

## City of London Solicitors' Company

### Inclusive Language and Style Guidelines

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The City of London Solicitors' Company (the "Company") is the Livery Company for City solicitors. The Company reflects the history and tradition of the City and its institutions, but also prides itself on being a modern organisation. Whilst it values and honours the past, it aims to be forward-looking too. An important part of this includes promoting a diverse membership and, in all its dealings with members and others, creating a culture whereby individuals of any gender and from all backgrounds feel comfortable, welcome, valued and, above all, included.
- 1.2 These guidelines were prepared to help in achieving a gender non-specific and inclusive approach across all of the Company's internal and external communications. The Court of the Company approved and adopted these guidelines on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

#### **2. Guidelines**

- 2.1 Wherever practicable, minutes, invitations, emails, website content and other Company communications should be drafted in a gender-neutral way. This involves two things:
- (A) Avoiding gender-specific pronouns (e.g. "he") for an individual who is not necessarily of that gender.
  - (B) Avoiding nouns that give the impression of assuming that an individual of a particular gender will do a particular job or role (see the examples in paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5 below).
- 2.2 A number of techniques can be used to avoid gender-specific pronouns. These include:
- (A) Repeating the noun.
  - (B) Using a defined term (for a long compound noun).
  - (C) Using "they".
  - (D) Rephrasing to avoid the need for a noun or pronoun.
- 2.3 When contemplating any of these techniques, readability needs to be borne in mind (which is why formulations such as "he or she" or "s/he" are discouraged). It is important to avoid language which is laboured or awkward and so, in many cases, using "they" may be the most natural choice, even as a singular pronoun. Whilst some feel that it is grammatically incorrect to do this, both the Oxford English Dictionary (Third Edition, September 2013) and Fowler's Dictionary of Modern English Usage (Fourth Edition, 2015) note established use of "they" as a singular pronoun in respectable literature over several centuries. In any event, the Company's goal of encouraging

diversity in its membership should take precedence over pedagogic deliberations. Using “they” as either a singular or plural pronoun is therefore considered to be acceptable by the Company.

- 2.4 Avoiding gender-specific nouns poses some particular challenges for the Company because some of its roles (i.e. Master, Liveryman and Freeman) are used in its Royal Charter of Incorporation and cannot (easily) be changed. These nouns are also common to all livery companies and form an important part of their tradition and heritage. For these reasons, Master, Liveryman and Freeman can and should continue to be used.
- 2.5 There are, however, other gender-specific nouns which can and should be avoided. Perhaps the one which is most likely to be encountered is “Chairman”. “Chair” should be used instead.
- 2.6 Titles should be avoided if they simply describe the sex or marital status of an individual and given names should generally be used instead of initials. So, for example, “Mr. A. G. King” becomes “Anthony King” and, when writing formally to him, your letter could start “Dear Anthony” rather than “Dear Mr. King” depending on how well he is known to you.
- 2.7 Other titles, which have been awarded and are peculiar to the individual in question, should be retained. For example, it would be correct to refer to “Janet Gaymer” as “Dame Janet Gaymer, DBE, QC (Hon)” and to open with “Dear Dame Janet” when writing to her.
- 2.8 In correspondence where the name of the recipient is not known, salutations which use titles or refer to gender (such as “Dear Sir or Madam”) should be avoided. As an alternative, salutations which refer to roles could be used. For example, an email to all members of the Company could begin “Dear member”. Another possibility would be simply to begin with “Good morning” before moving onto the substance of your message.
- 2.9 To the extent practicable, preferred names for seating plans and informal communications should be sought and recorded by the Company. For example, Anthony George King may prefer to be referred to as Tony King or, if in fact he uses his second given name in day to day life, George King.

### **3. Status of these Guidelines**

- 3.1 These guidelines are intended to be used as a tool to help you to avoid unconscious bias in your communications with and on behalf of the Company and play an important part in helping to create, promote and maintain a consciously inclusive environment for anyone dealing with us.
- 3.2 The guidelines are no more than that. It is more important to write what is appropriate to the circumstances and to avoid upsetting or offending others, than to stick rigidly to them.

- 3.3 They will be updated from time to time and available on the Company's website, at [www.citysolicitors.org](http://www.citysolicitors.org).
- 3.4 If you have any suggestions as to how these guidelines might be improved, please do contact us (see "Queries" below).

#### **4. Queries**

If you have any queries about the application of these guidelines in practice, the Clerk (Linzi James) or Administrator (Liz Thomas) of the Company would be happy to help you. They can be contacted on [mail@citysolicitors.org.uk](mailto:mail@citysolicitors.org.uk).

Version: 17.5.18