

How the Maples Group's office environment contributes to inclusivity

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Heidi de Vries (left) and Blessing Buraimoh (right)

London managing partner Heidi de Vries and global DEI lead Blessing Buraimoh explain the importance of taking a holistic view in designing accessible and inclusive spaces

International law firm and financial services firm, the [Maples Group](#) was shortlisted for Disability Advocacy Firm of the Year at the recent [Legal Benchmarking Group Social Impact EMEA Awards 2024](#).

In April 2024, the firm moved its London office to 280 Bishopsgate, a decision that has significantly boosted the firm's efforts to create an inclusive and accessible work environment. The new office, designed with the needs of neurodivergent and disabled employees in mind, is a key part of the Maples Group's broader strategy to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) throughout its global operations.

Speaking with IFLR, London managing partner Heidi de Vries highlights the importance of the office relocation in fostering an inclusive culture.

"We've invested in state-of-the-art workspace technology and created communal spaces that promote collaboration and creativity," she says. "Equally, we've ensured that the workplace is accessible to everyone, with quiet areas for those who need them."

Holistic view

The firm has taken a holistic approach to design, with a focus on inclusivity as a core principle.

Heidi de Vries emphasizes that beyond technology, the office also addresses the social needs of employees, offering spaces that foster not just business collaboration but also interpersonal connection.

“During the pandemic, we lost the ability to bring everyone together in-person,” she says. “Now, we’re building connections, not only socially but across different service lines and practice groups, which has been fantastic.”

At the heart of these efforts is Blessing Buraimoh, the Maples Group’s global diversity, equity & inclusion lead. Buraimoh, who joined the firm with extensive corporate experience in fostering inclusive environments, shares insights into how the new office reflects the firm’s commitment to DEI.

Buraimoh explains that accessibility and inclusivity were integral to the office design from the outset.

“We worked closely with designers to ensure we catered to neurodiversity and accessibility needs,” she says.

This included using neutral colour palettes, sound-absorbing materials, and incorporating navigational aids like icons on cupboards. Meeting rooms were also equipped with the latest videoconferencing technology and the firm has provided wireless noise-cancelling headphones for all colleagues.

The office layout was reimagined to offer flexible workspaces that suit different working styles.

“We’ve moved away from traditional office spaces and instead created different zones — open-plan desks, private offices, focus rooms, and communal areas — so people have the flexibility to choose the space that best supports their working day,” Buraimoh says.

Global advocacy groups

Beyond physical space, Maples Group’s DEI initiatives extend across its global footprint, with global and local business resource groups and DEI committees playing a crucial role in promoting an inclusive culture. Buraimoh emphasises the importance of these groups in shaping the firm’s approach to DEI. She shares that the firm recently invited thought leaders like Jack Kavanagh and Caoimhe Grogan to share their experiences on mental wellbeing and disability advocacy.

The Maples Group takes a tailored approach to supporting employees with disabilities, recognising that “not all disabilities are visible, and each person’s needs are different”.

Buraimoh highlights that 78% of disabled individuals acquire their impairment after age 16, meaning that many employees may become disabled during their working lives.

“Our policy is to encourage employees to speak with their managers about any adjustments they may need to succeed in their role,” she says.

DEI is not only a core value but also a business imperative for the Maples Group. According to Buraimoh, the firm's clients increasingly prioritise diversity in their selection of legal and financial services partners.

"Clients value diverse perspectives, which lead to more innovative and well-rounded solutions," she says. "Many of our clients are committed to DEI themselves and expect their legal and financial services partners to share those values."

While the Maples Group's DEI journey is ongoing, Buraimoh acknowledges the challenges of implementing these initiatives across 16 global offices.

"We strive to balance a global standard of inclusion with local nuances, which requires continuous dialogue with our teams on the ground," she says. "This is why it is important to have local DEI representatives across offices to address specific needs and foster an inclusive environment tailored to each location."

With its new London office and continued commitment to diversity, the Maples Group is setting a strong example in the legal and financial services industry — ensuring that inclusivity is not just an aspiration, but a reality integrated into every aspect of its operations.

The inaugural Legal Benchmarking Group Social Impact EMEA Awards took place in London on September 12. The full list of winners and photos from the evening can be seen [here](#).