

Mental Health and Wellbeing at the Bar Policy

Application: This policy applies to all members of chambers, door tenants, pupils and clerking staff.

Aims: This policy sets out Chambers' commitment to mental wellbeing, defines responsibilities across Chamber, establishes clear support pathways, ensures compliance with regulatory and statutory obligations and promotes a culture of dignity, respect and early intervention.

Monitoring: Monitoring via the Management committee.

This policy operates in accordance with:

- BSB Core Duties
- BSB Equality Rules
- Equality Act 2010
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Relevant employment and data protection legislation

Chambers recognises that unmanaged stress, bullying, discrimination or unsafe workloads may impact professional standards, client interests, and public confidence.

Chambers adopts the following principles:

1. Mental health is as important as physical health.
2. Early intervention prevents escalation.
3. No individual will be treated less favourably because of mental health issues.
4. Confidentiality will be respected.
5. Raising concerns will not result in retaliation.
6. Wellbeing is a shared responsibility across Chambers.

1. Chambers aspires to be both a good employer and create a safe environment for work and Practice. We aim to encourage and facilitate working practices and services that support the health and wellbeing of all staff, pupils and barristers.
2. Work can have a positive impact on our health and wellbeing. Healthy and well-motivated barristers and staff members can have an equally positive impact on the productivity and effectiveness of Chambers.
3. Responsibility for health and wellbeing at work belongs to everyone in Chambers. Factors that can influence whether people will have a positive or negative relationship with work include:
 - a. relationships between staff and barristers, and between workgroups and departments
 - b. relationships between line managers and other staff
 - c. whether staff and barristers feel involved in organisational issues and decisions
 - d. job design/barrister practice
 - e. income to meet more than just basic needs
 - f. availability and acceptability of flexible working
 - g. awareness of occupational health issues and whether they are taken seriously
 - h. whether the principles of fairness, equality and diversity are experienced in the workplace.
4. This policy provides a framework within which Chambers encourages and facilitates working practices and services that support well-being. It aims to draw upon good practice, recognising informal support arrangements, particularly among barristers, and to be flexible rather than prescriptive.
5. GJS Chambers seeks to protect their employees and promote best practice in people management. It is our aim to ensure that all members of Chambers have some sense of autonomy and voice and feel supported by colleagues and managers right to the top of the organisation.
6. As part of this commitment Chambers operates a mentoring scheme, and provides training to support:
 - a. Managers with the skills to manage people, practice development, and the business as a whole;
 - b. Pupils and junior tenants with support and guidance from more senior members;
 - c. Skills training to utilise new systems and technologies;
 - d. Greater awareness of equality and diversity including disability and mental health issues;

e. Opportunities for professional development for barristers relevant to their area of work;

f. Awareness of the signs of stress in ourselves and in others.

WORK LIFE BALANCE

7. Chambers acknowledges and seeks to raise awareness that, because barristers are self-employed, there is an assumption that they have control of their work-life balance. However, the very fact of being self-employed adds pressures that are not experienced by employees. The desire to maintain a busy practice and to keep clerks and solicitors happy can result in taking on too much work. This can seriously upset work-life balance and may lead to unhealthy work-related stress.

8. Chambers operates a supportive referral scheme when it is identified that pupils and barristers who display more than occasional cognitive, emotional, physical or behavioural symptoms of stress which give rise to concerns by colleagues or senior staff will be invited, in the first instance, to meet with a clerk of their choice, to discuss their workload and the management of their practice.

9. At any time, pupils and barristers can arrange to see one of the clerks if they feel a need to rebalance their practice for any reason.

10. Chambers operates flexible working and is supportive of providing adjustments, for short reviewable periods where the barrister feels that this is appropriate for them to manage their work life.

11. Members of staff should inform the Senior Clerk at any time if they are finding their work commitments too demanding, even if the reasons are personal in nature and external to Chambers.

12. 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 or job sharing.

13. Chambers' virtual model requires personal responsibility for management of workload. Members and staff should ensure that they take regular breaks throughout the working day and maintain a healthy work life balance.

Should any member or employee require assistance or guidance, you should speak to the Senior Clerk or a member of the Management Committee.

MENTAL WELLBEING

14. Mental ill health and stress are associated with many of the leading causes of disease and disability in our society. Promoting and protecting the mental wellbeing of people in Chambers is important for individuals' physical health, social wellbeing and productivity.

15. 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.

16. Important aspects of mental health and wellbeing includes 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 work after a period of absence due to mental health problems.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS POLICY

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

- a. reduce discrimination and stigma by increasing awareness and understanding of all forms of disability
- b. give employees information on, and increase their awareness of, mental wellbeing
- c. give non-judgemental and proactive support to individual staff, pupils and barristers that experience mental health problems
- d. include information about our mental health policy in induction sessions
- e. provide opportunities for staff, pupils and barristers to look after their mental wellbeing, for example through physical activity, stress reducing activities and social events
- f. offer staff flexible working arrangements and encourage barristers and pupils to have a good work-life balance
- g. set employees realistic targets that do not require them to work unreasonable hours

- h. 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
- i. manage conflict effectively and ensure the workplace is free from bullying and harassment, discrimination and racism
- j. establish good communication to ensure staff involvement, particularly during periods of organisational change.

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

- a. ensure individuals suffering from mental health problems are treated fairly and consistently
- b. where appropriate, clearly communicate to colleagues who are able to support when the symptoms of stress become apparent to prevent further stress
- c. ensure individuals are aware of the support that can be offered through occupational health (where appropriate), the Employee Assistance Program or their own GP
- d. in cases of long-term sickness absence, put in place, where possible, a graduated return to work or practice
- e. 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
- f. 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.

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

- a. 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
- b. 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
- c. ensure all line managers have information about managing mental health in the workplace
- d. recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue

20. Chambers can arrange training events to support this policy for and seeks to review the effective implementation and support of this policy amongst its membership and employees.

SUPPORT PATHWAYS

Individuals may seek support from:

- A Clerk of their choice
- The Senior Clerk
- A member of Management Committee

Further details on Wellbeing from the Bar Council can be found [here](#).

Where signs of significant stress or mental health difficulty are observed:

1. A supportive conversation will be initiated.
2. Workload will be reviewed.
3. Adjustments may be agreed.
4. A follow-up review date will be set.

Participation is voluntary except where professional obligations or safety concerns require intervention.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA PROTECTION

Information relating to an individual's mental health will:

- Be treated as sensitive personal data
- Be shared strictly on a need-to-know basis
- Require the individual's consent unless legal obligations require otherwise

Records will be stored securely and in accordance with data protection legislation.

Chambers affirms that mental health and wellbeing are integral to professional standards, ethical practice, and sustainable careers at the Bar.

All members of Chambers share responsibility for creating a culture where individuals can thrive.