### **Research Summary**

## Women at the Bar: Exploring solutions to promote gender equality



#### Why we undertook this research

The BSB Equality Objectives for 2017-2019 make a specific commitment to identify what can be done to improve the retention and progression of women at the Bar. The 2016 'Women at the Bar' survey of over 1,300 barristers, identified a number of areas that negatively affected the retention of women in the profession.

As a follow-up to that survey, in 2017, the BSB conducted further research by running five workshops with over 50 attendees, including barristers, clerks, chambers' directors, circuit leaders, specialist Bar associations, and Bar Professional Training Course providers. Workshop participants were invited to suggest potential solutions that might be taken forward by the BSB, or by others, to address some of the barriers to the retention and progression of women at the Bar. A series of recommendations arose from workshop discussions and can be grouped into following themes:



**Expanding monitoring** - in areas including: the allocation of work, reasons for awarding work to a particular barrister, flexible working requests, and the number of workplace harassment and discrimination complaints within chambers. This could help identify where issues exist, ensuring any responses are driven by accurate information, and helping to ensure that chambers are prompted to respond to issues identified.



Improving transparency - including: work allocation data, Equality and Diversity policies, and the way complaints of harassment and discrimination are dealt with. This includes key stakeholders doing more to promote and publicise good practice. This could help ensure awareness of issues and policies is improved, and ensure that discussions are seen as being 'driven by the data' rather than individual complaints.



Introducing or improving policies - Suggestions included: changes to parental leave policies, developing mentoring programmes, developing frameworks to improve communication between barristers and clerks, introducing an external 'helpline' to discuss discrimination and harassment, and creating an Equality and Diversity 'kite mark' for the profession.



**Expanding Equality and Diversity training** - in particular for clerks and senior management. This would help raise awareness of potential issues around the impact of discrimination, and effective approaches that can be taken to address them.



**Cultural change** - A 'zero-tolerance' approach to unlawful discrimination and harassment, ensuring there is clear and visible support for improvement and change from senior leadership, making a clear business case for equality at the Bar.

#### How will the BSB use these findings?

The findings of this research have informed the development of an action plan which sets out specific actions for the BSB and other key stakeholders to help improve the experiences of women in the profession and drive improvements to retention. The action plan has three areas of regulatory focus: the BSB Handbook, Guidance (produced either by the BSB or the Bar Council), and Engagement and Partnership. The actions broadly reflect the areas in which there was greatest consensus at the workshops.

# What do the findings mean for key stakeholders?

For chambers' management and clerks, the findings highlight examples of good practice. They also discuss how improvements to chambers' policies and procedures can help the retention of women, and how training can improve how any issues are addressed within chambers.

For the Bar as a whole, the findings suggest what could be done to help improve the experiences of women at the Bar, such as by working towards changing certain behaviours within the Bar through developing a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination and harassment.

The BSB will continue to engage with the Bar Council, Legal Practice Management Association, Institute of Barristers' Clerks, Inns of Court and other stakeholders to deliver the action plan.

The main report, which sets out these findings in more detail, can be found at <a href="https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/media-centre/research-and-statistics/research-reports/">https://www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/media-centre/research-and-statistics/research-reports/</a>