

Equal Opportunities Policy

Statement of principle

Bristows is committed to providing equal opportunities in every aspect of employment. We aim to create a working environment in which all individuals are able to make best use of their skills, free from discrimination or harassment, and in which all decisions are based on merit.

No employee or job applicant will be treated less favourably because of age, disability, marital or civil partner status, pregnancy or maternity, gender reassignment, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. These are known as “protected characteristics”.

The principles of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity also apply to the way we treat clients and third parties instructed in connection with client matters such as barristers and other experts.

All Partners and staff have a duty to comply with this Policy and to treat colleagues fairly and with dignity and respect at all times. We have a separate Anti-Harassment & Bullying Policy which deals with these issues.

The principles set out in this Policy apply in the workplace and outside the workplace in a work-related context, such as on business trips, client events or work-related social events.

Who is responsible for this Policy?

The Joint Managing Partners and the Head of HR have overall responsibility for the effective operation of this Policy and for ensuring compliance with discrimination law.

All partners and managers must set an appropriate standard of behaviour, lead by example and ensure that those they manage comply with this Policy and promote our aims and objectives with regard to equal opportunities.

Forms of discrimination

Discrimination may be direct or indirect and may occur intentionally or unintentionally.

Direct discrimination is where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic, such as refusing to employ a woman because she is pregnant. It also covers less favourable treatment based on the perception that someone has a protected characteristic (whether that perception is correct or not) or because a person is associated with another person who has a protected characteristic.

Indirect discrimination is where everyone is treated in the same way but this has an unjustified adverse effect on a group of people who share the same protected characteristic, such as requiring all employees to work late at night - this will adversely affect those with childcare responsibilities and these tend to be women.

Harassment is any physical, verbal or non-verbal unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic that has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

Victimisation is where a person is treated less favourably because they have complained or given information about discrimination or harassment, or supported someone else's complaint.

Equal opportunities in employment

We recruit, select and promote individuals on objective criteria related to the required skills and abilities to do the job. No employee or job applicant will be disadvantaged by any requirements or conditions which are not necessary for the performance of the job.

Our terms and conditions of employment, including pay, benefits and facilities, are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are free from unlawful discrimination.

Staff training needs will be identified through our development review process. All staff will be given appropriate access to training to enable them to progress within the firm.

Staff with disabilities

If you are disabled or become disabled, you are encouraged to tell us about your condition so that we can provide any support that may be necessary. For the purposes of the equality laws, disabilities are physical or mental impairments that have a substantial and long-term adverse effect upon a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Long-term means that the impairment has lasted for at least 12 months or is expected to last for at least 12 months. Certain conditions such as cancer and multiple sclerosis are covered from the point of diagnosis and do not have to be long-term from the outset.

If you experience difficulties at work because of your disability, you should contact any member of the HR team to discuss whether there are any reasonable adjustments that we could provide that may help overcome or minimise the difficulty. We will consider the matter carefully and try to accommodate your needs within reason.

Complaints

If you consider that you may have been discriminated against, you should approach your Head of Department or a member of the HR team in the first instance on an informal basis.

If it is not appropriate or possible to resolve matters informally, you should follow the formal procedure set out in the Firm's Grievance Procedure. All complaints will be dealt with promptly, fairly and in confidence. Anyone making a complaint in good faith will not be victimised or treated less favourably as a result.

Disciplinary proceedings may be commenced against anyone who is alleged to have committed behaviour which contravenes this Policy. Serious breaches of this Policy, or repeated offences, will be treated as gross misconduct and are likely to result in summary dismissal. Unwarranted allegations that are not made in good faith may also be regarded as disciplinary offences.

Equality and diversity in our dealings with clients and other third parties

We will treat our clients and other third parties instructed in connection with client matters (such as barristers and other experts) fairly and with respect for equality and diversity at all times. In the unlikely event that a client makes any request (explicit or implicit), which could result in an action by us which would be inconsistent with this Policy, the request should be drawn to the attention of the Partner concerned. That Partner will, in conjunction if necessary with the Joint Managing Partners, take such steps as are required to ensure that the Policy is followed, including discussing the matter with the client and, if necessary, ceasing to act for that client.

The Law Society's Diversity & Inclusion Charter

Bristows is a signatory to the Charter and is required to report biennially to the Law Society on the firm's progress towards best practice on each of the Diversity and Equality Standards. We are also required to monitor the diversity of our workforce annually and to publish the results (the SRA requires this). More information about the Diversity & Inclusion Charter is available at <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/advice/diversity-inclusion-charter/>.

Training

We will ensure that everyone who has responsibility for recruiting or managing staff, supervising client matters and dealing with third parties are provided with equality and diversity training. Training will also be provided to all staff on the principles set out in this Policy.

Monitoring and review

We will monitor the effectiveness of this Policy to ensure that it is achieving its objectives and will review and update the Policy as and when necessary.

This Policy does not form part of your Contract of Employment and may be amended by us from time to time at our absolute discretion.

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