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Bar regulator to address unfair treatment of women at the Bar

12 July 2016

The Bar Standards Board will be writing to every multi-tenant chambers across the country to seek their help in improving compliance with the Equality Rules, following the BSB's recent survey of women at the Bar.

The regulator is today publishing the [Women at the Bar report](#), which is the result of research conducted earlier in the year with women at the practising Bar about their experience of the BSB's Equality Rules. Almost a quarter of women at the Bar responded to the research.

The report found a number of examples of good practice and clear evidence of progress in some areas. It also found that the experiences of women at the Bar are significantly better in chambers where the policies which the Equality Rules require have been put in place following proper consultation and where everyone is aware of them.

Three key areas for improvement were also identified in the responses received:

1. Unfair treatment

The report showed the need to address a number of areas where women can face unfair treatment. These were:

- Harassment;
- Discrimination;
- Work allocation;
- Flexible working; and
- Returning from maternity leave.

2. Reporting unfair treatment

The survey responses make clear that many women are reluctant to report unfair treatment. The BSB will review its current enforcement procedures and supervisory approach to ensure that women are encouraged to report unfair treatment without fearing that this might limit their careers.

3. Lack of compliance with the Equality Rules

The report also identified some instances of non-compliance, poor implementation of policies and unsatisfactory levels of awareness of the Equality Rules.

This report follows previous focus group based research by the Bar Council in 2015 which produced similar findings. The Bar Council also recently published [Equality and Diversity Guidance for Chambers](#). The BSB and Bar Council will therefore work together to improve awareness of the BSB's Equality Rules and the Bar Council's Guidance throughout the Bar. We are pleased that the Institute of Barristers' Clerks and the Legal Practice Management Association have also said that they want to work with us to improve the treatment of women at the Bar.

BSB Director General Dr Vanessa Davies said: "The Equality Rules were intended in part to improve the retention of women at the Bar but, as we know, men outnumber women by two to one and this has not changed significantly over the last six years. There are some encouraging findings in this report but some are very

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disappointing, and we intend to address these issues as a matter of urgency. I will be writing personally to every multi-tenant chambers in England and Wales to ensure that equality policies are being properly implemented and that everyone is aware of them. We cannot tolerate a situation where women are treated unfairly in the workplace. Lack of diversity and discriminatory working culture and practices impair the Bar's ability to meet the needs of the public and could deter potentially great candidates from pursuing a career at the Bar.

"Since this issue affects both the public interest and the profession itself, we are pleased to be working with the Bar Council to combat discrimination and the harassment of women at the practising Bar."

BSB Board member Justine Davidge said: "As a criminal practitioner, and one who has recently taken a step back from the self-employed Bar after 12 years, I understand many of the challenges women face in their careers in this profession. We received more than 1,300 responses to our survey, which is about a quarter of the practising female Bar. That makes this a very robust piece of research and we are committed to acting in response to what women have told us."

[Read the Women at the Bar report here.](#)

ENDS

Notes to editors

About the Bar Standards Board

Our mission is to regulate the Bar so as to promote high standards of practice and safeguard clients and the public interest. For more information about what we do visit: <http://bit.ly/1gwui8t>

Contact: For all media enquiries call: 0207 611 1452 or email press@barstandardsboard.org.uk