

MEDIA RELEASE

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY AT THE NEW SOUTH WALES BAR

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The Law Council's Equitable Briefing Policy has been the subject of a review by the New South Wales Bar Association. A Working Party was commissioned by the President, Jane Needham SC, and chaired by Junior Vice-President Arthur Moses SC and Kate Eastman SC. The Working Party included members from across the legal profession, including barristers, solicitors at law firms, in-house counsel and government.

'The purpose of the review was to meet head-on the very real issue of a lack of diversity at the Bar. Currently women make up just over 20% of the Bar, and less than 10% of its senior members' Ms Needham said. 'There is a significant gender pay gap at the NSW Bar, with men earning around 39% more than women. The pay gap is evident at all levels of practice at the Bar and is not reflective of seniority or experience. Given that women make up over 50% of university graduates in law, the Bar needs to position itself as an inclusive, diverse profession to ensure that the Bar properly reflects the society in which it operates' said Ms Needham.

'Urgent action is required to ensure that women are considered for briefs in which they are qualified to act on a level playing field with men. To that end, the Bar Council approved the report being provided to the Law Council, for consideration by its constituent members' Ms Needham said.

The Working Party Report includes recommendations regarding amendments to the existing policy, a proposed reporting framework and suggested targets concerning the briefing of women barristers. A copy of the Report can be found at: <http://www.nswbar.asn.au/for-members/equal-opportunity>

'The Association commends the report to the Law Council and its constituent bodies as a real advance on the existing policy, and one which would, if adopted, be a blueprint for change in the profession nation-wide' said Ms Needham.

The review of the Equitable Briefing Policy and the recommendations of the Working Party are but one part of the New South Wales Bar Association's response to the Law Council's National Attrition and Re-engagement Study, released in 2014, which showed significant levels of discrimination against women in the profession. Other initiatives include the guarantee by the Bar of a number of places in a city child-care centre; the formulation and review of Best Practice Guidelines providing a framework for dealing with bullying and harassment, and for providing a flexible working environment for its members; and liaison with the Courts (State and Federal) to provide that carers' or family responsibilities are considered in setting court sitting hours.

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