis in Greece and recognises the serious impact that the lack of free legal support has on these asylum seekers. This charity works with a consortium of law firms in the UK, including A&O, to undertake two-week secondments to help prepare those in need for their asylum interviews.

"The provision of quality legal information and advice is crucial, and it's so scarce on the ground," says



“

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A&O, I learned  
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lawyer.”

“

I saw that Safe Passage was working to achieve systemic change in refugee and asylum policy. It had this combined focus on advocacy and strategic litigation together with the really crucial casework.”

Evangeline. “Many people are expected to navigate a complex legal system in a language they don’t understand. So much rides on their asylum interview, and the implications of no lawyer helping an individual to prepare can be catastrophic.”

Even though the pandemic meant that Evangeline had to do her two-week secondment remotely, the work she was involved in struck a chord with her.

“I care a lot about fairness. I saw that people who have already been through so much are finding themselves in the most distressing, hostile situations in Europe. And the odds are really stacked against them. The enormity of the problem is another level, above and beyond what we see on the news in the UK.”

### First instance appeals on Chios

Evangeline left A&O in 2020, having decided to relocate to Athens, where she initially volunteered as a legal assistant within the Athens office of ELIL, providing legal support to the Lesvos office remotely and working as

a part-time caseworker at Khora Asylum Support Team. After spending time in mainland Greece, she worked as a volunteer legal assistant for A.S.I.S.T. on the island of Chios, providing asylum interview preparation and working alongside Greek lawyers to help with first instance appeals, family reunions and other legal queries.

She says: “I realised that this really is front-line work. It requires emotional intelligence and a particular kind of resilience to work effectively and with integrity in a context where there is such a significant human dimension.

“I had no experience of this, for example in teaching or nursing, so I’ve had to develop that resilience on the job and learn how to put boundaries in place.”

Returning to London in 2021, Evangeline joined Safe Passage International.

The charity directly represents minors and adolescents, helping unaccompanied children and adolescents to find safe routes to sanctuary. For refugees it helps bring to the UK, it also supports their transition to a new life, reuniting them with family.

The charity uses the insights of its legal work to campaign for improvements in a system that currently provides no adequate safe routes for people on the move.

“I applied for the role at Safe Passage while in Chios,” says Evangeline. “I was attracted to it because I saw that Safe Passage was working to achieve systemic change in refugee and asylum policy. It had this combined focus on advocacy and strategic litigation together with the really crucial casework.”

Many of the young people that Safe Passage helps have found themselves alone in the chaos that surrounds border crossings; they have lost parents, carers and/or siblings as they flee from the turmoil of war or terror.

“Since Brexit, there is no Dublin process to allow children in the EU to reunite with their family in the UK,” she says. “Even though it’s obvious that family reunion is in the child’s best interests, the immigration rules are very restrictive, decision-making is poor, and we often fight our cases all the way to appeal stage. And children are trapped alone, in danger and with no adequate safe route to their family in the UK.”

### Progressive, pragmatic solutions

In the year ahead, Safe Passage will be launching an enquiry into people crossing the Channel to offer progressive, pragmatic solutions to an issue often in the news. It will also be setting up a legal consortium led by lawyers to address challenges faced by unaccompanied or separated children “on the move” in Europe.

Evangeline now supervises a Ukraine project that brings together nine law firms, including A&O, to staff a roving clinic in Warsaw providing advice to people escaping the war and moving to the UK. The project was recently praised as ‘standout’ at the Financial Times Live Innovative Lawyers Awards 2023.

She says: “It has been a pleasure to work with the A&O Pro Bono team, including Aditi Kapoor and Sarah Michael. A&O has sent out a number of fantastic volunteers to the Warsaw clinic, and it was lovely to have Atholl Macpherson, an ex-colleague, staff the clinic earlier this year.”

Safe Passage also set up an Afghan pro bono initiative, in collaboration with 14 law firms, including A&O, in response to the growing need for legal support for Afghans following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021.

Working with a number of law firms on pro bono projects is invaluable as it allows the charity to reach many more



people. The work is frustrating in the current environment and emotionally challenging but is also “incredibly rewarding”. Evangeline is staggered by the resilience of the people she works with and the courage and optimism so many of her clients demonstrate.

The work in her chosen field has attracted some hostility as not everyone is in full support of it. While Evangeline hasn't experienced any direct hostility, she's aware of the discussions around the legitimacy of immigration practitioners' work from senior politicians and certain sectors of the media.

### Transitions to new areas of law

“It speaks to just how polarised the political discourse has become,” she says. “We're lawyers, representing our clients' best interests, as we're professionally required to do. Mischaracterisation of legal practitioners in this field is an attack not only on our professional integrity, but also on our justice system, insofar as it undermines immigration lawyers' ability to provide independent and equal access to justice.”

Evangeline's experience shows the transition to a completely different area of law is possible. The legal, project management and soft skills she developed at A&O gave her the confidence, optimism and versatility to pursue work that means so much to her.

She believes we need to challenge and change the narratives which demonise people seeking safety in the UK – from the Afghan orphan desperate to join his older brother to the Somali teenager hoping to live in safety with her aunt after fleeing a forced marriage.

### Evangeline Atkinson

Supervising Lawyer at Safe Passage International  
A&O: 2016-2020

Reconnect with Evangeline Atkinson at  
[allenoverly.com/alumni](https://allenoverly.com/alumni)



# In memoriam

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The Alumni Network remembers A&O colleagues and friends who passed away between 17 October 2022 and 17 October 2023.

“

Bill was a charismatic leader, strategic thinker and trusted adviser to hundreds of clients.”



## Bill Tudor John

**A&O: 1966-2000**

Bill Tudor John, former A&O senior partner, died in June 2023 following a short illness. He was 79.

Bill started at A&O in 1966, making partner in 1972. During the 1990s, he led the firm, first as managing partner and then senior partner, through a period of significant international growth and transformation.

As Wim Dejonghe, senior partner said: “Bill was a charismatic leader, strategic thinker and trusted adviser to hundreds of clients. He was one of the leading banking lawyers in the City of London with an outstanding international practice at a time when today’s staple products of international finance were in their infancy.

“He inspired a generation of partners and staff, and made an invaluable contribution to A&O’s success, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s.”

Bill retired from the firm in 2000 but went on to have a successful career in banking with Lehman Brothers and Nomura, as well as being deputy chair of the Financial Markets Law Committee, deputy chair of the Nationwide Building Society and a Fellow of Downing College Cambridge.



## Edwin Tham

**A&O: 1997-2015**

Edwin Tham, former managing partner of A&O's Moscow office, died in August 2023 following a car accident. He was 58.

Edwin started his A&O career in Moscow in 1997, where he quickly progressed and made banking partner in 2001. He then switched to corporate, first leading our Russian and CIS Corporate practice, and then becoming managing partner of the Moscow office between 2011 and 2015.

Wim Dejonghe, senior partner, said: "Edwin was an exceptional man and A&O partner. Very sophisticated. I enjoyed spending time with him."

Khalid Garousha, interim global managing partner, added: "I had the privilege of getting to know Edwin over many years. He was a real gentleman."

After leaving A&O in 2015, Edwin joined Danilov & Partners as senior counsel and was promoted to partner in 2018. His most recent role was as senior counsel at INGVARR, with expertise in corporate M&A and energy and natural resources.

“

Edwin was an exceptional man and A&O partner. Very sophisticated. I enjoyed spending time with him.”

Read the many personal tributes from A&O and alumni colleagues at [allenoverly.com/alumni](https://allenoverly.com/alumni).



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