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## POLICY

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# EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

The Victorian Bar is committed to promoting equality and diversity in the legal profession. This commitment is consistent with the principles of justice, integrity, equality and the pursuit of excellence upon which the Bar is founded.

Diversity is an inclusive concept and encompasses matters such as ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, race, colour, nationality, age, disability, pregnancy and marital, carer and parental status.

The Bar recognises that its strength and vibrancy comes from having a diverse and egalitarian membership, where a variety of views are encouraged, accommodated and respected. Membership of the Bar should also appropriately reflect the diversity of the communities it strives to serve. By fostering diversity we will ensure that the very best lawyers are drawn to the Bar and given the opportunity to participate in the Bar's decision-making processes. In this way, the Bar is enriched and, with a greater skill-set to draw upon, it will be more effective in performing its institutional role in the practice of the law and enhancing the administration of justice. At an individual level, members will be encouraged to promote their abilities and make a real contribution to the legal profession, as well as broader society.

As part of its commitment to promoting equality and diversity, the Bar affirms the goals set out below in this policy.

### Membership

The Bar aims to:

- remove any impediments which may discourage competent and dedicated lawyers from joining, remaining and succeeding at the Bar;
- foster greater diversity in its membership by encouraging applicants from sections of the community that have historically been under-represented in its membership;
- foster a strategy of inclusion and equality throughout the Bar that promotes equality of opportunity for its members and supports and enhances the diversity of the legal profession in Victoria.

### Development of the Membership

The Bar will implement practical measures and strategies designed to achieve inclusion and equality at the Bar such as:

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- reviewing, developing and implementing initiatives that strive to promote equality and diversity at the Bar, including through the work of the Equality & Diversity Committee, the Indigenous Justice Committee, the New Barristers Committee, the Student Engagement Committee, the Readers Course Committee and the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Committee;
- supporting (where appropriate) and contributing to strategies developed by the Law Council of Australia, the Australian Bar Association and the Law Institute of Victoria to achieve diversity and equality, including the Equitable Briefing Policy;
- promoting and making easily accessible this Policy to members and prospective members of the Bar;
- encouraging a culture of leadership among senior counsel that ensures the principles of diversity and equality are led in everyday practice
- taking initiatives to encourage those using the Bar’s services by retaining counsel to embrace diversity in briefing practices
- providing mechanisms for members to raise concerns about diversity and equality and addressing any concerns fairly, justly and expeditiously;
- offering assistance (where appropriate) through mentoring, support and education;
- incorporating within its CPD program high quality seminars or workshops that focus on equality and diversity in the legal profession;
- developing and implementing policies and procedures that are consistent with fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion at the Bar;
- promoting the importance of diversity and equality in the appointments and recommendations made by the Bar (including senior counsel, judicial and quasi-judicial appointments); and
- actively and proudly communicating its commitment to equality and diversity as an essential aspect of the legal profession in which we serve, and the rule of law.
- monitoring progress so that achievements can be celebrated and obstacles to equality and diversity can be identified and addressed.

### **Leadership & Governance**

The Bar actively encourages members to seek to participate in decision-making structures within the Bar, such as Bar Council.

The Bar also aims to have membership and leadership of committees and working groups of the Victorian Bar that reflects the diversity of the overall membership of the Bar.

### **Benchmarking & Best Practice**

In order to effectively benchmark against international best practice in this area, the Bar will set targets, measure, compare or review the aims, practical measures and strategies set out in this Policy on a regular basis.

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