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[Shephard, C](#) (2015) The Full Service Lawyer. *Solicitors Journal*, 149 (42).

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When my generation of lawyers were recruited into private practice, in the early nineties, the goal of partnership was all that was on offer. As we progressed, new roles began to be created to meet a growing demand for a life/work balance, such as professional support lawyers, legal directors and business development professionals. However, many of my peers felt vulnerable moving into these non fee-earning roles, to the extent that, of the nine law students in my year at a particular Cambridge college, only one remains in private practice. How can it be that such bright, enthusiastic students found legal practice had so little to offer, and chose to employ their skills elsewhere to the benefit of other employers? It is no secret that the profession suffers a high drop-out rate, particular among women. It is rare to find a partner who would recommend private practice to their children. There has also been a step-change in the ambitions and goals of law students. They are all much more aware than we were of the difficulties partnership poses to a life/ work balance.

How can legal practice address these issues and attract and retain the talent they require to survive?

The profession has begun to embrace a more conventional approach to the role of the paraprofessional, and it is possible that this may emerge as a 'third way' into legal practice, if managed properly. It could offer an opportunity for practitioners to use their legal knowledge and skills while benefitting from more regular hours. However, careful thought needs to be given to career progression and reward if this can be anything other than a stepping stone to another career goal. We remain considerably behind other professions in this regard, and even in the professions who have forged ahead in structuring this role, such as the NHS and the police, there is evidence that paraprofessionals can feel their job satisfaction is compromised by their perceived attitude of their professional colleagues.

Here at MMU we have also been undertaking some research recently into the personality types of lawyers, using the Belbin model. A typical business model would suggest that a team should comprise people with a variety of different personality types who, together, offer the client a range of skills on which they can draw. Our findings to date are that there is a distinct lack of 'plant' personalities in legal practice (those who are creative and bring fresh ideas to the table, but who may not be the right people to implement those ideas). Anecdotally, it is possible to see that those who choose to stay in practice as a partner may fit a certain stereotype which may not appeal to the new breed of millennial lawyers or indeed to clients. Clients tell us that they want a lawyer who not only has technical ability but who is personable and to whom they can relate. By recruiting one personality type and asking them to undertake all aspects of the role clients demand; to draft with precision, to have good networking skills, to be adept at marketing and business development, to be sociable, may be asking too much of one professional.

Today's students are familiar with the concept of professional development planning, of identifying their strengths and weaknesses. They narrow their options based on this as they progress; choosing, for example, corporate or private law subjects. There is potential to encourage this type of selection in practice, so that lawyers progress towards a bespoke role which suits them most. Some roles would lend themselves more to flexible working, which has been a stumbling block in the profession to date. While admittedly it is difficult for a corporate lawyer to tell a client mid-deal that they are handing over to someone else, it is less difficult for a lawyer who specialises in first meetings with clients to schedule a mutually convenient first meeting.

If we can look to the wider business world, and the public sector, there is much to be learned about how to remodel private practice. To date, while alternative business structures have emerged, we have still been slow to consider the different roles which a lawyer could adopt. Just as there has been a move away from the 'full service law firm' so popular in the nineties,

there would be a benefit in thinking about how to create roles where lawyers play to their individual strengths and needs, yet work as a team to provide the 'full service lawyer' for the client.