
6.1 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY¹

We are committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination and to promoting equality and diversity within our policies, practices and procedures. This applies to our professional dealings with clients, all staff (including volunteers), and members of the Trustee Board, other solicitors, barristers, experts and third parties.

We treat everyone equally and with the same attention, courtesy and respect regardless of:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- sexual orientation;
- marriage or civil partnership status;
- pregnancy and maternity or
- caring responsibility

We take all reasonable steps to ensure that we and our staff do not unlawfully discriminate under the terms of any legislation in force from time to time relating to discrimination in employment and the provision of goods, facilities or services.

Direct discrimination is defined as 'someone that is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic they have or are thought to have or because they associate with someone who has a protected characteristic'.

Discrimination by association is defined as 'direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a protect characteristic'.

Perception discrimination is defined as 'direct discrimination against an individual because other think they possess a particular protected characteristic.'

Indirect discrimination is defined as 'a condition' rule, policy or practice of the Law Centre that applies to everyone, but disadvantages people who share a protected characteristic.'

Harassment is defined as 'unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment.'

Third party harassment is defined as 'liability for harassment of your employees by the third party who are not employees of the Law Centre.' The Law Centre becomes liable once the harassment has taken place twice, been reported to the Head of Operations and reasonable steps have not been taken to prevent it from happening again.

¹ SQM D1.3

Victimisation is defined as 'employee being treated badly because they have made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under this or any other policy of the Law Centre or because they are suspected of doing so.'

As a provider of publicly funded legal services we treat all clients equally and fairly and do not unlawfully discriminate against them. We also, wherever possible, take steps to promote equal opportunity in relation to access to the legal services that we provide, taking account of the diversity of the communities that we serve, in order to ensure that, subject to funding constraints, our services are accessible to all clients.

We are committed to meeting the diverse needs of clients. We have taken steps to identify the needs of clients in our community and developed accessible services to meet those needs, subject to funding constraints. We take account, in particular, of the needs of clients with a disability and clients who are unable to communicate effectively in English. We have a communications plan to promote the steps we have taken and/or will take to ensure that our services are accessible for people with a disability and meet the language needs of our clients

We make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled clients, employees or managers are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to those who are not disabled, and we do not pass on the costs of these adjustments to these disabled clients, employees or managers.^{2*}

We do not unlawfully discriminate in dealings with third parties. This applies to dealings with other legal service providers and general procurement.

We treat all job applicants equally and fairly and do not unlawfully discriminate against them. We do this by ensuring that we operate an open and fair recruitment process, using selection criteria which do not discriminate, and making decisions based on individual knowledge, skills and abilities.

We treat all employees equally and create a working environment which is free from unlawful discrimination. This applies equally to voluntary positions and anyone undertaking work experience with us. This includes, for example, arrangements for recruitment and selection, terms and conditions of employment, access to training opportunities, access to promotion and transfers, grievance and disciplinary processes, dress code, work allocation and any other employment related activities. Promotion within the Law Centre is made solely on merit.

All staff are informed of this policy as part of their induction and during annual equality & diversity update training. All staff are expected to pay due regard to the provisions of this policy and are responsible for ensuring compliance with it when undertaking their jobs or representing our Law Centre.

² SRA Code of Conduct 2011 O2.3

We treat seriously all complaints of unlawful discrimination made by clients, staff, volunteers, members of our Trustee Board, barristers, experts or other third parties and take action where appropriate. All complaints are dealt with promptly, fairly, openly and effectively. We investigate them in accordance with our grievance or complaints procedure and the complainant is informed of the outcome. We also monitor the number and outcome of complaints of discrimination.

Acts of unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation are disciplinary offences within the Law Centre. Where acts of unlawful discrimination, harassment or Victimisation are identified, we will ensure that our Disciplinary Procedure is followed.

We monitor and record the number of job applicants from different gender, disability and ethnic groups at least annually.³

Where possible and if requested, we will provide equality and diversity information to the Legal Aid Agency about our staff and clients as required in clause 5.5 of the Standard Terms 2010.

Our Disciplinary Procedure will be followed where it is identified that there has been a failure on the part of any member of staff in complying this policy.

We identify equality and diversity training needs as and when appropriate. We communicate this Equality and Diversity policy and provide guidance to staff and members of our Trustee Board on compliance with Equality & diversity requirements via annual Equality & Diversity training.

Responsibility

The Head of Operations is responsible for implementing and monitoring this policy. She undertakes a review of this policy annually in conjunction with the staff meeting and Trustee Board to verify it is in effective operation (or more regularly if we identify any non-compliance or problem concerning equality and diversity issues with clients or personnel) and ensures that appropriate action is taken in relation to non-compliance identified under this policy or barriers to equal opportunities.

³ Equality & Diversity Monitoring Form found in Appendix 7.2