

Equality and Diversity Policy

January 2025

1. Introduction

We are committed to:

- providing a working environment in which everyone feels valued, respected and able to contribute to the business
- employing a workforce that appreciates and/or reflects the diversity of the community and the clients we serve.

Our aim is to ensure that all colleagues should be able to work in an environment free from discrimination, harassment and bullying and that all colleagues and job applicants should be treated fairly regardless of:

- Age
- Disability *
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

* See also the Disability Discrimination Policy

The equality and diversity policy aims to ensure that the statutory terms of the Equality Act 2010 are properly applied and that the terms and recommendations of the associated Code of Practice are implemented positively and put into practice throughout the Firm.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all members of staff (and potential members of staff), regardless of their employment status.

3. Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Head of HR to regularly review the Equality and Diversity Policy to ensure its continuing compliance with relevant employment legislation and effective operation across the practice.

The department heads, director of finance and senior managers, individually referred to in this policy as ("the Manager") and all employees are responsible for ensuring the continuing success of the implementation of the Equality policy by:

- refraining from harassment and discrimination

- bringing to the attention of the Head of HR any suspected practices in breach of this Policy
- ensuring that selection for promotion, training and work allocation, is carried out in a non-discriminatory manner
- working together to promote a harmonious working environment.

4. Code of Practice

4.1 Recruitment

The recruitment process should result in the selection of the most suitable person for the job. Job advertisements will encourage applications from all suitably qualified and experienced people, through either internal and/or external advertising. Advertisements must be carefully worded to ensure that no person acting reasonably, could infer an intention of either direct or indirect discrimination.

All applicants should be told that the Firm is an equal opportunities employer and that the policy is to ensure that no job applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment than others on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which have a disproportionately adverse effect which cannot be shown to be justified. Selection criteria and procedures are intended to ensure that individuals are selected, promoted and treated on the basis of their relevant merits and abilities. All information provided by applicants will be treated as confidential.

4.2 Selection process

It is vital that the selection process is carried out consistently for all jobs at all levels within the Firm and that it is seen to be fair and non-discriminatory. Selection criteria must be objective, job related and carefully assessed to ensure that the characteristics specified are only necessary to carry out the duties of the job effectively.

Those who conduct recruitment/promotion interviews must ensure they have read and understood this Equality policy. They should ensure that they take an unbiased approach towards candidates and only ask questions which relate to the job and which are non-discriminatory (e.g. questions about marriage plans and intention to have a family may be construed as showing discrimination against women).

4.3 Employee training and development

The firm is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity in terms of access to training in order to increase employees' knowledge and skills and to provide opportunities to develop their potential.

This will be implemented by:

- continuous review and updating of training courses and literature
- ensuring training materials are free from bias and do not discriminate, e.g. by showing minority groups or disabled people in inferior roles
- ensuring promotions and transfers criteria are justifiable
- ensuring assessment criteria are clear and unbiased

- ensuring staff conducting appraisal interviews, salary reviews and promotion reviews are aware of their obligations to carry this out fairly and consistently in line with this Equality policy
- supervision and delegation of work

4.4 Equality & Diversity training

The firm will provide training for staff on their responsibilities in respect of equality and diversity. There will also be specific training for those with recruitment and management responsibilities. This will include training on unconscious bias.

4.5 Monitoring

In order to support the firm in meeting its objectives under this policy, we will undertake equal opportunities monitoring. We will analyse the diversity composition of our workforce and of job applicants to the firm. Information collected will be in line with the relevant legislation, best practice and where relevant guidelines from our regulators. The firm will also participate in the SRA's monitoring activities for the legal sector in order to meet the LSB's regulatory requirements. All monitoring data gathered will be collected, stored, analysed and published in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

The firm's Diversity Survey is used to collect monitoring data.

5. Complaints procedure

There is no minimum service requirement for discrimination claims, so workers are protected from their first day at work, and potential workers are protected throughout the recruitment process.

Employees, who believe that they have been the subject of discrimination, harassment or victimisation on any of the grounds contained within this Equality policy, should follow the Firm's Grievance Procedure.

6. Breach of this procedure

Discrimination, harassment and victimisation (see Appendix 1 for definitions) are disciplinary offences and will lead to action being taken against the offending employee which may result in dismissal. If any employee raises a complaint, which upon investigation is found to be deliberately malicious, then that employee may become the subject of disciplinary action, which may lead to dismissal. The firm's Disciplinary Procedure will be followed.

7. Review

This policy is subject to the Firm's Quality documents standard and is reviewed annually.

Appendix Equality and Diversity Policy - Definitions

Protected characteristics

The Equality Act 2010 is concerned with discrimination and harassment in respect of the following "protected characteristics":

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Types of discrimination

There are various types of discrimination and other unlawful conduct set out in the Act that apply to most (and in some cases all) of the protected characteristics:

Direct discrimination

Direct discrimination occurs where because of a protected characteristic, someone is treated less favourably than others are treated or would be treated.

For example:

- An Asian job applicant who meets the shortlist criteria is rejected based on his ethnic origin. This would constitute an act of direct discrimination in relation to the protected characteristic of race
- An advert containing references to the sex of the person required when a person of either sex can do the job. This would constitute an act of direct discrimination in relation to the protected characteristic of sex

Indirect discrimination

Indirect discrimination is concerned with acts, decisions or policies which are not intended to treat anyone less favourably, but which in practice have the effect of disadvantaging a group of people with a particular protected characteristic. Where such an action disadvantages an individual with that characteristic, it will amount to indirect discrimination unless it can be objectively justified.

For example:

- An employer requires an employee to work full time. This requirement would disadvantage women as a group, since women in society as a whole bear a greater part of domestic and

childcare responsibilities than men and are more likely to want (or need) to work part time. Unless the employer can objectively justify the need for a full-time worker to do the job, the requirement would probably be indirectly discriminatory against a woman with childcare responsibilities.

Harassment

There are three definitions of harassment in the Act:

- The general definition of harassment "related to" a protected characteristic, which applies to all protected characteristics (other than maternity and civil partnership, and pregnancy or maternity). Harassment is unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity, or creating an intimidating, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. Employees will now be able to complain of behaviour that they find offensive even if it is not directed at them, and the complainant need not possess the relevant characteristic themselves.
- Conduct of a sexual nature
- Less favourable treatment because of an employee's rejection of or submission to harassment of a sexual nature or harassment related to sex or gender reassignment

Victimisation

The Act's victimisation provisions protect employees who do (or might do) protected acts such as bringing discrimination claims, complaining about harassment, or becoming involved in another employee's discrimination complaint.

Instructing, causing, inducing or aiding unlawful acts

The Equality Act 2010 also expressly makes it unlawful to instruct, cause, induce or aid someone to discriminate against, harass or victimise another person, or to attempt to do so.