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## EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DIVERSITY POLICY

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Cobbetts are a committed equal opportunities employer recognising that diversity is a positive attribute and understanding and welcoming the differences that a diverse culture brings. We are committed to engendering a culture where everyone is treated with dignity and respect and we aim to provide a working environment which recognises and values differences.

This commitment reflects Cobbetts' values and behaviours and is part of the means of ensuring that we put these values into practice. Compliance with this policy is an essential step towards ensuring that we all behave in a way which is consistent with the Firm's core behaviours and delivering our promise of respecting others and their views, and being sensitive and supportive to all.

It is our intent to bring diversity to the heart of our Firm's culture to embrace the visible and non visible differences of a diverse workforce. The aim of this policy is to support these commitments by providing a framework for continuous improvement to ensure that all within our Firm, our clients and our business suppliers are treated fairly and equitably. We are therefore committed to ensuring that policies, systems and processes we use in the Firm are fair and ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to achieve their potential.

### **Why this is important**

The Firm places great value on all its Employees and regards any form of direct or indirect discrimination or harassment as serious. We believe everyone has the right to be treated fairly and equally and to enjoy a working environment free from discrimination or harassment.

We expect that everyone within the Firm is committed to, and acts in a way that upholds our view that inclusion and a diverse workforce is an essential part of our continued success.

This policy applies to all partners and Employees whether permanent, temporary, full time or part time as well as to clients, barristers, contractors and other third parties dealt with by the Firm.

## **1 PROMOTION OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

It is the Firm's policy that no partner, Employee, agency worker, contractor, self-employed consultant, job applicant or ex-employee, client or third party receives less favourable treatment:

- on the grounds of colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origins;
- on the grounds of sex, marital status and gender reassignment
  - a married person on the grounds of their marital status;
  - a woman on the grounds of pregnancy or maternity;
  - same sex couples adoption/fertility treatment;
  - a man on the grounds of paternity;
- under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995;

- under the terms of the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations;
- on the grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation
- people who plan to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone gender re-assignment
- people are treated fairly and equally in the workplace irrespective of their marital, civil partnership or family status;
- on the grounds of their actual or perceived religion or belief;
- is disadvantaged by conditions, requirements, policy or practices which cannot be shown to be justifiable.
- progressive illnesses (such as cancer and HIV)
- learning disabilities or dyslexia.

This list is not exhaustive

This policy applies to all aspects of employment including: recruitment, promotion, performance management, development, reward and recognition and termination.

In all areas the Firm will promote an environment which enables it to access and develop the widest possible sources of talent.

## **2 IF YOU FEEL YOU HAVE BEEN UNFAIRLY TREATED**

If you consider the treatment you have received amounts to discrimination, harassment, or victimisation in line with the definitions contained in this policy, where possible you should make it clear to the person concerned that their behaviour is unacceptable and offensive and you should ask them to stop.

You may find that this is enough to stop the treatment and prevent it happening again.

If the problem persists or you feel unable to make a complaint directly to the individual you should make a formal complaint in writing to your Team/Administration Manager in the first instance.

Your complaint will be treated in complete confidence. Any complaint will always be treated seriously and fully investigated.

A complaint made to your Team/Administration Manager about another member of the Firm will be discussed in detail with you. Once full details are clear your Team/Administration Manager will make a decision. It may be appropriate to involve the Human Resources Manager. However, this may not always be the case. Your Practice Area Head may also become involved depending on the investigation.

If you feel unable to raise the issue with your Team/Administration Manager, a complaint can be made directly to the HR Manager.

All investigations will be carried out in the strictest confidence and all the people who are part of the investigation will be expected to respect this confidentiality. Only once the facts have been established will a course of action be recommended. As part of the investigation you may well be asked to attend a formal interview to give evidence. You may bring a fellow employee with you to this formal grievance hearing.

Where evidence suggests that any actions have been carried out in breach of the Firm's policy and commitment to fairness, the Firm may consider disciplinary action in line with the Firm's disciplinary procedure.

Any person found to be inciting, encouraging or condoning discriminatory actions or behaviour will themselves be subject to a full investigation.

### **3 WHAT CAN EVERYONE DO TO ENCOURAGE EQUALITY?**

- Treat people with dignity and respect and encourage others to do the same.
- Ensure your own behaviour does not cause offence, misunderstanding and consider how it may effect others.
- Be prepared to support colleagues
- Think about the support you give to your colleagues and clients.
- Check your understanding of equality and diversity.
- Always promote Cobbetts internally and externally as an organisation with a firm commitment to equality and diversity for all employees and clients.

### **4 RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGERS**

The success of our equal opportunities and diversity policy depends on the Managers at all levels in the Firm. The Firm will ensure that Managers are aware of what is expected of them. To achieve this the Team/Administration Manager should:

- demonstrate commitment to equality and diversity by acting as a role model where appropriate, and manage their teams to ensure individuals are treated fairly and objectively in all aspects of work;
- promote equal opportunity and diversity awareness and encourage all people to work together and eliminate discrimination;
- investigate and take appropriate action regarding any claims of discrimination, victimisation and harassment.

The policy above and any updates are communicated to employees via the CACG (staff forum), along with any updates to Team/Administration Managers.