Following recent events, employers may experience an increase in the number of race discrimination complaints in the workplace. Many organisations in the United Kingdom, in the United States, and globally have made public statements to reinforce their commitment to racial equality.

**General Complaints of Race Discrimination**

Not all race discrimination complaints raised in the workplace are from existing or former employees; complaints may be made from individuals outside the organisation relating to the culture of the workplace and may not be specific. Such complaints could be from a member of the public, an external social media platform, or could even be anonymous. It is important that organisations take such complaints seriously. Employers may want to address such complaints promptly and take appropriate action where necessary. Although a complaint may not be specific, employers still may want to investigate it.

A first step may be to explore the allegation with the complainant—if the complainant is known—in more detail to enable a full investigation to be carried out. If that is not possible, a more general cultural investigation may be worthwhile in order to determine if there is any truth behind the allegations. Employers may consider appointing an investigator to speak to a small group of employees about their experiences working for the company and follow up on any issues that may become known. The group of employees could be identified through asking people to volunteer, chosen at random, or individually selected to represent a cross-section of the organisation. The investigator could be someone internal (seen as neutral), or alternatively, an external investigator could be appointed.

**Anonymous Complaints**

Dealing with anonymous complaints can be difficult for employers, especially when it is not clear as to where the complaints originated. This however, does not mean that complaints should be ignored. Where it is not known if a complainant is external, employers may want to be cautious when sharing details about an investigation or the findings unless the complainant reveals his or her identity. In a situation where contact can be made with the complainant despite his or her anonymity—for example, the organisation receives an email that does not identify the sender—then the complainant may be willing to speak, provided it is on an anonymous basis. In this situation, an employer may want to appoint an impartial person to investigate the allegations, such as an external investigator. Employers may want to assure the complainant that his or her anonymity will be protected and any victimisation will not be tolerated.
How Can Employers Foster Non-discriminatory Workplaces?

Organisations may want to review their non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies (which may be included within a respectful workplace policy) to ensure they include specific examples of conduct that would amount to racial harassment, making sure it is clear that such conduct will not be tolerated. Employers also may want to reiterate that any employee who breaches the organisation’s non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies may be subject to disciplinary action, which could include termination of employment.

Employers also may want to train managers on the policies so that they are competent to handle discriminatory or harassing behaviour that may arise in the workplace.

Employers may want to consider developing a focus group or employee forum to deal with diversity and inclusion issues in the workplace. The purpose of the group/forum would be to form a bridge between employees and senior management to report diversity issues, and a resource to whom employees can address complaints (including anonymous complaints) in addition to human resources.

Employers that take the time to consider the above action points may find they will encourage diverse and inclusive workplaces where all employees feel valued and supported.

Daniella McGuigan is a partner in the London office of Ogletree Deakins.

Carrie-Ann Hopkins is a paralegal in the London office of Ogletree Deakins.