

## **1. Our commitment to equality and diversity**

### **(a) Commitment**

Black & Co are committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination and to promoting equality and diversity within our policies, practices and procedures.

We are also committed to promoting equality and diversity at Black & Co.

This applies to our professional dealings with clients, staff, solicitors, barristers, and third parties.

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

- (i) age;
- (ii) disability;
- (iii) gender reassignment;
- (iv) race;
- (v) religion or belief;
- (vi) sex;
- (vii) sexual orientation;
- (viii) marriage or civil partnership status;
- (ix) pregnancy and maternity; or
- (x) caring responsibility.

### **(b) Legislation**

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

## **2. Meeting Clients' Needs**

### **(a) General statement**

As a provider of legal aid services, Black & Co will treat all clients equally and fairly and not unlawfully discriminate against them. Black & Co will also, wherever possible, take steps to promote equal opportunity in relation to access to the legal services that we provide.

(b) **Identifying clients' needs**

Black & Co is committed to meeting the diverse needs of clients. We will take steps to identify the needs of clients and develop policies and procedures setting out how we will meet clients' needs. We will consider the needs of clients with a disability and clients who are unable to communicate effectively in English. We will consider whether particular groups are predominant within our client base and devise appropriate policies to meet their needs, including: men and women; carers; children; the elderly; members of religious groups; ethnic groups or nationalities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

(c) **Communications Plan**

Black & Co will devise ways and methods to promote and raise awareness of policies and procedures for ensuring that our services are accessible for a diverse range of clients. Our communications plan sets out what steps we have taken and/ or will take to put in place customer service policies and procedures to make our services accessible to clients. It contains a list of policies and procedures; information about what steps we will take to put them in place; who is responsible for them; and how we will make our policies and procedures openly available for the public.

Employees and other staff will be informed of the Communications Plan and training provided where appropriate to ensure that it is effectively implemented.

**3. Dealings with third parties**

(a) **General statement**

Black & Co will not unlawfully discriminate in dealings with third parties. This applies to dealings with other legal service providers and general procurement.

(b) **Dealings with barristers**

Black & Co will instruct barristers on the basis of their skill, experience and ability and not unlawfully discriminate, or encourage barristers' clerks to unlawfully discriminate, on the grounds of their age; gender; marital status; race; religion or belief; sexual orientation; transgender or on the grounds of disability.

**4. Employment**

(a) **General statement**

As an employer, Black & Co will treat all employees and job applicants equally and fairly and not unlawfully discriminate against them. This applies equally to voluntary positions and anyone undertaking work experience with us. This will, for example, include arrangements for

recruitment and selection, terms and conditions of employment, access to training opportunities, access to promotion and transfers, grievance and disciplinary processes, demotions, selection for redundancies, dress code, references, bonus schemes, work allocation and any other employment related activities.

**(b) Recruitment and selection**

Black & Co recognises the benefits of having a diverse workforce and will take steps to ensure that:

- (i) we endeavour to recruit from the widest pool of qualified candidates practicable;
- (ii) employment opportunities are open and accessible to all on the basis of their individual qualities and personal merit;
- (iii) where appropriate, positive action measures are taken to attract applications from all sections of society and especially from those groups which are underrepresented in the workforce;
- (iv) selection criteria and processes do not unlawfully discriminate on the grounds of sex (including marital status, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity and paternity), sexual orientation (including civil partnership status), religion or belief, age or disability; other than in those instances where Black & Co is exercising permitted positive action or a permitted exemption;
- (v) wherever appropriate and necessary, lawful exemptions (genuine occupational requirements) will be used to recruit suitable staff to meet the special needs of particular groups;
- (vi) all recruitment agencies acting for Black & Co are aware of requirements not to discriminate and to act accordingly.

**(c) Conditions of service**

Black & Co will treat all employees equally and create a working environment which is free from unlawful discrimination and which respects the diverse backgrounds and beliefs of employees. Terms and conditions of service for employees will comply with anti-discrimination legislation. The provision of benefits such as flexible working hours, maternity and other leave arrangements, performance appraisal systems, dress code, bonus schemes and any other conditions of employment will not unlawfully discriminate against any employee on the grounds of their age; gender and gender reassignment; marital status; race; religion or belief; sexual orientation or on the grounds of disability.

Where appropriate and necessary, the firm will endeavour to provide appropriate facilities and conditions of service which take into account the specific needs of employees which arise from their ethnic or cultural background; gender and gender reassignment; responsibilities as carers; disability; religion or belief or sexual orientation.

(d) **Promotion and career development**

Promotion within Black & Co will be made without reference to any of the protected characteristics and will be based solely on merit. The selection criteria and processes for recruitment and promotion will be kept under review to ensure that there is no unjustifiably discriminatory impact on any particular group.

While positive action measures may be taken in accordance with relevant anti-discrimination legislation to encourage applications from under-represented groups, appointments to all jobs will be based solely on merit. All employees will have equal access to training and other career development opportunities appropriate to their experience and abilities. However, Black & Co will take appropriate positive action measures (as permitted by the anti-discrimination legislation) to provide special training and support for groups which are under-represented in the workforce and encourage them to take up training and career development opportunities.

(e) **Training Plan**

Black & Co will identify equality and diversity training needs and draw up a plan to address these as appropriate to their responsibilities. The plan will include details of the sort of training that will be provided, who will be trained, when training will be provided and who is responsible at Black & Co for ensuring that training is delivered. Employees will be informed of this equality and diversity policy and training plan.

(f) **Working with other organisations**

All those who act on Black & Co's behalf will be informed of this equality and diversity policy and will be expected to pay due regard to it when conducting business on their behalf. In all its dealings, Black & Co will seek to promote the principles of equality and diversity.

## **5. Implementing the policy**

(a) **Responsibility**

Ultimate responsibility for implementing the policy rests with Black & Co. Black & Co will appoint a senior person within it to be responsible for the operation of the policy. All employees 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 Black & Co.

Acts of unlawful discrimination on any of the protected characteristics by employees of Black & Co will result in disciplinary action. Failure to comply with this policy will be treated in a similar fashion. The policy applies to all who are employed at Black & Co.

Acts of unlawful discrimination on any of the forbidden grounds by those acting on behalf of Black & Co will lead to appropriate action by the Legal Aid Agency.

**(b) Complaints of discrimination**

Black & Co will treat seriously all complaints of unlawful discrimination on any of the forbidden grounds made by employees, clients, barristers or other third parties and will take action where appropriate.

All complaints will be investigated in accordance with Black & Co's grievance or complaints procedure and the complainant will be informed of the outcome.

We will also monitor the number and outcome of complaints of discrimination made by staff, clients, barristers, and other third parties.

**(c) Monitoring**

(1) Black & Co will monitor and record equal opportunities information about staff, on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, and disability.

(2) Where it is possible to do so, and where doing so will not cause offence or discomfort to those whom it is intended to protect, we will monitor the sexual orientation and religion or belief of staff, so as to ensure that they are not being discriminated against in terms of the opportunities or benefits available to them. We are aware that individuals may choose not to disclose their sexual orientation or religion or belief and that care will be taken to avoid inadvertent discrimination in such cases.

We will store equal opportunities data as confidential personal data and restrict access to this information. Equal opportunities information will be used for exclusively for the purposes of equal opportunities monitoring and have no bearing on opportunities or benefits.

Black & Co will monitor all elements of:

- (i) recruitment and selection process (applicants and existing staff)
- (ii) promotion and transfer;
- (iii) training (all training opportunities not restricted to equality and diversity training);
- (iv) terms and conditions of employment;
- (v) take up of benefits (work life balance policies eg flexible working requests)
- (vi) grievance and disciplinary procedures;
- (vii) resignations, redundancies, and dismissals.

Black & Co will provide equal opportunities information to the Legal Aid Agency as required in relation to personnel and clients under the terms of legal aid contracts.

**(d) Review**

Black & Co will review the operation of this policy not less than twice a year (or more regularly if we identify any non-compliance or problem concerning equality and diversity issues with clients or personnel). We will take remedial action if we discover non-compliance under this

policy or barriers to equal opportunities. When reviewing the policy we will consider the outcome of monitoring and review actions under our communications and training plans.