

SOLICITORS REGULATION AUTHORITY
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Committee Meeting

14 July 2015
2.00pm to 5.00pm
Board Room, The Cube, Birmingham

Public Minutes

Present:

Jane Furniss, Chair
Caroline Armitage (CA)
David Heath (DH)
Mike Franklin (MF)
Moni Mannings (MM)
Jemima Coleman (JC)
Ruth Grant (RG)
Sophie Khan (SK)
Uday Dholakia (UD)

Staff in attendance:

Jane Malcolm, Executive Director (JM)
Paul Philip, Chief Executive Officer (PP)
Pamela Harding, Group HRD Director (PH)
Leah Lee, Senior HRD Business Partner (LL)
Henry Myatt, Business Champion (HM)
Penny Bolton, Resourcing Manager (PB) for item 7
Tim Livesley, Risk Analysis & Research Manager/Chief Economist (TL) for item 8
Julie Brannan, Director of Education and Training (JB) for item 9
Aseia Rafique, Diversity & Inclusion Manager (AR)
Sian Hughes, Diversity & Inclusion Manager (SH)

1 Welcome and Introductions

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed David Heath (EDI Committee and SRA Board Member) to the meeting. David recently retired from the House of Commons after 18 years and was appointed to the SRA Board in January. This was David's first EDI Committee meeting and he was warmly welcomed by everyone.
- 1.2 The Chair explained that Business Champions are represented at every meeting and provide the Committee with an update on the work they do.

2 Apologies

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Bill Galvin.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2015

- 3.1 The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting on 20 May 2015, save for one typographical error in paragraph 7.1.

4 Matters Arising and declarations of interest

- 4.1 Matters arising have been addressed in the update paper at item 5. Caroline Armitage declared an interest; she has taken a consultancy engagement through her consultancy company Avocet Consulting Limited with Girlings Solicitors LLP.

5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion progress update (Public)

- 5.1 PH provided an update on Board and Committee recruitment. Gatenby Sanderson, an executive search recruitment service, has been selected to carry out recruitment for the Board. The SRA is seeking to recruit three Board members, two solicitors and one lay, and the closing date for applications is 18 August 2015.
- 5.2 There was a discussion on whether candidates should be able to apply directly to the SRA, as well as through the recruitment agency, and whether this would encourage more people to apply. The Chair will discuss this further with PH. It was suggested the recruiting panel receive training on unconscious bias, if they have not already done so.
- 5.3 Actions arising from Committee are collated into an action log and updates are provided at each meeting. The Chair suggested we publish the action log with the minutes of the last meeting and the public papers. Confidential actions will be noted and removed.

Action – Publish public actions from the action log with the public papers.

- 5.4 HM talked the Committee through the diversity breakdown of the Business Champions. Out of 24 Business Champions, 18 consented for their gender and ethnicity data to be shared; 6 Business Champions had been on annual leave when the request was circulated. HM will request additional diversity data from Business Champions on disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief.

Action - Provide a broader diversity breakdown of the whole Business Champion community to the EDI Committee.

Progress Update – Objective 1

- 5.5 HM provided an update from the Business Champions. The community helped organise events to mark Disability Awareness Day on 12 July. They are also organising a 'packed lunch' on 15th September 2015 to update colleagues on their work. Some Committee members are interested in attending the 'packed lunch' and will check their availability.
- 5.6 LL provided a verbal update on the Vulnerable Stakeholders Project. She explained that the project will provide training to staff who come into contact with vulnerable stakeholders. These are stakeholders who report the concerns they have about solicitors and solicitors themselves. One of the biggest drivers for this project is to support staff to deal with stakeholders who display signs of poor mental health and / or distress.

Action – Provide the EDI Committee with more information about vulnerable stakeholders and the complaints they raise.

- 5.7 DH asked if we had engaged with the Gypsy and Roma community as they are also identified as a vulnerable group. We will speak to the Consumer Affairs team to identify the best ways in which to engage with this community and to make sure we link this into the wider stakeholder engagement work.

Action – Initiate engagement with the Gypsy and Roma community and link this into the wider stakeholder engagement work.

- 5.8 The update on the Small Firms work and the creation of a virtual Small Firms team in Supervision was welcomed. The Committee acknowledged the progress made.
- 5.9 Committee has noticed that on some occasions the Small Firms work is used as a proxy to show that equality and diversity has been considered and requested that papers including points on equality and diversity look at this issue more closely.
- 5.10 A request was made to ensure that papers going to Board and Committee include a considered assessment of equality. Undertaking Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) is seen as a measure of quality assurance and the quality of the work provided to Board and Committees on equality, diversity and inclusion impact was seen as inconsistent.

Action – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team to engage with Regulation and Education and operational teams to look at improving EIAs.

- 5.11 AR took the Committee through the work we are doing on engaging with our stakeholders. There is a lot more to be done and it was acknowledged that it can take time to build such relationships. It was suggested we also engage with the In-house Division and the Women's Division of the Law Society. Committee members were keen to engage with stakeholder groups and support this work.
- 5.12 Statistics show women in the profession make up over half of newly qualified solicitors but only 30% of partners are women. RG suggested that women are moving into high profile in-house roles, such as General Counsel. Any statistical analysis of women in the profession needs to take into account individuals that do not work in private practice.

Progress Update - Objectives 2 and 3

- 5.13 AR took the Committee through the update provided in relation to EDI objectives 2 and 3.
- 5.14 The collection of firm diversity data opens this August. Firms will be provided with a six week window to submit their data. The system is currently being tested to see what it will look like and how it will work. Members of the Committee would like to know more about the process and would be willing to participate in the testing process.

Action – Circulate screenshots of the firm diversity data collection facility to Committee and invite Committee members to participate in testing.

- 5.15 This project has run for two years and this is the third year that firm diversity data will be collected. The Committee would like to have an open discussion about this year's data before an analysis and report is produced.

Action – Provide the Committee with an opportunity for early discussion of the 2015 diversity data.

6 Review of the EDI Action Plan and EDI Reporting (Confidential)

- 6.1 This paper is confidential to allow the Committee to discuss the review and approve the revised action plan before publication.

7 SRA Staff Recruitment Data (Confidential)

- 7.1 This paper is confidential because this is an early look at the first 6 months of recruitment data and the full year data set will be published in due course.

8 Firm Diversity Data Update (Confidential)

- 8.1 This paper is confidential because part of the paper involves early discussion of potential policy change and part of the paper requires discussion prior to publication.

9 Update on the Competence Statement Assessment Framework (Confidential)

- 9.1 This paper is confidential as it provides an early update on the development of the assessment framework which will be published for consultation in due course.

10 Any other business

- 10.1 None raised.

End