

KINGS CHAMBERS

A SET APART FROM THE REST



HEALTH & WELLBEING POLICY

Kings Chambers (the “Chambers”) seeks to promote and support the health and wellbeing of both its barristers and pupils and, as an employer, the health and wellbeing of all staff (the term “staff” referring to both clerks and employees at all levels). This document sets out Chambers’ approach at a policy level to such health and wellbeing amongst members and pupils and employees and is predicated on Chambers providing a safe and supportive working environment.

Work can have a positive impact on our health and wellbeing. Healthy and well-motivated barristers and staff can have an equally positive impact on the productivity and effectiveness of Chambers. Fostering a working environment that promotes the physical and mental wellbeing of its people is self-evidently good for Chambers’ business.

Responsibility for health and wellbeing at work is in the ownership of everyone in Chambers, from the top to bottom. Factors that can influence whether people will have a positive or negative relationship with work include (but are not limited to):

- Relationships between staff and barristers and between work groups and departments;
- Relationships between line managers and other staff;
- Whether the staff and barristers feel involved in organisational issues and decisions;
- Job design / barrister practice;
- Income to meet more than just basic needs;
- Availability and acceptability of flexible working;
- Awareness of occupational health issues and whether they are taken seriously; and
- Whether the principles of fairness, equality and diversity are experienced in the workplace

This policy provides a framework within which Chambers encourages and facilitates working practices and services that support wellbeing. It aims to draw upon good practice, recognising information support arrangements, particularly amongst barristers, and to be flexible rather than prescriptive. Such flexibility should allow for appropriate support and its management in relation to any particular set of circumstances concerning barristers, pupils or staff.

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PEOPLE MANAGEMENT AND MENTORING

Chambers seeks both to protect its employees and promote best practice and people management. Central to those aims is the need for all members and staff to understand Chambers' ethos and approach to wellbeing and to have a sense of autonomy and a voice that will be both heard and listened to in an environment where both members and staff have a genuine sense of support from colleagues and managers from the top to bottom of Chambers.

As part of Chambers' commitment to its people, it operates a mentoring scheme and provides training to support:

- Managers with the skills to manage people, practice development and the business as a whole;
- Other staff members with new knowledge and skills to develop their roles, maintain their interests and expand their horizons, and utilise new systems and technologies with confidence;
- Pupils and junior tenants with support and guidance from more senior members and staff;
- Greater awareness of equality and diversity, including disability and mental health issues;
- Professional development for barristers relevant to their area of work;
- Awareness of the signs of stress in ourselves and in others

The fact that a barrister is self-employed does not dictate that that barrister has control of his or her work-life balance. A lack of control may be caused by any number of factors including, for example, a desire to maintain a busy practice and to keep clerks and solicitors happy resulting in the taking on of too much work, or the pressures experienced by a self-employed person which are not experienced by employees. A lack of control over work-life balance may lead to unhealthy work-related stress. Chambers seeks to raise awareness of the risks posed by self-employment, as identified above, and an unhealthy work-life balance.

Barristers, pupils and staff, as human beings, may be given to behaviour which is reactive to any number of external factors. That is simply part of normal life. However, any barrister, pupil or member of staff who displays more than occasional cognitive, emotional, physical or behavioural symptoms of stress, so as to give rise to concerns by colleagues or senior staff, will be invited through a supportive referral scheme, in the first instance, to meet with a member of the Wellbeing Committee. This is led by Constanze Bell and Erica Bedford, and made up of a representative from each team: Sophie Allan, John Hunter and Chelsea Carter. The committee also includes Stephen Loxton, Debbie Andres and Lewis Martin. They are available to discuss possible solutions and a strategy for tackling that barrister's difficulties, including discussing workload and management of the barrister's practice in both the immediate and longer term.

Any barrister or pupil or member of staff may arrange to see one of the designated mentors or Senior Clerk in their practice area if he or she feels a need to re-balance his or her practice for whatever reason.

A member of staff should inform his or her line manager at an early stage if they are finding their work commitments too demanding, even if the reasons for such difficulties are external to Chambers.

There is substantial evidence that a flexible approach to working patterns can have significant organisational benefits, including reduced absenteeism, improved morale and greater productivity. There are many different ways of structuring working patterns and Chambers will consider requests from staff members for part-time working, flexible working hours, compressed working hours, annualised hours, job-sharing, working at or from home, or any other reasonable request relating to working patterns and working hours.

MENTAL WELLBEING

The promotion and protection of the mental wellbeing of all barristers, pupils and staff in Chambers is important and directly relevant to individuals' physical health, social wellbeing and productivity. Mental ill health and stress are associated with many of the leading causes of disease and disability in society. Chambers seeks to take a proactive approach to the maintenance of the wellbeing of all people in Chambers.

Mental wellbeing in the workplace is relevant to all and everyone has a responsibility to contribute to improved mental wellbeing at work. Addressing workplace mental wellbeing can help strengthen the positive, protective factors of employment, reduce risk factors for mental ill health and improve general health. It can also help promote the employment of people who have experienced mental health problems and support them once they are at work.

Important aspects of mental health and wellbeing include providing information and raising awareness, management skills to deal with issues around mental health and stress effectively, providing a supportive work environment, offering assistance, advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem or returning to Chambers after a period of absence due to mental health problems.

OTHER POLICIES

This policy is complimentary to policies already established within Chambers.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS POLICY

To develop a supportive culture, address factors that may negatively affect mental wellbeing and to develop management skills we will:

- Reduce discrimination and stigma by increasing awareness and understanding of all forms of disability;
- Give employees information on, and increase their awareness of, mental wellbeing;
- Give non-judgemental and proactive support to individual staff, pupils and barristers that experience mental health problems;
- Include information about our mental health policy in induction sessions;
- Provide opportunities for staff, pupils and barristers to look after their mental wellbeing, for example through physical activity, stress reducing activities and social events;
- Offer staff flexible working arrangements and encourage barristers and pupils to have a good work-life balance;
- Set employees realistic targets that do not require them to work unreasonable hours;
- Ensure all staff have clearly defined job descriptions, objectives and responsibilities and provide them with good management support, appropriate training and adequate resources to do their job;
- Manage conflict effectively and ensure the workplace is free from bullying and harassment, discrimination and racism; and
- Establish good two-way communication to ensure staff involvement, particularly during periods of organisational change

To provide support for staff, pupils and barristers experiencing mental health difficulties, we will:

- Ensure individuals suffering from mental health problems are treated fairly and consistently;
- Where appropriate, clearly communicate to colleagues who are able to support when the symptoms of stress become apparent to prevent further stress;
- Ensure individuals are aware of the support that can be offered through occupational health (where appropriate) or the individual's own GP;
- In cases of long term sickness absence, put in place, where possible a graduated return to work or practice;
- Make every effort to identify suitable alternative employment or practice, in consultation with the individual, where a return to the same role is not possible due to identified risks or other factors; and
- Treat all matters relating to individuals and their mental health problems in the strictest confidence and share on a "need to know" basis only with consent from the individual concerned

To demonstrate a positive and enabling attitude to employees and job applicants with mental health issues we will:

- Have positive statements in recruitment adverts and literature;
- Ensure that all staff and barristers involved in recruitment and selection are briefed on mental health issues and the Equality Act, and are trained in appropriate interview skills;
- Not make assumptions that a person with a mental health problem will be more vulnerable to workplace stress or take more time off than any other employee or job applicant;
- Ensure all line managers have information and training about managing mental health in the workplace;
- Recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue; and
- Ask about health and wellbeing in exit interviews to help identify factors that may cause stress

Chambers arranges training events to support this policy for both new pupils, new practitioners, clerks and other staff joining Chambers and seeks to review the effective implementation and support of this policy amongst its membership and employees.

COMMUNICATIONS AND REVIEW

All barristers, pupils and staff will be made aware of this Health and Wellbeing Policy. This will be part of a health at work approach that will be emphasised at induction sessions.

The Wellbeing sub-committee will be responsible for reviewing the Health and Wellbeing Policy and for monitoring how effectively the policy meets its aims and objectives.

WELLBEING FROM THE BAR COUNCIL

Further details on wellbeing from the Bar Council can be found at:

<https://www.barcouncil.org.uk/supporting-the-bar/wellbeing-at-the-bar/>