National firms shame City giants in diversity stakes

First-ever diversity league table sees Shoosmiths and Fladgates lead the way on workplace equality

By Steve Hoare

SHOOSMITHS and Fladgates Fielder have finished top of the first-ever league table of diversity in the UK's top 100 law firms, The Lawyer can reveal.

City firms lag far behind, with Clifford Chance highest in ninth place due to an exceptional proportion of associates and trainees from ethnic minorities (Asian, black and mixed), although its proportion of female lawyers is poor. Clifford Chance senior partner Stuart Popham said: "There's still much work to be done within the profession."

Shoosmiths' lofty position is due to its high proportion of female employees, while Fladgates has the highest percentage of partners from ethnic minorities.

The groundbreaking survey is the first of its kind and has been conducted by the Law Society on behalf of the Black Solicitors Network and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE).

Chairman of the CRE Trevor Phillips said: "This report confirms our suspicions that there's institutional complacency in the legal profession when it comes to racial equality. Without signs of improvement, the legal services are inviting government to consider tougher legislation and force it to do better."

Forty-seven firms, including Addleshaw Goddard, Eversheds, Irwin Mitchell and Linklaters, either failed to provide enough information or refused to complete the survey. The big City firms were ranked as follows: Clifford Chance (ninth overall), Norton Rose (eighth), Allen & Overy (21st), Lovells (30th), Herbert Smith (31st), DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary (40th), Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer (41st) and Slaughter and May (44th).

"This failure will have serious consequences for their businesses and, if they want to retain their clients, then they're going to have to start taking racial equality seriously," said Phillips.

* Full results and analysis next week.