

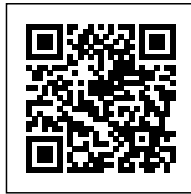
# TALENT SPOTTING

*Posted on 22/04/2019*



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**Finding lawyers with expertise in the pharmaceutical sector can be difficult, says Novartis' Leonor Pissarra.**



Searching for the best talent is never easy. Talk to Leonor Pissarra, country chief legal officer for Portugal at pharmaceutical company Novartis, and she will tell you that recruiting lawyers with an in-depth knowledge of the sector is tricky. And the problems don't end there. Pissarra says that finding external lawyers with experience of the pharmaceutical business is also challenging. Indeed, while some law firms claim to specialise in this area, on closer examination it appears that not all are able to back-up such claims. Pissarra heads a team of four lawyers in Portugal, though she hopes to soon increase that to five. The Novartis legal department currently has a vacancy that Pissarra is looking to fill, though she admits it has been difficult to find a suitable candidate with pharmaceutical expertise. If the search for a pharma-expert proves fruitless, Pissarra says the company will instead look to recruit "someone with potential who can be developed".

Pissarra has worked at Novartis for seven-and-a-half years. In that time the legal department has grown significantly. When she joined the company from Vieira de Almeida (where she was a managing associate) back in 2011, the department had one lawyer and one trainee. But, since then the company has become increasingly reliant on its legal department. Novartis' legal team is, in general, having to deal with an expanding workload. "All of the departments in the company see legal as a key function," says Pissarra. "They often need us to check wordings, for example if they are sending a letter to a client." Another reason that the company's legal team has grown in recent years is that it is having to grapple with an increasing number of compliance requirements. "There are a lot of regulations from government," Pissarra says. But the team has also grown because it needs to respond to demands more quickly and, in this scenario, it helps if the members of the legal department have the experience and expertise to fully understand what is at stake.

## **WE WANT EXPERTS**

The fact that Novartis' lawyers are increasingly seen as business partners means they handle a lot of corporate matters and work closely with the company's marketing department and finance department as well as handling a lot of regulatory matters. However, there are a number of matters that are outsourced, according to Pissarra. "If we lack expertise or time, we'll outsource work," she says. "This could be litigation, particularly complex matters, employment matters such as collective dismissals, or intellectual property litigation, of which we have a lot." Novartis' preferred firm in Portugal is Pissarra's former employer Vieira de Almeida. The company reviews its law firms every three years when it invites five law firms to participate in the bidding process. Among the firms that made a bid was a very prestigious international firm, which quoted what Novartis considered to be expensive fees. However, the firm did not make Novartis' preferred list of providers because it did not have the required level of pharmaceutical expertise. When Novartis is inviting bids from law firms, it requests details about the number of lawyers who will be involved in the work and their level of seniority. The company also assesses the law firms' expertise and experience in the relevant discipline. "We want experts in our field, they should be experienced and they should address our needs," says Pissarra. "They also need to reply to our questions effectively and on time."

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