

Essex Court Chambers Written Statement on Equality and Diversity

Statement of principle

1. Essex Court Chambers is committed to providing equality of opportunity regardless of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, nationality, citizenship, sex, gender re-assignment, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status, age, disability, religion or belief, political persuasion, pregnancy or maternity.

Circulation

2. This policy will be provided to all Members, pupils, mini-pupils and staff when joining and will be available on the Chambers intranet.

Recruitment and selection

3. Selection and recruitment of all staff, mini-pupils, pupils and tenants is carried out using fair and objective criteria.

- Selection and recruitment of pupils, mini-pupils and starter tenants is the primary responsibility of the pupillage committee.
- Selection and recruitment of staff is the primary responsibility of the staff committee.
- Selection and recruitment of established practitioners is the primary responsibility of the cross-recruits committee.

Each committee adopts appropriate procedures to ensure that the selection is carried out without discrimination and using fair and objective criteria.

4. All those involved with the selection and recruitment of pupils, mini-pupils and tenants will be provided with equality and diversity training. At least one Member of any selection panel for the recruitment of staff will be provided with equality and diversity training.

Fair access to work and the allocation of unassigned work

5. Chambers takes all reasonable steps to ensure a fair distribution of work among pupils and Members of Chambers.

6. When contacted by solicitors or another instructing organisation regarding a request for counsel for unassigned work, or where counsel requested is unable to accept the work offered, or where another barrister is seeking an un-named junior or leader, a member of the clerking team will ask relevant questions required to obtain an overview of the case in order to suggest suitable candidates for the work offered.

7. All Members of Chambers who are considered suitable on grounds of experience, seniority, cost and availability will be proposed for the work offered.

8. After putting counsel forward, the clerk in question will enter details of the case in question in the Chambers' database system.

9. All clerks involved in the distribution of work will be provided with equality and diversity training.

10. All clerks and members of staff concerned in any way in the allocation of work in Chambers are required to comply with this policy. Failure to do so will result in the implementation of disciplinary procedures, as set out in the Chambers Grievance, Disciplinary and Dismissal Procedures document which forms part of the Employee Handbook.

Harassment

11. Chambers will not tolerate harassment. Chambers' policy on harassment is set out in the Harassment Policy document.

Parental leave and flexible working

12. Employees of Chambers are entitled to parental leave in accordance with the law and the terms of their contracts of employment.

13. Chambers' policy with respect to parental leave and flexible working for Members of Chambers is set out in the Parental Leave Policy document.

Reasonable adjustments

14. Chambers is committed to making reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of disabled Members, pupils, staff, clients and visitors. Chambers' policy with respect to reasonable adjustments is set out in the Reasonable Adjustments Policy document.

Monitoring

15. The relevant committees will carry out equality monitoring in relation to recruitment, in conjunction with the Diversity Data Officer and the Equality and Diversity Officer. Such monitoring will be carried out at least annually; the results will be considered, and a decision taken as to whether any further action is needed and if so, what it should be.

16. The Senior Clerk and their colleagues will monitor the allocation of unassigned work monthly. At least once a quarter, the Senior Clerk will meet with a designated Member of Chambers (currently Martin Griffiths QC) to: (i) ensure that work is being allocated fairly and that any disparities in allocation are identified and rectified; and (ii) ascertain whether any instructing organisation or solicitors exhibit briefing practices which tend to favour a particular group. Any such practice identified will be considered by the designated Member of Chambers to see if there is any underlying discriminatory practice.

17. Each Member of Chambers will be invited to meet with the Senior Clerk and their team leader at regular intervals to discuss individual practice development and to consider the amount and type of work they have done, their fees earned and received, and the solicitors instructing them.

18. The Diversity Data Officer and the Equality and Diversity Officer will ensure that monitoring by questionnaire is carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct and that the information that Chambers is required to publish is published.

Implementation plan

19. The Equality and Diversity Officer will, with the approval of the Head(s) of Chambers, and after consulting those responsible for particular areas of Chambers' administration, produce an action plan identifying any areas of Chambers' practices which require attention in order to achieve the objectives of this policy.

20. The plan will be available on the Chambers intranet. It will be periodically reviewed to ensure that suitable progress is being made, to consider what further steps might need to be taken, and to revise the plan accordingly.

Complaints and grievances

21. Any Member of Chambers, pupil, mini-pupil or Member of staff who is concerned about any issues relating to this policy is encouraged to raise those concerns with the Equality and Diversity Officer. The Equality and Diversity Officer is available to give advice and support to anyone who requires it in relation to any equality and diversity issues.

22. Staff who wish to make a formal or informal complaint should follow the grievance procedure set out in the staff employment policies booklet.

23. Members of Chambers, pupils or mini-pupils who wish to make a formal or informal complaint should follow the Chambers Grievance Procedure, which is available on the intranet.

Explanatory note

This policy combines Chambers' original statement of policies on equality and diversity with its policy on equal access and fair allocation of work, and makes revisions in the light of changes to the Code of Conduct.

Reviewed May 2023. To be reviewed May 2026