

# Equal opportunities: diversity policy

## Key points:

- For Browne Jacobson, diversity is the creation of a positive environment which enables us to harness the business benefits of having a diverse workforce with everyone feeling valued as an individual
- This policy is non-contractual and may be amended at any time

Diversity has a number of different interpretations; for Browne Jacobson, it is the creation of a positive environment which enables us to harness the business benefits of having a diverse workforce with everyone feeling valued as an individual.

We appreciate that striving for equality means recognising and valuing diversity. We also accept that equality and diversity are significant drivers for change when they are related to the current and future needs of the business, such as:

- being an employer of choice
- improving morale, performance and service levels
- creating a positive commercial image and profile

We take our commitment as a signatory to the Law Society's charter on equality and diversity, and our Lexcel and IIP accreditations seriously. We are determined to go beyond the basic requirements and general duty of compliance incorporated in our policies and procedures.

In broad terms this means that we ensure all members of the firm, whatever their role or status, clients and those working on behalf of the firm, receives equal treatment regardless of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marital/civil partnership status, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, age or disability.

This approach extends to anyone with a perceived characteristic, e.g. being an ethnic minority, even where the perception is incorrect as well as any individual associated with a person with any of the above protected characteristics.

## Principles of Diversity

Our positive approach engenders a positive environment for our people through our five principles of diversity:

### 1. Establishing clear lines of accountability and responsibility

To ensure we build and maintain a positive environment and comply with the aim and spirit of diversity and equality legislation. The senior management team take the lead role in implementation and maintaining our policies and practices. This team in turn reports to the Managing Partner and the heads of departments.

We have made managing diversity a mainstream firm-wide issue, owned by everyone so that it naturally influences all our employment policies and working practices.

### 2. Gathering information, data analysis and research

Information gathering and monitoring are essential features for our positive environment which enable us to measure whether our policies are working, whether we are successfully managing diversity issues and, thus, ensuring that necessary action is taken as appropriate following an analysis of the results. Specifically we set out to:

- discover any barriers to equality of opportunity
- analyse the reasons for any differences in the treatment of an individual or group of individuals
- identify areas where change is needed
- identify the steps necessary to overcome barriers and achieve the required change.

We publish details of our demographics annually on our external/internal websites.

### 3. Setting priorities based on this evidence

A target we have set ourselves is to aim to employ people who are representative of the local community. However, we do not seek to achieve specific numbers or ratios as this could be counterproductive and potentially discriminatory if perceived to be a form of "affirmative action". Positive action is to be welcomed, positive discrimination is not.

#### 4. Regularly training, involving and communicating with people

A positive environment has been created by ensuring that all our people have equal access to relevant learning and development interventions. Every individual in the firm is appraised, all appraisals are stored and training needs are recorded centrally. In addition, all our people have equal access to sponsorship for education and qualification.

With respect to the wider issue of equal opportunities training, below are some of our initiatives:

- diversity training and coverage of our policies is included in the formal induction programme for all of our new starters ensuring that awareness is gained as early as possible
- managers are coached to understand diversity and equal opportunities and how to build them into operational policies and practices
- policy updates are a regular agenda item at our annual partner meetings and they feature as a routine discussion item at all department meetings
- we consult people for ideas, both formally and informally, and promote a willingness to talk to each other and listen to each other, respecting different views and ideas
- diversity and equal opportunity principles are built into management and teambuilding programmes to promote a positive approach to dealing with different views, perceptions and ideas

We use different and accessible methods of communication such as newsletters, in-house magazines, notice boards and our intranet to keep people up to date with diversity policies and practices. For example:

- making clear that everyone has a personal responsibility to uphold the standards
- modelling the desirable behaviours through coaching to gain positive commitment
- supporting a value system based on respect and dignity for all

#### 5. Monitoring, measuring, reviewing and reinforcing

To provide real equality of opportunity, people often need to be treated differently in ways that are fair and tailored to their specific needs. This requires systematic management action, with a focus on the development of a positive environment and open culture in which everyone feels valued and can add value. To achieve this we:

- regularly audit, review and evaluate progress and keep qualitative data to chart progress and show business benefits
- use surveys to evaluate initiatives, to find out if policies are working for everyone, and to provide a platform for improvement
- track actions to see if they have had the intended results and make appropriate changes if necessary
- benchmark good practice against other firms and adopt and adapt relevant ideas where appropriate
- network with others from outside Browne Jacobson to keep up to date and to share learning
- celebrate successes and identify learning opportunities from failures, to use them as building blocks for further progress
- treat personal information sensitively and confidentially, and reassure individuals with regards to how this information will be used
- continually monitor and update our benefits, policies and procedures to promote equality, fairness and a positive work-life balance
- publish details of the demographics of the firm (both internally and externally)

This policy is updated regularly to reflect our progress. Our ongoing commitment to the five principles outlined in this document is part of our long-term strategy.

Information provided by job applicants and employees for monitoring purposes will be used only for these purposes and will be dealt with in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

## Diversity and Equal Opportunities - our commitment

The firm is committed to providing equal opportunities in employment and to avoiding unlawful discrimination. This policy is intended to help the firm to put this commitment into practice. Compliance with this policy should also ensure unlawful acts of discrimination are avoided.

Striving to ensure that the work environment is free of harassment and bullying and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect is an important aspect of ensuring equal opportunities in employment. The firm has a separate dignity at work policy, which deals with these issues.

## Additional Considerations in Providing and Promoting Equal Opportunities

### Recruitment and selection

All existing and new positions and promotions within the firm are open to anyone, the sole criteria being the individual's ability to perform the job in question. As such we:

- actively encourage job applications by promoting our accreditations and looking at recruitment methods including working with Job Centre Plus access schemes and advertising with the Right2Work scheme
- review job specifications to make sure they are not discriminatory. Ensure we operate a fair and consistent recruitment process e.g. taking care when we draft and place advertisements to avoid discrimination and stereotyping through language and images
- ensure that people are offered appropriate conditions and adjustments to undertake tests and participate in selection processes
- consider the individual's ability to do the job and only ask about a characteristic if it has a bearing on the person's ability to work
- consider reasonable adjustments to job requirements when appropriate
- provide training and development which actively supports recruitment and retention, including training to avoid harassment and to ensure everyone understands their personal responsibilities and accountabilities
- raise the awareness about diversity and make sure key individuals are fully informed and know about their personal role responsibilities in making sure discrimination does not occur
- ensure that job advertisements and job descriptions are not discriminatory and that application forms are easy to use

With regards to the use of social media in recruitment please see our Social Media Policy.

### Policies, procedures and culture

It is a priority for us to make sure that prejudice and stereotyping does not result in unfair decisions about positions and training. To achieve this we:

- review policies and working practices to remove discrimination and bias: this is crucial to creating an open culture where being different is not a problem
- change attitudes, encourage good practice through managing equality issues, communication and training, whilst addressing specific areas as appropriate
- promote a culture of respect and dignity for all through effective implementation of policies, procedures and working practices; being aware of competing and sometimes perhaps conflicting rights to balance the needs of the individual and the business
- foster respect to realise different perspectives and backgrounds are constructive and that diversity is everyone's responsibility
- view the business case for diversity as an opportunity for the firm
- ensure responsibility for driving our diversity agenda sits at both board and executive level
- ensure we think inclusively when devising policies and procedures to offer different things to suit differing needs

## Communication and training

It is a priority for us to make sure that we communicate about diversity issues, and we provide training to educate and promote diversity within the firm. As such we:

- communicate to raise awareness regarding behaviours expected of all, particularly managers. We provide refresher training and follow-up workshops
- communicate our policies and ensure we always do more than simply send an email saying that a policy is available. Where relevant, we provide training on issues raised in the policy
- undertake our annual equality audit
- ensure all our equality policies and statements are readily available
- treat personal information sensitively and confidentially, and reassure how this information will be used

## Performance management and improvement

The aim of the firm's performance management and improvement policies is to provide the opportunity to discuss performance expectations, identify and correct areas for improvement, encourage and recognise strengths and discuss positive, purposeful approaches for meeting targets and goals. To accomplish this we:

- operate transparent and consistent appraisal and performance management processes with clear career paths including promotion and training opportunities for all
- use only objective criteria essential for satisfactory performance, and ensure these can be objectively justified
- act quickly on harassment and bullying issues
- ensure that everyone has a fair and equal chance to develop their potential and ensure that all training courses are fully accessible
- work with our Occupational Health partners to identify and implement appropriate reasonable adjustments both for those in work, and for those returning from periods of absence due to health issues

## Reward, remuneration and promotion

Rewards and promotions within the firm are open to anyone, the sole criteria being the individual's ability to perform the job in question. To achieve this:

- pay and terms of employment reflect the value of individual contributions and standards of job performance
- we monitor, review and benchmark good practice performance by conducting regular audits for consideration at senior level and publish the objectives, progress and achievements for the benefit of all
- we use only objective criteria for promotion considerations, and ensure these can be objectively justified

## Data Protection

The firm processes any personal data collected as part of this policy in accordance with the [HR privacy notice](#) .

Reviewed by: HR Advisor

Approved by: People Director

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