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Gains being made though gender gap in barrister briefings remains, report finds

Female barristers are starting to receive more briefs and are more often recommended for work by their colleagues in new or current matters, according to new Law Council of Australia data.

But the Law Council's [Equitable Briefing Policy Annual Report 2017-18](#) shows female barristers still lag behind male colleagues when it comes to the number and value of briefs.

It found female barristers received a quarter of the 23,170 briefs reported by the 44 briefing entities for the period. During the reporting period, male barristers received 83 per cent of the total reported fees.

Chair of the Law Council's Equal Opportunity Committee, prominent female barrister Kate Eastman SC, said while there was obvious room for improvement, the report set a foundation for the profession to continue to build upon.

"It's early days for the Equitable Briefing Policy but we've already seen a change in briefing practices, with firms and clients actively identifying a barrister who is best for the job rather than just the barrister they always use," Ms Eastman said.

"This benefits all barristers, shifting the focus to a barrister's expertise and experience. The firms have told us they welcome a deeper and wide pool of talent of Australian barristers.

"Importantly, the work of experienced and talented female barristers is receiving more coverage, highlighted in big cases and in a string of recent royal commissions.

"We know the legal profession is changing – the majority of Australian law students and solicitors are women. So if Australian bars want to remain relevant in the future, they also need to change.

"But change doesn't happen by accident. We need to embrace diversity and provide real opportunities for female law students and practitioners at the bar. The legal profession has the opportunity to lead by example in ensuring equal opportunity in our workplaces and developing effective strategies to eliminate the gender pay gap."

Law Council President, Arthur Moses SC, said while the report did show some gains for female barristers, the results illustrated a lot more work needs to be done.

"The fact is that male barristers, as a group, received about three times the number of briefs and five times the value of briefs than their female counterparts. This is not acceptable and as a profession we can do much better," Mr Moses said.

"It is good to see that in junior ranks targets are being met for female barristers, who received 30 per cent of the total briefs. This is a trend we must support and nurture.

"It is also interesting to note female barristers are more often recommended to take on new and current matters than males."

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