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CAREY, FALABELLA Y VANCE CENTER LANZAN PROGRAMA DE MENTORÍA PARA ABOGADAS

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The Cyrus R Vance Center for International Justice, Chilean firm Carey and local department store chain Falabella have launched a nine-month mentorship programme that aims to foster leadership skills among female lawyers and increase the number of women in senior legal positions in Chile.

The programme, called “Learning to Lead”, was launched on 23 June in Santiago and is sponsored byCarey and Falabella. It aims to mentor nine promising young female lawyers drawn from law firms, companies and universities by pairing them with lawyers and professors drawn from Bofill Escobar Abogados, Carey, Morales & Besa, Falabella’s in-house team, the Universidad Católica de Chile and the Universidad de Chile. The mentors will hold five confidential 90-minute one-to-one sessions with their pupils between now and January 2016. Participants are also expected to attend five group training classes.

The sessions and classes cover a variety of topics, ranging from strategic career planning and work-life balance to communications skills and lawyer-client dynamics. All the courses are analysed from the perspective of gender and are accompanied by an extensive reading list.

An advisory board, comprised of partners from Carey and White & Case LLP, the board chairman of Falabella and a member of Vance Center directorate committee was responsible for selecting candidates for the programme, which was advertised to the highest scoring legal graduates at select Chilean universities. Applicants then had to be employed as lawyers and have six years of work experience.

Falabella in-house counsel and one of the programme founders, Paola Bruzzone, says the number of places on offer was limited because it was the first year the programme was run. She adds all

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nine places were oversubscribed and the selection committee will review whether to continue the programme next year.

Carey partner Lorena Pavic worked alongside Bruzzone and fellow partner Jessica Power to set up the programme. Pavic says the idea for the programme came from a series of Vance Center conferences and is based on similar schemes at other Latin American firms. Pavic and Power then shared the idea with Bruzzone, who was attending one of Carey's annual breakfast meetings focused on women in law and the trio went about formulating a programme.

There is considerable disparity between the number of men and women in law above associate level across Latin America. According to a survey published by Latin Lawyer in late 2013, women only make up 20 per cent of law firm partners in Latin America. This percentage falls below 10 per cent in several countries, including Chile. However, this is not a problem restricted to Chile, or even Latin America, argues Falabella's Bruzzone. "According to our research, even in the US, the number of lawyers in senior positions is not that high," she says, adding issues like maternity leave are important factors behind the disparity.

Pavic also identifies issues like family-work balance and ingrained cultural attitudes as obstacles preventing women from progressing in their careers. However, she argues that clients are now demanding greater diversity from law firms and says the time is ripe to encourage young women to start thinking about their long-term career goals early on. "We've found young women are really excited about this programme and we've received a lot of positive feedback, so we are really happy with how things have gone so far," she adds.