



Wellbeing Policy

Policy Statement

Black Antelope Law aspires to be an “Employer of Choice”, and as part of that objective, we aim to encourage and facilitate working practices and services that support the health and wellbeing of all individuals for whom the practice constitutes a working environment. □

Work can have a positive impact on our health and wellbeing. Healthy and well-motivated lawyers, pupils, trainees and staff members can have an equally positive impact on the productivity and effectiveness of the practice. Fostering a working environment that protects the physical and mental wellbeing of its people is good for the practice’s business.

Responsibility for health and wellbeing at work belongs to everyone in the practice. Factors that can influence whether people will have a positive or negative relationship with work include:

- relationships between staff and barristers, and between workgroups and departments;
- relationships between line managers and other staff;
- whether staff and lawyers feel involved in organisational issues and decisions;
- job design/lawyer 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;
- whether the principles of fairness, equality and diversity are experienced in the workplace.

This policy provides a framework within which the practice encourages and facilitates working practices and services that support wellbeing. It aims to draw upon good practice recognising informal support arrangements, particularly amongst the lawyers, and to be flexible rather than prescriptive.

The practice aims at all times to observe and promote best practice in people management. This means that we aim to ensure that all those connected to the practice understand what we stand for and that there is a connection of purpose. It is our aim to ensure that all members of the practice have some sense of autonomy and voice and feel supported by colleagues and managers right to the top of the organisation.

As part of this commitment, the practice provides and/or facilitates access to training and mentoring to support:

- managers with the skills to manage people, practice development, and the business as a whole;

- pupils and staff with support and guidance from more experienced members of the profession;
- skills training to utilise new systems and technologies;
- greater awareness of equality and diversity including disability and mental health issues;
- professional development for lawyers relevant to their area of work;
- awareness of the signs of stress in ourselves and in others.

Work-Life Balance

The practice acknowledges and seeks to raise awareness that the desire to maintain a busy practice and to clients happy can result in taking on too much work. This can seriously upset work-life balance and may lead to unhealthy work-related stress.

Lawyers, staff, pupils and trainees 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 the Practice's Welfare Officer, or a work colleague of their choice, to discuss their workload and the management of their caseload.

At any time, lawyers, staff, pupils and trainees can arrange to see the Welfare Officer if they feel a need to rebalance their workload for whatever reason.

Staff should inform their line manager at an early stage if they are finding their work commitments too demanding, even if the reasons for their difficulties are external to the practice.

The practice operates flexible working and is supportive of providing adjustments, for short reviewable periods where the individual feels that this is appropriate for them to manage their work life balance. Our Flexible Working Policy can be found in the Practice Handbook.

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 the practice 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.

Mental Wellbeing

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 the practice is important for individuals' physical health, social wellbeing and productivity.

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 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 the practice after a period of absence due to mental health problems.

The Practice is a signatory to the Charter for Employers who are Positive about Mental Health:

Other Policies and Actions to Support Health and Wellbeing

This policy is complementary to established policies including:

- health & safety, grievance, disciplinary, sickness and capability policies;
- E&D, anti-harassment and anti-bullying, and whistle-blowing policies;
- maternity, paternity, and parental leave policies.

The practice is signed up to MINDFUL EMPLOYER Plus, which provides a 24-hour telephone confidential helpline to all the lawyers, pupils, staff and anyone else who for whom Chambers constitutes a working environment. The telephone advisers will offer a listening ear, immediate guidance and signposting to further advice.

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 and 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;
- 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 Mindful Employer Plus or their 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;

- 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;
- ask about health and well being in exit interviews to help identify factors that may cause stress.

Chambers arranges training events to support this policy for employees, consultants, pupils and other staff joining Black Antelope Law and seeks to review the effective implementation and support of this policy amongst its staff.

Further Signposting and Best Practice

Further details on Wellbeing from the Bar Council can be found here:
<https://www.barcouncil.org.uk/supporting-the-bar/wellbeing-at-the-bar/>

Further reading materials, useful websites and details of national organisations offering help can be found here: <https://www.mindfulemployer.net/support>

Communications & Review

All lawyers, pupils, trainees and staff will be made aware of the wellbeing policy. This will be part of a health at work approach which will be emphasised at induction sessions.

The practice’s Wellbeing Officer will be responsible for reviewing the wellbeing policy and for monitoring how effectively the policy meets its aims and objectives.