

**SHOOSMITHS**

SHOOSMITHS UNDERSTANDING  
RACIAL EQUITY

# Race equity action plan

November 2024

**FOR  
WHAT  
MATTERS**



# Introduction

Shoosmiths is committed to fostering a culture of diversity, equality, and inclusion across all levels of our firm. We recognise that the responsibility for driving meaningful change lies with us as an organisation. Therefore, we are committed to implementing robust policies and initiatives that address and eliminate inequalities. Our goal is to create an environment where every employee feels valued and supported, and where diversity is celebrated as a strength.

The last five years have brought significant challenges in society and the workplace. Events such as the BLM movement have highlighted race inequality, while the pandemic has further widened these gaps. We recognise the impact of these events and the clear need for progress. We are committed to working with our people to improve our firm.

During the recent riots in the UK, the support offered to worried colleagues, and the condemnation of racist actions demonstrated the deep care within our firm for the well-being of our community, and the desire to make changes to tackle racism. This Race Equity Action Plan (REAP) enables us to move beyond words of compassion and injustice and take concrete steps towards meaningful change. By embracing this plan, we are not only addressing the systemic issues in the workplace and society but also fostering a culture of empathy, understanding, and mutual respect. This initiative benefits us all, as it paves the way for a more inclusive and just environment, with fairer processes, where everyone can thrive. We know that when people come together with different views, approaches and insights, feeling comfortable to be themselves, it leads to a richer, more creative and innovative environment for our people, for the firm and for our clients; together we can make a difference.

## Language disclaimer

Throughout this document we use the acronym 'EME' to stand for Ethnic Minority Employees. This is based on advice from our external partner (culture change consultancy 'Aurora') – having agreed 'BAME' is not appropriate and in the absence of an agreed UK acronym. However we are aware of the profound limitations of this terminology as it groups together a wide range of people and their diverse lived experiences.

As we progress the actions within the REAP we will continue to monitor if a particular ethnicity or ethnicities within our UK EME community face distinct challenges that need to be recognised and addressed separately to other ethnicities.

# The story so far

We recognise the need to improve racial diversity within our firm, particularly at senior levels.



The firm has partnered with external data experts Pirical for several years, to provide us with a detailed understanding of the recruitment, retention and progression of underrepresented groups. Data, insights and trends are reviewed regularly by senior leadership and inform priorities and areas for improvement. We also share Shoosmiths' representation data on our external website.

15% colleagues at Shoosmiths and 6% of senior position holders (FEP, FSEP, Director) are from an ethnic minority group. Positively, these statistics sit above the market average for the legal sector (12% and 5.4% respectively). However, the rate of increase in ethnic minority representation has been slow and there is room for improvement when we compare ourselves to our 'top performing' law firm peers.

Like many in the legal industry, there is currently a difference in tenure based on ethnicity within the firm, with the attrition rate for EME colleagues differing to that of white colleagues. However, at the same time, our lateral recruitment of EMEs is significantly higher than the firmwide representation levels. We

also regularly review data for any differences in promotion rates based on ethnicity. Positively there are very few progression points of significant statistical difference, however 'Associate to Senior Associate' indicates a historically higher promotion rate for white colleagues. High levels of attrition and different promotion rates adversely impact on internal progression and the firm's EME talent pipeline.

Partnering with the external culture change consultancy, Aurora UK, we ran focus groups to provide qualitative data which would give us a fuller picture of the experiences of our EMEs, at Shoosmiths and within the legal sector. This project was known as Shoosmiths Understanding Racial Equity ('SURE').

The findings of the SURE project were presented to staff on 7 November 2024 and have informed the development of the REAP. Key areas for focus were career progression and advancement, attitudes and behaviours, employee voice and pathways for reporting, leadership and management, and systems and processes.

# The story so far continued

## Constructive engagement

We want to acknowledge and thank everyone who has engaged with us in the past year, especially employees who have proactively raised issues, participated in focus groups and acted as allies. We've listened and will continue to listen, and your comments have guided us in making key decisions including developing the REAP.

We've been holding some difficult but crucial conversations around the different areas of this action plan, and we will continue to do so. We will continue to have a range of people and views represented on decision making groups and committees and will seek out constructive engagement from the members of the firm.

## Shoosmiths makes its Anti Racism Commitment through its Race Equity Action Plan

We know that our racial diversity across the firm should be better, especially in our more senior levels and we are committed to changing through our REAP.

Our REAP is a culmination of the valuable partnership between senior leadership and all employees at Shoosmiths. We acknowledge that there is still work to be done, so the document is a live document that will continue to be reviewed, updated and amended over time as we learn from our experience, our community and experts in this area.

This strategy and its related efforts will enable us to clearly define our commitment to progressing race equality at Shoosmiths. Every proposed action has been informed by the SURE project, including feedback and recommendations from Aurora. They have been developed with the input of our EME network Embrace whenever possible. Strategic objectives, KPIs, and governance mechanisms will be created where necessary to ensure and monitor progress.

In developing this action plan, we:

- reviewed our data and risks, and partnered with Aurora to gain qualitative insights through focus groups regarding our employees' opportunities, challenges, and priorities for diversity, equity, and inclusion
- incorporated recommendations from Aurora into the action plan
- integrated actions into divisional action plans and the overall DEI strategy
- considered our available resources and capacity, and what we could realistically achieve
- used stakeholder feedback to shape the actions

We will commit to reporting on progress and DEI data to Executive Board every six months and ensure transparency through regular updates to all our employees.

# Objectives



## Accountability

### 1. Strengthen resources, governance and accountability to ensure EME voices are listened to, and act upon feedback

We understand strengthening leadership accountability will create a culture that ensures leaders take the initiative to understand the EME experience and to address their concerns.

Our ambition is to excel in our chosen markets and be the leading upper mid-market law firm, supporting clients across the UK and internationally, and this requires everyone to take ownership of our ambition and lead the way in delivering our strategic priorities. Those who lead the firm and manage people within Shoosmiths have a special obligation to role model great leadership and create the environment for each of their people to perform at their best.

Strengthening resources, governance and accountability from the top will ensure that EME voices are heard, and action is taken.

### 2. Build better understanding of the employee lifecycle of EMEs through data, insight and reporting

Being closer to our data will help leaders understand what is happening within the firm regarding our EMEs, influence behaviour change and implement the leadership actions that will be the most effective in improving performance for the firm. Stronger data driven decision making will ensure we make decisions based on facts instead of bias.

Benchmarking will allow us opportunity to seek out best practice amongst our peers and connect with them to support industrywide inclusion for EMEs. Shoosmiths is strengthening benchmarking and stewardship of metrics around recruitment, progression and retention of EMEs within the organisation.

#### Our commitments will be to:

- build DEI accountability into Board level roles
- share detailed feedback, including anonymised quotes, from EME focus groups with those in leadership and management roles to deepen understanding of the challenges and barriers faced by EMEs
- respond to legal and moral duties.

#### Our commitments will be to:

- understand, measure and report on the activity and impact of our work
- provide data and training guidance
- improve qualitative and quantitative data collection and reporting.

# Objectives



## Accountability continued

### 3. Ensure all policies and processes are free from bias, and that support mechanisms to identify and address identity-based harm are clear

Systemic inclusion starts with robust policies, and for employees to have access to them easily. We want to ensure the effectiveness of the existing systems and policies in place and for them to bring significant positive outcomes in terms of racial equity and inclusion. Strengthening our suite of inclusive policies, primarily HR policies, will ensure that our EMEs feel a culture of equity and inclusion. Clarity of our zero tolerance approach and the processes involved to report inappropriate behaviour will give confidence to our EMEs and employees at risk of identity-based harm at Shoosmiths.

Scrutiny of the EME journey through the recruitment process, will allow us to review the policies, processes and procedures at each stage and ensure they are fit for purpose, accessible and training provided where further understanding is required.

### Our commitments will be to:

- strengthen grievance and disciplinary procedures
- strengthen capability of our HR function with dedicated training on responding to incidents of racism, and review our recruitment processes for racial bias and take appropriate action
- protect and support employees at risk of identity-based harm
- improve recruitment and selection methods.

# Objectives

## Community

### 1. Continue creating a safe and inclusive working environment for EMEs, including through development and communication of our Anti Racism Commitment

At Shoosmiths, we want all our employees to be able to freely express who they are and fully participate in learning, work and social activities. We are aware we need to create an inclusive working environment for employees to be able to do this. We want our employees to feel connected to Shoosmiths and support us in fulfilling our ambition and vision.

We recognise we need to work harder in doing this for our EMEs. We are listening to our EMEs and will authentically consider their thoughts and ideas.

### 2. Develop firmwide support to provide clarity, grow capability and increase motivation in our employee networks

Creation of our employee networks has helped us connect a diverse workforce inside and outside the office, which has opened dialogue and has encouraged employees to discuss important topics in a safe space. We now need to do more to support our networks to continue their work in fostering a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with Shoosmiths values and vision.

Further investment in our employee networks will lead to greater collaboration of diverse perspectives which will lead to higher quality ideas. Integrating the thoughts and ideas of our Embrace network, will also lead to more innovative approaches. Our employee networks are helping establish meaningful relationships and enhance a genuine sense of community.

#### Our commitments will be to:

- develop and communicate our Anti Racism commitment
- produce inclusive guidelines to ensure religious events, observations and restrictions are taken into account in planning for all work related events
- have stronger representation across the firm.

#### Our commitments will be to:

- improve employee network structure and support
- recognise, support and value employee involvement
- provide specialist training to employee network chairs and committees on engagement and impact, and formalise network relationships with their Board Allies / senior sponsors.

# Objectives



## Community continued

### 3. Lead by example through living our values, of making a difference, being ourselves, delivering together and focusing on what matters, in our external partnerships and client relationships

At Shoosmiths we want to make sure we are always doing the right thing and that we live our values. Leading by example and acting with integrity ensures this. We want to build a strong sense of community internally through our employee networks, and also externally through our external partnerships and client engagements. Our zero-tolerance approach to racism and discriminatory behaviour will be communicated and reinforced internally and externally.

To deliver sustainable performance and fulfil our vision, Shoosmiths needs to be associating with those who also have the same high standards of integrity as us and lead by example as we do. Through this objective, we want to build trust with our EMEs and reassure them of our Anti-Racism Commitment.

### Our commitments will be to:

- strengthen whistleblowing and speaking-up procedures
- have a DEI lens on operational processes and practices
- support Business Development and client generation opportunities
- develop clearer processes and policies to report and address discriminatory behaviour or instances of prejudice by clients.

# Objectives



## Opportunity

### 1. Enhance employees understanding of cultural diversity through a comprehensive training programme

An inclusive work environment will make employees feel valued. At Shoosmiths we want EMEs to feel that their authentic self and uniqueness are appreciated. We will invest in the right learning tools to ensure our employees are able to support each other and managers are able to understand sensitive topics and deal with them appropriately.

We have ensured our new digital learning content provider is fit for purpose as well as being aligned to our DEI strategy and vision.

#### Our commitments will be to:

- develop an organisational culture of curiosity, empathy and learning
- widen the DEI learning and development offer
- introduce mandatory e-learning for all colleagues to uplift cultural and racial awareness, including targeted training for Partners and senior managers
- build diversity, equity and inclusion leadership, capability and capacity.

### 2. Support career development, through sponsorship, mentoring and coaching for our EMEs throughout their careers at Shoosmiths

Shoosmiths is building a more inclusive culture with mandatory training for all colleagues and we will champion colleagues' potential with accelerated and focused development programmes.

The development offering aligned to the One Shoosmiths career framework provides tailored training and development that is relevant, meaningful, impactful, and available in the flow of work; meaning that employees can find the support that they need, when they need it most. This framework will provide a strong foundation for management and leadership skills.

#### Our commitments will be to:

- develop and expand tailored mentoring and sponsorship opportunities specifically for EMEs
- continue our targeted focus on support and attraction of EME talent at the Early Careers stage.

**We note that some actions within the Race Equity Action Plan will take longer than one year to implement and complete.**



## Our commitment to lasting change...

We will be monitoring the results of our interventions closely. In the initial stages we will be looking to see positive and upward trends in the following key performance indicators:

1. quantitative data and regular benchmarking updates with Pirical
2. employee satisfaction – sense of belonging measured through employee engagement surveys (internal and external)
3. employee recruitment, opportunities and retention (EMEs want to work for us and stay with us)
4. DEI training: number of employees who say they can apply what they have learnt to their work
5. number of complaints/incidents involving unlawful discrimination or unacceptable behaviours connected to a protected characteristic (such as racism, disability harassment, sexism) from within Shoosmiths and clients
6. measures relating to inequalities across progression, succession, wellbeing, career development and access to promotion

At Shoosmiths, we pride ourselves on our values. We are calling on all our employees to live our values to stand against racism and champion equality. We are aware we must do better as a firm, sector and society to ensure greater representation of EMEs at all levels of business. With this REAP, we want to create long term change that is meaningful and impactful.



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