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Task: Explain why equality and diversity is important in the legal profession?

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Equality and diversity are fundamental principles that underpin a just and fair society. In 21st century England, respect for everyone's dignity demands that they be treated fairly, without prejudice or discrimination regardless of their demographic characteristics. 'Equal opportunity' is the concept at the heart of this democratic ethos. In legal terms equal opportunity refers to the legal stipulations put in place to deter any form of prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of gender, age, ethnicity, religious beliefs, disability, or sexual orientation. However, in general practice the principle of equal opportunity is commonly acknowledged as a more dynamic concept, encompassing the wider imperative of treating individuals and different social groups with fairness, justice and without bias. The cornerstone of social justice sets the foundations for all professions, particularly in the legal profession, where it is of utmost importance that these principles ensure access to justice, fairness in legal proceedings and the representation of diverse perspectives is obtained. This essay will explain the importance of equality and diversity in the legal profession.

Equality and diversity are often intertwined, but they represent distinct aspects of inclusivity. Equality is referred to as the right to be treated equal to others in regard to rights, status, or opportunities regardless of their background or characteristics. It ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity to reach their full potential of their lives and talents and access to justice without the barriers of being discriminated against or treated differently due to any demographic characteristics. In 2010 a new law was established in England and Wales that legally protected its citizens from discrimination in their workplace and amongst the wider society. This is known as the Equality Act 2010. This replaced the previous anti discriminatory laws such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and combined them into one single Act to make it easier to understand and making protection from discrimination much stronger. This ensured that there is nine protected characteristics from discrimination, gender reassignment, being married or in a civil relationship, being pregnant or on maternity leave, sexual orientation, race including its various aspects such as colour, nationality as well as the more commonly recognised ones such as age, gender, sex, and religious beliefs.

The state of diversity recognises and values the differences amongst groups of people's and applies a positive value to it. This is a practical example of equality that demonstrates the diversity of people's origins and strengths including their race, gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic status. It promotes the representation of various perspectives and experiences in the legal field due to the fact that nobody can fit into a single category with a single title. This is reflective in regard to every individual and everything that we do in life.

Since most solicitors and barristers are thought to be white, middle-class men, it is widely believed that the legal profession lacks diversity and inclusion and that women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds are underrepresented in leadership positions. This perception excludes anyone who does not fit into this category. Rarely is it mentioned that a lawyer has a disability, or that they are open about their sexual orientation or gender transition. However, in order to sustain an independent judicial system and uphold the rule of law in England and Wales, It is crucial to recognise and appreciate the importance of efficiently applying the administration of justice to reflect a wider range of perspectives and

methods among law firms and within the court to ensure equal access to justice for all individuals regardless of their characteristics or background and not discriminate against them. It is also important to have a diverse range of staff from various backgrounds to tackle the stigma regarding who can be seen as professional and to maintain a true reflection on the diverse community that they represent and build up confidence in relationships between those seeking legal advice and the legal professionals. This also shows others that becoming legally qualified and working in a legal profession is not only for people from certain classes.

Equality and diversity lie at the core of justice, and it is the legal professionals focus to ensure that justice is served impartially, without any bias or discriminative barriers. Principle six of the SRA's standards and regulations suggests that when working in the legal field, it is a fundamental principle that you behave in a manner that encourages equality, diversity, and inclusion. That your legal obligation is always upheld to ensure that a client or employee who is disabled are not at a significant disadvantage in comparison to those who are not disabled and need to be flexible to make alterations for others they work with as part of their work such as underaged witness's parents. This will help to gain the confidence of the broader public to seek legal advice from solicitor's who they share some kind of social or cultural characteristics with and potentially improve the access to services overall. By embracing diversity, it gives the legal professional a better chance of understanding and representing the community it serves, diverse needs and perceptions and encompasses a sense of trust and legitimacy. This also helps to ensure that talented people successfully become solicitors and maintain ambitious standards progressing in their careers. It is a goal set out in the Legal Services Act 2007 to encourage a diverse profession for anyone working in the legal profession.

Diverse perspectives in the legal profession can enrich and improve the standards of legal judgement overall by adopting innovation, creativity and critical thinking enhancing the quality of legal analysis. It also establishes a wider range of viewpoints that can be perceived when there is a larger group of legal experts from divergent backgrounds and with various experiences. This variety of viewpoints may result in a more sophisticated and well-crafted legal argument, empowering judges, or juries to reach a more impartial and informed decision as well as enabling the legal professional to understand more clearly and address the needs of a diverse society incorporating a wider representation of all members of society to be established. Diversity in the legal profession also contributes to a better representative and inclusive legal system as it helps to overcome stereotypes that may exist in the legal profession enabling a fairer outcome for all, as a diverse legal professional is much better equipped to understand the needs and concerns different communities have and ensure that legal processes are sensitive to diverse perspectives.

The modern society is constantly adapting diversly with individuals from diverse cultural, religious, or ethnic backgrounds coexisting and playing a vital role in challenging bias and discrimination within the 21st century society. A society that values equality and diversity is one that adopts social cohesion and harmony. A legal professional has a substantial power to influence social norms and shape the publics opinion that can be obtained from their role

of work carried out. By actively influencing equality and diversity within their positions, legal professionals can pose as advocates advocating for equal treatment under the law and as role models for social change, breaking down barriers and challenging any discriminating practices that encourage inequality. By performing in this manner, the legal professional ensures a successful, fairer, and more inclusive society.

In conclusion, Equality and diversity are paramount in any profession but particularly important in the legal profession and the academic importance of it cannot be overstated. By embracing these principles, the legal profession can strengthen the access to justice, representation of a more dynamic society and strengthen the legal decision-making process. It will reflect the society's pluralism and challenge the barriers of bias and discrimination. As legal professionals it is mandatory to keep equality and diversity at the fore front of their practice to uphold the rule of law and promote justice. Only by ensuring this, can they successfully fulfil their duty of serving the diverse needs of society and establish a much more inclusive and equitable environment. By upholding equality, the legal professional plays a vital role in protecting the rights and liberties of individuals, regardless of their differences. Equality and diversity can have a profound impact on the legal system in England and Wales ensuring its effectiveness and without equality, the legal system would be biased and discriminatory perpetrating injustice and undermining the trust of the public. In short, diversity and equality are one of the main foundations of a community and if properly carried out, will allow others to see the world through many different perspectives and contribute to a much stronger community, whilst on the other hand not up holding equality and diversity will contribute to the destruction of a civilised society due to lack of tolerance for individuals different characteristics, backgrounds and have a much more detrimental impact on the wider range of citizens accessing legal advice.

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