



THE BAR
OF IRELAND

The Law Library

BARRA NA HÉIREANN

An Leabharlann Dlí

The Bar of Ireland Equality Action Plan

Enhancing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at the Bar

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Foreword

It is a great pleasure to be involved in the launch of The Bar of Ireland's Equality Action Plan. The Bar of Ireland is committed to acting as a driving force in fostering equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across the legal profession through tackling imbalance and building a truly diverse membership, one of true inclusion, regardless of race, colour, creed or sexuality. It is the recognition of equality of all that drives this action plan.

Our new Strategic Plan October 2021 – 2024 places at its forefront the Equality Action Plan as we work to build and foster a more diverse and inclusive culture for all barristers. Recruitment and retention are challenges facing The Bar of Ireland as we aim to be reflective of our society as a whole. The Bar of Ireland acts for and on behalf of members of our society, so it is essential that we mirror that society. As a profession we strive for the rights of all, so it is imperative that we are a profession of 'all'. Our Equality Action Plan will work to mitigate barriers for those seeking access to our profession and services.

The plan outlines a series of clear and comprehensive steps by which The Bar of Ireland can advance the following five overarching EDI-related objectives:

- enhancing public awareness of a positive equality, diversity and inclusion culture at the Bar;
- introducing and embedding diversity awareness training at the Bar;
- enhancing access to the profession;
- supporting fair and equitable practice development and career progression opportunities; and,
- enhancing the accessibility of member services at the Bar.

The plan also reinforces a core pillar of our vision – that diversity is strength. Greater diversity within our profession ensures a greater variety of voices, experiences, and insights that benefit all. It reflects community expectations of fairness in all aspects of the administration of the law and ensures that our profession is more representative of the composition of the community we serve.

This should not be considered an ambitious plan but simply an underscoring of our core values, namely that dignity and equality should be and are the very tenets of being a barrister; that dignity and equality are a right irrespective of gender, marital or family status, age, religion, race/ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation.

We are indebted to those who kindly shared their experiences and provided input in the drafting of this plan, both external stakeholders and our own members and staff at The Bar of Ireland.

The implementation of the Equality Action Plan calls for the continued and co-ordinated mobilisation of a number of committees and departments/units across the organisation. To ensure accountability and transparency in its progress, this plan will be reviewed at the end of each legal year.

We look forward to the execution of the Equality Action Plan, the conversations it will spur, and the realisation of our efforts to build capacity and an inclusive culture across the legal sector here at The Bar of Ireland.



Maura McNally SC
Chair, Council of The Bar of Ireland

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maura McNally S.C." with a stylized flourish.



Aoife McNickle BL
Chair, Equality and Resilience
Committee of The Bar of Ireland

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aoife McNickle" in a cursive style.

Aims

To promote and enhance equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at the Bar, with a particular focus on addressing the challenges faced by underrepresented, disadvantaged and minority groups. Through investment in, and implementation of, appropriate supports and resources, The Bar of Ireland aims to enhance access to the profession and the retention of a diverse membership. Areas of focus include,

but are not limited to: gender; race and ethnicity; sexual orientation; disability; and/or, cultural or socioeconomic background.

We are committed to transparency and accountability as we work to advance EDI at The Bar of Ireland. This policy will undergo review before the end of each legal year.

Background

The Equality Action Plan Working Group, a sub-committee of the Equality and Resilience Committee, has consulted the insights and expertise of relevant stakeholders in order to better understand the challenges faced by underrepresented, disadvantaged and minority groups in accessing and pursuing a career at the Bar. Among those consulted were: AslAm, Ireland's national autism charity; the Association for Higher Education Access & Disability (AHEAD); the National Disability Authority; the Dyslexia Association of Ireland; the Immigrant Council of Ireland; the National Women's Council; the Irish Traveller Movement; the Irish Network Against Racism; and, the OUTLaw Network. We are indebted to those who gave so generously of their time and feedback.

An anonymous survey of the current membership of the Law Library was also carried out to assist the Working Group in understanding the current composition of the membership in terms of diversity. Members were invited to

disclose information relating to, for example, disability, ethnicity, and whether they experienced any discrimination in the workplace as a result of their background/characteristics, and what the Bar could do to better support them and others.

Consultation with external experts and current members enabled the Working Group to devise this Equality Action Plan. The Plan sets out a series of recommended actions to build upon existing EDI initiatives at the Bar, and to implement additional appropriate supports and resources to enhance access for, and retention of, those members who may encounter challenges over and above others.

Some of the issues raised by various groups can be addressed through improved communication from The Bar of Ireland and this need has been recognised in the development of this Plan.

Objectives

The Equality Action Plan's objectives are categorised under the following headings:

OBJECTIVE 1 To enhance public awareness of a positive equality, diversity and inclusion culture at the Bar

OBJECTIVE 2 To introduce and embed diversity awareness training at the Bar

OBJECTIVE 3 To enhance access to the profession

OBJECTIVE 4 To support fair and equitable practice development and career progression opportunities

OBJECTIVE 5 To enhance the accessibility of member services at the Bar



Recommended actions

A number of actions have been identified within each objective:

OBJECTIVE 1:

To enhance public awareness of a positive equality, diversity and inclusion culture at the Bar

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
<p>A. Devise and implement a communications strategy/awareness campaign, which informs current and prospective members about the Bar’s EDI supports and initiatives. Ensure that information is publicly available on the Law Library website.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communications Department ■ Public Affairs Committee ■ Equality and Resilience Committee
<p>B. Ensure a commitment to incorporate EDI into the strategic plan of The Bar of Ireland.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communications Department ■ Council
<p>C. Identify champions within the membership, e.g., a panel of members from diverse backgrounds, to promote visibility of law as a career choice among schools (particularly those with little or no connection to the Bar) and universities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communications Department ■ Equality and Resilience Committee ■ Public Affairs Committee
<p>D. Encourage and support champions to act as visible role models for colleagues and prospective entrants. Establish a facility whereby the panel of champions can be contacted by members and prospective entrants on an informal basis in order to seek guidance/advice in relation to the profession.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communications Department ■ Equality and Resilience Committee ■ Public Affairs Committee ■ Education and Training Committee
<p>E. Expand the ‘Look into Law’ TY programme through targeted promotion to students of underrepresented, disadvantaged and minority groups via representative/affiliated organisations and institutions, e.g., students with disabilities, students who are in Direct Provision, members of the Traveller Community, etc.</p> <p>Ensure that work experience/shadowing opportunities are advertised in consultation with community interests, to ensure reach.</p> <p>Seek to enhance diverse representation in course content, as well as content accessibility, to facilitate students with disabilities in accessing and viewing the material.</p> <p>When offering in-person components, where possible, reserve a quota of additional places for students of underrepresented, disadvantaged and minority groups, in addition to those from DEIS schools, and consider relevant accommodations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Look into Law TY Programme ■ Education and Training Committee

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
<p>F. Review and promote the Bar’s Disability Support Statement and provide open, accessible information on disclosure and reasonable accommodations. Seek to ensure that members and new entrants feel supported and comfortable in sharing their disability status.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communications Department ■ Member Relations ■ Library Committee ■ Equality and Resilience Committee
<p>G. Seek to ensure minority inclusion within The Bar of Ireland’s Council and committee memberships/co-options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Council ■ Committees
<p>H. Encourage The Bar of Ireland executive to participate in paid internship schemes/graduate programmes and to commit to continuing to recruit a diverse and inclusive workforce, e.g., AsIAm Owl project, AHEAD WAM project. Also consider the possibility of shadowing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ HR Department ■ Council
<p>I. Implement ethnic equality monitoring, including the roll-out and implementation of an ethnic identifier (in line with EU standards) across data collection points to monitor and assess participation of underrepresented, disadvantaged and minority groups, and to inform evidence-based analysis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Member Relations ■ Equality and Resilience Committee
<p>J. Apply a data collection set to record new entrants by ethnicity, and with inclusion of school location, which would be assessed annually, and remedial actions taken to address barriers and improve, and target diverse entrants going forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Member Relations
<p>K. Apply EDI standard proofing across all literature and settings including the Code of Conduct for Barristers. Scrutinise drafts for any potential specific and unintended impacts on underrepresented, disadvantaged or minority groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Council ■ Library Committee
<p>L. Continue to increase the visibility of the Voluntary Assistance Scheme for underrepresented, disadvantaged, minority and other diverse interest groups working in the equality and human rights area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communications Department ■ Public Affairs Committee

OBJECTIVE 2:

To introduce and embed diversity awareness training at the Bar

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
A. Provide EDI awareness training for masters, mentors, staff, and for the wider membership as part of the Bar's continuing professional development (CPD) programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Education and Training Committee■ HR Department
B. Advocate for the inclusion of an EDI module within course programmes in legal education institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Equality and Resilience Committee

OBJECTIVE 3: To enhance access to the profession

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
<p>A. Liaise with the King’s Inns and third-level institutions delivering legal education to create better pathways for underrepresented, disadvantaged and minority groups to ensure that barriers are addressed, such as greater engagement with college access offices, and scholarship and bursary schemes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Education and Training Committee ■ Equality and Resilience Committee
<p>B. Publicise that the compulsory Irish module, which is required as part of the Barrister-at-Law degree course, does not have an exam component.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Equality and Resilience Committee
<p>C. Liaise with the King’s Inns to consider possible alternative dining times and venues in order to assist those living outside Dublin and those with caring responsibilities. Also liaise regarding the possibility of increased opportunities for dining with practising members of the profession.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Equality and Resilience Committee
<p>D. Liaise with the King’s Inns to consider different options to satisfy the dining requirement in a way that might be more suitable for individuals with disabilities or neurodiverse conditions (autism, dyslexia, etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Equality and Resilience Committee
<p>E. Periodically update and review the Pupil Guidelines, which are provided to applicants and new entrants, and are publicly available on The Bar of Ireland website. Ensure comprehensive coverage of pupillage: The Bar of Ireland requirements for masters and pupils; the process for attaining a master; the financial support available for pupils; the Bar mentoring programme for pupils; and, how pupils might deal with any issues that may arise during their pupillage year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Education and Training Committee ■ Member Relations
<p>F. Consider establishing additional bursaries for those in their first years at the Bar from disadvantaged groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Education and Training Committee ■ Equality and Resilience Committee
<p>G. Incorporate further supports into The Bar of Ireland mentoring scheme for new entrants who have a disability through providing disability awareness training opportunities for mentors and/or establishing mentors with related experience, where requested.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Education and Training Committee ■ Member Relations

OBJECTIVE 4:

To support fair and equitable practice development and career progression opportunities

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
<p>A. Ensure meaningful female representation by improving access to all areas of practice for female counsel via the promotion of equitable briefing practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Equality and Resilience Committee
<p>B. Promote and publicise the supports available to members taking extended periods of leave, including parental leave (maternity/adoptive/paternity leave) and personal leave (carer/illness/bereavement), and consider the possibility of enhancing such supports.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Equality and Resilience Committee ■ Communications Department
<p>C. Enhance the supports provided to members returning to practice after a period of parental leave (maternity/adoptive/paternity leave).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Equality and Resilience Committee ■ Library Committee
<p>D. Provide support to members undergoing fertility treatment/IVF/fostering.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Equality and Resilience Committee ■ Library Committee

OBJECTIVE 5:

To enhance the accessibility of member services at the Bar

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY
<p>A. Conduct an accessibility audit in order to review the accessibility of legal texts and databases, and the potential need for assistive technologies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Library Services
<p>B. Enhance application of universal design principles across all member services including the Bar’s procurement processes (i.e., where accessibility is a key criterion in the procurement of services from vendors), products, built environment, public spaces, and communication channels (written, spoken, digital and signed).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Communications Department ■ Finance Department ■ Library Services ■ Estates
<p>C. Invite a cohort of individuals from various underrepresented groups to visit the Bar to explore, advise and reflect on the level of accessibility to the profession with regard to the traditional day-to-day practice of it, including member services and the surrounding physical infrastructure. Following this consultation process, determine further actions to be undertaken by the Bar to enhance accessibility. Liaise with the Courts Service’s Building Committee to advocate for further action regarding accessibility and infrastructure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Equality and Resilience Committee ■ Communications Department ■ Library Services ■ Estates
<p>D. Review special accommodation procedures upon entry to the profession. Encourage disclosure of needs more positively and proactively. Additionally, provide a facility for existing members who may have acquired a disability later in their career to disclose and request assistance/support if needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Member Relations ■ Library Committee ■ Equality and Resilience Committee
<p>E. Continue to implement a priority of needs system for the allocation of desks in suitable locations to those with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Member Relations
<p>F. Facilitate a booking system whereby members with particular needs can reserve desks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Member Relations ■ Library Services ■ Library Committee
<p>G. Facilitate bookable quieter workspaces as an alternative to open plan office settings that may pose accessibility issues to members with disabilities or neurodiverse conditions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Member Relations ■ Library Services ■ Library Committee



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